

Indeed, it is becoming
more and more evident
that there is something
fundamentally wrong with
education as we practise it.
The author takes a look at
education, past and present.

Need for Education: Education is inevitable for human beings as are food, drink and air. While the latter three are necessary for other animals also, education is necessary for man only. And for him, it is indispensable too. Man shares with other living beings the stages of embryonic development, having most of the stages like theirs, but when he is born he becomes quite distinct from all others, thanks to education. Other living beings have achievements in their lives, some of which even perplex man and surpass his own. But they achieve it without any education. Some of them live a wonderful social life, but man cannot have social life without being educated for it. His relationship with others of his species, with those of other species and with the whole universe depends upon his education. His rights and duties, his services to others and the services rendered to him are all to be understood through education only. In this, he is running the risk that his education can be helpful or harmful to him, while other living beings are quite safe from this risk.

What is Education. Education, being essential as well as full of risk, we have to give the greatest importance to its content. Its purpose has to be decided first. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, in his famous report on University Education says, "the purpose of education, it is admitted thinkers of the East and West, is to provide a coherent picture of the universe and an integrated way of life. We must obtain through it a sense of Perspective, a synoptic vision, a *Samanwaya* of the different items of knowledge. Man cannot live by a mass of disconnected information... Our ancient teachers tried to teach subjects and impart wisdom. Their ideal was wisdom (*Irfan*) along

EDUCATION

WHY & WHAT?

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with knowledge (*Ilm*), *Jnanam Vijnana Sahitham*, (See Bhagwat Gita IX:1)... No amount of factual information would make ordinary men into educated or virtuous men, unless something awakened in them an innate ability to live the life of the soul.

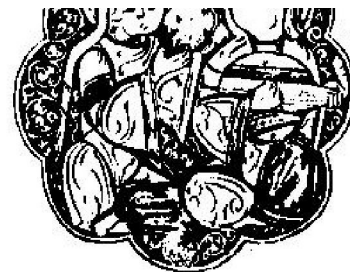
"Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The Cycles of Heaven in twenty Centuries
Bring us further from God and nearer to dust."

(T.S. Eliot)

Dr. Radhakrishnan continues, "Education, according to the Indian tradition is not merely a means to earning a living; nor is it only a nursery of thought or a school for citizenship. It is initiation into the life of spirit, a training of human souls, in the pursuit of truth and the practice of virtue. It is a second birth, '*Dwitteeyam Janma*'... It is of course true that we should mould students to a pattern that is sanctioned by the Past, if the society is not to become discontinuous. Education is a means by which society perpetuates itself. In 1852, Newman defined the function of the university thus: 'If a practical end must be assigned to the university course, then I say it is training good members of society'. (*The scope and nature of University education*). No system of education could be directed to the weakening of the state that maintains it. But education is also an instrument for social change."...

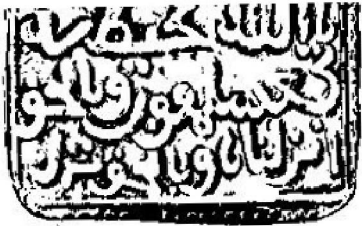
He says again, "Education, to be complete, must be humane, it must include not only the training of the intellect, but the retirement of the heart and the discipline of the spirit. No education can be regarded as complete if it neglects the heart and the spirit... Education aims at making us into civilized human beings conscious of our moral and social obligations. We must know the world in which we live, physical, organic and social..."

Religion and Education. Religion declares education to be compulsory for man. The Quranic revelation started with a command to read and reference to knowledge and education. The followers of the Quran approached all types of scholars and travelled to distant countries for acquiring knowledge. It has been reported that a follower of the Prophet had reached China as early as the 6th year of Hijra (in the first half of the 7th Century, Christian Era). The followers of religion became the torch-bearers of learning in the world, acquiring knowledge from wherever they could and disseminating it all over the world.



Books in other languages were translated into Arabic and standard books were written in Arabic on different subjects. Some of these books were being used in the universities and educational institutions over the world including Europe. The 'Canon' in medicine by Ibn Sina (Avicenna) is only one example. All these subjects were studied and taught as part of the observance of religion. Educational institutions were mostly mosques and partly the residences of teachers. Teaching and studying continued in the mosques day and night. Prayers and studies were treated as equally important. This practice continued till the first quarter of the 20th Century. The important mosques of Kerala, particularly in Malabar had classes in many subjects. The classes were known by the name 'Dars'. The subjects that were taught included Quran, Hadith, Jurisprudence, Arabic Language, Mathematics, Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, Chemistry, Medicine, History, Geography, Biology etc. Knowledge was being viewed as an integrated whole and it was acquired and imparted as a religious duty. It could give them control over the universe, enabling them material enjoyment and providing them with a coherent picture of the universe, a clear idea about God and a correct vision about the society and mutual obligations. Thus it made them great as well as good and the society prosperous and happy.

Change in Curriculum. There was an unfortunate development in Europe which proved detrimental to education. The Church and the Rationalists fell out and it resulted in the rationalists and students of science joining hands and the church opposing science along with rationalism. The inhuman punishments meted out to the rationalists and scientists at the instance of the church led them to stretch their opposition beyond the church, to religion and God, spreading of atheism was taken up as a humanitarian mission by the rationalists. The church which was infuriated by this offensive issued edicts against the rationalist and declared even scientific truths to be heresy.



Islam and Muslims had no part in this, but could not escape it. The Muslims became sceptical about science and were inclined to join the church in opposing its theories. Though they continued their study of science subjects in 'Dars' they lost the zeal and the conviction that it was part of their religious studies. In course of time, they also became inclined to consider science and the 'secular subjects' as alien to religion, if not against it. The Muslims of Malabar, the Moplahs, became the strongest in opposing the study of secular subjects and non-Arabic languages, particularly English. They even developed a new script, Arabi-Malayalam to replace Malayalam. They were the most oppressed people under the British and that had naturally antagonised them. The curriculum of 'Dars' shrank into Quran, Hadith, Jurisprudence, Arabic language and its allies.

Attempts for education. The Moplahs became the most backward of all the Muslims in India. The British government realised the consequences of their backwardness and took measures for educating them. Religious institutions (Othu Pallis) were used to attract children to schools. The attempt succeeded, though slowly. Later on, the single teacher "Othu Pallis" developed into Madrasas with different classes and many teachers. The single-teacher 'Dars' also developed parallel institutions called Arabic Colleges. The independence of India in 1947 gave a fresh impetus to the Moplah Education. Many schools and colleges came into existence. Farook College was the first of these. Now there are good number of schools, Arts and Science colleges, Engineering and Training colleges, and Arabic colleges established and run by the Muslims of Kerala. There is another attempt also in the field of Moplah education; that is to teach 'religious' topics in 'Secular' institutions and "Secular" subjects in 'religious' institutions.

Still truncated and incomplete. Education has not yet become what it should be, or what it was in ancient times. The dichotomy of education into 'Secular' and 'religious' still exists. There can be one education only,

which is to be comprehensive. The present 'Secular education' provides only heaps of information in packets of different kinds. This can make a man only 'informed'. As A.N. Whitehead has asserted, "a merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God's earth. What we should aim at producing is men who possess both culture and expert knowledge in some special direction... It must never be forgotten that education is not a process of packing articles in a trunk. Such a simile is entirely inapplicable. It is, of course a process completely of its own peculiar genesis. Its nearest analogue is the assimilation of food by a living organism and we all know how necessary to health is palatable food under suitable conditions." Similarly, the present religious education aims at giving only knowledge of the Divine scripts and allied topics, limiting even the knowledge about God to the Pages of the Scriptures.

'Secular education' fails to achieve what man has to achieve through education. In the words of Walter Lippmann, "Modern education has renounced the idea that the pupil must learn to understand himself, his fellow men and the world in which he is to live bound together in an order which transcends his immediate needs and his present desires."

What Begum Anwer G. Ahmed of Pakistan said is worth quoting in this connection. "Material progress relieves man from the struggle for the satisfaction of his basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. This is all to the good; but it is at the same time necessary that the greater physical and mental leisure, which comes from the freedom from this elemental struggle, is used to best advantage. Therefore, it is necessary that man's intellectual and spiritual growth keep with his material progress, so that he is enabled to develop those values that will insure the good and happiness of humanity.

"Here we must go back to the Prophets and the philosophers; it must be the function of education to inform the heart and spirit as well as the mind of man; to produce the skilled man, the cultivated man, the free man, the good man - indeed the whole man." (Education...by Emmet John Hughes)

Action in this line is an urgent need of the present world, in which education is helping to alienate men and people from one another instead of bringing them closer to brotherhood, helping to make of the loving and refined humans detested and dreaded brutes, and producing powerful giants who are ready to annihilate mankind - all these against the pleasure of God.