

## ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NEW EDUCATION POLICY

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*Abstract :- Higher education—as distinct from professional training—is abstract and often has no direct relation to the practical problems of life. Its abstractness is however its saving virtue, for it gives to such education a universal aspect. The failure to maintain an opposition so commonly accepted underlines the need to redefine from time to time the basic aims of education. While the power of analysis gives man ultimate superiority over all other animals, it makes him comparatively helpless till these powers have developed adequately.*

**Key Words:-** develop skills, development of personality, secure knowledge of the physical world

Higher education—as distinct from professional training—is abstract and often has no direct relation to the practical problems of life. Its abstractness is however its saving virtue, for it gives to such education a universal aspect. Not restricted to any particular field, it enables the mind to rise to those general truths which give us our first glimpse of the world of spirituality. The discovery of these universal truths is also the basis of all human progress.

There can of course be no simple answer to the question as to whether education should be confined to matters of common concern to all human beings or devoted to training of specific abilities of different individuals.

A popular way of expressing this opposition is to describe it as education for life versus education for a profession. Doubts, however, arise the moment the question is formulated in this form. What exactly do we mean by the term education for life? There is no such thing as life in general. Each individual is a member of a particular society and performs certain specific functions associated with the station to which he is called. Insistence on the specific duties of a particular station in life would tend to obliterate the difference between education for life and education for a profession.

The same result follows if we work out the implications of what is meant by education for a profession. A profession itself is a way of life, and hence education for a profession is education for a particular way of life. We must also be careful that the concept of one's station in life is not overworked. Insistence on station may divide society into rigid strata and lead to some kind of caste or class structure in which the individual is predetermined to perform a specific function. If this happens, the distinction between education for life and education for a profession again disappears. It may also be pointed out that insistence on one's station is likely to lead to a static society. One of the main lines of human progress has been to move away from rigid class or caste structure and give the individual a greater liberty in choosing his future vocation.

The failure to maintain an opposition so commonly accepted underlines the need to redefine from time to time the basic aims of education. Only if these aims are clearly realized can we attempt to relate what may be called general education to specialized education. No comprehensive analysis of these aims can be offered in a short essay. A proper understanding of the nature of education would have to be based on an analysis of the nature of the mind and its operations and the relation of the human mind to society and the world. Without entering into the far-flung speculation to which such an analysis would lead, we can distinguish four related but distinct purposes which together constitute the end of education. Its first purpose is to develop the personality of the individual. It also seeks to give him knowledge of the world in which he lives. A third purpose is to develop skills needed to sustain and advance social life so that he can be a creative member of society. Connected with all the three but at the same time distinct from them is the fourth purpose which is to satisfy the individual's search after values.

Each of these four aims requires more detailed and specific formulation than can be attempted here. When we talk of the development of personality, we refer to the growth and maturity of the individual's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual abilities. A retarded body is not merely an absence of physical growth but has certain positively undesirable characteristics. Similarly an undeveloped mind not only lacks intellectual freedom, but is a source of superstition, obscurantism, fear and hatred. It is common experience that to deny a child affection means not only that the child is emotionally starved but that he becomes a source of danger and infection to others. The spiritual flowering of a personality may be more difficult to define but there is little doubt that, as in the other cases, here also the failure to grow is not a mere privation but a negation which has an adverse effect on the individual as well as others. One is in fact reminded of Alice's predicament in Wonderland. She finds that she has to run for all she is worth merely to stay where she is. The failure to grow does not leave one where one was: it sweeps one back to a depth below one's original starting-point.

The second aim of education is to secure knowledge of the physical world as well as of the ideas and ideals of society. Without such knowledge, the individual cannot survive, let alone develop his personality. In fact, possession of such knowledge is a condition of both personal development and service to society. There may at times be a tendency to equate education with the acquisition of mere information. We must also guard against placing an undue emphasis on knowledge of the physical or the ideational environment severally, for both are equally important for our understanding of the world. Nevertheless, the acquisition of knowledge about the world in which we live is basic to all programmes of education.

The development of personality and the acquisition of knowledge of the environment are necessary for achieving the third aim of education. The individual can function only in a social context. If this milieu does not change and grow with the individual's growth, tensions are bound to develop. In fact the individual's growth is fostered by a friendly and retarded by an uncongenial environment. On the other hand, progress or deterioration of the different individuals leads to social progress or the reverse. If one is to be a creative member of society, one must not only sustain one's own growth, but contribute something to the growth of society. In the social conditions of today, the average man needs all his limited energy to keep society functioning. Progress, on the other hand, demands an addition to what society has already achieved. Since in existing circumstances, a major part of our energy is needed merely to keep up to the norm, it requires an uncommon effort to go beyond it. Nevertheless, it is an obligation which each individual must in some measure fulfil. We cannot take unless we give, and vice versa.

The position is further complicated by the fact that apart from his role as a member of society, each individual has an inviolate identity that is unique. He can find satisfaction only by fulfilling the demands of his inner nature. This may be described as a quest for values or a voyage of self-realization, but however we describe it, each individual has in him an element where he transcends his social needs. He cannot achieve self-realization by merely satisfying the demands of his society or performing the functions of the profession he may follow.

Reference has already been made to the paradox that education for life may in fact mean education for a specific function in life. In other words, education for life if interpreted in a narrow sense is hardly distinguishable from education for a profession. Nevertheless, a distinction has to be drawn for the reasons already mentioned. On the one hand, the progress of society is from status to contract, from rigidity to fluidity. On the other, the present organization of society demands from the majority of its members almost their entire energy merely to sustain the standard of civilization already achieved. It may be that with progress in social development, we will discover that the creative spark in man is more widely spread than we at present imagine but, even in a happier society, there will be differences in the brilliance of the spark. In future all members of society may contribute more to general social welfare, but the really significant advances are likely to take place, then as now, through the efforts of individuals of genius. Before, however, such an effort can be made, it has to be ensured that the individual or group making it has sustained the standard common to most members of the community. It is only from the achieved successes of today that we can launch into new experiments of the future.

The first two aims of education are to develop the various faculties of the individual and give him, some knowledge of the world. So far as the first is concerned, there is no need to think of any special functions which he may be called upon to perform in later life. Specialization begins to show in the second aim and determines the aspects of reality of which he requires greater and more intimate knowledge.

Specialization shows more clearly as we consider the third and fourth purposes of education. An individual can contribute to the sustenance and advancement of social purposes and thus be a creative member of society only in his individual way. Similarly, his contribution to the realization of old or discovery of new values must be based on his individual capacity. Self-realization is from the nature of the case essentially an individual function. It is said of religion that it is what a man does with his solitariness. The values of science, philosophy and art no doubt contribute to the enrichment of the life of the community, but like religion, they also are essentially the result of what a man does in his solitude.

Prima facie, it therefore appears that the first aim of education leads to a theory of general education while the third suggests training of special faculties and aptitudes. The second aim includes both general knowledge of the world and special knowledge suited to particular avocations. The fourth does not fit into either category and stands by itself. Analysis will, however, show that such clear-cut distinctions are not tenable. Each aim supports and is supported by the others. A striking example of this is furnished by the advance in material standards of life achieved as a result of abstract research which has at first sight no relation to any practical problem.

We may now try to see if these purposes of education may be related to different stages of education. One word of caution is, however, necessary. To relate a particular purpose with a particular stage does not imply that it does not operate in the other stages.

All that is meant is that a particular purpose is more clearly seen in a particular stage. It is then obvious that the development of the personality of the individual and acquisition of general knowledge of the world must begin at the primary or elementary level. This covers early childhood and continues up to or a little beyond the advent of adolescence.

There can be no question of developing any specific skills or abilities at this stage. The only aim of education at this level is to give the child a corpus of knowledge which he can share with all members of his society and to develop in him physical, intellectual, social and moral habits necessary for his survival and progress. Besides, his aptitudes are largely undifferentiated at this early stage of life. That is why we can and often do speak in terms of generalized education for children. While elementary education is the most general in purpose, it is simultaneously the most concrete of all the stages. We can give the child knowledge of the world in which he lives only by starting from his immediate surroundings. Any skills we want to develop in him have also to be based on the immediate requirements of his environment. If elementary education is to fulfil its real objective, it must be embedded in the local experience of the community. Since such experience is specific in nature, elementary education, in spite of the generality of its purpose and perhaps also of its pattern, is more specific in content than education at any other stage.

The concept of Basic education which has in recent times developed in India is a recognition of this truth. Basic education seeks to develop the child's personality by giving him knowledge correlated to a craft with which he is familiar. In its insistence upon a craft which is prevalent, Basic education has fastened upon an important truth. It recognizes that for a child, abstract teaching is not merely a strain but remains unreal.

By emphasizing craft, the element of activity is immediately brought into the pattern of education. Further, craft means socially useful activity so that the child is from the very beginning taught to recognize his function as a member of society. Insistence on a local craft is also a recognition of the educational principle that learning must proceed from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Finally, it seeks to develop habits of citizenship in children, not through abstract principles which have little meaning for a child, but by making them practise it in their daily life.

The very virtues of Basic education, however, suggest that the content of elementary education must differ from locality to locality. The pattern may no doubt be the same, but the specific details may differ so much that the underlying unity may be missed by all but the careful observer. The purposes of education are common to all but the way in which such purposes can be fulfilled depends at this stage on making the education as concrete and specific as possible.

Psychologically, there is a justification why elementary education is general in a specific environment. It is general because it caters to the wide-awake curiosity of a child. The child wants to know the why of everything that comes within its ken. It seeks to unite in a common world the diverse experiences that come to it with all their novelty. Elementary education has to be specific in respect of the environment but general in respect of its purpose. It is specific because it starts with the known environment. It is general because it aims at the integration of the life of the child with that of the community.

As we proceed from elementary to secondary education, a new principle comes into operation. What distinguishes man from all other animals is his power of abstraction. In spite of deficiency of physical power and weakness of the senses, man has triumphed over

all other animals because of his capacity to derive general laws from particular instances.

The essence of such generalization is the isolation of the significant from the irrelevant. Our experience at any moment is full of an infinite number of isolated items. We may focus our attention on a particular object, but we cannot altogether shut out impressions of odour, sound and sight on the fringes of our consciousness. If, however, we allowed this multitudinous world of senses to distract us, we could never find any unity in our experience. It is only by selecting the relevant items and combining them into significant objects that our experience becomes coherent and intelligible.

It may be said that, in a sense, even animals separate the significant from the irrelevant in their experience. A tiger stalking its prey excludes from its attention almost everything else. There is nevertheless a distinction between such selection and the selective process which governs human thought. For the animal, the selection is invariably an instinctive operation. It is therefore repetitive and at the same time unilinear. Given the same sort of situation, it is almost infallible.

If the situation changes, the instinctive response may and often does lead to disaster. In the case of man, selection is an act of the intellect, not of the instincts. It is much more complex and rarely repetitive. Because such selection is based on abstraction, it derives from man's power to break up his experience into its constituent units and determine the relations which obtain among them. This power enables man to combine great complexity of content with a unity of structure and is the basis of his superiority over all other animals. This may be seen with reference to his capacity for communicating his ideas.

Birds and animals produce noises that have a limited significance, but it is man alone that has created language out of articulate sounds.

While the power of analysis gives man ultimate superiority over all other animals, it makes him comparatively helpless till these powers have developed adequately. In the case of most animals, the skills needed for the sustenance of life are acquired before the end of adolescence. The human adolescent, particularly in modern society, cannot look after itself adequately. In addition, the duration of adolescence is longer in the case of man. His preparation for life therefore continues throughout childhood and adolescence and even beyond.

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