EDUCATION IN THE WEST AND IN INDIA: MODERN APPROACHES AND IDEALS

Of the eminent educationists of the modern West, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) towers high above others. Regarded as the father of modern system of education in Europe, Rousseau defined the aim of education to be a "spontaneous natural development of the child's nature through complete living in close contact with the phenomenal nature unadultered by human bonds". Education as envisaged by him should be strictly 'according to nature', the word 'nature' having been used by him in a broad sense as embracing biological nature, physical nature and psychological nature. By biological nature he implies the 'unpolluted inner man' who becomes impure, as he comes in contact with human society. Hence the aim of education according to Rousseau is to enable a man to realise the inherent nature. The physical nature is the world of nature, in close contact of which the child is to be brought up for the fullest development of his self. Rousseau's 'Emile', an apt illustration of this idea of physical nature, was taken away to an ideal teacher who lived in sylvan surroundings. The psychological nature implies the imparting of education according to

3. *Emile* (1776), a famous work of Rousseau, embodies his theory of education.
the inherent potentiality of the child. Rousseau decried the idea of imposing anything on a child by the dictates of the parents, teachers or the society. Besides, Rousseau did not neglect the religious and moral education of the child, which should start from the fifteenth year of the child. This was the age when the child should also be given the training to adjust himself in the society.

Rousseau's idea of education according to the biological nature of man is in consonance with ancient Indian educationists. The idea of 'unpolluted inner man' is very much akin to the Indian idea of the Self. Indian education aimed at the gaining of the knowledge of this Self. Rousseau's idea of education, according to physical nature of man, also reflects an interesting affinity with the ancient Indian system of the students living in the house of the preceptor in the tranquil surrounding in the outskirts of the village or towns in āśramas (hermitages) or gurugrihas (residence of preceptor). As regards Rousseau's idea of education according to the psychological nature, it bears similarity with the ancient Jaina system which took into account the potentiality and aptitude of the child.

Frederick Augustus Froebel (1782-1852), the follower of Rousseau, is another renowned educationist of
Thus the two famous educationists of the 18th century Europe, Rousseau, Froebel, based their theories on principles which were not unknown to the educationists of ancient India.

In the 19th century emerged a completely new trend as propounded by John Dewey (1859-1952) and his followers. Dewey was utilitarian and pragmatic and his work bears similarities and dissimilarities with the theory of ancient Indian education. According to the ancient educationists of India the Absolute or the Perfected Self remains enfolded within the individual and the function of education is merely to unfold the enfolded Self. But Dewey while admitting the place of truth, holds that truth is not an absolute eternal norm, it is also changing and it can be realised only through activity and not by meditation or deliberation. Learning, to Dewey, is an everlasting process and he held that the human contacts in everyday life provides him with unlimited dynamic learning situation. Thus śrāvāna (hearing), manana (thinking of the subject heard) and nīḍidhyāśana (constant thinking of the subject heard), have no place in Dewey's scheme.

Though subject to criticism on some counts, Dewey's permanent contribution lies in the democratisation
of education and in his attempt to make a learner a good citizen, he exposed the defects of the downward filtration policy, advocating the education to the elite. In this respect his concept of democratising education is similar to that of the Buddhists and Jainas of ancient India and the modern Indian policy of education. His principle of activity is, again, reminiscent of the Karmayoga which emerged in the later Vedic period.

The two stalwarts in the field of education in modern India are Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948). Tagore in his attempts to infuse new life in the British-oriented education system had treaded the same path as that of our ancient gurus. The aim of true education, according to the poet, is to know the Self, the realisation of which involves realisation of the Absolute Soul or Personalised Absolute that permeates the Universe. The student should be able to feel the presence of this Absolute in each natural object. The first essential requisite for the realisation of this idea is to be effected in the life of the student in the asrama or hermitage in the midst of bountiful Nature, whose myriad aspects in the shape of virgin forests, the wide sky, the open space, beauties of the sun-rise and the sun-set will teach him about the Absolute that permeates

it. Besides, the student will be guided by the teacher who will love him and guide him and will not subject him to rigorous punishments. Here again the idea of the poet reflects ancient Indian tradition. The perfect freedom of the student, as emphasised by the poet, should not be taken to mean the absence of discipline. According to him the students, like the ancient brahmachāris (celibates) have to build up an ideal character through self-discipline and for this they have to observe the six vows or vratas, viz., satyavrata, abhayavrata, punyavrata, mangalavrata, svadeshi-vrata and brahmacharyavrata. Devotion and prayer are also to be inculcated.

A worshipper of Nature and Beauty, Rabindranath had the concept of brahmacharya (celibacy) different from the traditional one. The brahmachāris of days of yore eschewed the cultivation of dance and music, but Rabindranath accorded a prominent place to dance, music and other fine arts in his educational scheme. In short, Rabindranath

1. Ibid.
2. A great admirer of the poet and his theory of education, Jawharlal Nehru possessed a deep and quiet sense of beauty and like Tagore wanted to make young learners aware of their cultural heritage. Once he observed: "I should like to see the whole country dotted with museums. Every child of India should see something of these artistic treasures, should understand something of what has gone to build up India, should assimilate even in a small measure the genius of India". In a message to the children he said: "I hope you will be more sensible and open your eyes and ears to this beauty of life that surrounds you."
sought to provide the widest possible cultural background for students and his Visva-Bharati is a perfect embodiment of all his ideas and ideals.

The educational scheme as envisaged by Gandhiji combines the fundamental principles of ancient Indian educationists with those of national needs. The ultimate aim of education, says Gandhiji, is to lead 'to the development of the mind, body and soul'. In his words, "a proper harmonious combination of all the three is required for the making of the whole man and constitutes the true economics of education". The development of the intellect, according to Gandhiji, "can come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs". But the ultimate aim is a 'corresponding awakening of the soul', that is, a spiritual development which is but the realisation of truth with one's entire being, and to reflect truth through every single activity. To him religion means "Truth alone, which

2. Jawharlal Nehru, the disciple of Gandhiji, also followed his guru in insisting on the restoration of the supremacy of mind and spirit in life. He was eager to raise the whole quality of people at all levels.
includes Ahimsā, Ahimsā being the necessary and indispensable means for its discovery". Gandhiji exhorted the student to subject himself to internal and external discipline. Discipline and Humility are the two watchwords of Gandhiji which bear the legacy of the past ideal. His insistence on inculcation of self-control and brahmacharya reflects ancient ideal of 'chittavṛtti-nirodha' and his insistence on self-sufficiency is in accordance with the life of the student in the gurugriha. The other important feature of Gandhiji's educational scheme lies in his stress on vocational education with a view to making education self-supporting.

**Education in Modern India: Affinity with the Past**

The ancient Indian educational system underwent drastic changes as a result of the major upheavals in the country. By the 12th century, following Muslim onslaught the Buddhist vihāras like the Nālandā, Vikramāsīla and

1. This is reminiscent of Basic Education, a system on which Jawaharlal Nehru and Zakir Hussain laid much emphasis. Moving a resolution on education at the Congress Session at Avadi in 1955, Nehru welcomed this system by observing that society needs trained human beings whose character is well-developed and who has certain elements of culture including noble and generous aspirations.
Odantapurī, met their doom. The Hindu mathas of bigger dimensions also appear to have suffered decline owing to Muslim ravages, though the less conspicuous tols or gurukulas managed to eke out their existence. With the establishment of Muslim power Muslim educational institutions like Waktabs and Mādrāsās came to the forefront, which again in their turn received set-back when the British conquered India. Apart from the efforts of the Christian missionaries in the late 18th and early 19th century to rejuvenate the contemporary education, the English rulers themselves took up the cause of the spread of education at an official level. Charles Wood and William Hunter with the help of Indians restructured the educational system which we have inherited as a British legacy. The post-Independence educational reforms have aimed at bringing about qualitative as well as quantitative changes in this educational system.

The first of the post-Independence Education Commissions was set up in 1948 under the Chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. The Commission stressed the place of spiritualism in education, as evident in its preamble: "We do not accept a purely scientific materialism as the philosophy of the State. That would be to violate our
nature, our svabhāva, our svadharma. True to the ancient Indian liberal tradition the Commission enjoined the necessity of respecting all religions to avoid wrangling of dogmas, since religion is not to be identified with any creed or ceremony, but self-realisation, which has to be attained through discipline and training (śādhanā). It recommended prayer, discussion of the lives of the great religious teachers, and discussion of those values, ethics and philosophies which are common to all religions.

In the modern society, education is increasingly becoming a job-oriented affair as a result of economic factors like the population explosion, dearth of natural resources and internationalisation of economy. The Kothari Commission, set up in June, 1966, was fully aware of this reality and hence stressed the need of study of modern science and technology. Yet it did not exclude our age-old traditions from their schemes. In its Report, in consonance with Indian traditional spirit, the Commission declared the indispensability of inculcating moral and spiritual values to make education meaningful. On account of the multi-religious democratic set-up of the country no religious

2. Ibid., pp. 378 ff.
creed can be given any prominence. Hence the emphasis is on the inculcation of the ethical values common to all religious system rather than any definite creed. Like the ancient educationists of India the Kothari Commission also sought to instil self-discipline in the students. In perfect conformity with ancient educational ideal the modern system envisaged by the Commission sought to make the individuals good members of the society. As a preliminary training compulsory social work for the students was recommended by the Commission. In one respect, however, the Report of the Kothari Commission makes a major departure from the Hindu system of education. The Commission recognised and asserted the accessibility of knowledge to all irrespective of caste, religion or creed, while the Hindus of ancient days found it difficult to scale the caste-barriers; the Sudras, for instance, were deprived of academic opportunities in life. The Buddhist and Jaina systems, however, took into account the aptitude of the child and thus disregarded all caste considerations.

Another new feature of the modern Indian educational system as envisaged in the Kothari Commission Report is the productivity orientation. One of the main objects of the

1. Ibid., p. 7.
2. Ibid., pp. 613 ff.
3. Ibid., p. 10.
4. Ibid., p. 7.
modern educational system is to raise the general standard of living. This can be achieved by the implementation of the ancient principle of making a man a useful member of the society. And this in its turn can be achieved through the study of science and technology. The secondary education has, therefore, been given a vocational bias in the Report of the Kothari Commission. Thus the Commission sought to promote the needs of the individual as well as the requirement of the nation and the society and strove to achieve a balanced synthesis of the modern ideas and the age-old traditions and of the forces of religion and science.

1. Ibid., pp. 7, 21.