SPIRITUALISM IN EDUCATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE UPANISHADS

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1. THE ESSENCE OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

The Indian philosophers study philosophy both as Darsana, the vision of Truth and Darsana Sastra, as the mode to accomplish the goal. The Indian philosophical systems reflect upon the qualitative aspect of life thereby enlarging scope of any spiritual realization. This standpoint reveals the humanistic and practical aspect about human life.

Indian philosophy is an interesting treatise about human life. Indian philosophers contemplate and venture to explore the essence of Truth. According to the Indian tradition, the Ultimate Truth is the Truth of Spirit and that Truth is One. The different philosophical systems attempt to view the Truth from different dimensions. According to the Upanishads, the Ultimate Truth – the Supreme Reality is Brahman, the Self - which is Sat-Cit-Anandam [Existence-Consciousness-Bliss].

In the mechanistic world of science, the faith in God is missing. Materialism as a way of life has influenced the most vulnerable human minds. Material prosperity has given man comfort but has not shown him the right spiritual path to know the Self. Outer development (material comfort) is generally preferred by men and inner development (spiritual progress) is almost ignored. This has given rise to erosion of moral and spiritual values in the society. It has degraded the quality of life in the world.

Inner development should be the basis of outer development. Thus, the need is to design a spiritual, human-centered, value-oriented programme for teachers, family heads and students.

FACETS OF SPIRITUALISM

Spiritualism focuses on the principle of the ‘Spirit’ in man-the Divine, which in fact is considered to be the basis of the material world. It is the most important foundation on which the material has the scope to progress with a purpose.

The acceptance of the principle of the Divine in our life nurtures a meaningful life not only for the individual but also for the society. The last knot of our bondage is at the level where the external draws its oneness with the internal, the machinery of ego itself becomes sublimated to the vanishing point and the law of our action is at last unity embracing and possessing multiplicity and no longer, as now, multiplicity struggling towards some figure of unity.

Spiritualism orients man to look within and grasp the presence of the Divine within oneself and others. Harmony in thought, word and deed elevates the qualitative aspect of life. It not only cultivates the mind and disciplines the body but brings man closer to the Self within.

The ascent to the divine life is the human journey, the work of works, the acceptable sacrifice. This alone is man’s real business in the world and the justification of his existence, without which he would be only an insect crawling among other ephemeral insects on a speck surface mud and water which has managed to form itself amid the appalling immensities of the physical Universe.

SPIRITUALISM AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE UPANISHADS

Contemporary Indian thoughts has its roots in the ancient philosophical tradition. In the philosophy of the Upanishads is revealed almost all the important aspects of spiritualism. Thus, we may conclude that the dominant spirit of the Upanishads reveals an idealism in which all reality is ascribed to the spirit which is the inner most essence of man and which is different from what we ordinarily understand by the soul, the five senses and the vital powers of the mind.

The identity of the Self within and the Brahman without is an important tenet of Indian spiritualism ancient and modern.

Indian philosophy focuses on the principle of Ultimate Reality- Brahman /Atman as an important aspect which relates man’s past, present and future. It considers the Spiritual Reality as that which possesses highest value. To evolve and unfold this Spiritual Reality is the actual purpose of human life. This approach is reflected in the Upanishads thought. The firm and focussed Upanishad spiritualism is the fountainhead of all spiritual thinking in India. The Upanishads direct us on the path within to grasp the essence of Truth. The philosophy of the Upanishads is practical and meaningful even today since it also highlights on the importance of ethical life. They insist on detachment vairagya -which does not imply indifference to the world. The Upanishads encourage people to follow the spirit of equanimity.

Spiritual wisdom through the Upanishads educates us about the Self. This wisdom has potentiality to develop human beings from within. The need is to spread the message of the Upanishads in the world today. The dynamism of Indian spiritualism as seen in the Upanishads, can resolve conflicts within and stop wars outside.

‘We have to look beyond the political and economic arrangements to Ultimate spiritual issues. We have to fashion a new type of man who uses the instruments he has devised with a renewed awareness that he is capable of greater things than mastery of nature.’

The purpose of man is to realize the spiritual network of life. The need is to evolve from the material aspect of existence to reach the spiritual pursuit of living. This is only possible when man learns to move from surface existence to the most centre of Divine from the material possessions to inner mastery. This shift in perspective towards life is difficult but not impossible. For this is needed, awareness of spiritual dimension of life amongst the family heads, institute in charges, teachers, students etc. It can regulate the material life from a spiritual perspective. The need is to spiritualize education to promote the essence of a meaningful life.

SPIRITUALISM IN EDUCATION

‘Within the schools the hallowed subjects and methods are criticized and by-passed. New items of learning claim priority; new constellations of subjects or subject elements provide new insights.’

The shift in the perspective with reference to education today, is to disturbing since it encourages materialistic approach in the pupils. It hardly trains the pupil to introspect and fails to acquaint him to the higher values in life.

The approach has provoked philosophers and thinkers to analyse the cause of the problem. Sophisticated teaching equipments, unique teaching methods will not really help the pupils to develop unless a new approach to educate is contemplated. Exploring the world outside is indeed necessary but exploration of the Self is essential. The conscien-
SRTIRIIALISM IN EDUCATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE UPanISHADS

The paper attempts to suggest a Spiritual Enhancement Programme for Teacher Educators. This programme is based on the philosophy of the Upanishads. This programme is designed for the teacher educators since teachers after taking the proper training can guide the pupils about the essence of life.

"Teacher is the only key to human survival through this crisis of values provided he is equipped with the value-oriented training himself in our colleges of education."76

SPIRITUAL ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME FOR TEACHER EDUCATORS

A. The aim of the programme:
   a. to bring forward spiritual enhancement in teacher educators.
   b. to bring forward attitudinal transformation in the teachers by orienting them to know the Self.

B. Approach

The approach adopted is holistic. It intends to nurture in the teachers a spiritual perspective about life by incorporating the thoughts from the Upanishads.

C. The Process Design

   a. to acquaint the teacher educators about the relevant content of some of the Upanishads

   For instance, The Isa Upanishad and the Svetasvatara Upanishads.

   Isa Upanishad is also called the Isaasuya Upanisad. It derives its name from the opening word of the text Isaasuya or Isa. Its aim is to teach the essential unity of God and the world, that is, being and becoming. It teaches that life in the world and life in the Divine spirit are not incompatible.

   Verse 1.

   isavasyam idam sarvam yat kim ca jagatya ca jagat
   Tena tyaktena bhuunjita, ma grdhah kasyasvid dhanam

   Verse 1(15lated)

   (Know that) all this, whatever moves in this moving world, is enveloped by God. Therefore find your enjoyment in renunciation; do not covet what belongs to others.

   Analysis of the verse: We must enjoy whatever is allotted to each one of us by God. World is not away from God. It is indeed pervaded by Him alone.

Lifelong learning

   i. this aspect of spiritual enhancement can help the teacher educators to realize the essence of duty towards the pupils
   ii. the turmoil within can be reduced and the mind can be made calm if the content of the verse is effectively explained by the expert to the teachers.
   iii. the depth of the verse can initiate a dialogue with the Self. This can lead teachers to self-exploration and self-realization.
   iv. the teachers are likely to develop positive attitude towards the pupils and life in total.

   The Svetasvatara Upanishad

   The Svetasvatara Upanishad belongs to the Taittiriya school of the Yajur veda. Its name is derived from the sage who taught it. The Upanishad teaches the unity of the souls and the world in the one Supreme Reality.

   Chapter II. Verse 8.

   trirunnavatam shapya samam sariram hradindriya
   manasa sannivesya brahmodupena pratara vidvan
   srotamisi sarvani bhayavan.

   Verse 8 (translated)

   ‘Holding the body steady with the three (upper parts, chest, neck and head) erect, causing the senses and the mind to enter into the heart, the wise man should cross by the boat of Brahma, all the streams which cause fear.’8

   Analysis of the verse: The verse reflects on the aspect of meditation where we are expected to hold the trunk, the head and the neck in a straight line. It highlights on the bodily postures and control of the senses with the help of the mind. The body, mind and spirit form one whole.

   Life long learning

   i. the content of the verse is relevant even to the teachers of the modern age. Orientation about the sacredness of the body, the control of the senses with the help of the mind and the significance of the Brahman can help the teachers to become more responsible towards the students.
   ii. This also can help the teachers to be emotionally mature, creative, dynamic, positive and calm from within. These are some of the essential attributes of a good teacher.
   iii. to arrange activities for the teacher educators to extend the theoretical and practical significance of the Upanishads.

   These activities can gradually promote self-awareness in the teacher and can help them to develop from within. The activities are as follows:

   i. Story interpretation session

   The Upanishads have interesting stories which reveal to us the dimensions of the Self. Story reading and interpretation session can be conducted once in a week by the programme expert.

   ii. Dynamic drama as a therapy

   The creativity in the teachers can be tapped, attitudes can be corrected through the drama sessions. The different stories in the Upanishads can be presented in a drama form by the teachers. This session can be organised by the teachers and for the teachers once in a month.

   iii. Dialogue discussion session

   Different meaningful dialogues from the Upanishads are extremely thrilling and highly instructive. The discussion on different dialogues can encourage teachers to be more contemplative and analytic. Dialogue discussion session under the expert’s guidance can be arranged once in fifteen days for approximately one hour.

   iv. Yoga training for teachers

   Yoga training for teachers under an expert’s guidance can help the teachers to be physically fit, mentally calm and emotionally stable. This training under a qualified teacher’s guidance should be conducted thrice a week for a duration of one hour per day.

   v. Meditation session

   Meditation can help the teachers to explore the inner realms of the mind. Meditative techniques should be taught to the teachers gradually. Meditation should be practised by teachers everyday for approximately thirty minutes.

   vi. Mantra chanting and prayers

   Mantras and prayers from the Upanishads can be imparted by the experts to the teachers. Mantra chanting and prayers as a group activity for teachers can result into a positive, pure and lively atmosphere at the work place. Ten minutes everyday can be allocated for this activity.

   vii. Forgive, forget and thanks giving assembly
Teachers should be encouraged to participate in the forgiving, forgetful and thanksgiving assembly. Personal and professional conflicts can be resolved, good gestures can be acknowledged and bad actions can be stopped through such sessions. This session can be organised once in two months time for minimum one hour.

viii. Creative charisma
A corner at the workplace should be reserved for displaying all the creative and reflective work of the teachers. This can encourage other teachers to explore the Self. Articles, poems, paintings etc should be displayed and changed once in fifteen days.

D. Benefits
i. Teachers can become effective facilitators
ii. It can help the teachers to be positive and responsible towards life.
iii. It can enhance lifelong learning
iv. It is cost effective and a relevant programme in the modern age.

e. Limitations
Lack of faith and commitment on the part of the teachers can restrict the scope of the programme.

f. Unique
The programme is scientific and spiritual at the same time.

g. Global significance
The programme can orient teacher educators from different countries to be effective facilitators and promoters of peace.

The ancient wisdom of the Indian heritage is pragmatic and eternal. The synchronization of the material and spiritual realms of life can guide man in his endeavor to realize Self. The realization of the Self will bring about peace and prosperity in oneself and others. “On the whole, it may not be untrue to say that the Upanishads are regarded by the Upanishads themselves as being the work of the inspirational activity of God in the human mind.”

REFERENCES