

Cultural Unity Through Education

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Abstract

In this paper the importance of cultural unity and education, the significant traits of eastern and western concepts of education and their role in building real unity, where diverse cultures may be unified have been highlighted. The pursuit of education giving emphasis to intellectual and spiritual training, enabling man to know the purpose of scientific discoveries for the welfare of all, producing an integrated individual in an integrated society and placing importance on early childhood education as it lays the foundation of all subsequent education have been mentioned.

Keywords: Cultural unity, cultural diversity, East-West, intellectual training, aesthetic values

Unity is agreement or harmony while diversity refers to variety or mixture. What is required in today's world is a culture that unites. One begins to realize that in order to build communities that are successful at improving conditions and resolving problems, an understanding and appreciation of many cultures, building strong alliances with a variety of cultural groups becomes all the more important. Each cultural group has unique strengths and perspectives that the larger community can benefit from. There is need for a wide range of ideas, customs and wisdom to solve problems and enrich community life. It will also prevent social and ethnic divisions resulting in violence.

It is therefore, essential to formulate universal trends of thought and discover an intellectual and spiritual nature of synthesis so that the East and West may converge at one point and present a unified philosophical outlook in the sphere of education.

The modern world lays emphasis on unification and integration. The

East and West depict two complementary aspects of educational thought-one emphasizing the spiritual side and the other emphasizing the intellectual side. "East and West no longer be isolated either in thought or in life. Contacts between them which were hitherto occasional and brief have now become steady and permanent."¹ The distinction between East and West is in terms of geography, but even geographically the terms East and West are relative in global world. Every region of the world is both East and West, depending upon the location of the person who refers to it. The description of Asia as East, and Europe as West, dates back from the time when men thought of the world as flat and limited. The popular description of philosophies developed in Asia as Eastern and those of in Europe as Western is a relic of the same habit of thought.² Eastern and Western inhabitants had common beginnings and they developed independent thoughts and views through a gradual process of evolution. In modern times, they are dealing with the problems of reunion of the values of spirit and of mind and "it is in the striving to overcome the tension between the values of the spirit and the achievements of the mind that we find the incomparable soaring of the human spirit and the opening of new horizons."³ Here it is necessary to realize the contributions made by Eastern and Western educationists in the sphere of human knowledge and understanding.

According to Prof. Keay, "India may learn and is learning from the West many useful lessons in all subjects and in educational thought and practice no less than in others; but if a system is to be evolved for India which shall be truly Indian, it must while assimilating much that is Western also gather up what is best and most useful from its own ancient system and weave them into the complex whole that is being built up. For this reason the study of ancient Indian education is most important, and deserving of far more attention than it has hitherto received. And it may be that in the investigation certain points will be brought out that may not be without interest even for Western educators"⁴.

As per Rabindranath Tagore the meeting of the East and the West, is necessary for true realization of spirit. The edifice of all philosophies of education

should, therefore, rest upon the principle of inter-mingling of cultural expressions of East and West. There is no concept which is restricted to either East or West. In educational theory and practice, the West has laid greater emphasis upon thinking elements and the East on realization of reality. But this does not imply that a particular value is the exclusive possession of a particular country. The function of education is the imparting of knowledge of both the inner and outer world of man. Knowledge is the property of all mankind. What is essential is to find a unity among individuals and nations. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore, "Now the problem before us is of one single country, which is the earth, where the races as individuals must find both their freedom of self-expression and their bond, of federation... Mankind must realize a unity, wider in range, deeper in sentiment, stronger in power than ever before. Now that the problem is large, we have to solve it on a bigger scale, to realize God in man by a larger faith and to build the temple of our faith on a sure and worldwide basis".⁵

What is needed is a vast field of activity where diverse cultures may be unified, where comparison and exchange of ideas may not be an unknown feature, where any national culture could be judged in the background of evolution of culture of mankind. Thus, cultural unity will not only be essential for intellectual pursuits but for providing a common base for mutual understanding of a cultural group by another cultural group. Real unity rests in the essence of all unity, which is eternal. One finds that there is a similarity between Eastern and Western concepts of education. For instance, Plato is of the view that a society is stably organized when each individual is doing that for which he has aptitude by nature in such a way as to be useful to others. It is the task of education to discover these aptitudes and progressively train these for welfare of society. Also, education is not a mere extension of knowledge or mere culturation of man's nature by way of nurture but it is the conversion of a soul from study of the sensible world to the contemplation of real existence.⁶ This Platonic conception of education is quite similar to the ancient ideals of Indian Education. The theory behind this is that the Mind, seeking external knowledge, contacts, and is contaminated and transformed by Matter, and then communicates this contamination

to the Soul, Self or Pursusha, who thus enters into bondage. The problem is how to remove this bondage and escape from the clutches of Matter. This can happen by simply stopping the inflow of Matter upon Mind by checking the materialization of the Mind and Soul. In ancient Indian education there is a significant inclination to cut off from the touch of the 'sensible world,' as Plato has put it, in order to reach the conception of 'real existence', which is the 'Absolute' or 'Brahma'.

Looking at this unity in Eastern and Western concepts, one can enumerate the pursuit of education as given below:

1. The cultivation of the whole man is essential in education. Intellectual training or education forms only one part. Education of the imagination and the spirit as well as the mind through creation of aesthetic values should be acknowledged.
2. Man's power to master nature by technology implies scientific thinking and reasoning. It has enabled man to master the world but it should not be allowed to grow as a weapon for enslaving man himself.
3. The attitudes of Eastern and Western individuals are to be modified by education and cultural contacts.
4. Education should help in removing the tendencies of uncivilized and fanatical minorities within a single civilization and in this effort, both East and West should act consciously.
5. Education should help evolve an integrated individual in an integrated society by presenting an integrated picture of the universe and an integrated way of life.
6. Education for Peace to be encouraged.
7. Education should aim at presenting a coherent picture of the universe to the minds of young learners and awakening in them a clear vision of perspective, an integrity and a synthesis of different items of knowledge.⁷
8. Education in early childhood lays the foundation of an all out subsequent education. All discoveries, scientific or spiritual, are made by an observing,

questioning, curious, creative mind. Human educators need to nurture these qualities in order to help the fullest flowering of the human potential in the child.

To conclude, the unity of the modern world demands a new cultural basis. The real issue is whether it is to be guided by the economic and pragmatistic mind, dominant at the present age or by the spiritual. Unfortunately, human beings all over the world lead the same miserable life of conflict and division, torn by their various problems of life. Thus, they lead a divided and fragmented life. Therefore, change in the very psyche, in the minds of human beings is essential. As Krishnamurti puts it that one never thinks, "Let's find a way of living which is whole and therefore healthy, sane and holy."⁸ There is inter-connectedness in the universe. Trees give us our oxygen. The bees are agents of pollination and produce one-third of the food we consume. Earthworms till the soil. Human beings and all things in the universe exist as an interdependent whole. But how should one be aware of all this? Intellectual or experientially? Knowledge is not knowledge unless it transforms the knower. An integration and synthesis of Eastern and Western concepts of education should be so engraved in the clash of civilizations that it prepares and transforms the mind of every individual and enables it to intermingle with this vast oneness.

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