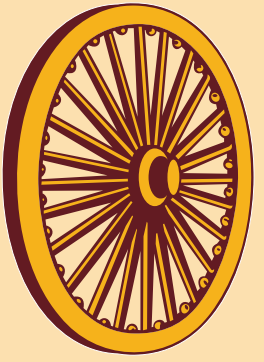
Value Inculcation through Self-Observation



Vipassana Research Institute

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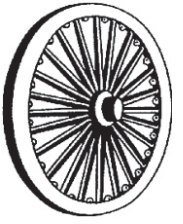

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1. Introduction

To any discerning person, it must strike as a great paradox that in spite of so much advancement in science and technology, society is still besieged with the age-old problems of inequity, poverty, strife, religious intolerance, terrorism, crime and violence. Society today seems to be highly insecure, like never before in history. Though superficially, these problems seem to be disparate, having their origin in the economic, the political and the social systems, all these have their roots in the deficiencies of education being imparted in schools and colleges. Aristotle recognized this over two thousand years ago when he said: "All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of the empires depends on the education of the youth."

The modern education system has been overwhelmed by the rapid growth in knowledge. As a result, the main aim of the very best schools and colleges is to deliver the largest possible amount of latest information in the shortest possible time. What the student is supposed to do with that information seems to be nobody's concern. The education system completely sidesteps the whole question of human values and goals. The result, as pithily put by Albert Einstein, *"…perfection of means and confusion of the ends seem to characterize our age."* No wonder, today most people, failing to find any meaning in their lives, lead an ad hoc instinctual life

and become crass hedonists, thus accentuating all-round degeneration of the society.

Distinguished thinkers and educationists, of all ages and climes, from ancient sages of the Upanishads to modern thinkers like Vivekananda, Krishnamurty, Aurobindo, Dewey, Gandhi and Einstein, have pointed out that education should cater to the whole of Man and not just to his intellectual development. According to the Upanishads, "*S*ā vidyā yā vimuktaye." Education is that which leads to liberation (from all bondage). Epictetus puts the same idea in different words: "*Only the educated are free.*" Elsewhere, the Upanishads lay down the objective even more clearly: "*Vidy*āya amritam ashnute." Education leads to immortality. For Vivekananda, [1] "*Education is the manifestation of perfection already in Man.*" and for Einstein: "*The most important human endeavour is the striving for morality in our actions. Our inner balance and very existence depend on it. Only morality in our actions can give beauty and to life. To make this a living force and bring it to clear consciousness is perhaps the foremost task of education*". Krishnamurty [2] advises a holistic view of education: *Education should be concerned with the totality of life and not with immediate responses to immediate challenges*. In the same vein, Jacques Delors, [3] in the report of the International Commission on Education for the twenty-first century, identifies four pillars of education:

- *learning to know* (gathering intellectual knowledge and ability to learn throughout life)
- *learning to do* (which includes occupational skills and competence to handle situations),

- *learning to live together* (developing respect and understanding for others, learning to manage dissent and conflict) and
- *learning to be* (which essentially involves developing all the potentials, or self actualization).

All the Education Commissions [from Radhakrishnan Commission (1949) to Kothari Commission (1964-66)] set up in our country have repeatedly stressed the need for providing a holistic education that caters to all aspects of human life: physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. Figure 1 shows a pictorial representation of such an education. The four facets of education, though interconnected, are distinctly identified for pedagogical reasons. Holistic education should cultivate all these aspects in full measure.

Developing the ability to act independently, rationally and logically on the basis of a deep understanding of the various phenomena of nature and the world in which we live in all its dimensions (be these scientific, social, economic or aesthetic) is termed "intellectual education". This includes the *learning to know* and *learning to do* of the framework of Delors.

Physical education means learning the art of keeping the body fit through various means like physical exercises, sports, *yogāsanas*, *prāṇāyāma* etc. The body is the vehicle of all our activities and learning its proper maintenance should be an essential aspect of education.

Emotional education implies learning to keep the mind fit so that we can face the vicissitudes of life, pleasant or unpleasant, without losing our balance. This leads to increasing emotional maturity and understanding of the

world. A conjugate part of this education is developing positive human emotions of universal love, compassion, forbearance, humility, equanimity, etc., and eradicating the baser instincts such as greed, envy, pride, aggressiveness, etc. This obviously is the crux of *"learning to live together"* (Delors [3]) which seems to have become so difficult, and yet imperative, in the increasingly globalized and highly competitive world.

Finally, spiritual education implies understanding the "phenomenon of Man," that is, to manifest that elusive "fourth dimension" of the human personality from which springs forth an intuitive understanding of the very purpose of our existence, and a clarity of what ought to be done to achieve it. This can be seen as the consummation of the *learning to be*.

The education systems throughout the world seem to focus only on two of these four aspects: intellectual education and physical education. The quality of education is usually measured by the success in imparting these—how many students are able to score good grades, get good jobs or show good performance in sports, etc. The need for emotional and spiritual education is usually acknowledged but there is rarely any agreement on how to impart it or even on whether this can or should be a part of formal education. Thus, in our country, the Kothari Commission made a clear and strong recommendation to incorporate moral and spiritual education as an integral part of education system at all levels of education, but even after forty years, we are yet to see any concrete action on these recommendations.

Recalling the long discussions the author had with the late Prof. D. S. Kothari in the early eighties, the main difficulty has been the apprehension in a section of society that equated

moral and spiritual education with sectarian indoctrination—an anathema to a secular state. Rather than addressing the issue squarely and taking the bull by the horns, the educationists have taken the softest option: avoid such education altogether. This apprehension remains intact even today and every attempt at introduction of education in human values (EHV) in the education system is viewed with the suspicion of some 'hidden agenda'.

There is also a fundamental doubt, especially popular among philosophers: how can values be taught? Their implicit belief is that values cannot, and even should not, be taught. They believe that these values are picked up from the family and society (school being a part of it) by observing role models—be it parents, teachers, film stars or political leaders. In their view, any attempt by ordinary mortals to 'teach' values is tantamount to becoming self-styled moral masters, and this posture itself defeats the very purpose of this education.

In this booklet, we shall address all these issues in detail and point out how education in human values can be given rationally by training the students to analyze their own life in a scientific manner, just as they are trained to analyze the world outside.