

CONCEPT OF MAN AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION IN EAST AND WEST

NATURE OF MAN

Any philosophy of education would very much depend upon the concept of what a man is. There are many views about what man is, though there seems to be a large amount of agreement as to what the spiritual part of him or the soul-aspect is. The person whose education it is with which we are concerned is an embodied creature or spirit. There seems to be no doubt about the actual condition of the consciousness he has. It is limited or conditioned, ignorant in many directions, and partial or fragmentary knowledge is all that he gets. There is also a wide area of agreement in respect of the knowledge that is got by him through his sense-organs and through his logical abilities. The purpose of Indian thought is to liberate man from his fragmented existence or knowing by a radical shift from the sensory or inferential processes to the utilisation of the spiritual or direct cosmical or, as the Modern Sage Sri Aurobindo styles it, the integral immediate knowing by the self. Even here though there have been some differences as to the theory

of knowing between the Vedantic Schools,

There is no doubt that mystical knowing – a knowing or grasping of the unity in diversity without annihilating the diversity but granting a more secure reality to the diversity in the Unity – is what can be a fundamental educable ability in each individual.

Man is an evolving being. The word ‘evolving’ may mean just the process of continuous ascent to higher and more adequately adapting form of living. This is certainly not the idea behind much of Indian Thought – by which I refer primarily to Vedantas. But there is no doubt that if evolution is the process of growing out of or manifestation of the immanent spiritual nature gradually from the veils of ignorance and material formation, the soul as spiritual regain its nature, as a fully conscious or universal consciousness which is indeed also a consciousness both subjectively to freedom from Nature and its ignorance (mukti or moksa) and objectively of Nature (the bondage that it was). Jainism and Buddhism also are agreed about this ‘transcendence’ or ‘conquest’ which is incognitive terms known as knowledge (Jnana). To know Nature itself as a field of Divine Action which is only action done in the knowledge that All in the Nature and Souls is of the Divine is the end. There are several points of coincidence between the Medieval East

and West or the traditional East and the traditional West. The emphasis on self-discovery or the discovery of the self as the spiritual entity which ought to be freed from the Nature or body or be the intrinsic value of itself which has been lost in the pursuit of Natural ends, is a point of great importance.

We have to reckon three entities, Universal, the Individual and Nature or God, Soul and Nature. The inseparable relationship between these three is accepted by the Visistadvaita of Ramanuja and all that we are aware of is that these inseparable relationships have to be interpreted rightly. A wrong emphasis on any one or the other of the categories due to preoccupations with one or the other of the categories has led to a lot of confusion and delusion. The individual *qua* individual is seized with the purpose of becoming aware of the Universal, central to his meaning and existence or his 'self' and of knowing himself as the expression or function or dharma or prakara of the Universal Spirit. The intimate conviction that the individual is charged with the purpose of discovering within himself the Universal Spirit for which purpose he acts in a cosmic manner that is in a disinterested self-surrender to the Divine as the Visva or the All, leads him to the realization that he is the body of the Divine. Education in this consciousness is to draw out the essential principle of Divine Oneness or the One abiding, supporting and controlling Deity in

All in oneself. Monotheism reconciles itself in the Polytheism of the other individuals because it begins to perceive that the One Divine can and indeed does appear and indeed exists as the many Gods.

Universal Religion is possible only when men begin to realize that God is One who is also many or having infinite personalities or functions, each of which is infinite, indescribable or holy. As with our Idea of the Concrete Universal Godhead realized by all sages and mystics, despite differences of language and experience, as real and necessary for individual realization and freedom from intestine conflict and World-Freedom and Peace, so also the realization of the identity in nature as functions of the One Divine Spirit or God or Brahman is a necessity. This is again possible only when each soul is considered to be an end in itself as Kant put it because it is 'eternally seized or indwelt by God'. As such is a bhagavata (having the Divine), and not merely as a means. In the West also this same idea is deep-rooted and the Political life of the West (and its instrumental theory of Nature as means) reveals that recognition. Indian thought can grant this inward respect for all individuals and to life itself a deeper character and greater amplitude. There is not much fundamental difference in the ideas but in the technique of realization. The beliefs in the possibility of transformation of Matter itself as capable of being (and holding that it is always

such) and instrument of the Divine and a field for the manifestation of the Divine is dominantly pursued by the West, and Hegel has given it a great impetus. For Hegel Nature is Objective Spirit; State is the temporal Absolute, the individual is a means for the Realisation of the Absolute in the temporal and the objective. This is a lesson which East might take in order to explain an immanent transcendence possible and open to the soul, whereas the West must realize that the world is not an end in itself nor even the conquest of Nature but the means for the living realization of the Souls as one supreme body of the Universal, spiritual and essentially valuable to the Divine per se. Collective life directed towards the exploitation of Nature and pursuit of needs of the body-physical, which mystic thought in East and West has shown to be a deviation of the pursuit, does not but lead to a sharing of the world at best. It has of course brought up problems of distribution and population etc., which have to be solved in a collective rational way. Those problems whilst urgent from the point of view of the ordinary man need of course a global vision and perception and reasoning freed from the prejudices of the individual or national and racial kinds. The Universal however is not exhausted by the collective security means and measures. It promises a new dimension to being itself which would liberate it from the pursuit of distributions and exploitations for pleasure, more the

knowledge. If we shall certainly know man as a peculiar and significant unity of the Nature and God, for the realization of their significant and eternal unity or inseparability, it would reveal man to be not merely a creature torn between the two but also to be a synthesis and fulfilments as the child of the Divine pair. The reconciliation of Nature and God in Man, through the perception or awareness of the Divine in Nature and in all other souls as their significance and meaning, is a truth that may be characteristically and in different ways and traditions be shown to seekers. This does not abolish the unique qualities of the traditions but lifts up the possibility of a universal intelligent understanding of world tradition.

The Universal's participation in a collective effort by individuals aware of and vigilantly acting in and for the universal values of the Divine who gives meaning to Nature and the individuals is an education which would unfold the twin truths of drawing out the spiritual and the universal immanent in each and the evolution of the natural by a gradual process of transmutation and translation of the individual and the hedonistic organizations or organs so as to take over the universal functions to which he is the heir.

East and West have agreed on certain fundamentals so far as the mystics are concerned. Whilst the emphasis on

the monotheism and the monistic view have been dialectical poses opposing the polytheism and pluralism, this real opposition has and can be overcome when the reason of each individual synthesizes in the spirit of the Mystic Wisdom of the Vedanta and Plato that the real monism must enfold and describe the pluralism, and monotheism should explain and grant strength to Polytheism. Rational Mysticism in education which suggests the universal of our problems is, it appears, capable of doing the job. But a large metaphysical and psychological understanding must be a prelude; and teacher's needs must have these supreme qualifications. Educational Psychology has to be grounded not so much on science of physiology as on axiology.

There is no opposition between the East and West, though during the period after the advent of Science there has been preoccupation with Nature and Economics and the appreciation of the poverty of individuals which, it was discovered, it is necessary to relieve. The preoccupation with the spiritual was that the real sufferings of the people were thoroughly forgotten. This is as much a snare as the mother preoccupation with the Natural or the individual. Our present condition is that we are preoccupied not so much with the individual as such but with his very existence, his survival. Intelligent people have discovered that this cannot be solved by a programme of economy or politics, and were

faced with the problem of hope in the ultimate global wisdom of all men. Does Religion (and Education) promise this? So far the religions have not; on the other hand, they have developed new impervious ideologies and have had recourse to the most extravagant myths. A new educational theory must start over again the process of liberating the individual from old and stagnant but no less impervious ideologies and make him the seer of the universal, and the embodiment of the universal. This is the substantial freedom that education can encourage to discover and practice.

I agree with the view that we have no doubt that doctrinal differences may exist and be held if viewed in the right perspective, and all that men and teachers of the *unesco* can do is to supply this fundamental and foundational pattern: Man is the body (particular, individual, function) of the Universal Spirit (Ultimate, Brahman, God, Truth, etc.). So is the Nature (the World, Matter, Energy, Field). The Process is the realization of the Universal by the individual (embodied in Matter or Nature). He is the meeting place or junction of the Universal Nature and Universal Spirit. He grants significance and objectivity to both. The three are inseparable – a triunity. Nature is dependent, instrumental, objectivity of the Universal Spirit. All men are equally, though uniquely, bodies or functions of the Universal Godhead. They have a dual responsibility, not

only to act in and for the Divine but also for the welfare and unity of all others of whom they are aware through Nature at first and through God at the end and in fullest realization.