Reform India's Education
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MY TURN

Reform India's Education

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The twentieth century, more than any other period in human history, has witnessed tremendous progress in science, technology, space and outer space, medicine and telecommunication. But the sum total of human happiness, of peace, tranquility and harmony has been in inverse proportion to all the material advances. That is because equal emphasis has not been laid on moral upgrading as it has on material progress.

Swami Vivekananda said, "Education is not the amount of information that is put in your brain and runs riot there undigested all your life. We must have life building, man making, character making and assimilation of ideas. If education is identical with information, libraries are the greatest sages of the world and encyclopedias are rishis." Swamiji also said that a man who has extensive learning without wisdom is like a pack animal which only knows the weight but not the value of the sandalwood it carries. Therefore what is needed is to make education a tool for

development of social and moral values.

The history of civilization is nothing but the story of man marching from bestial life to an orderly and harmonious life, enjoying peace, progress and comfort. Religions appeared from time to time and preached morality, harmony, love, charity, kindness, compassion, sacrifice and devotion to duty as correct conduct of the individual. Religions called upon their followers to abjure violence and falsehood, decoity and robbery, cheating and covetousness, selfishness and so on. Thus religions shaped human behavior in such a way that people could live in harmony with their fellow beings and devote themselves to the pursuit of art, science and culture.

The moral and ethical values have been enumerated by the Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. In Chapter XII, slokas 13 and 14, the Lord says, "One who is without hatred or ill will towards any being, friendly, compassionate, without ego and arrogance, even-minded in pain and pleasure, forgiving and always contented is dear to Me."

Mahatma Gandhi summed up ethical values in two words: satya and ahimsa, in their widest sense. There is no dearth of precepts of human values. Yet, modern education makes no effort to inculcate them in the students. Nothing is done today in our educational institutions to instill morality and virtue in the students. In a plural society like ours, with many religions, castes, creeds and faiths, education should foster universal and eternal values oriented towards the unity and integrity of the nation. It should fight against religious fanaticism, violence, exploitation and injustice. It should concern itself

with the development of a total person. This is what Swami Vivekananda called man-making education. One should be taught to rationalize events and situations without bias or prejudice and with an equipoise bereft of dogmatism or surrender to sudden spurts of emotion. He is truly educated who can sacrifice his selfish, personal interests for the sake of the country and the people, and thus promote peace and harmony among fellowmen.

A great deal of improvement in our education rests on the teachers. Our society has always placed the guru (teacher) on the same pedestal with Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshvara. The guru taught more by his example than by precept. With the changes in society, that venerable teacher has now practically disappeared. Replacement of those great teachers by teachers with dedication towards the development of the pupils, able to identify the latent talents in them and to bring them out and encourage their growth, is the urgent need of the hour.

I am an admirer of the tremendous progress that India has made in industry, science and technology. We have put satellites into orbit, achieved nuclear capabilities, mastered missile technology and many other sciences far ahead of any developing country. But these are only partial successes. As an English poet said, "Vain is your science, vain your art, your triumphs and glories, vain to feed the hunger of the heart and the famine of the brain." Education will, therefore, be complete only when it inculcates moral values in the pupil and ennobles his mind and heart. In short, we should spiritualize education.

The distinguished R.Venkataraman is a former President and Vice President of India and a former Minister of Technical Education in Tamil Nadu. He now lives in Madras as chairman

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