

Yogananda: A great Educator and his philosophy

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1. Introduction:

On one afternoon of showering Shrivana, the two young monks set their foot on the soil of Bolpur Railway Station, West-Bengal, India. They were welcomed to the Ashram of Santiniketan. The poet of our great poets, the creator of art, the Noble Laureate, Rabindranath was sitting at his newly planted grove, at Santiniketan. The young monks, Yogananda and Saytananda appeared before him. Recollecting that remote past of 1917, Satyananda wrote: The epoch-making Teacher of character-building education Rabindranath, remarked firmly with smiling face, "What ever system of education might be adopted, it does not matter. I have nothing to say. But I have one humble request that you will give a little freedom to the children. Our children were snubbed from childhood onwards, so their inner beauty slowly faded. In child hood they had to face the chastisement of most of the parents and teachers. In their young age, they were reprimanded and censured by the boss. How much can one tolerate? Let the flower of joy blossom in their face."¹ The words of 'liberty of joy' that dropped from the lips of our great Acharya, have been manifested in the education of Yogananda. In the educational institution set up at Dihika, they have wanted the same system to education. The tune of harmonious note of the two great men delighted Sytananda immensely; this is because, in the education system of both of them, the naturalism and the pragmatism have been assimilated in one. It is through the communion of life with activity, activity with religion, religion with science, and science with the welfare of mankind that education will be an integral part of life and through this, the all round development of humanity is possible. Swami Yogananda framed that system of education in collaboration with his associates.

Paramahans Yogananda reached the precipice of spiritualism from his boyhood. He had no deep regard for the formal education. Why did he think about education? Why did he set up schools for the children? He has said, "The ideal of right education for youth had always been very close to my heart. I saw clearly the arid results of ordinary instruction, aimed at the development of body and intellect only. Moral and spiritual values, without whose appreciation no man can approach happiness, were yet lacking in the formal curriculum. I determined to found a school where young boys could develop to the full stature of manhood [2]. However, after completing his education somehow, he was eager to tread the path of asceticism and never thought of the way to rectify the evil result of general education. But Yukteswar Giri opened his inward eye of this disciple of education. When Yogananda, expressed his desire to go to the Himalaya and meditate there, Yukteswar told him, "Don't not try to disobey the law of nature. You and your friends must study nicely. After having proper education and attaining the proper age, engage yourself with serving humanity. After studying and finishing the education, to serve in the world is the direction of nature [3]. It is obvious in this in this little speech as to why this great teacher is called the incarnation of wisdom. The teacher also told Yogananda "Remember", he had said slowly, "That he who rejects the usual worldly duties can justify himself only by assuming some kind of responsibility for a much larger family [4].

From that instant, the plan of a greater family began to rise in his mind in various ways. He acknowledged from the first hand experience of earthly life that the real fault lied in the base of conventional education which could not provide the education of real life encompassed. So his first work was provide the children education proper. Then "I decided to establish such an institution, in

which the tender boys and girls can be molded in the idealism of humanity. To that end, my first Undertaking was to start my mission with only seven boys at Dihika, a little remote village of Bengal [5].

Later on it was transferred to Ranchi. It was named "YOGDA SATSANGA BRAMHACHARYA VIDYALAYA." After that many more schools and colleges are established. Which of the distinct theories of education philosophy can explain the process in which he set up such school in the kingdom of nature to develop the entity of humanity? Which of the western theories of education philosophy, Rousseau's naturalism, John Dewey's pragmatism, of Kant's idealism, shall illumine the system of Paramhansji's? Or rather should we explain it with the theory of Eastern Educationists like Gandhi and Rabindranath or is it a unique idealism?

2. Views of Plato, Rousseau, Dewey and Yogananda in Education:

Like Rousseau's naturalism, Yogananda set up his first school at Dihika, far away from the social life, in the solitary lap of nature. Satyananda, alias Monohohon, known as the left hand, and Basab Kumar alias Dhirananda being the right, described beautifully the location of the school, "This bungalow was located on a hill like an elevated place. In front, the river Damodar was flowing in a zigzag way. From a distance the railway bridge looked like a picture. On the long horizon one could see the range of mountains, and a sat tree forest in the surrounding area. Small fountains and creeks made the place beautiful..... real soil and meadows made this place a dreamland [6]. The relationship of nature with objective of setting up of this school in the lap of great Nature is something different from the idealism of Rousseau. Because in Rousseau's opinion society spoils the child, so children are taught in the lap of nature, detaching them from the society. Nature is the only teacher. The idea of Yogananda is unique and different from that sense in which nature is used in Yogananda. He did not want to separate the children; rather, he wanted to work within the society. The work of Yogananda is with man and his society. Here nature has been used as a congenial environment, it is for the realization of the entity of God in nature, and such solitude is necessary. Satyananda has explained it as "It seemed to be the pilgrimage of the feeling 'Satyam Shivam [7] In the atmosphere of meditative activity the newly set up school of Divinity, roused in the mind of the workers, the idealism of hermitage. The importance of the role of teachers was there, and as a result Yogananda's thought of education was different and unique from Rousseau's theory of naturalism. Thought there was nature in the system of Yogananda's education, within it there was directives to build life and make life successful in reality. Even he himself formulated the theory of success in life. In this formula we may find the pragmatic theory of Dewey. Dewey has shown his phlegmatic theory through direct and out ward application and observation, but here in Yogananda there is no such system. The steps and explanations that we have in Dewey's system of 'solution of problem' is absent in Yogananda. The system of problem solving method in the thought of Yogananda's education is different. In the field of spiritual consciousness the permanent solution of the problem of life is different. Paramhansaji has determined the way of permanent solution of the problem of life in spiritual consciousness. From this point of view there is an objective affinity with Plato, the father of the theory of idealism of remote past (427-347 BC). Plato rejected any process of materialism on education. He considered the term 'conversion' synonymous with education. That is to say education is a process of the different states of existence. In Plato's view, to enlighten the inner soul is the aim of education which is also the basic principle of Yogananda's thought process. Like Plato, Paramhansa Yogananda also felt the importance of song in the development of soul in education. But the stamp of uniqueness in Yogananda lies in the fact that he showed the way of soul searching, having been immersed in into the melody of harmonious madness. Really, Yogananda's theory of education teaches us how to gain social and humanitarian education through idealism that unifies nature with soul.

3. Views of Rabindranath, Mahatma Gandhi and Paramhansa Yogananda in Education:

Being invited at Santiniketan, Yogananda had the opportunity to discuss about the subject related to education. He was elated to observe his "YATRA VISWABHABATYEK NIRAM" (where the world

has built its nest). He found the affinity of his own idealism. In the calm atmosphere of Santiniketan, the independent nature of the Ashramites, especially in the cultivation of song, teacher's meditation in studies, after all in everything he a unison with his school at Dihika. Rabindranth's devotional songs were very favorite to him. He would sing 'mandire mama ke' (who is in my temple), "Amar-e-ghare, apanar kore, grihadip khani jalo" (Light the lamp of love in my home) etc. In the cosmic chart of Yogananda, a number of such songs are included. All these are the part of education, helpful to the development of soul. However in the education philosophy Rabindranath, there was no unique system of Yoga-education, though there existed spiritual idealism. Both have established the perfect philosophy of education, unifying naturalism, idealism, and pragmatism. But Yogananda's philosophy of education differs from that of Rabindranath in that he lays much importance on the role of 'meditation' in scheme of education.

On the other hand though it has been described in 'Yogi Katahamrita' the meeting of Yogananda with Gandhi, and the former's visit to his Sabarmati Asram, there is nothing about their discussion relation to education. But Gandhiji praised the school established by Yogananda in Ranchi, after visiting it. The theory of self-development is prevalent in the education philosophy of both the spiritual personalities, yet Yogananda's education theory is separate from the way in which Gandhiji's basic education centers round activities. In Yogananda's philosophy real education only will lead the learners to the way of activity. Gandhiji was an idealist along with a politician, but Paramhansa Yogananda was an educationist and a teacher of idealism.

4. Different horizons of Education according to Yogananda:

In the thought of Yogananda's education, almost every aspects of life are addressed. Even by criticizing Rabindranath's literature, he establishes how to achieve the art of criticism. Criticism does not necessarily mean negative comment, it is the quest of its inner beauty, and such education is very much pertinent today. He has mentioned this type to education in the context of Rabindranath, in his "Yogi-Kathamrita". He has spelt out different aspect of social life, such as science education, religious education, domestic education, women education, education for the backward class and tribal people. Vocational education and hospitality education were not out of his mind. He not only thought but also implemented them. He paid his homage by registering his presence at Bose Institute. His discourse with Jagadis Chandra Bose enlightens his attraction to the study of science and its importance to life. His analysis of religion is based on science. He established a relationship of science with religion in his book "Dharma Vigyan" (Science of religion). Taking cue from the education theory of Yogananda, Dayamata has shown us how to achieve domestic education, how to nourish the little children, and even for the all round development of the women, classes for the girls students were arranged at the neighbouring villages [8]. The complete development of women-entity was his chief aim. Without being the slave of any other entity, women will brought about the exact development, through their activities and education. Yogananda has enlightened that path. In the Asram of Ranchi Yogananda taught the Tribal communities like Orao, and Munda, and employed them in the agricultural activities as the soil was very fertile there. Vegetables are still produced by the use of compost fertilizer and they meet the demand of vegetables in Ashram to some extent. Paramhansaji's system of health education was unique and exceptional. Public welfare was the only mission of Paramhansaji and it was also the advice of his master. He has sent a message of selfless service by exhibiting his kindness even to fawn and taming it by love and affection. In his mission of education, health-building, public welfare, and spiritual motivation occupied an important place. In his "Yogi-kathamrita" he himself mentions about the games and sports like hockey and football. Pupils are introduced to 'Yogda Method', a process of transferring force into the muscle by will power and infusing life force in any part of the limb by mind power. Pupils are taught Yogasan, sword-fencing, stick-fighting etc. during natural calamities, famine and hard times, the trained pupil in First-Aids, served the marooned people with great skill and zeal. In the course of gardening, they produce vegetables for their own dietary [9]. At present, these activities have been increased to a great extent.

The amazing is that, for the all-round development of a child, inculcating creativity is very important and that faculty is also encouraged through the cultivation of song, dance, acting and creative art.

Sometimes Yogananda would say suddenly that a play is to be acted. He would fix the subject matter, select the characters and the characters would compose dialogue verbally. He himself would play the role a yogi clad in Tiger's-skin, as if the teacher himself importing the lesson of creativity. So, the idea of perfect education is imminent in his system of education. Education can be correlated with life and this co-relation helps a student to find the way of life. The bond of education can be ingrained in heart only through yoga and there can be no possibility of depravity in the way of its development. All these point to the perfection of Yogananda's system of education.

4.1. Aim and Object:

The aim of Yogananda's education was to build the simple boys in the ideal of humanism. The children have tremendous potentialities and the manifestation of these potentialities is the sole aim to education. The chief aim of education is to ameliorate the body, mind and soul. The principle of 'live and let live' should be prevalent in the life of man. Yogananda's thoughts about the aim and objective in the all-round development of a child are:

1. Imparting to students a comprehensive vision of life.
2. Making the students appreciative of the ideas of balanced development of body, mind and soul.
3. Inculcating a spirit of service and sense of responsibility.
4. Enabling the students to be able to face challenge of life.
5. Providing an environment of love, ethics, etiquette, and cleanliness, conducive for acquiring right values of life.
6. To appreciate the glorious cultural heritage of the land of his birth.
7. Love for God and for God in all.
8. Self honesty, Truthfulness in speech, thoughtfulness of the needs and feeling of others.
9. Self control to avoid those things he should not do and achieve 'will power' to do what he should do.
10. Spirit of selfless service that links to noble goals.
11. To acquire good moral character.... etc.

It is not that he only speaks out these thoughts, or preaches them to his disciples by establishing Ashram, but also as a perfect educationist like Pestalotsi, Dewey, or Montessori of Western Country, his thoughts of education are extant in his great activities throughout the world. They are reflected in his curriculum, method of teaching, functions of a teacher, and activities of the learners and above all in the observation whether learning has come is achieved. For the implementations of his theories, he established many institutions and his societies are also building in many ways different institutions ranging from primary to College governed by the organization of 'Yogada Satsanga'. Question may be raised where lies the relevance of discussing Yogananda's education theory, where everything from curriculum to teacher, is there in the system of Govt. and Govt.-aided schools. In a society hankering after consumerism, there is no connection between the curriculum and the learners, the teacher and the teaching method, and the education becomes a degree oriented one. No method is there to activate a balanced development of the brain-cells. So, in the context of this cognitive development based learning, the techniques of the Yogananda's concept of education claim the need of special discussion.

4.2. Curriculum:

With the object leading a religious life centering round dedications and rugolas, Yogananda established a Brahmacharya Ashram at Dihika on the bank of river Damodar on 22 march, 1917, in an auspicious moment. Lesson on education begins through devotional song, kirtan, reading hymns, games and sports, gardening and study. Later on in Ranchi, Dept. of Brahmachari, Dept. of Satsanga, and Dept. of child are set up with particular curriculum. As the members of Ashramites increased, a complete aspect of education was framed along with the thought of Ashram in mind of Paramhansaji.

He wanted to education in the reality of life, not avoiding reality. He materialized his thought as directed by his master, by implementing the curriculum framed by the government in his class room. The teaching of history, geography, science, and language are barred on following the syllabus prescribed by the government, because in those subjects books are composed highlighting different aspect of life keeping in view the age group of the pupils. Something more is needed to help comprehending those subjects and in that respect, Yogananda gave much importance to co-curricular activities. The curriculum should be time-tested as education is a process throughout the whole life. For the total development of physical and mental faculties, such activities as rising early in the morning, taking physical exercise at dawn chanting hymns, observing meditation for concentration are compulsory, obviously they are the part and parcel of the curriculum. Imparting class-wise lessons and involvement in work education at the end of the lesson was also endorsed by yogananda. In the behest of Yoganandaji, both the curriculum of formal education in primary and secondary levels is implemented at Ranchi, where one can read agriculture, industry and commerce along with other school subjects. It envisages a perfect curriculum for comprehensive process of life-education.

4.3. Teacher:

Teaching shall be a commitment to a teacher, not merely a profession. Yogananda himself would impart lesson in class teaching of the tribal and underdeveloped students and worked as a class-teacher; in a wider sense he was a great teacher. His power of leadership was unquestionable. Each and every lesson was carried on delightfully and he believed that teachers must have been endowed with intuition. Comprehending all the good qualities of contemporary great teachers, he framed a guideline, regarding the duties and responsibilities of teacher.

4.4. The salient features of a good teacher are:

1. Teacher must have the filial devotion like parents.
2. Teacher shall be a friend, philosopher and guide. (The child in him should not cease to exist).
3. Teacher should be a man of liberal mind.
4. Teacher should lead the pupils from darkness to light. He shall perform the role of incendiaries.
5. He shall be well aware of the aims objectives of education.
6. He should be a good resource person and meet the curiosity of the learners carefully.
7. His manner and nature should be adequately beautiful so as to be a model before the learner.
8. Learn to have a control over own emotions, specially temper, jealousy and enmity.
9. Helpful in inciting eagerness and creativity among learners.
10. Equipped with the attributes of humanity and should have the capacity for building good relationship with others.
11. After all, a teacher should follow the spiritual guidelines laid down by Yogdananda and in this respect he should consider himself well intuitive. He must have clear idea and capacity for understanding the introspective behavior and motive of the learners. With the proper apprehension of Yogananda's philosophy, teacher shall have the capacity to introspect the psychological problems of a student minutely. Therefore, in Yogananda's education philosophy, teacher plays very significant role.

4.5. Teaching method and technique:

Paramhansaji is leading his disciples to the school of Great Nature. Sometimes he led them to river, chanting hymns all as the way, for bathing, or often to a remote place for picnic. Within the periphery of wonderful discipline, he would inculcator the idea of liberal education. He would say, "Rules are made for us and not we, for the rules." Needless to say, it points to his dependence on inherent discipline totally different from the hard and fast rules of punishment in conventional school. This is very much imperative for primary stage. Other techniques to be followed are :

1. To invent technique through experiment and observation as to inculcate the subject in mind of the learners.
2. To rouse the inquisitive mind.
3. To build self-confidence and concentration, develop clear and obvious thinking, to follow the method of exercise and meditation for intuition and will power, such methods are to be followed as are :
 - i) To over live by those principles of Dharma, as revealed by the saints, scriptures and his own conscience. Provide the students the opportunity, to apply the fundamental of concentration of class by having
 - a) short periods of silent meditation (2 Minutes) at beginning and the end of each period.
 - b) The students practice concentration while learning a subject; giving the students the chance to practice closing eyes, focusing at 'Kutastha' centre (between the eye brows) whereby they may absorb, understand and increase their learning, retentive and inspirational power, and ensuing their relaxation.
4. The way, the imparting of lesson is to be carried on : (Method will change with regard to subject, and new methods need to be invented.)
 - i) Read whole context.
 - ii) Reread, making and outline of major points and concentrating of deep points and those to be remembered.
 - iii) Read outline and try to mentally fill in all details.
 - iv) Review just before sleeping at night (Sub conscious and memory mind, absorb during sleep).
 - v) Make mind clam by practicing technique of concentration :
 - a) before studying and
 - b) Again, after studying to assimilate what was read.
5. To arrange, 'counseling and guidance' for the back word students and bring them to positive thinking.
6. Teacher must motivate students and do his part to create an atmosphere of love, understanding and encouragement and surrounded by good examples in his teaching where in learning to the highest degree is not only possible, but enjoyable both for the students and the teacher.

According by: a) Hold outdoor classes as much as possible.

b) Undertake fieldtrips and instructive extracurricular activities.

4.6. Effects:

The Result of mental, cognitive, spiritual and social development, which a learner achieves through education, will be as follows:

1. Mental engineering :

- a) Art of concentration.
- b) Coping with failure, adversity.
- c) Gaining mastery over the senses
- d) Positive Thinking
- e) Eradicating bad habits and cultivating good.
- f) Experiencing superiority of mind over body.
- g) Developing will power.
- h) Art of choosing right mate, treating mate rightly and creating and rearing spiritual children.

- i) Self confidence and self-reliance.

2. Social Arts :

- a) Learning to harmonize with others.
- b) Art of serving family, neighbors, community, state mankind.
- c) Value of self-sacrifice.

3. Applied Spiritual Science:

- a) Cultivating a relationship with God through meditation.
- b) Retaining inwardly peace.
- c) Being and making other happy
- d) Performing all action through discrimination and free will.

4.7. Testing of Outcome:

The method of education is not established unless the outcome of these methods is not tested. There have been enough provisions of teaching these methods as well as testing their outcome, in schools governed by Yogda Satsanga. In fact Paramhansa Yogananda thought that it is necessary to test how much a learner has achieved in the trends of development, and then begin from where one stands. Weekly review is to be carried on for that purpose. The learners have to fulfill the schedule of self-examination or self-building. In this weekly schedule everything is to be tested. Besides memory, clear thinking, intuition, will power will be obviously seen in the behavior of the learners. The teachers, trained in the method of Yogda, will certainly detect these developments. After all, in teaching all these, fellowship or scholarship is to be awarded.

5. Conclusion :

Profound concentration has a good result among the children in defeating the restlessness of both body and mind. The picture of a boy of 9-10 years old sitting at 'Yoga' in the school campus for an hour or so, with his eye ball keeping fixed, is nothing new. (Yogi Kathamrita). He has given through his lesson sic an education which we call today 'distance education'. The education thought of Yogananda is very much relevant and indispensable in the field of practical and spiritual life of present day world. There is no doubt that in all respect it is a perfect method of education.

6. References:

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