

17. Examinations then and now

FOR every man the development of his personality is a primary duty. The *Samskrith* word for "Personality" is marked by *Pourusham* (vitality and heroism). This is not found in everybody. It is revealed only in outstanding persons, who have made a mark in history. The Raamaayana, which is the textbook on Dharma (righteousness) for the Hindus, describes Raama's personality as the product of character, morality and adherence to truth. Emperor Ashoka was another great personality in history.

A true individual is one who manifests the divinity that is within him. The word "person" is used in Latin to describe the character in a play. It was later used in the English language to describe a person of divine descent.

It is derived from the *Samskrith* word "*Purusha*", which describes the divine origin of the individual. Hence, the primary purpose of education must be to make the individual develop his personality by the pursuit of spiritual and moral disciplines. Education is thus a process through which man is led to his highest status. It is the failure to infuse education with ethical content that is responsible for the futility of education to-day.

Examinations in ancient days were morality tests

In ancient times examinations were held not as an imposition on students but for the development and protection of the personality of the students. Examinations to-day have become a kind of punishment for the students. Unlike present-day examinations, which are primarily memory tests, examinations in ancient days were morality tests. The growth of educational institutions to-day is more an index of a growing disease rather than a means of training people to solve their problems. Everywhere there is trouble, violence and confusion, most of which is mused by educated persons. Hijacking, kidnapping, looting and other anti-social acts are indulged in mostly by educated persons. Because of the absence of character and morality in education, the educated persons are behaving in an unbecoming manner. Improper education results in great harm to the whole nation.

There is a wish-fulfilling tree in the shrine of the heart; that tree is surrounded by weeds. Unless the weeds are removed, the wish-fulfilling tree cannot be seen. That wish-fulfilling tree is a proper system of moral education. If the weeds that have grown round the tree are not removed, the educational system will not grow properly and yield good fruits.

In preparing question papers for examinations, teachers should observe certain rules. The questions should relate to what has been taught to the students. Very often questions do not bear any relation to what the students have been taught or to the prescribed *syllabi*. This results in misbehaviour by the students. The examiner should also know the answers for the questions he prepares. The other day an issue relating to a Medical Examination question paper went up to the Supreme Court. Teachers often fail to complete the syllabus within the prescribed period.

Right teaching is absent today

Teaching has become a process of transmission from head to head. Teachers teach with the head, and students listen to them with the head. Students go to the examination-hall with a headload of information, empty it out on the answer books, and return home

empty-headed. This kind of student may earn degrees, but what good will these youths bring to the people around? True teaching goes straight to the heart 'and imprints itself permanently on the hearts of the students.

By preparing students merely for answering certain questions in examinations they are induced to concentrate only on portions of a subject and not the subject as a whole. There is need for an interdisciplinary approach so that the connection between one subject and another is properly understood.

Teachers should regard their profession as one in which they not only teach but also continuously learn more and more about the subject that they have to deal with. It should be like the battery in a car which gets charged when the car is running.

University teachers, especially those serving in the Sathya Sai Institute, have to bear in mind certain important obligations. The foremost among them is the eschewing of involvement in politics. A great national leader like Baala Gangaadhar Thilak, who played a key role in the national struggle was a teacher in a High School at Poona. When he was asked, what ministerial position he would like to have when India became free, he replied that he would continue to remain a teacher and not seek any ministerial job. The proper training of young men who might become future ministers was, in his view, a more important job than being; a minister himself. This showed Thilak's spirit of sacrifice and devotion to the national interest.

Baba's discourse as Chancellor of the Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, inaugurating the Five-Day Workshops on Examination Reform, jointly sponsored by the Association of Indian Universities, New Delhi and the Sathya Sai Institute at the Institute's Campus, Prashaanthi Nilayam, 19 March 1984

God is Omnipresent; He is immanent in every being in equal measure. So, man must visualise Him equally in himself and in others.

That is to say, he sees only God in all. So how can he injure others or fear that he will come to harm through others? This is the basis of the Indian ideal of Ahimsa.

Sri Sathya Sai