

## Chapter 3. Modern Education

### Problems of the educational system

Today, the educational system, though very expensive and elaborate, has ignored instruction in morals. In the spiritual teacher's homes (*gurukulas*) of the past, instruction was provided for right living, spiritual advancement, and moral conduct and behaviour. Students were trained to lead lives marked by humility, sense control, virtue, and discipline. Now, these qualities are not recognisable among students. Students are not aware of the means or meaning of sense-control. From childhood, they revel in following every whim and fancy; they find pleasure in the free play of the senses and believe only in materialism.

As a result, the situation in the colleges fills one with alarm. The head of the department of health in Calcutta found that 80 out of 100 students in the Calcutta University are afflicted with poor health. In the Bombay region, the condition is even worse, with 90 out of 100 affected. The reason is to be found in the fact that the students are engaged in sensual living, the uncontrolled pursuit of sensory pleasure and evil habits. Can these be counted as gains from education? Or are they to be called "riches" accumulated through perverse ignorance?

Teachers have to identify their role and their responsibility. They have to bear a major share in fostering and preserving the mental and physical health of their tender, innocent wards.

### To each their own world

Every living being looks at the world around, but each one looks uniquely in their own special way. The same object is looked at by ten persons with ten different feelings. The son looks at one individual with the feeling that he is the father. The wife looks on him as the husband. His father looks upon him as a son. His companion has the feeling that he is a dear friend. Since he is the same individual, why doesn't he evoke the same reaction in all? Those who visualise him differently are affected differently. That is the truth.

Once, a *guru* residing in Brahman Mutth (a hermitage), while in a happy mood, chewing betel with great relish, asked his disciple, "Dear fellow! How is the world?" The disciple answered, "Dear *guru*! For each one, their own world." Although all are in one world, each one lives in their own world, shaped by their own actions and reactions. This is why Sankaracharya declared "fill your vision with wisdom; then, all that you see will be God." When the vision (*drishti*) is filled with wisdom (*jnana*), creation (*srishti*) is filled with Brahman.

### Story of Narayana and Lakshmi

In the vocabulary of education today, riches (*dhana*) is *dharma* (merit). The pursuit of riches is the "right" path. Every activity (*karma*) has the acquisition of riches as the goal. Possessing wealth (*dhanam*) confers the highest status. There is no ideal more desirable than getting rich. Here is a short story as illustration: Narayana (God) has sixteen manifest aspects; yet, He is the latent immanent reality. So, too, the material Narayana, the rupee, also has also sixteen "pennies" (*annas*) as parts. When men worship the rupee as the visible god, Narayana becomes unreachable to them. Few try to estimate the vastness of the loss they sustain therefrom.

One day, in the midst of conversation, Lakshmi, the divine consort and the goddess of wealth, teased Na-

rayana, “Lord! The entire world adores Me; not even one in a hundred, why, not even one in a million, worships you.” She put forward a plan to test people’s sincerity. She said, “Lord! Let’s discover the facts for ourselves. Come, we’ll go forth into the world and find out.”

Narayana agreed. He changed into a great pundit, wearing golden bracelets on his wrists as evidence of the appreciation and admiration of famous academic bodies. He had a garland of beads (from the *rudraksha* bush) around his neck and thick streaks of holy ash on his forehead. He manifested on earth as a redoubtable scholar. He moved from village to village and began enchanting the people through his enrapturing discourses. His splendid personality and deep scholarship attracted the people. Thousands gathered to hear him and followed him from place to place. *Brahmins* invited him to their settlements and honoured him. His arrival was celebrated as a festival, with rich feasting.

While Narayana was being feted thus, Lakshmi appeared on earth as a great female ascetic. She too proceeded from village to village, enlightening the people on the *Atma* through her discourses. Women assembled to hear her fascinating speeches in wave after wave, in massive numbers. They prayed for her to honour their homes with a visit and partake of the feast they were most eager to offer. In reply, she informed them that she was bound by some vows that made it difficult for her to accept their request. She would not eat out of plates already in use in the homes. She said that she must be allowed to bring her own cups and plates. The women yearned so deeply to host her that they accepted the condition. Whatever her vow, they were ready to respect it. Invitations came from every woman, from everywhere.

The female *yogi* reached the house where she was to take food the first day and took from her bag a gold plate, a few gold cups, and a gold tumbler for drinking water. She spread them before herself, for the various items of the meal. When the meal was over, she left, leaving the precious golden articles for the host. She had a new set for each day, she said.

The news spread. The villages where Narayana was holding his delightful discourses also heard the wonderful happenings of the female ascetic’s gifts. The *brahmins* who were staunch admirers of the far-famed scholar also rushed to invite the female *yogi* to their homes for lunch! She told them that they should drive the pundit out before she could enter their settlement. She would not set foot there as long as he continued to stay there! She was adamant. Their greed for gold was so strong that they forced the pundit, whom they had adored for so long and so pompously, to leave their village.

Thereafter, the female *yogi* entered the *brahmin* settlement, gave discourses, partook of feasts arranged in her honour, and presented the golden plates and cups to each of her hosts. Thus, she managed to get the pundit driven out of every place where he sought recognition and attention. Instead, she secured the worship of people everywhere. Unable to bear the universal insult, the pundit cast off the role, and Narayana disappeared from the earth. The female ascetic came to know of this. She also gave up her role and resumed her real form. She joined Lord Narayana. While they were conversing, she told the Lord, “Now, tell me! What did you discover? Who between us is honoured and worshiped more on earth?” Narayana smiled at her question. He replied, “Yes. What you said is true.”

Yes. Today, education and the knowledge gained are being marketed. Money is all in all. Educated people desert their motherland like mendicants in search of money. Is this the sign of a proper education?