

The Process of Your Life Should Be the Process of Your Education

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THE NECESSITY AND THE ABILITY TO LEARN ARE IMPLICIT IN HUMAN NATURE

The greatest and the most harmful illusion, from which our society is suffering today, is that 'schooling' and 'education' are synonymous. So, the most important task before all thoughtful and honest citizens in our society is to break this illusion. The origin and functioning of teaching-learning on this earth is as old as the origin of human beings, and the process of life itself has been successfully educating human beings, without them undergoing any schooling.

God or the Goddess Nature, while creating human beings and giving them the opportunity to live on this earth, had enough love for them and enough wisdom to make teaching-learning a combined and concurrent feature of life itself. God gave hunger and thirst to human beings which compelled them to engage in the search for food and water. God made life dependent on breathing which compelled them to learn about the air or atmosphere. God also provided men and women with a conscientious heart to prompt them to lead an honest and nonviolent life and to provide a loving care to their offspring. Human beings needed help and protection from other forces so they learned to cooperate with their fellow men and women. The need for cooperation also gave human beings a sense of morality. They realized that life was based on an interdependent relationship of getting help, on the one hand, and giving (or returning) help, on the other hand. God also granted human beings a wondering and questioning mind — an endowment that inspired them to learn about the movements of Sun, the moon, the planets and the stars. This questioning and wondering nature led many people to their perception and faith in some hidden power and hidden mind as the sustainer and creator of this Universe. Thus, spiritualism emerged in human society.

In fact, it is God or the Goddess Nature, who has not only equipped humankind with the capability to learn, but has also made human beings' survival and welfare dependent on their ability to educate themselves. As a result of this capability and necessity for learning, the human race has been engaged in educating itself from time immemorial, without establishing or depending on any schools.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WORK AND COOPERATIVE LIVING AS AN EDUCATIVE PROCESS

God or Nature also made it necessary for humans to use their hands and legs to undertake some activity so that they could earn their livelihood and bring up their children. But this activity, which is called 'MANUAL AND PRODUCTIVE WORK', does not provide for livelihood only. In fact, work with the hands educates the person who is working. We forget that this activity yields four good fruits when it is undertaken seriously, devotedly and skillfully: (1) livelihood, (2) new learning, (3) a sense of achievement and satisfaction, and (4) a sense of relief and relaxation.

As a cow gives us milk through all four of her breasts, in the same way, the manual and productive work we do can be compared to a four-breasted milk-giving cow. But, the

folly of human beings is that we milk only one breast of the WORK-COW — that which provides livelihood. We have been made to forget that the WORK-COW is the main educator of humankind, and has been so throughout human history. Today, not only are we made to believe that manual and productive work is barren educationally, but also that it is a hindrance to the process of education.

In fact, it is very important for us to understand how work is the best source of human education. The fact is, meaningful learning can only take place when the human being faces some questions and thus becomes eager to find answers and solutions. This situation is created and faced only by people who are engaged in some manual and productive work and feel responsible and motivated to do it. The great amount of knowledge with wisdom that human beings have gained up to now is the result of questions and problems encountered in their work. So, when a school prohibits manual and productive work in its activities, it does not enhance its capacity to educate its students, but it loses its best friend or ally in the process of educating its students. Information given to or imposed on students allows for neither questions nor curiosity, and therefore can neither be digested by the students nor properly used by them.

The second important thing to note is that the spoken or the written word is not the sole means of educating oneself. The child learns a great deal by sharing life with his/her elders and those younger than him/her, as well as by just watching and weighing the behavior of his/her seniors and juniors. Hundreds or thousands of young boys or girls of the same age, assembled or crowded in a school or college, are deprived of all opportunities of learning spontaneously and silently by participating and sharing in the cooperative living of elders and youngsters working with some purpose. A learner should not be totally removed from participating in the life-sustaining work that is done cooperatively by his/her family. The burden of work on a young learner must be light, of course, but the responsibility of work must not be totally forbidden or prohibited. If we wish to teach swimming, we must allow the child-pupil to enter water, though with full care and caution. Postponing the child-pupil's entry into water, until s/he has acquired a certificate of swimming, cannot be a sound and successful approach of education.

NURTURING YOUNG PEOPLE TO BECOME SELF-EDUCATORS IN THE ART OF LIVING

The bifurcation of 'training for a job' and 'actual engagement in that job' into two separate engagements is based on a very wrong concept of human work. It is perfectly right to accept the idea of apprenticeship or novice-ness of a newcomer in a job. But to disallow him/her to enter a job, unless s/he has been trained in a separate training school and has acquired a certificate qualifying him/her for that job, is not only a farce, but also is a fraud that is exploiting our youth mercilessly. In the olden days, young people joined most work as apprentices or helpers. They were admitted in an office, shop or a workshop as novices for a short period of time and after the expiry of that time, they were recognized as regular workers. The apprentice did not have to pay any fees for his/her initial training, but, on the other hand, it was s/he who received a token remuneration from the workplace. It is true that some initiation is necessary and helpful for a novice, but we should not forget that human beings are born with the capacity of self-learning.

Thus, the best education is that which makes one his or her own self-educator, using the conditions and facilities provided by God or Nature for continuous self-learning.

Moreover, language or mathematics or science or art or history or geography is not the real subject or concern of education. The real aim of education is, on the one hand, to establish a synthesis between the individual and the society; and, on the other hand, between the society and its natural surroundings. The learner has to learn the 'art of living' as the main subject of education — that is, how to live with the members of a community by cooperative interactions of getting and giving. The processes of 'getting' and 'giving' must be balanced, even with our natural or physical surroundings. A child may be allowed to get a lot of help and give back just a little. But this reciprocity of getting and giving cannot be ignored during the student years with the hope of reviving it when the student-life is over. If giving is not practiced during childhood, the adult will not practice it when grown up. We become what we practice, and we cannot become what we profess unless we practice it in our real life. Mere listening to sermons, without practicing their content, will produce only hypocrites, not men and women of integrity.

TODAY'S EDUCATION DEGENERATES HUMANITY BY INCULCATING THE WRONG VALUES OF LIFE

However, in the capitalist worldview, education is seen as an investment of money during the child's student years, and the hope is that this investment will yield profit in the future. This view of education is below human dignity. It degenerates and devalues human beings by reducing them to a market-commodity. If a 'schooled' individual proves to be an unscrupulous exploiter of society and polluter of natural surroundings, his so-called education is worse than non-education.

We must understand that human beings are not born to be ungrateful exploiters or parasites, for they are gifted with a conscience to keep them away from parasitism or exploitation of others. But when a child is allowed to practice getting/taking, without practicing the duty of giving, his/her conscience becomes blunted and desensitized, and then s/he is destined to become an exploiter of others. While those boys and girls who do not allow their lives to be dominated by schools (and choose to remain so-called uneducated people) go on practicing getting as well as giving concurrently and naturally, this essential opportunity is denied to school-going children. If we ponder over this situation deeply, we shall be able to understand why the moral standard of humankind has been falling, despite the spread of modern school education. In fact, it is quite difficult to decide whether modern school education is really education in its true sense, or just an instrument to bring about the moral downfall of humankind in disguise.

Today's education provided by schools, colleges or universities can be compared with a lottery, for which tickets have been secured in the form of certificates awarded by their schools or colleges. Whether these lottery-tickets will bring any prize for the ticket-holder is not certain. Rather, the schools of today guarantee that they will uproot students from their parental occupations and from their local society. While our rural people may be economically poor or even illiterate, they are quite rich in their cultural and vocational heritage and their very expressive local dialects. But the influence of today's schools on

these rural people is very harmful, for they cultivate in children a sense of disdain and inferiority for their parental occupations involving physical labor, for their rural life, for their local mother-language, for their traditional attire, and for their traditional culture. Moreover, with too many competitors in the fray, these days, it has become extremely difficult for a rural student to secure a 'table and chair' job. Yet, having developed an ambition for modern comfort, the rural neo-educated youth have lost their capacity to do laborious jobs which they can easily learn from their parents. So the question that arises today is, "Is this school education good or helpful for the rural people, or is this education harmful to them?"

The answer to this question is clear. The school of today cannot help the rural people or the common masses of our nation in improving their lives or their living conditions. This answer emerges clearly from the common people's point of view. But, even if we judge the present school education from the point of view of the elite class of our society, we will come to the conclusion that in the long run, this school education will not be good or beneficial even for them. This education will ultimately make the elite class totally dependent on the so-called uneducated farmers, laborers, dairy workers, and other craftsmen and artists, to fulfil their multiple needs. Secondly, this elite class is bound to face unemployment, because the schools today are producing too many aspirants for a limited number of jobs. As a result of the spread of school education during the last 53 years of our freedom, the unemployment crisis among the so-called educated people has deepened. So, the present school education is now proving to be harmful even for the traditional elite class of our country. In fact, the so-called uneducated person still retains some ability or power to face unemployment, but the so-called educated person does not retain even a little power to face unemployment.

EDUCATION IS A LIFELONG PROCESS WHILE SCHOOLING IS A TEMPORARY PHASE

More importantly, today's belief — that a human being will be an educated person only when s/he is trained by others who claim to be superior to him/her — is very harmful and wrong. The fact is that human beings are constant learners by nature. They have an inner teacher within their minds and hearts and an inner will to improve themselves. What we have to learn and realize most urgently, is that human beings have not been born in this world as destitute orphans with regards to their education. The source or the fountain of learning is already there in him/her and the main task of worldly teachers is to introduce each person to his inner teacher. While Indians do have a tradition of searching for an appropriate spiritual guide (*Guru*), the role of this spiritual *Guru* is to introduce students (or disciples) to their Divine *Guru* (residing within the student's own mind or heart), and not to dominate the student. In fact, Nature has arranged that when a worker is wedded to his/her work, the worker becomes a learner and the work itself serves as his/her *Guru*. The situation today demands that we remind our fellow human beings that they must become their own self-learners and must assume the responsibility of educating themselves.

Human beings must also be reminded that everything found in their surroundings, and every event taking place around them, can become a source of their education. We must remember that books and teachers are only a fraction of the educational facilities

provided by God or Nature. Moreover, teachers and books cannot be any human's constant and permanent sources of education. While education is a continuing and a lifelong process, schools and teachers are merely a temporary phase in our life.

Nor can education take the shape of a stock or storehouse, secured in our student life, with a view to serving us throughout our life. Each day, and in each situation, we need some new education — relevant to that particular time and that particular place. But today the fashion or trend is to acquire a large stock of information and facts, so that it might serve us for the whole of our future life. We generally talk of 'finishing' our education after passing the M.A. exam or obtaining our Ph.D. degree. And then we talk of our entry into real life and assuming its responsibilities. But this is an absurd notion, because education cannot be bound in any timeframe, nor can it be collected as a stock and stored in our mind to be used for the whole of our life. Education must be relevant and connected to the place and time to which the learner belongs. Education is like a perennial river, constantly flowing towards the ultimate goal of human life. It must not be seen as a mass of stagnated water collected and stored in a big dam.

Thus, we must realize that the era of school education that has flourished during the last few centuries is now coming to an end. The school of today shall not be able to solve the problems of the world tomorrow. So let us stop worshipping these schools, which have cut themselves off not only from the hard realities of life, but also from the rich educative possibilities of the process of human life. Life and learning are so united that they cannot be separated at any time, at any place or in any manner. Life knows the ultimate goal of each human being and it is constantly leading him on the path towards this ultimate goal. So, let us have faith in the educative capacity of our own lives and pursue our education up to the highest goals of human life through our own processes of living.

STOP THIS CRIPPLING EDUCATION

God or Goddess Nature gave hands, a heart, and a mind to every human being. This means that human beings, who are using their hands, must combine this with the use of their hearts, as well as with the use of their heads. God made human beings as 'whole' people. God did not create one class of people with only hands (having no heart and no mind), nor a second class endowed with only hearts (having no hands and no mind), nor a third class of only minds (having no hands and no heart). But our schools today have only been dealing with the minds of their students. They forget that the mind alone cannot be educated or developed properly, without combining it with the use of hands and heart. Thus, our schools are creating a society of crippled human beings as they are engaged in a rebellion against what Nature has ordained. Our model of education today is Anti-Nature and that is why it is proving to be a pollutant not only of our ecology, but also of our minds. If this very school education is continued and universalized, it is bound to prove itself a great calamity for our future generations. So, let us not continue to keep our school education 'Crippled and Anti-Nature' but let us make it 'Wholesome and Pro-Nature', so that it may prove to be not a bane but a boon for the future of humanity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shri Dayal Chandra Soni (26 Vidya Marg, Dewali, Udaipur 313001 Rajasthan, India) was born in 1919 in a small town, Salumbar, in the old state of Mewar. He was selected to lead a Gandhian Basic Education School in 1941, and in connection with his work, he was fortunate enough to learn about Basic Education from Dr. Zakir Hussain, from Gandhiji himself, and from Vinoba Bhave. He later worked at Seva Mandir, an NGO in Udaipur, on a literacy campaign for rural areas. He was chosen to be the Programme Officer in India for the World Literacy Programme of Canada. For the past 60 years, Shri Soni has been writing essays and books on educational reconstruction. He has published nearly 400 articles and 25 books. One book written by him on Non-formal Education (in Hindi) has been given the Madan Mohan Malviya award by the U.P. Government in 1994. He currently runs a small flour-grinding mill in his home and is still actively engaged in writing his views on Educational Reconstruction.