

Spiritual Education and Well Being

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Abstract

In the age of knowledge explosion, the relevance of Herbert Spencer's question "What Knowledge is of most worth" requires a thorough assessment. The world with the passage of time has become a boiling pot where human life is being sacrificed at the cost of material gains. As a result of this, foul play, unhealthy competition, violence, depression and unhappiness are breeding in the society. Education being an instrument of change therefore requires a further redresser in terms of survival of the human race. The pertinent question therefore is what type of education? On analysis the buzz word which is doing the rounds in the intellectual world is, "Spiritual Education". Philosophers and educators around the globe are trying to seek answers to spiritual education and its impact on the lives of human beings so far as ethical standards are concerned. On the basis of empirical research undertaken by other scholars the paper will address spirituality in its concept and meaning. It will also highlight that spiritualism is the path of achievement that one attains through years of struggle giving man the power of dignity, which nothing else like wealth, scholarship or office can give. This form of education should begin right from the formative years of life where an individual should be taught to be a seeker by setting an example of how human spirit can be elevated to greater heights by his own efforts. It is therefore, spiritual education alone which can transform the society and can direct goodness towards oneself and others. The only weapon therefore should be to educate our souls and the author of this paper firmly believes if practiced will put a curb on vices completely.

Key words: knowledge explosion, unhealthy competition, spiritualism, seeker, faithfulness

INTRODUCTION:

‘Knowledge is power’, a maxim put forth by Swami Vivekananda is of immense importance in today’s world but the author of this paper believes this maxim should be rewritten as knowledge explosion has taken place flooding our minds with the kind of knowledge that we should value, revere and trust. What knowledge is of most worth is a central question therefore which should be uncovered and a clear distinction be made between fact, theory and reality, etc. Even in doing so we value knowledge that enables us to coerce the world into meeting our needs – no matter how much violence, opposition to the ecology or anti welfare programmes to the society or even survival of human species is concerned. Most of the times we have therefore seen that we have made ourselves adversaries of our very own existence. In the language of religious tradition, Adam and Eve committed the first sin and in the language of intellectual tradition they made the first epistemological error. It was an error that has been repeated many times in human history, not least by those scientists of whom Robert Oppenheimer said, “The physicists have known sin.” In scientific terms man wants knowledge which could exclude the finer aspects of life. The critique of modern knowingt is important that we move from objectivity to truth where factual observations and logical analysis was not only heavily relied upon but taking care of subjective faculties like emotion, intuition and faith which engages mankind into mutual accountability, transformed relationship forging trust and faith in the face of unknowable risks. The basic difference between moral and spiritual education needs to be highlighted since truth, faith and emotion - a former concept rich in philosophical and psychological literature is different from the latter concept of spiritualism which is in a relative infancy stage and there is a need to understand its conceptual geography.

The term spirit has clear classical roots or origins in the Latin spiritus which means ‘breath’; and the Greek pneuma means air or wind. Breath is constructed as something which moves animate beings in modes of operation not available to inanimate objects. The soul is a spiritual entity, the potentially immortal essence of a human agent in the absence of which he could claim no distinct personal identity. The spiritual identity of a person then is determined by reference to his thoughts, beliefs, feeling and goals and it is liable for evaluation

is essentially normative in terms precisely, of its aspirations to what is true or false, right or wrong, good or bad. A healthy soul then which is divine oriented to the transcendent condition which is eternal rather than temporal, immortal rather than mortal, invisible rather than visible, intelligible rather than sensible. In the pursuit of spiritual knowledge the grasp of spiritual truths and cultivation of spiritual dispositions the school curriculum should focus more on aspects which are humane. Spiritualism in the real sense of the term and according to Missinne and others, spirituality is more universal, intrinsic and an integral part of human existence. The concept of spirituality is not limited to any particular ideology and allows for a wide range of religious convictions and experiences. There have been a number of attempts to define spiritual dimensions. Genia reviewed the literature and identified the specific criteria that are characteristic of mature faith. These criteria are theoretically grounded in the works of Gordon Allport, William James and Erich Fromme and are as follows:

1. Transcendent relationship than something greater than oneself.
2. Consistency of life style with spiritual values.
3. Commitment without absolute certainty.
4. Appreciation of spiritual diversity.
5. Absence of ego centricity and magical thinking.
6. Equal emphasis on both reason and emotion.
7. Mature concern for others.
8. Tolerance and human growth.
9. Struggle to understand evil and suffering.
10. A felt sense of meaning and purpose.
11. Ample room for both traditional beliefs and private interpretation.

Plato too focused on spirituality as the basis of one's life since spiritual education teaches logical thinking and educating one's soul will stop a person from being impulsive. The universal law therefore is the spiritual law

which states that there cannot be an effect without a cause. Faith and rising above one's ego is an integral part of the concept of spiritualism.

Spirituality is traditionally linked with religion but they are not synonymous. Spirituality is a broader construct than religion. Spirituality allows the individual to have a sense about the sacred without the institutional practices and limitations that are associated with traditional religion (Zinnbauer et al.,1999). McGhee and Grant (2008) offered a universal and useful definition of spirituality consisting of four behavioural characteristics that is the evidence a specific mindset. The behavioural characteristics of the spiritual individuals include: 1. Seeking to transcend their ego. 2. Awareness and acceptance of their interconnectedness with others, creation and their ultimate concern. 3. Understanding the higher significance of their actions, while seeking to integrate their lives holistically. 4. Believing in something beyond the material universe which ultimately gives value to all else. In other words there are four major domains of a spiritual person namely personal well-being, communal well being, transcendental well being and environmental well being. These four domains integrate to form overall spiritual well being of an individual. Spiritual persons thus seek to live an authentic life sourced in meaningful relationships. McGhee and Grant (2008) further noted that these persons can be guided by this concept in their practice, by way of regulating their motivation, perceptions and actions towards others.

SPIRITUALISM AND RELIGION

Natural religion, Rousseau believes has been tampered with and worship made too ceremonial. Religion is the path and spiritualism is the goal. Religion helps us to tread on activities and rituals but spiritualism is a way of thinking and understanding our lives. Religion divides on the basis of these activities, rituals and ceremonies segregating us in different communities but spirituality diminishes all boundaries and makes us one with the universe – gives us the concept of 'Vasudev Kutumbh Kamb'. The knowledge and lessons of spirituality should be taught right from primary level so that a child develops his way of thinking on a wider spectrum. Religion comes by birth but spirituality has to be inculcated, rigorously practiced and

discussed by way of a constant learning process. It is a slow and gradual process of development and it is an individualistic journey towards self-realisation and self-enrichment. Without spiritualism religion is baseless since no one understands the religious activities and their importance in life.. In doing these rituals the question of why? bothers an individual. Spirituality answers an individual's curiosity in many ways by giving food for thought with regards to question like life and death, happiness and sorrows, success and failures, etc but. religion divides us into narrow domestic walls and the outcome of which is unrest, agony, violence, anguish and depression all over the world. The verses and religious texts are recited without understanding the meanings and essence. Wars are being waged on the basis of dogmas of religion, the meaning of which have already been lost. It is only spirituality which gives meaning to religion, making us understand how different religions are like different paths leading to the same goal. Religion should never make anyone violent, weird and scrupulous against humanity. It is our lack of understanding of the spirituality which gives us a narrow vision of 'me and mine'. Spirituality gives a bird's view where different religions are nothing but different paths that anyone chooses and nothing is wrong. So it can be summed up as religion says "You are a body and you have a soul." whereas spirituality teaches us to think as "You are a soul and you have a body".

SPIRITUALISM AND MORAL VALUES

To attain the philosophy of spiritualism and that "I am a soul" one needs to undergo a self-purification process where moral values is the first stepping stone universal in all religions like truthfulness, honesty, non-violence etc. Meditation helps us to focus on one's own thinking, behaving and believing. Spiritualism is internalisation, self evaluative and an upliftment process which can only blossom in a congenial environment. It is lack of spiritualism in our curriculum which is defocusing children, making them depressed and sad all the time. They are always on a lookout for immediate and instant pleasures failing which they develop suicidal tendencies. Students are not steady in their relationships either at home or in the larger society. Materialistic pleasures and gains is the only motto and focus to achieve excellence in life. Moral science or value education classes are imparted only at the primary stage and the link gets lost with the exclusion at the later stage due to

overburdening of the other subjects considered more important. Through sports, community service programmes, music, group activities and exchange programmes spiritual qualities can be inculcated in students. Today's educational system is making the child more selfish as he is becoming a prey to the number game position and power struggle. Bad qualities like rivalry, unhealthy competitions and conflicts is giving way to unnecessary threats and challenges of social cohesion which is not in line with the moral lessons imparted in schools. Feeling of caring and sharing evaporate as they grow up and this breeds in self-centredness. Knowing fully well that they are deviating from their original self, they hold on religion as an emergency brake to satisfy their own ego and this is how religious practice becomes more and more prevalent among the ignorant and is the cause of all sorrow and suffering .

SPIRITUALISM AND SECULARISM

Modern spirituality is a concept of the second half of the 19th century and secularism is a concept of nationalism and is considered a part of greater transformation. Science and scientific rationality are fundamental to the secular age and scientific progress is often seen to depend on the secularisation of the mind (Chadwick,1990). Vivekananda who received thorough western education and in his address speech in the World Parliament at Chicago at 1893, claimed that he “was proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance” (Ziolkowski, 1993;221). Vivekananda's spirituality was not modest or meek but was forceful, polemical and proud. This speech resonated powerfully among American audience. His writings in English often compare the lack of spirituality in the West with the abundance of it in India. Vivekananda is probably the first major advocate of a ‘Hindu spirituality’ and Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore were deeply influenced by him. Gandhi and Rabindranath argued that materialism of the West created warfare and colonial exploitation while spirituality of the East led to peace and equality and prosperity for all. India has always seen deep rooted spiritualism in the Buddhist ruler Ashoka and Muslim ruler Akbar. Tolerance is an important aspect of the Indian civilisation and is connected to the idea of secular neutrality. Nehru's major book ‘Discovery of India’ has highlighted on spirituality by rejecting communism. Tagore was also convinced that

unique spirituality unified Asia and while delivering a series of lectures in Japan and China tried to create a pan-Asian movement towards a common Asian civilisation. He also acclaimed that Asia should assume a role in the spiritual leadership in the world. Radhakamal Mukherjee firmly believed that duty, love and goodness are higher spiritual values of a civilisation. These values guide and shape the personality in everyday business of life and human personality therefore should be continually engaged in searching these values at the level of the society. Human beings therefore need interventions to develop these natural propensities for good. “We are born weak, we have need of help, we are born destitute...we have need of assistance, we are born stupid, we have need of understanding.”

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

Several studies have been carried out in different areas of spiritualism. The notable studies in this context are briefly stated as follows:

- (Suthers-McCabe, Van Voorhees, and Fournier, 2004) undertook research on human animal interaction and suggested that providing prisoners with the opportunity to raise service dogs also gave them a renewed sense of purpose in life. According to them providing purpose in life may be as simple as affording the opportunity to care for others, such as taking care of another living being. This is a very simple intervention.
- Tuck and colleagues (2006) investigated the acceptability and feasibility of a six-week, support group-based, spiritual growth intervention intended to relieve stress. Partly by facilitating the search for meaning, this spiritual development program appeared to bolster stress coping responses. Specifically, this descriptive longitudinal study found a significant decline in perceived stress and increased growth in spiritual perspective at a six-week follow-up, albeit with only 27 participants. So it can be ascertained that spiritual growth can help a person overcome stress
- Kelley (2003) provides empirical evidence for how community empowerment and school-based programs improved youths’ sense of community and direction in life. The programs in this study were

based on “health realization”—a set of positive psychology-based principles, for example, viewing the mind as “a spiritual truth. . . that grounds the observable”—that are intended to promote well-being and resilience in youth.

- Gear, Krumrei, and Pargament, 2009 employed ‘Winding Road’ has a spiritual intervention which facilitated group discussion to help undergraduates understand these spiritual struggles as part of their larger spiritual journey. The report highlighted that these students behaved more consistently with their personal values in course of their spiritual enlightenment.
- Maestas and Gaillot, 2010 employed another intervention for children and adolescents described in RAND’s evaluation of the Spirituality for Kids Program. This afterschool program, which was not religious, 13 was based on best practices in resilience literature and sought to “build four areas of personal strength: social competence, problem solving, autonomy and self-efficacy, and sense of purpose” (Maestas and Gaillot, 2010, p. 3). A randomized, controlled study used a validated survey instrument to measure children’s positive behaviors (e.g., social skills) and negative behaviors (e.g., anxiety, depression) immediately after the intervention as well as 12 weeks later. Results showed that the program significantly increased children’s positive behaviors and, to a slightly lesser extent, decreased negative behaviors.
- Astin and colleagues (2010) suggested that fundamental college experiences, such as civic engagement and exposure to diverse people and ideas, “contribute to students’ spiritual growth.” Also, growth in particular spiritual areas was also associated with satisfaction with various aspects of college (i.e., the institution).
- Studies of mindfulness and meditation techniques suggest possible ways that can be employed to improve well being. A few studies undertaken by these researchers are stated. Hart, 2007, Linberg, 2005, Ekman et al., 2005, Follette and Colleaugues, 2006, Thompson and Waltz, 2008, Berceli and

Napoli, 2006 emphasised that meditation is the only technique that may help to reduce stress in general and well being in particular.

- Beekun and Westerman (2012) undertook a research study in Norway and showed increased spirituality resulted in increased intention to behave ethically.
- Fernando and Chowdhury (2010) undertook research on ethics in Australia and the result showed positive spiritualism, well being based on the concept of idealism.
- Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2010) conducted a study on ethics in the USA. The findings showed higher personal spirituality resulted in higher projective ethical decisions.
- Issa and Pick conducted a study on ethics in Australia and found positive relationship between spirituality and ethical practice in the work place.

From the above researches it can be concluded that spirituality has supplemented ethical development of human beings. It develops vision, character, kindness, morale and a sense of goodness in all humans which helps him to rise above himself and ultimately lead an achievement which would be through scintillating acts of mindedness. Spiritual fitness interventions will attempt to bolster spiritualism through counselling, therapy sessions, and meditation techniques and will help an individual overcome stress in any form.

EPILOGUE:

Jean Jacques Rousseau said “Man is born good, another man meddles with him and makes him bad” or we can say the society that comprises of individuals makes him bad. From this statement we can surely say that the society has to be a model of practical spirituality bringing in a coating of goodness not allowing pressure tactics but teaching man to conquer himself. Spiritual knowledge should be that light which will dispel the darkness of the mind.

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