

KRISHNAMURTI'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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J. Krishnamurti is basically a philosopher who is also deeply concerned with right education. To him, there is no difference between philosophy and education. The aims of both are one and the same: to bring about a fundamental and instantaneous change in man and society by setting human mind absolutely and unconditionally free. What the philosopher teaches to the elderly, the educator teaches the same to the young. A true teacher is also a philosopher. He is not only knowledgeable but also wise. A philosopher loves truth and not ideas and theories. Philosophy is understanding life wholistically, directly and instantaneously. It is living life not as conceived by thought but as it truly is. A true teacher or a philosopher 'directs' the student towards the true living, at the very beginning of life. He catches them young and teaches them the art of living life unconditionally by keeping their minds free and fresh. Krishnamurti devoted his life to the task of keeping the young minds uncluttered by thought. He taught them to love truth or life without being caught in the network of thought. Writing to the students, he said, "Life is what is happening at this instant, not an imagined instant, not what thought has conceived. So it is the first step you take now that is important. If that step is in the right direction, then the whole life is open to you. Right direction is not towards an ideal, a predetermined end. It is inseparable from that which is taking place now. This is not a philosophy, a series of theories. It is exactly what the word philosophy means—the love of truth, the love of life. It is not something that you go to the University to learn. We are learning about the art of living in our daily life".¹

Krishnamurti holds that human mind as we know is deeply conditioned and contaminated by thought. Thought has divided and disintegrated it. It has made the mind narrow and old. Thought is by nature conditioned, either by an object or by an idea. It is a 'materialistic' process. Which is the movement of the past. It is the response of memory which is the past. Thought is never independent. Independent thought is a contradiction in terms. Thought is finite. It is self-contradictory and self-isolating. It is divisive and conflicting. Thought is measure and mechanical. So the mind conditioned by thought necessarily is a heir to selfishness, division, contradiction, conflict and so on. Thought may build up a civilization of scientific and technological advancement. But it inevitably brings about a society of division, conflict, poverty, violence and war. It renders life sorrowful, for sorrow is the urge for the repetition of the past, however pleasant it may be. And thought is precisely the repetition of the past. Thought cannot create a culture of true living of integration, peace and happiness. True living is possible only when the mind goes beyond thought and comprehends truth. Truth is 'nothingness'. It is the 'emptiness' of the mind.² Truth is when thought is not. Thought is 'something' whereas truth is 'nothing'. Thought is conditioned and truth is freedom. Therefore right education should not confine the student to the realm of thought. It should not exaggerate the significance of thought in life. It should not give thought undue importance. Instead, it should teach the student the nature and limitations of thought and help them to go beyond. Right education should enable them to 'perceive' truth, to keep their minds 'empty' and absolutely nothing. It should empty the student's mind of its fictitious content of ideas, beliefs, opinions, hopes, regrets, fears which are, in fact, the manifestations of thought entering the realm of truth or freedom. Cultivating thought beyond a certain limit creates imbalance in life. Right education should not allow thought to dominate the whole of the mind and life. It may condition the mind with information to the extent necessary but it cannot neglect the vast field of one's being and life. Krishnamurti says, "Right education cultivates your whole being, the totality of your mind, and gives your heart and mind, a depth of understanding and beauty".³

Krishnamurti contends that the existing systems of education all over the world are faulty for they have not been aiming at creating a free

and wholistic human being and a sane society. On the contrary, they are busy in deeply conditioning the student to the psychological structure of greed, envy, jealousy, ambition and success. It is concerned with conforming the student to the prevailing sick and rotten social structure of utterly materialistic values like, possession of wealth, power, position and prestige which are the products of thought. The educators - the parents, the teachers and the educationists- are moulding the student's mind according to their own wish and will. They are imposing their pleasurable and brutal ideas and ideals on the students. In fact, they are 'industrializing' the students and reducing them to second-hand human beings. Conditioning to a pattern, whether religious, economic or political, thwarts the inward flowering of the student. It mars the inborn aptitude to discover the right vocation and the 'way' of life which the student really loves. Conditioning is a barrier to the fundamental change of flowering in goodness which is of great urgency. The elders and the teachers are totally oblivious of the unwholesome consequences of conditioning the student. Talking to the parents and teachers Krishnamurti observed, "You have very carefully conditioned your children, though perhaps not deeply understanding the issue. Not only you, but society, the environment, the culture, in which they have been brought up, both economical and social, have nurtured them, shaped them to a particular pattern. They are going to go through the mill of so-called education".⁴ Conditioning, conformity and identification divide the student 'within' and the world 'without. They create inner conflict between 'what is', the fact and the 'what should be', the fictitious idea. They divide the humanity and the world into various kinds of groups. They build walls of resistance between these groups. Living in groups with their labels as rich and poor, Indians and Americans, Hindus and Muslims and so on, results in conflict, violence and bloody wars. It has put man to untold and unwarranted misery. Nationalism, for instance, justifies homicide. It involves the greatest evil of man killing man. Nationalism is in fact a glorified tribalism. Religion is the absurdity of conditioning the mind to beliefs and symbols in the name of Truth or God. Krishnamurti says, "Technologically we have gone very far, and psychologically we are very primitive. We are still at the state of tribal conflict with our beliefs, our gods, our separate nationalities".⁵ Right education has to bring about individuals who are neither rich nor poor,

neither Hindus nor Muslims, neither Indians nor Americans but just human beings who are not divided 'within' and 'without'.

The sole aim of the present system of education is the acquisition of knowledge, especially the technological knowledge. The system is mainly interested in turning out knowledgeable people. It is concentrating on sharpening the intellect. It is neglecting the observation and understanding of the mind and life in all their aspects. Right education, according to Krishnamurti, is a process of self-knowing and self-discovery. It teaches the student to learn about the workings of the mind, its conditioning, its prejudices, fears, likes and dislikes etc. It does not limit the student to mastering a technique. It does not confine the student to a particular corner of life. Right education enables the student to comprehend with sensitivity the whole problem of living which includes relationship, love, sex, anger, fear, death etc.⁶

Krishnamurti says that the system of education as we know is a positive process of programming the student's mind like a computer. It is teaching the student to acquire and store knowledge and apply it mechanically. It is emphasizing learning from books by rote. But true education implies the inculcation of the sceptic attitude of discovering by enquiry. It is a 'negative' process of questioning and finding out the truth of 'what is'. It is understanding truth as truth, false as false and truth in falsity. It is a critical study of books without rejecting or accepting them dogmatically. As Krishnamurti puts it, "Education is not only learning from books, memorising some facts, but also learning how to look, how to listen to what the books are saying, whether they are saying something true or false".⁷

Krishnamurti distinguishes between learning and mere accumulation of knowledge. Accumulation of knowledge is a process of time and thought. It burdens the mind and makes it mediocre and dull. Apart from the knowledge or information which is absolutely necessary for physical existence, knowledge is responsible for the 'me', the pride, the prejudice, the confusion, the conflict, violence and war. Whereas learning is devoid of accumulation. It is a process of observing 'what is' without knowledge and authority. It is seeing 'what is' directly and as it exactly is. It is understanding 'what is' with a mind which is empty and fresh. Learning

and acquisition of knowledge are antithetical. Learning is possible only when there is no acquisition. An acquisitive mind is incomplete, for knowledge is finite. It cannot approach life adequately. Krishnamurti regards learning without accumulation as of great significance, for it reveals the truth of 'what is' and life as a whole. Learning, like life, is open and infinite. Krishnamurti says, "When knowledge becomes all important, learning ceases. The more I add to knowledge the more secure, the more assured the mind becomes, and therefore, the mind becomes dull and ceases to learn. The mind is merely acquiring. The acquisition dictates the conduct of life and therefore limits experience. Whereas learning is limitless".⁸

Krishnamurti decries disciplining the student through the process of education. Discipline is regimentation. It compels the student to do what he does not love to do. It adapts the student by force to the so called ideals and ideas conceived by the educators. Discipline is an external conditioning and controlling of the student who is inwardly disintegrated and undisciplined. It involves suppression, resistance and opposition. It is a barrier to the understanding of the fact of inner indiscipline and disorder. Imposition of an outward order over the student cannot bring about order and integration 'within'. The outward order of discipline is artificial and superficial. It is put together by thought which can never grasp true order. The order of thought is not creative and complete but destructive and incomplete. Allowed beyond the biological realm, thought goes berserk. All its ideals and ideas, including religion and God, invented as the sources of order are disorderly. They are in fact the source of confusion and chaos. That is why the student is disorderly and is disciplined in spite of the patterns of discipline. Right education has to enable the student to observe disorder 'within'. It should not invent the patterns of order without understanding and ending inner disorder. Outer disorder is the extension of inner disorder. Disorder 'within' ceases to be when it is observed without choice. Ending of inner disorder is the beginning of true order which is love. The students in whom love is created, never do anything wrong. They love what they do and do what they love. They do what is right irrespective of the authority of external discipline. They do not become licentious in the absence of external control. They do not do whatever they like. Krishnamurti says, "It is love that leads to right action. What brings order in the world is love and

let love do what it will".⁹ Krishnamurti admits of discipline in its true sense of constant learning about oneself without accumulation, prejudice, opinions and conclusions. Discipline in this sense is not subjugation but diligence of actively watching or observing oneself without sinking into second-hand and imitative existence. A truly disciplined mind is never negligent but ever vigilant. It feels responsibility to all its actions and the environment around. Krishnamurti observes, "The word discipline comes from the word disciple - to learn, not conform, not rebel, but to learn about your own reactions, your own background, their limitation, and to go beyond them".¹⁰

Krishnamurti is against comparison and competition in education, for they destroy the student's vulnerability to truth and creativity. They generate hostility, envy and jealousy between the students. They are a hindrance to the harmonious relationship of love. Comparative and competitive approach involves struggle and conflict. Comparing and asking a dull student to compete with a cleverer one is cruelty. Examinations, rewards and punishments are the ultimate expression of comparison. Comparison causes fear in the student. It is a barrier to clear understanding of oneself and life. Fear experienced as student persists in the rest of life. Krishnamurti observes, "Giving marks, grading, comparison and any form of compulsion, either through kindness or through threats, breeds fear, and it is because we are caught in this fear while we are young that we struggle in fear the rest of our life"¹¹ Fear stunts the natural and intelligent growth of the student. The so-called dull student has to be allowed to end his dullness by understanding instead of comparing himself or herself with others.

The present system of education is encouraging the student to be ambitious. But Krishnamurti says, "All ambition is stupid, petty-there is no great ambition".¹² An ambitious mind is brutal in its effort to achieve the motivated ends. It is ridden with the constant conflict and resistance of becoming. It is a slave to self-aggrandisement. Its activities are self-enclosing. It is greedy, envious, insensitive, impatient etc. To be ambitious implies to be successful. Success is pleasure-oriented. And the pleasure of success carries within itself the pain of failure. The sense of success, like ambition, makes man selfcentred and wicked. The mind aiming at success may go to any extent of achieving its pet goals. It may adopt any

kind of means. It does not understand the nature of the means but manipulates and moulds the 'what is' to its likes and dislikes. Krishnamurti says, "Success in any form, political and religious, art and business is brutal. To be successful implies ruthlessness".¹³ Right education should enable the student to overcome ambition and success by revealing their true nature. It should make the student to overcome the self-centred activity and selfish life. It should inculcate in the student the intelligence of acting without the centre, the 'me' which is the product of thought. Action with the centre is motivated and end-oriented. It is mechanical, contradictory and conflicting. Whereas action without the centre is creative. It is devoid of ambition and success. It is not dictated by the psychological pressure and the environmental demands. It is harmonious and without contradiction and conflict.¹⁴

The present system of education is destroying the natural intelligence of the body, the physical organism. The intelligence of the body is the energy without division and dissipation. It is the functioning of the senses together in harmony. But the intelligence gets distorted when thought dominates over the body. Thought with its images, sensations, hopes, habits, remembrances, desires and pleasures, narrows down the energy by stimulating one sense as against the other senses. It fragments the harmonious functioning of the senses, the organism as a whole. It manipulates the energy towards a desired end. It directs the energy into the groove called the 'self'. Thus thought makes one of the senses dominate over the other senses. The student, in whom thought is dominant over the body, may find delight in hearing great music and yet be insensitive to other sensations. He may have sensitivity to taste and be wholly insensitive to delicate colour, subtle smell or touch. Right education has to awaken in the student the intelligence of the body. It should enable the students to release their total energy. It should make them to function, respond with all the senses and with the same intensity of energy. The teacher has to point out to the student the mischief of thought's interference in the harmonious functioning of the senses, the organism. In fact, there is no division as senses, sensations and the body. They form a single organism or movement. The division is brought about by thought. The total awareness of the fragmentation of thought releases the total energy which is the intelligence

of the body. Krishnamurti calls the release of total energy the flowering of goodness. The intelligence of the body is a part of an intelligent mind which is aware of the finitude of thought. Only an intelligent mind has as intelligent body.¹⁵

Krishnamurti lays utmost emphasis on exposing the student to Nature, art and music. Looking at Nature and 'appreciation' of art in all its forms have a profound impact on the student. They create a sense of beauty in the student. The sense of beauty establishes right relationship between the student and people, things and ideas. Right relationship is relationship without labels and images. It is not based on attachment, detachment and expectation. It is devoid of the sense of possession, likes and dislikes. It is not self-centred and self-assertive. To be related is to respond accurately. To be accurate means to have great care. Beauty, like love, is without the 'centre' the 'me'. It forms the basis for the relationship of care and concern for the other. "To live is to be related. There is no right relationship to anything if there is not the right feeling for beauty, a response to nature, to music and art, a highly developed aesthetic sense".¹⁶

Krishnamurti holds that right education should accomplish in the student an intelligent mind which has two movements - the scientific and the religious. The scientific movement is factual. It is based on thought and knowledge. It explores the world of matter through instrumental and experimental reason. Betterment of our biological survival is its concern. Whereas the religious movement is the movement of truth. It is beyond thought and knowledge. It is a mind which is empty and wholistic. The religious mind is not orthodox. It does not belong to any organised religion. It has nothing to do with belief and dogma.¹⁷ To be truly religious is to live truth in actuality. Religious life is the operation of truth in the world of reality. It is the working of the emptiness- the freedom of the mind - in daily living.¹⁸ Left to itself the scientific movement creates havoc in life. Thought and knowledge are incomplete. That which is incomplete is bound to create problems. Thought and knowledge cannot decisively solve the problems they bring about. It is therefore imperative that the scientific movement is rooted in the religious movement. The religious spirit of the intelligent mind reveals the limitations of thought and knowledge. It does not allow them to enter the realm which is beyond their purview. It confines

them strictly to the physical realm. It prevents them from cluttering the mind with beliefs, prejudices, opinions, conclusions in the name of religion or spirituality. True spirituality, as it is already mentioned, implies the sacredness of keeping the mind totally empty of all content except the factual knowledge essential for biological living. To be spiritual is to have a mind which is absolutely and unconditionally free. In freedom, truth and love guide thought and knowledge and not vice versa. Truth and love as invented by thought and knowledge are pseudo and not real.

Life according to Krishnamurti has a wider significance than acquiring knowledge through thought. It has a higher purpose than securing a degree, a job and settle down in life. To be efficient at a certain profession is necessary but not sufficient. Fulfilment of life is living in freedom and peace 'within' and 'without'. Through education, Krishnamurti aims at creating an individual who is not only knowledgeable and efficient but also free from division, conflict, fear, anxiety, jealousy, envy, prejudice, violence and so on. He aims at bringing about a world without division, war, poverty, injustice, exploitation and misery. He hopes that right education can bring about a new world order in which all are just human beings and the resources of the earth are shared by humanity and not monopolised by a few. A new world order presupposes a new mind and a new man. As is the mind so is the man. As is the man so is the world. Krishnamurti says, 'You are the world and the world is you'. The crisis in the world is the spectacular manifestation of the crisis in consciousness. There is therefore an urgent need for the fundamental transformation of the individual. But the question that often arises, in the context of Krishnamurti, is : How to change the individual fundamentally? How to make man realize the truth? Krishnamurti does not prescribe any method as a means of transformation. He shuns all methods, for method implies the continuation of the same old mind. Methods can only modify the mind but cannot change it radically. Krishnamurti says, "There is no system, no practice but the clarity of perception of a mind that is free to observe, a mind which has no direction, no choice".¹⁹ To him, direct and choiceless observatoin and understanding of the facts about oneself and the world is the only 'way' of changing oneself and the world. Realization of truth is timeless and pathless. The student should be taught to observe and understand the whole content of

the mind without conforming to any method, system, religion or sect. An unconditional and absolute approach alone can understand the truth which is also unconditional and absolute. The means is not different from the end. Each determines the other. Radical change of the mind happens to be when it realizes the truth that the means and the end, the observer and the observed are one and the same. It is not thought or intellect but insight that transforms the mind. Insight takes place when the mind is completely 'still' without any movement of thought. Insight is holistic. It happens to be when the fragmentary thought is silent. Understanding of this truth without any choice is sufficient to realize freedom. "Insight is not the careful deduction of thought, the analytical process of thought or the time-binding nature of memory. It is perception without the perceiver; it is instantaneous. From this insight action takes place... Insight is supreme intelligence and this intelligence employs thought as a tool. Insight is intelligence with its beauty and love. They are really inseparable: they are actually one. This is the whole which is the most sacred".²⁰

To conclude, the teachers as well as the parents have a great role and responsibility in educating the children and bringing about a new generation of human beings. The parents have to really love their children. They should not try to fulfil their desires and ambitions through them. The children are not the psychological extension of the parents. They are independent and unique beings. They should be allowed to grow and flower in real freedom, happiness and goodness. As Khalil Gibran puts it, "Your children are not your children; they are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself; they came through you and not from you. You give them your love but not your thoughts".²¹ The teachers have to transform themselves before transforming the student. It is not enough if the teachers impart knowledge to the students. They should understand the truth and help the student to understand it. They should live as human beings without images and labels. They should be 'alone' without any identification. To be alone means to be undivided. To be undivided is to be one with all. Unless the teachers are philosophers, education cannot accomplish the task of changing man and society radically and fundamentally. Educating the educators is the primary and the urgent need of the hour.

NOTES

1. J. Krishnamurti *Letters to the Schools*, Krishnamurti Foundation India, Madras, 1981, p. 72
2. J. Krishnamurti *Truth and Actuality*, Krishnamurti Foundation India, Madras, 1992, p. 37.
3. J. Krishnamurti *The Years of Fulfilment*, Avon Books, New York, 1983, p. 208.
4. J. Krishnamurti *The Beginnings of Learning*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1965, p. 223.
5. J. Krishnamurti *The Years of Fulfilment*, p. 176
6. J. Krishnamurti *The Beginnings of Learning*, p. 54.
7. J. Krishnamurti *On Education*, Orient Longman, London, 1974, p.14.
8. *Ibid.*, p.62
9. J. Krishnamurti *This Matter of Culture*, Victor Gollancz, London 1975, pp.102-3.
10. J. Krishnamurti *Letters to the Schools*, p.101
11. J. Krishnamurti *Life Ahead*, Victor Gollancz, London 1963, p.150
12. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
13. J. Krishnamurti *The Years of Fulfilment*, p.110 .
14. *Ibid.*, p.184.
15. J. Krishnamurti *Letters to the Schools*, pp.62-63.
16. J. Krishnamurti *On Education*, p.53.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.
18. J. Krishnamurti *Truth and Actuality*, p.39.
19. J. Krishnamurti *The Network of Thought*, Krishnamurti Foundation India, Madras, 1982, p.108.
20. J. Krishnamurti *Letters to the Schools*, p. 49.
21. Khalil Gibran, *The Prophet*, UBS Publishers, New Delhi, p. 20

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