



PARAMHANSA YOGANANDA

Nayna B. Chauhan

Assistant Professor,

Bhagwan Mahavir College of Education (B.Ed.), Vesu

Affiliated to Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat,

Gujarat, India.

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ABSTRACT

The achievement by its very nature entails the allround development of human being. According to his claims, he sets down exactly how to achieve what scholars have busied themselves with for centuries; namely attempting to understand and define exactly what is achieved by true Vedic philosopher in the meditative state and interpreting what others have said or have done in service to that end. The various cloaks of karmic ignorance are laid away and man views himself in his native essence. The only reality of man is his soul; his soul is a part of God. God is perfect; therefore, man is essentially perfect; all man has to do is improve the knowledge of his perfection. This is the foundation statement. But if they would concentrate on the universal principles of peace, love, service, tolerance, and faith that govern the spiritual life, and devise practical methods of growing such seeds in the fertile soil of the child's mind, then the imaginary difficulty would be dissolved, his a great mistake to ignore this problem just because it is seemingly difficult.

Introduction

“The art of education will never attain complete clearness in itself without philosophy. There is interaction between the two, and either without the other is incomplete and unserviceable.” J.G.Fichte The structure of education is built on four parameters of man's life-biological, psychological, sociological and philosophical. Whatever philosophy says, its consummation is found in education. Besides explaining the basic sources and aims of human

life, it answers the deepest questions of life, thus helping human being not to lead a life of confusion and conflict, ambiguity and inconsistency. Whoever tried to philosophise, sees the culmination of his thinking in being an educator. It is a fact of history that philosophers of all times have also been great educators. It is to point with avowed certitude that the ideas of Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans are straight from the Sankhya philosophy of India as explicated thousands of years prior by Kapila, the principal formulator of the Hindu philosophical system. Yogananda is one of the great educators as well philosophers who widely viewed by his Western and Eastern followers and his Indian countrymen as both a divine personage and a manifest example of the “ideal man.” Yogananda gave the validity of Vedic philosophy’s avowal that it is not speculative in nature; rather, it is universal truth which is affirmed pragmatically realizable and affirmed that the goal of life for every human being is to attain one’s true and inherent capacity which is, when manifest, divinity itself exemplified as, what is some times called, the “ideal man.” This is the unalloyed—the pure—state of attained truth. The achievement by its very nature entails the allround development of human being. Ainslie summarizes this point by confirming that: The Hindus, alone of mankind, have penetrated behind the veil and posses the knowledge, which is really not philosophical, i.e., wisdom-loving, but wisdom itself... Truth is not an eternal discussion; it is Truth. It follows that only by actual personal realization, by practice or method such as Paramhansa Yogananda offers, can Truth ever be known beyond doubt. (Cited in Yogananda, 1982, p. 8) The six systems of Hindu philosophy are Nyaya, Vaisesika, Mimamsa Yoga, Sankhya and Vedanta. Three of the six systems are principal evidence in the philosophy and teachings of Yogananda, namely, Sankhya, Vedanta and Yoga.

His purpose was to teach (a) all interested persons the universal precepts of right living to foster their three fold – physical, mental, spiritual well being and (b) the kriya yoga technique to accelerate their highest attainment – selfrealization. But these instructional objectives of his are, in fact, precisely what Indian philosophy has always been about.

According to his claims, he sets down exactly how to achieve what scholars have busied themselves with for centuries; namely attempting to understand and define exactly what is achieved by true Vedic philosopher in the meditative state and interpreting what others have said or have done in service to that end. As he said in his mission: “I came not to preach a doctrine but to teach the living truth” (SRF, Note 3) and this is true. Looked at contextually, it would appear that Yogananda not only had as his mission the transmission of the age-old knowledge and processes of the highest philosophy, but also, through his own existence, the living example of the true philosopher-seer; the consummate example that the

life rightly lived can and does result in the vowed culmination the “ideal man” the consummate realization of the self as soul. Given the absence of the personal validation, and without the living example that this end is real and possible, the philosophy would remain what most philosophy essentially is, a merely speculative, analytic and descriptive academic enterprise. The Vedanta doctrine revealed in the philosophy and teachings of Paramhansa Yogananda is that advanced by Sri Shankra and is properly referred to as Advaita Vedanta; the qualifier “Advaita” denoting a strictly monistic philosophical position. The quintessential teaching is that God alone exists, all souls are a part of God and are therefore the same in the essence as God, and that God alone exists, all souls are a part of God and therefore the same in the essence as God, and that God is knowable. In summary, three Vedic philosophical systems are identified as imminent in the philosophy and teachings of Paramhansa Yogananda. The Sankhya system postulates the cosmological doctrines; Yoga the ethics and scientific application principles necessary to achieve Self-Realization. The Vedanta system, in a sense, is the “foundation” philosophy in that it embodies and synthesizes all the doctrines into a unified whole, yet, it basically leaves articulation of certain discrete elements to each respective systems. In conclusion, it is important to note that Yogananda intended his teachings to emphasize the application (“how-to”) approach.

Man as Body

Yogananda states, “the human body is the most intricate of all His creations.” An idea of the magnitude of this intricacy is suggested in the following: “A single original cell, the united sperm and ovum, divides; and by multiplication of the process builds up trillions of cells around itself to create the bodily temple that houses our divine soul consciousness. You don’t realize how much energy is locked in even one little gram of flesh. Its release would spread countless electrons far into space. And the power and extent of the consciousness that is present in the body is beyond human conception. Though we are made of flesh, behind these gross cells are electrical currents, life currents. And behind these subtle energies are the thoughts and perceptions.” Yogananda makes reference to three bodies the causal, astral, and physical. In his philosophy, these three bodies are perceived as three sheaths that successively encase the soul. Liberation is, according to this philosophy, a matter of working one’s way back through the vibration creation-producing spectrum of God's creative consciousness. The subject of desire and its role in keeping the soul bound to delusion is so strong in Yogananda’s philosophy that a statement of his must be included. In this statement, he renders the relationship between the doctrine of karma and desire lucid: “To become the friend of God, man must overcome his own karma or actions that ever urge him to spineless acquiescence in

the magic delusions of the world. Knowledge of the iron law of karma encourages the earnest seeker to find the way of final escape from its bonds. Because the karmic slavery of human beings is rooted in the desires of Maya darkened minds, it is with mind-control that the yogi concerns himself. The various cloaks of karmic ignorance are laid away and man views himself in his native essence.” Conceiving man as a threefold being affords the opportunity for a more facilitative grasp of Man’s intrinsic and essential nature. This, in turn, enables a more pragmatic focus when it comes to attending to these factors in an educational context. Yogananda unequivocally affirms that it is only when balanced attention to all three aspects—the physical, mental, and spiritual is achieved that true and complete education can be realized. And, as it has been earlier stated, only when true and complete education is effected can man be said to know how to live life rightly- Based on this premise, Yogananda referred to his educational institutions as “how to live” schools. Philosophical Foundations The philosophical foundations of education as they derive from the philosophy of Paramhansa Yogananda are next presented.

The foundation statements offered are those which stand in principal importance and which derive from the philosophical discussion presented herein. 1. The only reality of man is his soul; his soul is a part of God. God is perfect; therefore, man is essentially perfect; all man has to do is improve the knowledge of his perfection. This is the foundation statement. 2. All knowledge exists, and it exists within the consciousness of every man. 3. Learning is a discovery process as it entails the clearing away of intra-psychic impediments thus enabling awareness of the resident knowledge. [308] 4. One basically learns by teaching one’s self, the external teacher being principally the facilitating stimulus to the inner true teacher. 5. Concentration of the mind is vital to the access of knowledge. Instruction in practical and effective methods of concentration should be offered the student. 6. Man manifests differential learning abilities and needs at different times. One must begin where one is. Therefore, teaching must determine the needs and abilities of the student and be adaptable to them. 7. Faith in oneself is of absolute importance. To enable meaningful learning to occur, only positive ideas, words, and methods should be used in the educational setting. 8. SriYukteshwar commented that “good and positive suggestions should instruct the sensitive ears of children. Their early ideas long remain sharply etched.” 9. Truth is knowable and should be taught as objective (communicated) and subjective (experienced) knowledge. 10. “Truth”, as Yogananda defines it, is no theory, no speculative system of philosophy, on intellectual insight. 11. Truth is exact correspondence with reality. For man, truth is the unshakeable knowledge of his real nature, his self as “Soul”. The end of all education is to

learn how to live rightly. To do this man must know his true nature, the true nature of creation, the relationship between the two, and the goal(s) of life. He must then be encouraged through positive example, constructive environment, and facilitative educational processes.

The Pedagogical Teachings of Paramhansa Yogananda

Ancient Vedic Ideals of Education The scope of the Vedic educational ideal encompassed the entire life of man and was divided into four stages known as the four ashramas. Yogananda identifies and outlines these stages: The four ashramas [are] (1) Physical, mental, moral, and spiritual education of the celibate student (Brahmacharya). (2) Fulfilment of householder or worldly responsibilities (Grihastha). (3) Retirement from the world to seclusion or an ashram to devote more time to spiritual pursuits and thinking of God (Vanaprastha). (4) Complete outer as well as inner renunciation of all ties to the world (Sannyas). Though complete renunciation was generally the fourth ashrama, it was not confined to that state, but was advocated earlier in life for those who felt the supreme desire for God alone. Yogananda firmly upholds the perenniality of the Vedic ideal for he admonishes one to “see life as divided into four periods, during each of which the main focus should be on developing efficiency in the activities appropriate to that part of life.” While adhering to the Vedic concept in principle, Yogananda does render his prescriptives in a contemporary Western mode and vernacular. The “How to Live” School Concept It was stated that Yogananda conceptualized man as a true being and avowed that a balanced education necessarily attended equally to each aspect; the physical, mental, and spiritual. It is further held that only when this balanced approach is realized in practice that true education can be said to occur. Some of Yogananda’s views on his “how to live” school concept is rendered in the following: “Why not take the proper educational steps ... [to create] ‘how to live’ schools, where the art of living and a balanced development of all human faculties would be taught?” “I consider properly organized schools as gardens where infant souls are grown and nurtured. The gardeners should be well selected and given cooperation by parents and the public. We should never neglect teachers, for they are soul moulders. The care and spiritual nourishment of the early life of a human plant usually determines its later development.” “After a thorough training, the students of such a school should undergo ceaseless introspective examination throughout life; and the various diplomas won will be health, lame, efficiency, wealth, and happiness.” In another equally cogent statement, Yogananda further elaborates the need to invoke the means to educate the mental (psychological) and spiritual aspects of man: “Educators will hasten the true progress of civilization only when they themselves first learn, and then teach others, how to develop harmoniously the factors of life

and of man's nature. This is the true education and all-round human culture that the entire world is seeking." "Educational authorities deem it impossible to teach spiritual principles in public schools because they confuse them with the varied conflicting religious dogmas. But if they would concentrate on the universal principles of peace, love, service, tolerance, and faith that govern the spiritual life, and devise practical methods of growing such seeds in the fertile soil of the child's mind, then the imaginary difficulty would be dissolved, his a great mistake to ignore this problem just because it is seemingly difficult." Relative to Yogananda's two preceding statements, three points stand out in particular significance. First, Yogananda states that true physical, mental and spiritual development is a science. Relative to this science of development, he admonishes educational authorities to focus on the universal principles underlying the necessary three-fold development process and to devise practical methods for imparting these principles. The second point regards present systemic deficiencies. When considered against the balanced approach he espouses, it stands compelling clear that Yogananda finds the spiritual principle deficit in American education. In modern times, this can also be seen in Indian educational system. There could not be a clearer statement to this effect than when he writes: "Sri Yuktेश्वar, like many sages, grieved at the materialistic trend of modern education. Few schools expound the spiritual laws for happiness or teach that wisdom consists in guiding one's life in awe of one's Maker." "Young people, who today hear in high schools and colleges that man is merely a 'higher animal', often become atheists. They do not attempt any soul exploration or consider themselves, in their essential nature, to be images of God. Emerson observed: "That only which we have within, can we see without. If we meet no gods, it is because we harbour none. He who imagines his animal nature to be his only reality is cut off from divine aspirations. In educational system that does not present Spirit as the central fact of man's existence is offering Avidya, false knowledge. The third significant deficit is adequate and proper mental (viz., psychological) training. His statements on this deficit appear to require no further amplification; it being all too painfully self-evident and true. And it seems Yogananda also holds some reservation regarding the adequacy or effectiveness of physical training. Educational Methods For a look at the way Yogananda himself developed and conducted his schools, Gosh (1980) provides a graphically detailed and sensitive overview. He recapitulates his personal observations: "In all of the schools, the academic curriculum and spiritual routine were balanced with recreation, sports, and picnics and hikes to nearby scenic spots. All who had the opportunity to come into contact with Mejdā (Yogananda) knew that his spiritual ideals and precepts of Justice could not be compromised. But his manner was so charming, and his heart so loving, that no one felt rejected or uncomfortable. His sweet smile was always present and in the warmth of that

glow, all hearts and minds were caught. On the other hand, when Mejda decided to get to the bottom of a matter or to make it a point of issue, there was no avoiding the sharpness of his perception. His testing was severe indeed.” “The rules and regulations of the Ranchi ashram-school were strict. Rising at five in the morning, the boys lined up outside for group chanting of prayers. After bathing and cleaning their rooms, at six o’clock they again met together for exercises and meditation. Mejda himself taught advanced methods of meditation of boys over twelve years old.... The students wore the simple, coarsely woven cloth of villagers. Clothing was kept spotlessly clean as were dormitory quarters and the ashram grounds. In so far as all principal educational activities are presently being conducted in India, the focus of Yogananda’s methods is necessarily on those activities. It is reasonable to presume, however, that when schools begin to officially operate in this country, the same principles will in here, however, the instructional methods may vary. In the following quote is observed the synthesis of much that has been earlier stated. This, then provides a fitting summary and insight into the educational practices and principles of Paramhansa Yogananda as they derive from his philosophy and teachings. “While founding his ashrams and then the schools within the ashrams, Paramhansaji maintained the high ideals of the ancient Rishis of India with loving strictness. He demonstrated by his own Self-Realization that God is one though He may be called by many names and various are the paths that lead to Him. Therefore Paramhansa Yogananda taught the children in the Ashrama School to respect all religions and avoid narrow-mindedness and intolerance. As God dwells in all body temples, none should insult Him by discriminating against any individual because of caste, creed, colour, or race, but rather be the divine friend of all by striving to see God in all.” “These are the ideals Paramhansa Yogananda lived, and taught in his ashrams and schools. Yogoda Satsanga Society of India perpetuates these ideals in its guidance of the great Guru’s society and educational institutions, all of which have grown from his first ashrams in Calcutta, Dihika, and Ranchi.” Conclusion The fidelity of Yogananda’s philosophy and teachings to the ancient Vedic tradition consistently reveals itself as compellingly unequivocal. This was demonstrated to some degree in this small book by identifying and briefly discussing certain cardinal doctrinal elements. This demonstration is important to undertake for often times contemporary statements of traditional works lose substantially in accuracy, completeness, and philosophic context thus rendering them impotent, ineffectual and erroneous. The central thesis is that Vedic philosophy affirms that the nature of man is both known by some and knowable by all. This knowledge, it explicitly avows can be directly apprehended by anyone intent on so doing for the system specifically prescribes and embodies the scientific means to do so. And any truly viable system of total education necessarily takes this knowledge into full consideration.

Paramhansa Yogananda was not one to point out the shortcomings of a nation, group, institution, or individual without offering a straightforward and practical solution. Educators of today serve a vital role in shaping the leaders of tomorrow. And with the leaders of tomorrow ‘Tests,’ as Aristotle proclaimed, ‘the fate of empires.’ It makes little difference whether one is a formal educator, administrator, philosopher, or psychologist for all share the responsibility for the present state of American education, America’s future and ultimately (to some degree) the world at large. Perhaps it would serve us well if from time to time we reflect on whether or not our efforts and visions are at parity with the true necessary and sufficient requirement attendant to the educational tasks at hand and those, which stand before us. Thus there is a need for such an educational system, which fulfils the needs and demands of the individual as well as of the human society in general for leading a balanced and productive life. It is in this context that the educational philosophy and pedagogical methods of Paramhansa Yogananda come into play. His educational philosophy is both idealistic as well as pragmatic with sound educational aims, methods and strategies of education for complete development of man. It is unfortunate that his system has not been studied and researched into by the scholars and only a few researches have been conducted in India and abroad. His educational philosophy is all the more relevant in modern world, which is facing different types of crises both at individual and social levels.

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