# Meenakshi Thapan - I,2. II,9. III, 12, 15. IV. IV,30, 23, 26

From Human Education in the 3rd Millennium

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ABSTRACT

## I POLICY

### Education in India

We need to seriously reflect upon the ambiguous contribution of an economic production model of social development on the growth of a particular kind of education policy and on the goals and practice of education per se.

## II DEMOCRACY

### Challenges to Human Education

The challenge is to develop strategies in education that counter regressive ideologies that are inimical to human education. One way of doing this is through the development of a school culture that celebrates selflessness, diversity, and inclusion.

## III BEING HUMAN

Defining the sacred in human education A shared reality

An education that nurtures the ability to extend the boundaries of the self outward to humanity, especially those others who appear as most different from ourselves, becomes imperative.

### Inherent Complexities

I must emphasise that the struggle that emerges from the inherent complexities, and the contradictions it gives rise to, will undoubtedly influence the shaping of a truly global outlook.

## III BEING HUMAN / IV PEDAGOGY

### Human Education and the Moral

Educational institutions inhere in society and it is imperative that we view education as an exercise in building moral agency as much as in imparting knowledge and skills.

### IV PEDAGOGY Developing a human school culture

The teacher is at the heart of the endeavor for human education and any effort to emphasise human education must begin from and work with the teacher.

## I POLICY

### Education in India

India carries the burdens of being a postcolonial society and therefore has the baggage of the colonial imagination of what should be an 'Indian' education. This is the notorious legacy of the infamous Macaulay's Minute whereby a concerted effort was made to eliminate indigenous education by English education for natives who appeared to lack everything the British imagined as civilization. Having said that, however, post-colonial development did not go much further.

The Nehruvian push for industrialization and 'catching up' with the rest of the developed world, the decline of Gandhi's perspective on education, the movement away from small-scale industry, manual labour to mechanization, and capitalist forms of development has resulted in the kind of competitive and hugely self-centred forms of education that go against the grains of human education.

The policy driven agenda for education has always pushed for human resource development, capacity building, and training labour for skilled employment in diverse sectors. This has not however always been successful due to the social divisions and hierarchies that prevail and prevent equal and equitable growth. The push has always been on getting more and more children into school, retaining them there, against all odds, and providing them with a learning environment. The last has however received the least attention and that is why the quality of school education and teacher education is abysmal in this country.

• We need to therefore consider the contribution of an economic production model of social development on the development of a particular kind of education policy and on the goals and practice of education per se.

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## II. DEMOCRACY

### Challenges to Human Education

We must simultaneously understand the challenges to empowering young people to have moral agency and be critically engaged citizens. The rhetoric of nationalism and right-wing politics in many societies does not enable the development or nurturance of critical pedagogy. Caste and religious slurs are commonplace in educational institutional spaces in India. The autobiographies of Dalit scholars (Limbale 2007, Valmiki 2001) highlight for us their experience of humiliation and exclusion in educational spaces. How do we build moral agency that disputes such exclusion in everyday life? The contestation of ideas and practice that tend to exclude some communities on the basis of religion or caste is essential. However, dissent is not always tolerated especially in education as we have seen in educational institutions in India and China.

• The challenge is to develop strategies in education that counter such regressive ideologies that are inimical to human education.

• One way of doing this is through the development of school culture that celebrates selflessness, diversity, and inclusion.

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Limbale, Shravan Kumar and S. Bhoomkar. 2007. The Outcaste. Akkarmashi (tr. From Marathi). Delhi, Oxford University Press.

Valmiki, Omprakash and Arun Prabha Mukherjee. 2008. (2003). Joothan: A Dalit's Life. NY, Columbia University Press.

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## III BEING HUMAN

### Defining the sacred in human education

*A shared reality*

Human education, to my mind, rests on a unique understanding of what constitutes the sacred in everyday life and our ability to transform and build the learning environment through innovative pedagogies. This has received emphasis from educators in India including Gandhi, Tagore, Aurobindo and J. Krishnamurti. The sacred in their endeavor is not concerned with specifically religious or ritual practice but with relations in society. This view rests with our understanding of our life as connected with others, whether these include other humans, nature, objects, ideas. We are not distinct individuals separated by caste, class, race, gender, ethnicity, region or religion but are more importantly, connected to one another as humans.

This idea of the transcendent as being present in the everyday world allows us to understand the value of human education. Such an education must be grounded on the premise that the social is the primary feature of everyday life.

To cite the Indian educator, J. Krishnamurti: 'We are the world and the world is us' (1973: 66). It is not enough however to understand this theoretically but to experience it viscerally, emotionally, 'to feel that, to be totally committed to it, and to nothing else, brings about a feeling of great responsibility and an action that must not be fragmentary but whole' (Krishnamurti 1973:66). The Dalai Lama refers to this as 'the recognition of a shared humanity' and argues for the need for 'an understanding of interdependence as a key feature of human reality, including our biological reality as social animals' (Dalai Lama 2015 (2011): 19, emphasis in the original).

• An education that nurtures the ability to extend the boundaries of the self outward to humanity, especially those others who appear as most different from ourselves becomes imperative.

### Inherent Complexities

Through developing empathy, compassion at a visceral, emotional as well as at social, political levels, it is possible to transform lives in society. Such an understanding of the self in relationship in the everyday is an expression of the experience of the transcendent in everyday life. This understanding will not however be without struggle as there are, what the anthropologist Michael Jackson refers to, 'micropolitical exigencies' of 'ethnic, familial and personal identity' (1998:5), shaped by the intersecting categories of race, gender, religion, caste.

• I must emphasise that this struggle, and the contradictions it gives rise to, will undoubtedly influence the shaping of a truly global outlook.

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Dalai Lama, His Holiness. 2015 (2011). Beyond Religion. Ethics for a Whole World. New York, Harper Element.

Jackson, Michael. 1998. Minima Ethnohraphica. Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press.

Krishnamurti, J. 1973. The Awakening of Intelligence. Chennai, Krishnamurti Foundation (India).

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## III. BEING HUMAN IV. PEDAGOGY

### Human Education and the Moral

American psychologist/educator Howard Gardner has argued that human intelligences are 'morally neutral' or 'value free' (1999: 67). He does however consider the possibility of 'moral' intelligence and emphasises the importance of education and schooling and of the family and community for the development of morality. We do not however view the 'moral' as a dogma to be enforced by religion or any other external agency in an educational setting. Often, the moral is enmeshed with political or religious ideology, and this is not my usage. I view it more as a matter of 'individual conscience', celebrating an individual's ability to cognize her responsibility to the earth and to humanity. The moral domain in this sense is indicative of personal agency whereby the individual has a sense of purpose and will, in the context of relating to others and to their life processes. It is in this sense that I consider the individual a 'moral' being, capable of exercising choice, taking decisions, and seeking to address numerous personal, social and cultural difficulties in the context of her surroundings and others.

• If the moral is about individual agency, the individual assumes responsibility towards others, towards life, towards the sustenance and nurturance of that life in different ways. We seek to nurture the moral as a form of intelligence through educational processes and practices and thus seek to build what we may call ethical subjectivities through education.

• Educational institutions inhere in society and it is imperative that we view education as an exercise in building moral agency as much as in imparting knowledge and skills.

Gardner, Howard. 1999. Intelligence Reframed. Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century. New York, Basic Books.

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## IV. PEDAGOGY

### Developing a human school culture

Developing such a culture is imperative. Such a school culture is concerned about 'value' as practice, and not a mere idea. Or perspective.

What do we mean by 'moral' education in contemporary society?

What does it mean to be moral and how can this be developed in educational institutions?

### Teacher as the Agent of Change

At the same time, I also believe that we cannot insert value or human education as an add-on but something that has to be integrated into the curriculum, into the pedagogy of everyday life in the classroom. The burden for change ultimately rests with teachers. They must therefore work on their relationships with children, based on trust and friendship, without fear or authority. (for examples in some KFI schools in India, see the collection of essays in Thapan 2018). Teachers must also ensure that children through critical pedagogy develop moral agency and contest forms of exclusion, oppression and marginalization. That children grow into deeply sensitive and caring human beings. For this to happen, we must first help empower teachers.

• It is to this end that I contend that human education cannot be separated from curricula, pedagogy and to be successful, must be adapted by state policy and agenda for education.

Thapan, Meenakshi. 2018. J. Krishnamurti and Educational Practice. Social and Moral Vision for Inclusive Education. Delhi, Oxford University Press.

> **Enriching teacher Education**

At the KFI Rishi Valley Institute of Educational Resources in rural Andhra Pradesh, we are agreed that the present approach to teacher educationin India needs to be re-conceived in a more concrete and accessible manner. Our aim is to enrich the teachers' experience of schooling by exposing them to the multiple forms in which learning has been transmitted from one generation to the next across geographies, culture and time. The approach should be to expand teachers' intellectual and emotional horizons by illustrating concepts, honing

pedagogical skills and building reflective and analytic thought processes. Our continuing hope is that the course will empower teachers by creating in them the confidence to work towards the possibility of change. The teacher develops a human perspective that helps her understand, among other things, the meaning of 'value', moral agency, critical pedagogy, inclusion and her own significant role in the process of change.

• The teacher is at the heart of the endeavor for human education and any effort to emphasise human education must begin from and work with the teacher.