

## **Philosophy – Teaching at School Level**

**YASHIKA SETHI**

Department of Philosophy, Miranda House, University of Delhi, New Delhi (India)

### **ABSTRACT**

“We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one’s own feet”- *Swami Vivekananda*.

Philosophy, a multidimensional subject, guides in construction of a comprehensive system of education and provides freedom in acceptance of thoughts. The Indian civilization has its own Schools of philosophy, preaching multiple objectives. A discourse in the field of education exists among the Western and Indian schools to establish central position rather than peripheral. New priorities have emerged in field of education with the influences of monastic, scholastic, realistic, idealistic and pragmatic trends. While education institutions have evolved over time, there remain several gaps between the ancient instructive materials and modern day westernization of Indian culture and value system. This has been substantiated by various countries by allowing mandatory teaching of philosophy at school level. The suggestions of the Conference held in Central Hall of Parliament house in 1951 and the UNESCO reports, emphasis has shifted towards teaching of civics in school. The essence of introducing philosophy in school curriculum is to make children develop logic, analytical thinking and value the ancient Indian heritage. Such an approach could help in developing an integrated and inclusive approach of teachers towards education and assist in strengthening their role in shaping the inner potential of a learner in a constructive manner. It has to be accepted that scientific advancement, discoveries, and concept of human rights are gifts of Western world but the seed was sown by intelligible Indian scriptures. This paper brings forth the urgent need to bridge the gaps from business of philosophy to education of philosophy, in order to reflect indigenous ethos and intellectual potentials. A pragmatic and dynamic content has been produced to facilitate the understanding of Philosophy as subject in school curriculum of India. This paper proposes to introduce philosophy in Indian schools to develop students understanding of Karma, celibacy, spiritualism, materialism and integral humanism. Simultaneously, the National Education Policy 2017 needs to include this objective.

**Key Words :** Conscience, Real knowledge, Self realisation, Westernization, National Education Policy

### **INTRODUCTION**

There is no specific definition to explain the term philosophy. Definition emerges from the confrontation between nature and conscious mind. In everyday life, it is generally asked – meaning of philosophy of governance, philosophy of right path, philosophy of ethic and religion. Philosophy empowers education making it pragmatic and utilitarian.

Education is the tool of achieving empowerment, economic gains, social justice, political equality, spiritual knowledge and divinity in man. In Indian diversity of thoughts, region, religion and caste has generated own

philosophical ideas. The Indian school of philosophy is one of the longest continuous histories. Beginning with the hymns of the Rig Veda to concept of integral humanism, the discourse covers a wide array of positions and arguments. Indian Philosophy could create pool of young thinkers and contribute substantially in personality development, emotional quotient and social intelligence. At present these principles are neglected in schools. Inclusion of Philosophy in school curriculum would create pool of diversified thoughts and ideas demonstrating critical thinking, cognitive development and spiritual gains among children. This will enlighten them and create desire for self knowledge, self realisation and self improvement.

There has been landscape transformation of Indian education system since many centuries. It has witnessed fundamental structural transformation from heterodox school and orthodox to influences of Jainism, Buddhism and Islam and later modern school of thoughts. In today's era of globalization, education has become a dead-commodity from earlier living soul. Nevertheless, the attainment of philosophical education contributes significantly to establish a set of values and qualities to individuals (Kumara, 2016)<sup>1</sup>. With the emerging philosophical thoughts there has been change in the perceived notion of Nation, State and Rights. Inclusion of philosophy in school curriculum can invoke ability of logical questioning, methodology of induction and deduction, constructive discussion, effective descriptions and powerful demonstration.

### Literature reviews:

Education can be defined as continuous flow of knowledge, skills and values. It is symbolized by quality, modernity and accessibility. In India, education has been influenced by past histories. The Indian education system is arranged in democratic hierarchical order driving its strength from literatures, culture and languages. Contemporary Indian school education system is going under transformation from indigenous Indian school of thoughts to realistic, neo-liberal and market oriented approaches. This transformation under the effect of western school of thoughts has created a glut of instable social order and disintegrated world outlook. People tend to adopt western culture, western standard of living, and search of pleasure in world affairs. However several developed societies have started focussing on the improvement of quality of education for children since childhood by including basic training in philosophy in primary and secondary education. Education planners in India like J.P. Naik, has empathised that Western philosophy education rests on trinity of equality, quantity and quality is an Elusive Triangle (Naik, 1979)<sup>2</sup>

The salient features of Indian philosophy are based on the arduous search for spiritual values which enlighten

humans and look for the cause of existence, discovery of truth and evolution of religious beliefs. Western philosophy stresses upon the dynamic view to measure the divinity of the man in accordance to his/her utility in the society (Dupuis and Gordon, 2010)<sup>3</sup>.

India has been the wonderland and origin of living legends called Vedas. The first education system originated was called Guru Kul, which imparted knowledge in Sanskrit. Subjects covered were sciences (Metaphysics), Cosmic Consciousness, Astronomy, Spirituality, and Mathematics. The education system facilitated the understanding of Universal truth and not just memorizing scriptures. The Chhandogya Upanishad mentions 18 different subjects such as philosophy, religion, mathematics, natural disaster management, science of defence etc. The modern period work of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi on State-Society Human values, Veer Savarkar on spiritualism and politics and Sri Aurobindo on science and spiritualism has been important contribution in philosophy.

Through several publications on study of philosophy, UENSCO celebrated the interdisciplinary and multidimensional approach of Philosophy. For better understanding of multifaceted view of philosophy, different versions are provided such as Philosophy is a set of questions and answers having several solutions from common questions. Philosophy can be viewed as map providing world view on matter and man, economics and politics, God and Soul, State and Society.

Earlier at various conferences and seminars, question were raised to what extent the duty of teachers has to be in building the foundation of our society and giving justice to our ancient thoughts. The National Policy of Education (1986)<sup>4</sup> clearly identifies the role to be exercised by the teachers in constructing the traditional values into modern day outlook. "The status of the teacher reflects the socio-culture values of society; the teachers have the freedom to innovate, to devise appropriate methods of communication and activities."

National Curriculum Framework (2005)<sup>5</sup> mentions "Philosophy involves a concern, on the one hand, with

1. Kumara, S. K. (2016). Meaning, scope and functions of philosophy of education. *International Journal of Social and Economic Research*, 6(4): 150-157.
2. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3443729>
3. Dupuis, A.M. and Gordon, R.L. (2010). *Philosophy of education in historical perspective* University Press of America
4. Government of India, 1986. National Education Policy (New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resource Development)
5. <http://www.ncert.nic.in/rightside/links/pdf/framework/english/nf2005.pdf>

analytical clarification, evaluation and synthetic coordination of the aforementioned forms of understanding in relation to life, and, on the other hand, with the whole, the ultimate meaning and the transcendent”

It has to be established that school education and its pedagogy is not about sciences and social sciences, but to develop an idea which holds equivalence with supreme principle of truth. The articulation of Western philosophy has produced new challenges for teachers and students by focusing more on world order. Such framework has created a void in thought process and perception of college students. The principle of the Anekantavada or Syadvada, a very valuable contribution of Jainism to world thought, is being read in equivalence to work of Kant, Hegel, Froebel. They are more prone to study philosophy governed by globalization, driven by technologies and challenging the absolute truth of Universe.

According to Professor Satish Deodhar<sup>6</sup> of Indian Institute of Management (IIM)-Ahmedabad there has been a lack of awareness about the economic thinking that emanated from ancient Indian texts. Jack Sarfatti, a noted American theoretical physicist, says, “The cosmic consciousness or the Mahat of India’s Samkhya Philosophy is the basis of entire creation”.<sup>7</sup>

At school level philosophy has wide dimension in questioning and reasoning the beliefs and ethos of decision making. The study relates to analytical thinking and cognitive development in areas of emotional and social intelligence. In a study on India students it has been validated that philosophy in form of civics in secondary schools have only enhanced and deliberated the concept of mutual respect, compassion, cooperation, coordination and sympathy. They have not developed skills of critical thinking and reasoning, principle of sacrifice and holistic teaching of duty, discipline and devotion as proposed in Bhagwat Gita.

“Teaching of philosophy to children is not only possible but most beneficial. Having taught children from five year onwards such as philosophical truths as the reality of one divine, promoting concept of human brotherhood, reincarnation and Karma develops amazing understanding and intuitive perception” The Indian

Institute of Culture Bangalore.<sup>8</sup>

However, question arises whether the school children will be capable of responding to philosophical culture and outlook on life? Several studies have established the fact that children in age group of 11 or 12 are not capable of philosophical outlook and philosophical appreciation.- (Jean Piaget). Several criticisms have been raised over Piaget’s due to difference in uniformity of standards. The western philosophy extends from idealism to realism and behaviourism to essentialism which has not been able to replicate the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, Aparigarha of Jainism, Cycle of Six principals of Vedanta, and Oneness of God.

### **Need of philosophy at school level teaching:**

*“We should make sure that the child grows in spirituality, for it Philosophy is necessary to strengthen and refine the living spirit”* Dr. S Radhakrishnan

At present, study of philosophy is catering needs of specific and specialized sections of educational institutions, colleges and universities. By defining the range of philosophy we have diffused the potential of generating philosophical values, culture and world outlook.

Western philosophy has reformed the understanding of human. At present the discourse of western philosophy by Aristotle, Plato and others focuses on the human rights, human freedom and human development thus creating diversified forces of natural justice. This has led to westernisation of Indian culture, traditions, values, and ethos. The teaching of Indian philosophy of Nyaya, Yoga and Vaisheshik has been organized to deal with living problems of life and world order. Without a living philosophy, a community and a nation cannot discover a meaningful and empowered life to handle subjective and intellectual challenges effectively. Teachings of Indian school of Philosophy, have been imparting values and ethics to every student irrespective of his age, gender and caste.

Philosophy at school level is important to downsize the westernization of Indian culture and promotes indigenous Indian thoughts of Bhagwat Gita, Vedanata, *Anekântavâda* of Jainism etc. Today Indian thoughts

6. <https://www.indiatoday.in/pti-feed/story/indian-economic-thoughts-predate-those-of-plato-aristotle-iim-profs-research-1222679-2018-04-29>

7. *Mysticism and the new physics*, by Michael Talbot

8. The Indian Institute of Culture, Bangalore (Mrs Sophia Wadia Editor, The Aryan Path, Bombay)

are less favoured in Indian educational system. The system needs to recognize the way of inductive logic, gender equality, and fundamentals of ethics, theory of knowledge, art, religion and spirituality thus facilitating ideas of democracy to build social environment. Sir William Jones said, "Human life would not be sufficient to make oneself acquainted with any considerable part of the Indian ancient literature".

The school level teaching of philosophy will provide sound knowledge about traditions, and promote the consciousness of work attitude and promote integral humanism. School level teaching will build foundations of arguing with the facts about existence of God and Universe. The introduction of philosophy at school will reintroduce the principles of logic, non-absolutism, "intellectual Ahimsa", religious pluralism, debates between scholars of Jain, Buddhist and Hindu schools of philosophies.

At present, teaching philosophy does not mean that one is opting principle of "golden straitjacket", however providing an open environment for teachers and students to interact and develop own ideas based on plurality of thoughts and rejecting extremes of the answer, acceptance and rejection based on discourses.

### **Impact Assessment :**

Philosophy teaching can help in enable to control human desires, develop analytical view (Nyaya), develop consciousness (Vaisheshika), critical thinking (Mimansa), and meditation and contemplation (Yoga).

It will help students to consider and understand difference between Form, Sensation, Conception, Volition and Consciousness. Philosophy is an interesting subject as it promotes deep understanding and wisdom. Students get engaged in questioning, answering and reasoning about some of life's most basic, meaningful, and difficult questions, such as-What is it to be a human? What is the human mind? Is there God?.

Philosophy creates Skill development- enables student to develop critical thinking, adopt logical argument and evaluate causes. There is improvement in problem-solving capacities, learn to build constructive arguments, and to go for holistic development. Students tend to learn effective interpretation, plural comparison, develop analytical thinking, and strong writing skills allows student to present ideas in more organised ways. There is

personal development and empowerment. The study of philosophy enhances student's intellectual quotient, Intelligence Quotient and emotional intelligence.

Relevance of philosophy in school education can be used to develop a better understanding of the ideas of social and political ideals (equality, justice and liberty); develop thought process over issues of Sovereignty, Individual and State (rights, duties and accountability), various forms of government ( Monarchy, Theocracy and democracy); political ideologies (Anarchism, Marxism and socialism), Humanism, secularism and multiculturalism, Crime and punishment (corruption, Mass violence, Genocide, capital punishment), sustainable development and social progress, gender discrimination, and caste discrimination

It will help student understand that success is not just physical achievements but to be self content, realise self happiness and overcoming one's own desire.

In schools, the teacher can be active in demonstrating that philosophy is not market driven in fact it touches all the dimensions of nature, human, God and aesthetic views. The general activity which the teacher should engage is to make student lead the community from ignorance to knowledge and to create in all an atmosphere which may propose as: Sarvabhuta hite ratah (The Gita).

Indian philosophy needs to be introduced since school level to develop better cognitive and management skills bringing diversity of ideas, spirit of tolerance and better understanding of different cultures and ignoring western culture.

This education system will create a process of philosophical inquiry leading to principle of ethics and morality, respecting differences of ideas, accepting discourses and responding critically.

### **Challenges:**

A conference was held in Central Hall of the Parliament House in New Delhi from 21-23 September 1951<sup>9</sup> - where it had to decide the place of philosophy in secondary education and in vocational schools, etc. It had set agenda to discuss the role of teachers, qualification, research orientation, popularisation of philosophy through adult education schemes, etc. Finally it was proposed that philosophy at secondary school stage is not an appropriate option.

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9. The teaching of philosophy in India by N A Nikam

From 1951 onwards till present this void between school teaching and Universities level education has led to shifting of Ancient Indian schools of philosophy to periphery, and being occupied by Western and neo liberal thoughts. This has affected the people-to-people intellectual growth, creating differences in toleration of values and westernization of Indian value system.

Westernisation has modified philosophy as business, generating revenues. The children has to be given open space to develop own thoughts, not to fall into fall ideologies or discard the universal accepted customs under the influence of dominating sectarian views. It is suggested that subjects like history, geography, literature etc. should be taught in perspective to philosophical problems. Teaching philosophy at school should not be confused with promotion of Hindusim. Indian Philosophy promotes Humanism and not Hinduism or dialectical materialism. It would be difficult to teach primary students the history of philosophy, debate over heterodox and orthodox schools, rise and fall of Buddhism and Jainism, epistemological issues, work of Plato, Socrates etc.

### Substantial evidences:

The reports of UNESCO<sup>10</sup> published recently, highlight some important outcomes which supports the claim of introducing Philosophy in school curriculum. In a small country like Tunisia, the students benefited from introducing Philosophy in school teaching at the secondary level. The effort started in 1996 and was reformed in 2006.

At international level an annual philosophy competition for secondary students has been held since 1993 by International Philosophy Olympiads (IPO(67)). “In Europe, The International Association of Philosophy Teachers (AIPPh) regularly updates information about curricula and pedagogy on their user-friendly on-line map of Europe” (UNESCO reports)<sup>11</sup>

Among BRICS nation, Brazil after a long gap of political turmoil reintroduced into schools, in 1996, the philosophy discipline to make ensure the subjectivity and objectivity of philosophy is met. Among the Latin country like Uruguay, philosophy is taught to students of age 15-17 years irrespective of subjects opted in schools. The

East Asian country like Japan has introduced Philosophy both in the primary level and at lower secondary levels (children of twelve to fifteen years of age). The Philosophy taught covers Buddhism and ethics. Other Asian country like Thailand, philosophy is taught in general and technical at secondary levels. The Dutch government has made mandatory to teach Bhagavad Gita from Grade 5. Philosophy for Children (P4C) programme<sup>12</sup>, UK, in which primary school children are guided through talks on basic questions such as “what is good health?, Should we respect other religions? etc.

All these examples set precedent for Indian education system to generate positive forces in bring reform in school curriculum.

### Conclusion and Recommendations:

In order to teach philosophy at school level, we need to have proper mechanism, curriculum and material designs. The school level teaching needs to be fair and open without discrimination between various schools of philosophy. For elementary education the curriculum drawn could include basics like truth, right, wrong, cause-effect, mind, importance of time, beauty etc. Students can be engaged through works on logic, analytical thinking, reasoning, questioning and freedom of thoughts. Teacher needs to organise meaningful discussions on issues of morality, ethics, integrity, empathy, compassion, well being of society etc. through basic examples. It will help in developing interdisciplinary approach such philosophy and music, philosophy and virtual arts, philosophy and literature etc.

UNESCO on World Philosophy Day<sup>13</sup> published study entitled, Philosophy: A School of freedom-Teaching Philosophy and Learning. It discussed the need to teach philosophy at primary level, secondary level and at University level to develop democratic paradigm, the historical and patrimonial paradigm and the problem-solving paradigm.

The present time is an appropriate time to take Great Backward Leap in introducing disciplines on logic, Vedic mathematics, integral humanism, meditation, self-discipline and spiritual connectivity of Vednata, and Bhagwat Gita at all levels of our education system. Some

10. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001466/146663e.pdf>

11. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001466/146663e.pdf>

12. <https://www.sapere.org.uk/>

13. <http://www.un.org/en/events/philosophyday/>

of the examples of African countries, Uruguay, Thailand and others has delivered remarkable results in educational system. The Government after 1951 in its strategic Conference in Central Hall failed to recognize the importance of philosophy at school level and opted for Civic studies in its behalf. Now education is become important parameter to judge the countries social integrity and spiritual dimensions. The western philosophy overtook Indian philosophy in early 17<sup>th</sup> century through Lord Maculay Educational reforms supported by Wood's Despatch of 1854. It is the right time for India to develop its own set of educational maps integrating all educational institutions and conducting its own Philosophy Olympiads. On 15 December 2017- Vice President of India inaugurated the World Conference on Vedas<sup>14</sup>. He said, Vedas are the source of knowledge and guide us to advance in economic, social, educational and political fields and also in maintaining high moral and ethical standards. This endorses the supremacy of Indian schools of philosophy which will regain its lost position from periphery to centric position by introducing it in school curriculum. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2017 should consider the implementation of philosophy in school curriculum.

“Since philosophy is the art which teaches us how to live, and since children need to learn it as much as we do at other ages, why do we not instruct them in it?” (de Montaigne, On teaching Philosophy of Education).

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