



Dr. Zakir Hussain: A Lost Visionary of Education

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Dr. Zakir Hussain was one of the most eminent educationists of the world. He was a true representative of India's composite culture and great secular ideals that instills brotherhood and harmony in our society. A great humanist, he served in multifarious dimensions directly related to the national interests and promoted secularism in the country. He was amongst the first to realize and propound that revitalization and resurgence of Great India could not come from a mere political dimension but through reforms in education. His spent his entire life trying to elevate and enrich the standards and rudiments of education and to serve and inspire the value of secularism. It is believed that education is a key to all kinds of development- individual social and national. Therefore, Dr. Husaain laid more and more emphasis on continuous improvement of education both qualitatively and quantitatively.

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Born in 1897, Dr. Zakir Hussain went out to become the third President of India. He was the first muslim president of India. By nature was an educationist and a man of great intellect. Besides being the president he served as Governor of Bihar and Vice President of India as well. He was also the co-founder of Jamia Milia University, New Delhi and recipient of Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honor, in 1963.

Dr. Zakir Hussain was a humanist philosopher who believed that education must be developed in balance, where the abilities and capabilities should be formed in right proportions. He embraced the idea that real education is about self actualization. According to him, "Education is not only to know the unknown but also that with which innate education they were born can develop them accordingly. Education is about total development of human brain." He wants his country to be free from caste & creed difference, religion base and unemployment but the countrymen should be co-operative, trust worthy, friendly and able.

According to Zakir Hussain, "Overall development should be the main objective of education." The objectives, moreover, must find place for self actualization, character development, mental development and a spirit to work and dedicate oneself for the development of the nation. His ideas clearly indicates that a nation's character can be judged by the character of its people and once people tends to increase their values, morals and intellect, a nation, then, would rise all by itself. Through education, each & everyone should be able to inculcate their mental & religious abilities. Education should assist as a helping hand which enables an individual to demarcate the difference between good and bad or right and wrong. Zakir Hussain was also attentive for the social and culture aims of education. He believed in an education which permits its students to inculcate values and ethics in them and it should be deemed as a grave insult and humiliation for a student should he chooses education for materialistic purposes i.e. merely earning wealth and luxury.

Education and knowledge can never and should never be restricted. Knowledge is for everyone to acquire and how they use it, implement it measures the ability and capacity of the individual intellect, values and ethics. Contrary to the tradition of keeping the educational work of the institution restricted within its four walls, Dr. Zakir Hussain tried from the very beginning to extend it beyond the rugged walls of classrooms and Universities. To enable this, numerous centers were established in the city for adult literary work and suitable literature was produced and made available far and wide in the country. As demand for the literature of adult education was increasing constantly, a separate department known as Idarai Talim-o- Taraqqi (institution of education & progress) was established to produce and disseminate for the welfare of people in the surrounding localities. The Jamia broke the unjust tradition of restricting education mostly to the upper class people called 'ashraf', while lower classes and cases were generally deprived of this blessing. From the very beginning, the Jamia gave the latter special consideration in its educational programmes.

According to Zakir Hussain, "A child has a personality of itself as well. He is not just a non-living thing or a mannequin and so we have to take care of their personality and behave in accordance to it. We have to arrange the education system for them in accordance to their personality and traits to ensure strong development of skills and behavior further in life. We have to understand and we must learn to appreciate their virtues, nature, values and strength. Born with numerous kinds of innate possibilities, potential and diversities, children tends to change in accordance to time, situation and environment. Dr. Zakir Hussain advocated the development of heart, mind and soul. He laid great emphasis on the fact that students should have patience, understanding and a moral compass. We take moral values too lightly in these contemporary times, but the fact that no one seems to realize is that without the moral guidance, which this world have so profoundly neglected, we are all running towards destruction of our own personalities, traits and identities. Why there aren't any great philosophers whose thoughts brings about another renaissance? Why there aren't any great scientists whose discoveries and inventions brings revolutions? People are not becoming anything but only employees. Therefore the only groups of people who can bring about a change in such personality, identity and values crisis are the Teachers. A good teacher must have patience, kindness, seriousness and above all values and it is these values that a teacher would pass on to his or her students. This underscores the importance and vitality of having effective, morally sound and proficient teachers more than ever.

Dr. Zakir Hussain believed schools to be the laboratory of social life. In schools, students learn such views and work, inculcates such values and morals, such traits and skills, with the help of which an individual would go on in his life and prove oneself to be an important person of the society and good and strong link in the generation to follow. Zakir Hussain emphasis on that in school, students should know their rights and duties. Dr. Hussain emphasized on the fact that human personality is shaped not by heredity but by personality and school is one institution that has the power and capacity to perform this intricate, delicate yet vital and crucial task. He suggested that schools should not only act as institution of bookish knowledge but also workshop of knowledge where wisdom is imparted, groomed and augmented..

Dr. Zakir Hussain wanted education to be the basic instrument used for creating, defining and designing national purpose and opinion. Dr. Zakir Hussain introduced the notion of work centered education instead of book centered education. The main features of the Wardha Scheme were imbibed in the following resolutions: that in the opinion of the conference endorses the purposely made by Mahatma Gandhi that the process of education throughout this period should centre around some form of manned and productive work, and that all the other abilities to be developed or training to be given should, as far as possible, be integrally related to the central handicraft chosen with due regard to the environment of the child. Dr. Husaain made a classical remark on the Indian political condition when

he said in Kashi Vidhyapati convocation, “I wish that there was more education in our politics and less politics in our education.”

Dr. Zakir Husain tried to give a new shape and form to educational thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi through Jamia Milia Islamia by Zakir Hussain. He always tried to push for an ideal education system in India. Through education he always wanted to develop human values in students besides elevating traits, proficiency and intellect. He always believed and stood by two principles which he considered essential and fundamental for reconstruction of Indian educational system. According to him, the fundamental guiding principles of our educational reconstruction should be: the principle of work and principle of social orientation.

Principle of work was based on the thought and notion which tries to investigate the question as in which medium or through which channel should a student be educated? His idea was that work alone can become a true vehicle for quality and fruitful education. His idea can be best surmised from his speech which he delivered in the Convocation address of the Sri. Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya Rural Institute, Coimbatore in the year 1961, on the theme ‘Work as an Instrument of Education,’ he quoted that:

“The idea of work as the instrument of education has been under discussion in our country for quite some time, and I cannot resist the disturbing conclusion that, by and large, its significance and its possibilities have been missed. Some have reduced it to a harmless and meaningless ritual; some have narrowed it down to sheer mechanical handwork. But if the concept of work in education were grasped as educationally productive work, as work that result in education, its incorporation an appropriate forms at various stages of education would mean a real contribution in the country. Educationally productive work, we should do well to remember, is essentially the work of the mind.....”

Again in an Address at the All India Education Conference (1940) Dr. Zakir Hussain made one of the finest statements about the meaning of work in education, the English translation of which we reproduce below:

“All work is not educative. It is educative only when it is preceded by mental effort..... Only that work is genuinely educative which serves some value, higher than our selfish ends, and to which we are devoted. He who works for his own ends may become skilled; he does not become educated.... Later those who wish to make work the medium of education remember that work is not purposeless, that it is not content with any results that may follow. Work does not mean the passing of time by doing any haphazard things; it is not amusement; it is not play; it is purposeful striving. Work sits in judgment on itself with the strictness of an enemy and, when it passes the test, it yields joy, unparalleled and unsurpassed. Work is worship.”

Another school of thought he propounded and fervently advocated for was **Principle of Social Orientation**. He developed this philosophy from the influence of great german educator George Kerschensteiner. The ‘correspondence’ between the growing powers of the individual mind and the totality of the cultural goods which Kerschensteiner advocates as the basis of any educational process presuppose a social setting. Spiritual regeneration of the man which Dr. Hussain emphasizes so much could never be imagined in a social vacuum. Isolated development is no development. The growing child undergoing the process of education must grow and flourish in the service of others and in mutually shared work. In the language of Dr. Zakir Hussain himself, “Only the shared experience of such work can establish habits of thought and action which can keep the subjective individual urges of a free democratic environment within their legitimate framework and prevent their degeneration into

disruptive social forces. Only such work can make equality and fraternity real experienced values. Only in such work does social responsibility become more than a phrase.”

These two principles were well imbibed in all the actions of Dr. Zakir Hussain whenever he pleads for an educational system which should seek to transform our educational institutions, from the elementary school to the university, from places of passive receptivity to those of spontaneous activity, from places of collecting and forgetting information to places of the discovery of knowledge and its use, from seats of theoretical intellectual one sidedness to those of practical human many sidedness, from places of individual selfishness to those of devotion to social ends.

But when we see and ponder upon all these ideas of Dr. Hussain, we could clearly surmise that there is a huge gap between what Dr. Hussain once argued and advocated and in what predicament our educational system is entrapped today. I should use two words pathetic and disgusting for Indian educational system or perhaps I should use something more derogatory to this effect. Students before left India in search for better jobs, which was very profoundly called, brain drain. Now students are leaving the nation for pursuing higher education as well. I am very certain they will begin leaving tomorrow in pursuit of basic education as well. Well this is all but understandable - A nation where political party's eclipses public opinion, where uneducated and criminally active holds the ministerial portfolios, where religion and caste have upper hand over science and logic – in such a state ideas are forced not formed, opinions are fabricated and not appreciated and legends like Dr. Zakir Hussain are not found but lost.

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