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Concept of Education in the Poetry of Sheikh Nooruddin

Gh. Mohiuddin

Assistant Professor English
Govt. Degree College Pulwama (J&K)

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Abstract:

For the harmonious development of an individual, education is of vital importance. It is as essential for the safe survival in this world as are food, clothing and other basic necessities of life. Men of intelligence and erudition have over the ages stressed on the need and importance of acquiring education. Western as well as Oriental scholars, thinkers and religious figures have emphasized on the pivotal role of education in an individual's life through their prose works and through verse. Sheikh Nooruddin, a celebrated Saint-poet of Kashmir, has also dealt with this universal theme of education in his poetry; its aims and objectives, and how some people get benefitted from it and share those benefits with others while some others acquire it for achieving their material goals only. The present paper will attempt to deliberate on the concept of education while taking into consideration a few definitions given by the prominent educationists both from the East and the West. It will also discuss the concept of education as expressed in the *Shruks* of Sheikh Nooruddin and will highlight how, according to Sheikh Nooruddin, many people do not get benefitted from education even after formally attending the schools or academies meant for this purpose.

Keywords: Education, Survival, Oriental, Pivotal, Saint-Poet, Definitions, Shruks, Academies.

Education is a continuous process which begins with the birth of an individual and lasts as long as a person survives on this earth. Education leads to an all round development of a person, be it physical, mental, social or psychological aspect and is aimed at complete transformation of an individual. Education liberates the mind and the soul from the shackles of self-centeredness, egotism and parochialism, and guides us towards open-mindedness, egalitarianism and democratic spirit. True education expels darkness and brings illumination. One cannot recognize one's self and one's Creator without education because it is education which creates in us awareness about this world, its creator and about all those things which exist around us. Education elevates us from mundane earthly existence to the world of immortality and enables us to soar high into the limitless heights of the sky. Education sensitizes us about the existence of an eternal world that lies ahead of this mortal one and therefore broadens the spectrum of things which lie in our minds. Rabindranath Tagore has aptly said, "Education means enabling the mind to find out truth which emancipates us from the bondage of the dust

and gives us wealth, not of things but of inner light, not of power but of love, making this truth its own and giving expression to it.” (Khan and Bhat 31)

Education differentiates humans from other animals and beasts by way of developing them into better conscious creatures who work not for their welfare only but for the welfare of the whole world including animals and even plants. It is the sum total of all those fruitful experiences which empower us to change the environment for the better so that we live a comfortable life in the world. Education must bring about a complete change in our character and imbibe ethical values in us. An educated person must be able to differentiate between right and wrong. His faculties should be evolved to such extent that he should possess insight to look into the essence of things. Right education does not drive us to mere sermonizing rather it impels us to practice what is good; not for us only but for all of us. Education is a comprehensive and all round development whereby an individual self is nurtured under the supervision of a better experienced person in order to metamorphose it into an able and capable human being balanced in all respects who could well adjust to the surrounding environment and who could realize the ultimate aim of human existence. John D. Redden has explained it in an exhaustive manner:

Education is the deliberate and systematic influence exerted by the mature person upon the immature through instruction, discipline and harmonious development of physical, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual powers of human being according to individual and social need directed towards the union of the educand and his creator as the final end. (Aggarwal 6)

Sheikh Nooruddin, a popular Saint-poet of Kashmir has produced invaluable poetry in Kashmiri language which is read and appreciated world over now. His poetry relates to almost all spheres of life and has contributed greatly in the social awakening among the people. Besides, his Rishi movement played a major role in the Islamic acculturation of Kashmir. He too has touched upon this vital issue of education and its individual and social aims in his *Shruks*. Although Sheikh Nooruddin is said to have been illiterate but still he had gained enormous knowledge through his interaction with men of scholarship and therefore he was in no way an uneducated person. According to Mohd Ishaq Khan:

In spite of his illiteracy, Nooruddin Rishi had a wide range of sources to draw upon. There was enough spiritual inspiration in the valley for an earnest seeker after the truth like him to have an opportunity for gaining knowledge of a faith which had posed an imminent threat to the belief structure of his own social environment. His verses bear eloquent testimony to the discussions with those who differed from him as well as those whose views were similar to him. It was not by meditation and penance in the cave and the forests alone, but also through extensive discussions during the long course of his travels in different parts of the valley with the Hindu ascetics, the Brahmans, the theologians, the commoners, including even peasant girls, and, above all, Sufis like Muhammad Hamadani,

Shaikh Sultan, Sultan Gunj Baksh and a Sufi scholar like Haji Adhami that Nooruddin was able to quench his thirst for a knowledge which would lead to the solution of the difficulties and problems of his faith. (Khan 84-85)

Sheikh Nooruddin upheld the view that education should aim at an all round development of personality of a person. He believed that education does not mean merely attending a school or an institution in order to get a degree or acquiring the skills to read and write; that in simpler words is called literacy. Education is a rigorous training passing through which an individual refines his overall personality and becomes self-conscious, God-conscious and socially responsible person. Knowledge and education are the most valued and precious treasures which should be preserved in the inner recesses of mind just as a golden treasure is preserved in strong iron chests.

Precious gold knowledge is to be preserved in coffers.

Vend it pure as a vendor to a vendee.

Veracious shalt thou be to vend it.

A lamp thy faith is let not be blown out. (Alchemy of Light-I 226)

Sheikh Nooruddin was convinced that knowledge emanates from God Himself and therefore deserves to be sought with utter submission and with great reverence. It is a great bounty from our Creator and if put into practice candidly will eventually lead to prosperity in this world and ultimate salvation in the Hereafter.

Knowledge is great and the word of God eternal.

If thou follow the path of Mohammad- the prophet.

Thy pious behaviour is not less than a pearl treasure.

Swift as air be thy market price to get there in Hereafter. (AL-I 230)

Real education according to Sheikh Nooruddin leads to wisdom which opens new gateways of experience and understanding for us. Only right type of education develops our personality in a positive way so that we start pondering over the transitory nature of this material world. Once our vision is broadened we shun worldly greed, egotism, criminality, violence and other such vicious qualities. Eventually our focus shifts from this world towards the Creator of this world who is the source of all peace and prosperity.

Fusion in knowledge and wisdom wilt break thy bonds of dependence.

Calamities,-great and hardships-soar wilt tame thee to servility.

A seeker-true, conscious enough wilt be in quest of Godliness.

Thus worldliness to him wilt be nothing but trash and ash. (Alchemy of Light-II 24)

Sheikh Nooruddin is strongly against such unbalanced education system which is based on bookish knowledge only and which lays stress on just getting of degrees and nothing else. If a person's behaviour is not modified towards positive direction after a certain course of study and he or she fails to realize his or her duties towards the society and the world at large, then such education is only waste of time.

Those who perceive but not practice

Art surely cataractic without light clean.

Bookish knowledge wilt they be carrying like silly jackass!

Deeds impious and actions malicious wilt be their peculiarity.

Flatulent wilt they be with hypocrisy and suspicion.

Guided wilt they be by the devil-execrable. (AL-I 447)

Sheikh Nooruddin overtly criticizes such type of education where all round development of character does not take place and where lopsided personalities are produced. He considers it better not to go for such education and instead spend one's time in the remembrance of God who is the greatest source of knowledge and enlightenment. One must not boast of one's degrees and achievements after undergoing a specific training course because true education must develop humility in us and sensitize us towards the imperfect nature of humankind.

Vain is the knowledge without effects-thawing

As donkey's jack art loaded with books-valuable

Learners- true art inspired with perceptions-real.

Thus blissful depart they to destiny-eternal.

Let not display thy haughtiness on achieving degree-doctorate.

As a turnip bulky is unpalatable owing to abscess formation.

Penitent wilt thou be after elevation thus

Elited wilt thou be as a sprouted seed under soil. (AL-I 452-453)

Education must bring about a complete change in an individual; rather it must develop the whole personality and polish the character and habits. If we accumulate only knowledge of things and lack in basic human etiquette, we are highly detestable.

Designed art thy religious percepts just to enjoy a life-toilless

Thus engaged art thou in plotting plans to each other.

Let not thou be presumptive of a personality unique and matchless.

As a fraction of fractions wilt thou be able to be safe from Hereafter trouble. (AL-I 454)

Humans enjoy superiority over most of the creations in this world but the key of this supremacy of humans lies in their ability to get educated and share the same with others in order to make the world a better place to live in. Therefore education should enable us to develop ourselves so that we are able to control our surroundings. But it is possible only when we practice whatever we learn from books, teachers, environment etc. Otherwise it makes little difference whether one is literate or illiterate.

A well read, bookish and wise personality did thou possess.

But voracious in dainties and dishes charitable

Ah! An expert carpenter but adzeless in deal and doings.

O, a stout body like the log of a yew tree and poisonous like rhus plant.

Refuge and shelter of God did I seek in Godly abode.

But annoyed art thou with the halt of fakirs for a time brief

Belief in God did thou find a thatch safe.

But unbudded art thou alike a stiffen handle.

Behold! How cookies art arranged by thy Lord.

Wise be the one who wilt think the other most revered. (AL-II 359)

Sheikh Nooruddin has launched a scathing attack on those mullahs whose aim is to preach to others what they do not practice themselves. They are spurious sermonizers whose education has failed them and who are similar to empty vessels that make much noise but who lack any substance. They may pose great scholars but they are devoid of real education.

Apparently gaudy but malignant at heart art the mullahs.

Pulpits did they attend to deliver sermons-emotive.

Debatable be none but Maulana Room in scholastic rank.

Else! Seek refuge of God in seeing a mullah.

Oceans abysmal in knowledge-great did he traverse.

Thus fused He the psyche-candid with pulsative beats. (AL-II 363)

Be not pompous on thy cleanness and sponge baths O mullah.

Empty art thou of a knowledge-radiant O Mullah.

Able not thou be to find a space at hereafter portal.

As thou soiled the scholastic state of true scholars'. (AL-II 360)

Modern educationists subscribe to the view that education is a multi-polar process where students are equally responsible in the delivery of material as are the teachers, the environment etc. Therefore students or learners have to be mentally ready and attentive to learn, otherwise education proves useless activity which yields no positive results. Sheikh Nooruddin also warns us about such type of educational interaction where learners are mentally absent or unwilling to learn or are mere dullards unable to grasp anything.

Ready not a ram be for a packsaddle.

Late not a falcon be to swoop its aim.

Curdle not the water under solar radiations.

Listen not a dunce a valuable suggestion. (AL-I 212)

From the above discussion it is obvious that sheikh Nooruddin was a great educationist who espoused such type of education which laid stress on character development and which would metamorphose people into better human beings. He despised those people who in spite of being literate lacked in basic human traits and who confined the scope of education to mere accumulation of worldly wealth and titles while neglecting altogether the proper grooming of their inner selves.

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