

- Mastery of a few but essential subjects is far preferable to tasting a conglomeration of superficially studied disciplines.

THE ESSENCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Educational grace and virtue lie in the friendly and reverent struggle of the mind with great books and authors and ideas, compelling them to yield their gracious fruits of wisdom and meaning. Such an experience, even with a few books, can be educationally far more significant than the cursory, uninterested and superficial reading of many more books of the moment. The process, therefore, is two-fold. On the one hand, we have to enrich the curriculum with significance and encourage the reading of classics and other books that matter — books that illumine the mind and do not merely titillate the senses. On the other, we must be careful to eliminate the trivia from it, which have found a place because tradition set them there and inertia keep them there. There is, either, no

spring cleaning for decades or, in some so-called progressive educational systems, there is a to-the-minute up-to-date-ness, as if the latest need or fad of the moment could be included in the curriculum, merely because it was new. Neither the American “book-keeping of credits” nor the Indian practice of gearing all work and study to the annual or public examination can provide any real intellectual education. It can only prepare for specific jobs, not for any commerce with greatness. Real education involves a sincere, flaming dedication to knowledge and pursuit of truth and a training of the mind to reach for new knowledge. It will draw into the process the head as well as the heart. If the heart remains untouched and there is no “passion”, the student cannot endure the many dis-

appointments and frustrations which beset this pursuit. It is good for a student, whether he is engaged in the study of natural or social sciences or arts and humanities, that the road to knowledge and intellectual and artistic achievement is steep, involving many headaches and heart-breaks. It is his business to adventure on this road with courage, for it is in this process that he can discover himself and his realizable possibilities.

The teaching method, which is consciously or unconsciously favoured in most of the educational institutions, is "spoon feeding" in some form or another, when lessons and lectures become the substitute for intellectual activity and passive accumulation of information takes the place of active acquisition of knowledge. Its results are always disastrous, for they undermine or arrest the development of all the qualities of the mind which education is meant to foster — initiative, independent work, resourcefulness, originality of approach. Instead, there is intellectual conformity and diffidence, an aver-

sion to mental adventure and a fear of the challenge of the imagination, even in science and art. The average Indian student, for instance, is usually unwilling to face exacting intellectual challenges and prefers shortcuts and by-ways to reach his end. Is that because he is mentally inferior to his fellow students in other lands? There seems to be no valid justification for such a belief. In fact, under similar conditions of education abroad, many Indian young men and women have distinguished themselves academically amongst their colleagues from other lands. The fault lies, in considerable measure, with educational methods and techniques normally employed, which are content to place their sights low, to make do with narrow curricula and unstimulating ways of work and not to expect from the students adequate standards of excellence. There is no reason why, in a democratic set up, we should take it for granted that the life of the mind and academic interests are only meant for a small elite and they need not find an ho-

noured place in the life of every man, so far as his natural talents and limitations make that possible. If this view demands that we enrich the curriculum of the school and the college with the best of our cultural heritage, we should do so: if it implies that we encourage promising talent in everyone, using active and creative ways of teaching and learning, we should explore that possibility to the fullest. Democracy would be stulti-

fying itself if it confined its ambition to enabling an increasing number of citizens — and eventually all — to have enough food and clothing and houses and more and more material goods and leisure but left their minds uncultivated and failed to fill their life and increasing leisure with significant intellectual, cultural and artistic activities. — *by K. G. Saiyidain, Excerpt from his book Universities and the Life of the Mind.*