

Report of the conference held on 30 and 31 January, 2014 organized by D S Kothari Centre for Science, Ethics and Education, University of Delhi and Tibet House, Cultural Center of His Holiness The Dalai Lama on ***Neuroscience, Psychology and Educational Practices***.

D S Kothari Centre for Science, Ethics and Education, University of Delhi and Tibet House, Cultural Center of His Holiness The Dalai Lama, organized a two day conference on *Neuroscience, Psychology and Educational Practices* on 30th and 31st January, 2014. This endeavor was an attempt to rethink the meaning of education in the context of several perspectives on consciousness from psychology and philosophy.

Learning and knowing are central to being. Consciousness opens the door for the *becoming* and hence needs to be recognised for its potentialities of transformations. Human beings can choose to be what they want to be, but the awareness that such possibilities exist, must be there for the will to choose to materialise. An awareness that the way we think creates our world for us, and an awareness that thoughts are the seat from where much of our being, relationships, achievements, follies and breakthroughs arise, can be a truly empowering learning.

The valuable contributions made by neuroscience and psychology in comprehending the complex world of mind and brain have opened up pathways for transformations. The rich and deep philosophies developed over the centuries offer alternative ways of knowing. The two, in interaction with each one and make for a facilitating field that opens new vistas for human endeavours to flourish. Educational practices are conscious exercises in learning. And for this field, an awareness of thought, mind and consciousness holds unparalleled significance. Much of the mainstream educational practices, however, overlook this core aspect of learning.

Experiences with students over the years show that they are deeply concerned about the epistemological questions just as much as they are about the relatively material concerns such as finding a suitable job. The unanswered questions remain so for most and possibilities of empowerment suffer consequently.

The first day of the conference had eminent scholars share their insights into the nature of consciousness from the perspective of neuroscience and psychology. The world of psychology was examined from Indian traditions, with a focus on the Buddhist perspective. Dr Ceon Ramon, Profs Sisir Roy and Girishwar Mishra, and Geshe Dorji Damdul led these talks. Dr Suneet Varma presented the perspective of Sri Aurobindo in this context.

Dr Ritu Chowdhary, Associate Professor, Aditi Mahavidyalaya chaired the students' panel discussion. Ms. Smriti and Ms. Jyotsna from Aditi Mahavidyalaya spoke on self and self awareness, referring to William James's theory. They discussed the consciousness of self as known or the me, and the self as knower or the I, the 'pure ego' as discussed by many. They tried to explain the thought which at each moment different from the last moment but is appropriative of the latter, together with all that the latter called its own and how the experiential facts find their place in this description.

Ms. Pinki and Ms. Manisha from Gargi College spoke about the three principles of true teaching by Sri Aurobindo that nothing can be taught but everything can be learned, the mind has to be consulted in its growth and finally the concept of learning from near to far and education according to the nature of the child. They also discussed the role of the teacher as helper or guide.

Ms. Manisha Chugh and Ms. Anjali Mittal from Shyama Prasad Mukherji College gave a Power Point presentation on the topic, "Integration: A Rhetoric or Reality." The importance of known to unknown, specific to general and local to global was explained in the process of integration. Also, the value of child friendly and child-centered approaches was highlighted. There were other two presentations from the same college, Ms. Bhithika Mandal and Ms. Vishakha gave a presentation on the "Importance of Psychology for teachers", where they mentioned different theorist like John Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky and their relevance for the teachers and how teachers can improve their understanding and enhance their knowledge by putting them into practice. Ms. Deepali Gupta and Ms. Jinni Gupta presented their work on 'Gender in Schools', where they showed visuals of interviews with teachers and the problems faced while handling gender in the classroom. Common problems like a separate row for each gender in the primary classes, less interaction of female students with male teachers and male child's more friendly approach towards the female teacher were discussed.

The last session on Applied Psychology: Lessons from the Field had Loraine Lester (Therapist for anxiety, cardiac and cancer patients) speak about her experiences with terminally ill patients and the methods of developing positive thinking used by her. The session concluded with an experience in contemplative methods.

Day two had practitioners of various philosophies and ideologies share their experiences as administrators and directors of schools and colleges. Dr Pratibha Jolly, Principal, Miranda House, University of Delhi, spoke about mindful learning and the need to constantly have a creative openness in and to learning per se. She provided us with

insights from the various innovative endeavours in this field at Miranda House. Dr B.Tsering, Principal, Dalai Lama Institute for Higher Education, Bangalore, emphasized the significance of secular ethics in the curriculum for higher education and showed the ways this is being done in her Institute. . Prof.P. Krishna, Secretary, Rajghat Education Center, Krishnamurti Foundation India, Varanasi presented his views on the need to reinvestigate the constitution of thoughts through a distinction based on ego centred and non ego centred intention. A transformed consciousness is the key to a transformed world both locally and globally and this must be implemented through the education process.

Dr Ritu Chowdhary, Associate Professor, Aditi Mahavidyalaya once again co-ordinated and chaired the students' panel discussion. On the second day, there were five presentations by students. Ms. Madhulika Sonkar from the Department of Sociology, University of Delhi, presented her work on 'Right relationship between teachers and students: Traversing Krishnamurti's ideas in practice. A study on Rishi Valley School' and Rashmi Sharma also from Department of Sociology, University of Delhi, on "Right education in the age of information overload -- Rishi Valley School experience".

Ms. Swastika and Ms. Susan Jose from Shyama Prasad Mukherji College spoke on discipline and RTE. The focus of their presentation was on the practice of corporal punishment in schools despite its ban by the government of India. They elaborated on the traumatic effects of punishment on the psyche of children and the physical and the psychological long-term damage caused by these in the lives of children.

Finally, two students from Aditi Mahavidyalaya, Ms. Kannika and Ms. Shama came forward and discussed their personal experiences as trainee teachers. They emphasized the need to give positive regard to the little children in school and relating everyday teaching to the child's immediate environment and culture. Also the role of an affectionate and friendly teacher in the lives of the students was highlighted as they shared their experiences.

The final session had Dr G. Gautama, Director-Secretary, Krishnamurti Foundation, (India) Chennai present a very distinctive pattern of functioning of one of the newly established schools of KFI (India), *Pathshala*. A completely reconstituted design of this school at structural, pedagogical, social, spatial levels opened up new ways of thinking about schooling and school education. Ms Kamala Menon, Former Principal of Mirambika Free Progress School elucidated on the way the teachings and philosophy of Sri Aurobindo lay at the basis of the plan, perspective and practices of their school. The conference concluded with a wrap- up session chaired by Geshe Dorji Damdul (Director), Tibet House, New Delhi.