What Is Education?

I suppose most of you understand English, although it does not matter if you do not, as your teachers and your elders understand it. Perhaps you would ask them afterwards to explain what I have been talking about; make a point of asking them, won’t you? Because, what we are going to discuss for the next three or four weeks is very important; we are going to discuss what is education and what are its implications, not just passing examinations, but the whole implication of being educated. So, as we are going to talk about that every day, if you do not understand what I am saying now, please ask your teachers to explain it carefully. Also, after I have talked, perhaps you would ask questions. These talks are meant primarily for students, and if the older people want to ask questions, they should only ask questions that will help the students to understand, that will explain further the problem. To ask questions about their own personal problems will not help the students.

Don’t you ask yourself why you are being educated? Do you know why you are being educated and what that education means? As we know, education is to go to school, to learn how to read and write, to pass examinations, and to play a few games; and after you leave school, you go to college, there again to study very, very hard for a few months or a few years, pass an examination and then get a job; and then you forget all about what you have learned. Is that not what we call education? Do you understand what I am talking about? Isn’t that what we all do?

If you are girls, you pass a few examinations, B.A. or M.A., marry, and
Education is something much more, is it not? It is to help you not only to get a job in the world, but also to meet the world, is it not? You know what the world is. In the world there is competition. You know what competition means—each man out for himself, struggling to get the best, pushing the others aside. In the world there are wars, there are class divisions and the fight between them. In the world every man is trying to get a better job, to keep on rising; if you are a clerk, you try to get a little higher, and so fight all the time. Have you not noticed it? If you have a car, you want a bigger car. So, there is that constant fight going on, not only within ourselves, but with all our neighbours. Then, there is a war which kills, which destroys people, like the last war, when millions were killed, wounded, or maimed.
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Our life is all this political struggle. And also, life is religion, is it not? What we call religion is rituals, going to temples, putting on something like the sacred thread, mumbling some words, or following some guru. Life is also, is it not, the fear of dying, fear of living, fear of what people say and do not say, fear of not knowing where one is going, fear of losing a job, fear of opinion. So, life is something extraordinarily complex, is it not? You know what that word complex means? It is very intricate, it is not something simple, which you just follow; it is very, very difficult, a great many things are involved.

So, education is, is it not, to enable you to meet all these problems. You have to be educated so as to meet all these problems rightly. That is what education is—not merely to pass a few examinations in some silly subjects in which you are not at all interested. Proper education is to help the student to meet this life so that he understands it and won’t succumb, won’t be crushed under it as most of us are. People, ideas, public opinion, country, climate, food—all that is constantly pushing you in a particular direction in which society wants you to go. Your education must enable you to understand this pressure, not to yield to it, but to understand it and to break through it, so that you, as an individual, as a human being, are capable of a great deal of initiative, and not merely traditional thinking. That is real education.

You know that, for most of us, education consists in learning what to think. Your
society tells you; your parents tell you; your neighbours tell you; your books tell you; your teachers tell you what to think. The machinery of ‘what to think’ we call education, and that education only makes you mechanical, dull, stupid, uncreative. But if you knew how to think, not what to think, then you would not be mechanical, traditional, but live human beings; you would be great revolutionaries—not in the stupid sense of murdering people to get a better job or to push through a certain idea, but the revolution of knowing how to think rightly. That is very important. But, when we are at school, we never find out about all these things. The teachers themselves do not know. They only teach you how to read or what to read, and correct your English or mathematics. That is all their concern, and at the end of five or ten years, you are pushed out into this life about which you know nothing. Nobody has talked to you about it; or, if they have talked, they push you in certain directions—either to be a socialist, a communist, a congressite or some other—but they never teach you or help you to understand and how to think out all these problems, not just at one moment during a certain number of years, but all the time—which is education, is it not? After all, in a school of this kind that is what we must do, help you not merely to pass some stupid examinations, but to be able to meet life when you go out of this place, so that you are intelligent human beings, not mechanical, not Hindus or Muslims or Communists or some such thing.

It is very important how you are educated, how you think. Most of the teachers do not know how to think; they merely get a job
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and settle down. They have families, they have worries, they have fathers and mothers who say, ‘You must follow certain rituals, you must do this, you must do that’; they have their own problems, their own difficulties. They leave all those at home, come to school and teach a few lessons, but they do not know how to think, and we do not know how to think. In a school of this kind, surely it is very important for you, for the teachers, for all of us who are living here, to consider all the problems of life, to discuss, to find out, to investigate, to inquire, so that our minds become so very alert that we do not just follow somebody. You understand what I am talking about? Is not all that education? Education is not just until the age of 21 but until you die. Life is like a river, it is never still, it is always moving, always alive and rich. When we think we have understood a part of a river and hold to that part, it is only dead water, is it not? Because, the river goes by. To watch all the movement of the river, all the things that are happening on the river, to understand, to be faced with it—that is life, and we all have to prepare for it.

So, education really is not merely passing a few examinations but being able to think of all these problems so that your mind is not mechanical, traditional, so that your mind is creative, so that you do not merely fit into society but break it, create anew out of it—not a new thing according to the socialist, the communist, or the congressite, but a completely new thing—which is real revolution. And after all, that is the meaning of education, is it not, so that you grow in freedom, so that you can create a new world. The old people have

अत: वास्तव में शिक्षा का मतलब कुछ परिस्थितियों पर पास कर लेना भर नहीं बल्कि इन समस्याओं पर विचार करने के लावक होना भी है। ताकि आपका मन वायरिक्ष और परपरवर न हो जाए, ताकि आपका मन सृजनशील हो, ताकि आप समाज के अनुप्रेरण हों जिनके ही ही न लगे रहें बल्कि उसे लोडिंग पूर्णत: नए का सृजन करें—समाजकारी, समाजवादी या कांग्रेसवादी विचारधाराओं के अनुसार किसी नयी चीज का नया बताने के लिए नया वस्तु का—नया वास्तविक क्रांति है। क्योंकि शिक्षा का तात्पर्य आखिरकार यही तो है कि आप स्वतंत्रता में विकसित हो सकें ताकि एक अभिव्यक्ति विश्व का
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not created a beautiful world; they have made a mess of the world. Is it not the function of education, of the educator, to see that you grow in freedom so that you can understand life, so that you can change things and not just grow dull, weary, and die as most people do?

So I feel, and most of us do feel who are serious about these things, that a place like this should provide an atmosphere in which you are given every opportunity to grow, uninfluenced, unconditioned, untaught, so that when you go out of here you can meet life intelligently, without fear. Otherwise, this place has no value; it will be like any rotten school, perhaps a little better because it happens to be in a beautiful place, people are a little kinder, they do not beat you; though they may coerce you in other ways. We should create a school where the student is not pressed, is not enclosed, is not squeezed by our ideas, by our stupidity, by our fears, so that as he grows, he will understand his own affairs, he will be able to meet life intelligently. You know what all this requires—not only an intelligent student, a student who is alive, but also an educator, the right kind of educator. But the right kind of educators and the right kind of students are not born; we must struggle, discuss, push until the thing comes about. You know, to grow a beautiful rose you require a great deal of care, don’t you? To write a poem you must have the feeling, you must have the words to put it in. All that requires care, considerable watching. So, is it not very important that this should be such a place? If it is not such a place, it is nobody’s fault but your own and the teachers’. Do not say, ‘The teachers do not do this. It is the teachers’ fault if they do not create this place.’ Nobody else is going to create it; others are not going to create it. You and I and the teachers must do it. That is real revolution—to have the feeling
that it is our school, which you and I and
the teachers and all of us are building
together.

So, it is very important, is it not, to
understand what we mean by education—
not ideals of education; such ideals are all
nonsense. We must begin as we are,
understand things as they are, and out of
that, build. You do not have a readymade
garden or school; you take the soil as it is,
you till it, manure it, water it, and so create
something out of nothing. As there is
nothing, you will have to create, to build
together.

Is it not very important for each one of us
to know how to think rightly, not what to
think, not what the books say, but how to
think? That is what I would like to discuss
with you for the next three or four weeks,
namely, how to think, so that you and I at
the end of it will have our minds very
clear; and with that clarity, with that
thinking, with that capacity, we can then
go out and meet life.

May I ask you the question, ‘What do you
want to do when you leave the school and
when you have been to college?’ Do you
know what you want to do? Don’t you
want jobs, is it not your primary concern to
get a job? You have all become dumb. It is
the first day and you are a bit shy. It will
be all right in a couple of days. Please do
not keep your shyness too long, we shall
only be here for a few weeks.