

TRACING OUR STEPS: IS REGRESSIVE EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION AN ALTERNATIVE?

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Abstract

In the twenty first century, after 68 years of national independence, India is still much behind China in terms of education, a country; she is very often compared with among the BRIC nations in terms of overall growth and development rates. Unavailability of proper schools, teaching staff and lack of proper implementation of rules are administrative and legal problems that are often paid attention towards with corrective measures and may show improvement in the years to come. But, the flaws beyond administrative and legal obstacles that lay in the very ideology of education in the country are showing a fall in its quality and must also be taken into serious consideration. Students unable to choose educational streams of their choice or schools evaluating students solely on the basis of rote learning, without any practice or thought involved in assignments are basically ideological problems that are more deep-rooted and difficult to eradicate as compared to the administrative ones. Following the same line of thought, the paper traces philosophical theories stated in the past that contain alternatives to eliminate some ideological problems in education in today's era. A progressive move in the field of education would mean coming up with new alternatives. However, if the older philosophical theories that were stated billions of years ago provide us with alternatives for today, then a regressive move being more pragmatic, must be followed, so that education encourages the flourish of human resource in the country in a comprehensive way.

Keywords: national independence, BRIC, rote learning, philosophical theories, human resource

1. INTRODUCTION

Evolution as a concept has several meanings implied in it. It comprises of advancement, growth and gaining in a new identification of a particular phenomenon. While at present, several of us are against the ideas of students being pressurized by their parents due to the hegemony of a particular discipline over the others or the dominance of rote learning during school education, many philosophical notions have been expressed since time almost began till the contemporary times by successful thinkers and figures, in India and internationally, stating their thoughts against these phenomenon already. Perhaps, if we trace our steps, the solutions to such problems can be found when we peep into the minds of the oldest thinkers.

Every nation must have a philosophy of education which must become the foundation while designing and framing the structure and policies of the education system of the country. The philosophical foundation may act as a charter of solutions for the obstacles arising in the present and the future of the education system. In India, the philosophical theories, be it be laid down by the Hindu religious scriptures (the Hindu religion being mentioned as it is practiced by the majority in the country) or the ones left behind as results, observations

and theories of the educational experiments conducted by the greatest Indian figures, education has been looked at with a spiritual light. The basic purpose of education in the earliest scriptures has been attaining Moksha or the highest form of freedom. As against this motive related to the highest self – actualization and freedom, the west mostly focuses upon attaining materialistic contentment through education and work, giving equal importance to service to the society. However, both the worldviews laid a very profound level of emphasis on development of morality within an individual.

The well-known *Gurukul* system that existed in India, where the student was completely the teacher's responsibility for a certain span of time did leave a profound effect on the student making him well rounded and experienced. The individual would often grow, well versed in several disciplines including life skills as well. But perhaps, the worldview obtained by the *shishya* through this system was very limited due to being enlightened and taught by one single entity. Also most importantly, it was not a custom that allowed questioning and challenging the *Guru* overtly. This does not mean that our country never had a tradition of arguments and consensus. The Buddhist philosophy and concept of *sanghs* had their very identity in the concept of consensus where any form of teaching or any form of decision making was performed after discussions and reaching a consensus making the process intensely participative. Within *Nyaya*, any and every form of learning and teaching was crafted through discussions, which also included certain forms of arguments. Above everything, the *Upanishadic* system, very core to the Indian environment of learning involved and encouraged intense dialectics, deduction, induction and discussions in its educational set-up, giving birth to and raising deep and intense deliberators.

This rich element of discussions and consensus, leading to deliberations that constituted the philosophy of Indian education was washed away with the ravages of time. Perhaps with a blend of the later tradition of the *Gurukul* system and the period of colonization, giving rise to an ideological establishment of a master-slave concept eliminated the idea of questioning and challenging. Hence, one of the most important problems in the education system today is a result of this blend. Absolute subservience in front of authority or fear of negative reinforcements still play their parts, giving rise to hesitation in voices and blockage in thought processes, creativity and novelty often trapping the real spark of the human resource.

2. THE MAJOR OBSTACLES TODAY

The major flaw in the Indian education philosophy also shows its face in the form of obstacles among individuals or a group of individuals today. Very often we come across children who do very well at school level but fail to perform equally well in college due to change in environment and curriculum. It is also not necessary that very efficient performers at college and university level will get positive appraisals at workplace as well. Strength at its peak during specific sections and not during the other sections of life can imply a lot of things. It may either mean that we as individuals make the wrong choices or it may imply that the basic skills required in order to adapt to different levels in our lives and perform considerably well in most situations is lacking. It clearly means that the education system is not built in a way where individuals go through the development of soul that is flexible and accommodating. In this system, somewhere individuals are groomed in ways by which they do not quite obtain the ability to think, analyze and create something novel, but just grasp and reproduce what exists already. Perhaps it is too idealistic to expect a foolproof system, but at least the goal of the very concept of imparting education must be raising moral and ethical individuals, who are well versed with the ability to learn, adapt and create without much conflict, taking place both internally and externally.

Another major pothole that can be seen today lies in the evaluative measures that are solely based on rote learning and gathering of facts and figures within the four walls of the classroom.

3. THE REGRESSIVE EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION

As contrast to the scene of pressure, stereotypical judgements and evaluations taking place on the basis of rote learning solely, during around 450 B.C.E, Greek philosophers started stating concepts about education that would negate all the negative repercussions the rote learning system in particular, brings us today. For instance, when the society was not as advanced as today and technology was not even a spark in its founder's eye, Greek philosopher Plato, had stated education to be one of the three major constituents of an ideal state. In his education system, the early childhood has been dedicated to anecdotes and moral stories which would enhance the ethical behavior in a person at an age where the mind is most flexible. Late childhood, the entire adolescence and very initial stage of adulthood have been characterized mainly by gymnastics and music. Gymnastics has been emphasized upon for physical development and wellbeing. Music, very different in essence from the current idea of music, which also included poetry, drama, dance

and forming and studying of tunes and rhythms has been stressed on for mental development and wellbeing. Today, hardly any schools have disciplines in their curriculum, which are made mandatory for explicit physical and mental development. It is certain that a very few schools may have a serious discipline structured in the field of sports, music or any discipline that actively promotes physical wellbeing for each and every student, mandatorily.

Advancing the thought beyond just development and wellbeing, Greek philosopher Aristotle threw light on the deeper advantages of indulging in physically vigorous activities. According to the philosopher, gymnastics not just develops a sound body and physique, but also develops sportsmanship that is essential for life. Today, enormous cases related to suicides, depression, bipolar mood disorders come up every day, suggesting a decline in the ability to face challenges, difficulties or failure among the young generation. Currently, when any educational institution is attended, the sole motive is to gain a degree for job, which is believed to provide with a comfortable and happy living in the future (indeed following the western purpose in the educational philosophy, but lacking the entirety of service as citizens). Education in order to gain knowledge and maintain ethical standards has become secondary if not the last motive for acquiring education. Aristotle also very meticulously pointed out towards the morality aspect of education that must be gained by an individual. Education has become an object through which an individual is judged, critiqued and pressurized on, minimizing the concept to the level of mere numerical values or grade points. Hence, the character building and the ability to analyze choosing difficult but correct ways through education has lost its position from being at the priority which often show results today. Several students, irrespective of obtaining above average scores in their educational institutions face difficulty while confronting the world beyond the gates of those institutions.

Not only western philosophers, but as stated above, contemporary figures from India, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Kautilya and Shri Aurobindo have also stressed upon the imparting of education as the very foundation of creation and development of a society. M.K Gandhi with all the difficulties, obstacles, planning and struggle that surrounded him during the freedom struggle, had always emphasized on the inculcation of a comprehensive education system, "*Where children grow in body, mind and spirit*". He also stressed upon the importance of fine arts as a unique and important element of education where the mind opens at a different level while the hands are engrossed in creation. Due to a blind idealization of western education according to him, the most traditional ways of imparting education, which included extracting knowledge and experiences from the real aspects of nature was suppressed. The class room stopped being a reflection of the real world, with the kind of education that may or may not be beneficial in life ahead.

Similar ideas were put forth by Shri Rabindra Nath Tagore, who believed that education without gaining an experience of the natural world around us, translates to gaining in of knowledge "*in proxy*". A man cannot be fully educated if his soul is derived of the most essential values and wisdom. Tagore's educational experiment that can be seen even today in his institution called *Shantiniketan*, in West Bengal, attempted and succeeded in opening up and maintaining the comprehensive development of a person, that included all kinds of potentialities within a man, that aids with collectively reaching an optimum level of recognition and utility. He also believed very strongly that in a bid to obtain uniformity and win the competition in terms of receiving education, people often forget the growth of the individual himself.

4. THE CONTRAST- DIFFERENT PATHS, DIFFERENT REGIONS, BUT THE SAME DESTINATION

As is evident, where on one hand, the earliest of Greek philosophers emphasized on an overall development with exposure to various disciplines in practical ways with morality moving in parallel, the later Indian thinkers also put forth the importance of the overall development of an individual by exposure to the real world with the practice of morality. Although different paths, the destination is to gain a rich educational experience where the individual recognizes himself and the others around and goes through a comprehensive development. This proves that as time has progressed and boundaries have been transcended, people have devised dynamic ways of imparting education, but, the destination has been the same and has shown positive results.

Education system in India, with a generic overview today, lacks every element that the earliest thinkers have put forth. Policy makers and thinkers have restricted children to the four walls of the classroom, which all the four thinkers mentioned above, have shown an opposite stance towards. Change due to the progress in time does not mean that we forget the legacies we have had. Today, the ultimate aim has been restricted to the maximization of personal- material pleasure. However, human resource of a country will be able to reach the

zenith, only when they recognize and gain knowledge about themselves, as a foremost priority, rather than learning by rote and being evaluated on facts, figures and analysis done by others.

5. THE ALTERNATIVE

Hence, the education system should be crafted or recreated, with blend of the theories and beliefs of the thinkers from the oldest to the contemporary times. In this way, the body, mind and spirit in individuals develop hand in hand. Sports, gymnastics, dance and similar activities that result in a healthy and sound body and sportsmanship (in case of sports) in order to reach the readiness to face challenges and gain a balance between the mind and body must be imparted as an important discipline, mandatorily for every student equally, with an equal attention towards it as mathematics or grammar. Such disciplines in the education system would also step beyond the concept of evaluation on the basis of rote learning, where the students just grasp and reproduce, and would act as a catalyst for the students where they would think, create and produce.

Today, due to relative amount of job guarantee and a stereotypical judgement on a person's smartness based on his/her efficiency in mathematics and hard sciences, children are often pressurized to select subjects according to their parents' whims. The whims may or may not coincide with the student's aptitude and choice. Choosing and practicing professions on the basis of choice was emphasized by both Plato and the Indian philosophy in the early Vedic age. Plato introduced the concept of aptitude keeping a foundation of the tripartite soul introduced by Pythagoras. In his concept of education, post the anecdotal and musical cum physical education, a personality test conducted would throw some light on the kind of profession - Honor, aptitude or philosopher (drawn from the tripartite soul), a person shows an inclination towards. According to the results, the person would be placed in the respective field, in which he/she would serve the state with all his/her dedication. The early Vedic age in Indian philosophy did not even emphasize on aptitude, as much as it emphasized on a person's individual choice to practice his/her own occupation. It is only later that the caste system restricted occupations based on the Hindu Varna system and at present, societal pressures and people's opinions climb a pedestal, much higher than the student's comfort and aptitude. Parents often try to live their dreams through their children without realizing that their children are individuals themselves who must gain education for themselves.

Anti-thesis

Of course it may seem unreasonable to quote examples from the past as Plato and Aristotle had certainly formulated ideas in their time and context, which may or may not work out in today's context. The very fact that we have moved forward must imply that old ideas must be forgotten and novel ideas must be welcomed and applied. However, at the end what matters is what brings us better results, even if it means tracing our steps and going through a regressive evolution in terms of the concept of education. Also, the resources that would be required for such a seemingly grand and idealistic form of education system is a huge matter of concern, especially for developing countries like India. The solution is to make extremely gradual changes. Such transformations cannot occur overnight. Also, ideas change between the inks on paper to their on-ground application, which could imply that not every practice followed today may be changed. The basic idea is that the ultimate destination of education, although personal from individual to individual, must also be general, with regards to the human resource of a nation. Morality, self-realization and gaining real life experiences, with a number of different disciplines being taught in the classroom, must be blended with theory and facts for the individual to have a wide visual and cognitive field. Lessening of unreal and artificial resources for education, and increasing of real life elements in the education system can only mean lowering of expenses in materially expensive resources, benefiting the resource providers and increasing affordability by the people. So, a blend of ideas by taking regressive steps, brought forth with time, that aids the flourish of morality with knowledge within an individual may have more advantages than disadvantages and may be easier in practice, than as an ideology.

CONCLUSION

In the present era due to overpopulation or an overall increase in the IQ of the present generation in India, both parents and children have been blinded by the idea of competition. There is a cut – throat competition in every field of discipline and career, coercing sweat droplets on the foreheads of many. However, is education a concept that should be solely based on competition and status in the society? Due to this state of the society we live in, the original motive of the very concept of education has disappeared up to a large extent. The motive was always to build up and maintain a moral and an ethical system within an individual as well as focusing upon a comprehensive development for the self and the betterment of the society as a whole. If

potholes in the current structure can be repaired by tracing our steps in the field of education, then perhaps a regression in the evolution of education rather than advancement is the perfect alternative.

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