

Education that Inspires

Creating the Future of Human Education

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to visit the future of education, which is reduced to a well-marketed knowledge certifying agency rather than helping students of the future to evolve into authentic human beings harmonising life, relationships and societal goals, to create inspired learners who are propelled into contributing to the building of a better world. The ultimate teleology of education is the seeking of a harmonious goal of human education; the necessity is to provide an education that is oriented towards being more human, that aims to promote critical thinking and problem posing in education, that harmonises one's relationships with oneself, the other, planet earth as our common home and – in terms of the future – harmonious co-existence of humans and technology. Three important derailments in modern education will be dealt with, namely, (a) the lack of subjectivity and critical thinking in education, (b) the mechanical system of education and (c) the emphasis on the production of a marketable student. The paper concludes with the necessity of reviewing our fundamental educational philosophy in order to ensure that we, as a community do not miss out on the very nature and purpose of education.

INTRODUCTION

We are a country that believes in educating its populace. The best years of the youth of our country are entrusted into seemingly able and trusted hands to be nurtured, reared and educated. Thus, the responsibility

of being accountable not just to the generations to come, but to our very selves must lead us to reconsider the fundamental question of the telos or goal of formal education in India. The aim of this paper is to establish that the ultimate teleology of education

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is the seeking of harmonious goal of human education (Gupta, 2005); the necessity is to provide an education that is not oriented towards perfection but is oriented towards being more human, that aims to promote critical thinking and problem posing in education, that harmonises one's relationships with oneself, the other, planet earth as our common home and – in terms of the future – harmonious co-existence of humans and technology.

In order to establish this claim as the end of education, the philosophical perspectives on education by the Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire and the contemporary German philosopher, Peter Sloterdijk have been extensively used. Using their arguments, an attempt has been made to point out certain drawbacks in the Indian formal education system so that the said goal of education can be achieved.

THE TELOS OF THE HUMAN PERSON

In order to speak about the goal of education, we could begin by establishing the telos of humankind first. In light of the already existing philosophies, one remembers Aristotle's concept of Eudaimonia, the existentialists' 'search for meaning,' the educationist Paulo Freire's 'ontological goal of being human' and ancient and modern Indian philosophers who speak of 'Moksha' as the end of life. These are some of the already established views of the teleological end of human life.

Building on these existing views, and in an attempt to re-visit them to make them relevant to our times, the teleological end of the human person, is to be as human as possible. Although this seems to be a mere re-phrasing of what has already been said, the greatest challenge of our times is to forgo the desire to minimise the void between 'what is' and 'what ought to be' and to focus on being as human as possible.

The 'ought' could be understood fundamentally as some sort of perfection, where, perfection could imply material precision or qualitatively superior morality (Aristotle, 1999) and spirituality. The former of these perfections has been and will be taken to greater heights by technological advancements such that artificial intelligence might take control over humans in the near future. The latter could probably be equated to be transcending the human realm. However, the path of spirituality and transcendence is the path chosen by a very limited number of people all over the world.

One of the greatest realisations in the context of the 21st century, given the technological precision around us, is that it is only in the context of technology we can expect some sort of perfection. At a human level (except through a spiritual path), the elimination of this gap is impossible. We probably owe this realisation to the ethical complexities of the present world where ethical issues can no longer be solved by

observing a moral exemplar, or by asking ethical questions to a guru. An ethical dilemma remains a dilemma even after one's decisions have been made. Therefore, there seems to be no possibility of perfection or perfect harmony. In fact, the whole discourse on harmony arises from the impossibility of the realisation of perfect harmony.

This leads us to a small but significant realisation—that since we are aware of perfection, there is the untamed human heart's desire to achieve perfection, to be as close to the 'ought' as possible. In the pursuit of perfection, one tends to forget to be human. Therefore, the very irony of the situation is that it is in giving up the idea of perfection that one comes close to perfection, where one pays more attention to the process than to the product. This, I believe, is the most important and challenging task – to create harmony out of chaos, to build relationships from brokenness and to sprout out social justice from an ethically barren society.

The quest for perfection is an illusion because, especially in a materialistic society, perfection is bound to be evasive and just around the corner. The quest for perfection has led humanity to pursue ruthless advancements in science and technology, which seems to appeal the human mind at the cost of the desire of the human heart to accept human fallibilities and place love above all other virtues. This quest for perfection has further led to the

destruction of our planet, increased greed, pride and made human beings essentially inhuman.

The only manner in which some humanity can be restored into us is by letting go of the quest for any sort of perfection, which paradoxically is the only path to perfection.

THE TELOS OF EDUCATION AS A FACILITATOR OF BEING HUMAN

The removal of the obsession with any sort of perfection leads one to the realisation that the goal of humanity is to be as human as possible (Vivekananda). One very important path through which human beings could achieve such a telos is through both formal and informal education. This paper, however, will contain itself to the formal education, without denying that, undoubtedly, informal education also has an equally, if not more, important role to play in the realisation of the said telos.

We need to revisit the telos of our formal education system, especially the Indian context, where the youth of the country seem to spend the best years of their lives receiving years of classroom education. There is a need to critically evaluate whether the teleological end of our education system seems to be obsessed with materialistic perfection, instead of developing a growing awareness of our own strengths and weaknesses and that of others, and realising that materialistic perfection is an illusive telos.

In this context, the Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire's

perspectives on education – which we will elaborate upon in the following section – proves to be very helpful to understand some significant lacunae in the Indian education system.

Understanding Paulo Freire's Banking Model of Education

Paulo Freire's banking model of education, explained in detail in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is based on the oppressor-oppressed relationship that he underwent as a part of the colonisation experience in Brazil. Freire argued that just as the coloniser seeks to oppress the colonised based on the assumption that the coloniser is the all-knower and the colonised is an empty vessel which needs to be filled, similarly, the teacher is seen as the sole possessor of knowledge while the student is seen as empty 'containers' and 'receptacles' which have to be filled by the teacher. Thus, "the more completely she fills the receptacles, the better teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are." (Freire, 1970)

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorise, and repeat. This is the banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits (Freire, 1970).

The students ought not to be filled in with facts which have to be memorised. The banking model of education prioritises the memorisation of facts instead of the applicability of those facts leading us to know what four times four is, but never understanding what it actually means to multiply four by four or what could be its implications. It is about knowing the capital of a state, but not knowing what it means for a place to be a capital and its relationship to the state (Freire, 1970).

This obsession with facts leads to two important issues. Firstly, it presents the teacher as the subject and the student as the object as pointed out by Freire who says, "For the oppressors, 'human beings' refers only to themselves; other people are "things" (Freire, 1970). The teacher is given great importance as the teacher seems to be the sole source of facts.

It follows logically from the banking notion of consciousness that the educator's role is to regulate the way the world enters into the students. The teacher's task is to organise a process which already occurs spontaneously, to fill the students by making deposits of information which they consider to constitute true knowledge (Freire, 1970).

The student is treated as a mere 'thing' who cannot have knowledge of anything more than facts, whose skills of the application of facts, critical thinking and problem solving would make the student aware of their state of oppression and the

nature of the oppressor which would lead them to revolution or demand to be treated as a subject.

Secondly, our present education system, seems to thrive on the illusion of making a 'perfect' student. It thrives on achieving perfection by making education objective, and as an objective evaluation presents us with the illusory guarantee of knowledge. This process of guaranteeing and certifying of the knowledge of a few facts has been mistaken to be the delivery of a sound education.

Freire however, has also received criticisms for his banking model of education due to the unclear terminology. Moreover, his philosophy has been misused by those who call themselves 'Freireans.' "In some cases, the use of Freire's name as a banner for support is mischievous or positively misleading. For example, teachers who describe themselves as "Freireans" simply because they encourage students to discuss ideas among themselves or allow the political issues of the day to become a subject for student projects unwittingly make a mockery of the depth of Freire's theory and practice." (Roberts, 2000).

We need to grow out of the illusion that education is meant to create perfect individuals, where getting your facts right is the point of education. Perfection, whether material, psychological or spiritual is not the ultimate end of education. We need to let go of the inclination of judging a student by their grades,

instead, we could judge their quality of education by the person they have chosen to evolve into.

Moving from the Banking Model to the Democratic Model of Education

The primary concern of Freire was to shift the education system from the banking model to the democratic model of education, where, in Freire's words, Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators (Freire, 1970).

This is the presentation of both the teacher and the student as subjects who co-exist, co-learn and co-create. "As long as they live in the duality in which to be is to be like, and to be like is to be like the oppressor, this contribution is impossible." (Freire, 1970). Every teaching experience involves some form of a learning experience. It makes dialogue the norm of the day which harnesses critical thinking, problem-solving and the ability to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of the other and build on each other's arguments to come to the realisation of some truth.

They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the

problems of human beings in their relations with the world. “Problem-posing” education, responding to the essence of consciousness—*intentionality*—rejects communication and embodies communication (Freire, 1970).

Education, therefore, is not that which involves ‘healthy’ competition, but that which promotes whole-hearted cooperation not only between the teacher and the student but also between the individual and the society at large. Education is that which promotes “concern for humanisation [which] leads at once to the recognition of dehumanisation, not only as an ontological possibility but [also] as a historical reality (Freire, 1970). Education that promotes competition is education that prevents us from being more fully human, making education an act of oppression (Freire, 1970).

Prioritising the Process of Education and over its Product

Freire’s democratic model of education essentially is his perspective of education without discrimination and oppression where the freedom to think critically is prioritised over the blind adherence to rules (Vivekananda). His focus is more on the process of education rather than the product of education. If the goal of education is to make us more human then, the process of education has to be molded accordingly. “Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each

other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are “owned” by the teacher” (Freire, 1970).

Freire’s expression of “mediated by the world” could be understood as the role that ‘the world’ which is a synthesis not just of cognisable objects, but also cognisable experiences – of one’s life as a whole – which are often personified as one’s greatest teacher. Thus, the dynamics within a teacher-student relationship is bridged by the role that ‘life’ plays.

The Role of Life in the Process of Education

Education needs to prepare us for life itself. This according to Freire is possible only in the democratic model of education, as otherwise, he says, Education is suffering from narration sickness. The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalised, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students (Freire, 1970).

By life the author means, the sum total of all of one’s cognisable existential experiences. The necessity to give importance to one’s ground reality which involves specific problems and experiences, which are practical, moral and ideological, which need to be prioritised in education. Therefore, not merely the application of knowledge, but the ability to synchronise knowledge with one’s surrounding reality is

more important than the knowledge of facts.

Life plays the role of that adhesive which binds the process of education together. However, it is when life itself is limited to being only that adhesive bond of the process of education, it is then that education seems to devolve into the banking model of education.

The Process of Education as Prioritisation of one's Existential Experience

The extent to which one's existential experiences are given importance in education is the extent to which a student is ready not only to face challenges in the professional world, but is also ready to face challenges in one's life itself such as the ability to recover from a financial crises or a heartbreak, to live up to one's true potential, and to have the will and ability to pull oneself together from life's tragedies and to constructively contribute to society, to think critically of one's social and political decisions, to apologise when mistaken and build enduring relationships.

Re-evaluating the Teacher-student Relationship

The first step of prioritising existential experience is to place into perspective, the teacher-student relationship as it is the nature of this first relationship that will determine the manner in which the communication of knowledge will take place. As Freire says, "education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the

poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students (Freire, 1970). Thus, when knowledge is on a one-way road to educating generations then, "the [so-called] "humanism" of the banking approach masks the effort to turn women and men into automatons—the very negation of their ontological vocation to be more fully human" (Freire, 1970). In the banking model of education, knowledge is no longer essentially a dialogue where both the teacher and the student mutually participate in the act of learning. "The students, alienated like the slave..., accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher's existence—but, unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher" (Freire, 1970).

The Teacher's Existential Reality

The second step is to ponder upon how do teachers learn to teach students? Especially in the case of higher education in the Indian context, a teacher does not undergo professional training in teaching. The actual art or skill of teaching, probably also applicable to lower levels of education is essentially an act of imitation or representation of the various teachers one has witnessed in one's life. In a banking model of education, where the teacher and the student are the oppressor and the oppressed respectively, the oppressed has a tendency to imitate the oppressor, or, as in the words of Freire, "adopt an attitude of adhesion to the oppressor"

(Freire, 1970) and “during the initial stage of their struggle the oppressed find in the oppressor their model of manhood” (Freire, 1970). If this is the case, then in a banking model of education, knowingly or unknowingly, both the student and the teacher are perpetuators of oppression and quoting Freire, ‘bank-clerk teachers’ serve only to dehumanise. (Freire, 1970).

DERAILMENTS IN MODERN EDUCATION

The following section of the paper addresses certain issues that exist within our present education system that pose a direct threat to a human goal of education. Some of these have already been elaborated by Peter Sloterdijk, a contemporary German philosopher, who, along the lines of Paulo Freire, repeatedly speaks of the significant pitfalls in modern education in his book *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Three important issues discussed here are as follows:

Lack of Subjectivity and Critical Thinking in Education

One of the important derailments in the education system is the extent to which it is limited to the knowing of facts and is not open to their interpretations. As mentioned earlier, it is the preoccupation with objectivity and objective assessments that prevents us from critical thinking.

The aversion to subjectivity probably arises due to the fear of lack of accuracy and precision. The onus then lies on the teacher who

could guide their students to a more refined interpretation instead of merely repeating already established opinions. It is only when we are not afraid of subjective analysis and interpretation of facts, then we are not closed to radical or even jarring opinions that true rendition of education can take place.

In such a process of education, the teacher has an opportunity to learn from their students. The teacher evolves into a better learner and remains a learner for life.

The Mechanical System of Education

One of the major issues of modern education, according to Peter Sloterdijk, is its mechanical system where the student seems to be in the process of production through years of education only to be made ‘marketable’ in a seemingly enlightened age. Sloterdijk explicitly criticises the mechanical and commercialised system of education responsible for the creation of what he calls the “enlightened meaninglessness” of the modern society (Sloterdijk, 1987). A mechanical system of education where students are treated as automatons is essentially the banking model of education where the students have no choice to deviate from the set norms of what it means to be educated. As Sloterdijk says, “where “I” seem to be, others always went before me in order to automatise me through socialisation” (Sloterdijk, 1987). The confinement to a fixed

mode of years of education seems to be a system built to breed out the individuality out of the individual where “socialised human beings lost their freedom when their educators succeeded in instilling wishes, projects, and ambitions in them. These separate them from their inner time, which knows only the now, and draw them into expectations and memories” (Sloterdijk, 1987).

Our dreams, ambitions and our wishes are not about recognising and living out the humanness within us, we do not care for our common home, and in doing so, we are explicitly failing to be visionaries. Sloterdijk argues that we focus on the ‘here and now,’ being too tangled within the traditions of the past and the demands of the present. We also envision a similarly limited existence in the future for our children too (Sloterdijk, 1987) Thus, the element of automation in the process of education has to be broken and replaced by a system that promotes problem posing, critical thinking and prioritisation of the existential experiences in human beings so that, “Through appropriate education, care is taken in the future that innocent children are not made into the same artificial social cripples the previous system produced” (Sloterdijk, 1987). Although the elements of problem posing, critical thinking and subjectivity are present in our national education policies like the NCF, 2005 (National Curriculum Framework, 2005), the elements of

automation continue as a part of our education system (Francis, 2019).

The Emphasis on the Production of a Marketable Student

The process of education has deviated far away from the aim of being and becoming more human to the extent that, to be educated has been reduced to literacy and acquirement of degrees. Only knowledge which can provide a living is worth knowing. Therefore, a third major derailment from a human-oriented education is the reduction of a student to being a product in a market that has commodified not only education but also, the human person.

Learning is separated cynically and instrumentally from its aims and is treated as a mere abstract certificate of qualifications. In some cases, the only thing that links study and occupation is salary, which is set according to the type of highest educational qualification achieved. The “substance” is degraded with cynical realism to a mere prelude, to academic chitchat. (Sloterdijk, 1987).

This “academic chitchat” is not merely the evasion of ground reality but is something even more dangerous, it is that which is mistaken to be the truth, mistaken to be worthy of mindlessly intense discussion of intellectual minds.

In such a system where knowledge is reduced to certifications and, where salary links study and occupation, one can be sure that the education system itself is oppressive and is

an oppressive tool to manipulate the masses, fueling a dehumanised education system and ensuring that people are automated into working for the oppressor.

THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION – WHAT DO WE OFFER?

The human race is on the brink of taking its next great leap, i.e., the leap into the age of artificial intelligence (Wilson, 1987). In such an age, if education is a tool in the hands of a few used to oppress the masses, then, in the coming age of artificial intelligence, which could turn out to be the oppressor of oppressors, human beings may be tools in a world controlled by machines. The created will be greater than their creators and the well-being of machines will be prioritised over the well-being of humans. Therefore, the necessity to replace the penury of the humanness of education is more dire and relevant today, than ever before. The future of humanity will live in times where a human education will not only be what they deserve but might also prove to be salvific when

faced with crises of survival in the face of technological advancements. Therefore, the telos of education requires a radical re-evaluation such that the process of education will promote subjectivity and will be far from a mechanical system. The focus will be on individuality and essentially human-centric for a harmonious existence with the technology of the future.

CONCLUSION

This paper poses several questions such as—what is the extent to which the said goal of education can be achieved? Can the process of education be differently structured? Can every form of curriculum prioritise critical thinking over facts? etc. These answers are beyond the scope of this paper. However, the centrality of existential experiences, the focus on growing into a better individual and the change in perception from competition to cooperation will prove education to be a paradigm shift for a harmonious existence of human beings vis-à-vis technology.

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