



Education is a Civilising Experience

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Abstract

The field of education has not kept pace with human progress. The current education system sticks to rote memorization, especially in India, and kills the creativity of the child. Examinations that test the child's capacity to memorize facts can only destroy the structure of the education. A change in attitudes both in the teachers and the parents is the need of the hour. A foreign language can develop thought, but not inspire. So, ignoring the mother tongue is a grave error. Man should not become a slave to Artificial Intelligence, as he has to money and other organizations he created. Education, which is more of an experience than a rigid structure, becomes meaningful when the child acquires the capacity for self-organization. Self-education is the ideal. Progressive schools can accomplish this. this.

Great pioneers of education like Montessori, Glenn Doman, Dewey, Summerhill, Santiniketan, Krishnamurti, etc. have made themselves felt during the past 100 years and have made a dent in the decrepit system. All these names are revered but the world only pays lip service to their ideals. Tagore was a Nobel Prize winning poet who established a university. Motilal Nehru, a lawyer-activist of the Indian Independence Movement, and his son Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, had a difference of opinion about whether to send Indira, Jawaharlal's daughter, to Santiniketan, an experimental school founded by Rabindranath Tagore which later expanded into a university. Ultimately she was educated in Poona, Santiniketan and Cambridge. How then can we expect ordinary parents to send their children to Primrose, a school that is ahead of its times terms of vision?

Primrose was founded inspired by the work of Glenn Doman, an American physical therapist in the army who during his service discovered the relation between brain injury and learning capacity. He started a School to educate brain injured and retarded children, which later blossomed into a full-fledged method for teaching normal children. He found children can find greater enjoyment in learning than even in playing or eating. One more great discovery of his was that mothers are the best teachers. In his School he dispensed with teaching alphabet, words, etc. and resorted to flash cards. Flashing cards with long words before children for one second each while simultaneously pronouncing the word, children learn the alphabet, the words, spellings and acquire the capacity to read straightaway. He gave children total freedom and employed crawling copiously. At the age of 4, a child learning by his method can read any book. They are devoid of jealousy, comparison and competition and love to come to School. His books have sold in the millions and 250 schools applying his methods sprung up all over the world. Still, it is unknown in its native Philadelphia. For over 50 years it was not recognised as a valid model.

Summerhill is an exceptional innovation in democratic education. Established in England in 1921, today the school has about 70 students. Over the decades of her existence, she has produced finished products of human accomplishments. The students acquire the capacity to accomplish in any walk of life they choose. Twenty years ago, the rule-bound British Government launched a vicious legal campaign challenging the school's approach. It is a credit to the emerging world of progressive education that the case ended in favour of the school. Society at large is far from rational. It is irrational with a vengeance.

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Mirra Alfassa, the spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo, founded a school in Pondicherry in the 1940s, emphasizing the central importance of freedom in learning and full development to all aspects of the students' personality – physical, vital, mental, artistic, psychic and spiritual. The school acquired national eminence for the quality of students it nurtured.

The West has a mentally developed culture. India is a vital society but her basis is spirit. The question is whether we can create a system of education that combines these two ideals. The answer is yes. The main obstacle is parents who expect their children to seek professional education. Selection for it is based on marks scored in the exams. Exams are the prime culprit. Are we to compromise even in the beginning? It complicates a complex situation.

The Indian Freedom Movement was headed by lawyers of Inner Temple, educated in the Britishers' best tradition. The Congress leaders used the Englishman's language against him. He had introduced a semblance of democracy and it was effectively used against him. It was English that helped the Freedom Fighters of various provinces to communicate with one another. The Englishman brought the British law to us, spoke of self-determination as a cardinal freedom and never declared that it was his right to rule over us forever. Even Churchill could not declare so. After prolonged procrastination Power was transferred to the Indian Constituent Assembly by the House of Commons by an Act of Law. It was a legal transfer. It is possible to devise a system based on Eastern Spiritual Values as well as Western Mental Values which will not be at loggerheads with the present examination system.

As freedom and flash cards have improved the atmosphere of the school, a change in the attitude of the teachers can electrify the class. Children at Primrose say they could sit all day in such a class, giving up games. SpellBee can markedly improve the comprehension of words and their pronunciation. Of course, the bug bear of the exam system must be ultimately abolished. It rewards students for mindless memorization and fails to encourage understanding and thinking.

English is valued all over the world and in India it has achieved a preeminent status. It has displaced Tamil and other vernacular languages. Children are proud of their ignorance of their mother tongue. English is a foreign language. It can develop thought, but it cannot inspire. For effective education of both the mind and personality of the student, the mother tongue must acquire pre-eminence and become the medium of instruction. It is a fundamental error to ignore the mother tongue. USA, where the mother tongue is English, because it only emphasizes the superficial practical utility of the language, has not produced eminent thinkers or poets in the last four hundred years.

Monarchy was a great institution which served the world through aristocracy but over time it became rotten. At one stroke the English King Charles I lost his head and monarchy

was abolished. Next was the turn of aristocracy, especially in France. They were insular and blind. The outraged public rose in revolt and guillotined 1800 of them, but never knew what to do. It led to a decade of terror until the appearance of Napoleon. Ironically, he desired to become an Emperor. The liberty the French ushered in is still being established as political equality.

“Education is an experience, not a structure.”

In 1848 Karl Marx conceived of communism. He called the world proletariat to unite and violently overthrow capitalism. His call alerted the world. All governments rose to the occasion and offered their largess to the workers. Their thunder was stolen by the innate aspiration of the masses to become capitalists. The call intended for industrial England and Germany was heard by rural Russia where oppression was most acute. Abolition of violence took the form of violence of the coterie of the party. In seven decades the Russians were disillusioned and reverted to Mafia, the chaos of unorganised awakened prosperity boom in Italy.

Presently technology is moving fast and once again Man is enamoured of the Modern Maya of the computer technology. AI has captured Man’s imagination. Recent past has seen his willing slavery to Money, his own creation. Money’s rule was enforced by the rule of selfishness – capitalism organising itself in America. Life permits the very opposite to excel any ideal, as the teetotaler was rivalled in health and longevity by one who would not touch anything but wine. USA took the challenge of communism and socialism and said capitalism could successfully rival socialism. American President Franklin Roosevelt regarded the Sears Roebuck mail-order catalogue as a fitting answer to Stalin’s Russian communism.

Education is an experience, not a structure. It is an enjoyable civilising experience. A child from Primrose said children love to come to School and education at Primrose is an enjoyable mental experience. Glenn Doman was our inspiration. A highly educated couple in Bombay heard of Glenn Doman, studied his ways and courted the adventure of educating their three year old baby girl by his methods, rather than send the child to school. Many others followed their example. They provided the child with home education, self-education, provided by both the parents with love and affection. It was a great adventure.

An American lady responded to that adventure and Primrose was founded. She introduced the freedom of the American school, flash cards and never allowed kids to be punished or scolded. The children learned very quickly. Their parents loved a school that never punished the children. Beyond that, Primrose is an ordinary school. It soon became evident that teachers who were educated in the old system were ill-suited to be teachers of Primrose. The State Board, CBSE, ICSE/ISE were all viewed by parents as conduits to professional courses. They withdrew children in large number. In the higher classes only a few remained.

All experiments of self-education or free education have met with their death at the altar of the ubiquitous examinations. It was James Mill, a clerk in East India Company, who conceived of self-education for his son John Stuart Mill. The boy finished his education at 14. The most educated university professor of Tamil Nadu declared he wished he could have read as much as Stuart Mill by the age of 14. Stuart Mill became a scholar and thinker in philosophy, economics. He was a leading free thinker of England in the late 19th century.

One complaint against home schooled children is that they miss acquiring social skills. In essence it is a false charge, but in practice it was partially true. The home-schooled aristocrats of the 19th century who became the rulers never suffered from that defect. Nor is the woman at home a victim to that charge, nor are the children of affectionate families of high breeding. Only in uneducated, unaffectionate mercenary families is it true. The future is for self-education. An educationist recently said that by 2020 world-class education will be available free.

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Our basic theme is learning goes with earning. The example of the 6 year old child who earned \$12 million last year on YouTube shows what is possible. Universities and schools are to be closed or they will die their normal death just as monarchy, orthodoxy and all anachronistic forms of life have died in the past.

A child is raised to become a complete Man by the family, the school and the society. The process is normally completed by the age of 35 or 45. The family is academically replaced by the school. The structured school gives way to the unstructured society. Dropouts and street children have the advantage of the widest education which life in the city can give from the very beginning. Very few can benefit, as it requires the capacity for self-organization. Schools of the new type can offer that self-organization so that children may become finished products long before they reach 35. All the progressive schools achieve it, especially the Ashram school. Earning from an early age vastly aids this process, as it gives the child social strength. At age 10 the child can be fashioned into a Man by the affection of the family. Affection is not mercenary. Freedom fortifies affection. School reinforces the Man in the child by the absence of punishment and mean behaviour. Teachers go about asking that their birthdays be celebrated. It is a shame. No personality can be built in the child this way. Memorization saps energies. Thinking and understanding release the students' energies. Magnanimous behaviour of the teachers and principal helps.

The student entering life must be self-reliant, defying the low consciousness of modern life. That way he will be a crusader as Gandhiji was for freedom. Now the crusade should be for Prosperity and inner psychological freedom. The Indian Prime Minister has launched a salutary campaign against corruption at all levels. Our students must be the brave soldiers of that Army.

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