

Education as Medium to Transform Cultural Values

Kushal De

Abstract: *Education is considered as the best means to condition or de-condition any society. The basic principle underlying Indian education was to acknowledge the fact that the self is separate from the body, mind or senses and all pleasures are sought for the satisfaction of these faculties. Indian civilization reached its glory banking on these philosophies but the modern educational system adapted from the West contradicts these indigenous principles. The questioning culture was replaced by a commanding culture. The new system proposed, defined and validated ideas which were to be accepted unquestioned by the masses. Accumulation of data deemed worthy for the entire population and reproducing them on demand became the new name of genius. This mad race hypnotized the masses to believe data as ultimate knowledge, truth as a static principle, knowledge as receivable from external agencies; thereby leading to the mediocrity of society.*

Keywords: civilization, education, liberation, methodology, patronage, values.

Introduction: The proven remains of Indian civilization dates back to ten thousand years and despite numerous foreign invasions, the culture and values survived and continually flourished. Indian culture and ethos respected diversity as most of its ancient philosophies believe the truth to be evolving and constructible by an individual in unique manner. The experiences and realities faced by individuals are stored in the

huge reservoir of memory, they act as reference points to give meaningful insights to any occurrence and since the reference points are different, perceived truths are different. As new data or experiences are acquired/ stored, they act as further reference points evolving and modifying constructed truth.

The very foundations of Indian civilization were laid on the belief that salvation is the ultimate goal of mankind and one has to strive lifelong to find a unique way for his liberation. This required in-depth understanding of the mind-body coordination and many enlightened beings devoted their entire life experimenting with this phenomenon. Numerous schools practicing various techniques and methodologies were established since time immemorial but they all aimed at the same fundamental goal of liberation. The teachings were incorporated in the life processes of the masses through various means. Thus, a system of living was devised that prepared every individual to face the daily chores, besides building a sound foundation to experiment with the realities that lie beyond the senses.

Transmission of this scientific living procedure required internship under expert guidance which resulted in growth of the indigenous Gurukul system of education whereby the child was guided by a committed Guru. The child was kept away from the comforts of his home, was given similar tasks and responsibilities as other students irrespective of his family status, his talents were nurtured for an ideal vocation and he was taught to perform his functions independently which prepared him as a valuable individual besides developing the other faculties of mind to perceive dimensions beyond the physical. Self-realization was the basic feature on which education was based and this foundation developed strong, moral and ethical citizens who valued their character and culture over petty external luxuries.

Objectives of the Study: Education assists individuals to explore the truth and construct realities based on experiences. The traditional Indian educational system acknowledged the changeable nature of perceived knowledge and encouraged construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of realities based on present perceptions. This was possible as the culture of questioning existed since time immemorial. The modern educational system introduced by the British believes in imposition of facts as knowledge. The present study discusses how the modern educational system transformed the indigenous cultural values of India.

Education and Culture of Questioning: The Indian education system was based on the premise that truth is evolving, changeable and subjective and so it encouraged questioning. The earliest literature shows that questioning was a basic tenant of this

culture and people holding supreme power and position like Lord Krishna, King Yudhistira, Yama or the lord of death, Yajnavalkya etc. were not spared by lesser mortals and were subjected to innumerable questions pertinent to lives which they were obliged to answer. It is mentioned in Bhagavad Gita that Lord Krishna was questioned by Arjuna during the battle at Kurukshetra. The epic Mahabharata shows that King Yudhistira was questioned by a petty bird when he visited a lake to drink water. It is said in Katho Upanisad that little Nachiketa asked questions to Yama, the Lord of Death and it is mentioned Brihadaranyaka Upanishad that Maitreyi put up questions to Yajnavalkya on the absolute self. The process of questioning continued until the questioner was convinced with explanations or logic of the answerer, so that the knowledge about the subject matter became crystal clear.

Traditionally no absolute path was suggested to be holistically pervasive. Pre-supposition in any field was discouraged and throughout history, enlightened beings have critically analyzed any knowledge before accepting it. In Indian culture commandments were seldom given which resulted in questions directed to any uplifted soul whom the masses had access to. For generations people sacrificed riches and material comforts in order to find answers to questions that were pertinent to contemporary societies. It can easily be comprehended that the progress of knowledge was possible due to openness towards new ideas brought forward as a result of meaningful questioning.

Social stratification through the caste system existed but wealth or power did not have the luxury to command the quality of truth flowing into the masses. Knowledge was independent in its purest form and available to all who had thirst for it. Whosoever had a question was allowed to express his views openly before the experts, where his doubts were either cleared through logic / examples / natural laws or his arguments were publicly accepted. This is also evident from the fact that millions of gods having different specialties or proficiencies are mentioned in the ancient scriptures and one was given the liberty to choose or worship any of the gods according to his liking irrespective of the belief of the contemporary rulers.

Inherited Values Through Education: Education is used as a means of developing an individual physically, mentally and emotionally to take control over his life and become a responsible member of the society. The phenomenon becomes even more significant as values are internalised in the process. The basic principle underlying Indian education was to acknowledge the fact that the self is separate from the body; mind or senses; and all pleasures are sought for the satisfaction of these faculties. Sorrow is the inevitable byproduct that pleasure seeker receives due to his actions

and true knowledge is the vehicle on which an enlightened soul can embark upon the journey known as life. Education is a formal means by which inherited values and knowledge is passed on. The teachers ensured that each student had thoroughly internalised the values through practical methodologies. The ideal students, in turn, became reference points in their societies to pass on the learning thus inherited.

However, most learning was informal and was acquired by every individual across generations by observing the prevailing norms and practices. The culture and traditions were designed in such a manner that all institutions formally or informally reminded the citizens about ethics, morality, sacrifice, virtues and, above all, attainment of liberation or moksha. This formed an orientation or structural guide for all experiences that are faced by men. The epics, fables, music, chanting of mantras, folklore, daily rituals, marriage rituals and even last rites were scientifically designed to remind all about these values. This tradition continued without much modification for centuries. The general population was unaware of the values which they had subconsciously absorbed formally or informally but their reference points were firmly rested on these values. Even the most ignorant members of the society were informally inducted into these cultural values. This perpetual process was successfully performed by societies to ensure the glory that India commanded till the advent of foreign invasions which specifically targeted its belief systems.

Overwriting Inherited Values Through Education: Education is considered as the best means to condition or de-condition any society. The Islamic invaders were able to rule the land but were unable to destabilize the prevalent value system or educational setup since spreading of religion got their priority over education. The number of institutions was considerably reduced and the free flow of indigenous knowledge was disrupted in certain parts but since no alternate system was proposed for all, dissemination of values through educational set up continued. "The first efforts to destabilize the system were undertaken by the English invaders who proposed the mass education system to replace the existing system" (Deb 2014: 203). Education has long been held by the West as one of the best ways to 'civilize' the Indians and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. "The conquerors viewed education as a means through which Indian culture could be eliminated" (Van Otten and Tsutsui 1984: 138). Thus, came the minutes of Macaulay which led to the introduction of formal education of the West. The questioning culture was replaced by a commanding culture. The new system proposed, defined and validated ideas, which were to be accepted unquestioned by masses. A large section of contemporary elites also supported the new proposal of the English, removing possible obstacles that could have come otherwise.

Power, political patronage, racial and religious beliefs became the reference point of

curriculum formation and students in classrooms were conditioned to accept all that was taught to be the ultimate truth without questioning. People sitting at the apex of the decision-making bodies decided how much information was to be given; at which stage of life it is to be received; through which medium it can be given; and finally the acquisition of how much information can satisfactorily be accepted as a success. Uniformity became the new norm of society and selective information was disseminated in the name of education. The information was processed and presented in such a manner so as to establish supremacy of the Western culture, pinpointing ignorance of Indian masses. The new system predicted a bright future for all who followed it and finally those who did not follow it suffered the consequences. To make matters worse, all formal employment sectors were directly linked with outcome of acceptance of the new system of education. "The introduction of marks centric education resulted in a situation where more data recollected and presented in a comprehensible manner by the evaluators ensured more grades" (Culp 1929: 364). The system became transformed in such a way that grades became the sole criterion for measurement of success and modification of behavior. Values became secondary. The learners were neither encouraged to put forward a counter argument against the propagated knowledge nor were they made curious enough to investigate the truth for themselves. All academic success was measured in the yardstick of grades obtained. The students were forced to adopt the prevalent system or be branded as a failure in life to suffer the consequences.

Conclusion: The Indian value system is a result of direct and indirect assimilation of the Indian educational system. It aimed to break the bondage of the mind and proposed perceptions or inferences of the self to become the sources of valid knowledge. Internalisation through practice and validation through self-trial was proposed which removed all doubts regarding the quality of acquired knowledge. Enlightened beings were accessible to the masses and they readily answered any queries that became an obstacle in self-realization. There was a passion for education and uplifted souls travelled across the country to design methodologies to assimilate these proven principles in the everyday practice of people.

Indian civilization reached its glory in the fields of architecture, music, art and craft, economics, trade and commerce, social administration and justice, etc. banking on these philosophies. The modern educational system adapted from the West, contradicts these indigenous principles. Introspection, realisation, sense perception or inference slowly lost their relevance in the mad race for grades. Accumulation of data deemed worthy for the entire population and reproducing them on demand became the new

name of genius. This mad race hypnotised the masses into belief in data as ultimate knowledge, truth as a static principle, knowledge as receivable from external agencies; thereby leading to the mediocrity of the society. From the Government data available today on mass education, it can safely be concluded that new system of education has been successful in the process of overwriting of inherited values.

References

- Culp, V. H. 1929. 'The Truth about Marks', *The Journal of Education* 109 (13): 364-365, April.
- Deb, P. 2014. 'British Education Policy in India: The Legacy still Continues', *Indian Journal of Applied Research* 4 (10): 202-203, October.
- Van Otten, G. A. and Tsutsui, S. 1984. 'Reflections on Indian Education', *Journal of Thought* 19 (3): 137-142.

Bio Profile of the Author:

Assistant Professor, Dhruba Chand Halder College
Dakshin Barasat, South 24 Parganas, W. B.
Email: dekusshal@yahoo.co.in