



Some Reflections on Pedagogy: In the Light of Paulo Freire and Rabindranath Tagore

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ABSTRACT *The article features the concerns of the modern trend of education which targets children and instrumentally uses them at achieving millennium strategies and aims at making children only an 'exam-machine'. In result, it creates dehumanization of a child's self, where a child perceives education not as a guiding path for life, but as a fearful factor. Here, an analysis has been drawn taking into considerations the two views of the prominent educationists of twentieth century – Paulo Freire and Rabindranath Tagore, whose experimental ideas on reshaping and remodeling educational patterns and structures can help in truly reshaping human society and save the civilization from misery.*

In the last few decades, several pedagogical approaches concerning the science of education and learning activities is making relentless efforts for ensuring qualitative enrichment in the strategies of educational schemes and policies. In an urgent hour of need when humanity is all around losing its honor and grandeur, education in the real sense can stand as a blessing and also an instrument in regaining mankind's lost glory. Undoubtedly today, nations are granting and implementing multiple educational strategies to eradicate illiteracy and root out social evils, yet our biasedness towards diverse cultural prejudices and superstitions restricts a child's independent and sovereign mental development. Education is a visionary and hence must be future oriented in the age of stunning scientific and technological innovations and changes. Although it is true that the modern test oriented education is still dominant in both the east and west; but here, an attempt is being made to explore the views of our contemporary educationists and thereby go beyond the narrowness and hollowness of treating a student merely as an 'exam-machine'. To make it clear, an attempt here is not to discard completely the modern test oriented education, but rather to bring it in focus that overemphasizing book learning and memorizing stanzas and phrases weakens the imaginative and creative skills in a child. The message that modern day test-based education leaves is that the survivors of these tests are winners and otherwise, shall turn to be a loser for the whole society. Such an order inherently structured in our system delineates in the mind of a child a hollow picture of reality, devastating a child's mind completely and projecting a narrow and fake representation of human self. This paper is an attempt to revisit the ideas of leading educationists of East and West and rethink in their light and vision the possibilities for the transformation of a better India.

Education, in the real sense, should aim to cultivate the best possible human qualities and virtues in man and allow him learn 'what one loves passionately'. One of the modern thinkers of the west, A. Whitehead emphasizes in his 'Aims of Education' that 'the students are alive. Since they are alive, education should not be a process of packing articles in a truck.' Whitehead stresses, 'education must pass beyond the passive reception of the idea of others... the purpose of education is to stimulate and guide their self development'. For Whitehead, 'The students are unique concrete beings with creativity and style, aesthetically interesting'. Whitehead stressed on the application of philosophical and cultural knowledge to the ever contested ideas of mathematics and science. Only factual knowledge which excludes one's encounter with life world experiences and development of intelligence creativity and thought process is inadequate and futile.

The west has produced significant number of contemporary views on reforming and modifying educational trends and patterns. Another noted contemporary educationist of the west is Paulo Freire. He perceives the radius and horizon of education from a much capacious level. In his opinion, pedagogical approach ought to aspire critical consciousness. It must teach students to stand against social injustice, oppression, autocracy and inequality and challenge dominance and superiority of any kind. Freire devalues all kinds of market oriented educational demands and instrumentality of education. In its place he argues for the development of critical consciousness, imaginative thinking and the art of social responsibility in man by wrapping the traits of an insignificant self. Freire in his monumental work, 'The Pedagogy of the Oppressed' argues that traditional pedagogy views students as empty bank accounts which should remain open to the deposits made by a teacher. Freire holds that it results in the dehumanization and deculturalization of both the teacher and students. Education ought to aim at freedom of man, in the sense to liberate man from all kinds of biasedness and instill the seeds of awareness among learners enabling them to perceive and apprehend the world critically. In the process of developing an inquisitive mind and a reflective engagement with the intellectual world, a learner grows more from within and cosmos a human. He begins to regard the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in the process of beginning and transformation. In his words, 'education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.' Adhering to such a principle, Freire does not negate the possibilities of implementing education in the context of socio-political issues. Pedagogical activity is a process to democratize the human potentials, sensitize the knowing brains and resorting to the culture of openness, thereby integral realization of the human self. Education acts as a moral force to erase all skeptical beliefs and prejudices, and adopting a convention of knowing through questioning in the journeys and phases of life.²

Even in the east, there are numerous thinkers such as Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi who can be regarded as the pioneers of education. Tagore in his work, 'Sikshar Herfer', 'Sikshar Dahan' dealt with the problems of universalization of education and the limits of colonial system of education. Condemning the present system of education, Rabindranath Tagore said that though the blessings of science and technology could bring physical comforts to a few, but it has failed to generate adequate employment among

men and women with a strong value system. Tagore even depreciated the use of English as the medium of instruction. He said that mother tongue is like breast milk. A clean and pure mind can generate significant ideas only in the language of one's mother tongue. Tagore adds that foreign language is definitely a tool for understandability and world communications, but education through mother tongue can best help to bring out the best in man.

Tagore holds that education must help in the realization of a Universal man. He emphasizes on becoming an integrated personality by focusing on the spiritual, intellectual as well as physical development of Man.³ By intellectual development, Tagore means the development of imagination, creativity and freedom in man, resulting in free thinking, undisturbed by any barriers, hindrances or harmful authority, thereby establishing a correlation with Man, Nature and God. A few lines from Tagore's works can be quoted:

Where the mind is without fear

and the head is held high,

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken

up into fragments by narrow domestic

walls;

Where words come out from the

depth of truth;

Where tireless striving

stretches its arms towards

Perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason

has not lost its way into the

dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward

by thee into ever widening

thought and action-

into that heaven of freedom,

my Father,

Let my country awake.⁴

Even Gandhi in his work, '*Hind Swaraj*' also brought in within the discourse of education the understandings of the culture of peace, sincere work, social mindedness, friendliness, right feelings, socio-economic development and socio-cultural development of an individual and so on.⁵ As regards the role of a teacher, something similar like Sri Aurobindo is said by

Tagore. A teachers' job is not only to instruct but also to be a helper and a guide. Tagore held that a teacher can never really teach unless he is a learner himself. Tagore illustrates this understanding with a lamp when he says '*a lamp can never light another lamp unless it constitutes to burn its own flame*'. Both Tagore and Gandhi considered Man to be the most important entity for bringing up a peaceful and harmonious life. In Gandhi's words, '*Man is neither a mere intellect, nor a gross body, nor a heart, nor a soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all the three is regarded as the true economics of education*'. According to Gandhi, education includes '*all training that is useful for the service of mankind and what liberates man from all kinds of servitude in life*'. Tagore was a hard core rebellion of formal education and so he reshaped the education patterns and learning system in Vishwa Bharati where students were taught not in the foul walls of the classroom but in the lap of nature where there remained no boundaries, wherefrom new ideas can flow and come in undisturbed. Tagore perceived Shantiniketan as a ground for 'meeting of cultures' where the strength of aesthetic development of the senses is as important as that of intellectual development.

In considering the two great figures of the twentieth century, both Paulo Freire and Rabindranath Tagore experimented tirelessly with numerous models of education. Considering the purpose of education, both of them held almost similar opinion that the ultimate goal of education leads to freedom. Tagore called freedom the inner strength, '*atma shakti*' which interlinks human self with the divine being. Education leads man towards the process of realization. Freire also bore the same sentiment in saying that '*education is the process of becoming*'. Tagore's uniqueness can be seen in his articulation of aesthetic sensibility in man. A learner can never become complete unless s/he is creative in arts, dance and music. Education is education of the mind and of the soul. In preparing the curriculum of studies, Tagore adopted an integrated approach by which individuals from divergent backgrounds can come and share the interconnectivity cultural and linguistic engagements and prepare the minds to fight for social justice and empowerment. Like Tagore, Freire also felt that the conventional way to by-heart notes and reproduce it in answer papers has rotted the brains of the youth. Both of them called for a fresh creation in learning and knowing. Any preconceived notion must not guide human's thought. Rather it should be undisturbed and free from presumed biasedness of any kind. In a way, both of them made a wakeup call and pleaded for liberation, liberation not in body, but in thoughts and culture. Today, where the world is increasingly enamored with technology and economics have become all important and nuclear power is a must, it is time to rediscover the ideals of these educationists. The dazzling prospects of mechanization ranging from the creation of micro cellular organisms to controlling rocket science, from ruling the psychological world to a virtual world, has never ever been imagined before. In all these, what lacks with the modern man is a systematic expounding the true self of humanity, a self sufficiently free to think, a self discovering the newer aspects of arts and creativity remaining unbiased to orthodoxy of any form and kind. The ideals and principles espoused by the educationists, their doctrines and perceptions are not mere theoretical structures, but are very much constructive and practical oriented, and hence, are more urgently required and needed than ever before.

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