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 patters 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 through 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’¹. 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 imagina tive 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 encountering 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 the injustices 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.’ In 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 de-
preciated 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 communica-
tions, 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. 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 es-

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 timeless 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.

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. 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 harmo-
nious 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
ture economics of education’. According to Gandhi, educa-
tion includes ‘all training that is useful for the service of man-
kind 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 patters 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 aes-
thetic 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 articula-
tion of aesthetic sensibility in man. A learner can never be-
come 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 interconnected cul-
tural 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 re-
produce it in answer papers has rottened 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 pre-
sumed 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 hu-
manity, 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 percep-
tions are not mere theoretical structures, but are very much
constructive and practical oriented, and hence, are more ur-
gently required and needed than ever before.

REFERENCE