

PRAGMATISM AND INDIAN EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract

Education as such had been always the dynamic shade of a chosen philosophy. It creates an avenue passing through which one can clearly distinguish between the existing values and those surmised to be universal. With education to backup, one gains the freedom to modify the curriculum in vogue so as to suit to the extant environmental influences. Through Idealism nonetheless we can look at the reflective side of the education and grasp only some shades of Truth depending on one's own level of comprehension. On the other hand with Pragmatism one can make out what is real or merely idealistic. To enter into the arena of Universal Truths we must sportively permit a revision or decade wise an overhauling or sincere re-evaluation. Pragmatic approach in building a curriculum relies on the human capacity for discovering and recognizing variety Truths and later classifying them for the sake of utility or application. It also lays an emphasis on the fact that there are no fixed or eternal truths, a viewpoint which can be reckoned as purely scientific. Therefore expecting a uniform curriculum throughout a Nation may sound impressive in print but could end up in vain efforts. Urban to Rural areas ratio in majority countries had been absolutely disproportionate. Therefore, it would be wise to adopt a three tier system to deal effectively with the present situation in India. The paper envisages a survey taking stock of the existing conditions and would propose remedies. Obviously different rungs of the society have their own exclusive needs. Therefore, so far primary education is concerned it has to be regarded as the first tier or essential class of education. It is only at the secondary and lastly tertiary level that the requisition of technical knowledge or specialized field study is without dispute, necessary from all aspects.

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1. Philosophy and the Curriculum

There had been a meaningful and functional relationship between Philosophy and Education. In fact education may be looked upon as the dynamic side of a chosen philosophy. For that matter, any philosophy which has no practical applications in the mart of the world would remain confined within the boundaries of theoretical scholarship. If at all any fancied derivations are drawn no worthy purpose can be served. Therefore at the very inception care should be taken so that while structuring educational curriculum the ideals set have a proper context and workability. Many times it so happens that with initial enthusiasm clubbing of ideals takes place but during execution the main contention of the same gets abruptly aborted. Since philosophy offers a purpose and suggests a thorough orientation to the endeavours of individuals, no curriculum should be run without a proper base of philosophy. It goes without dispute that every educational philosophy supports values in the choice of studies and discipline, for which methods and means of instruction are clearly put forth. Ultimately it is the values which constitute the genre of a true philosophy of education. Much owing to this approach the values when subjected to practical analysis might indicate the reflective side of philosophy of life. Furthermore it is the philosophy which takes into account the pertinent issues of all subjects which help in constituting the curriculum. This is because each subject has its own well defined domain which may not be suitable to other subjects equally. It is unlikely that there has been a pure

and consistent philosophy of education. However we do refer to different issues or philosophies for bringing about a change in the existing pattern of the curriculum.

2. Pragmatism in Education

It is quite natural that different schools of philosophy pursue and nurture own notions as exclusive ones. A Naturalist may concentrate on the present experiences, interests and activities of the child, so as to use the same as guidance for future curriculum. An Idealist may stick on to a particular axis brought forward from the domain of ideas rather than looking seriously at the child's activities. A Realist may even condemn the curriculum which is filled with bookish ideas or derived from abstract ideas. Therefore there would be scores of opinions.

Pragmatism may be considered as a typical American school of philosophy although in the modern age it has invariably caught the attention of all. It can be viewed as roughly equivalent or pretty close to Praxeology, 'A branch of sociology that studies methods of considering various actions or aggregates of actions from the standpoint of their effectiveness'. (Dictionary of Philosophy, 1984, p.334). Therefore Praxeology is considered as one of the methods of sociological investigations in modern times. With a little deviation Pragmatism happens to be an idealistic trend in modern bourgeois philosophy. Pragmatism needless to say lays emphasis on the determination of the value of knowledge by its practical application or utility. Therefore there is always an insistence on the empirical knowledge, or one may call it 'Radical empiricism' or even 'Experimental naturalism'. That is why this philosophical approach can always deny the existence of any eternal values and refuse to be guided by any established theory. One may say that it arises out of actual experience. Every decade poses different problems and challenges to our idealism. That is why an impartial renewal in policy is required. The main tenet of this philosophy is that man creates his own values and there are no fixed or external truths. Truths as cognized are man-made products. Reality on the other hand is always changing and has many shades.

A pragmatist may not prefer the popular a priori system of values. He expects learning while experiencing. Rather he would prefer to have de-learning, followed by re-learning by choice to gain practical wisdom. In a nutshell, he expects every student to develop by way of voluntarily creating values on examination only. Although there isn't any ulterior motive yet it expects the students to grow independently and evade the ready-made values. Therefore even the pragmatist expects a dynamic adaptable mind which can function on own and bring about the necessary changes in the extant values to face the unknown future.

3. Pragmatism and Curriculum Construction

There are many criteria suggested by Pragmatism for Curriculum Construction. The criterion of utmost importance is utility. In schools the child must get an environment which would provide worthy experience suitable to the age and the level of comprehension. Therefore the curriculum must be comprised of subjects that can not only impart knowledge but various types of skills which could find applications for the present as well as future course of life. Therefore subjects such as languages, physical training, sciences and elementary mathematics should definitely be included but introducing Home science and Agricultural science would prove to be of immense use in life both for girls and boys. Utility as a principle must be adopted in a clear and broad sense.

Every child has instinctive choices. Therefore the inborn tendencies and inclinations must be judged and monitored during the stages of development. There need not be a fixed curriculum for a given age-group. Instead division/admission is to be made on the basis of psychological leanings. The curriculum ought to be based on occupations and activities with own experiences. The principle of integration must be taken as a true guide for building the curriculum because it integrates knowledge and skill. In brief pragmatism expects integration of variety subjects which is popularly known as interdisciplinary study because isolating subjects with the knowledge would hamper development at every stage.

4. The Indian Scene and Suggestive measures

The history of the evaluation of the modern system of education in India has a background of social, political and constitutional history of India. Therefore, needless to say, many Indian institutions were inspired by the institutions in England which already had established an envious repute. Probably that had been the reason as to why, 'Often controversies in Indian education arose from contemporary controversies in English Education.', (Nurullah & Naik, 1951 p.334).

It is an undeniable fact that there had been varied influences on the Indian educational system. Some of them were indeed of great utility and guidance, while a few could not serve any purpose in worthy sense. However it is wrong to lament upon the past and claim complacency by placing the blame on one particular school of thought or agency as such. Whatever may be the cause but it is a fact that the present situation indicates an absolute imbalance. Just as there are different rungs in the society ladder, institutions with enormous funding are mushrooming. Under the disguise of social service and spread of education particularly for the poor class a well manipulated business is going on. The mercantile attitude is the only true but hidden base of all these institutions. At the most, they may vary in percentage but their ultimate aim is same. The underprivileged find solace only on paper but in reality the policy which claims for a total justification, has to prove in execution.

Recently the government of India has taken up the challenge and to quite a good extent shown its commitment in pursuing Grade I to VIII as compulsory education. However there isn't a proper response from the society either. Crores of children haven't bothered to even get enrolled. Those who got enrolled have dropped out in the mid-stream and it has gone to an appalling percentage of more than 50. This shows that there is no monitoring. The reason had been and continues to be the lack of proper planning and apathy towards the lower class.

There is a need of a gradual development of Public Education in India by way of philanthropy in education. For a thorough progress introduction of charity schools in an official manner has become the need of the day. In past, 'As a reform of the moral, religious and economic conditions of the masses in the eighteenth century, philanthropic training served a great purpose but its real mission would now seem to have been to pave the way to the common schools', (Graves Frank, 1996, p.78).

Quality of education is another major problem faced by the children in rural areas and in the government aided institutions. Private schools mostly have English as the medium of instruction. They are affiliated to the Central Boards which are autonomous. They have the freedom to introduce or terminate any course when they wish. Students do get proper exposure but the fee charged is extremely heavy. Therefore only affluent class children can seek admission. State boards are merely revamping their syllabi to stand parallel but conveniences are far away. This gap is widening every year and there seems to be no remedy at least in near future.

In order to overcome these problems some of the suggestive remedial measures could be as following :

- a. Curriculum planning has to be handed over to the teachers who are actually involved in teaching the primary and High school sections. Later it may go for a perusal to be done by the educationists.
- b. The planning to be run for a duration of at least three years and then should go for revision.
- c. Reservation for the underprivileged in admission to the private institution be made mandatory. Presently it is only on paper.
- d. Importance to be given to subjects like Agriculture science, Home Science and psychology.
- e. The government must invest a certain amount per child for its development.

With these suggestions if put in practice there may not be a miraculous change but at least the efforts will find a direction and new planning will have proper path for treading and marching with sizeable success.

Reference List

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