

EDUCATION AS 'CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION'

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Abstract

Education is critically paramount to a community's cultural progress and social development. It is through education that society moulds the human capital for the performance of various responsibilities. The researcher proposes to assert that 'Culture' and 'Education' are interdependent

The present paper attempts to:

- i) Clarify the concept, purpose and meaning of education and culture and establish its relationship and impact on each other.
- ii) Introduce a 'culture design' as an analytical frame.
- iii) Examine the implications of 'modernism' on education and culture.
- iv) Critically examine Third World Education.
- v) Briefly survey the evolution of Indian education and culture
- vi) Elucidate how education functions as a cultural transformer.
- vii) Posit an alternative- a return to ancient schools of humanistic thought as a paradigm shift.

The study concludes stating that Modern Western education is instrumental in ushering a techno- economic insurgency and a materialist culture in the world. Though 'Modern Culture' claims 'reason' as its epistemological basis, from a functional point of view it is very 'irrational.' So the cultural mission of education in the emerging twentieth first century is to build a postmodern culture. In building up such an alternative 'world view' in our proposed 'culture design' we need first of all to liquidate modernism; and then search for alternatives – a return to ancient Indian schools of humanistic thought which insists on both knowledge and wisdom for a holistic personality.

Keywords: Education, Cultural Transformation, Modern Culture, Cultural Design, Humanism, Holistic Personality

1. INTRODUCTION

Education has an acculturating role. It refines, sensitizes and perceives, creating a national cohesion, a scientific temper and independence of mind and spirit -- thus furthering the goals of socialism, secularism and democracy enshrined in our constitution. Education is critically important to a society's progress. It is

through education that society moulds the human capital for the performance of various responsibilities. Education and culture are interdependent. The intimate relationship between 'education' and 'culture' is evident from the fact the one of the major aims of education is to impart to the learner, cultural and social heritage. The cultural patterns of a society funnel its educational patterns. For example, if a society has a spiritual pattern of culture, then its educational procedures will emphasize the achievement of moral and eternal values of life. On the other hand, if the culture of a society is materialistic, then its educational pattern will be fashioned for the accomplishment of material values, which promotes pleasures of senses and material comforts. A society devoid of any culture will have no definite educational organization. Hence, the culture of a country has a very prevailing impact on its educational patterns.

From a cultural perspective, the eminent educational thinker, Paulo Friere observes in **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**: "No education is neutral. It either domesticates or liberates."¹ The present western type of education in the 'Third World' is predominantly domesticating and not people friendly. It is biased towards the western oriented elite and the rich. In the promising post- industrial global scenario, education has added significance; because the production of knowledge has become the most decisive economic activity.² 'New Liberalism' is projected as the ideology suited to the '**Third Wave**.'³ It has serious implications on the ethical and cultural life of people all over the world. In the existing fragile, social situation of the world, education has to be used as a cultural weapon for the genuine freedom of the people of the entire world. Alternatively, through education we must aim at a 'paradigm shift'⁴

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2. CULTURE DESIGN: THE ANALYTIC FRAME

The cultural milieu of a society may be simply understood by resorting to an 'architectural metaphor'⁴ observes Thomas Kuhn, in **The Structure of Scientific Revolutions**. We may draw a parallel between 'physical architecture' and 'social architecture.' The physical architecture comprises of the foundation, basement and superstructure. These are mutually interdependent and together stand as a system. Similarly the social architecture also has three tiers. Just like the 'foundation' of the physical architecture, in the society we have epistemological foundations of a world view or paradigm. The dominant paradigm governs peoples understanding of reality, nature and human nature. Above this level, as the base in the physical architecture, in the social architecture, there is a hidden structure of cultural norms, assumptions, ethical and moral commitments etc. In the social superstructure, one could notice elements like language, symbols, customs, laws, constitutions and many other institutions.⁴ These three layers in the social architecture are closely related and therefore they together constitute a system.

3. MODERNISM, WESTERN CULTURE AND EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW

Till the end of the Middle Ages, the world view of Europeans was subjected largely by the Catholic Church and the authority of the Pope. The cultural norms, ethical and moral principles were all positioned accordingly. The Church also played a decisive role in the maintenance and formulation of symbols, customs, laws and many other social institutions. This type of a western social architecture was termed 'traditionalism.' By the close of the Middle Ages, this sort of a western society was disintegrating and there emerged the signs of 'Modernism.'

Louis Dupre discusses the transition of western society from 'Traditionalism' to 'Modernism.'⁵ According to him two currents co-existed in western culture -- the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian, the former stressing 'Objectivity' and the latter internal 'Piety.' 'The end of the middle ages witnessed the weakening of the internal spiritual energy that kept the objectivity just under control. As the dam broke, the torrents of objectivity began to flood the continent, but the other took refuge in the continuing mystical tradition.The

transition was in scholasticism which emphasised objectivity, while the Protestant Reformation, by stressing personal faith, upheld the subjectivity aspect. As the Scientia of Scholasticism gave place to modern science, the mystical or the religious was marginalized and as science and objectivity triumphed, the basic assumption was that precise knowledge would help overcome the 'other', or the objective world would give rise to modern science. Only control would emancipate humanity from the constraints of external reality and lead to the true emancipation of the human being. Control is power, and power is the perennial quest of the west⁶

Renaissance and Reformation prepared the ground for European Enlightenment. According to Paulos Mar Gregorios, in **A Light Too Bright– the Enlightenment Today**⁷ the European enlightenment is a spiritual – intellectual fever. The fever has not yet subsided. It has only begun to manifest some of secondary symptoms. It has affected the mental, moral, anaesthetic tastes of the people brought under its influence all over the country.(p.19)⁸ Immanuel Kant, in '**Answer to the Question: What is the Enlightenment,**'⁹ observes that 'Enlightenment' is the evolution of a man from his self-imposed immaturity. Dare to think! Think Boldly! Wake up! Take courage, to serve your own understanding .This is the motto of the Enlightenment. (Ibid.p.29)¹⁰ So the spirit of enlightenment involved denial of the authoritative structure that prevailed in Medieval Europe, namely the authority of the Church, the tradition of the Christian Fathers of the Church, of Christian Theology and the Clergy as well as a lot of superstitious folklore.

Modernism grew through Renaissance, Reformation, and the European Enlightenment. To be modern is to use reason and to reject all authority of tradition. As a consequence the world views of Europeans were radically altered and in effect there was a paradigm shift.

Modern Western education is a progeny of Enlightenment. 'Critical Rationality' applied in epistemological explorations gave birth to a number of secular sciences: social as well as physical and biological. The new education also promoted Science and Technology. The Revolution in science and technology and the colonial exploitation of global surplus made European Worlds a power house. Along with the multi-dimensional changes, Europe claimed its new culture was superior to all others and therefore the rest of the world has to follow Europe. Europeans, particularly the Christian missionaries'-considered it the white man's burden to bring all non-European people to the culture of 'Modernism'. Education was used as the most important institution to inculcate 'rational culture' in all the colonized people of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

4. WESTERN EDUCATION AND THE THIRD WORLD: A CRITIQUE

European colonial administrators viewed the pre-modern cultures prevalent in the colonies inferior to the culture of the west. Colonial people especially the elite were so structured by colonialism to accept a 'self-image' imposed by the colonial masters.¹¹The colonial education brought from outside facilitated **the 'cultural hegemony' of the metropolis**. Even after decolonisation, the colonial pattern of education persisted in the Third World, which continued to nurture western culture in these countries. The text book, the references, periodicals, video cassettes as teaching aids, light reading materials, news and reports presented in various mass media, advertisements (de)cultural programmes displayed in television networks etc. of the 'Third World' are dominantly driven by the imperialist 'brain centre'- The TNCs ¹². Neo Colonialism successfully continues to exert its cultural weight on the Third World for protecting its market. Education of the western type has serious flaws in the present context of the third world, particularly from the cultural point of view. Some eminent experts on Third World Education have conducted certain critical studies on it. We will briefly touch upon a few of them.

Let's start with Paule Friere.

4.1. Education -The 'Banking' System

Paule Friere in his various works on education¹³ characterises the formal system of education in the Third World as the 'Banking System' where the 'teacher' is assumed to be the one endowed with knowledge, narrating; and the 'taught' the mere receptacle, a container to be filled, memorizing, and annulling the creative potential of the student, allowing no space for meaningful discourse. The teacher is also subjected to the same handicap. Though the teacher can deposit his knowledge onto the students, he is conditioned by the oppressive power structure of the society. He can operate only within the constraints of syllabi, examination, and the bureaucratically imposed code of conduct. Any violation of the same will put him into serious problems. As we have already stated, according to Friere, no education is neutral. It either domesticates or liberates. In the banking system the students as well as teachers are domesticated to the prevailing socio- economic structure. As a result the 'culture of silence' is being perpetuated.

4.2 Status –quo, Preservation and Cultural Division.

In one of his very persuasive books, *De-Schooling Society, Celebration of Awareness*²¹, Ivan Illich argues that formal schooling of Western type is instrumental in cementing the existing status –quo of society. Further it divides the people into two cultural groups- the educated and uneducated. According to him, formal schooling only helps in accentuating the vulnerability of the poor and the powerless.

4.3 Third World Education as ‘Mis-education’

Gunnar Myrdal characterizes education in countries like India as ‘mis-education’ because through education ‘wrong types of abilities and perverse attitudes are imparted or preserved’²² For instance, in India, there is a dislike for manual work. - Education is valuable to a large number of young people because it affords an avenue of escape from manual work. Caste and Creed still plays a decisive role in educational institutions this sort of a culture cannot be regarded as legitimate from a development point of view.

4.4 Western Type of Education and ‘Dependence’ of the Third World

Dependency theorists argue that western style of education only perpetuates the dependence of the Third World on the more developed countries in the western hemisphere. Third world education, taking the developed world as its model emphasises education of the elites at the expense of the poor. It is very shocking to note that the recent trend of education in India, for quite some has been moving in this direction. Further, the context of education is quite irrelevant to the needs of poor countries, which require more good farmers and skilled artisans and fewer bureaucrats and technocrats.²³

5. EVOLUTION OF THE THIRD WORLD EDUCATION: THE CASE OF INDIA

The social architecture of traditional India was governed by the ideology of Caste - the dominant, intermediate and subordinate Caste. The Brahmins and the Kshetriyas belonged to the dominant Caste. The Visyas were the intermediate Caste and the Sutras –those outside the Caste frame were the subordinate Caste. Only the dominant Caste enjoyed the privilege of education -- ie the acquisition of religious, literary and military knowledge. Some of the secular subjects were also dealt with as part of the divine science (e.g. Ayurveda, Astronomy, Astrology, Architecture, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Arts, Music and Dance, and Management etc)

In the traditional Indian Society, Sanskrit was the official religious and technical language. However the knowledge and skills of the toiling masses were not considered as education; activities which involved physical labour were also considered inferior in social status. The people of subordinated caste were also not allowed to learn and use Sanskrit. They used local and regional vernaculars for their discourse. Young people were given practice training in the specific caste occupation of their families by elders. With the ascendance of the Muslim political power in India there arose an alternative education which was discoursed in Arabic. Persian was the official language of the government of India until 1837. So both the Hindu and the Muslim kind of education were delivered in a language unknown to the common man. Nevertheless, Muslims were more democratic in opening up their education to all people²⁴; but Muslim women were denied the privilege of formal learning.

5.1 Colonial Designing of Indian Education and Culture by the British

As already stated, Europe was caught up in frenzy in the 18th Century –the fever of enlightenment. ‘Critical rationality’ was the essence of the enlightenment. When this yardstick was applied to the Indian situation, the British found that the Indians were ‘pagans’, trapped in traditions and superstitions. The so –called educated Brahmins were also branded as ‘superstitions.’ The British questioned the rationale of the very base of the Indian social ‘artefact.’ They wanted to replace it with ‘Modernism.’ The European type of education was instrumental in this kind of cultural transplantation.

Missionaries and British educationalists claimed that by promoting European education, they were ‘shedding the moral light of the west on India.’²⁵ From the administrative point of view, the British discerned the need of a common language (English) to bind the Indians. Further they found the advantage of running Indian administrative machinery with Indian personnel by giving them education in English. Lord Macaulay, Secretary to the Board of Control of India, envisaged creating, “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.” Thus in 1835, the East India Company decided that English should be the language of instruction for higher education and the purpose of education should be to disseminate western knowledge.²⁵ In colonial India, the job of deciding, selecting and shaping primary education was performed by the ‘enlightened outsider.’ This was the role adopted by the British

officers and missionaries, who were involved in developing an educational system for India. From their perspective, very little of the knowledge and skills that the native population possessed appeared fit for educational use.²⁶ The cultural function of colonialism, which evolved from the beginning of the nineteenth century, was posited in the view that indigenous knowledge and culture were 'deficient'. India's material poverty was seen as a proof of the numerous weaknesses that Indian culture was supposed to suffer from. Education as an instrument of moral and material improvement could not possibly use a deficient culture as its knowledge base; it had to be rooted in the knowledge and culture that represented the colonizer²⁷

Even after political decolonization, the system of education which the British established in India persisted without much alteration. With the spread of the so called modern education, the role of the 'enlightened outsider' was picked up by educated Indians. Except for a few exceptions, these enlightened Indians did not challenge the form, content and texts of the knowledge that colonial administrators had assembled as appropriate curricula for schools and colleges. Critics of the established system were of course, a plenty. But the basic structures of knowledge and the style of transmission that were determined to be appropriate for educational use under colonial rule continued to shape education throughout the independence struggle and after it.

6. EDUCATION FOR CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

6.1 Decolonizing Western Education

Modern western culture and its epistemological basis are now crumbling. In spite of this decomposition the Westerners, including the Japanese, are trying to preserve 'modernism' through re-colonization. The new liberal ideology is promulgated to legitimise the process of re-colonization. For effective cultural transformation, the Third World has to strive for a new 'paradigm' alternative to the new modernisation one which is concurrently in circulation all over the world. Education has to strike at the root of the social architecture. But enabling 'education' to discharge this heroic task we need to reorient alternative education befitting the historic and specific social condition of each Third world country. In short, the present formal education itself has to undergo a process of decolonisation to make it a tool for cultural transformation.

6.2 Promotion of Basic Education

Mahatma Gandhi prescribed 'basic education'²⁸ to fill the 'cultural deficit' of Indian society as well as to break the strings of western modernism. Epistemologically, 'basic education' resorts to the indigenous knowledge and skills of ordinary Indian people with the so called modern system of education. Some of the core aspects of core education are:-

- i) Learning by doing
- ii) Learning by serving and
- iii) Learning while learning.

It is very encouraging to note that some serious efforts are being made by committed Indian intelligentsia to explore the indigenous Science and Technology of India. R Caste and creed still plays a decisive role in educational institutions Rabindranath Tagore, the highly respected Indian philosopher and Education IST emotional experiment to preserve and transmit culture through education is best exemplified through the establishment of the international university- 'Visvabharathi.' In this institution is India's obligation to offer to others, the hospitality of her best culture and India's right to accept from others their best.²⁹

6.3 De-schooling

Ivan Liliith suggests deschooling to ward off the cultural burden of modern education and replace the formal system of education with informal education for cultural transformation of the 'Third World.' The recent craze for commercialization of education and starting of posh educational institutions would only help in shaping 'comprador intelligentsia'—people who are antagonistic to the interests of the masses of people and cater to the requirements of neo-colonial forces. At least the spirit of 'deschooling' has to be imbibed in the formulation of curriculum and pedagogy for the cultural transformation of the social architecture.

7. MODERN WESTERN EDUCATION:-A MATERIALISTIC CULTURE

Modern western education is instrumental in ushering a techno- economic insurgency and a materialist culture in the world. Though 'Modern Culture' claims 'reason' as its epistemological basis, from a functional point of view it is very irrational. The irrationality of the so called rational system is discernible in

- The madness of piling up armaments for killing the entire life of the planet,
- In keeping millions of people below the poverty line, to entertain the super luxury of a few;
- Applying technology to such an extent of deserting our green earth and transforming it to being uninhabitable by the destruction of the Ozone,
- Trading toxic wastes,
- Engineering and commercializing,
- Even cloning life,
- Dehumanising social relations to such an ugly level of child prostitution
- Genociding all other cultures
- Môn culturing of the mind globally.

All these reveal the decomposition of modern western oriented culture and the need for a paradigm shift.

So the cultural mission of education in the emerging twentieth -first century India would be to build up an alternative 'world view' in our proposed 'culture design'. We need to first of all liquidate modernism; and then search for alternatives in the entire reachable range of human History- Humanistic Philosophy. For this Humanism has to be the spirit of this intellectual enquiry.

Humanistic philosophy which emerged in Europe in the 19th Century recognises the value and dignity of Man and emphasises that man has the power and potential to solve his own problems depending on his reason, inspired by a sense of justice and compassion. It recognises human freedom, tolerance, respect, for truth and personal dignity in all humanity, irrespective of nationality, caste, creed, and gender as a movement Humanism denounces all theories of determinism, fatalism and pre-destination. It declares that though man may be conditioned by the past, he is the master of his own destiny. It upholds an active life of participation and sees life as a harmonious blend of self-development and activities that contribute to the welfare, progress and freedom of all mankind. It lays emphasis on social progress, democracy, peace and a high standard of living based on flourishing economic order both nationally and internationally. Humanism remained an influential creed in Europe from the 16th and 17th centuries and was responsible for replacing the narrow provincialism of the Medieval Age with a growing spirit of tolerance and secularism,

Though the tenets of traditional humanistic philosophy did not focus on the divine it was not anti-religious in character. It emphasised that the function of religion was to support a man in civil and political activity as propounded by Humanists like Gianozzo Manetti.³⁰ It emphasized the need for religious tolerance based on the fundamental unity of all religious beliefs of mankind; and the possibility of peace as propounded by Pico Della Mirandela, the prophet of regenerative peace.

Humanism which is part and parcel of ancient Indian philosophy and culture from times immemorial is the most important contribution of Indian philosophy to world thought. From the beginning of the 8th century to the 19th century repeated foreign invasions threatened to destroy Indian cultural values, religious foundation, philosophy and traditions. However, the Indian mind was quick to assimilate the best from these alien cultures and work for the propagation of the ideals of Love, non-violence, religious tolerance and universal brotherhood.

Contemporary Indian philosophy has been influenced by three factors-ancient Indian religion and philosophy, the medieval ideas of universal brotherhood and mutual tolerance; and the western scientific outlook and liberation. This brought about a new phase of intellectual activity characterized by a synthesis between spiritualism and empiricism, thus recognizing the ultimate supremacy of moral and spiritual values and simultaneously the significance of a modern significant outlook.

Twentieth century Indian Philosophers like Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. S Radhakrishnan reinterpreted ancient Indian Philosophy to meet the needs of the changing times, conscious of the disproportionate emphasis education places on Science and Technology. Dr. Radhakrishnan points out that "the great crimes against civilization are committed not by the primitive and the uneducated but by the highly educated and so-called civilized."³¹ (p.42) He attributes the increasing unrest by students and their defiance of authority to a lack of attention to our own culture. Students should be trained to have "disciplined enthusiasm for great causes, otherwise they would become a danger to themselves and to society."³² (p.45)

8. CONCLUSION

Thus the need for 'de-schooling' and 're-schooling' and returning to our original source of ancient Indian schools of thought. Indeed it is very encouraging to note that serious efforts have been made by committed Indian intelligentsia like Swami Chinmayananda, Dr. Abdul Kalam, Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar to name a few to resolve the physiological, psychological, familial, social and national values enshrined in ancient Indian scriptures and restore them in the current educational system of India because of their relevance even today.

"Any satisfactory system of education should at a balanced growth of the individual and insist on both knowledge and wisdom. It should not only train the intellect but bring grace into the heart of man. Wisdom is more early gained through the study of Literature, Philosophy and Religion. They interpret the higher laws of the universe. If we do not have a general philosophy or attitude to life, our minds will be confused and we will suffer from greed, pusillanimity (cowardice), anxiety and defeatism. Mental slums are more dangerous to mankind than material slums." ³³(p.43)

On this score, the intellectual contributions of ancient Indian schools of thought would be of great help. In the building up of a postmodern world view, India and other Asian countries can chip in a lot. This is the enormous intellectual challenge awaiting the intelligentsia of Asia in the 21st century. Let us drastically streamline our education enabling the intelligentsia to undertake this heroic cultural occupation.

Thus, education and culture are interdependent and complementary to each other. However the existing system of education in India has not evolved from its own culture. There is a need that education should be related to our own culture.. It has been rightly said. "The existing system of education is largely based on the ideals of spreading western science and literature and the way of life among a small minority of the population and of training persons for services under the government. It is still academic and book-centered and fails to promote social, cultural, economic or political development on proper lines." A foreign system of education was introduced in India without taking into account the cultural heritage of India. It is cut off from Indian cultural traditions and is alien to masses.

Reorganization of education has remained a challenging task right from the beginning after independence. K.G. Saiyidain an eminent educationist observed, "We are to-day at one of the great cross roads of our history when the pattern both of our culture and our social order is being refashioned. While it is true that education should always be essentially a forward-looking activity, in normal times when changes take place rather slowly and decorously, its function is mainly conservation — adjusting the child to a relatively stable environment. But in periods of crisis like the present, when the older is dying out and the new one is not quite born, when the older forms of culture have lost their grip on the majority of the young at least, and the new "shape of things" is far from being clear, education has a special difficult and critical role to play."

Modernization of education and cultural renaissance is needed to evolve education from its own culture. India is on the move again with the promise of a new renaissance in the making. The most powerful tool in the process of this renaissance and modernization is education based on moral and spiritual values on the one hand and on the other on Science and Technology. In this context we cannot do better than to quote Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, "Can we combine the progress of Science and Technology with the progress of the mind and spirit also?"³⁴ We cannot be untrue to Science because that represents the basic fact of life today. Still less can we be untrue to those essential principles for which India has stood in the past throughout the ages. Let us then pursue our path to industrial progress with all our strength and vigour and at the same time, remember that material riches without toleration and compassion and wisdom may well turn to dust and ashes.

Education should transmit the culture to the new generation and transform the outlook of the young towards life in the light of the past; in the context of cross-cultural influences and in the light of the future requirements of the individual and the society.

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