

Meaningful education

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Carve your own path by means of your own axe, to tread on some one else's path is hell.

—Iqbal



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One of the most justifiable charges against our educational system is that it discourages independent thinking and suppresses originality and creativity.

The main function of education is transmission of knowledge. Insofar as education transmits the already discovered knowledge, it is a conservative force. Education becomes a revolutionary force, when in the process of transmission of knowledge, it transmits knowledge so as to meet the challenges thrown up by an ever-changing reality.

As Iqbal puts it:

The essence of the universe is creativity.

Repetitiveness does not contribute to the strengthening of life.

One of the consequences of Darwin's theory of evolution is the notion that human activity is a manifestation of the creative force inherent in life itself. The creative force of evolution seems to heave itself forward into an inexhaustible variety of forms—unique, unprecedented, unrepeatable and irreversible.

Life is creative because it organises and regulates itself and because it is continuously engendering novelties. In physical evolution these novelties arise in response to genetic change and to changes in the environment.

In man there appears the power consciously to initiate novelty—the power of creative imagination. This power is expressed in man's ability to find order in a mass of particulars, to impose meaning and pattern on a multitude of things or experiences that at first sight seems unrelated.

Henry Bergson maintains in his magnum opus *'Creative Evolution'* that novelty and hence creativity are products, not simply of life, but of reality itself. Ultimately reality, he says, is an evolving process, which is becoming ever more complex and which constantly gives rise to novelties that are not merely re-arrangements of past states but genuinely unprecedented. The human personality is constantly forming itself. Each experience adds something to it, so that it is ceaselessly growing and changing.

Human activity has also been seen as the expression of a universal creativity immanent in everything that exists.

According to A.N. Whitehead this creativity is rhythmic or cyclical. This creativity, says Whitehead, is ceaselessly producing novelties. These novelties are of two kinds:

In one sense, any existing thing must continually renew itself in order to exist at all. If it is to maintain itself as it is, it must constantly replace its own components. Each of these components is both similar to its antecedent yet also unique because not identical to it.

Creativity, then, both maintains what already exists and also produces new forms altogether.

The process of education reflects the creativity of the universe as a whole. Thus according to Whitehead, education is rhythmic, moving in cycles, each of which passes through its own stages of romance i.e. the first enthusiastic encounter with a subject, precision in which order and system are introduced; generalisation in which the student having mastered the structure of his subject, can put it to a wider use.

Just as everything in nature ceaselessly creates itself so the learner is continuously realising his nature. He has an innate craving for education precisely because education is necessary for

the development of an organism as complicated as man.

Education is not something foreign to the learner but rather something that he inherently desires and the best type of education is that which responds to the divine cosmic process itself. Education is nothing if it does not inspire independent, original and hence

creative thinking.

Education is the response to the challenge of the cosmic creative force. Response must equal challenge, otherwise the individual and hence the society must face stagnation, decay and disintegration.

Independent, original thinking and creativity manifest themselves in many ways in education. The child has an inborn passion for discovery, which education should nourish. Instead of simply receiving knowledge passively from his teachers and the textbooks, he should recombine what he learns in ways of his own. If knowledge is accepted as given, it remains inert and at the same time deadens natural imagination.

The teacher must select the proper method of teaching i.e. weeding out the unessential and helping the students to concentrate on the main ideas of the subject.

Teaching should be a voyage of discovery rather than imparting of information.

The student should not be treated as an empty vessel to be filled with facts, formulae and theorems. The teacher should help him in grasping the basic structure of the subject so that the student may be able to learn by himself the latest developments in the subject. He should become a perennial student, carrying out the holy Prophet's (PBUH) command: "Seek ye knowledge from the cradle to the grave." This is the only way to meet the ominous challenge of the explosion of knowledge, which is making the latest knowledge obsolete within a decade.

In the most profound sense to be independent and to be original is to fulfil oneself as a person. Each student is a unique bundle of potentialities. The task of the teacher is to tap and release these potentialities. The teacher must enthuse the student so that he stretches himself to the maximum.

Self-realisation means self-knowledge. It should be the prime function of education to bring the student to a knowledge of his own individuality. It is here that one realises the profundity of Hadith-i-Nabvi: "He who understands himself, understands God."

Original thinking implies that knowledge is not so much an explanation as an attempt to explain, and hence the explanation is always tentative.

The teacher is always on his guard against dogmatism. All theories are tentative. All theories are only guide to action. The moment they are turned into dogmas, they become useless. If a student is to cultivate a creative attitude towards his studies, he should keep in mind the following:

- What he knows is largely mediated through cultured categories. It is largely through these categories that knowledge may be understood.

- To many of these categories there exist alternatives within the culture.

- To be true to himself, he should seek those categories that correspond to his own experience of life.

- He should strive to be open and flexible towards all that he learns. He will never close his mind to fresh ideas, new values and novel dreams. He should keep in mind what Iqbal says:

A living heart is the creator of new ages and new worlds,
Through imitation his soul loses illumination.