

EDUCATION IN INDIA: AN EXTENDED COLONIAL FACTORY

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It is an indisputable fact that colonization has had harmful effects on the people of the colonized areas. Traditional life-styles were disrupted, cultures destroyed and entire people subjugated or exterminated. Further, colonization is made possible only when the defeated forsake their culture and embrace the conqueror's culture. The British played their cards so cleverly that even after fifty years of independence we still continue to exist in a state of stupor, unable and even unwilling to extricate ourselves from one of the greatest hypnoses woven over a whole nation. Indians are still under the colonial yoke but only with a difference; the country once ruled by the British is now ruled by its own people, however with no significant changes from its colonial legacy. Though there are many religions, beliefs, customs, traditions, languages, ceremonies, arts, values and ways of life, yet India is bonded together by a *Sanskriti* or culture. Education is one of the crucial aspects which reflect the culture of a nation at its best or it could be said that the culture of a nation is propagated through education. But now, the whole Indian scenario shows sectarian interests and further, Indians find pride in dissociating themselves from their classical roots, traditional way of learning, and knowledge.

Education is a source of illumination in the path that leads to maturity in various spheres of life. The most striking feature of ancient and early Indian education was its scholastic anchor. There was no compromise in the quality and depth of scholarship. The search for knowledge is deeply ingrained in the Indian ethos. It projects philosophies such as,

Nahi Jnanena sadrsham

(Nothing is equivalent to knowledge)

Buddhau Sharanamanvicha

(Let intelligence be thy sole quest)

(Bhagavat Gita-chap.2-49 verse –line 2)

The ultimate aim of every of Indian thought is to pursue knowledge and wisdom and thereby create liberated individuals. The ancient sages of India realized that the theme of education ought to be the development of the resourcefulness and receptiveness of men so that they can live as sovereign beings. However, the question which remains is that, is our present system of thought, beliefs and attitudes capable enough to mould a liberated being as envisaged by the ancient scriptures? Answer to this question challenges the present educational practices in India. Language and literature have always been used by the colonizers as a powerful tool in the process of colonization, be it political or cultural. The British worked out their plans effectively in the guise of the introduction of English language in India. English education was seen as an important basis for expanding the British market in India by reigning English values and tastes.

The English language in India shares at least two characteristics of its existence with the cow in India. The 'worship' of English is expected to bring the devotee the wealth of this world –a promising career, a prosperous bride (groom) , a coveted green card and a Non-Resident Indian status with all its 'perks'.

(The Politics of Indians English 1)

This colonial mind is deep-rooted in almost all Indians and they exercise this colonial mind set knowingly or unknowingly in all their endeavors. This colonial legacy is projected in the education system in India from primary to higher education sector. The rapid growth of English medium schools and India's present educational practices including the code of conduct, dress code, compulsory rules and regulations, all these indicate the colonial mind working out through the society. Everyone follows this system of colonization under a belief that only it will benefit their lives.

According to Kahlil Gibran,

Your children are not your children
 They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself.
 They come through you but not from you
 And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
 You may give them your love but not your thoughts.
 For they have their own thoughts.
 You may house their bodies but not their souls.
 For their souls dwell in the house of to-morrow, which you cannot visit, not even
 in your dreams.
 You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
 For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
 You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth (20).

The present system of education devised by the erstwhile alien rulers was not in consonance with these goals and aspirations. Macaulay and the British education system have been blamed for producing a generation of Indians who are not proud of their distinct heritage. In an article published in the daily Hindu it was told,

How important was Macaulay?

Individuals matter, but the extent of their importance is debatable. It is widely believed that if Macaulay had never come to India, or if he had not served the East India Company, India's system of education would have been different from what it is... the Latin inscription below Macaulay's statue in Trinity College, Cambridge, gives him the credit for reforming "the letters and laws of India"... Macaulay did indeed leave his personal stamp on India by shaping its system of education and by preparing an early draft of the codes of civil and criminal procedures. Robert E. Sullivan in his book Macaulay: The Tragedy of Power cites Nehru as an example of the success of Macaulay's much deprecated project of 'forming a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern'. (Hindu, 21 June 2012)

Lord Macaulay, a historian and a politician made a historical speech in the British Parliament on 2 February 1835, commonly referred to as The Minutes, which struck a blow at the centuries of old system of Indian education. Lord Macaulay clearly said that, "We must at present do our best to form a class, who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect." The poison induced by Macaulay continues to weaken this nation; we hardly even care to know about Indian thinking, Indian problems and Indian models and solutions to these problems. We seem to know less and less about our own nation. People lose faith in their own way of life, their philosophies, their principles, their thought currents etc:

The single point is that, today the aim of education is to gain employment. When seen in this light, education is the development of a set of skills with limited application. But there is no guarantee that an employment, however good it is, will lead to happiness. In reality the working life is very often spent in an environment infested by competitions, jealousies, exploitation and anxieties. These competitions and jealousies get injected into the young minds through a systemic schooling. Every student is a rival to each other in their school days because of the method in which the students are evaluated. It creates a sort of competitive rivalry among them rather than a healthy relation. Mark is considered as the only basis of his efficiency. Is it justifiable that a student is evaluated only on the basis of his / her performance through just a 3hour long exam? If the axis of grading and marking is shifted to classroom participation, project work, communication and leadership skill and extracurricular performance, then only a genuine student will shine out. This might sound like a utopian proposition but the Indian education system badly needs to bring about this change. Academics is not everything in life. Now the present system of education gives undue priority to project works and assignments. The purpose of giving assignments or projects to students is for their integral development. But nowadays that too has lost its purpose and it merely funnels marks to the students. The awarding of marks is also not justifiable because most of the educational institutions award good marks for every student irrespective of their own capabilities only to retain the prestige of their institution- a corrupt utilitarian perspective. In this process, the talented and the deserved may be sometimes devalued. More to it, they are only inculcating the utilitarian philosophy into the young minds.

The child is taught to acquire knowledge only to pass exams and those exams appear to be the be-all and end all of existence. It is an oft – repeated statement popularized by the former Chair of the Scientific Advisory Council to the Indian Prime Minister, C.N.R. Rao, that India is said to have an examination system, not an education system. Our education system is designed from the ground up, primary school upwards, to teach students how to write exams. Our education system, at all levels, is examination oriented. It has caused many evils such as cramming, mass-copying, leakage of question papers etc. The evil of rote learning is yet to be wiped out from a majority of Indian schools. Owing to the fixed style of question papers that have been doing the rounds in board exams from time to time immemorial, rote learning has continued. This is a fundamental change that needs to come about in our Indian education system.

The parents are well aware of the job oriented value of education and it compels them to send their children to English medium schools. Now, the English medium schools are mushrooming across the Indian villages. They are sprouting in India's villages to meet the growing demand. Small farmers,

factory workers and labourers are sending their children to English medium schools, even if it pinches their pocket. However over the years, there has been a marked shift in the case of Kerala too. It seems that all across India, parents have made up their mind that private schools provide better quality education than government schools. The perception that Government schools are bad and private schools are better has become deep rooted. The parents always consider the private schools better because they provide English education. The colonial mindset inculcated by the westerners forces the parents to give undue importance to the English language in our education system. This legacy of colonial education only ensured the reproduction of colonized minds.

Many, like Shyam Menon, the Director of the Ambedkar University, believe that the rise in the number of children at English medium schools reflects the aspirations of India's middle class, which believe that the English education transforms them into greater upward mobility, irrespective of the quality of education delivered at many schools. People feel that only English can help their kids to do well in life because higher education in India is in English and all employers prefer people who speak English. The English medium schools are strictly imparting this value of English in their students. The school diaries of Al Manar Senior Secondary School, Alphonsa Residential School and Holy Spirit Public School three prestigious English medium schools in Kottayam District of Kerala, clearly indicates this fact. These are two rules prescribed in the diaries of these schools:

- All the students are expected to use only English as the Medium of communication in the school campus. Defaulters will be seriously dealt with.
- Speaking English is compulsory at school premises, in the school bus and at the bus stop while waiting to board the bus.

They strictly demand the speaking of English and if any student violates this rule he/ she should be punished. We have never heard an instance in which a student is punished for not speaking his mother tongue or for making incorrect use of his mother tongue. This is an ironic situation. We always have an inclination to discard our own language for the sake of other and retain the adopted through our younger generation. There by, it maintains its upper hand in the society through generations.

The English language in India has been steadily declining for a long while but Indians are resolved to let it neither die nor flourish. The educational institutions retain this prominence of English by conducting their major institutional programmes in English. It reassures the belief that only English programmes will keep the standard of the institution and it will contribute to the institution's national recognition.

Another important factor which retains this colonial English legacy is the 'pass port' to employment. Most of our students show a drastic interest for professional courses because they believe that it will make their lives safe and secure and it gives them the opportunity to go abroad. But the problem is that if they want to go abroad they should pass 'IELTS'. This test will ensure their capability and efficiency in English rather than their employable skills and thereby it helps to retain the fascination for English in India.

Speaking at a national seminar on "Decolonizing English Education" in 2001, Kapil Kapoor of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, declared that one of the byproducts of mainstream English language education in India today has been its tendency to "marginalize inherited learning"

and to have uprooted academics from traditional Indian modes of thought inducing in them “a spirit of self – denigration”. The recent comment made by Greg Chappell, the former Indian Cricket Team coach proves this fact. Greg Chappell says that Indian culture doesn’t breed leaders ... the Indian cricket team lacks leaders because Indian culture is not conducive to breeding leadership (Time of India, 10March 2012). Chappell’s comments about British rule inculcating certain traits in us - keeping our heads down and finding the path of least resistance reflects this fact. Due to the western invasion the Indian culture lacks in its ability to produce leaders. Such a valuable comment made by a westerner provides the opportunity for self- reflection even though the Indians are unmindful of this reality. It is India’s duty to prove our own cultural heritage before them rather than promoting the western values. But nowadays everyone is willfully ignoring this fact.

In the Indian philosophical methodology, generally followed by most of the systems of philosophy the ‘final ascertainment’ (*nirnaya*) of a philosophical position is based on the ‘critical examination’ (*pariksa*). There can be no final ascertainment or *nirnaya* without critical examination or *pariksa* in turn is dependent on ‘doubt’ or *samsaya*. Questioning attitude is the starting point of argumentation or the frontal clash of ideas. Now this questioning attitude is diminishing in our education system and students are satisfied with whatever they get. They are spoon-fed and often force-fed. Independent reflection is discouraged at every step especially at school. A teacher should have faith in the inherent potentialities of each and every student and at the same time he should be able to recognize the differences in the capacity of assimilation owing to their diverse backgrounds. A recent article by the Chief Psychiatrist, Dr.C.J.John of Medical Trust Hospital, Ernakulam on 1st of June 2012 in “Malayala Manorama”, makes this point clear. He discusses in detail the role of parents and teachers in the process of education. In his opinion, “Each student is unique in his character and capabilities and the duty of the parents and teachers is to detect them and divert them based on their abilities and interests rather than making them quality products”. The doctor also points out some of the instances too in his article. Accordingly, a teacher should be able to act as a resource person for all students by catering to the students’ diverse needs. He questions his students and encourages them to express their opinions. Questions serve an important purpose. They stimulate the students to think and thus serve as an effective way of animating their minds. In turn, the viewpoints of the students can stimulate new lines of thought in the teacher and offer him new insights. To teach is to learn. Hence, the ideal teaching- learning process is not a one way traffic. It is intended for the welfare of both teacher and students. Such kind of teachers can be named as *Gurus* and *Acharyas* in ancient times. Now, teaching is considered only as a prestigious profession in the society and teachers are more profit oriented. This is an idea which takes its root in the west. They are the ones who consider teaching as a profession or job like any another and as a profession; it has its own shortcoming.

There are various instances in which the colonial standard retains its upper hand in our educational institutions. To point out a simple case, take the case of the English nursery rhymes taught to many of our little children as if before knowing anything about India, they needed to know about Humpty-Dumpty or the sheep that went to London to see the Queen. Indian curriculum and syllabus continue to reflect the colonial standards. Indian children still study in our Indian system-a body of literature- crowned by Shakespeare and symbolized by Wordsworth’s “Daffodils” flowers which the native children have to see in their inward eye without the poet’s benefit of actually witnessing them “dancing in the breeze” . The stultifying nature of teaching methods and school curricula tends to

undermine the motivation of the child. When they grow older, some of them will be learning Western psychology while remaining totally ignorant of the far deeper philosophy offered by yoga or they will study medicine or physics or evolution without having the least idea of what ancient India achieved and often anticipated in these fields. Which teacher, for example, will tell her students that the Darwinian evolution was always at the back of the Indian mind, as the sequence of the *Dashavatar* shows? May such example be applied in other fields, from mathematics and astronomy and quantum physics to linguistics and metallurgy and urbanization? If teachers were not so ignorant, as a rule of their own culture they would have no difficulty in showing their students that the much vaunted 'scientific temper' is nothing new to India.

The education system in India focuses only on books and there by an Indian student becomes a recording machine stuffed with a jarring assortment of meaningless bits and snippets. The only product of this education has been the creation of a modern, westernized "elite" with little or no contact with the deeper sources of Indian culture and with nothing of India's ancient view of the world except a few platitudes to be flaunted at cocktail parties. Nothing illustrates the bankruptcy of our education better than the manner in which just a year ago, state education ministers raised an uproar at an attempt to discuss the introduction of the merest smattering of Indian culture into the syllabus and at the singing of the '*saraswati vandana*'. The message they actually conveyed was that no Indian element was tolerable in education, while they are perfectly, satisfied with an education, that, at the start of the century, Sri. Aurobindo called "soulless and mercenary" and which has now degenerated further into a stultifying, mechanical routine that kills our children's natural intelligence and talent.

Another important instance which shows this colonial supremacy is the school calendar of students in which the institutional demands are clearly put forward. Take the calendars of three colleges namely, Alphonsa College, Pala; St. George's College Aruvithura; and Deva Matha College, Kuravilangad and the student's Diary of Al Manar Senior Secondary School. All these institutions have similar rules which indicate this colonial supremacy includes,

- Students are expected to behave in an exemplary manner within the college and outside. Only a college with good discipline and work culture will attract Campus Selection Teams from reputed organizations.
- Every student should be refined in behaviour.
- Nothing is more appreciated in a student than courteous and mannerly behavior. Women students are expected to show lady like dignity in their dress and general behaviour.
- Every student should endeavour to keep up the high reputation of the school by excelling in his/ her conduct, good manners and department inside the school and outside.

What is these 'exemplary manner' or 'refined behaviour' or 'lady like dignity'? Who defines it? It creates the doubt that who is important? Is it the individual or the institution?

- Students are expected to spend their free hours in the library or in the classroom. They should not loiter along the corridor or crowd along the verandah.

- Students who happen to have no class are not to loiter on the verandahs during class hours.
- Students are expected to spend their free hours in the Library / Reading room. They should not loiter along the verandahs or crowd at the corridors and staircase.

It demands that the free hours of the students shall be strictly used for academic purposes and thereby it gives priority only to academics and not to the overall developments of the individual.

- All the girl students shall use only the inner verandhas and the staircases marked for them and all the boys students shall use only the outer verandhas and the staircases marked from them.

Allotting separate space for boys and girls in our institutions creates a secluded mentality in them and thereby limit them within the boundary. Nothing will happen if they are allowed to mingle together. It reflects the colonial mentality of our society that always confines the individual within its limit and makes them mere types. All these indicates that, individual growth is not the aim of these institutions, they try to mould stereotypes and job oriented citizens and they want to keep the dignity and name of the institution. They never allow any student to go out of this system in accordance with his interests and capabilities. They always create a boundary and within the boundary it exercises its power. The institution also encroaches upon the personal freedom of the individual and demands peculiar type of behaviours from them. Another instance is the implementation of ID cards among students. Most schools impose strict wearing of ID cards for students. The purpose of wearing ID cards is for easy recognition. The belief is that students wearing ID cards at school is an indication of a well mannered and rule abiding individual. Is it the only purpose of wearing ID cards? Or can we trace anything beyond it? Is it not in a sense a form of individual colonization?

Being labelled with a number or card is a form of degradation where in the individual is relegated to an animal who must summarily submit himself to the will of his authority. His individuality is reduced to six digits or to a name and address. The ID represents a collectivist mentality, these lofty goals of “security” and “efficiency” is placed above the rights of the individual. Our country was founded on the principle that people should be allowed to live freely, provided they do nothing to harm others. Life involves risk. It should be up to the parents and their children to decide what risk they are willing to take; this is not the choice of some bureaucrat who has a minimal understanding of each individual. The government, colleges and any institutions have no right to compel people to follow their rules. We must recognize that it is the student who is the victim, he should not be aggressed against any further.

The products of India’s higher education system are not adequately equipped to serve the traditional sector, which consists of occupations such as agriculture, farming, fishing, indigenous crafts etc. Today, the Indian picture shows a growing demand for white collar jobs and no one is ready to earn his livelihood through agriculture or through such traditional crafts. English, which is not the language of agriculture in India, is the medium of instruction in the agricultural universities because all modern knowledge on agriculture is available in English. English, which is not the language of day-to-day business in the market place, is the language of business management courses in the universities in India because it is the language of international business. English, which is not the language of daily transactions in a factory or workshop, is the medium of instruction in the Indian

Institute of Technology and other engineering colleges because it is the language of science and technology. All these exemplify the fact that Indian languages are still under- developed and standard publications are not available in Indian languages.

There are certain educational contributors whose methods and visions are something remarkable in the case of Indian education; even it has its own applicability in the present day world. Tagore envisioned an education that was deeply rooted in one's own immediate environment but connected to the culture of the wider world. Learning should be pleasurable and individualized to the personality of the child. It could be gleaned from his various writings and educational experiments at *Santiniketan*. Education, according to Tagore, should enable the student to appreciate the richest aspects of other cultures, while maintaining one's own cultural identity and specificity. This is very significant in a world situation in which the emphasis is on sharpening skills and gathering profitable information dictated by the market's requirement to the utter neglect of the humane arts. Such a non formal education system in India gave birth to the great Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen. Another example of such systems is "Kanav" and "Sarang" in Vayanad District. Kanav is established specially for the adivasi students and equipping them to meet the global challenges. "School is not a factory, teacher is not a worker, student is not a commodity and parents are not producers of commodities." This is the basic philosophy of Sarang. This type of non formal education institutions emphasized the importance of an empathetic sense of interconnectedness with the surrounding world, the diminishing factor in the present day formal education system. Such non- formal educational institutions could not flourish due to lack of official support.

The Indian mind had become too feeble to take the trouble of assimilating the few positive elements of western thought and rejecting the many negative ones. It is swallowed but could not be digested. There are increasing and hopeful signs of an aspiration to a reawakening and liberation from this intellectual and cultural degeneration. It is only if Europe is allowed to think for India, India is in danger of becoming an ill- executed and foolish copy of Europe.

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