

Holistic Approach to Higher Education-The Need of the Hour

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Abstract— Education is an outcome of the finest endeavours of human life to improve life's processes. Education in general and higher education in particular envisages fulfillment of human pursuits in attempting to lead a happy life. The purpose of education is to metamorphose the basest human intentions that guide life into the most sublime and supremely perfection principles. Education should not only convert human beings into useful human resource necessary for nation building, but empower a human being to lead a purposeful, happy and meaningful life capable of finding fulfillment in life. Education should promote equity, harmony and individual liberty in each human being and render him/her capable of respecting similar attributes in others. The purpose of education should be holistic development of an individual rendering the humans into sublime species capable of making life happy for fellow human beings.

INTRODUCTION

Education in general and higher education in particular should promote excellence among human beings. There is no denying the fact that the purpose of education in life should be to facilitate refinement and fulfilment. Higher education should give wider perspectives to human approaches in life and facilitate holistic development in domains of work life, personal life, peer life, domestic life and in totality the societal approach to life per se. by general perception, life should have been more easy, equitable, happy, peaceful and harmonious among human societies because of the empowerment provided by education. The contrary is true, as one takes stock of happenings around one's own self. There is all round intolerance, hatred, terror, atrocities, exploitation, gender discrimination, genocide, and absence of bonds among individuals and societies. With the growing number of literate masses, educated elite, intellectual societies

and highly qualified professionals, there should have been more of good in the society than what is visible for everybody to witness. With the advent of the knowledge economy, economic prosperity, globalization, and all-round ease of life facilitated by technology, it is sad to note that the society is degenerating into lawless and chaotic society full of anarchy.

'The Second Coming' of W.B. Yeats appropriately captures the present-day predicament:

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer.

Things fall apart; the Centre cannot hold.

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity.'"¹

The 'so-called educated' in the society seem to be selfish and blind to the happenings in the society and the worst of the human beings, hoarders, unscrupulous elements, intolerant religious groups, rogue nations, the cruel and the corrupt seem to organize themselves into cult communities out to destroy human societies and annihilate the core human spirit. What is the purpose of education? The pertinent question would be 'what is wrong with our education?'

India is a nation of diverse eco-system. The higher education eco-system is also as diverse as its people. In a country where the aspirants of higher education have various purposes and varying contexts, the question is: what is the purpose of Education in general and higher education in particular?

Dr. Kothari in his Report entitled "Report of the Education Commission, 1964-66", envisages the purpose of education in a befitting manner. The report beautifully conceives the purpose of education and the

first lines of his Chapter-1 say: “The destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms. This, we believe, is no mere rhetoric. In a world based on science and technology it is education that determines the level of prosperity, welfare and security of the people. On the quality and number of persons coming out of our schools and colleges will depend our success in the great enterprise of national reconstruction the principal objective of which is to raise the standard of living of our people”.²

It is indisputable that the purpose of education is to achieve the culture of the mind. Any education should aim at ‘man-making’ initiatives, instead of just imparting knowledge and skills. The holistic purpose of education is to chisel holistic personality of an individual and through such personalities the building up of a harmonious, rational, equitable society which

1. Yeats William Butler, ‘The Second Coming’ (<http://webbooks.com/Classics/Poetry/Anthology/Yeats/Sailing.htm>)
2. Dr. Kothari. D.S. Education and National Development. Report of the Education Commission, 1964-66, Ministry of Education, 1966. P.2

promotes economic development, peaceful coexistence and prosperity for all around irrespective of caste, creed, gender, race and class should be its ultimate purpose. Education should invariably aim at building character and culture in an individual. Vivekananda opined the “... the ideal of all education, all training, should be this man-making... The end and aim of all training are to make the man grow.”³

Dr. Kothari in his report opines that there is an imminent need to retain the spirit of individual freedom and at the same time, use ‘education’ as a tool for social reorganization, restructuring and social change that facilitates the achievement of national goals. In a way, he predicts that the purpose of education is social re-engineering. He says: “The social purposes of education, on the need to use it as a tool for the realization of national aspirations or for meeting national challenges, does not imply any underestimation of values for the individual. In a democracy, the individual is an end in himself and the primary purpose of education is to provide him with the widest opportunity to develop his potentialities to the full. But the path to this goal lies through social reorganization and emphasis on social perspectives individual fulfilment will come, not through selfish

and narrow loyalties to personal or group interests, but through the dedication of all to the wider loyalties of national development in all its parameters.”⁴

Life is dynamic and so is the society. The needs of the society always manipulate the goals of education. Education existed in the earliest human societies and it changed its goals, shape and size as the society demanded. As society was dynamic, education also was dynamic. Human experience over centuries with education has been highly rewarding. The societies decided the ‘why’ and ‘what’ of education and started setting up schools to educate the youngsters for a particular purpose. Sometimes the purpose was very simple, to impart their beliefs, culture, and values. The culture of a society always guided its perception on education and its requirements.

3. Swami Vivekananda, The Complete works of Vivekananda, vol.2, (part of the lectures delivered by Vivekananda), The Power of the Mind, (Delivered at Los Angeles, California, January 8, 1900)
4. Dr. Kothari.D.S. Education and National Development. Report of the Education Commission, 1964-66, Ministry of Education, 1966. P.6

Education in general and Higher Education in Particular owe a lot to the founding fathers of educational centres in the ancient times. Promotion of good citizenship was an important aspect of education. However, the intervention of the British changed the scope of education in India. Though Warren Hastings, the Governor-General of Bengal showed some interest in spreading the Oriental education, the other colonial masters looked down upon the ‘Indian wisdom’ (Deepak Chaturvedi, 2014). Lord William Bentinck appointed Thomas Babington Macaulay as the Chairperson of the Committee of Public Instruction who sided with the Orientalists and economic aspects and commercial interests dominated the purpose of education. In the infamous Minute on Indian Education (February 1835), he put forward his ‘utilitarian’ aspect of education as the guiding force for the policies of the Company towards Indian Education system. Unfortunately, different people had different views on education to suit their purposes and contexts. British too had their own.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishna Report way back in 1949 diagnosed the problem and suggests the solution. According to him: “Our present condition is in part

due to the failure of our education to cope with moral and spiritual uncertainties. Human values are, not a part of nature in the sense in which stones and plants are and yet they can be studied scientifically. If intellectual fragmentation and anarchy are to be avoided, the student must acquire a frame of reference which give meaning and direction to his college work as he moves from class to class to study different subjects. The different studies should be treated as parts of a whole. There must be an intellectual integration of his varied knowledge.”⁵ Dr. Radhakrishnan refers to holistic education as an integral part of all branches of science, humanities, engineering, or any branch of knowledge for that matter.

Education should be ‘life-changing’ and it should always change life for the better. Education has always been looked at both by the society and individuals as indispensable. The need for education has never been questioned by successive generations and societies. It is natural that every aspirant of higher education yearns to get a degree and a lucrative job, but the ideal goal of a society is to put other graduate attributes in every individual through ‘education.’ Besides, knowledge and skills necessary for a ‘purpose,’ there are other purposes and other requirements through education.

5. The Report of the University Education Commission (December 1948-August 1949) vol.1, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 1962.p.35.

Steven Schwartz, the former Vice-Chancellor of Brunel University says: “A sound economy is, of course a necessary means to achieve our social goals. But first we need an agreed set of social goals. Otherwise, we are a nation of means without ends. If their contribution to the economy provides the means, what are the ends that universities should be striving to achieve? The answer is greater social justice. Universities contribute to a just society in two ways: by producing graduates who improve social life and by promoting social mobility.”⁶

So, what is the purpose of higher education: Do we need theoretical knowledge? Do we need only skills? Do we need religious education? Do we need vocational education? Do we need value education? Can we manage with Churches, temples and Mosques rather than build institutions of higher learning? Do we need only technical education? Do we need Medical

Education? If both knowledge and skills are important, what is the right mix? These seem to be pertinent questions.

We cannot educate our children for a particular industry. We cannot customize our products to sun-rising industries. Because education is individual centric, and each individual is unique whether we agree or disagree. We cannot create custom made automations as per the whims and fancies of a set of people who don the role of an employer. The paradigm shift should be to re-orient the teacher and the taught and the very approach of the society towards education. The purpose of education is to create a happy society that finds fulfilment and refinement in all its endeavours. The purpose of education is to make life better for one and all. The purpose of education is to teach the people to make a distinction between knowledge and wisdom. Wisdom rather is the guiding force for all the knowledge and skills that one acquires. Bertrand Russell rightly said: “With every increase of knowledge and skill, wisdom becomes more necessary, for every such increase augments our capacity of realizing our purposes, and therefore augments our capacity for evil, if our purposes are unwise. The world needs wisdom as it has never needed it before; and if knowledge continues to increase, the world will need wisdom in the future even more than it does now.”⁷

7. Schwartz Steven. “The Higher Purpose” – Times Higher Education, May 16, 2003

8. Russel Bertrand, knowledge, and Wisdom, (<http://www.personal.kent.edu/~rmuhmma/philosophy/RBwritings/knowlegANDwis.htm>)

It is the teacher and the taught that should take the centre stage in the process of education. It is the teacher and the taught that negotiate the curriculum, strategies, methods and means that suit their teaching-learning purpose. It is high time that holistic approach to higher education guides our curriculum, classroom proceedings, funding policies, teacher recruitment and training and all the intricate issues involved in the development of this nation. Today, as a nation, India needs more than ever, a sound under structure which is made of ethics, morality, values and rationality to sustain holistic education. We need to redefine the purpose of education with a right mix of ancient wisdom and modern knowledge that promotes ‘man-making’ system.

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