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FISSURES IN EDUCATION

Indukuri John Mohan Razu

Candid  Publications

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INDUKURI JOHN MOHAN RAZU

Candid » Publications

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Unless the educator himself is educated,
 it is not possible to help the student to break down his limitations.
 Now, is the educator willing to educate himself?
 ... Is he willing to understand his own status ... his limitations and
 break through them as much as he can,
 thereby helping children to break through?

J KRISHNAMURTI

Every day, all over the world, people make one of the
 most difficult decisions in their lives:
 to leave their homes in search of a safer, better life
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Extinction is the rule. Survival is the exception
CARL SAGAN

Charity begins at home and justice
 Begins next door
CHARLES DICKENS

Curiosity is probably the outstanding characteristic of
 modern thinking. It goes back to Galileo, Bacon and Sir Isaac Newton, and
 it must be absolutely unhampered
ABRAHAM FLEXNER, Usefulness of Useless knowledge

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and
 I remember. Involve me and I learn
Benjamin Franklin

The principal mark of genius is not perfection
 but originality, the opening of new frontiers
ARTHUR KOESTLER

Learning will lead to boredom, if it fails in its approach to be
 Inquisitive, Imaginative, and Innovative
-John Mohan Razu

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FOREWORD

This monograph is located in an uncomfortable place: at an intersection. What I mean is that the roadmap of India's educational system is at a crossroad. It is cornered at a junction where the traffic lights all of a sudden goes off, and what we see is only the amber keep flickering. Those on four, three and two wheels are totally dismayed and do not know how to navigate, because the road traffic has gone hay way and is in total pandemonium. However, I have used 'traffic lights' at a junction as an analogy to explain the maze of lacunas that our system of education is facing and thus being explained in succinct ways as fissures.

Analogy of traffic light is befitting to the present state of India's education. Education being one of the concurrent lists for both the Centre and the state governments, to suit their political objectives and outcomes keep meddling and changing with the syllabi, curricula, pedagogy, process, methodologies, and obviously the outcomes. Therefore, the term 'fissures' becomes more appropriate to the fiasco of India's education as the system which is developing a number of cracks—fissures. 'Intersection' as an analogy along with traffic lights that I used signals directions characterizes chaos and confusion. 'Fissures' connotes cracks in education.

Traffic lights are like learning centers where theories, issues, realities, views and perspectives converge and diverge. It is a place where education is imparted, debated, discussed, and critiqued. Academia is a place where diverse minds intersects and where learning takes place—enjoining creativity and criticality. Academia offers an atmosphere accommodating diverse views—consensual and conflictual. Education ought to be something where critiques and creativity flourish. Learning centers ought to be a place where thought process gets de-learning, re-earning, re-directed and re-oriented.

Education is undoubtedly the centripetal and foundational. Since education acts as a regulating agency that intersects other domains across by-lanes and main-lanes. Therefore, education per se mandates that those who are at the helm of affairs in education should be open to the changing contours of knowledge and innovative domains. A common thread that weaves the pieces in this monograph candidly shows the fissures. The materials in this monograph are written from intersectionality of experience as a learner and pedagogue.

Indukuri John Mohan Razu
February, 2024

1

ARE INSTITUTIONS THE DUMPING YARD OF KNOWLEDGE? ARE STUDENTS CONSIDERED AS OBJECTS?

A: Education in a Nutshell

For children to reach their optimal potential, education is the fulcrum, and so education ought to be comprehensive. Therefore, schools will have match the Childrens' aptitude, creativity, and personality. If these are the in-built expectations of the learners and the academic, then the learners at the end of their schooling thus achieve and realize comprehensive, integrated, and wholistic growth—overall life. Success does not depend on materiality, but the ways with which they view their words and actions and the world around them—transforming the world so that all may live in unity and harmony, share the bounties of resources equitably, protecting the nature and eco-systems for the present and future generations.

B: Curriculum is More than Books

Working out a comprehensive and integrative curriculum is the base on which one can build on pedagogy and pedagogical processes including the objectives as well as outcomes. It is more than books because those involved in the preparations of the curriculum should be well-versed with the knowledge domain attuned as well as growing body of literature in multifarious fields/disciplines. Along with a good curriculum which is undoubtedly a pre-requisite, the institution should also offer opportunities to assist learners in diverse avenues promoting their physical, intellectual, and other social skills, apart from academic skills.

A variety of co-curricular activities be initiated for learners to choose whatever they want as per their aptitude and in the process gradually finding out the skills (s) that they have enabling them to concentrate fully on those. Knowing their areas and discovering those through a process plays an important component in their learning, and so, this should be made as foundational component of a student's educational experience, since they foster disciplines, determination, focus, fostering teamwork, self-assurance, and individual and collective responsibility.

A curriculum that lays a strong emphasis only on academics may not serve the purposes for wholistic and integrated development of the learners. It will miserably fail as the academic skills are found in others that those who control the system of education seemingly have taken for granted or undermined. Education is for life, and so, essentialize academic skills that flows outside the curriculum. More importantly, there should be an ideal balance between curricular and extracurricular activities, that plays pivotal role for the students' overall growth. Evolving a curriculum is an ongoing exercise as the context in which we live is changing at rapid pace.

C: Facilities that Cuts the Edge

Private schools that charge huge fees cater to particular classes of people in society. Investing on infrastructures, class-rooms and other intellectual and physical activities do spend enormous moneys. Whereas the governments hardly spend moneys on these. However,

those who are poor and economically backward admit their wards in government-run schools. Those classes who can afford join the schools that have modern amenities and technology facilities and thus prepares them for future work opportunities right from the earlier stages. In a digitalized world and higher levels of technological know-how those who study in these schools acquire required skills and prepare themselves to the expectation of changing world.

The learning spaces are called as ‘smart classrooms’ fitted with latest gadgets and other gadgets to make teaching and learning more conducive to the changing contours, while those who cannot afford fee are left behind. Those who run schools and institutions should keep this in mind as we leave behind one category who are left behind in the changing world context-specific. Those who study in ‘smart schools’ will be entering the competitive world confidentially, while others should struggle and in due course of time only a few make it but many end up as failures.

D: Specifying the Cutting-Edge

According to pedagogues, “higher education is a medium to acquire a degree, schools are key to a well-rounded development as they shape one’s personality and thoughts and groom the cognitive abilities in a pupil.” However, besides imparting knowledge, there are others aspects enjoined that adds value to students’ lives:

- **Mental Development:** School plays the most important role in molding and offering a shape to the child who is raw, like a clay, open to learning without any subjectivity gradually step-by-step offering shape by developing the cognitive abilities right from kindergarten as they move on

from one class to another. Education offers an open-minded environ that enables the learners to go beyond enhancing mental health skills thereby building resolve and resilience.

- **Social Skills:** Socialization process takes place for children takes place only in schools. Skills that are premised in socialization that are numerous—befriending, interacting with peer group, friends, teachers and other staff, managing conflict-centric situations. Children acquire skills need to manage diverse individuals and groups. They also learn sharing, giving-in when situation demands, caring, helping, and many other values.
- **Physical Activities:** Total education involves not just the mental or intellectual domains, but also physical activities. Energy will have to be channelized into something productive. Physical activities enhance mental agility, leadership, patience, team-work, self-confidence, patience, accountability, responsibility, self-discipline, competitive spirit, open to participatory process and through those children learn what it means winning or losing – learns how to navigated life in their ups and downs.

E: Learning Outside Four-walled Classroom

Learning within the four-walled classrooms is good for some subjects and certainly not for all-round growth. Going beyond class-rooms and moving beyond curriculum can be done only outside i.e., in the fields such as where communities live and plants and trees live. Whatever is learnt by the learners need to applied and tested. Often some of the processes goes

beyond the learning taking place within the four-walls, such as critical and creative questioning being triggered only outside meaning the field exposures as well as play grounds. It has multiple impacts – physical, psychological, spiritual, and intellectual.

F: Grading Students' Future

Marks and grades seem to be the determining factor and thus decides students' future in education. Students' performance in academic is assessed by ways of marks and grades. But a question that surface is: What are the bases on which marks and grades awarded? Usually there are hardly any yardsticks or criteria that the teachers' follow while awarding grades or marks. Without proper guidelines on assessing the written examination papers, usually subjectivity enters in and as a result we can observe lots of flaws and unfair assessments. How gradings, ratings, and rankings undermine students' personality, learning, and future seem to have been undermined and underrated.

Let me start by asking a basic question: Why do we need tests and grades? Commons answers that we get usually is to motivate and to know their academic proficiency and skills tests and examinations are conducted. Based on the marks and grades secured on their performance, more clarity is derived on students' proficiency and deficiency. Question that follows is: How are the grades and marks awarded shows objectivity without any prejudice or bias? Can teachers point out the procedures followed while awarding marks and grades? Those who run the schools and education institutions have they organized any orientation sessions to the teachers on these nitty-gritties? All these are required for the sake of requirement when the students' want to go to higher

classes or want to study in other institutions or for employment.

G: Grading Systems and Criteria Followed

When we seriously look into the grading system, it annoys the students, rather than keeping them composed. Is it possible to evaluate students in toto in few hours of conducting examinations. When we say education is composed of intellectual, mental, spiritual, and physical facets, why then we conduct exams and tests to assess students in a given time duration with a set of questions or papers? And the irony is those who secured A+ are regarded as the best students and those way down the ladder viewed in accordance to the marks secured.

By awarding grades do we realistically assess the students' innate abilities? Often, we come across question papers are leaked or answer sheets are chased and in many ways those who know the games can upgrade their marks including the competitive examinations. Those who have money can buy seats. We come across such incidents happened in world renowned institutions wherein students secured admission by paying huge donations. Cheating of all kinds right from admission to promotion to becoming prefect and in other co-curricular favoritism and nepotism prevails in subtle and overt ways.

Marks per se promotes inequalities amongst the student community. Those belonging to wealthy class could push their children in appalling ways to realize their dreams applying more pressure in diverse ways. Then we come to 'standardized test', then to 'norm-reference test' followed by 'criterion reference' – all meant to decide whether the students have come to a 'desirable point' or the norm fixed by the academia failing which some support can be

offered. All these have become though nomenclature and the contents may vary, but no substantive changes have happened thus far. Probably be termed as ‘academic destiny’,

H: Education: Gradational and Hierarchical

Educational institutions particularly the schools are supposed to be the important equalizers of social opportunity. Students of various caste and class socio-economic backgrounds will come and study. Everyone is endowed with a couple of talents and none is talented in all the things. Unless and until, the teachers or pedagogues identify and inform the learners the strengths and weaknesses and offer support system or a system that erases those deficiencies and weakness how would the students know about. Likewise, the students are to be told to work on their strengths and push further those strengths.

In academics too standardized tests being conducted to all belonging to diverse socio-economic status will glaringly portray the difference between those who hail from urban and rural areas, between dominant and oppressed castes and the rich and poor. To make things easier for different categories, in India we have evolved multi-layered system having different systems based on their status, privileges, and income. For the poor and downtrodden there are government schools and colleges and for the rich a number of private schools and colleges in accordance to their affordability.

Formats of varied kinds are followed to assess students in so many ways. Over and above, evaluating and correcting the papers adds more to the examiners. To an extent it is dependent on the moods of the examiners. Likes and dislikes of the teachers over children also plays a significant portion in awarding the

grades. In addition, those who are well-connected with the administration it adds some more. More importantly the students’ proximity with teachers and the ways students moderates with the likes and dislikes of the teachers.

I: Education: A Lopsided Terrain

In the sphere of higher education apart from infrastructures and other paraphernalia, more emphasis is given on the composition of faculty, research, and publications, students’ field placements, quality teaching and faculty-student ratio. These are the parameters that are looked into seriously whenever affiliations, accreditations or educational rankings take place. Different methods are chosen and employed to measure, analyze and evaluate the data.

Quality of teaching should absolutely be made paramount. When we use the term ‘pedagogy’ it accommodates many facets the ways with which lessons are prepared, analyzed, and delivered. Alongside any other aids and supplementary given. More importantly, did the pedagogue take the students beyond what has been taught. It simply means making the students to think beyond – the confines of the subjects taught. The quality of learning follows from the quality of teaching. Within the entire gamut of ‘quality of teaching’ lies the matter of pedagogy.

How to measure ‘pedagogical quality’ and with what parameters? And also, it is to be noted that if it is difficult to measure the pedagogical quality to quantify the learning outcomes. If this is so, then we need to have a method to quantitatively measure the outcome of the pedagogical quality. We need to evolve new ways and means to assess students’ ability, skills, and innate capacities, so that comprehensive assessment can be brought about in realistic manner. We are expected to look closely the use of each

and every tool taking into account the context and accordingly evolve broader goals. This means we need to recalibrate, rather than reinventing or recycling the same old. This is what we have been doing all along.

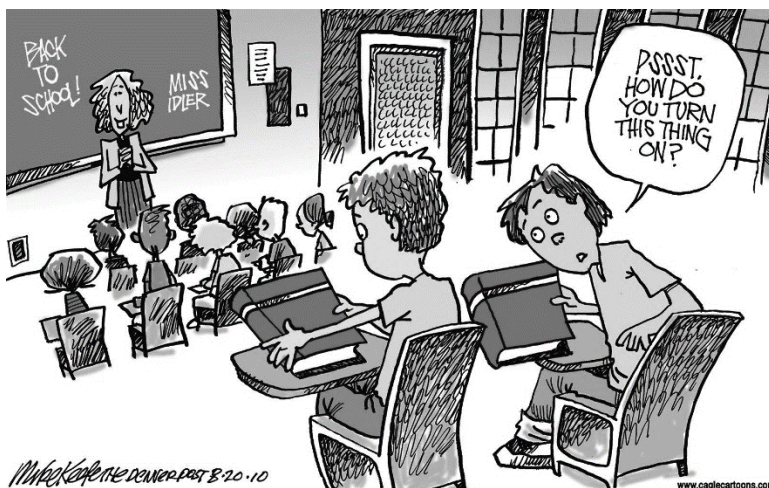
J: Taking the Students to Higher Levels holistically

Have we taken into account the diversity of students evolving appropriate pedagogies? Are the courses offered evokes vigorous atmosphere that pushes the learners to get engaged in class room discussions? Teaching, in any subject, is fundamentally creative, critical exercise,

where the teacher in passionate ways teachers her subject harnessing it to pedagogy and thus aligns towards broad outcomes for a particular discipline or a course.

Teaching at higher education needs more creative and intellectual levels. Teachers should not think that they are in a lab handling something because the recipients of the knowledge are young and came to equip themselves with knowledge-based skills. In the class room there is genuine subject to be discussed enjoined with teacher and taught interacting with each other actively.

Example is the school of mankind,
And they will learn at no other
EDMUND BURKE



Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/57983913929515763/>

2

EDUCATION IS ALL ABOUT CRITICAL THINKING AND CREATIVE INQUIRY

For any society to survive or a nation-state to keep itself abreast with others in achieving development, progress and prosperity should concentrate or give emphasis not just making its populace one-hundred percent literate in reading, writing, and arithmetic (3R's) or starting or establishing more public and private educational institutions offering diverse streams and disciplines, but to look carefully the contents, syllabi., pedagogy and pedagogic process.

In an era of globalization of education, there have been number of tie-ups between renowned colleges and universities and those well-known universities in two-third world. The State to a larger extent has withdrawn from the sector of education. Entrepreneurs who have the capital invest in starting educational institutions. Barring a miniscule percent of those who invest in starting educational institutions – schools, colleges, and universities, many view investing in education is good because venturing into education assures profits.

The forces of globalization have enabled the movement of students to places where premier institutions are located in the West, such as United Kingdom, United States, and Canada. Institutions located in these countries especially some in particular and many are known for offering courses in varied disciplines and areas of study. Those who can afford to go abroad for higher education leave India spending huge sums of money for enhancing their critical academic skills, while others having no means stay back.

Institutions located in England, USA, and Canada earns sizable amount of money in the sector of education. A sizable student who goes to these countries for higher education spending lakhs of rupees say that education abroad is qualitative and good. But the government usually comes out with all kinds of excuses and flimsy arguments, but hardly wants to go deep into the exodus of young creamy layer that wants to leave. Education is thus a big business. Educational institutions keep mushrooming locally and globally.

An array of choices and combinations is being offered to those who want get into any stream. Those who have the money can take any stream that suits them. Forces of globalization has furthered and pushed the education market to another level. Marketization of education and job market go hand-in-hand, as the market forces decide which area of specialization is in demand. Accordingly, those who govern the system of education and the CEOs make decisions leveraging the students who are keen to those streams that are in great demand.

Education and employment are enjoined together. They operate on the basis of supply and demand. Demand for particular streams and disciplines that are in demand keep changing every year as seekers for select areas to which the students rush-in. The dynamic depends on the market conditions. Every year we see fluctuations in the market conditions that prompts some areas and disciplines having more demand, while the others

have fallen aback. Therefore, education is a multi-billion industry as it is increasingly getting globalized where the movement of students shuttling across the world for want of education in some of the reputed educational institutions keep growing.

Along with education we should also add other paraphernalia attached to it such as computers, electronic and mechanical gadgets, and host of others that facilitates pedagogic processes more effective and pragmatic. And so, there have been many other factors seem to have attached with education. Hence, we should not minimize or underestimate the returns. The returns are huge and so we see intense competition taking place luring the students with a number of learning and physical facilities that are need for the mind and body. For any society to compete in a world of competition will have to provide quality education to its populace.

Philosophers of education and educationists keep advocating for education that leads to critical inquiry. Only a few who define and conceptualize what is education all about from a different perspective. John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Ivan Illich, Ken Gnanakan, J.P. Naik and few others viewed education not in conventional ways, but totally in different manner. Education ought to impart to know about them and the reality around and in the process creating awareness of the self and the world around, critical consciousness and critical thinking.

The learning process continues till lifetime creating critical inquiry, so that, examination and analysis that are

undertaken will reveal the intrinsic complex facets paving way for an objective evaluation. The process would also facilitate intense critical scrutiny and reflection. In tune to it Sumit Paul in one of the column articles in “The Speaking Tree” title *Only Those Who Inquire Are Able To Acquire*¹ bring to the fore one of the astounding statements of Noam Chomsky that “Do you train for passing tests or do you train for creative inquiry?” This statement is impregnated with profundity. Sumit Paul intensifies that statement by Chomsky that education sans any fear of evaluation the form of examination, can create individuals who will be capable of ‘creative inquiry’.²

Substantiating further Sumit Paul adds,

Creative inquiry is the process of exploring issues, objects or works through the collection and analysis of evidence, including combining or synthesizing existing ideas, products, or expertise in original ways to answer an open-ended question or achieve a desired goal. In other words, creative inquiry is a personal or pedagogical process where learners engage in reflective, critical thinking though artistic, or creative modalities. Chomsky’s emphasis is on holistic and comprehensive education that encourages liberal as well as lateral thinking.³

Along with Chomsky Sumit Paul brings sutra in Prakrit: “‘Nijjho Gyanam” – knowledge that prepares. Though this sutra in Jain Agam appears to be incomplete, it’s complete in itself, because it pithily says, knowledge that prepares.”⁴ Elaborating on this,

Knowledge that prepares an individual to face the varied and myriad issues of life, existence and metaphysical issues is knowledge in the proper sense of the word. The very purpose of education is to provide us with knowledge that empowers and prepares. It creates an inquiring mind

¹ See for more details “The Times of India”, December 7th 2023.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

and an ever-inquiring is an ever-alive mind.⁵

Quoting Stendhal Sumit Paul strengthens his argument by bringing the need for 'inquire'. Stendhal aptly said that "Consign the mind to a blazing fire/That cannot question and inquire."⁶ What he means is "Creative inquiry is required for a wholesome existence."⁷ Adding some more flesh and blood to his argument by bringing in Socrates who would tell his disciples that "I'll not teach you anything new. I'll teach you how to inquire logically, think creatively and act aesthetically."⁸

As a tribute to Noam Chomsky's 95th birth anniversary Sumit Paul expounds in detail that.

Chomsky enshrined Socratic wisdom into Creative Inquiry. Education liberates the mind, deepens perceptions and knowledge, and gives birth to an inquiring self. An ever-questioning and inquiring mind is never cerebrally blind. Such an intellectually equipped individual doesn't go by the cover of a book, nor does he flip through the pages, he pores over every page and word the book of life contains.

Illumining on this subject Sumit Paul adds that "Noam Chomsky is of the opinion that an inquiring mind can be developed and honed to perfection by the ruminative and regurgitative process but that it needs an inspiration, satori or a life-transforming occurrence, often

something heart-rending."⁹ De-coding Noam Chomsky on this furthermore,

He cites the examples of Ovid and Virgil, two great Latin poets who were not exactly born bright. Both developed an inquiring mind when faced with extreme and heartbreaking situations. Ovid experienced the shock of his life when he saw a drowning child and Virgil lost three dear friends in a battle. Why did such dismal fate befall them? The question generated an inquiring mind and activated, rather ushered. Ovid and Virgil further into the world of poetry. The same can be understood in the Indian context when an ordinary Valmiki question why were copulating birds arrowed. The simple but profound word 'why' births an inquiring mind and an inquiring mind further culminates in a creative and fecund outcome. This is an encouraging finding as we erroneously believe that certain individuals are born geniuses. Nope. Circumstances create an inquiring mind and polish it. Only those who inquire are able to acquire. To imbibe the spirit and essence of the words of Chomsky is the need of the hour, nay the need of our times.¹⁰

The above quotation amplifies the importance of critical thinking and inquiry leading to productive and creative learning outcomes. All of us are endowed with multiple intelligences. There are those given the opportunities make it, while others hardly make. Those who are involved in the business of education will have to create atmosphere or facilitate learning environment that would in turn create inquiry mind and critical consciousness.



⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

3

NO NEVER MIND TO MIND OF A CHILD

We seem to have taken for granted by not paying adequate attention to mind of a child. At last, in the last few years there have been growing awareness being raised for the mind of the adults, and not children. Indian society at large has given more priority to the physical and spiritual, and not to the mind (mental). Formation of the mind is pivotal and foundational to a child in particular, and to the children, in general. Recently on 'mind', I did go through one of the captivating write-ups *The impact of violence on a child's mind* appeared in the Editorial of "The Hindu" by Krishna Kumar, former director of NCERT and the author of *Prejudice and Pride*.

Let me go through his exposition which I think merit attention. He starts his observations with Maria Montessori. He raises a question what would have Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu felt when he said he was at war with Hamas and so finish off by bombing Gaza? She wrote classics such as *The Secret of Childhood* and *The Absorbent Mind*. But she also gave some hard-hitting lectures on war and peace during 1930. A collection under the title *Education and Peace*, these speeches elaborate on her life-long mission to make the world recognize the significance of early impressions.¹¹

She substantiates by clarifying what she said that "A child's encounter with violence – personal or collect – sets in motion a cycle of revenge. Montessori saw this cycle as the root cause of war. A

few thousand children have been killed in Gaza, but many would have survived. Montessori's arguments suggest that these survivors will prove Mr. Netanyahu's hope a folly."¹² Substantiating further on this, Krishna Kumar pitches in a similar argument present by the celebrated Jewish philosopher and write Elias Canetti.

In the book *Crowds and Power*, "he devotes a section to the child's mind. Canetti points to the seed of revengeful thoughts that the experience of violence lodges in the mind."¹³ Canetti explains how it develops.

Over time, into a full-blown motive to resist social norms. When the child becomes an adult, the resistance mutates into rebellion in many cases. Often induction into violence during adolescence occurs when historical circumstances, including technological forces, creates the ground. Poverty also adds to the factors that make children vulnerable to violent roles. In a study of Nepal, Sanjeev Rai presents an interview with child soldiers who became victims of this combination factors. In several reports, UNICEF has discussed how difficult it to rehabilitate children who have experienced or participate in violence, into civic life.¹⁴

The State of Israel has bombing Gaza, West Bank, and East Jerusalem on slides killing more than 9000 children since 7th October, 2023. Every 10 minutes a child is killed. Those children who got injure have lost their limbs or hands or injured in other parts of the body. Bombing is going on relentlessly the noise and

¹¹ For more details See Krishna Kumar, *The impact of Violence on a child's mind* in Editorial in "The Hindu, November 24, 2023.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

destruction the war machinery causes is so nauseating and heart rending. Day-in and day-out children in the occupied areas are witnessing the gruesome killings. It has been observed every Hamas is killed Israel is creating nine more Hamas is added.

In such a context the writer adds some more interesting points and thus analyses in the following ways:

Israel's retaliatory assault on Gaza will have several unpredictable outcomes, but one outcome that can be easily predicted is its psychological impact on Palestinian children, especially adolescents. Thousands are reported to have been killed. The rubble in the streets shown on television is extensive, but no one is looking for survivors buried underneath. Those who survive and migrate (under the Israeli army's order) to the southern part of Gaza must be facing an awful uncertainty about their future, along with the agony of forced displacement. No matter what efforts their parents make in the post-conflict scenario, the children who have lost all semblance of childhood will fulfill Montessori's worst prophecy the perpetuation of violence.¹⁵

Children are the worst affect in any conflict or war. Take for example, Wars on Ukraine and Gaza, we come across children happened to be the victims of war. In reality they have nothing to do with the war, but eventually they become the targets of war. Children are caught in crossfires and not knowing anything innocently gets caught in the melee. For instance, in "*The Secret of Childhood*, Montessori underlined the role of peaceful circumstances in a child's upbringing. First published in 1936, this book presented her thesis that all major individual and social problems have their roots in childhood."¹⁶

Though the findings of Montessori's were not the first one on this subject

matter, "Montessori developed it into a full-scale pedagogic philosophy and strategy that might enable society and the state to break the cycle of the influence of historical circumstances on children's mind and behavior."¹⁷ However, she boldly expressed "The implications of this perspective were drawn out in her lectures on peace and liberation from the reproductive cycle of war. Driven by anger and internal political compulsions, Israel's leaders have chosen to ignore the message that Montessori had given to the world during and after a horrific global war."¹⁸

Montessori was part of an inter-war movement initiated by eminent educators of her time. She along with those in the peace movement used education to fight the culture of war. To substantiate, "Rabindranath Tagore was also involved in this international effort. Although it could not prevent the Second World War, the movement has left behind a rich legacy of ideas for us to engage with in our turbulent present."¹⁹ Peace against war will have to be part of curricula so that children would be in a position to learn and imbue the importance and serious ramifications conflict and war and how peace could be initiated.

In a world of conflicts and wars the writer points out that,

One aspect of this legacy is to worry about children who grow up in a war-infested world. Technology of communication has dispersed the Gaza battle all over the world. News of the killing of Israeli civilians by Hamas at the beginning of October and heart-rending scenes of human misery caused by Israel's armed forces in Gaza have reached children everywhere. No one can guess or predict what consequences this exposure to

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

aggression and violence will have in the long-run.²⁰

Education and peace, truth and reconciliation will have to be part of the school and collegiate syllabi. They are the victims and those who survive be part of the future and so be given apt orientation and adequate openings to respond to the cycle of violence that grip the world at large. Though they are questions that Krishna Kumar raises such as “Can education mitigate the effects of this massive dose of violent imagery? In principle, education has this potential, but most system of education today lack the energy required to harness this potential.”²¹

Most of the societies have taken violence as natural and part of the world they live. “Many believe that education cannot reverse the political impact of dangerous ideologies. Disappointment with education has grown in recent year.”²² The reason being the causes and effects of violence all of a sudden spurt and continues, but its impact on children is horrendous. Accordingly, what is happening does show the spiral of violence erupting across. For instance,

In fact, frustration with education is common across the world. Many believe that education cannot reverse the political impact of dangerous ideologies. Disappointment with education has grown in recent years. Russia’s war with Ukraine and the ongoing destruction of Gaza raise serious questions about the power of education to inculcate basic good sense. Russia, Israel, and the U.S. are among the most educated nations of the world, but they have failed to use education to nurture peace. Current discussions about the future of Gaza are focused entirely on politics. They must include the future of education in Gaza – and in Israel as well.²³

Images that we see on TV screens on Israel’s war on Gaza especially of the children getting killed, crying, running

across the rubbles and desperately running into the hospitals searching for their parents, and loved ones. Their eyes and body language are the expressions of what is going in their minds. We also see pictures of those teens throwing stone at the Israeli soldiers and security personnels. There are many images that portrays adolescents being arrested and languishing in Israeli jails for years. Their minds must be filled with anger and revenge. Given an opportunity they would rather take up violence in their hands or join terror groups.

Who then is responsible for young adolescents getting converted to violence? It is the society and all of us. For them there is no other option or alternative, except to resort to violence. Young minds have been living amidst violence right from their childhood being perpetuated against them and they grow up in violence-ridden milieu right from their young age having lost their dear ones – never been cared, shown love, and seen peace. First and the foremost one should be at peace within, and then can talk about peace. If they are not at peace, what else can be expected of them. Our world, societies we live, communities and families are increasingly becoming violent and resorts to all forms of aggressive behavior both physical and verbal.

The above may have been the contextual reality that Krishna Kumar visualized and thus ventured to write this column article. Continuing further,

Those concerned about children in Palestine will have a tough time deciding their future course of action. In Israel too, education has not played a peace-building role. Two decades ago, I attended a workshop on peace education in Jerusalem. The headmistress of a school for Palestinian children in Old Jerusalem was invited to talk to us. I wanted to visit

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

her school, but the organizers did not agree to arrange the visit – due to security concerns, I was told. The children in her school were studying textbooks presenting a very different view of the past from the present one. I had seen in the school on the campus of Jerusalem University.²⁴

By all means within the system of education there is an urgent need to bring-in violence and its implications on the children and adolescents in the contemporary world. As part of his concluding remarks Krishna Kumar says that,

Contrasting portrayals of the past are common in contiguously located hostile nations across the worlds. They are just one more factor that keeps old hostilities alive. Conciliatory histories are rare in such cases. No wonder education reinforces and perpetuates divisive ideas, preparing the adult mind to accept such ideas as the only way forward.²⁵

As the above quotation points out that there are converging and diverging perspectives, but educational institutions should provide ample resources for reconciliation and peace which is the only process and the way to keep moving forward. For long time peace and stability in the air in the Middle East, therefore, the concept of peace is the only way that would push both the Israelis and the Palestinians to live side by side. In order to co-exist Israeli should not live in an illusionary world that lethal weapons, intelligence surveillance, and the world's most powerful country throwing its weight both financially and militarily on its side would never bring *shalom*, but more hostilities. Renounce hatred, rage, and arrogance, pursue just peace.



Dreams are a mirror to the sub-conscious. They can be an invaluable help in understanding our understanding our repressed aspirations

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

4

MENTAL HEALTH, THE NEED OF THE HOUR

We live in a knowledge-based and technology-driven world. However, for any society or country to grow, progress, and develop, along with education, the most vital component which is fundamentally required for any individual, group, community, and society is mental health. The reason being, mental health is the key for ensuring economic vitality, social cohesion, wellness, security, and overall well-being of humanity. In order to fulfil this mandate, mental health needs to be given utmost importance and thus be integrated as the most important component in all societal, educational and professional avenues. And so, we need to impart awareness on ‘mental health’ in all domains.

Nowadays, we are concentrating and prioritizing many others especially critical thinking, skill development, creativity, competence, communication and connectivity and many others, but have failed to take into account the core of all these vis-à-vis mental health. As we progress and keep climbing higher and higher, we tend to forget about the mental health or have not taken it more seriously. In the past, somehow, there has been some kind of coping mechanisms and support systems available to balance our ‘mind’.

There is a need and necessity to derive clarity on these conceptions – ‘mind’ and ‘mental’. ‘Mind’ is a noun, while ‘mental’ is an adjective – a scientific term commonly used for mental disorder. Whereas the ‘mind’ is a set of faculties responsible for all mental phenomena. At the same time, while

‘brain’ is considered to be a ‘physical thing’, whereas ‘mind’ is related to ‘mental’. These two terms ‘mind’ and ‘mental’ presently are gaining momentum and assuming greater significance. Increasingly in the last few years, millennials across the world especially in India have been complaining about the state of their mental health.

We tend to think that if we have good physical fitness, it automatically takes care of our mind/mental. In reality it is not true as we come across those who are physically fit keep complaining about their mental state. Nick Kyrgios and Naomi Osaka, top-ranking professional lawn-tennis stars had withdrawn from major tournaments complaining about their mental state. Another example is Deepika Padukone, the top Bollywood actor came out complaining about mental health issues in 2015. Currently she is a staunch advocate of ‘mental health’ campaigning in favor of for mental health in national and global fora.

Mental health is increasingly becoming not just the individual or familial, but societal. The numbers who have been affected by mental illness are growing significantly. Take young school going children. They are worrying about their academic performance stemming out from parental, familial, and peer pressures. Issues related to mental health are on the rise. And the consequential impacts are varying in terms of magnitude and severity. Therefore, it’s better to know all about it by not subscribing to “Ignorance is bliss”.

Experts such as Dr. Ruchi Sharma, Consultant Psychologist, HCMCT Manipal Hospital, Dwarka, in nuanced manner adds that “Students, especially adolescents, face a lot of stressors from multiple domains. Brain and bodily changes, personality changes, changes in social dynamics, interests and the additional demands, all have a collective effect on their overall well-being. Some of the most common issues that students come up with include ideological differences and communication challenges with parents, peer pressure, personality changes leading to increased aggression, self-esteem and confidence issues, sleep and appetite-related problems, anxiety and panic, difficulty in attention and concentration.” The above quote amplifies the causes leading to mental ill-health.

In tune to it, Moly Suryawanshi, HOD Wellness, Ridge Valley School observes: “A child spends nearly one-fourth of his/her day in the school with educators and peers. School is the second safe space that the child creates in his/her mind after home and teachers are the second guardians after their parents. Therefore, it is important that schools ensure a safe and healthy learning environment for each child. It can be tough to tell if troubling behaviour in a child is just a part of growing up or a problem that should be discussed with mental health professional. But the most common issues that surface are related to separation anxiety and excessive internet usage concerns which result in poor attention span, and poor self-regulation stemming from which could be condition of attention deficit, hyperactivity, poor executive functions, and communication skills being impacted ... From one-on-one intervention to educator-parent sensitizing sessions to cognitive behaviour therapy, all come together to

support the child in bringing back their socio-emotional equilibrium.”

In addition, online-classes during the pandemic followed by off-line classes seemed to have played a havoc in the mental health of the learners. A parent of a class 9 student Sushma Rajput shared: “The way a classroom functions has changed several times in the last two years. With the pressure of academics, peers, pandemic also added to the anxiety amongst students.” Mind-mental is a dialectical dynamic that compliments each other. And so, they are closely webbed with each other. If anything goes wrong to one will have ramifying effect on the other. Only a tiny percent of our populace has come to reckon with the fact that mental health ought to be seen as an integral part of our overall well-being – be it a child or an adolescent or a grown-up.

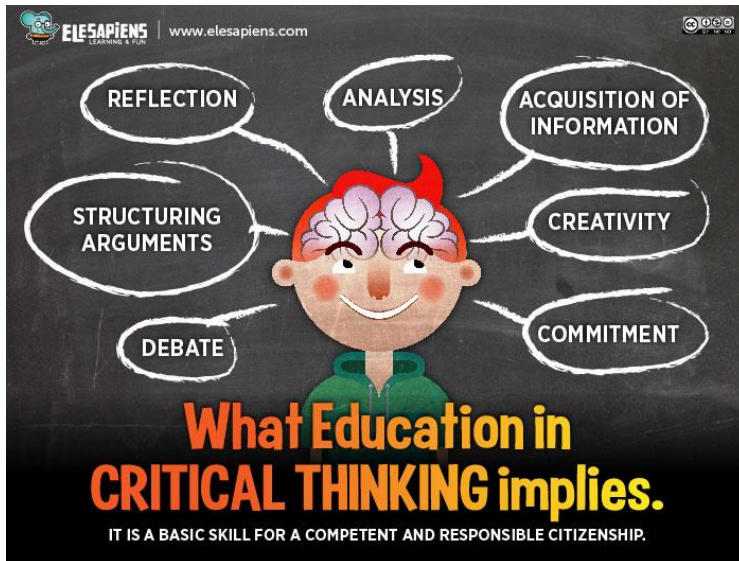
We come across periodically is the young scholars committing suicides in IITs. Those who resorted to suicide deaths belong to Dalit and Tribal background. Reasons ascribed for suicidal deaths ranges from depression, isolation, inferiority, taunting, and others. Likewise, women suffer both physically and mentally. Patriarchy employs sophisticated techniques to oppress and dominate women and thus being used in diverse methods to subjugate and wilt their mental resolve. It is a known factor that patriarchy as it moves along the times evolves new ways and means. One crucial weapon it employs attack women mentally/psychologically that automatically wrecks women psychologically resulting in gradually deterioration of physical.

As Dr. Samir Parikh, Director, Medical Health and Behavioural Sciences, Fortis Health care, adds: “Mental health needs to be prioritized and integrated into ...

not just in India, but worldwide. Awareness around mental health and mental illness, early identification, screening, and also solution-based approaches are important ... access to resources for intervention on specific concerns – to be learning disability, other illness like depression and anxiety, etc. Prioritizing awareness around mental health also needs to happen so that resilience—building positivity and the culture of well-being ...”

Be it class rooms or homes or society or the terrains – private or public, children, young millennials, and women are

undergoing serious mental illness due to varied reasons should be addressed and resolved. Those belonging to said categories are the major pillars for the present and future. Their contributions for the present and future for our society and nation should never be minimized or taken for granted. How and in what ways will have to be left to the concerned people, organizations, state governments and the government at the Centre. Trinitarian components – body, soul, mind enjoins wholeness, but without or minus mind/mental, the comprehensive understanding of health becomes just a hole or a part.



Source: Critical Thinking: Educating Competent Citizens – Elesapiens' Blog

5

AN INQUIRY INTO THE SOCIAL ECONOMY OF MENTAL HEALTH

Nowadays numerous researches are carried out not only by the specialists in medical sciences related to mental illness, but also others such as social scientists, educationists, and economists. Literature on mental health is growing as the number of affected people is also growing. Nonetheless, mental illness is to be viewed through the prism of multi-dimensional perspective because it encompasses psychological, social, economic, and educational aspects. Since it is multiple in its horizons, its implications are ramifying. Mental illness should be construed as societal, not because of its intensity, veracity, magnitude, and severity, quite a vast number of people are getting into the web of mental illness both micro and macro levels.

For instance, the data worldwide on mental illness as of 2023 shows that general mental health disorder is estimated around 79 crores; those suffering under depression is 201 crores; 305 crores of people are affected by anxiety disorder. Studies shows that mental health problem kills 8,00,000 lakh people every year worldwide. And so, it is not just national, but also global. Those who are struggling and affected by mental disorder finds very difficult to manage the expenses every month towards treatment of their mental illness such as weekly counselling sessions, pharmacotherapy and medication totals to several thousands of rupees.

A recent study based on researchers of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and World Health Organization (WHO) highlights that owing to mental

illness “approximately 20.7% of households experienced a transition from a non-poor status to living poverty.” The study shows that in Tamil Nadu, there is a relatively higher percentage of patients seeking treatment for mental health disorder compared to the national average. In the State, 21.8% was the total burden of income loss compared to the national average of 10.4%.

Countrywide 59.5% and 32.4% of households experience catastrophic health expenditure due to expensive health-care for mental illness. Households are expected to spend around 18.1% of their monthly consumption expenditure on mental health care. At an average for the medical expenses such as surgery, hospitalization, transport, lodging, food and other miscellaneous totals to Rs.2,549/- in Tamil Nadu. The burden of income loss due to mental illness is 12.8% of the monthly consumption expenditure.

The burden of expenditure is higher in urban and more literate patients when compared to rural and semi-literate patients; and so, on a comparative basis it is an indication that mental health treatment is not accessible or affordable for all sections of society, regardless of location or education. In addition, the survey indicated that in India only 10-12% of individuals with mental health conditions were receiving appropriate treatment. The prevalence of common mental disorder in India is 5.3%, while the incidence of severe mental disorders is 0.6%. The treatment gap for mental

health disorder is high in India, with 82.4% of individuals with common mental disorders such as depression and 87.5% of individuals with severe mental disorders such as psychosis not receiving treatment.

The treatment gap is even higher for alcohol use disorder with 88% of individuals not receiving treatment, with 7 of every 100 individuals at high suicidal risk. Another important factor that surface is mental illnesses not only increase the risk of poverty but also impedes individual's ability to contribute labor the following day or to sustain employment possibilities. Poverty and hunger not only affect the physical body but also erodes the mental agility. We need to inter-face economic and social impact of mental illnesses on households, individuals and the sum total of number who have been affected by mental illnesses.

This I call as social-economy of mental health. Diagnosing the illness is to be left to the concerned experts, but the cause or the factors that trigger or prompts or push mental illness need to be brought within the purview so that mental illness could be understood and analyzed holistically, and certainly not in isolation or in compartments. Following the tragedy in Erwadi, Ramanathapuram, where 26 patients had been kept chained in a religious asylum were burnt to death, the Supreme Court ordered a national survey of mental health resources.

The survey conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare between May and July 2002, revealed shortage of mental health professionals, with a deficit of 77% for psychiatrists, 97% for clinical psychologists, and 90% for psychiatric social workers. The state of

mental hospitals was not satisfactory. Though we have National mental Health Policy 2014 and the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, nothing substantive has been achieved. There should be more serious efforts and measures be taken up in terms of addressing the mental health problems right from diagnosis, rehabilitation, and monitoring.

More allocation of funds be made from the state governments as well as Centre since it involves more money which the poor and the vulnerable cannot afford. Private and public participation be encouraged. At the same it should be borne in mind that we need to take social and economic factors more seriously as these two categories are enjoined and inter-dependent, though mental illness affected everyone across the spectrums. In addition, religion also plays a major role as those who are ignorant of the causes of mental illness come out with different understanding attributing to possession of evil spirits or demonic works etc. etc. In such a situation a country filled with all sorts of belief systems, religious practices, superstitions, indigenous and cultic worships it takes time. All efforts such as creating awareness may be staunchly resisted.

More importantly mental health by all means has to be integrated within the overall health system in India. For a society to function or perform well its people of all ages including white or blue color workforce should be mental fit which plays the vital role and important part in determining the present and the future. Without wellness of mind/mental fitness, we cannot envision a sustainable society. Let us not forget that when we say 'wholeness' or 'holistic' it is mind, body, and soul. And so, we need to give equal importance to all these.



6

DROPOUTS OF STUDENTS FROM SUBALTERN CATEGORIES IN HIGHER LEVELS OF LEARNING

India is a caste-ridden and caste-driven society. Caste is the fulcrum of the Indian society that underpins each and every sector/facet of the country. Consequently, caste has also infiltrated into the education sector as well. It is a fact that education happened to be the prerogative of the ruling and elite class. Across the world a number of incidents and inferences can be drawn how education has deprived the subaltern categories. Over and above, the poor and the vulnerable sections have been made to believe by the ruling class that they have no right to go for education and higher levels of learning as they belong to menial and laboring subalternities.

The system of caste categorizes who is do what based on the caste they are born and what one should do. So, birth and occupation are enjoined and entwined and so accordingly one should workout the road map of education as well. Education even now use to be the prerogative of the dominant castes because those top-wigs in politics, law-enforcing bodies, teaching and learning communities belonging to the Brahmins, kshatriyas, Backward castes (BCs) who have the access to education in premier institutions.

As years and decades passed-by literacy (reading, writing, and arithmetic) gradually paved way for the subalterns to move up in the higher echelons of learning. Undoubtedly, BR Ambedkar's dictum 'Be Educated', Be organized, and 'Be Agitated' sparked the subalterns to go for education. Apart from BR Ambedkar, a few reformers and

educators who also pushed the subaltern communities to get educated, emphasizing that education is the key leading to transformation and liberation of the self and the world around them.

Notably, BR Ambedkar, is indeed a stunning and sterling example the ways with which he navigated to climb up to the top handling all odds equipping himself as an organic intellectual thereby becoming the architect of the Indian Constitution. He is undoubtedly a persona of par excellence who showed academic rigor expressing thoroughly total courage and deep commitment. He weaved through areas of study that excited him in scholarly and authentic ways. BR Ambedkar who unflinchingly believed that education alone enables a person to emancipate from all kinds of domestication.

Over decades there have been somewhat better scenario than earlier times in the literacy ratio of the SCs, STs, and Other Backward Castes (OBCs). These subaltern categories almost cover about two-thirds of the population, but their levels in literacy does not reflect to the percentage of population. If we take their educational profiles right from post-graduate and higher levels of professional qualifications the percentage is staggering and mind-boggling. Once caste is allowed to one's psyche till the death it lasts, and so, India, by and large, is corroded with caste psyche. Except a tiny percentage who go beyond caste discrimination and other prejudices, India has not changed in this regard. Indian society remains

very caste soaked and casteist manifestation. Caste remains the societal base and continues as the foundational principle of India.

In recent times we have witnessing SC, ST, OBCs students are dropping out of central universities, IITs, and IIMs. In the last few years, we have been hearing and reading that those students belonging to SCs and STs committing suicides in IITs across the country. The numbers of students who are dropping out of these premier institutions and institutions are not in tens and hundreds but running to thousand which cannot be ignored, but merits careful scrutiny. A total of 13,000 Other Backward Castes (OBCs), Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) students have dropped out of Central Universities, IITs, and IIMs in the past five years, according to the data shared by the Minister of State for Education Suhas Sarkar in the Lok Sabha recently.²⁶

Those belonging subaltern categories got their admissions in the most prestigious and premier institutions. Leaving those centers of learning abruptly not completing the program signals something drastically might have happened. Why did they drop out? What would have been the reasons? The reasons for dropping out involve migration are as follows: across institutions for preferred courses, financial constraints, academic challenges, caste discrimination, difficulties in communicating in English language and preference for job placements over pursuing academics.²⁷ If you look at the data, as many as 4,596

OBC, 2424 SC, and 2622 ST students dropped out of the central universities in the last five years.²⁸

A total of 2066 OBC, 1068 SC and 408 ST students dropped out from IITs, and 163, 188, and 91 OBC, SC and ST students dropped out from IIMs.²⁹ Adding further, "In the higher education sector, students have multiple options, and they choose to migrate across institutions and from one course/programme to another in the same institution,"³⁰ said Sarkar. Despite a number of incentives such as fee reduction, establishment of more institute, new scholarships, and priority access to national-level scholarships to help the students from historically disadvantaged groups to pursue their education, there are a couple of deeper aspects that deter the students from the subaltern to drop-out. Nonetheless, all these initiatives and sops would not help without fixing those deep-rooted causes.

Cosmetic treatment and peripheral expressions would hardly help those who find discriminatory practices and academic apartheid being expressed in covert and overt ways. Ramgopal Rao, former director, IIT Delhi says that most postgraduate students usually quit IITs because of attractive placement offers from public sector. Reiterating his point further, "Almost 90% usually drop out once they get job placements after joining MTech."³¹ Adding the reasons for the dropout of subalterns, Furqan Qamar, former vice chancellor. University of Rajasthan and Central University of Himachal Pradesh says:

²⁶ See for more details, See Sonal Srivastava, under the caption *Why SC, ST, OBC students are dropping out of central universities, IITs and IIMs*, in "Education Time", supplementary of "The Times of India, December 11th, 2023.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

Students perceive that Medicine and Engineering offer better career prospects. Several students drop out due to financial constraints too, besides the tuition fee, they may face difficulties in bearing the overall cost of living in cities. If they do not receive social endowments, they may find it difficult to pursue their course. It is equally important that students perceive equity and fairness among peer groups and in the way curriculum is transacted on campus.³²

Hailing from marginalized and ostracized communities though they get admitted in higher echelons of educational institutions and institutes, there are more to it. Opening the door to the subaltern groups is one way of responding to the, but it is not enough, and there is more to it. The above quotation amply demonstrates some of the aspects that ought to be taken into consideration. Educational institutions be it public or private, right from schools to higher levels of learning that includes IITs and IIMs are not devoid of caste discrimination and caste practices. As Sonal Srinivastva, rightly points out that “Students of historically disadvantaged groups face difficult social conditions and caste discrimination in society that may demotivate them from pursuing higher studies.”³³

On these lines, BJ Rao, Vice-chancellor, University of Hyderabad echoes, Academic institutions are constructs of society and they cannot be insulated from it. It is important to overcome these issues and move ahead, therefore, we should focus on helping students stay in the system and forge a mechanism to bring more students into the higher education fold. Many students from SC, ST, and OBC categories come from less privileged background and face language-related problems. At the University of Hyderabad, there are remedial programmes for English language proficiency and other subjects but most students who opt for these programmes,

are not able to continue. Their motivation to take remedial classes and overcome academic deficiencies needs a boost. There is little in the system to keep the students motivated as they face legacy issues. Students need role models they can emulate and mentors who can motivate them to overcome difficulties to succeed academically.³⁴

Adding one more reason along with the those said above points to the fact that “Support from the peer group and faculty could be the real game changer.”³⁵ Resonating similar view, Bhimaraya Metri, director IIM, Nagpur, elaborates that,

The problem is not restricted to one category of students, even meritorious students from the general category have weak areas that need to be addressed. IIM Nagpur offers customized mentoring from industry experts who offer e-mentoring throughout the year and in-person mentoring for at least two days on campus, under the Professional Management Programme (PMP). Mentors identify the capabilities of the students, which eventually helps in reducing dropouts.³⁶

On these lines, the fresh batch of students at IIT-Jammu did not perform well in exams, and the faculty decided to have a face-to-face talk with them. Then they came to know that many of the students were from rural area not proficient in English unable even to follow the lectures. Then the Institute held language proficiency exam, identified students who were weak in English starting remedial English classes. Based on the performance the entire group was divided into three categories (beginners, intermediate and advanced)—beginners (around 60%) who will be taught basic grammar and conversion; those in the advanced

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

category be in English literature.³⁷ A new initiative embarked by the Institute.

This issue was discussed at the IIT directors' forum at a conference – Pan-IIT World of Technology in toto gave their consensus. Many directors and deans expressed that extra measures were taken ensuring smooth transition for students. On these lines IIT-Jodhpur director Prof Santanu Chaudhury said:

There are diagnostic tests that will help understand the proficiency of students in the language. Once students walk into the campus, we provide them the test and then the necessary training, especially in listening and reading comprehension. During the first year, ... supplementary materials in Hindi ... video lectures ... give some portions of lab manuals and question appears in Hindi. The problem is that we can cater to only one or two such languages.³⁸

Academicians find faults with the ways the students are coached to crack JEE, the gateway to get into premier engineering institutions. According to K.N. Satyanarayana, director, IIT, Tirupati says that “Unlike the regular school where the children are made to learn languages, the coaching centres merely concentrate on the ability to crack the Physics, Chemistry and Maths problems.”³⁹ In addition to these institutes such as IIT-Tirupati holds a two-credit compulsory language course in the first semester. Students who are not proficient in English in a test will have to choose English. Other students

have the options of languages like German, Japanese, Spanish and Sanskrit.⁴⁰

Pointing to other deficiencies, Seshadri Sekhar, director of IIT-Palakkad said that “Students tend to think in their mother tongues and less of writing down notes, and not practising speaking in English means the skills suffer.”⁴¹ Adding further, “Another reason could be due to the SMS language culture. The present generation is more used to communicating by short messages and emotions ... casual talk means scientific writing skills are affected more than speaking skills, relatively.”⁴² The director of IIT-Bilai, Rajiv Prakash pointed out that the language problem was faced mainly by students who did not have English in class 12 and so, “We conduct a screening at college and provide extra help to them.”⁴³

With all the support-systems and other sops, caste and its practices continue to hinder the students from subaltern communities to successfully complete in the higher educational levels. Only those from dominant caste categories enjoy the fruits of higher education offered in the prestigious and premier institutions and institutes. Unless and until Indian society overcomes caste prejudices and discrimination, initiatives taken would end as superficial and cosmetic.

³⁷ See “The Times of India”, December 15, 2023, p. 13.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

7

CJI EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER SUICIDES OF DALIT AND ADAVASI STUDENTS IN IITs

Prime Minister Narendra Modi while interacting with the Indian community in Shanghai (China) and Seoul (South Korea) commented that Indians who were born prior to BJP-led NDA in 2014 should be ashamed of being born in India. If this is so, what response should the Dalits and Adivasis offer when discrimination in forms perpetuated against them even today. For hundreds of years, they have been living and leading sub-human existence. Even now the Dalits and Tribals are undergoing all sorts of humiliation and discrimination in a caste-ridden Indian society. An incident that must have shaken those who have conscience. On the 14th September, 2020, a 19-year-old Dalit young girl was gang raped in Hathras District, Uttar Pradesh by four men who belong to dominant caste. She was cremated without the presence of her parents.

Caste is a scourge. Even in 2023, in India we have caste atrocities and caste practices. Caste is the foundational schema for the Indian society to run. Caste has permeated into all segments – socio-economic, politico-cultural, and religio-educational. Be it Congress-led or BJP-led, Dalits and Tribals have been treated not as equals. Everyday we come across violence unleashed against the Dalits and Adivasis. And yet their contributions to progress, prosperity, and development of the country have been stupendous. Take for instance, the indices that fall within the socio-economic, educational rubric, the Dalits and the Tribals fall far behind. The prime reason for Dalits and Tribals not

climbing the indices is caste and casteism.

Corroded casteist mind-set do not want the Dalits and Tribals to climb up the educational ladder. As BR Ambedkar rightly urged the vulnerable communities such as Dalits and Tribals to '*educate*'. With great difficulty those Dalits and Tribals enter into IITs, the most prestigious and highly sought after institutes spread across the country, the corroded mind-sets ridicule them: 'quota', 'free-ship', 'non-merit' with similar casteist slurs. Even the administration and the faculty by and large is composed of those who hail from dominant caste background. And so, unable to secure coping mechanisms they eventually push them to commit suicides. Students belonging to Dalit and Tribal categories in IITs have become new normal. The administration, faculty and other paraphernalia connected belong to dominant castes and so somehow cleverly hush-up this matter.

Caste is a scourge. Caste has corroded the mind-set of Indians. It is prevalent even amongst the young millennials. Since caste offers them power, status, privilege and many others they tend to enjoy and want to perpetuate. Accordingly, they also do not want the Dalits and Tribals to enter into higher levels of education. Having understood the growing menace of suicides committed by Dalits and Tribals which has now eventually become one of the imminent social problems, and so, the Chief Justice of India Chandrachud said on the 11th March, 2023, that he was

disturbed by incidents of students from marginalized communities taking the lives in top institutions, and that there was a pattern in Dalit and Adivasi students dying by suicide that should be questioned. The CJI added that the time had come to have a model of education that had empathy at its core rather than excellence. Talking about the suicides of a Dalit student at IIT, Bombay and a tribal student at NLU Odisha, he said: “These numbers are not just statistics. These are stories sometimes of centuries of struggle. I believe that if we wish to address the issue, the first step is to acknowledge and recognize the problem.” Expressing anguish at the loss of lives of first-generation students who it to these institutions after centuries of suppression of their communities, the CJI said: “My heart goes out to the family members of these students. But I also have been wondering where our institutions are going wrong.”

Sukhadeo Thorat, former UGC chairperson and one of the noted educationists in the country said that “If almost all those who have died by suicide in particular situations are Dalits and Adivasis, then it shows a pattern which we must question”. He also added that “When students leave their homes, it becomes the responsibility of educational institutions to establish a bond of institutional friendship with them. Excellence cannot go without empathy.” In tune to it, the CJI said there is too much focus on creating “institutions of eminence”, adding further, “We need institutions of empathy I think the issue of discrimination is directly linked with lack of empathy in indentations. Judges cannot shy away from social realities.”

As I was about to complete this write up, a third-year BTech student of IIT-Madras died by suicide on 14th March, 2023, which is second in a month. The

20-year-old student of the electrical engineering department, son of a bus conductor, who hailed from Andhra Pradesh, was found hanging in his hostel room by his room-mate, the police said. A preliminary probe indicated that the deceased may have had issues on “focusing on his studies and completing his academic tasks”, a police officer investigating the matter said. Only after completion of the probe and autopsy can lead to fresh detailing. This incident comes within a month wherein a post-graduate student of engineering at IIT-Madras died by suicide on February 14th, 2023. Another view that emerged was that the challenges posed by post-Covid environment.

The Brahminic hegemonic casteist schema would never allow according to them the ‘Untouchables’ and ‘Vanachals’ to enter into higher levels of education. The so-called ‘new millennials’ continue to echo and follow the same casteist schema. They do not want get rid of casteist mind-set because they enjoy all the privileges and want more and more. And so, the casteist mind-sets keep chanting all sorts of things that mentally disturbs the Dalits and the Adivasis. CJI Chandrachud rightly pointed and astutely observed that these institutions need to go beyond from ‘excellence’ to ‘empathy’. Dalits and Tribals have been perpetually and for centuries have been negated the due rights to the Dalits and Adivasis. Unable to digest the entry of the Dalits and Tribals into these institutions that have been monopolized all these years, the casteist mind-set use diverse strategies that will push vulnerable categories to end their lives.

CJI Chandrachud’s intervention on the suicidal deaths of Dalits’ and Adivasis’ @ IITs is timely and hope enlivening. Internal inquiry and statements of police may not hold any objectivity, unless and

8

STUPEFYING: DEATHS OF DALIT AND TRIBAL STUDENTS IN STATE-RUN INSTITUTIONS

BR Ambedkar knew very well that those historically discriminated subaltern categories namely Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs) should be shown affirmative action leading to privileges to come on par with other dominant caste categories. In tune to it, BR Ambedkar candidly expressed their concerns as part of the Constitution and thus made those provisions mandatory. More importantly, SCs and STs are given special privileges in education and employment by virtue of being considered as historically discriminated communities.

BR Ambedkar was indeed prophetic. If not for his forethought and if not for writing those in the Constitution the plight of the subaltern communities would have been much worse. Their enrolment in schools, collegiate, and professional courses are abysmally poor as compared to population-wise and other indices when compared with other dominant castes categories. Precisely because of these reasons BR Ambedkar categorically worked out these privileges so that the subaltern could climb up in the rigid hierarchical caste schema.

Paradoxically even in 2023 the SCs and STs continue to be lagging behind in all aspects of profiles and parameters. How can they be expected to do well and be better off in education as they have no access and are negated from all kinds of

basic needs and necessities. A data recently published by a panel that ascertained the status of Dalit and Tribal students in the state-run institutions show an appalling state of affairs of the Dalits and the Tribals. The Scheduled Castes and Tribes' Welfare Committee of the State Legislature of Karnataka has revealed that 92 students of Karnataka Residential Educational Institutions Society (KREIS) schools and colleges died over the past five years, many of them under mysterious circumstances.⁴⁴

As per the data, "Of the 92 students, 29 died by suicide, while some met mysterious ends while enroute to their homes. KREIS are run by the state social welfare department."⁴⁵ The committee presented its report for 2023-24 in the assembly and stressed the need for a thorough investigation into this death. The committee also recommended that the government should take stock of the investigations conducted by the directorate of civil rights enforcement.⁴⁶ The committee was forthright and said that "If no investigation is carried out, the government must initiate action as per law."⁴⁷ In its recommendations it emphasized counselling sessions for students, parents, and teachers to deter suicides.⁴⁸

The report also pointed out that significant financial investment to be made to develop SCs and STs, nothing that a substantial Rs.2.5 lakh crore has

⁴⁴ For more details, See "The Times of India", December 7th 2023, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

been spent under the Karnataka STs Sub Plan and ST Sub-Plan (Planning, Allocation, and Utilization of Financial Resources) Act since 2013. The Act mandates allocation of 24.5% of the state's budgetary allotment for the development of SCs and STs.⁴⁹ However, it calls for judicious and efficacious spending to the purposes to which the funds have been allocated. And so, it has been suggested that some mechanisms will have to be evolved to ensure that SC and ST students be benefitted.⁵⁰

The committee stressed the need for careful scrutiny and thus evolve broader framework and a system for proper utilization and evaluation of funds meant for the development of marginalized and ostracized communities. Towards this end, the government is likely to withdraw the contentious 'deemed expenditure' clause from Karnataka SC Sub-Plan and ST Sub-Plan (KSCSPTSP). The government is also contemplating scaping Section 7D, a key demand of various Dalit organizations and movements such as Dalit Sangharsha Samiti (DSS).⁵¹

Towards this end, Section 7 (D) of KSCSPTSP (Planning allocation and utilization of financial resources) Act, 2013, allowed funds to be used –in

exceptional cases—for work that cannot be divided. It was called 'deemed expenditure'⁵². This is a clear deviation from the earlier BJP government as it used to divert a substantial amount—estimated at about Rs. 10,000 crores in the last fiscal alone—from department such as public works, revenue and others towards deemed expenditures. Sources say over the past five years, approximately about Rs. 25,000 crore may have been diverted to other departments.⁵³

Many view that “Scrapping the clause could lead to significant cost savings, which could be redirected for the welfare of SC and ST communities. But officials said funds saved will be redirected to fulfil poll guarantees, including for SC and ST beneficiaries.”⁵⁴ However, “Under clause 7C of KSCSPTSP, Rs. 11,000 crore has already been allocated for various poll guarantees. The decision of the cabinet is keenly awaited as it could impact allocations for marginalized communities.”⁵⁵ More than economic factor there are social, psychological, emotional and others play as young scholars from the subaltern communities pursue their education. The governments of the day should get indulged in pro-active initiatives so that SCs and STs will move to higher levels of learning.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

2

A LOSIDED WORLD: PROPELLED BY RECKLESS CRONY CAPITALISM

The world we live is increasingly becoming 'the survival of the fittest'. In a world of cut-throat competition filled with greed and accumulation, means and ends hardly matters. Barring a few, many do not care about 'means', but are concerned the 'ends' that should multiply. Every year the world adds more millionaires and billionaires. In such a bizarre world every year as it dawns those so-called wealth creators, those in the governments regulating finance and others assemble under the banner of "World Economic Forum" to discuss about the global economic order and the problems that confronts the world at large.

The world is creating wealth and food more than is need for all to consume three times a day, and live better, but in reality, there are many who live in abject poverty and thus exist amidst hunger. Inequality within and between nations is growing at alarming levels. At the same time every year we see disproportionate growth of the millionaires and billionaires. Mukesh Ambani is on the list of top five billionaires in the world. Along with his name we see Adani who is rising on the top of the list of billionaires. At the same time, an estimated 24.8 crore Indians may have moved out of multi-dimensional poverty in the past nine years, With UP and Bihar recording the biggest improvement, according to the recent Niti Aayog official report.

Multidimensional poverty is calculated on the basis of 12 parameters including

health, education, housing, material health and bank accounts. Based on these parameters, it seemed to have reduced to 11.3% in 2022-23 from 2019-21 and 29.2% in 2013-14 based on the discussion paper by Niti Aayog member Ramesh Chand and senior advisor Yogesh Suri. So, it is hoped that by 2030 multidimensional poverty be reduced to half. However, more than half of the global population liv under squalid conditions, unemployment, hunger, poverty, housing, education, quality life, and basic amenities are the reality on the ground across the world.

The assemblage of crony capitalists, those representing some of the nation-states, CEOs, and business entrepreneurs who have defrauded the nations and shareholders have attained 'celebrity' status with a series of shows using all kinds of dubious ways meet at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Davos has become an annual feature of these crooks to meet and show to the world they are the drivers of economic engine in the world. Their duplicity we have seen how they pushed their vaccines during coronavirus and how much profits these big oligopolies made during COVID-19 period. For instance, the ways with which Bill Gates and Pfizer CEO got exposed in their interviews. There are many vaccine manufacturers who accrued huge profits by ways of dubious efficacies and narratives pushing their products.

The governments of the countries these vaccine and pharmaceutical companies

originate and the regulatory bodies are hand-in-glove and so the global pharmaceutical corporations and the governments colluded together pushed these vaccines in huge quantities—to the tune of billions of vaccine doses. The global monopolies involved in the manufacturing of vaccines used COVID-19. Those who control agribusiness, pharmaceuticals, technologies such as Google, Apple, Microsoft, and other involved in AI figures in top 100 companies that have in billions. For example, Elon Musk's current wealth of about \$230 billion could soon like tiny.

This is due to the fact that he could become first trillionaire in a decade, says UK-based non-profit Oxfam. At the same time Oxfam observes that ending poverty – the target for which is 2030 under the UN Sustainable Development Goals – may not be possible for another 229 years. Former Cuban president Fidel Castro said that while presenting its blue print at the UN at the turn of this century said: “Unless global poverty is erased, the future will be apocalyptic.” It is prophetic if we observe those crony capitalists the ways in which they are generated wealth. Oxfam notes that “Runaway inflation across the world has destabilized governments and pushed people to desperations, but if there's one thing that's grown faster than prices of bare necessities it is the wealth of the ultra-rich.”

Oxfam says that the “supercharged surge” enjoyed by the wealthy in the last three years has meant that billionaires are \$3.3 trillion richer than in 2020, their wealth growing three times faster than the rate of inflation.” Meanwhile, global poverty remains mired at pre-pandemic levels. Adding further, Oxfam said: “Runaway corporate and monopoly power is an inequality-generating machine: through squeezing workers, dodging tax, privatizing the state, and

spurring climate breakdown, corporations are funneling endless wealth to their ultra-rich owners. But they're also funneling power, undermining our democracies and our rights.”

The global rich only a fifth of global population residing in the Global North own 69% o the global wealth. Concentration of wealth is aided by monopolies created by the wealthiest people and the largest corporation—Google to Amazon and Benard Arnault-owned luxury goods giant LVMH to Africa's richest person Aliko Dangote. All these become evident that monopolies are everywhere. Oxfam's International Interim executive direction Amitabh Behar said that “Monopolies harm innovation and crush workers and smaller businesses”. He added that “Governments must intervene to break up monopolies,” pointing to actions like the US anti-monopoly suit against Amazon and the European Commission's probe against Google's online advertising business.” Oxfam says people worldwide are “working harder and longer hours ... The wages of nearly 800 million workers have failed to keep up with inflation and they have lost \$1.5 trillion over the last two years.” It would take 1,200 years for a woman in the health and social sector to earn what an average CEO of a top-100 Fortune company earns in a year.” It also points out that “the quality of work and quantum of wages have declined for workers at the lower rungs.” Continuing further, it suggests that the effective corporate tax rate has fallen by “roughly a third in recent decades” even as privatization is fast becoming the order of the day. A wealth tax on the world's millionaires and billionaires could generate \$1.8 trillion a year; it estimates. ED and other regulatory authorities are selective in their pick. Longer the scams, the higher the activity, and so, one can

assume the backing of high-level political involvement.

The scams in India are as deep as an ocean. The deeper one dives the darker it gets—a bigger fish. A glimpse at the layers of tax-paying would reveal how the tax-brackets furthers those who are already rich. Suhana Khan, bought three houses for Rs. 12.91 crores to save taxes as an agriculturalist owned by Sharu Khan's sister-in-law and mother-in-law. Alia Bhatt bought an apartment for 37.8 crores under the name of her production house for a tax relief of 25 percent due to her company and one percent which she availed as a female buyer under the scheme of Maharashtra. KL Rahul and Athya Shetty received gifts worth 55 crores as wedding gifts

but paid zero tax since marriage gifts not taxable. BCCI made Rs. 24,195 from selling IPL rights, but paid zero taxes as it is a charitable organization.

Today 670 million poorest Indians pay 64% of the total tax which is about Rs. 14.83 lakh crore in 2022. The middle class contributes 33% of the tax; the lower middle class pays six times more indirect taxes than the richest; the top 10% own 77% of the nation's wealth worth \$660 billion but pays only 3% tax. This is India which is no different than others countries sleazing and squeezing the sweat and labor of the poor and the lower-middle class. The world we live is for the rich and super-rich and they decide the lives of the weak, poor, and vulnerable.



10

THE REASONS FOR DROPPING OUT IN CLASS X! WHY AND FOR WHAT?

COVID 2019-21 and immediate post-COVID periods show that there have been significant dropouts in all classes and so the respective state governments accordingly promoted the learners to next levels because many learners could not attend the classes and take exams. However, it is strange that why in 2023, we see a huge percent of learners are getting dropped out of class that too in class X, which is the gateway for future educational and employment prospects.

The concerned minister for education of the Central government in the Lok Sabha on the 18th of December, 2023, said that “Dropout rate in Class X in India stood at 20.6% as of 2021-22 as compared with 28.4% in 2018-19, with Odisha as the worst performing state with a rate of 49.9%, followed by Bihar (42.9%), among the ten states where dropout rate is more than the national average.”⁵⁶

Responding to the queries from DMK MP Kalanidhi Veeraswamy, Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan stated that 1,89,90,809 students appeared for Class X examination in 2022, of which 29,56,138 students failed to progress to Class XI.⁵⁷ In his explanation he said:

Reasons for failure of students in exams depends on various factors – not attending schools, lack of interest in studies, level of difficulty of question paper, lack of

quality teachers and lack of support from parents, teachers and schools. Further education is in concurrent list of the Constitution and majority of the schools are under the domain of respective states and UT governments.⁵⁸

Along with the above, the Union ministry of education shared the details of statewide dropout rate at Class X for the last four years (2018-19 to 2021-22). Apart from Odisha and Bihar; the other states with high dropouts are Meghalaya (33.5%), Karnataka (28.5%), Andhra Pradesh and Assam with 28.3% each, Gujarat (28.2%), and Telangana (27.4%).⁵⁹ While Assam has shown marked improvement in the last four years from 44% to 28.3%, Odisha witnessed a negative trend from 12.8% to 49.9% in the same period.⁶⁰ The states with dropout rate less than 10% include Uttar Pradesh (9.2%), Tripura (3.8%), Tamil Nadu (9%), Madhya Pradesh (9.8%), Himachal Pradesh (2.5%), Haryana (7.4%), and Delhi (1.3%), Maharashtra record no dropout.⁶¹

In a lighter note, six states and UTs namely Bihar, NCT of Delhi, Kerala, Odisha, Tamil Naud and Est Bengal have not signed the MoU with the central government yet, whereas Punjab has proposed to withdraw from the MoU that was originally signed for PM SHRI school scheme. So far 29 States/UTs along the KVS/NV Shave signed the

⁵⁶ See “The Times of India”, December 19, 2023.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

MoU.⁶² In response to queries such why many states did not sign MoU, Annapurna Devi MoS for education said the cabinet has approved a new centrally sponsored scheme – Pradhan Mantri Schools for Rising India in September, 2022 that “These schools are to showcase the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020 and emerge as exemplar schools over a period of time, and also offer leadership to other schools in the neighborhood.”⁶³

Above data is conveying a dismal scenario of the nation at large. According to The Time of India in its view said that,

It is heartening that the drop-out rate of students has dipped in the past five years. But the current national average of 20.6% is far from acceptable and must be brought down. The larger point is that drop-out rates are also linked to poverty, health and gender. If these social progress indicators improve, drop-out rates will automatically decrease. This apart, states with alarming drop-out rates such as Odisha and Bihar should carefully look into the data, investigate the reasons and work in mission mode to improve the situation.⁶⁴

On the whole, the scenario is not that bright and not at all satisfactory. We may say about nation’s future and points to where the country is heading and

moving towards, but what really fail to see that how education will make the country strong and vibrant. Therefore, education is the base for everything. Even if we want democracy to work or function or to be precise only education and educated populace will make democracy to work and function well and also will bring about to moderate the governance and government as functional entities. Hence, this segment that dropped out comes from subaltern categories who should be asked to continue, and therefore needs our attention.

The state governments and the government at the Centre should take seriously the reasons for the learners dropping out from schools. Accordingly, they should be given utmost attention by carefully looking into the lacunas and fixing those, so that they be provided opportunities to get educated. The data conveys more to it what it appears on the surface, wherein the state governments should intervene and objectively respond to some of the grey areas that inhibits those who resort for dropping out.



⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

11

STUDENTS' FUTURE: 'DEPENDENT ON GRADES' OR CAN GO BEYOND EXAM ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS

In one of the weekly columns that appeared some time ago in "The Times of India" with a caption "mindfiled: Short Takes on Big Ideas" entitled *How Not to Mark A Student's Future* starts with the following: "Marks and rankings are the currency of education and advancement, But they are flawed and unfair assessment according to Jack Schneider and Ethan L Hutt in *Off the Mark: How Grades, Ratings, and Rankings Undermine Learning (but Don't Have To)* is set in the United States, but analyses this global dilemma."

They raise the following questions that grips the educators and educationists across the globe. "Why do we need tests and grades? To motivate learners, to succinctly record their abilities, communicate these to other institutions, and signal to employers." The authors come out with mindboggling responses: "But they don't work that way; grades goad students, but not their learning. Students don't waste time on anything they won't be tested. Grading skews incentives, as students cheat or game the system. Marks also sharpen inequalities. The strongest predator of mark is a student's family and neighborhood; affluent parents exert more pressure and provide more support."

Long ago Ivan Illich in his seminar work entitled *De-schooling Society* echoed similar views that critiques the role and practices of education in the modern world. The authors push their arguments in this way: "Then comes the standardized test, first devised in 19th

century America for a uniform diagnosis of varied student populations. Unfortunately, they have been used as snapshots of ability that become lasting portraits of inequality. The test-takers did not ask whether the content of the test measured biological intelligence or social opportunities. The standardized test became educational destiny."

Exams, gradings, and assessment systems are based on uniform and standardized ways of assessing all irrespective of the socio-economic backgrounds. The destiny of students' is wholly dependent on the grades secured and thus determines their future. Pushing their arguments and standpoints further, the authors unfold "But what blanket critiques of standardized tests mis is that they are not all the same. 'Norm reference' tests, meant to place a student in a particular distribution, can identify those who are very advanced and those who need special assistance. Meanwhile, 'criterion-reference' tests are used to check if a student has reached a particular standard."

In pushing education that ought to be for all especially for the weak and the vulnerable by pushing their arguments still further say that "This targeted assistance for identified weaknesses can make all the difference to students and can be a tool of educational equity. If someone is nearsighted, then they are not told they have a permanent deficiency, they are prescribed glasses. It's when a result is treated as the end of the story, rather than the impetus for intervention, that there's a problem."

The authors beautifully diagnose the problems that the current education system pose. The grades that are secured determine the future and destiny of many. However, the grades do not represent the whole of the learners, but just a part.

In such a setting the authors say that “School is supposed to be the great equalizer of social opportunity, but it doesn’t work that way. Standardized tests do take away the high-stakes pressure of school grades, but both are correlated with socioeconomic status. But then again, so are student essays, for which they often rely on their networks. Recommendation letters can be hard to parse, a mess of adjective and writing styles. There is no easy fix for fairness, the only way is to use nuanced judgments, knowing that those useful tools can also be weapons.” Usually, the judgements that the teachers make at the subjective and peripheral levels using power and authority that enjoins a number of superficial and reductionistic levels.

Notion of education though abstract at the conceptual becomes real when it is translated and de-coded right from syllabi, curricula, pedagogy and school. Education per se becomes real when all these paraphernalia enjoined as part and parcel of learning. Expounding more to it, the authors view that “The predicament of marking and testing is a wicked problem, the whole world struggles with similar frustrations. Countries experiment with different elements and weights. Zambia assesses students with 75% on national exams

and 25% on school grades. New Zealand measures progress in secondary school through a pass-fail system, not grades, reducing both competition and gaming.”

Different countries those that are serious to finding and fixing the lacunas experimenting at different levels. However, there still seems to be gap while assessing learners’ output. This is why many institutions across the world are experimenting on objectives, in-puts and pedagogical process. This is the dilemma even those imparting in higher educational levels. For instance, the authors point that “At higher levels, it adds distinctions for merit and excellence, to let students compete. Singapore has recently flattened its ranking systems, after deciding it was unhealthy. Another way is to peg tests to practice, for instance, instead of multiple-choice questions for history, it makes sense to do what historians do, piece fragments from the archive to offer and interpretation of the past.”

In sum, the authors in their book conveys that “we need to go beyond the usual either/or framing about marks and exams. We need to look at the specific uses of each tool, and within the context of broader goals. We need to recalibrate rather than reinvent.” Education is all about imparting skills and critical awareness which in turn augment to know about them and the world around the learners. When the authors say that we need to re-calibrate means to correct or adjust gradation or re-examining one’s values and thinking and accordingly evolve a set of values based on new understanding and purpose.



12

AI AND US: WILL THE PROCESS LEAD TO DIRE STRAITS OR ENHANCING?

In recent times one of the most critical questions that are widely raised across the spectrum—the politicians, academics, technologists, ethicists, and futurologists is: Are these machines in the nearby future take over humans? Development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and parallel development of synthesis in almost all spheres keep astounding us the way with AI and its allied development processes and its applications are spearheading. Over and above, the development of AI and its advancement particularly AI's relationship has led to all kinds of questions—from different walks pose who are supportive or on the opposite of the fence.

The reason being AI has pushed us to think whether we did the right thing getting into research on AI and pushing the research further. At the same time there are some who view that invention of AI is indeed one of the most crucial and significant innovations that has happened in the human history which would play the most vital part in human life and its future. The fear is that whether AI take over the human wisdom and, in the process, start dominating humans? It does not end there the questions keep multiplying further and farther.

Everyday we come across new developments keep happening in technology vis-à-vis Artificial Intelligence. However, as humans, we add on and contribute to more innovations and fabulous synthesis in its

manifestations and applications, we are also adding to new risks. More innovation especially in the field of AI, we are also adding to colossal risk-factors. A simple logic those on a positive note say that 'humans create, and therefore, we have the ability to control'. What is there to worry, the creators of technology will have and do have the ability to control because AI is a human product and obviously has the capacity to control.

AI is a game-changing technological innovation. Human nature is to innovate and keep moving on in developing new things and entering into unexplored terrains. This trajectory we cannot ignore, rather we cannot escape. If we go back one of the spearheading innovations is undoubtedly aircraft that goes up more than 40,000 feet with a speed more than 1000 kms. And in that the most important component is called as 'black box' that tracks and records everything. It tracks and thus records accordingly in such precision. Without risks there are no benefits. These facts are wildly held by us and accept them as bases of life.

With all these, there is a fear that AI could control human autonomy and, in the process, tend to push us into a rollercoaster. It is a fact and a factor that AI's explosion is phenomenal. The ways in which AI is making strides pushes us into fixation. We are as of now practical and in the near-term we will be enmeshed with issues that would be mind-boggling. We should reckon with a

fact that AI intelligence is transformative. AI has taken us to 'beyond-ness' – both in knowledge and applications. Therefore, we cannot brush AI aside because it is there and live, and so, we need to understand and go for more clarification in terms of AI's content and at the same time not forgetting the process and the context.

AI is adding everyday new chats leading to texts, music, virtual arts and host of others. AI acts on the data that we feed-in, therefore, cannot be equated with consciousness. AI also manifests empathy towards other AI. AI is creative and authentic and capable of many other things as well such as planning, programming, and executing. It is everyone's understanding that new technology tends to bring-in new challenges. One of the major challenges could perhaps be threats for future nation-states.

We have been witnessing empire-building and expansionism continuously happening across the world. In years to come, AI could become the most powerful weapon of those nation-states who have military and financial power and authority in the multilateral global organizations. Though the supporters of AI eulogize that in 30-50 years its ability to add more food and in the process eradicate hunger and poverty; enhance health facility and agricultural production. Through its processes, AI would effectively bring-in efficient food which in turn would benefit all. It would reduce cost of health and everyone will have access to education.

Efficiency and productivity will add to boom which in turn spill down to everyone. Those with skills will enjoy the boom that AI would create. Others who are unskilled and semi-skilled numbering in billions might probably fallback and face the brink and doom.

AI as it unfolds and take the domination of all segments and sectors of human activities such as doctors, journalists, lawyers, financiers, teachers, and many others. If most of the human activities is taken out or considered as redundant or even wiped out in the changing scenario, what would most of the populace would do which by all means could perhaps be 9-10 billion.

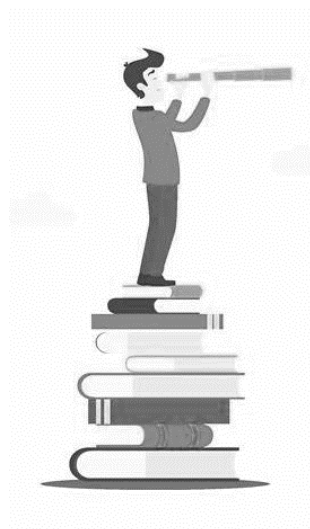
The supporters of AI say those professionals who have tools that AI has enhanced be the beneficiaries. Those endowed with skills can maneuver and navigate. Those falling outside AI's ambit being considered as useless and non-productive will be left out and eventually be phased-out. AI era according to the proponents seem to be transformative, but in the process of transformation process there are a few winners, and many losers. Many hardly visualize their energy and creativity would be burnt out. Governance and politics could easily be manipulated to suit their narratives leading to collapse of governance. The state actors eventually become powerful and thus throttle the rights of the non-state actors. It is likely to mitigate extinction of many humans, which should be taken seriously—as a global priority.

AI is positing the best and the worst scenarios. New challenges that entail misinformation and new forms of authoritarianism would emerge. AI would enter into the private domains of the citizens. There are possibilities for AI promoting biological and chemical weapons. And so, there are many risk factors. Whether AI would promote accountability in governance because the new generation under AI influence is hybrid and idealistic. Humans have been idealistic and visionaries, but in the name of 'idealism'

AI should not be allowed to subvert human agency of the power to bring AI under control. A set of criteria should be evolved on the lines of transparency, accountability, and relational-responsibility. AI pose innumerable questions and issues which should not deter human will and resolve. Humans despite the fact live and face chaos, catastrophe, and anarchy engaged in constructive future and so AI need not be demonized. Along with AI we will have to work with state-power and ideology. Humans per se have cruised through conflicts and wars and navigated

multiple hurdles that came in their ways such as nuclear arsenals and countered it wisely by moderating nuclear proliferation.

Given the challenges I'm reminded of Stephen Hawking, a renowned Astrophysicist responding on AI to a magazine said that, "I fear that AI may replace humans altogether. If people design computer viruses, someone will design AI that improves and replicates itself. This will be a new form of life that outperforms humans."



Source: <https://www.innervate.in/>

SORRY STATE OF AFFAIRS: INDIA'S LEARNING AND PEDAGOGIC PROCESS

Coaching culture ... doing much harm especially
at the secondary school level, replacing valuable time for true
learning with excessive exam coaching and preparation
NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

India is still rural made up of villages as majority of its population live and thus engaged in agriculture. When it comes to education urban India relatively seem to be doing much better than the rural. At the same time while working out the national aggregate both the domains need to be brought together. Nonetheless, “Nearly 43% of children in the 14-18 age group in rural cannot read sentences in English, while 25% struggle to read a Class 2 level text in their respective regional language, shows the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2023.”⁶⁵ Elaborating on this, “More than half of the children struggle with even simple division, something they are expected to have mastered in Class 3 or 4.”⁶⁶

When it comes to subjects/disciplines, “The figure on reading English, in fact, is an improvement compared to 2017, when 47% of students were found to be faltering. Of those who could read sentences in English, almost three-fourths could get the meaning (73.5%) compared with 53% in 2017. The data comes the report published by Pratham Foundation is based on a survey conducted in 28 districts across 26 states, reaching out to 34,745 children in the 14-18 age group. One rural district was surveyed in each major state with

the exception of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, where two such districts were surveyed.⁶⁷

Interestingly, the survey found that 90.5% of the teenagers in this age group said they had used social media in the reference week, with a slightly higher proportion of males (93.4%) than females (87.8%). However, it observed that “of all youths who used social media, only about half are familiar with online safety settings that were included in the survey.”⁶⁸ The children were surveyed on four points—basic reading, mathematics, and English abilities; application of basic skills to everyday calculations; reading and understanding written instructions; and real-life financial calculations.⁶⁹

Apparently, ASER 2023 data from the sampled districts showed that 45% of youths in the surveyed group have basic arithmetic proficiency. But the report emphasized that “The rest need to ‘catch up’. Low levels of foundational numeracy affect the ability of youth in tackling everyday calculations where they need to apply measurement or use the unitary method in practical situations, or even do simple financial computations (managing a budget, applying a discount or calculating

⁶⁵ For more details, See “The Times of India”, 18th January, 2024, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

interest rates or repayment of a loan.”⁷⁰ The report did bring out practical applications. The report clearly points out the learners’ applications in everyday life.

On these vis-à-vis practical applications the report elaborated that “On everyday calculations besides reading and understanding written instructions in daily life applications, the survey looked at whether a youth can measure length using a scale when the starting point is 0cm and then when the starting point is moved, and whether he/she can read and understand simple written instructions on ORS packets.”⁷¹ In addition the report found that “nearly 85% of surveyed youths can measure length using a scale when the starting point is 0cm but this drops sharply to 39% when the starting point is moved. This showed a decline as compared with 2017 when it was 86% and 40%. Males do better than females across all everyday calculations.”⁷² The report insists that learning in classrooms should enhance application capacities as the learners spend more time outside—in the world.

Moving further, “For nearly two decades, ASER reports have consistently pointed to deficiencies among children in elementary school with regard to foundational skills like reading and basic arithmetic. But this year’s focus on an older age group also points to a similar gap in learning outcomes at a higher level.”⁷³ Governments’ usually reply on ASER reports for formulating policies. The report stated that “Trends on basic learning have remained relatively unchanged over the last decade. Although the National Achievement

Survey (NAS) and ASER use different metrics and methods for assessing learning, both point to the fact that basic learning levels of elementary school children need significant improvement.”⁷⁴

Pedagogic process in India is not appropriate or conducive to the learners. Deliberating on it, Krishna Kumar a former Director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in the Editorial published in “The Hindu”, 14th of September, 2023, brings his observation with a metaphor that describes imagine a teacher who asks the classmates of her seven-year-old students to slap him one by one. Those who do so softly are asked to hit the boy harder. One is naturally curious to know where the teacher was trained. And, who appointed her as a teacher? The short answer is that the teacher is an educational entrepreneur like tens of thousands of other. She runs her own private school in a village of Uttar Pradesh. Like thousands of other schools like hers, it is recognised by the government. For now, it has been closed down because the incident caused a stir, and perhaps some embarrassment.⁷⁵

Krishna Kumar goes deep into the problem by probing into the teacher training. Since 1990s teacher training has become an economic activity of small-time entrepreneurs. Even the National council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has failed to enforce its norms. Even J.S. Verma Commission appointed by the Supreme Court of India in 2008 which was submitted in 2012 though offered some hope, but failed. However, the apex court in August, 2023, said that

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.9.

⁷¹ Ibid,

⁷² Bid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Krishna Kumar, *Mockery of pedagogic ethics, the breaking of a bond* in the Editorial of “The Hindu”, September, 14th, 2023.

“NCTE has not applied its mind while allowing Bachelor of Education (BED) degree holders to teach at the primary level – BED is traditionally associated with secondary education.⁷⁶ There have been numerous reports since independence but failed to spell out what could perhaps constitute appropriate professional conduct of those who serve as teachers.

Krishna Kumar brings in D.P. Chattopadhyaya, a philosopher of education in his commission submitted many decades ago is available now on the Internet. A summary of recommendations is available points out that how far school teaching India was from standards and ethics that one might regard as professional. He even opens up by saying that how far Internet helps those students facing an examination such as BED without attending classes.⁷⁷ One cannot dismiss his observations on the basis of having no relevance. The Chattopadhyaya report had advocated “a well-read, thoughtful teacher who is conscious of her decisions and action. That view found limited traction in the Indian system, especially in the bureaucracy governing it.”⁷⁸

Chattopadhyaya being a philosopher of education and as an educationist went deep into the problems, holes and gaps of our educational system. His observations are as follows:

The Chattopadhyaya report had advocated a well-read, thoughtful teacher who is conscious of her decisions and action. That view found limited traction in the Indian system, especially in the bureaucracy governing it. It continued to regard the teacher as a minor functionary. During the 1990s, the compulsions of structural adjustment led to the loss of what little dignity teachers of small

children had enjoyed. North Indian States had no problem opting to recruit teachers en masse on contractual or ad hoc basis under euphemistic titles. Reckless privatisation implied that market laws should prevail in deciding emoluments. Enrolment grew, but there was no lasting improvement in working conditions. Under the influence of the global policy adviser James Tooley, low-budget private schools multiplied, enabling State governments to merge their own smaller schools in the name of rationalisation.⁷⁹

The above quotation amply demonstrates that those who call themselves as teachers/ pedagogues having gone through training have by and large not lived up to the expectations. Krishna Kumar ends in the following ways: To substantiate, he invokes Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, former President of India and statesman whose birth date (September 5) we celebrate as Teachers’ Day reminds us that,

the nation gains little when it enfeebles the school teacher’s voice – individual and collective. It is not a fantasy that Dr. Radhakrishnan would have entertained. He taught in benign times, when institutions of higher learning enjoyed a modicum of freedom and teachers emerged from training colleges with a thorough or two about to how to look after children. Many still have that ability, and their heads will hang with exhaustion when they read about the Muzaffarnagar incident.⁸⁰

Krishna Kumar skilfully develops his arguments and thus weaves into an incident happened in a school located in Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, and coherently develops his arguments. He says in precise terms what he wanted to say. While concluding,

The administrative machinery in U.P. has shut down the school. The teacher, also the school head, made a mockery of

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

pedagogic ethics. The child who suffered her wild imagination will suffer the imprint of his experience. By separately assigning a day for teachers and another one for children, we seem to have forgotten that the two form a bond. No worthwhile education can take place when the bond breaks. The Muzaffarnagar teacher is reportedly not even sorry that she shattered the bond so wantonly. For her, the great advances of child psychology never took place. Nor would she care if told that Rabindranath Tagore and Gurbhaji Badheka – who created an Indian version of the Montessorian approach – had pleaded for adult kindness towards children.⁸¹

Pedagogic ethics seems to be one of the missing links in our system of education. Pedagogues will have to be sensitive and open to developing the trust with the learners. Krishna Kumar has candidly explained the importance of bonding between the teachers and the taught. The pedagogues will have to be couched with pedagogic ethics comprises of principles that are to be followed. The thread is very delicate and so the pedagogues should maintain moderation in the balancing act. Therefore, pedagogic ethics in its entirety revolves around ‘trust’ that the pedagogues will have to earn and certainly is not given.

In conjunction to the above, I came across a very short write-up entitled *Class Struggle: Too many exams, hence too much coaching* in the “Times of India” dated 20th of January, 2024, p. 20 is as follows:

It starts like this:

Union education ministry’s guidelines to regulate coaching centres will be seen as corrective but taken together, they’re simply band-aid. Here’s why.

Define it again? By existing rules, difference between coaching institutes and schools is the absence of

“counselling sports or creative activities” in the latter. New guidelines say coaching centres must organise classes for co-curricular activities for “holistic development”, mental wellbeing, etc. Where is then the differentiator from a school?

Necessary evil? NEP 2020, new India’s vision document for education, emphasises need to wean away from exam-led assessment, “resulting coaching culture ... and its harmful impact”. Given that, rules for “fair and responsible fees”, or putting an age-bar of 16 or saying classes should be beyond school hours can only trigger a black market of fee-deals, and stress students further by restricting age and time. Where are the measures towards removing coaching culture?

Exams galore: NEP speaks of “reform” in entrance exam systems “to eliminate need for coaching classes”. For that, number of exams must be slashed. More “fair and reasonable” - priced colleges are needed – especially government institutes, and scholarship based, not loans-led fee systems in private colleges. Government must know its pan-India online CUET has spawned more coaching centres.

Road to future: Coaching centres were once instrumental in helping students from non-privileged backgrounds “crack” entrance tests across strata. They set up shop and flourished in a competitive market created by gaps— poor schooling and a shortage of colleges and job opportunities. Desperate parents and hapless students still find in coaching centres’ “guarantees” the only jab at a future with an income – all entrance exams have coaching institutes as feeder agencies.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Rules such as minimum space per student, ventilation, lighting, drinking water, detail basic minimums. These are also a depressing recognition that

coaching centres are often sweatshops. Even a 16-year-old could have figured out all this.



All credibility, all good conscience, all evidence
of truth comes only from the senses
FRIEDRICH NIETZCHE

Political language ... is designed to make lies sound
truthful and murder respectable, and to give an
appearance of solidity to pure wind
--GEORGE ORWELL

14

DE-CODING SOCIAL JUSTICE: A CAUTIONARY NOTE

BR Ambedkar went beyond Rawlsian understanding of justice. For Rawl's justice means "whatever is due to a person"; whereas Ambedkar pitched 'social' before justice. Since India's social structure is premised on caste system BR Ambedkar had to bring-in 'social justice' which stands for liberty, equality, and fraternity of all human beings. He unequivocally voiced for a social system that is based on socially egalitarianism between humans and humans in all the spheres of life. For BR Ambedkar, 'social justice' is simply another name for liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Social justice is the soul of the Constitution and the spirit of the Indian democracy. Therefore, it is the bounden duty of the state to secure an order that offers dignity, equality, and fraternity. It further reiterates that that justice be dispensed to those who have been historically discriminated and socially ostracised and marginalized based on caste. Therefore, BR Ambedkar said: "social equilibria precede economic equilibria". The term 'social justice' is increasingly being used by the political class representing all shades of political parties. Therefore, 'social justice' as a political category abounds narrow and chauvinistic politics.

As a concept – philosophically, religiously, sociologically, or politically, 'social justice' sounds revolutionary and attractive, but when it is translated in real terms it gets diluted. Across the world those who have been the victims of diverse situations across particularly in India keep clamouring and demanding

for justice and those victims due to caste schema i.e., the Dalits and tribals clamours for social justice. Dispensation of social justice is the task of those who are at the helm of governments and in responsible positions. Social justice per se will have to be viewed as the duty of the political class, but gets mired by diverse forces that are at play.

Increasingly in India, 'social justice' when it comes to the delivery of it those dispensing agencies view often as a piecemeal by compartmentalising it leading to all kinds of conflicts and aberrations by those groups who look at it differently. What is happening now is the very term 'social justice' is being stretched and reshaped by the political parties and thus converted as a catchy term for welfare measures. 'Social justice' is the current parlance means a populist promise having lost its core meaning – equal access to all resources, education to health to mobility, jobs to justice and expression.

Social justice and economic justice should go hand in hand. Having been deprived of being born at the lower rungs of caste ladder they need to be uplifted offering pro-active programs and policies, so that the vulnerable and ostracised communities can come up in due course of time. Latest CMIE data showed that unemployment rate has climbed to its highest in the last two years more than the previous years; joblessness also increased in rural areas. Despite the appalling scenario, every political party offers quota as succour or

proportional representation in the name of 'social justice'.

Quotas have been abused and misused beyond its limits as those marginalized communities hardly benefit. As a result, quotas have become populist political slogan. Nothing new is offered in the manifestos of the political parties. Political parties keep playing their games around caste and vote-bank

politics. India's ruling dispensation and other political parties believe in trickle-downs, handouts, doles such as gas cylinders or cash benefits, bicycles or laps. The bottom-line is, 'social justice' in its true form remains as peripheral as the communities that need it most and to whom it stands for. Has 'Social justice' become a mirage or an illusion or a jargon?



We need a Global Coalition for Social Justice. It will position social justice as the keystone of global recovery....

In sum, it will ensure our future is human-centred.

GILBERT F HOUNGBO, ILO

Fissures in Education is a monograph that examines, analyses, and evaluates the current system of education in India. It highlights the entire package of education couched with all sorts of innate contradictions and pre-suppositions. The articles that appear in the monograph unravels the duplicity and irrelevancy of our education for life and living. It fails to augur educational relevancy vis-a-vis the dynamics of reflection-action-reflection process leading to critical consciousness.

Over and above, the monographs rips-opens the educational learnings and pedagogical applications to the learners in the class rooms that include – students, teachers and the public at large who pursue education for meaningful existence. Education per se ought to enjoin critical learning and creative engagement to the learners. In doing so, this monograph unravels the gaps and holes in the current educational scenario and in the process unpacks a number of critical pedagogic leverages for meaningful education for life and living.

It also attempts to retrieve and sustain within the current discourses the rational-liberative articulation in polity, history, culture, and economy. Its objective is not just only to inform and enlighten the readers, but also to impel them towards emancipatory engagement with academia and society at large. It hopes to function as a tool both of deconstruction as well as reconstruction of socially relevant knowledge.

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