

The Whole Purpose of Education is to turn Mirrors into Windows.

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It is perhaps not coincidental at all that one of the first computer Operating Systems was called Windows. Windows it was to a Wonderland of conveniently accessible knowledge and information. It opened forth new possibilities and lent newer meanings to the idea of disseminating knowledge, thereby successfully re-enacting the most important purpose of education: to open all the hitherto shut windows of the mind.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the greatest Romantic thinkers, had conceived a theory of education whose primary task would be to strengthen the imaginative faculty of the young. His over emphasis on the function of imagination in educating the young mind echoes the essence of the topic at hand: to turn mirrors into windows; to make the surface that reflects only the self into that opening that shows the world and ultimately to turn the self into the world, to find infinity within oneself.

Here of course education scarcely implies the sum of learnt tables, rehearsed dates or structured questions. All these are constituent elements of the institution of education and not the idea itself, and hence must not be considered as identifying markers of the same (though cultural reductions such as these are, sadly, the state of the present education system in most places). Education, in its true sense, stands for a holistic process of nurturing, a careful nourishment provided to the mind, so that it can learn to connect itself to the world outside. Education is therefore about connection and transformation.

Every education system operates within a specific social structure. Therefore the system has inevitably written into it the normative conditions of society. The way History is written in our history books, for instance, is the way we are expected to read and perceive history. The present system discourages major divergent interpretations and hence feels jittery when a particular brand of 'terrorism' might be called revolutionary activities by another social group. Paradoxically, if not surprisingly, one of the ways in which education brings about transformations is by subverting the system within which it operates. When one learns to push at and question the frontiers of comfortable thinking, one is committing a dangerous act because when we question the world and its conventions, we automatically question ourselves-the self that has been fashioned by the world and its conventions. Education facilitates this dynamic exchange between the self and the world.

This potentially transgressive role of education was exemplified by the only modern open university: the Viswa Bharati, established by Rabindranath Tagore. The little boy who hated the repressive and stifling regime of the classroom(a significantly Western concept imposed by colonialists) devised an alternative system as an attempt to redress the damage done to free thinking. Confined within the four walls of the classroom the mind was being tutored to treat education as a curriculum-driven narrow and deterministic practise designed to meet personal ambition and aspiration. This self defeating system of imparting education that thwarted the mind to look beyond itself was what prompted Tagore to unshackle it.

The reason why dictatorships pack their authorized school textbooks with glorifying rhetoric for the leaders, is to strictly reflect the state's (by implication its citizens) doctored image of itself and destroy the possibility of alternative visions. All dictators fear teachers and educators. Hence, the large scale persecution of teachers and thinkers in USSR during the Stalinist Regime or in China's communist dictatorship. All the elaborate efforts undertaken to clamp down on free education in the various authoritarian and semi

authoritarian states validate the sheer power of education to shake the world out of its stupor. The figurative mirror that the state forges to blind people of all the other sights is shattered by education, that always points to a world a greater, wider, better world.

All this seems idle-talk, the babble necessitated by an essay writing competition when all that one can be proud of at the end of another exhausting year is the sum total of certificates and trophies on the shelf, when all the one gets rewarded for is to win another `competition'. It seems rather contradictory that while the idea of education inspires free thinking, its system more often than not inhibits it, if only by imposing a rigorous curriculum and strictly prescribed methods of learning. A highly competitive model often churns out able competitors who run only for the gold and remain blind to the larger picture because they were never asked to see. Truly free thinking is clearly not encouraged. No one has any time for it because at the end of the day, all revolutionary ideals cower under the enormity of social expectations and the temptation of social reward: Mr. X heading to Oxford for Ph.D. should henceforth be worshipped, idolized and glorified. Such demigods abound everywhere.

Perhaps here we can bring about a possible reconciliation. Reform in education system as it is at present is a dire necessity. However, rather than complaining about an absence or lack, it is possible to polish and sharpen our dulled powers of thinking even within the system. This however cannot be achieved by the students alone. The teachers and the students can collaborate to reshape the system from within, attack it to refashion it, by talking about the old ideas sans the stereotypes. This can begin by taking the elements from the prescribed curriculum and rethinking its definitions, asking newer questions or questioning the questions we have been asking for so long. Tests can be written, marks can be accumulated even while trying to carve out this new path. Ultimately, if one is trained to think harder even within the system, the system is likely to evolve naturally into a more healthy and functional one. Ultimately, education in itself is powerful enough to violate all the external conditions imposed on it by socio, political or economic factors.

By opening the window to the infinite, education ultimately teaches us to be human. All the questions and counter questions, the aggregate of new forming ideas strive for the betterment of the republic of humans, to unshackle it from all varieties creed and dogma and re-establish an overall harmony between contraries.

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