

RE-THINKING SCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT

A higher quality education has always been a yearning for humankind since the emergence of human species on earth. Philosophers, religious personalities, preachers and teachers have since ages toiled to create a perfect education system. An education system where human faculties grow to their utmost; where human personality as a whole develops. But questions like 'what is development?' and 'what is personality?' have haunted the human imagination ever since. This paper seeks to underscore some infelicities in the school education system of our state, Jammu and Kashmir. The paper highlights some basic flaws that hinder the development of critical thinking which has to be the essence of the whole pedagogy of the education. The basic cause is that our schools inflict rote memorisation on students which most of them find temperamentally ill-suited. This way not only do we kill the instincts of critical thinking but we shut all doors of progressive thought in the student community. It is further stated that reformations turn counterproductive where systems do not respond positively. Consequently, our efforts to streamline the system prove to be counter-productive.

KEY WORDS: *Mugging, One-dimensional, Grades, Intellectual touchstone, banking system of education.*

INTRODUCTION

A great society is particularly characterised by the close attention the government bestows on the education of its future pillars. A firm belief takes root about the value of effective investment in high quality education. Prioritizing education leads to vast opportunities, thereby widening the horizons of success. The people at the command of our education system too seem to have woken up from a long hibernation but instead of addressing the plethora of problems our education department is threateningly faced with, government teachers

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more often than not have been held solely responsible for the ongoing morass. But there is more to the truth than would such one-dimensional analysis see.

DISCUSSION:

Ours is a strange society where no sooner the JKBOSE³ results are out than blame games set off. Private schools are often hailed as ‘a great success’ and their government counterparts are lambasted for their ‘pathetic show’. Authorities and parents denounce teachers of negligence towards their duties and the teachers in turn do tend to pass the buck to the failed system, inadequate facilities in schools and the lack of reading culture in our homes.

As the world stands at present, private schools have been universally doing better for reasons that need no illustration here. The first question which needs a critical examination is what does ‘doing better’ mean in a real context? Let us question the entire terminology. Words are not only words; they are actions and reflections simultaneously. They are concepts in themselves; they are ideas and reflections. For example “performance” is a concept, an idea, a reflection, an action, a tag, a taboo, a measurement, a sensation, a state of mind, a culture. What meaning do we assign lies in our discretion. The worry is that we have made private schools a measuring rod with which the performance of government schools is weighed. What ensues is the rat race for high percentages and grades which makes cramming a necessary evil. Critical thinking and conceptual and critical learning have been left with little or no space in our education system. To encourage the parrot-fashion, congratulations pour in from all sides and even our ‘babus’ visit such students who score 99.9% or, sometimes, more. How on earth can you score that much, pardon my opinion, without mugging for the whole year? This is not to belittle the intelligence of our students or to doubt the intentions of the politicians in applauding the toppers. However, there are people from Kashmir who have spent the prime of their life in foreign universities doing scientific research and, unfortunately, they are living quite unknown lives. They too deserve a pat on their back for their considerable accomplishments at the international stage.

One just miserably fails to comprehend the underlying rationale and the metrics we customarily use to weigh the performance of our students. Did Addison score 99.9% in his school? Did Christy Brown, Bill Gates, George Washington, Robert Frost and many others bag first positions ever? The recent human history brims with instances of the people who altogether altered our perception of the world without having been ever recognised as good students. The grim reality, which we are terribly afraid to say, is, we are seriously faced with a crumbling

³. Jammu and Kashmir State Board of School Education.

school system, whether it be government or private one. The very recognition of this sad state of affairs is the first step in overcoming it.

Isn't it true that we bank on a 'banking concept of education'⁴ where knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing?⁵ Education has two purposes to serve: one, to challenge the status quo and bring revolution by liberating humans; second, to adapt the young generating to the existing system by capturing their minds. We bank on a 'Narrative System of Education' where teacher plays the role of a narrator and students that of a container filled by deposits. A successful teacher is one who successfully deposits higher than others and a good student who successfully digests the highest number of deposits. Narration leads to students memorize mechanically narrated contents and turn them into 'containers' or 'receptacles' to be filled by the teacher.⁶ Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.⁷

Education is, and has to be a liberating force. Liberation from all constraints that make an individual lesser being, less of himself, of his personality. Liberation can't be reached without revolution--- a complete change not only in the process and situation but also in the entire structure of the system. Liberation is reached when you become producers yourself. We are not the producers of knowledge, not even the consumers; but we dream to be developed. Let us stop building castles in the air! Production of knowledge occurs through critical thinking and the best education system is one that cultivates a culture of critical thinking in the society. Critical thinking evolves by questioning, doubting and trying to exert yourself on the environment. We don't merely live; we rather exist. Let us learn to question even the unquestionable!

The educational standard of a society reaches its acme when its youth are self-motivated to learn things with the hope of a bright future. Real education prepares you to shoulder the responsibility of seeking education yourself. Let us acquire education not for the sake of education only but for changing the environment, its limitations and constraints; and to widen our opportunities. Let us learn to have a goal oriented education. We, on the contrary, possess the conventional wisdom of motivating our students through rewards and punishments. The 'intellectual touchstone' of high percentages has already had a profound negative effect on our education. We may feel proud of our land for producing some real geniuses, but such grand successes are just peanuts when seen

⁴ . See Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, UK: Penguin Books, 1993, p, 53.

⁵ . Ibid.

⁶ . Ibid.

⁷ . Ibid, p, 53.

in the larger crumbling scenario of our education department. Their story is an exception- not expectation- in the general failure of our education system.

Let's pause for a moment to have a passing look at the structure of libraries in our schools. The hard truth we seem reluctant to admit is that our school libraries lack only one thing which prevents them from being good libraries. Yes, just a solitary thing. Wait.... Good books! Who can deny the influence of great books in shaping great minds? We become what kind of books we read. They say that books are the 'best weapon' in the world. Our school libraries are, however, reserved restrooms for the staff, courtesy lack of proper infrastructure in our schools. Unless our school libraries are furnished with good books, and good books are read by good readers we will only delude ourselves into thinking that our education department has better days ahead.

To most of us education is confined to our classrooms and school buildings. We are unmitigatedly blind to what Mark Twain, the great American novelist, once famously said, "I have never let my schooling interfere with my education".⁸ An 'ordinary' parent has to be told that education doesn't begin when our child hears the ringing school bell for the first time. It commences long before. Unfortunately, most of us are continually 'busy in doing nothing' and that all-important meaningful communication between a child and parent has become a rarity in our culture. And we must not accept wonders from our children when we neglect them at home.

The apex recruiting body of the state has also a role to play in pulling down quality education in our schools. While qualifying NET/SET is the minimum eligibility for higher education, it is highly astonishing that at +2 level these eligibility certificates have been credited with no value. These days, getting a Ph.D or M.Phil degree is quite often a prepaid affair. Research publications have been paid for in our universities! God save the system in which a serious effort of qualifying a national eligibility test is left unrecognised before degrees that most people have become habitual of getting by plagiarism and other mean ways! Corruption and nepotism have so much engrossed us that our senses have deadened to consider hard work and talent.

The callousness of our authorities towards our teachers is yet another thorn in the flesh. A well qualified person in our society appears to have second thoughts about becoming a teacher owing to the usual discourteous treatment our teacher is exposed to these days. He/she is unnecessarily blamed for all the social evils that have of late crept into our life.

⁸ . Daniel Coenn, *Mark Twain: His Words*, BookRix, 2014.

Instead of comparing government schools to private schools, we must see the worth of our education system alongside some successful and enduring similar systems elsewhere in the world, and find out what sets them apart from the mediocre. The educational standard of countries like Finland, Japan and South Korea has been soaring high and we should not shy away from borrowing a page from their success book. Remember, their schools are absolutely free from political prescriptions. There, a teacher's profession is quite prestigious and, unlike we do, teachers are considered as highly valuable people in the society.

Prophet Mohammad SAW said, "Two groups in my Ummah are such that if they are on the right path, whole humanity will be on the right path; and if they are on the wrong path, the whole humanity will be on the wrong path. These are the Rulers and the Scholars".⁹ In another hadith Prophet SAW mentioned that 'Everything has a plinth and the plinth of Din is Knowledge and Understanding'.¹⁰

From the above quoted hadith some principles can be deduced:

1. Our education system must have a mission. The mission must be, as the Quran mentions, to produce best humans whose heart throbs for entire mankind. Best technologies may not be of much help because best technologies require best humans.
2. We need to address two things simultaneously, i.e. *education and training*. To ones utter dismay, we have a system of education which makes us literate rather than train us. When knowledge become commercialized, degrees become market commodities and money becomes the driving force for our careers, what else will our eyes blink for, rather than to see the deterioration of our society speeding up? We produce for the market and have hardly time to ponder on worth and morality.
3. Teacher community has a profound responsibility to shoulder as it is they who can bring the much needed reform and revolution. They act like the pivot round which the whole society revolves. If the pivot knows its duty and the value, the whole society reaps the benefits; and if it is otherwise, the whole society has to pay the price.

CONCLUSION:

Education is a multi-faceted concept that needs necessary reading environment at home, your own talent and desire to learn, and, above all, the teaching resources. Lacunae at any stage will seriously delimit a great success. A paradigm shift in our approach towards education is the need of the hour. Playing blame games is only going to

⁹. Sahih Al Bukhari.

¹⁰. Ibid.

aggravate the already deteriorating system. Our policy makers must together assume the huge responsibility of spotting the infelicities in the system and identifying ways that would improve our achievements in quality education, instead of diverting the attention of innocent minds by beating about the bush. Let us hope that the near future unfurls limitless possibilities to our younger generation to create a world we all want to live in.