

BOOK REVIEW

A Call for Educational Renaissance in India

By Dr. G.N.M. Dixit

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- Reviewer: Sudhindra Gargesa*

Renaissance is to re-recognise its roots in modern context. While it is finding a new path in many countries probably for India, it is revisiting its roots which had flourished millenniums ago with the spirit of आनो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः 'Aa No Bhdrah Kratavo yantu Vishwatah' Let noble thoughts come to us from every side – a dhyeya vakya from Rigveda and the purpose of education defined in this shloka:

विद्या ददाति विनयं विनयाद्याति पात्रताम् ।
पात्रत्वाद्धनमाप्नोति धनाद्धर्मं ततः सुखम् ॥५॥
(true/complete) knowledge gives discipline,
from discipline comes worthiness,
from worthiness one gets wealth, from wealth
(one does) good deeds, from that (comes) joy.

Acquisition of knowledge/talent went hand in hand with ethics in life, while humanists in Europe sought to create a citizenry able to speak and write with eloquence and clarity, thus capable of engaging in the civic life of their communities and persuading others to virtuous and prudent actions. This was to be accomplished through the study of the humanities: grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy.

'A call for educational renaissance in India' the book authored by Dr. GNM Dixit, brings out a plethora of transformative thoughts with author's deep research into the roots of renaissance in education in various countries of Europe, China, Japan and South Korea. The way his analysis opens up the way the idea of nationalism and humanism get into the roots of the society through carefully planned education system is eye opening. Written in four thematic structure of the book, the author traces the path of education ancient India, middle ages, gives the examples of

other countries and suggests solution cautioning the obstacles in the modern India. The degeneration of the system is brought out not with cynicism but objectively, so that the policy makers could ponder over them.

Discussing the inclusiveness of values and materialism in the development of society, the author says 'A society is a conglomeration of different communities sharing some common element, like belonging to a single nation and nationalism, as a binding force'. For example, communities of teachers, business class, peasants, salaried class, bureaucrats and others form the constituents of a society. These constituent elements should work in unison for the welfare of the society. The value system defines the role of wealth, which is for development of the community. The value system in ancient India clearly defined this.

India was known for its knowledge in various areas like language, literature, grammar, mathematics, medicine, astronomy. The attitude of questioning was encouraged as we see in the emergence of Upanishads. Brahmasutras framed to enable the seeker to interpret them in the background of Upanishads, ushered in various schools of thought in the country. However, in the period 12th century to about later part of 19th century, during which the country was subject to severe invasion from Middle East and Europe, the picture of Indian education system is unclear and hazy. This was the time when much of Indian Knowledge was lost. Total destruction of universities like Nalanada, Takshashila and Sarda in Kashmir resulted in near demise of not only education system but also the knowledge itself. Dr. Dixit mentions in the book that the library in Nalanda University destroyed by Bhaktiyar Khilji in 12th century, burnt for over three months.

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Concept of education in ancient times

On the concept of Dharma, which was the foundation of all the actions in the ancient India and advocated ethics, the author says:

Man should conduct himself beyond boundaries to evolve this kind of Dharma, and education is the driver of this cause. This is what the "Bhagavadgeetha" teaches, as I understand. This clearly defines the purpose of education. Both the material and the intellect with knowledge are useful for foundational ethics to conserve nature, and the development includes both. As I understand, birth of any new religion is not to be settle the earlier religion or dharma and on the other hand, it is to make living better just as any new education system replaces or has to replace a former system to improve the current system.

Author recalls thoughts of Aristotle and Amartya Sen while talking about the role of wealth: *'Wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking, for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else. According to Amartya Sen, the usefulness of wealth lies in the things that it allows us to do, the substantive freedom it helps us to achieve, should we say, wealth is what wealth does?'* Reflected in Indian thought 'dhanaath dharma tatah sukham' – from wealth one does good for the society and the happiness follows! The purpose of learning itself was to *experience knowledge and discover the self and true nature of consciousness.*

Author discusses *'Four models of development to illustrate how education has served as the driver of the process of development – both human and economic – through political systems in the respective countries kept on changing. There are three phases in this process of development namely the pre-industrial revolution, the post-industrial revolution, and the post – World War II. The four models are about China, Japan, South Korea and Finland, the first three being the Asian nations and Finland a European nation. If in China, the leadership(s), In japan gradual evolution of systemic approach, and in South Korea the patriotism and learning lessons (introspection) from the mistakes are playing the role of development, in Finland the development of a cohesive social capital is being realized by providing more and more freedom(s) to the education operators and students while treating them with respect'.*

He also discusses emergence of education system in these countries along with European Countries viz., England, Germany, Italy, Russia and finally the United States of America before discussing Indian scenario thus building a solid background for comparison and probably formulating the path of renaissance in our own country.

Like all Indian sages, as brought out in Upanishads, Confucius too took lifelong delight in learning as well as teaching. Highlighting the role of Confucius in formulating Chinese education author says *'The Confucianism along with its leader Confucius was seen as the founder of education for the masses in China. One of his saying was 'provide education for all people without discrimination', and another was teach according to the student's ability'.* Author emphasises out that in China Confucius heralded opening of education to the rich and poor alike. His teachings required examination and context to be understood. He developed in own education doctrine. Author continues: *Confucius firmly believed that right education as a blend of virtue and knowledge coupled with skill as appropriate to the social structure of a nation develops the culture, nature, or way of life of the people while bringing in good governance – Dharma of the nation.*

Kathopanishad defines happiness as – one, which is permanent viz., Shreyas, and the other one, which is temporary or short-lived as Preyas. *The search for chemical formula to combine both shreyas and preyas perhaps is the purpose of life of a sensible mind as Yajnavalkya and Aristotle said.* How thoughtful of the King of Bhutan to usher in a refreshing concept of Happiness through heralding of Gross National Happiness (GNH), like the world saw economic development defined through GDP. Author intertwines the GNH and education as *'the outcome of educated populace can be reflected in qualitative elements such as happiness, quality of life, and well-being- as well as quality of education, the quality of jobs and quality of environmental assets like forests, rivers and lakes and the quality or supply of timber and water available.* Author also talks of a class belonging to the class of pure shreyas focused individuals. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore founded Viswabharathi University

at Shantiniketan in West Bengal spending his Nobel Laureate money. Another Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen is an alumnus of this university, who always speaks about Welfare Economics meaning to serve the less fortunate. The author notes on how *Bhutan has envisaged its own Dharma of education as reflected in a GNH based education system....*

It was fascinating to read about the growth of education South Korea after the liberation from Japan after enslavement. The author points out how naturally *'South Korea strengthened its antique value system by harnessing local education system to develop patriotism in the minds of young school going children and their parents as the way of life'* which is lacking in the education system in India, which also saw long history of invasion and enslavement more so in the recent days when the system is being polluted by excessive political interference in the system. Naturally, the author questions if *'India is on the path of progress! Is an illusion or a reality?'* This thought lingers in every thinking educationist's mind.

Calling for inclusiveness of values, Author notes that *'A society is a conglomeration of different communities sharing some common element, like belonging to a single nation and nationalism, as a binding force. These constituent elements should work in unison for the welfare of the society'*. The purpose of education is to educate or develop a healthy intellect in a person, which thought made many wealthy in the United States *to invest in education because of which we see universities to develop competent graduates to serve in intellectual needs of their industry'* also serving the society as we see today as Jamshedji Tata did in India. In fact, Indian thought believed that the purpose of education is to gain wealth where by one could serve the society *'Dhanatdharma tatah sukham'* Such an education would be 'value education'. The purpose of education has always been invariant but the learning is dynamic which depends on the evolution of the civilization and intentions & attitudes of the individual learner.

The history of development of education in China, Japan or Korea is due to the influence of Confucianism's *'inward thinking'* which has resulted in an undisturbed education development identity which is inward looking

narrative, on which India is still struggling to figure out after seven decades of independence.

Author explains in detail the growth of education in China, Japan South Korea and Finland the education is specific to their national needs, thus education triangle has three vertices- knowledge, skills and values. Irrespective of the political turmoil, China today is second largest economy, a technology leader and Chinese entrepreneurs provide valuable lessons on managing effectively in an 'unpredictable context'! China's transformation process incorporates that relationships between the essential drivers of development are ownership, capacities and policies. Ownership is the basis and forms the critical starting point.

Author traces the path of education in the 'dark' period of about 6 centuries prior to independence, which was under 'invaders' rule- Muslim rulers and also British. In fact reading this was a good treatise.

He notes *'The destruction of these centres of learning at Nalanda and other places across northern India was responsible for the demise of ancient Indian scientific thought in mathematics, astronomy, alchemy and anatomy'*.

The education system under the rule of Akbar adopted an inclusive approach with the monarch favouring additional courses, medicine, agriculture, geography and even from texts from other languages and relations, such as Patanjali's work in Sanskrit.

The traditional science in this period was influenced by the ideas of Aristotle, Bhaskara II, Charaka and Ibn Sina. It is anybody's imagination how Europe was struggling to sort out its educational priorities during the same age and how advanced was the Indian education.

Many dynasties of South India _ Pandyan, Cholas, Vijayanagar Kinds, Wodeyars of Mysore and some more till Tipu Sultan was defeated by the British were responsible for the development of education. Immaterial of the rulers, the temples of South India were not only religious centres but also played the role of educational institutions.

They were considered as centres not only of education but also of moral and spiritual instruction.

'Indian subcontinent did have an excellent education system until about 13th century. Later due to successive invasions and due to influence of the invaders the Indian system of education started losing its base and of course Britishers dealt a death blow by uprooting the Indian cultural fabric including education by imposing their system to their advantage'. (216)

As a result, the present education system in India has been a total deviation from all these aspects. As author observes: *The current system of education, with its western style and content, was introduced and founded by the British during the British Raj, following recommendations by Lord Macaulay, who preferred to form a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. He enrolled Jawaharlal Nehru, whom he met on a ship voyage before India became independent, and as Prime Minister of India, Nehru was an ardent supporter without whom the project would never have taken off. We are yet to get over Macaulay and reinvent our roots.*

However, author delves into details how centres of excellence like IISC, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre grew with the patronage of industrialists with vision and a sense of patriotism, which unfortunately is missing in today's education system.

Author says in his book *'the only thing that anybody has any control over is his life on this earth: so better make the best of it. Make money as much as possible to lead a "comfortable" and powerful life. One should live as secure and enjoyable a life as he can. And, when one thinks about it, the fact that he might misuse other people in order to get what he wants does not really matter'*. The purpose of education must be enable this.

One can see his exasperation when he speaks of Japanese system and especially the 'Bunjins':

In the mid eighteenth century – the Bunjin (literati or humanists) of Japan used education to create a new vision and a new social class. They rejected the official hierarchy based on birth, with its three hereditary classes of swordsman (samurai) peasant and townsman. They replaced it with a meritocracy in which nothing countered except performance as a scholar, calligrapher, and artist. If one sees between

*the lines, this is a great cultural shift towards social reconstruction and national development. They thus laid the foundation for modern Japan. A hundred years later in 1867 where the feudal regime of the Tokugawa Shogun fell and the Meji Restoration began, every one of the new leaders was a graduate of an academy founded seventy years earlier by such eminent stalwarts as Bunjin, Nukina Kaioku and Rai Sanyo. **Though late than never, would it be possible for India to create a class like Bunjin in India who will transform India! – It is only a wishful thinking of a frustrated mind, perhaps.***

The frustration much higher when he talks of how the present day leaders have messed up the education system: *It appears as if Machiavellian Humanism and Laissez Faire have stayed firm on this land in all walks of life unseating our rich cultural heritage. Thus, India is at the cross – roads looking desperately for a pathway to get back to her rich swadeshi cultural heritage.* The author observes the education system has gone into wrong hands who have successfully converted the educational institutions into commercial institutions with 'saleable' degrees with scant respect for quality.

However, the author does not stop at posing problems. As a teacher and thinker, he also gives directions for improvement. He gives a beautiful example of comprehensive outcome and culmination outcomes through the example of Krishna and Arjuna. But cautions against the divergence of the aspects. However good system one may implement, if the attitude of the people who are supposed to follow the rules is corrupt the system will be a failure. He discusses the gaps in education (239) elaborates role of Industry – Education interface by numerous examples of involvement of entrepreneurs in education and resultant innovation, generously entwining Deming's philosophy of *'Constancy of Purpose as continuous Improvement'* based on the notion that in education domain, change is always changeable.

As Dr. Kalam says *The primary purpose of education in a country such as India is to develop and enhance the potential of our human resources and progressively transform into a knowledge society, (241) author stresses that there is a great need for a robust education*

system that will drive a meaningful change. - In the event all should join hands to pull the country out of the dark ages of education, we are presently in. (217).

Author, concluding his book says '*System of Education as a whole should work in such a way that it develops a generic holistic human character to adopt to any situation to augment developmental process from all angles...*' He continues like '*Swatchha Bharath, Swatchh Swadeshi Shikshan may have to become a mission*' to which everyone would endorse.

With good printing and quite readable fonts, reading the book was an experience for me and I strongly feel that there is an urgent need that this book should reach the policy makers who can spearhead change. As author opines '*Knowledge is the true wealth as a thief*

cannot steel it; the government cannot take it away; brothers cannot ask for a share in it; it is weightless and if you go on spending it, it becomes richer and richer... Functional nationalism is the form of yoga and swadharma on the platform of right education for the entire nation encompassing all functionaries without exception (348).

In 'What the book is all about' the author pushes us into thinking that 'Right to Right Education' is more fundamental than 'Right to Education'. Despite Globalisation, India is still grappling with a conservative mind-set and quality of higher education is slipping into deep abyss.

Will the policy makers please stand up and come out of the 'cobweb' created by the 'educationists'.