

# **Towards a Learning that Liberates**

## **A Sociological Review**

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In the process of our search for a ‘learning that liberates’, especially in an increasingly globalizing world, I suppose, the most fundamental question that stares us in our face is ‘what does learning really mean’ in terms of its outcome?’ What is that ‘system of learning’ that facilitates the learner to ‘learn’ in the right sense of the word and produce ‘quality’ in life, both as individual and social persons?

It is unfortunate that, education, in the present day times, and very much so in India, seems to have got derailed from its track! There is an undue stress on one’s career. It is under the grip of an inbuilt mania for individual success, even at the cost of competing with the other at a cut-throat level. Isn’t it an eccentric phenomenon, if not an aberration?

As a matter of fact, is education a sheer tool for getting a job, for making money and for becoming rich, even to the extent of being filthy rich? The attitude of ‘getting the best from the society and then forget about it’ is equal to pushing out the ladder that helped climbing up! A large majority of students, a considerable percentage of teachers as well, gives an impression that it is so! If this is true, doesn’t education ‘enslave’ the learner much more than liberating him or her?

There was a student who walked into the ashram of a Guru, who was well-acclaimed both as a Sanskrit scholar and a Guru. The student found the Guru in deep meditation as he approached him. He presumed permission and quietly sat before the Guru. After a short while, the Guru opened his eyes and found the student seated in front of him.

The boy expressed before the Guru, very politely so, his desire to learn Sanskrit. Guru right away asked him a question ‘why do you want to learn Sanskrit?’ The student gladly and readily replied, ‘there is a job available in my village school for a Sanskrit teacher and I want to teach the students in that capacity’. Badly annoyed by the answer, Guru ordered the boy ‘get out of my ashram’.

The student got a shock for life. He thought to himself, ‘isn’t learning Sanskrit a good thing? Is it a crime to teach students? Why is Guru upset about it? Meanwhile, Guru added, ‘when you want to learn for yourself, you are welcome’. Having said this, Guru went back to the state of meditation.

The student, not finding any point in being there any more, got up from there and took his way towards home. As he was returning, he was taken to a major reflection that

changed the entire course of his life as well as perception of learning. 'Learning', first and foremost, 'is for oneself'. 'Bahujan hitaay' evolves from 'swaantah sukhaay'. Only the learning that one learns for oneself will assist one in blossoming one's life in larger dimensions.

Shree Narayan Guru argues for a realistic idea of religion thus, 'whatever may be the religion you belong to, it would suffice if you become a good human being'. A slight variation of these words would apply to education very well. The system of learning and even the content of learning are of second importance only. Becoming 'learned' in the true sense of the word, getting liberated from the fetters and conditionings of life and emerging qualitative human beings that are capable of leading the society to higher altitudes of life are points that count up in life.

'Running the system perfectly and successfully' seems to be the catchphrase of the modern educational system. There is a 'uniform' for inculcating the value of an egalitarian mindset; but often it fails to achieve the target. There is a provision of 'examination' for testing the quality of performance by the learner; but often it does not assess the calibre as well as the character of the student. Education, more often than otherwise, creates victims of systemic rituals and not liberated grown-ups with creative thinking, responsible action and good character.

What is the standard for assessing whether learning liberates or not? In order to get the answer, one doesn't have to examine the system of education or the examination-results of the schools, colleges and universities. What is required is to scan the 'quality of social life' in the country, especially in terms of the literate, educated and elite. Often what differentiate the literate and the illiterate are 'bookish information' and not the quality of being humane and responsible citizens.

According to a survey, the educated tell more 'lies' than the uneducated. They are extra capable of fabricating truths by lining up a hundred lie, very convincingly so, in order to establish one lie. They seem to profess the belief that a frequently repeated lie is equal to truth itself, even more a truth. Education often boosts up their 'ego' so much, that admitting their failings is almost next to impossible for them. Education helps people become astute and cunning. They know what is best for them and they are capable of getting at it, by hook or crook. They are intelligent for themselves, and for the society, almost deaf and dumb as well as foolish.

A large percentage of people among the educated are found highly self-centred, profit-minded, loose-principled and socially insensitive. Among those who indulge themselves in unethical ways, slip away from marital commitments, 'hit and run' scot-free after committing crimes, etc, a considerable number are from the sector of the more or less educated. Most of the abandoned old people are from educated families. False licences, certificates and documents are in circulation predominantly among literate people and not among the illiterate.

The level of social consciousness appears to be on the whole lower among the educated and the elite, though ironically so. The literate often seem to be much less capable of settling their day-to-day problems, when compared to their illiterate counterparts. Educated persons, who learn from books, to a large extent, are found less wise than uneducated persons, who learn from experience. Often educated people stand ahead in striking a deal with God to get what they want in life and thus in using him or her as a screw-driver to open new avenues in life.

Educated people are better equipped for profit-oriented negotiation. The illiterate are no comparison when it comes to high-tech tactics of corrupt practices. The gap between theory and practice is highly visible among the educated than otherwise. The educated has a high propensity for misusing their office for private interests, in terms of vehicles, buildings, property, etc. Superiority complex, false prestige, suicide, wasting food and other materials, and the like, are tendencies that are more commonly seen among educated and affluent people.

The quality of one's behaviour in social life is the yardstick of education! How do the educated behave in public places, like toilets, roads, bus and railway stations, parks and cherished monuments? Do we see a culture of responsible and committed work in public offices? What is the degree of integrity and transparency among public persons in diverse sectors? What is the level of honesty and truth in a country which celebrates 'satyamev jayate' as its national motto?

Is the educational sector 'educated' enough in terms of its perceptions, principles, policies and practices? Where do teachers and students stand in terms of value-based learning as well as teaching? What is the degree of awareness among the educated and the elite that they have a duty to facilitate the society to be transformed, not only for getting relieved of the obligation of 'guru-rin', but for leading the society to further heights?

Hindi films, like 'Three Idiots', 'Taare Zameen Par', 'Paathshaalaa', 'Admission Open', challenge the logic and expose the dynamics of modern education and propose radical change. Education has to be assessed in terms of the fruit it produces for the society as well as for the individual. The power to 'transform individual lives' and the 'capacity to lead the society' ahead are the fruits of learning.

As on today, are the educated of the country a strength or a liability? What is the scale of motivation in them for being 'enlightened citizens and empowered leaders'? It appears that it is too early for us to say that at least a 'half-plus-one majority' of the educated of the country are truly 'milestones of promises', in terms of the result of learning!

The benchmark for assessing ‘learning’ is the ‘ethical fibre’ that leads one to a ‘value-based’ life. The criterion of being educated is to ‘be enlightened’, to ‘be cultured’ and to ‘be socially responsible’, as full blown adults. A ‘learning that liberates’ is that which unshackles the learner from enslaving individual habits and suicidal social obsessions.

The concept, objective and scheme of learning require being re-visited and transformed. Learning, and teaching as well, needs to become ‘devotion’. Only then, it will contribute to growing that will render one free, in order to go beyond borders. The ‘result of learning’, the ‘quality of being human’, the ‘impact on societal life’ and the ‘capacity for social leadership’ are the ingredients of a ‘learning that truly liberates’.

Could we join Rabindranath Tagore, praying ‘into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake’! When are we going to translate this prayer into the reality of personal experience, as individual persons and responsible citizens of the world society as well as of our country? The ball is in our court. It takes courage to play, and play towards victory!

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