

EDUCATION AS A ROUTE TO PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL BEING

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Abstract:

The Buddhist philosophy uses the metaphor of the second arrow to reflect upon the problem of clinging upon negative emotions that increase suffering and postpones an individual's prospect of attaining peace, happiness and content. Education in the present context (not only because of the global pandemic of Covid-19 in particular but also due to the very nature of human life) needs to embrace Psychological Wellbeing. Only an education that is drenched in Psychological Wellbeing can rise to the epitome of purifier by being able to touch upon the inner world of an individual. It is an inescapable need for evolving humanity through knowledge that education in itself witnesses an anagnorisis of education as the new normal.

Key Words – The second arrow, Education, Inner world, Outer world, Psychological Wellbeing.

*Na hi jnanena sadrisham pavitraniha vidyate,
Tatsvayam yogasansiddhah kalenatmani vindati.*

(Bhagavad Gita, 4.38)

Education, in its core, is the most sophisticated form of anthropocentrism. It is not a serendipity in the course of human evolution, but, significantly, education is the very peripeteia in defining humanity. The Bhagavad Gita explains education as the epitome purifier. Education, as per the Bhagavad Gita, is second to nothing in the world that can propel purity, liberation and unification/harmony (both in one's existence in this world and beyond). Education has the power to purify as it can facilitate in an individual the power to transcend. Thereby, the purpose of any and every form of education is to seek solution(s) by a transition from ignorance to knowledge. Human beings are entangled in two worlds, the inner and the outer world, and our life is the reflection of the dynamics between these two worlds. Whatever we receive from our outer world (stimulus and circumstances) is inevitable, but whatever we behold in our inner world (perceptions and experiences as a response to the stimulus and circumstances) is a matter of individual choices.

The Buddhist philosophy has used the metaphor of the second arrow. Consider an individual being stuck by an arrow (the first arrow) and suffering due to its pain. The individual then is hit by another arrow at the same place and time (the second arrow) which ends up in adding more suffering and angst for the individual. The first arrow reflects the anguishes, agonies, tortures and suffering that life circumstances unfold, the arrow that comes from the outer world, the one on which individuals have the least or no control and choice. The second arrow (the arrow in the inner world of an individual), however, is escapable as individuals can choose and govern (to a very large extent) their reaction(s) to the first arrow. It is in the domain of an individual to decide and control the extent of one's suffering. The power to remove the second arrow predominantly resides in the undamaged inner world of an individual. Moreover, in terms of identifying the role of education there can be two major interpretations based on the impact of education – Education for the outer world and Education for the inner world.

The first and the foremost, and also very explicit, is the role of education and its impact upon the outer world of an individual. In this sense, education facilitates livelihood on the parameters of providing economic and social strength and status. The outer world of an individual demands certain credentials in order to uphold one's existence in terms of age and contextual appropriateness. We, as individuals in a specific socio-cultural system, are defined on the basis of roles we enact and the responsibilities we carry out which forms the cornerstone of our identity/existence. Education, in this context, is the tool, the power, that enables individual sustainability and fuels our existence in the outer world. As Rousseau (1762) remarks, "We are born weak, we need strength; helpless, we need aid; foolish, we need reason. All that we lack at birth, all that we need, when we come to man's estate is the gift of education". The role and impact of education in the outer world is expressed in the understanding of education as per the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 which states; 'Education's aim is not just cognitive development of the individuals but a holistic development of character that can survive the turmoils of 21st

century. Education, in this respect, is the power that enables an individual to perform their individual roles and responsibilities as successful and strong individuals in terms of their socio-economic status. *Dutta* (2009) and *Chaudhary* (2011) have promulgated that the purpose of education is to help an individual make necessary adjustments towards a constantly changing environment. However, an education for the outer world (the most widespread and shadowed in the present context) is in halfway in being the epistome purifier. Such an education, if successful in its endeavors, can work on the problem of the first arrow and addresses the concern and challenges of the outer world of an individual.

The second and more important, also the implicit, is the role of education and its impact upon the inner world of an individual. In this case, education is the cement for a sound and intact inner world. It can deal with the problem of the second arrow and can be considered an anagnorisis of education as the new normal. An education for the inner world is an education drenched in psychological wellbeing. Removing the second arrow of the inner world is the defining feature of a holistic education that can be facilitated only through the presence of Psychological Wellbeing through education. *Arnold* (1992) remarks, "To know that a person is a valedictorian is to know only that he or she is exceedingly good at achievements as measured by grades. It tells you nothing about how they react to vicissitudes of life". An education that focuses on the psychological wellbeing of an individual would be an assurance of a well-knit inner world, a world that is non-fragmented, unbroken and in the capacity to shield the second arrow. The second arrow can only damage in the absence of a non-fragmented inner world and an education for the inner world is the epithet of psychological wellbeing. Education for the inner world should not be the serendipity of education, as it is in the present context, but the soul of education.

Swami Ranganathananda (2019) writes, "*Undigested food becomes poison and an enemy of the body. Similarly, undigested knowledge also becomes poison and an enemy of the mind. Vanity, cleverness and other similar mental traits are the poisonous fruits of undigested knowledge*".

An anagnorisis of education is possible only if education is assimilated and can facilitate inner engineering that results in psychological wellbeing in an indissoluble inner world. As per *Pivot and Diener* (2003), wellbeing denotes the subjective feeling of contentment and happiness with no worries and anxieties. For *Campbell* (1976) and *Diener* (1984), there are several cardinal characteristics of the wellbeing. First, it is subjective and second, it is inclusive of positive measures. Wellbeing is not merely an absence of negative factors. *Seifert* (2005) has defined wellbeing in terms of "a dynamic idea that incorporates subjective, social and psychological dimensions as well as health related behaviors". According to *Levi* (1987) wellbeing is a dynamic state of mind, and harmony between the person's needs, expectations, situations, and opportunities. Furthermore, the concept of wellbeing is categorized into hedonic wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing.

Weijers (2012) remarks that all the hedonistic theories identify pleasure and pain as the main vital component of whatever phenomenon they are intended to describe. According to the hedonistic understanding the goal of life is to experience pleasure, and that happiness is the totality of one's hedonic moments (*Deci and Ryan*, 2001). As per Epicurus, hedonism involves the urge to seek pleasure and avoid negative circumstances (*Hergenhahn*, 2009). For *Bentham*, the utilitarian

philosopher, the good society is built through individual's attempt to maximize pleasure and self-interest. Hedonism, according to *Deci and Ryan* (2001), has less focus on physical pleasures but more on self-interests. An Indian understanding of the same is found in the Charvak philosophy where wealth and fulfillment of pleasure (Arth and Kaam) are considered to be the pursuit of human life. The Charvak philosophy does not consider Dharma and Moksha (Duty and Enlightenment) as the Purushartha (the goal of human existence). In the western philosophy, Aristotle (4BCE) in his work 'Nicomachean Ethics', was the first to reflect eudaimonic view of happiness. Contrary to the idea of pleasure seeking and pursuit of happiness (by maximizing pleasure), the eudaimonic wellbeing lays emphasis on meaning making. The eudaimonic understanding of wellbeing propagates individuals to live one's true self (*Waterman*, 1993).

For *Ryff and Singer* (1998), wellbeing is not merely the attaining of pleasure (as is in the case of Subjective Wellbeing based on the hedonistic approach to wellbeing), but as "the striving for perfection and ensuring the realization of one's purpose".

Psychological wellbeing has been originally promulgated by *Ryff* (1989) and denotes self-acceptance and personal growth. It is reflected as the development of an individual's real potential. As per *Edward* (2005), psychological wellbeing refers to a positive mental health. According to *Diener and Diener* (1995) psychological wellbeing incorporates an individual's evaluative reactions to their lives. For *Dzuka and Dalbert* (2000), psychological wellbeing is the overall satisfaction and happiness and positive mental being. As per *Huppert* (2009), psychological wellbeing includes life's achievements and good experience and is the true combination of contentment. Psychological wellbeing is entrenched in systematic reviews and integration of various theories and conceptualizations of happiness and wellbeing. According to (*Park and Jeong*, 2015) multidimensional construct which consists of six dimensions namely

- Self-Acceptance
- Positive Relation
- Autonomy

- Environmental Mastery
- Purpose in life
- Personal growth

Education that propels psychological wellbeing is the only education that would facilitate the blossoming of a sound inner world. It is through psychological wellbeing that education would be in a position to deliver holistic development of an individual that can further propagate inner engineering leading to a non-fragmented inner world. The purpose of education is imperfect and inadequate in the absence of its impact on the inner world of an individual. Removing the second arrow through an education for the inner world is the very parameter of an education which can be considered as the epitome purifier. Most of the education in the present world is focused upon enrichment of human potential with regard to sustainability and development in the context of the outer world. Education in this respect provides knowledge to attain a position of power and status to be able to survive and sustain in a competitive world. It is the tool of empowering individuals and enabling them to lead a life of prosperity and develop skills that are conical to sustain or/and attain a socio-economic status. The education is aimed to empower individuals with new technological advancements, sky creeping diverse socio-economic status and heights and ever-expanding horizons of human ambitions. However, in the absence of an education which is fundamentally aiming to balance the inner harmony and meaning orientation in life, education is simply failing to acknowledge and to deliver meaning and purpose in human life. This further leads to two crucial failures; one, the failure to acknowledge one's existence beyond the materialistic world (in other words, the failure to transcend one's existence from temporal truths to more fundamental truths of existence); second, the failure to deal with negative emotions and rather be persuaded by them due to the lack of meaning in life.

The education of the present age focuses on advancements that are crucial for survival in a more competitive and demanding world. It is an education that promises happiness in the hedonistic sense. One can fulfill pleasure seeking desires on the basis of affordability and education empowers one to be able to afford. Also, and significantly, the education that impacts the outer world facilitates minimizing pain. It empowers one to combat burning issues of hunger, disease, poverty and other such problems affiliated with one's existence in a materialistic and demanding world. It is an education that emphasizes on skill development required to empowering oneself and achieving (through knowledge) the heights of socio-economic status. It is the education which increases the possibilities of attainment of pleasure and reduction of pain (materialistic pleasure and pain). Moreover, there is a huge fallacy that goes unacknowledged in such education system which is devoid of the power to remove the second arrow (in the absence of an education for the inner world). The fallacy of considering pleasure seeking as a route to contentment. The problem of happiness rooting from pleasure seeking and avoidance of pain (hedonic happiness) is in its very nature. The *Bhagavad Gita* expounds;

*Indriyasyendriyasayathe raga-dveshau vyavasthitau,
Tayor na vasham agachchhet tau hyasya paripanthinau.*

(Bhagavad Gita, 3.34)

Our senses illuminate on us to the sense of pleasure and pain leading to formation of likeness/attachment for the pleasurable and hatred/dislike for the non-pleasurable. It further leads to craving and blindly following of desires. The more pleasure we tend to seek the more desirous we tend to become for pleasure seeking. It is this tendency of being carried away by our desires that causes more pain as our endless desires push us for seeking unlimited pleasure. The desires lead to a sway of attachments (for pleasure seeking, likeness) and aversions (for unpleasurable) that tend to be the highest foes of an individual as the desires trap the individual in the vicious circle of pleasure seeking. The hedonistic happiness creates more void in an individual leading to an uncontented sense of existence. Moreover, a blind chasing and uncontrolled fulfillment of desires, rooting from an unthoughtful seeking of pleasure as means of happiness has the tendency, on the contrary, to pull an individual towards a greater despair, dread, insecurities, discomfort and misery. A hedonic approach to happiness ends to a condition of an inner disorder which Csikszentmihalyi (1991) refers to as 'psychic entropy'. According to Csikszentmihalyi, "in the quest of happiness, partial solutions don't work". However, it is important to note here that this education (which can remove the first arrow by impacting the outer world of an individual) is also a hard found privilege. There are certain individuals who are unable to receive a 'quality education' that can facilitate development. For many, education that may facilitate employment and empowerment is a dream, something far beyond their reach. However, the fallacy of this education of the outer world can be dealt with the presence of an education (running equally parallel) that impacts on the inner world of an individual.

Jung (1996) remarks; "Each individual experiments with life and makes an attempt to adapt to ever changing situations." In the absence of an education that removes the second arrow there is no scope for either dealing with negative emotionality (that stem from failures and hardships in life), or for acknowledging one's existence beyond the materialistic/transactional world. It is only through the subtle texture of psychological wellbeing can education empower an individual through having an incredible impact upon the inner world of an individual. The power to understand life beyond our puny self-identity, and the development of potentials that facilitate emotional strengths and successfully battling negative emotions are the defining features of removing the second arrow. An education dedicated to the inner

world (along with the education for the outer world), is an anagnorisis of education as the new normal and its high time that we awaken ourselves to this eternal reality.

Conclusion

Education opens up the inner world to experience greater possibilities in the outside world. It helps in opening of the mind and new opportunities are made available with education.

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