

AN INSIGHT INTO THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AS AN AGENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Education enables a man to acquire virtue, by making him social, interactive, and disciplined; it opens the vistas of learning by helping him better absorb information and sharing the same, thus making him humane, and the central element in the social structure. Maclver (1959) asserted that social change happens as a response to many types of social and nonsocial environment. Education is considered the most important 'ideological state apparatus' devised by the ruling classes to ensure that the society largely conforms to their ideas and interests. In the traditional educational system the role of education was to transmit a fixed way of life to the students as society itself was an unchanging and static entity. However, in this modern context, education is seen as an instrument of social change brought about by changing man's attitude and outlook. In this paper, the authors tried to display the importance of education as an agent of change in this rapid changing world as well as the relationship between education and the social change. The paper concludes by discussing the importance of training faculty members in higher education institutions to cope with the change and teach their students soft skills that are required for students' success in the 21st century.

Keywords: education, social change, agent, 21st century, information technology.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a never-ending process; it starts with the birth of an individual and continues till the life lasts. Education makes a man a **real** human being. It is an essential human virtue. Education equips the individual with social, moral, cultural and spiritual aspects and thus makes life progressive, cultured and civilized. P. C. Banerjee (1947) defined education: *“It is the development of the power of adaptation to an ever changing social environment”*.

Culturally, the material and non-material aspects depend upon the needs of the society. Change occurs in these with the passage of time. New challenges are there before every society. The structure and functions of different social orders change as a result of a number of inter-related and inter-dependent factors. In addition, new technologies are developed for the benefit of mankind. This paper will discuss the human development, education, social change, and the role of education in building well-being societies.

SYNOPTIC VIEW OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

A peep into the human history will illustrate how man has progressed to date. There was a time spanning millions of years when man walked erect, lived in caves and in groups but could not communicate except through cries, shrieks and howls. Body language developed to facilitate some communication which remained, for the most part, vague. Anatomically, the voice box had not developed. Then, there was sudden change in anatomy– the brain size grew from 650 cc to about 1,500 cc - and with this development, the power to think grew manifold. The voice box developed and various kinds of cries developed as a result of voice modulation. Slowly, pictography and pictorial language developed. With the passage of a long time, language took a crude form and, with it, writing developed. Variety came about in language and grammar was evolved to arrive at exact meanings. After the invention of the wheel, printing was a revolutionary change. It made it possible to store knowledge and preserve it for future generations. In the last 150 years, man has invented telephone, telegraph, radio, television, satellite and digital communication systems and the latest is the mobile phone technology. This brings to light the fact that education – passing of information, invention and innovation from one person to the other, from one generation to the next, through the spoken and the written word – facilitated spread of new knowledge and learning. It may be emphasized here that in the past, this was possible only by using archives, libraries and other modes of recording. It proves the hypothesis that education is the tool of social change which includes change in other aspects of life, such as, cultural, economic and structural sub-systems of social system.

DEFINITION OF EDUCATION

Various educationists and philosophers have defined education as a process of development. The meaning of education is manifold. It not only encompasses the all-round or holistic development of the child, but also includes teacher education as an independent field of study. Further, it has an intrinsic economic value (and hence its nickname as an *investment*) and is also, at the same time, a veritable instrument of social change and control. Education is a creation of the society and, equally, a creator of it as well. In fact, Education is not only relevant in the present time but, is also, the means for preparing one for the future. M. K. Gandhi (1969) said, *“By education, I mean all round drawing the best in a child and which means body, mind and soul”*.

The basic objective of education is to get knowledge, skill and values (ethical, moral, spiritual and professional) as well as to learn desirable behavior in societal institutions that make up the structure of society. Socialization process helps man to adapt to the diverse behavior patterns and changing situations in diverse role contexts. As far as the application of philosophy of education goes, education helps in reduction of poverty by mitigating its adverse effects on population, health and nutrition.

While changes in social, economic and political environment take place due to various factors, the human resource has to adapt to those changes for stability of society, economy and relationships. Similarly, science and technology introduce inventions into the methods and processes and so, education has to be re-oriented to respond to those changes.

Thus education is a dynamic, continuous (lifelong), purposeful or objective-oriented process. Education is, therefore, a tool of individual and social transformation. Historically considered, during ancient times, in very remote past, social change was brought about by social wars and battles. Civilizations died and new ones emerged. Science and Technology ushered in (and continue to do so) changes in methods, cultures, systems and structures of society. Nowadays, therefore, changes can be made by changing education. It would be appropriate to discuss the subject at this stage in a historical perspective.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ABOUT EDUCATION

Education among the masses in the world, was extremely restricted for the elite, very poor in content and coverage. Further, education as a part of the entire culture of the society was controlled and administered by a specific section, and was used as an instrument of training with a specific aim in sight. It taught the pupil the virtue of unconditional allegiance to elders, to parents, to teachers, and to the king. It was a means of making the individual accept and conform to hierarchical structures of the society and completely subordinate his individuality to it. Modern education has a fundamentally different orientation and organization as compared to traditional education. Its content is liberal and exotic and it is steeped in modern world-view. Modern education is not contained in water-tight compartments. It encourages an inter-disciplinary approach. In the present time, our social and professional problems are very complex. They cannot be solved by the experts of any one discipline. It requires experts of various disciplines to work jointly to find workable solutions. Social change happens as a result of the fast changing world of the 21st century.

CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Parsons (1937) believe in the existence of structural and functional sub-systems within the social system. The change in structural and functional sub-systems of the social system is called *social change*. According to Jenson (cited in Jadhav, 2012), social change may be defined as modification in the ways of doing and thinking of people. As per the views of Dawson, cultural change is the social change. Cultural change can be grouped into two categories: material and non-material. Material aspects of culture deal with the materials of utility while the non-material part constitutes habits, ideals, beliefs, attitudes and values. State of social development is called *civilization*. In the light of the above facts, social change means change in material and non-material aspects of the society. According to McIver (1920), change in social structure is called social change. Peter McLaren defines it as “the process through which students learn to critically appropriate knowledge existing outside their immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world,

and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live” (as cited in Shor, 1992, p.16).

Education and Social change

There is hardly anything in our midst which is static. Everything changes, just as every organism grows. The society composed of human beings also undergoes changes. These changes occur in the society’s cultural pattern and its structure and, consequently, cast an impact on its members. This process of change is quite complicated and needs careful and in depth study. Education has to change its direction in response to the changes in environment. The institutional framework in society is geared towards improving the quality of life and this is brought about by changes in production patterns, which, in turn, influence the consumption patterns, and that leads to change/shift in relationships. The structure of society undergoes change and such changes are a continuum.

Education is considered as the most powerful social change instrument. Through education, any society can bring desirable changes that can cope with the rapid development of technology. Education, no doubt, can help the process of social change as a necessary and vitally important collateral factor. It can help to stimulate, accelerate and work out that process by disseminating and inculcating knowledge, information, skills and values appropriate to the changing socio-economic issues. Education may help the process of far-reaching social change by using its liberating role of examining and analyzing the existing social situation.

The relation between education and social change has been examined in rural contexts, where rigid class systems have proved as barriers to education as well as agricultural changes. Some research studies are mentioned below:

Lerner (1958) stated that the *key to modernization lies in the participant society* – one in which people go through school, read newspapers, are in the wage and market economy, participate politically through elections and change opinions on diverse matters. He also posted that education is the pivotal agent in the transition to a fully participant society.

Theodore Schultz (1982) has pointed out that with economic development and the requirement for highly educated and trained manpower, parents become increasingly concerned with the quality of their children, as against the number of children emphasized in traditional societies. Therefore, *parents invest in children’s education more as it is investment in growth agent* (education); it has twin advantages of stimulating the process of development and lowering fertility thus accelerating the process of development.

Marion Levy (1972) has indicated that the aspects of social relations of people may be discussed in terms of (i) rationality and traditionalism; (ii) universalism and particularism; (iii) functional specificity and functional diffuseness and (iv) avoidance and intimacy. As the level of modernization of a society increases, the emphasis shifts on to explaining one’s reasons for doing a given thing in scientifically defensible terms. Education can be viewed as investment, an instrument of economic stability, and a discipline.

Education as Investment

In modern economic thought, the concept of education as investment in human capital and as a critical factor in economic development is of recent origin. The Prime Minister of India in his foreword to the Seventh Five-Year Plan emphasized human factor in development process in the following words: *“In the final analysis, development is not just about factories, dams and roads. Development is basically about people. The human factor, the human context, is*

of the supreme value. We must pay much greater attention to these questions in future.”. Therefore, the human factor is an important correlate of socio-economic development. Productivity is not a simple consequence of economic resources and inputs. Economic resources are manipulated by the human factor which serves as a critical variable in the input-output analysis.

Education for Economic Stability

In the modern society where specialized workforce is the need to attain economic power, the acquisition of special knowledge and education has assumed economic significance. These are in great measure economic investment and, combined with other human investment, predominantly account for the productive superiority of the technically advanced countries. Nicholson (1990) has given a beautiful example to illustrate the superiority of human skill. He says that Germany had been devastated by pestilence, famine, civil and foreign wars in almost every century but it has regained its power quickly every time, while rich and mighty Spain enjoying comparative internal peace had sunk deeper into poverty and misery. The same sun still shines on the Spaniards, they have been endowed with rich minerals but that nation has gradually lost powers of production and has become poor and miserable. It is due to immaterial products of human industry. Thus, a country is required to sacrifice and give up measures of material poverty in order to gain culture, skill and powers of limited production; it must sacrifice some present advantage in order to ensure future ones. Human capital is, therefore, a joint product with the commodity being produced and this capital formation aids further developments in both the protected industry and the economy as a whole. The description above boils down to the stark truth that for economic stability, the human capital has to be sustained, further trained in the latest methods and technology and kept happy and contented; these steps will keep the human capital (work-force of the country) motivated and committed.

Education as a discipline

Education has general and professional aspects. As a general discipline, it teaches desirable attributes to develop well groomed or rounded personalities, makes students (children/disciples) values and build strong characters. Education removes ignorance and creates awareness of subjects, sets the aim of life and as a short-term objective, prepares one for survival and for making a positive contribution to the society through the process of socialization and assimilation. Education polishes manners, develops the spirit of service and enquiry; makes the individual a true citizen, an informed and responsible parent, proficient worker and efficient professional. The education system provides alternatives in choosing professional courses as per aptitude or taste or interest. Thus, education does not only make an individual a good human being, but, also, makes him a worthy member of the society, a proficient or expert professional.

Education has three components: knowledge, skills, attitude. While knowledge of content is provided in all kinds of education (general or specialized), skills are imparted and practiced more in professional/vocational courses. Attitude is tackled in all courses and at all levels in all disciplines. Without a positive attitude, knowledge and training remain idle rather only in store (tacit knowledge) which loses relevance and may fade away to a degree.

In the 21st century, the core strength of any country can be natural and human resources. Change in employment pattern, industry, business, services through the adoption of an education system which is in sync with the Information & Communication Technology will make a country a financial (Economic) superpower. The US and its allies fought two world

wars because of money power and the longest sword they possessed. Now, economics will rule the world. Time has changed. Good and relevant education creates specialized and skilled manpower. To cite an example, India changed its education policy and supported technical education. The result is a large specialized and professional human resource called human capital. The result is that Indians have occupied a good percentage of highly skilled jobs in the most advanced countries. Domestically, technology was upgraded and India is now among the few advanced nuclear powers, included in the exclusive nuclear club of six members. This is the miracle achieved through education.

SAUDI GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO SOCIAL CHANGE

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the government has set high expectations from its higher education institutions. It indicated that the education system remained insufficient to meet the requirements of the rapid changing society. It thus recommended that new mechanisms that would respond to the demands of the economy and the labor market and, particularly, increase the employability of young people in different majors, medical, science, engineering, administration, computer science, and information technology are crucially needed. One of the most important initiatives designed to pursue drastic reforms in the sector of higher education is the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA), which came into being in 2003 with the aim of improving the quality of higher education provision through determining standards and criteria for academic performance and accreditation of academic programs. The NCAAA has set eleven key quality standards for higher education institutions the most relevant of which to the professional training program is Standard 4. Standard 4, which deals with aspects of teaching and learning, focuses on five broad areas known as learning outcomes domains. These are knowledge, cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and responsibility, communication, information technology and numerical skills, and psychomotor skills (National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment, 2009).

Although each college has a strong cadre of qualified faculty, intended learning outcomes do not cover the five domains specified in the National Qualification Framework stated by the NCAAA as well as the other important skills that are considered crucial for students to cope with the 21st changes. This might be due to the fact that faculty members lack the necessary educational competencies and skills mentioned above. Current university teaching is problematic because faculty members tend to teach the way they were taught with the inherent dangers of proliferating uninformed, outdated, and/or inappropriate teaching and assessment practices.

IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING FACULTY MEMBERS

A teacher has to be taught how to use the knowledge of psychology and sociology along with the knowledge of the subject-content while teaching a student to make him or her understand the material easily, fully and without the fear or inhibition of any kind. The teacher has to be so trained as to develop the right attitude, understanding and commitment. The teacher should also have access to resources and technological tools to smoothen the process of teaching-learning. For this, appropriate training is imparted before taking him on rolls, retrained in-service. They should be encouraged to develop *reflective analysis* to think of new ways, methods and content to improve the quality of his output as per the needs of the students.

Teacher training is a process that involves inputs from three disciplines: Education, Sociology and Psychology. The solution found to any problem will be a confluence of these

disciplines. We may term this as “*social psychology of education*”. A teacher has to play his role effectively by first updating himself through reflective teaching, identifying classroom problems/situations where experience-based decisions will have to be taken. Experience does not come naturally; it has to be acquired by research, seeking the feedback of peers and having open discussions. The teacher’s lessons should be intelligible, clear and clothed in simple language. He/she should generate a classroom discussion and encourage questioning. His behavior should inspire the students and thus promote human values in them. The teacher has to be innovative and creative to identify student-related activities to engage them in community service to sensitize and guide them on the path of righteousness and truth (Al-Hattami, et al., 2013).

Higher education institutions should provide regular training workshops for faculty members. The importance and effectiveness of faculty training programs is to enhance and elevate faculty members' professional abilities in teaching. Faculty professional development should be looked at as a lifelong learning process. Based on a number of in-depth interviews, Gibbs and Coffey (2000) developed a framework that lays out the rationale for conducting a faculty training program. Their rationale is based on the improvement of teachers' skills, the development of teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning, and the consequent changes in students' learning.

There is no doubt that the teacher plays a crucial role in the transformation of individuals and society. Teachers are the people who can affect the child’s eternity. Teachers are the role models for young students. They continue to influence their wards - some inspire them to the extent that they make their mark and excel. As students are the future of a country, the models they follow should be absolutely exemplary. Teachers are one single community of elders who can have very far reaching effects on the younger generation; they have broader spectrum of influence on the students, even more than the parents. Teachers should be properly educated, made aware of contexts, enabled to be up to date with the subject matter and audio-visual and tech-savvy. They can deliver the goods, present their lessons well and create perfect understanding in their students. They must generate discussions, sharpen intellects and help the learners relate their lessons to real life situations. Such a divine job can be done by a teacher who is passionate about teaching, who is professional to the core. Teacher-training is the most important subject that must attract serious attention of the higher education institutions, governments and administrators (Al-Hattami et. al., 2013). The power of individuality makes a grain of mustard into a mountain.

CONCLUSION

Education is a dominant factor which affects the social and cultural behaviors of individuals directly or/and indirectly. The effect of education is discernible in: (a) standard of life and living; (b) resources; (c) population situation; (d) environmental problems; (e) existing socio-cultural patterns, etc.

In fact, education is fundamental to bring change in the socio-cultural behavior of people. People are constructively engaged and are trying to improve their standard of living. The awareness component as well as development component is the function of education with specific reference to social change in the area of standard of living. Not only this, education affects the development of resources which leads to a significant change in the material and non-material aspects of the culture of any society. This paper discussed, briefly, the role of education as an agent of change in the social development and how it contributes to human resource development and human capital formation. The latter is the sum total of knowledge,

skills, initiative, resourcefulness, capacity for sustained work, right interests, attitudes, values, aptitude and all the other human qualities conducive to higher output and accelerated economic growth. Human resource development and human capital are non-material components of culture.

Further, technical education is the tool to develop technological resources owing to researches. Education makes it possible to capacitate people to use natural resources like forests, water, air, petroleum, metals and minerals, etc. Education helps reorient attitudes towards environment, nationalism, modernization, internationalism, westernization, etc. Above all, it is through education that we learn to cooperate, collaborate, be humane and uphold human rights and respect human dignity as well as dignity of labor. Education teaches us the lessons of peace and harmony, overcoming strife and conflict and working for a better future.

To sum up, education is a necessity for all irrespective of caste, creed color or gender. Every country should be concerned about education. Computer power, Technology, and Telecommunication technology and technology in relation to activities (in industry, business, services and home) have converged and, therefore, education system has to adapt to them to develop the education methods, practices and procedures. Case study method, storytelling method, experience sharing, group discussions, exercises and role play are now the tools used to teach and learn without strain and stress.

Education develops the individual: it makes him civilized and sophisticated, and a competent professional capable of coping with difficult situations and ultimately an expert with the qualities of a good human being and a responsible citizen.

Education effects changes in thinking, ideology, culture and interaction and this is what makes society dynamic, vibrant and prosperous. There is an undeniable link with personal development, social and economic development and ultimately, national and international development. Education removes all kinds of barriers and helps in establishing peace, harmony and happiness. Teachers are the kingpins for growth, development and empowerment good governance is the driver.

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