Education: An Option for Social Change
by
Persis Ginwalla and Jimmy Dabhi

Societal change may take place by accident but not social change and transformation. It needs human will and ability to bring about change and transformation. The important point to understand is that social transformation is not accidental; rather it is purposeful, an act of will which is consciously undertaken.

The 21st century, the much-hyped "new millennium" will not cure the ills that plague our societies. Things do not happen by themselves. They are made to happen. Change and transformation, for that matter stagnation and underdevelopment as well are outcomes of our decisions and actions, in democracy like ours they are also outcome of our political decision and actions. It would not be an understatement to say that these decisions and actions will be largely influenced by the kind of education 'tailored', delivered or denied lack of it or tailored and made available to us, especially to Indian masses. We agree with the stand that education is important for progress in society but we are going further to state that it is equally important to pay attention to the kind of education that is being given today, how it is given and to whom it is made available and who are denied. Our contention is that the educational system as of today (in the context of India) has not only become irrelevant[i] and outdated but has assumed insidious proportions. It fosters discriminations and excludes by obliteration or distortion.

The paper talks about education as one of the means of change and the role it can play in transforming society, in a particular way addressing social discriminations based on gender, caste, class, religion, geography, language, race, and very recently, history. For the purposes of this paper we restrict our focus on the two discriminations viz. caste and gender. The paper begins with a brief note on discrimination and its various aspects (section I). The subsequent section, section II, deals with the present scenario. Section III finally examines the concept of education as it exists and what it could be and the factors which influence education and learning.

I

Violence is not always physical and bloody. Certain kinds of violence are more subtle, more cruel, aimed at debilitating or killing the spirit – the self-image, self respect, the identity of a person, community or group. The discriminations mentioned above are such a kind of violence. They no doubt result in physical violence but often it is resorted to when the subtle (non-physical) violence fails. These discriminations are human-made and not God-given as we are "given" to believe. Its ultimate aim is power or control over others. Socialisation (family and the educational institutions) is a powerful medium of communicating these beliefs and perpetuating the existing inequalities/injustices.

Discrimination impacts the cognitive, emotive and behavioural aspects of a person. The cognitive factor refers to the frame of mind of a person, a society, what that person/society thinks, assumes, believes and expects of

oneself, others and the world at large. For example, the belief that women are inferior or the assumption that the presence of some people is "polluting".

Emotive aspect is to do with the emotions or feelings of a person and are, by and large, influenced by their cognitive disposition. In other words the emotions and feelings are brought on by our thinking, our beliefs and assumptions about reality and about ourselves. For example, the belief that women are inferior arouses emotions of contempt for the woman. The assumption that the presence of some people is "polluting" arouses feelings of disgust or repulsion in the presence of people so considered. For the woman who also holds a similar belief about women's inferiority or the person who has accepted the "pollution" associated with oneself it may arouse feelings of contempt towards their own selves. Through passage of time the belief becomes so much a part of the being (internalised) that it evokes the emotions "naturally".

The emotions, in turn, influence the behaviour. The emotion of contempt for women may be expressed in jokes about the female body or the emotion of disgust towards an "untouchable" may be manifested through prohibitions on their drawing water from the well of the "touchables", or separate water pots for the Dalits in the rural school. For the woman it may be manifested in jealousies or bickering about other women and for the "untouchable" in physical pulling away when in the proximity of "touchable" people.

Any discrimination is based on the assumed superiority (along with privileges) of the one against the inferiority of the other. On this is built the edifice of inequality, injustice, oppression. This is of course rationalised on the basis of a natural given (sex, birth, colour, race etc.) and further authenticated, approved, affirmed and asserted through religion and institutional assent.

As is clear from the foregoing, discriminations and their practice have the power of shaping not only those who are discriminated against but also those who discriminate against. The need to rise beyond such thinking and practice is not only for those who are discriminated against, as is commonly held, but equally so for those who discriminate against. Let us now briefly examine two discriminations that exist in Indian society.

Caste discrimination based on the Varna system is a model that ('organises') divides society into four hierarchical categories: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. There is still a fifth category, composed of those who are outside the Varna / caste system, the 'avarnas' or the so-called untouchables. The characteristic of this model is that there is a hierarchy of superior – inferior which orders the relationships among them. It is a system in the sense that it structures and orders the relationships and predetermines the behaviour and practices of its adherents (Franco, 1993). In the village schools even today (region small Bhal, Saurashtra, Kutch of Gujarat) the children of 'outcastes' cannot easily mix with other students and drink from the same water pot. In these areas wells are still separate based on caste differences and the 'avarnas' have to wait for hours for a good soul to pour some water in their pots from above if their well does not yield water.

Similarly the discrimination suffered by women, what we call gender discrimination, is based on the assumed superiority of the man over the assumed inferiority of the woman. The discrimination here too is on the

basis of a natural given, ones sex, and the relationships are ordered on the basis of this dictum.

<p style="text-align:center">II</p>

It is pointless to dwell on the need to change these discriminatory sets of relationships; it has been asserted ad nauseum onwards of 1947. The present educational system, in view of the above, does not respond to the above discriminations. To that extent it appears to us as subtly reservationist (the reservation which society does not wish to acknowledge) and secondly, as largely irrelevant – examination oriented and ill equipped to understand and cope with the world around (Heredia, 1996).

It is reservationist, a "dual system operating in a society with a strong class bias" (Xavier, 1996: 1). Those with the means are able to acquire an education of a higher quality in private institutions; those without them are forced to opt for an education of the lowest quality, if at all, mostly in government schools. The concept of 'excellence' then, understood as securing high percentages in the Board / University examinations, works to the advantage of the former. They are then the ones to make use of further educational opportunities. The job market would also favour these students only. They are also the ones who occupy the top posts in government and bureaucracy with the power to shape policies. The system is exclusive because admission to the privileged circle is "reserved" by default, of ones birth or financial status.

The educational system operational today is also irrelevant to the context and has failed to answer the needs of the country. The U.G.C. document - Challenges of Education (1985:1-2) reads, "If the present system is allowed to continue, the chasms of economic disabilities, regional imbalances and social injustice will widen further, resulting in the building up of disintegrative tensions". Let us look at the growth of the educational sector in terms of student enrolment, numbers of institutions and universities in the following table (Sisodia, 1999:45).

Growth of higher education system in India – 1947 to 1997

No.	Higher Education System	Year		Growth (fold increase) %
		1947	1997	
1.	Conventional Universities	20	179	8.9
2.	Colleges (total)	591	8529	14.4
	▪ Colleges of General (liberal) education	459	6759	15
	▪ Professional Colleges	132	1770	13.4
3.	Enrolment (total)	228881	5898407	25.76
	▪ Colleges of General (liberal) education	183238	5332782	29.1
	▪ Professional Colleges	45643	565625	12.4
4.	Teacher (total)	24000	320000	13
5.	Teacher – Pupil ratio	1: 8	1: 20	--
Source: Sisodia, M. L. (1999) 'Meeting HRD Challenges in Higher Education', in Pareek U. and Sisodia V. (1999) HRD in the New Millennium, New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill.				

The above table indicates the phenomenal increase in the educational opportunities available in India in the 50 years after independence. It goes without saying that those who have benefited most are the elites (who are also from 'upper' castes), while the SCs, STs and women of the marginalised communities continue to be discriminated against in education (see Franco, 1996). The following table illustrates how the upper caste have benefited from the education system and 'captured' the institution to serve their interests. Educational institutions are acclaimed instrument of socialisation, based on the following table Haq (1991:245) argues that "it is through the educational structure and educational process that the values pertaining to caste like untouchability, caste feeling, casteism, parochialism, caste superiority, caste hatred, discrimination etc. are transmitted and, thus, education becomes a mechanism of 'traditionalisation' of modernity".

Caste Background of Members of Managing Committee, Teachers, Administration Staff and Students in Educational Institution					
Sr. No.	Caste Background	No. of elected members of Managing Committees	No. of Teachers	No. of Administration Staff	No. of Students	Total
1	Upper Caste (Only Thakurs)	124, 98.40 %	300, 86.58 %	53, 43.08 %	1468, 48.42 %	1845, 52.53 %
2	Middle Castes	1, 0.8 %	29, 12.55 %	63, 51.22 %	884, 29.15 %	977, 27.82 %
3	Lower Castes	1, 8.8 %	2, 0.87 %	7, 5.69 %	680, 22.43 %	690, 19.65 %
Total		126, 100 %	331, 100 %	123, 100 %	3032, 100 %	3512, 100 %
Source: from an unpublished document of 'Caste, Land and Power'. The document is based on the date collected from nine educational institutions managed and financed by the Government in Dobhi Region of Sultanpur Dist., U.P. in 1978-79, cited in Haq, 1991:246						

Therefore, while India has witnessed an increase in educational institutions and student enrolment after independence, it has been accompanied simultaneously with an increase in the incidence of poverty, violence (against SCs, STs and women), communalism, criminalisation of politics. We submit that these ills are on account of many reasons but education and the educational system must also take some of the blame in these matters – "as the education system may have built-in devices for perpetuating inefficiency and corruption in the society" (Srinivas, 1968).

The educational process that a child passes through is devoid of an active values inculcation and integration component in the regular curriculum. This, coupled with the plethora of wrong patterns of behaviour, life styles and role models (also see Desrochers, 1987) which are available to the young mind today, makes them aspire or simply follow (in the absence of any other) to those life styles and patterns of behaviour. The

cycle goes on reproducing itself in society. S/he looks at the utility of a bit of information / knowledge from the perspective of Board / University performance only.

The output of this kind of an educational process is a product which is utilitarian and status quoist. Utilitarian, because s/he would only value the degree in terms of a job and the salary-perks- position package which it brings. The creativity which s/he can bring to the job and the contribution to the organisation and society at large are of secondary importance. This kind of education produces disparities, and tragically for the country, we must admit, the system thrives on these disparities. The citizens that such a system produces are numbed to the gruelling realities of the times and in that sense, status quoist, because it would never occur to such a product that the reality needs questioning.

We would like to briefly present our observations, which are based on the examination of a few sample textbooks[ii] (of Standards I and III) used in some of the schools of Ahmedabad. The content of the textbooks clearly reveal the biases of the writers themselves and thus society itself. e.g. the exercise asking for an introduction of the student asks about the name of the father. The mother has been obliterated from the exercise, and the process of marginalisation of women has been subtly introduced. In fact the textbooks, without exception, are full of gender role stereotypes. One can imagine the child being bombarded with these "facts" ("This is our kitchen, mother cooks here", "My Daddy is big and strong... he sees to our needs. Mummy...looks after us... She does all the work at home", "some mothers go out to work... they earn money to help the family") and images (the teacher and nurse are always women, woman along with the girl child fetching water, man sitting on the cot while the woman is sitting on the ground, the outdoor games are all played by boys, girls only listen to the radio or watch T.V., all professions and positions of power and influence are held by men,). The western / elite / upper class biases of the textbook are revealed thus: porridge, bread and strawberry jam for breakfast, the Collector in a tie and shoes... What impact these would create on the young mind is anybody's guess.

The teacher/s, who are the products of the same society, reinforce and perpetuate the stereotypes and thus strengthen the discriminations. The teachers of the village school maintaining separate pots of water (for the teachers and students) for the avarnas (outcaste) and the savarnas (caste). The attitude of questioning such practices is absent in the teachers themselves. How will it be transmitted to the students?

The methodology followed in the classrooms is that of 'dishing out' on the part of the teachers and passive reception of what is 'dished out' on the part of the students. A stray question from a student invites reprimand from the teacher, one, to hide the inability of the teacher to answer the question and secondly, the lack of honesty to accept ones limitation. The assessment of the students is heavily based on reproduction of the facts, repetition. Creativity and originality are not the criteria for assessment, at best.

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that the present state of education in the country is in need of serious rethinking and rejuvenation. This process of rethinking needs to take account of the various sections of the society, their varying demands and aspirations, especially the ones who have been historically marginalised and who form the bulk of the uneducated masses in the country (residing mainly in the villages and urban slums).

III

There are various means (Maadhyam) through which we act, we create, we transform but destroy as well. Education is one of the means which can be used for this purpose – of transformation, of dynamism and of healthy challenge. Education is a process through which we act upon the young mind with the hope of shaping it in order to promote and create a humane, just society.

The word education is derived from the Latin 'educare' which means 'to elicit, to bring out'. Therefore, an educator (a teacher), by implication, is one who elicits or brings out. There is a crucial assumption implicit in the meaning of the term, which is that each individual has potential which is latent and which has to be brought out. This, then, is the task of an educator. An educator is a catalyst who brings out the full potential of the individual, one who facilitates the process of "potentiation", one who helps the student do and achieve all that she is capable of doing or achieving. Education therefore has to be a process in which, through interaction, human beings are potentiated to their fullest capacities.

As illustrated in Section I social discrimination affects not only the discriminated persons / communities but also the groups / persons who practice the discrimination. Since it makes use of and affects all the three faculties cited above (cognitive, emotive and behavioural), social change and transformation, if it has to be lasting, effective and pervasive, must also take into account these three faculties.

Education today world-wide is run like a "banking system" (Freire, 1972) – you put in what you have and withdraw, with interest, after sometime. The assumption is that the mind is an empty vessel and it is the educator's task to fill it – with, data, facts, figures... and that this will equip the individual with the skills to earn a livelihood. But what this kind of an 'education' gives is information, which is very different from knowledge. The emphasis in this kind of education is on the delivery of the content (by hook or by crook), and cramming the facts. The process of arriving at an awareness of a subject, which is the way to knowledge, is overlooked, bypassed or simply ignored. Further, it thrives on the rigid maintenance of the boundaries of the teacher and the taught – one knows and the other does not. Such an attitude impedes growth for the teacher and brings in stagnation and mediocrity (also see Dabhi, 1999).

Paulo Freire, an educationist from Latin America, proposed another understanding and practice of education in his revolutionary book called The Pedagogy of the Oppressed. He held that education had to be "problem-solving". It has chiefly three implications:

- That it is an interactive, interdependent, two-way process, wherein both the teacher and the learner are involved in the process of learning and acquiring knowledge. There is an important assumption made here which is that the teacher is not the final authority or repository of knowledge; the student plays an equally important role not only in her own learning but also that of the teacher. It is therefore envisaged as a dialogue between the teacher and the taught. His educational pedagogy questioned the 'teacher-taught' dichotomy in education – i know, you don't know.
- That it is a dynamic process, not static. Learning and education are seen as lifelong activities which do not stop with the acquisition of a

degree. Change and transformation, renewal and upgradation are an integral part of education.

- It is praxis-oriented therefore involving constant and conscious action – reflection – action.

Ivan Illich, in his influential work Deschooling Society, suggests that education should be a liberating experience in which the individual explores, creates, uses her initiative and judgement and freely develops her faculties and talents to the full.

Therefore we may rightly conclude that true education has the following ingredients:

- ➢ Dialogue between the teacher and the taught.
- ➢ Praxis
- ➢ Transformation of both the teacher and the taught,
- ➢ Dynamic (as opposed to static or one time),
- ➢ It is a perspective (a spirit of learning) not an end in itself.

Along with education let us briefly introduce the word learning that is so often talked about. Learning is part of education; it is "a process of acquiring knowledge through experience which leads to a change in behaviour". Here 'learning' is a process, 'knowledge' is the outcome or the result, and 'change in behaviour' is an indicator of learning. The entire experience of learning involves the human faculties of cognitive (mind), emotive (heart) and behavioural or motor (behaviours and skills).

We would like to highlight three factors which need to be paid attention to in this process of learning, which education is expected to provide and educators are expected to facilitate. These three factors are the educator, the content and the desired output.

- The educator should have adequate knowledge of the subject and is expected to exhibit quality. The educator is expected to have competence blended with right attitudes and values which are people oriented, which exhibit respect, dignity and equality for human beings, their cultures. If the educator is not an integrated person with right qualities of knowledge, competencies and human values the process of education and learning are hampered, the outcome is suspect, the student is not entirely to be blamed for lack of adequate education and learning. In other words we are talking here of providing effective "role-models" to the students.

- The content reflects the processes that go into education. Content has to do with the methodology used in education. Various means such as teaching, action-reflection, type of in-house/outdoor curriculum, research, expeditions and exposure are part of this content. The means the educator uses are important. It reflects the creativity and spirit of experimentation of the individual and of the institution. However, the means on their own, without the spirit of the educator and the learner may not bear much fruit; but often the means are motivating, the dynamics in-built in them are stimulating and facilitate the environment for learning.

- The desired output may be thought of in terms of the person who passes through this process and the climate the process creates in an educational institution. The climate, the environment becomes both the content and the outcome. The human 'outcome' in terms of students, who have passed through this process may be expected to be persons with a healthy self-image, i.e. of self acceptance and acceptance of others, one who exhibits respect for self and others.

Such a person has adequate criticality and ability to analyse the environment, one who does not take the observed at face value but who is interested in exploring the 'how' and the 'why' of what is observed.

The person who has been subjected to such a process through the kind of education described above may be expected to be an 'actor' and not just a 'reactor' in a situation and to stimuli. Such a person faces situations, problems and makes adequate attempts to solve problems whether in oneself, in the family or society at large. Therefore education and knowledge which does not help to face reality, but on the contrary help to deny the existence of the problem, is suspect. Often suicides, drugs, some other vices are not always a free choice but escape routes from reality and both the educators and educated of our times are victims of it.

Educator	Content	Desired Output
Quality	Methodology	Growth, joy of learning,
Knowledge	Processes	Respect – for self and others,
Competencies	Research	Co-operation, Acceptance,
Attitude	Publication	Feeling of being wanted, important,
Values	Reflections	
Integrity	Training	

In the context of education, it is an illusion to assume that education can be value-free or value-neutral. Education is value-loaded and it is influenced by the values, biases, cultural context of the educator and her/his society (also see Desrochers, 1987). Therefore it is all the more imperative for the educators, education systems and institutions to guard against the anti-human, anti-poor, anti-women cultures, values, attitudes. Language, which is a medium of education, can play a facilitating or hindering role in the process of learning. Language has the potential of generating 'negative' feelings such as guilt, disrespect for self and others, hatred and biases towards women, other religions, race and cultures. Our feelings are the products of our assumptions and thoughts about objects and reality. These feelings facilitate or hinder learning. E.g. Calling a student 'nālāyak' is likely to generate feelings of humiliation and it is likely to demotivate a student from learning, apart from the fact that it goes against the very meaning and calling of an educator. A feedback to a student about their performance, if given with firmness but without using words which might be perceived as humiliating and insulting, may be more productive and effective. We therefore can say that:

- Education is value-based and influenced by the agents, culture of society and community. Feelings play an important part in educating and learning – language / symbols used may help produce 'positive' or 'negative' feelings.
- Textbooks which are far from the reality and insensitive to cultural, religious, caste and gender biases may reinforce anti-human, anti-women and anti-poor values and attitudes, Spirit of freedom and experimentation (lack of fear) enhances creativity and learning.

The examples of some of the of South-East Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, Singapore has shown how education has helped these countries make a quantum leap in terms of development. The experience of Kerala shows that bringing about cent percent literacy helps in the process of social transformation (Parikh, 1999). The Chinese proverb "Give a man a

fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for life" makes sense here.

<div align="center">IV</div>

We have talked about education, learning and some of the factors which influence learning. Education (formal and Nonformal) helps betterment of a community and society at large. Education as we have defined above is not just a means of socialisation but a door to a new and better future opening up a vast world of opportunities and ideas (Parikh, 1999), creating a new world.

We further argue that an educational system which does not respond to the realities around us (of mass poverty, violence, environmental degradation, fundamentalist onslaught, religious bigotry,) is dangerous for the health of the nation. It has the potential of further dividing society into two opposing interest groups.

In the paper we have made an attempt to examine the concept of education and learning. The various aspects and factors of education are briefly examined. It is argued that real education is transformational and builds society. It is also argued that the values and biases of the society at large and teachers who are involved in the process of education influences the output, the student, in one way or another, and, therefore it is suggested that the responsibility of the educators (teachers) is greater.

Education, then, understood in a proper perspective has the potential to facilitate community and nation building – the educators have to be committed to the process and people who are undergoing the process of being educated.

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Endnotes:

i. This comment is made in full recognition of the efforts that have been made by various individuals and organisations towards improving or changing the quality and content of education today.

ii. The textbooks referred to are Std - 3, Gujarat State School Textbook Board, Gandhinagar, and Std. - I, R.P. Gupta & Sons, Delhi, Cambridge Publication House, New Delhi, Orient Longman, New Delhi, Goyal Brothers Prakashan, New Delhi.