

PEDAGOGY OF FREEDOM

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The word 'Education' is derived from Latin 'educare' which means 'to bring up' or 'to bring forth' or 'to draw out'. Thus, education doesn't mean teaching, or schooling or giving of knowledge or even acquisition of knowledge. Education simply means development of the qualities which are already there. Socrates compared a teacher with a midwife who just helps to bring forth the child.

I compare a teacher with a gardener or an orchard keeper. The tree is already in the seed. The seed knows what kind of tree it is. The gardener doesn't put a tree in the seed, only helps the seed to become a tree. The gardener may find a piece of good soil to plant the seed, put good organic compost to nourish the seed, put a fence to protect the seed, give water to nurture the seed, but a gardener never tries to change an apple seed into a pear tree.

Parents and teachers need to be like gardeners. They need to observe their children, understand them, help them to become who they are, support them on their way to self-realisation. But never try to impose on them their idea of an "educated person".

In our modern Industrial Age education has become confused with training, schooling or acquisition of facts, information and knowledge in order to get a job. Rather than a teacher helping a pupil to become who he or she truly is and realise his or her true potential, a teacher has become a technician or a trainer or even an agent to meet the needs of the market. The teacher is paid to mould the child so that he or she is fit to make a success of the economy. In this kind of educational system, the market and the economy become the masters and the human beings become servants.

This corruption of education worried J. Krishnamurti. When I first met him on the banks of River Ganga in Varanasi, in 1960, he said to me, "I want to recover the original and actual meaning of the noble word 'Education'. I want schools and teachers to return to the true meaning of the word and dedicate themselves to the cause of helping young people to discover their vocation."

Krishnamurti further said to me, "there is nothing wrong with the market or with the economy. As long as they serve the needs of humans, they have a place in the world. But when humans are required to serve the needs of the market and the economy then we are in real trouble. Unfortunately, that is the problem at this moment in the world. This is why we need a total revolution in our idea of education."

"I understand the etymological meaning of the word, education," I said "But do you have something more to say about it?" "I asked.

"Yes, I do. I want to say that we need to liberate ourselves from the idea that education takes place only within the four walls of a school. It is not that you read a book, go to a classroom for your lessons or pass an examination and then you have finished with your education. Education is a life-long process. From the moment you are born to the moment you die you are in the journey of learning," said Krishnamurti.

"What exactly are we trying to learn during this journey of life?" "I asked.

"We are learning to be Free! Learning is all about liberation. We need to learn to be free from fear, free from anxiety, free from dogmas and doctrines. We need to discover and rediscover that we are born free and freedom is our birth right! Fear is a conditioning of the mind. From our family, from our religious belief, from our media and even from our educational systems we are conditioned to fear. The purpose of true education is to free us from all kinds of fears."

For me this was a new Pedagogy of Freedom!

But our educational system at present is totally unaware of the fact that it is based on the Pedagogy of Fear!

Since that meeting with Krishnamurti, I have keenly observed and realised that schools and universities around the world seem to look at their students and think of them as if they have no bodies! They have no hands, no hearts, no senses, only brains. All education is focused on the education of heads only. No wonder that many of our young people feel inadequate, incompetent and fearful. They have never developed their heart qualities. They don't know how to relate to other people and to the natural world. This lack of emotional and spiritual intelligence is a major cause of fear. The usual educational curriculum includes almost nothing about compassion, about a sense of service, about courage or about love! These qualities should be cultivated during the time we are being educated.

Most educated people not only lack this spiritual and emotional intelligence, they also lack body-intelligence. The curriculum also ignores all practical or physical skills. Most undergraduates or postgraduates coming out of Universities know nothing about growing food, nothing about building a house, nothing about mending or repairing and almost nothing about cooking. They have highly trained heads superbly capable of complaining, comparing, criticising and strong desire to control and consume. They have little or no capacity for making, producing, building or creating. There is very little in our educational philosophy or practice which promotes self-reliance and self-confidence.

On top of this deficit in emotional intelligence and body-intelligence the current educational system is more or less indifferent to the development of the imagination. Music, art, dance, plays, poetry and philosophy are relegated to some distant and specialist corners. Instead of the Arts being an integral part of everyday life they have been exiled to museums and art galleries to be pursued by a small minority of celebrities and marketed as commercialised commodities, or practiced by a small number of struggling idealists, who can hardly make a living.

The educational system produces millions upon millions of young people to serve the needs of machines, markets and money. And all these young people are struggling to compete and succeed and are often afraid of not succeeding.

This fear of failure is one of the most detrimental aspects of the current Pedagogy.

In order to compensate for this fear of failure, young people are encouraged to seek success for themselves; seek bigger salaries, bigger cars, bigger houses and higher positions with higher expectations. Some succeed, but many fail. This ego-centric rat race results in family breakdown, mental breakdown, discontentment, depression and disappointment.

J. Krishnamurti was pained to see such a state of degradation in education. He called education a noble word which is misunderstood and misused. Therefore, instead of just criticising the present paradigm, he established a number of exemplary schools where learning, living and loving are integrated. In these schools we can witness the education of head, heart and hands. I have had the privilege of visiting them and found that teenage girls and boys there are enjoying a holistic approach to learning, based on a Pedagogy of Freedom. I wish these schools would provide a University level of education so that the students don't have to enter into the Pedagogy of Fear after they leave Krishnamurti Schools.