

Revamping And Modifying The Construct Of Education In The Times Of Pandemic –Scope And Perspectives

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About the author

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Abstract

In times when a pandemic like the Corona has spread its fangs far and wide, it becomes crucial that the role of educators is reinvigorated to keep the priorities in focus and also lead from the front for the students to emulate. The article envisages exploring the possibility of literati paving the way to a more holistic world; be it in terms of formation of opinion based on social media or working in tandem with different academicians all across the spectrum of education. It also integrates the opinion of acclaimed writers and leaders from the world to arrive at an approach which may not be perceived as the best choice by everyone but is acceptable to all where all the voices; the heard and the unheard are taken into account without toppling the balance on either side.

Keywords: lockdown, social media, holistic, political, social, environmental, educators, education

Social Media in the times of Corona

The world awaits the end of the lockdown owing to the corona pandemic and the anticipation is palpable. The myriad emotions that the world is wading through are muddled with anxiety and restlessness. Although the ray of hope in the form of gratitude for simply being alive disperses the pall of gloom for a while, the world around seems more and more abound with doubt and conundrum of 'To be or not to be'... As we soak ourselves in the multitudinous sea of information, where the real seems fake and the unreal adorns the garb of truth, the consumer is at his wits' ends. The usage of social media grew extensively within a few days of lockdown. Social media is a very broad term and refers to the various applications and websites that are used for sharing, interacting or creating content.

Kaplan and Haenlein (qtd. in Özçakir, Erkoç, and Özçakir) defined social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (Özçakir, Erkoç, and Özçakir 1).

The users visit various sites and interact on various forums without paying too much attention to the consequences or validity of the information being dispersed. They remain passive consumers of the web-based series which is our country is hardly regulated. Therefore, the user cannot absolve himself of the responsibility. Seemingly in an advantageous position because of lack of accountability and almost that of namelessness, he posts, tweets, displays statuses and Instagrams. This is based on half baked information that too which is made of dough that lacks any ingredients for nurturing the mind or soul. This is served on a platter to him and the platter bears the stamp of being the 'real' thereby making all the others feel inadequate if they do not partake from this platter. It is as if the opinion that is not on social media does not exist; thereby undermining the most important strata of the society be it the technologically ill-equipped, or those on a voluntary digital detox or of course those, who never seem to care about this medium. There are two aspects of the response of these consumers who prepare and consume fodder of and for social media. One, of course, is the opinion based on the particular media house which might be left or right inclined thereby adding its flavour to the piece of news. A disclaimer that needs to be added here is that this in no way undermines the very crucial role that the media plays but its tendency to sometimes get carried away in

the process of 'preparing' the right morsel of news for its viewers to suit their palettes. Two is the tendency of the consumer for only listening or reading selectively or paying attention to whatever suits his sensibility.

It may apply to the constant compulsion that we have to hold an opinion, that too, many times an unsubstantiated opinion. The virtual platforms come with a benefit of namelessness and people are tempted to express such opinions that would never find vent in a civilized world in a face to face interaction. They hide behind the veil and share their perversions with impunity and garb them as creative expression. The ideologies which were supposed to guide our political alignments are assuming the proportions of cults. The tribes play their part in preserving our culture but to imitate them in terms of a cohesive group governed by some irrational political considerations is to carry it too far. People aligning with one ideology never hold the opinion of their counterparts worth paying any heed to. We like to wear the guise of liberals or traditionalists while sticking to our claims. We have become shallow brooks which make echoes in the chambers of social media while disappearing in the next turn. But by the clouds of doubt and venom of hatred is left behind. We fail to acknowledge that there is another point of view in a civilized world that we like to believe we live in. We pay no heed to the deep waters which continue their journey with substance and nurturing silt while laying the foundation of a new civilization. The ones with a substantial view are sometimes considered either inaudible or irrelevant. They do try to make sense of their existence and stance before they merge into the sea of eternity. Their voice is considered too humble which is synonymous with weak and therefore not to be paid heed to. We become the self-appointed torchbearers of truth and colour the walls of social media with our blatant views. We are yet to come across a debate where either side budged even a little and continue to barge the other side not realizing that such remarks make for deep scars. This is not to undermine the importance of politics in our day to day lives but the grave need to save the environment, fighting malnutrition, dealing with heinous crimes with an iron hand and fight as one world rather than fragmented pieces trying to build separate multiple 'futures'. These considerations must find adequate share in the thoughts of especially the young minds which are taking shape in academic institutions worldwide. As we face these similar threats, we would be better off dealing with them as one race, as human beings. The age-old Indian dictum of 'VasudhaivKutumbkum' can be the guiding mantra to direct the efforts in one direction (Malik n.d.). The common energy that pervades in the entire human race should be recognized and nurtured. This is not to advocate the idea of one country, one world but to inculcate a sense of common identity with fellow human beings.

Role of literati - weaving the rainbow of harmony

The role of all those directly or indirectly involved in the education system must gear up to face the new challenge. The teachers all across the world must consciously work upon themselves to be able to nurture the right thoughts; they cannot continue to burden the next generation with the same ideas. The world looks up to them. They hold the magical sceptre to nurture the blossoms that come their way in the right direction. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Nation opined that the teacher should recognize, acknowledge and nurture the hidden potential of each pupil (Singh 2009). A kindergarten teacher and a College teacher must unite in the common effort of nurturing and inspiring growth in human personality (Misner 1939). They must allow space and encourage pupils to strive and grow. An old story where a man, in his earnestness to help the little butterfly come out, cuts open the cocoon thereby crippling the butterfly forever is a quintessential trait of adults today. The children must be encouraged to bloom and grow (Coelho 2007) The priorities have to be set right. If there is no water left to drink or no trees to breathe under, humanity can hardly look forward to any other bounty of life. Every aspect of life is preceded by the availability of natural resources. It is as simple as this. And it is rather late, but the right step in the right direction can go a long way. Cooperation of countries is of paramount importance here. The countries seem to be embroiled in issues which should not figure in the list as we are all moving at light speed towards common annihilation. Disputes relating to religion, caste, race, gender or any other such division should not be spent resources upon. These demarcations may be kept for personal perusal and should be a matter of personal choice and opinion without a proclamation to the world. The poverty of general ideas is equally debasing as exemplified by George Orwell. A social memory helps us to connect and dream of a shared future (Roelofs 1987). It is worth sharing that the objective is not the idea of a person falling in love with the whole multitude of humanity as it is neither possible nor feasible for the common man. Our endeavour should be to 'live and let live' and try and tolerate everyone around.

A conscious effort must be made to empathize even if we do not agree with a counter opinion. Every voice is worth hearing. The atmosphere in academia should be stimulating such thoughts in its pupils rather than preparing them for futile matters. The objective, execution and conclusion of such collisions based on impertinent issues are going to lead to equally frivolous results. Such issues are not worth putting the resources of the world at stake. This moment of epiphany for the students will be a giant leap for mankind towards a better and safer world and the educators must visualize this moment and focus their efforts for students to feel inspired and stimulated. The literati must, first of all, free themselves of the biases and direct the young energies towards building a new world rather than destroying. Peace, harmony and ecological balance should be part of the common vision and concrete efforts must lead the young brigade. A crucial step towards this would be a course that acquaints the students with the need for these common goals. Strength is prerequisite to peace but the buck should stop there. The world cannot afford another war to learn a lesson. Unfortunately, wiping the earth clean of the human race should be not on the agenda to learn the hard way.

Let the balance not be toppled on either side. For instance, we unwittingly label big business houses as being profit-making hubs irrespective of the huge contribution of social responsibility that they dispense. Similarly, we label the underprivileged as the blot of the population which must stay hidden under the glossy pages of plans and purviews. Or to take it to the other extreme, use the faces of these people as symbols of abject poverty and helplessness. What is needed is a balance; avoiding both the extremes and just letting people be while working for a more equal world. What matters is what percentage of our emotions we dedicate to a common cause rather than beating the bush and running down anyone or everyone who comes our way. Criticism is healthy for the growth of civil societies but merely criticizing without any accountability or personal responsibility should be avoided.

In the age of instant gratification and an attention span of about eight seconds, the complete story cannot be read within such a short time leave aside be comprehended fully. A substantial opinion is lost in the din of propaganda. Therefore, before passing the buck to the media, let us pause and reflect the role of literati. Accountability needs to be fixed and the 'common man' cannot absolve himself of all his duties once he posts his views. Action must and should follow a social media consumer's expression in the form of ignoring what does not qualify him to even opine. When a citizen receives a piece of information and processes it instantly without chewing on it to derive the real meaning and finally expels the unsubstantiated views, his word should not be taken with finality. He has absorbed only the visible piece on the surface while ignoring the ominous chunk that floats ominously under the water. The iceberg is waiting to strike the Titanic which envisages becoming invincible (Lynch 1992). It is very important, rather crucial to know the facts in a vibrant democracy like ours, but twittering, tweeting, 'Instagramming' and 'status' loses its sheen when ensconced in an uncooked layer of misinformation. 'Look before you tweet' becomes the need of the hour and 'Read before you opine' should become the norm of the day. The drug of baseless arguments consumed by such netizens should not let them go into a slumber. This is more a responsibility of the literate people to not use misinformation as opium to sway public opinion. To call a spade a spade irrespective of our alignment is the mark of a truly evolved and well-read ignoble soul. In this context, it is the mark of a well-opined person when he takes a stance as per the pros and cons concerning a question rather than harping on the beat of his political inclination. He should not lose sight of the common challenge that threatens humanity today.

As I prepared myself to join the noble profession of teaching, I came across a beautiful thought that stays with me in all my interactions with my pupils. A good educator is the one who helps his pupil think without telling them 'what to think'. We must bring forth the pros and cons of a situation or an idea and let them form an opinion rather than thrusting our viewpoints on them. The Socratic irony is a good way to bring out their ability to reason, argue and contemplate rather than cook, serve and thrust knowledge down their throats (Wolfsdorf 2007).

In the conventional sense, where to 'teach' is simply to transfer knowledge from the teacher's to the learner's mind, Socrates means what he says: that sort of 'teaching' he does not want to do and cannot do. But in the sense that *he* would give to 'teaching' - engaging would be learners in eclectic argument to make them aware of their own ignorance and given them opportunity to discover for themselves the truth the teacher had held back – in that sense of 'teaching' Socrates would want to say, he is a teacher, the best of teacher in his times, the only true teacher (Vlastos 86-87).

We certainly do not need a common pool of 'domesticated intellects' who are churned out of the school, colleges and universities year after year (Taylor 1957). Also, what is needed on the part of international organizations is to form a common pool of academicians where the ideas confluence and new ideas are born under the rainbow hues of various cultures. The idea is not to mix, but to assimilate the ideas and then arrive at a common end which may be adopted by educators worldwide to direct the pupils in the right direction.

The overdose of negative aspects of social media must be countered with the common pool of knowledge which would be both effective and more significant towards achieving the goals. Also, this confluence should be drawn from various ideologies but care should be taken that the luminaries are the ones who are ready to unlearn and learn.

Deconstructing the binaries

The key to new world order as it unconditional obedience to the past is unnerving. If the world has to take a new leaf in its social and cultural construct retaining what is useful and adds values to life, then this process must be undertaken at the international level in letter and spirit. The tyranny of conventional thought must be challenged, when it becomes necessary to evolve for realizing the vision of a shared future (Rao 2016). Focused actions with the right intent must be placed in sync to rebuild the education system where usage and focus of social media content should be properly developed. The youngsters are a vibrant lot; taking them for granted will not work. Greta Thunberg, the teenage climate activist, was compared to Joan of Arc by Margaret Atwood. Thunberg challenged the world leaders and the policymakers to focus on the priorities (Alter, Hynes & Worland 2019). Many a Greta Thunberg(s) are squirming and coiling in their skin when things do not work despite us having made so much progress in every field. Technological and scientific advancement is imperative to progress, but eyes must rest on the horizon; that is sublime, yet approachable; amalgamated yet holistic. The educators must encourage the discovery of new forms of knowledge and new values which is going to make a civilization worthy of being preserved (Taylor 1957). The academics should consciously avoid binaries and strive to be on the same side. It is not a game of badminton where the 'left' throws a ball and the 'right' defends. Or the Occidental hits while the Oriental waits to hit it back. The need is to recognize that we, the inhabitants of this planet Earth in the least, are on the same side of the court.

Vision

The dawn of the future awaits us. Not sure as to how many of us would make it to the other side. Or whether the seemingly innocuous movies depicting the apocalyptic proportions that about such a pandemic might just come true. In that case, only about two-thirds of the world population would survive to see the sun. Francesca Melandri, an acclaimed Italian writer, in her letter to the UK, wrote that we are all entwined in a parallel dance and play music in our windows to signal a new hope (Melandri 2020). Taking this thought further, this hope has to be for a common future and this is where the educationists have an important part to play. This quote rings in this future, with renewed hopes for me, you, and for all of us. The great social and civil rights activist wanted to be remembered as the one who dedicated his life serving others rather than being the recipient of a Nobel Peace Prize when he was suggesting what may be written for his eulogy (Carson, [Holloran, Luker, and Russel](#) 1991).

As educators, let us just give wings to the young minds that come under our tutelage, rather than pasting small feathers and tell them which branch to perch themselves at. The sky beckons them. Let the quagmire of misinformation or incomplete information not bound them to the ground. Let us catch them young because 'A' will always be apple and never 'aggravate', 'B' will always be 'bat' and should not be 'bungled' and 'C' will always be a cat and must not be 'confusion'. The kids and the teens and the young men and women have the right to live in a world that is free from prejudices passed on to us in the form of world legacy. They must not feel entitled to use the resources and should learn to revel in the beauty of nature without trying to overpower it. The current scenario of the pandemic sweeping the world should be taken as a warning before it's too late. It will be a lost opportunity, to build a new world. It is an opportunity for the literati to come forward and break the shackles, in their minds, before they undertake to free the birdies that come to them.

Further Scope

The article opens the door for further research to narrow down the objectives for educators modified in light of the above-mentioned perspectives. Therefore, a concerted effort on the part of policymakers, educationists, students, and their wards need to be provided with a common platform to draw a roadmap. Rather than exhausting all resources towards e-learning, e-content, online classes, priorities need to be set right. Merely reducing the syllabus is just a stop-gap arrangement. Redesigning may be too ambitious, the need of the present times is to intersperse the sermonical construct of online education to a more interactive, empathetic, and creative one. And all this must be done while keeping in view the bigger picture; that of the need to save the environment, rather preserving the environment to save humanity. Research is urgently needed in the academic institution to work in this direction. A parallel may be drawn from the medical fraternity who is constantly on its toes to fight the coronavirus. Since the subject in question is real students whose thoughts are going to shape the future, a two-pronged approach taking care of the vent up energy and need to remain competitive by enhancing skills leaves ample scope for research in the area.

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