

Education: A Plea for a Humanistic Approach

Dr. Hyacinth Pink [1]

“Education is not about the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think.”

Albert Einstein

Abstract:

The study explains the concept of Humanistic Education and records the various philosophical premises of those who propound the importance of critical reflection in the cultivation of equity and social justice minded educators that should ‘light a fire’ and train the mind to think rather than just filling the mind of the students with mere information and facts.

Humanists also believe that it is necessary to study the person as a whole, especially as an individual grows and develops over the lifespan. The study of the self, motivation, and goal-setting are also areas of special interest.

The study also focuses on modern western education which is instrumental in ushering a techno-economic, materialistic dog eat dog cultural revolution in the world. Though modern educational culture claims ‘reason’ as its epistemological basis, from a functional point of view it is quite ‘irrational and ‘inhuman.’.

So the cultural mission of education in the emerging twentieth first century is to build a postmodern, holistic, just, and humanistic culture. In building up such an alternative ‘world view’ in our proposed culture design we need first of all to liquidate modernism; and then search for alternatives – a return to ancient Indian Schools of humanist thought which insists on both knowledge and wisdom for a holistic personality.

Keywords: Humanism, Reflection, Multicultural .Teacher Education, Social Justice, Education, Critical Education , Holistic Personality. (255 Words)

Article History: Submitted: 24th May, 2020, Revised: 25th June, 2020, Accepted: 26th June, 2020,
Published: 30th June, 2020.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is an important aspect of our lives; while some of us take it for granted, there are others who crave and struggle to get it. The purpose of humanistic education is to provide a foundation for personal growth and development, so that learning will continue throughout life in a self-directed manner De Carvalho, (1991)¹ Humanistic education is an approach to education based on the work of humanistic psychologists, most notably Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, and Rudolf Steiner. 2. The approach seeks to engage the whole person: the intellect, feeling life, social capacities, artistic and practical skills which are all important focuses for growth and development. A principal purpose of humanism could be designated as the improvement of self-actualized, self-directed, independent people E.M. Forster observes that the four characteristics of humanism are curiosity, a free mind, belief in good taste, and belief in the human race. (E. M. Forster) ³ Some core principles of Humanism are: respect for life and human dignity; equal rights and social justice; respect for cultural diversity, as well as a sense of shared responsibility and a commitment to international solidarity. These principles are all fundamental aspects of our common humanity. A lack of cohesiveness with respect to defining the critical components of the humanistic approach has hampered its development. However, Aspy and Roebuck’s

(1977)⁴ concept of ‘facilitative teaching; in appraisal with the Giaconia and Hedges (1982)⁵ ‘meta-analysis of open education’ suggest that Rogers & Freiberg, 1994)⁶ approach may be more descriptive of ‘the critical conditions’ for achieving academic success as well as important ‘affective and volitional outcomes’. In many ways, the positive psychology movement has its roots in humanistic psychology Robbins, (2008)⁷ adding a more empirical, quantitative approach to humanism’s more philosophical, qualitative methodology .Seligman, (2002)⁸.

Humanism, an archetype that materialised in the 1960s, focuses on human freedom, self-esteem, and potential. “The central assumption of humanism, is that people act with intentionality and values” W.Huit (2001)⁹ Humanists believe in holistic education, especially as an individual grows and develops over the lifespan. It follows that the study of the self, motivation, and goals are areas of particular interest to humanistic thought.

II. OBJECTIVES

- To develop a student’s self-esteem, ability to set and achieve appropriate goals, and a development toward full autonomy.

^[1]Prof. & Head, Dept. of English Language & Literature, Science & Humanities, Kumara guru College of Technology, Chinnavedampatti, CBE

- An overall, Humanist education is thought to be an important factor in the preparation of a student's life. Its main goal was to improve the lives of citizens and help their communities.
- The main goal of Humanism is to guide students to a more enlightened way of life...to help them become the best versions of themselves and consequently create a better world for future generations

III. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The paper is divided into four Parts -

- Part I will explore the concept, purpose, meaning and belief of humanistic education and culture; and its relationship and impact on each other.
- Part II will examine the implications of 'modernism' on education and humanism
- Part III will posit an alternative -a return to ancient schools of humanistic thought as a paradigm shift.

Humanism, an ancient school of thought, is derived from the great minds and works in Eastern and Western History and Literature; and does not find its origin in experimental sciences. It is concerned with the restoration of lost values and humanistic thought, where man is seen as an end in himself. Its meaning lies in its call for cultural change, imbibing human values and a progress towards human excellence. A central assumption is that human beings behave out of 'intentionality' and 'values'. Kurtz(2000)¹⁰ which is in direct contrast to the beliefs of conditioning theorists, who believe that 'all behaviour is the result of the application of consequences or to the beliefs of cognitive psychologists who hold that the discovery of concepts or processing of information is a primary factor in human learning'. Humanists also believe that it is necessary to study the person as a whole, especially as an individual grows and develops over the lifespan. The study of the self, motivation, and goal-setting are also areas of special interest.

As with other approaches to learning and development, there are a variety of viewpoints within this tradition. The dominant view is called 'modern' or 'naturalistic humanism' and traces its' heredity to Aristotle and Socrates.' Gogineni, (2000) ¹¹ It is defined as "a naturalistic philosophy that rejects all supernaturalism and relies primarily upon reason and science, democracy and human compassion." Lamont, as cited in Edwards, (1989).¹² It is thus described as 'anthropocentric or human-centred.'

There are two branches within this view: 'Secular' and 'Religious'. Advocates of a Secular Humanism believe that an individual human being has within him-or herself all that is necessary to grow and develop that person's unique capacities. Religious humanists, on the other hand, believe that religion is an important influence on human development and advocate a communal aspect of their approach bordering on atheism. A small, but important, group within humanism disagrees with the atheistic thesis. They trace their roots to Plato, St. Augustine, as well as various other religious scholars and believe that, while humanity is a distinct species, existing separate and apart from all animal species, God or a Supreme Being is the centre of humankind's existence.

Maritain (1936/1996, 1952) and de Chardon (1955, 1973) ¹³ are two of the primary advocates of this theocentric (or God-centred) approach. This is in stark contrast to the naturalistic humanist who believes that an individual must be true to himself, existing as an autonomous being, capable of self-realized development. Perhaps it is the open advocacy of atheism by the modern or naturalistic humanists that seems to have drawn the wrath of religious leaders toward humanism, especially fundamentalists. Christians (e.g., Holgate, n.d.; Waggoner, 2001).¹⁴

From the perspective of Huit's (2009) 15 systems framework of human behaviour, the primary emphasis of humanistic education is on the regulatory system and the affective/emotional system. The development of these systems is often overlooked in our present education system (Am, 1995) ¹⁶

In our present environment of constant change and uncertainty, the development of knowledge, attitudes, and skills discussed in these systems is especially significant.

- i) Students' learning should be self-directed.
- ii) Education should produce students who want and know how to learn.
- iii) The only form of meaningful evaluation is self-evaluation. Humanistic educators believe that grades/marks are irrelevant and that only self-evaluation is meaningful. Grading encourages students to work for a grade and not for personal satisfaction.
- iv) Emotive and Cognitive Psychology are important in the learning process. Unlike traditional educators, humanistic teachers do not separate the cognitive and affective domains
- v) Students learn best in a non-threatening environment. Humanistic educators insist that higher education need to provide students with a non-threatening environment so that they will feel secure to learn. Once students feel secure, learning becomes easier and more meaningful.

There are a variety of ways teachers can implement the humanist view towards education. Some of these include:

1. Allow the student to have a choice in the selection of tasks and activities whenever possible.
2. Help students learn to set realistic goals.
3. Have students participate in group work, especially cooperative learning, in order to develop social and affective skills.
4. Act as a facilitator for group discussions when appropriate.
5. Be a role model for the attitudes, beliefs and habits you wish to foster. Constantly work on becoming the best versions of yourself and then share yourself with your students.

This approach is also connected with Giaconia and Hedges,¹⁶ concept of 'Open Education.' 'Open Education' is a viewpoint about the way people should harvest, segment and construct on knowledge. Open Education exponents believes that everyone in the world should have access to high quality educational experiences and resources, and they work to eliminate barriers to this goal. A meta-analysis completed

by Giaconia and Hedges (1982)¹⁷ of approximately 150 studies of open education suggest that this approach is associated with

1. Improved cooperativeness, creativity, and independence (moderate);
2. Increased positive attitudes toward teacher and school, creativity, adjustment, and general mental ability (slight);
3. Lower language achievement (negligible) and achievement motivation (moderate);
4. No consistent effect on math, reading, or other types of academic achievement; and
5. No consistent effect on anxiety, locus of control or self-concept.

From the above study it would seem, then, that open education, broadly defined has not met the objectives and principles normally used to define humanistic education. While it has not been detrimental to basic skills achievement, per se, it has not had the impact on self-concept and locus of control as expected by its originators. In addition, the decline in achievement & motivation is especially troublesome.

In a subsequent study the overall review of open education was 'facilitative teaching' developed by Carl Rogers. Aspy and Roebuck (1975) ¹⁸ studied teachers in terms of their ability to offer facilitative conditions (including empathy, congruence, and positive regard) as defined by Rogers and Freiberg (1994).¹⁹

Teachers who were more highly facilitative tended to provide more:

1. Response to student feeling;
2. Use of student ideas in ongoing instructional interactions;
3. Discussion with students (dialogue);
4. Commendation to students;
5. Compatible teacher talk (less ritualistic);
6. Tailoring of contents to the individual student's frame of reference (explanations created to fit the immediate needs of the learners); and
7. Cheerful rapport with students.

Modern Western education, in one sense, is a progeny of enlightenment. Critical Rationality applied in epistemological explorations gave birth to a number of secular sciences: social as well as physical and biological. The Revolution in science and technology and the colonial exploitation of global surplus made European Worlds a power house. Along with the multi-dimensional changes, Europe claimed its new culture was superior to all others and therefore the rest of the world has to follow Europe. Europeans, particularly the Christian missionaries'- considered it the white man's burden to bring all non-European people to the culture of 'Modernism'. Education was used as the most important institution to inculcate 'rational culture' in all the colonized people of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

IV. WESTERN EDUCATION AND THE THIRD WORLD: A CRITIQUE

European colonial administrators viewed the pre-modern cultures prevalent in the colonies inferior to the culture of the west. Colonial people especially the elite were so structured by colonialism to accept a 'self-image' imposed by the colonial masters. Even after decolonisation, the colonial pattern of education persisted in the Third World, which continued to nurture western culture in these countries. The text book, the references, periodicals, video cassettes as teaching aids, light reading materials, news and reports presented in various mass media, advertisements (de)cultural programmes displayed in television networks etc. of the 'Third World' are dominantly driven by the imperialist 'brain centre.' Neo Colonialism successfully continues to exert its cultural weight on the Third World for protecting its market. Education of the western type has serious flaws in the present context of the third world, particularly from the cultural point of view. Some eminent experts on Third World Education have conducted certain critical studies on it.

V. MODERN WESTERN EDUCATION: A MATERIALISTIC CULTURE

Modern western education is instrumental in ushering a techno- economic insurgency and a materialist culture in the world. Though 'Modern Culture' claims 'reason' as its epistemological basis, from a functional point of view it is very irrational. The irrationality' of the so called rational system is discernible in stacking up of weapons, missiles and artilleries for mass destruction; millions still below the poverty line; destruction of our environment and eco system and consequently the destruction of the Ozone; trading toxic wastes; engineering and commercializing, even cloning life, dehumanising and child prostitution; geocoding all other cultures and mono culturing of the mind globally.

VI. EDUCATION IS NOT 'FILLING OF A PAIL' BUT THE 'LIGHTING OF A FIRE

William Butler Yeats in his various works on education¹³ characterises the formal system of education in the Third World as the 'filling of a pail' where the 'teacher' is assumed to be the only one endowed with knowledge, narrating; and the 'taught' the mere receptacle, a container to be filled, memorizing, and annulling the creative potential of the student, allowing no space or time for "a fire to be lit." W.B.Yeats (...) ²⁰ The teacher is also subjected to the same handicap. He can operate only within the constraints of syllabi, examination, and the bureaucratically imposed code of conduct. Any violation of the same will put him into serious problems. In the "filling of a pail" system, both the students and the teachers are domesticated to the prevailing socio- economic structure. As a result the 'culture of silence' is being perpetuated.

All these reveal the decomposition of modern western oriented culture and the need for a paradigm shift.

Decolonizing Western Education:

Modern western culture and its epistemological basis are now crumbling. In spite of this decomposition the Westerners, including the Japanese, are trying to preserve 'modernism' through re-colonization. The new liberal ideology is promulgated to legitimise the process of re-colonization. For effective cultural transformation, the Third World has to strive for a new 'paradigm' alternative to the new modernisation one which is concurrently in circulation all over the world. Education has to strike at the root of the social architecture. But enabling 'education' to discharge this heroic task we need to reorient alternative education befitting the historic and specific social condition of each Third world country. In short, the present formal education itself has to undergo a process of decolonisation to make it a tool for cultural transformation

So the cultural mission of education in the emerging twentieth -first century India would be to build up an alternative 'world view' in our proposed 'culture design'. We need to first of all liquidate modernism; and then search for alternatives in the entire reachable range of human History-Humanistic Philosophy. For this Humanism has to be the spirit of this intellectual enquiry.

Humanistic philosophy which emerged in Europe in the 19th Century recognises the value and dignity of Man and emphasises that man has the power and potential to solve his own problems depending on his reason, inspired by a sense of justice and compassion. It recognises human freedom, tolerance, respect, for truth and personal dignity in all humanity, irrespective of nationality, caste, creed, and gender as a movement Humanism denounces all theories of determinism, fatalism and pre-destination. It declares that though man may be conditioned by the past, he is the master of his own destiny. It upholds an active life of participation and sees life as a harmonious blend of self-development and activities that contribute to the welfare, progress and freedom of all mankind. It lays emphasis on social progress, democracy, peace and a high standard of living based on flourishing economic order both nationally and internationally. Humanism remained an influential creed in Europe from the 16th and 17th centuries and was responsible for replacing the narrow provincialism of the Medieval Age with a growing spirit of tolerance and secularism,

Though the tenets of traditional humanistic philosophy did not focus on the divine it was not anti-religious in character. It emphasised that the function of religion was to support a man in civil and political activity as propounded by Humanists like Gianozzo Manetti.²¹ It emphasized the need for religious tolerance based on the fundamental unity of all religious beliefs of mankind; and the possibility of peace as propounded by Pico Della Mirandela, the prophet of regenerative peace.

Humanism which is part and parcel of ancient Indian philosophy and culture from times immemorial is the most important contribution of Indian philosophy to world thought. From the beginning of the 8th century to the 19th century repeated foreign invasions threatened to destroy Indian cultural values, religious foundation, philosophy and traditions. However, the Indian mind was quick to assimilate the best from these alien cultures and work for the propagation of the ideals of love, non-violence, religious tolerance and universal brotherhood.

Contemporary Indian philosophy has been influenced by three factors-ancient Indian religion and philosophy, the medieval ideas of universal brotherhood and mutual tolerance; and the western scientific outlook and liberation. This brought about a new phase of intellectual activity characterized by a synthesis between spiritualism and empiricism, thus recognizing the ultimate supremacy of moral and spiritual values and simultaneously the significance of a modern significant outlook.

Twentieth century Indian Philosophers like Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. S Radhakrishnan reinterpreted ancient Indian Philosophy to meet the needs of the changing times, conscious of the disproportionate emphasis education places on Science and Technology. Dr. Radhakrishnan points out that "the great crimes against civilization are committed not by the primitive and the uneducated but by the highly educated and so-called civilized."²² (p.42) He attributes the increasing unrest by students and their defiance of authority to a lack of attention to our own culture. Students should be trained to have "disciplined enthusiasm for great causes, otherwise they would become a danger to themselves and to society."²³ (p.45)

VII. CONCLUSION

Thus the need for 'de-schooling' and 're-schooling' and returning to our original source of ancient Indian schools of thought. Indeed it is very encouraging to note that serious efforts have been made by committed Indian intelligentsia like Swami Chinmayananda, Dr. Abdul Kalam, Sad guru Jaggi Vasudeva, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar to name a few to resolve the physiological, psychological, familial, social and national values enshrined in ancient Indian scriptures and restore them in the current educational system of India because of their relevance even today.

"Any satisfactory system of education should at a balanced growth of the individual and insist on both knowledge and wisdom. It should not only train the intellect but bring grace into the heart of man. Wisdom is more early gained through the study of Literature, Philosophy and Religion. They interpret the higher laws of the universe. If we do not have a general philosophy or attitude to life, our minds will be confused and we will suffer from greed, pusillanimity (cowardice), anxiety and defeatism. Mental slums are more dangerous to mankind than material slums."²⁴(p.43)

On this score, the intellectual contributions of ancient Indian schools of thought would be of great help. In the building up of a post-modern world view. This is the enormous intellectual challenge awaiting the intelligentsia of Asia in the 21st century. Let us drastically streamline our education enabling the intelligentsia to undertake this heroic cultural occupation.

Thus, education and culture are interdependent and complementary to each other. However the existing system of education in India has not evolved from its own culture. There is a need that education should be related to our own culture.. It has been rightly said. "The existing system of education is largely based on the ideals of spreading western science and literature and the way of life among a small minority of the

population and of training persons for services under the government. It is still academic and book-centred and fails to promote social, cultural, economic or political development on proper lines." A foreign system of education was introduced in India without taking into account the cultural heritage of India. It is cut off from Indian cultural traditions and is alien to masses.

Reorganization of education has remained a challenging task right from the beginning after independence. K.G. Saiyidain an eminent educationist observed, "We are to-day at one of the great cross roads of our history when the pattern both of our education and our culture and our social order is being refashioned. While it is true that education should always be essentially a forward-looking activity, in normal times when changes take place rather slowly and decorously, its function is mainly conservation— adjusting the child to a relatively stable environment. But in periods of crisis like the present, when the older is dying out and the new one is not quite born, when the older forms of culture have lost their grip on the majority of the young at least, and the new "shape of things" is far from being clear, education has a special difficult and critical role to play."

Modernization of education and cultural renaissance is needed to evolve education from its own culture. India is on the move again with the promise of a new renaissance in the making. The most powerful tool in the process of this renaissance and modernization is education based on moral and spiritual values on the one hand and on the other on Science and Technology. In this context we cannot do better than to quote Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, "Can we combine the progress of Science and Technology with the progress of the mind and spirit also?"²⁵ We cannot be untrue to Science because that represents the basic fact of life today. Still less can we be untrue to those essential principles for which India has stood in the past throughout the ages. Let us then pursue our path to industrial progress with all our strength and vigour and at the same time, remember that material riches without toleration and compassion and wisdom may well turn to dust and ashes.

Education, prepares, perceives and polishes an individual thereby creating a national consistency, a scientific temper and objectivity of mind and spirit -- thus expanding the goals of socialism, secularism and democracy enshrined in our constitution. Education is critically important to a society's progress. It is through education that society moulds the human capital for the enactment of various accountabilities. Education and culture/ humanism are interdependent. The intimate relationship between 'education' and 'humanism' is evident from the fact the one of the major aims of education is to impart to the learner, social-cultural and humanistic heritage. The humanistic and cultural patterns of a society funnel its enlightening designs. For example, if a society has a spiritual pattern of education then its educational processes will emphasize the achievement of moral and eternal values of life. On the other hand, if a society is materialistic or humanistic then its educational pattern will be fashioned for the accomplishment of material or human values which promotes the pleasures of the senses and material comforts or human values. A society devoid of any pattern will have no definite educational outcomes. Hence, the humanistic culture of a country has a very prevailing impact on its educational patterns.

VIII. REFERENCES

- Am, O. (1995). *The Evolutionary Structure of the School System*. Stavanger, Norway:
- Aspy, D, & Roebuck, F. (1975, Spring). *The Relationship of Teacher-Offered Conditions of*
- *Meaning to Behaviours Described by Flanders' Interaction Analysis*. *Education* 95, 216-222.
- DeCarvalho, R. (1991). *The Humanistic Paradigm in Education*. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 19(1), 88-104.
- de Chardin, T. (B. Wall, trans.). (1955, 1975). *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Edwards, F. (1989). *What is Humanism?* Amherst, NY: American Humanist Association. Retrieved December 2001, from <http://www.jcn.com/humanism.html>
- Gianconia, R., & Hedges, L. (1982). *Identifying Features of Effective Open Education*. *Review of Educational Research*, 52(4), 579-602.
- Gogineni, B. (2000). *Humanism in the Twenty-first Century*. *The Humanist*, 60(6), 27-31.
- Holgate, K. (n.d.). *The Progressive Assault on the Christian Education System*. Palm Desert, CA: Parents National Network. Retrieved December 2001, from <http://www.capitolresource.org/STW-CS.html#THE%20PAIDEIA%20PROGRAM>
- Huitt, W. (1995). *An Overview of a Systems Approach to the Study of Human Behaviour*.
- Valdosta, GA: Valdosta State University. Retrieved October 2009, from <http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/materials/sysmdlo.html>
- Kappen, S (1994) *Tradition Modernity Counter Culture*, Visthar, Bangalore.
- Kurtz, P. (2000). *Humanist Manifesto 2000: A call for a new planetary humanism*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books.
- Maritain, J. (1936/1996). *Integral Humanism: Temporal and Spiritual Problems of a New Christendom*. Chicago: University of Notre Dame Press. [excerpt]
- Maritain, J. (1952). *The Range of Reason*. NY: Charles Scribner's Sons. Retrieved December 2001, from <http://www.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/range.htm>
- Robins, B. (2008). *What is the Good Life? Positive Psychology and the Renaissance of*
- *Humanistic Psychology*. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 36(2), 96-112. Retrieved October 2009, from <http://mythosandlogos.com/Goodlife.pdf>
- Radhakrishnan .S .(2003) *An Ideal before the Youth," Representative Selections from Indian Prose* ,ed. by S.P.Appasamy and C.D Govinda Rao, Macmillan, Chennai.
- Rogers, C. (1969). *Freedom to Learn* (1st ed.). New York: Macmillan/Merrill.
- Rogers, C., & Freiberg, H. J. (1994). *Freedom to Learn* (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan/Merrill.

- Seligman, M. (2002). *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to realize your Potential for Lasting Fulfilment*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Thomas, Kuhn (1962) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago University Press, Chicago.
- Tony, Barnett (1988), *Sociology and Development*, Hutchinson, London, p.138