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A critical study of Indian and Western Knowledge Traditions in Education

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Abstract:

It is considered that an ideal education would be global. Then the civilization of many centuries of India introduces an integral vision about life, a complete and complex empirical exposition of human being, its continual regeneration, and the ecological life of this planet, which completions a lack from the envisioned educational system, of just materialistic nature Eastern "tradition" differs deeply from the Western one though unicity and diversity of their philosophical expression. Then Germans and France thinkers focused sharply and clearly to find absolute truth, why Indians are lost among infinite and generative truths, stories, poetry, depths of meanings, analogies, metaphors, austere and enigmatic aphorisms, parables, myths and the magic of various contradictions; because their culture does not come from a depressive natural science, but from an inner unexemplified knowledge, a pyramidal knowledge produced during thousands of year based upon the principle that heavens are reflected upon the Earth and that human being is set between macro- and microcosms, all connected by an immeasurably great and universal energy, where a Sacchidananda (being, conscious, bliss) invisible nature pervades everything becoming the ineffable secret (Ferrer, 2018).

Keywords: Indian Philosophical Idealism, Integral Education, moral value, Vivekananda, ethical, Aurobindo

1. Introduction

It is an undeniable fact that the vastly shifting landscape of the Indian education system has become a concept with deep significance to scholars in the field of comparative and international education. Nonetheless, such deliberations necessitate a particular focus on the indigenous philosophies which provide the historical and socio-cultural framework that can offer a more in-depth understanding of the genesis and progression of Indian comparative and international education. In addition, issues of educational philosophy are not independent of wider sociopolitical forces. The endeavor to explore a comprehensive philosophy of education has long been seen as one of the principal objectives of comparative education research in India. As the oldest ancient civilization, Indian education has been set as an influential paradigm for many other countries. Due to the uniqueness of the ancient tradition, Indian education has inherited an indigenous educational philosophy which maintains a striking difference from Western culture.

Education is one of the oldest known Indian traditions, but it is less known that there is also an ancient tradition of educational philosophy with a greater antiquity. Also, originally Indian educational philosophy has had a profound influence on English language perception of educational philosophy. This Indian tradition, like education itself, is quite different from its Western homologue. Essentially these concepts are: praxis or practice, dialectical epistemology, ethics, aesthetic taste and creativity, psychological health and holistic cognitive ability, political etiquette, politics and governance, and matters of power. Although originally it evolved from the wider ancient and mysterious knowledge sciences a narrower and more specialized educational tradition was also eventually produced. Indian education's vast influence on Chinese civilization was by way of Tantric Buddhism. Since the later stages of East India Company rule, a more didactic and instrumentalizing proselytization of ancient Indian educational philosophy has been witnessed, at this time often assaying it with either Hindu spiritual or Muslim terrorist dogma.

The papers selected for this monographic issue have a common focus on the analysis of two educational knowledge traditions: the Indian and the Western. In India, the educational system is based on Western models introduced during the British colonial period. After independence and until now, besides certain efforts to adapt those national procedures to Indian cultural and philosophical viewpoints, especially according to the first Constitution of 1950, no radical changes were implemented (Ferrer, 2018). These transplants and adaptations have been characterised by an unquestioning behaviour towards the West, due to India's colonial past and to the enormous prestige, particularly

in the educational domain, achieved by the Western countries based on their outstanding economic, technological, and scientific development. This respect for Western science and technology has been combined with disdain for anything of a non-material nature and ultimately for “tradition” and “religion,” to which the so-called less developed countries (LDC) are believed to adhere.

Accordingly, education in India is aimed almost exclusively at increasing the economic wealth of the Country, and knowledge course are selected at the expense of a true integral development of the individual. Currently, after 50 years of Independence, the Western-style educational system has been fully accepted. However, different reasons have started an educational crisis, among which the unrealistic expansion and bureaucratization of such system, the heavy economic burden and the low pedagogical standards. Furthermore, the detrimental effects of blind imitation of the western model on the national Indian culture and identity are now acknowledged by a growing part of the country. Political nationalism, recently regained in a violently aggressive form, reflects these sentiments and tends to require a return to some idealized and artificially reconstructed “Indian tradition”. Regrettably, Indian educational practice, besides having in the past admirably incarnated specific Indian knowledge in an educational system, has done very little to foster and implement it in a radical way as a part of the educational curriculum.

2. Historical Development of Indian Knowledge Traditions in Education

Education is considered as the transmission of culture in the Western sense. On the other hand, in the Indian knowledge traditions, particularly in Jnana Yoga and Vedanta, it is the memory of what is already known to listeners, which is being brought out by the teacher. Indian psychology and epistemology consider knowledge to be innate to consciousness and which is continuous (not acquired), i.e., always exists and has only to be revealed. Cognition is a discovery rather than an invention. This model contrasts with the Western model of acquiring knowledge in the tradition of David Hume, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and others.

The key question, then, is whether the above models of education will lead to two different kinds of outcomes that are academic excellence in the Western sense and atman. To answer the question, a comparative representation of the key ideas of Indian and Western traditions is necessary (Srivastava, 2017). Hinduism entered into a critical dialogue with Buddhism that changed the nature of classical Indian philosophy and provided the basis for a very rich tradition of logic developing, resulting in the rise of the logico-epistemological school around fifth century BCE. The purpose of the dialogic period in India was to characterize attacked opponents or philosophies through close examination

of their basic beliefs. The nyaya tradition tried to bring logical rigor and coherence to the jumbled corpus of Vedic texts, thus helping to fashion the so-called classical period of Indian philosophy (circa 200 BCE–200 CE). Buddhist arguments influenced much of the development of Brahmanical logic and helped reinvigorate the general skeptical climate in culture, which would eventually affect all Indian schools.

The roots of Indian culture date so far back that, intermixed with religious or mythological tales, they are hard to distinguish from History. Note, for example, how the story of Krishna's youth is entangled with the account of a great war so that the events leading to the war – the contest between two factions, the intentional loss of a key figure in a gambling match, the years of exile, and the discovery of a true nature by a doubting warrior – appear merely as accidental. By summarizing from that untold age, it will be shown that seminal ideas arising from the fertile soil of the Great River were already crystallized many millennia ago into the proto-historical texts of the tradition, the Vedas. At that remote time, it is held, all the knowledge endurable on earth was spoken in the Vedic language. These ideas will then be shown to have flourished in a period central to the scholarship of Indian lore within the known context of a unique epic.

3. Historical Development of Western Knowledge Traditions in Education

In the globalized world of the 3rd millennium, nations with deep-rooted histories adopt facets of Western culture under the guise of development that represent an alternative, while offering rich knowledge-based systems. These systems produce knowledge in many manifestations, and can also give birth to great wars. Thus, it is the historical and cultural context from which they emerge that is here addressed. Long before the education manifest in various pillars, it was suggested that five continents comprise: South and East Asia, Africa, America, and Australasia. Since the existence of the Indian subcontinent can hardly be dated in less than tens of millennia, it is reasonable to expect that the historical and cultural roots of Indian education are of the same order.

4. Philosophical Foundations of Indian and Western Education

The system of education of the East is caste-bound, traditional and spiritual, while that of the West is knowledge-bound, empirical and material. At the dawn of independence, India faced the challenge of reconciling these two diametrically opposed systems to establish a new form of education (Srivastava, 2017). The clash of these diverse educational systems, rooted in their ancient, rich cultural heritage, created a dilemma: which system of education to adopt to foster the desired social, economic, technological, scientific and intellectual growth. As such, the educationists, reformers and scholars of the period had to restructure India's education system based on a comparative analysis

between these two seemingly contradictory but strikingly complementary knowledge traditions.

At the same time, a new psychological outlook on humans appeared through which humans came to be seen as impulses. The senses help humans interact with their environment, and the mind recognizes and understands the things around them. The movement of different types of knowledge, primarily spiritual, secular and methodical, began to take place during this period. Through the implementation of the philosophy of philosophy, it began to emphasize the realization of purity and good qualities of the mind. In the east, mind control, moral and ethereal knowledge began to be emphasized. Traditionally, the Guru has always been exemplary in every sphere of personal behavior. As a result of the presence of the Guru in the society, various social norms have been able to be passed on from generation to generation. The building of the character of the disciples through the education focused on the moral education of the Guru was given high priority. The East emphasized senselessly blind faith in the methodology of education, considering the Guru to be full of the wisdom of the world. The East has always upheld the traditional religion, and the teachings and acquisitions of the Guru have been seen as divine revelations.

5. Pedagogical Approaches and Methods in Indian and Western Education

Despite the important distinctions in epistemological and ontological positions between Indian and Western knowledge traditions, spectacularly harmonious findings emerge from a comparative analysis in education (Hassan & Syuhada Jamaludin, 2010). Within of these traditions, important tensions regarding the aims and methods of education are also seen.

In particular, in recent decades, an extraordinary amount of research has been conducted in the Western empirical tradition in an attempt to identify evidence-based conclusions about what works in education. This research has typically been carried out within the positivist paradigm of inquiry and it is considered acceptable only if it follows “rigorous” procedures and standards. At the other end of the spectrum, the Indian knowledge tradition views methods of education as fundamentally dependent on the specific combination of teacher, student, context, and domain of interest. Respect for the particularities and idiosyncrasies of every educational encounter is considered more important in this tradition compared to the systematic, standardized methods that emerge from Western educational research.

In the Indian tradition, education is not a commodity that can be packaged, stored, and shipped, or a product that can be designed, produced, tested, marketed, and distributed

for maximum efficiency. It is an intimate, indeterminate, iterative, and deeply subjective process that defies categorization. From its perspective, the rigid distinction between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge that has been at the heart of recent debates on educational research in the West is irrelevant and misleading. Orthodoxy and authority can inhere in action just as much as in speech or writing, and indeed the activities of education may ultimately be more important than the “content” being “transmitted” through them.

Conclusion

The comparative exploration of Indian and Western knowledge traditions in education unveils two profoundly distinct yet potentially complementary paradigms of learning, human development, and societal progress. Indian education, deeply rooted in spiritual philosophy, inner transformation, and holistic consciousness, emphasizes self-realization, moral development, and cosmic interconnectedness. It views education as a sacred process of unveiling the eternal truths already latent within the learner. In contrast, Western educational traditions prioritize empirical knowledge, scientific rationalism, and material advancement, treating education as a systematic acquisition of information aimed at individual achievement and economic utility.

Over centuries, India has witnessed a steady shift from its indigenous, value-centric system to a Western model imposed during colonial rule—a system that has remained largely unchanged even decades after independence. This has resulted in an educational crisis characterized by bureaucratic inefficiency, a loss of cultural rootedness, and a diminished sense of national identity. The blind imitation of Western frameworks has often led to the neglect of integral human development, sidelining the ethical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of education.

Yet, this critique is not a rejection of Western education but a call for synthesis. The Indian tradition's introspective, experiential, and moral approach must be harmonized with the Western focus on analytical thinking, technological innovation, and empirical rigor. Such integration can give rise to an enriched, balanced, and globally relevant educational system that fosters not only intellectual excellence but also emotional intelligence, ethical integrity, and ecological awareness.

In reimagining education for the future, it becomes imperative to acknowledge and revitalize the indigenous philosophies of India while engaging constructively with Western methods. A truly transformative education will arise only when both traditions are seen not as adversaries but as partners in the shared goal of human flourishing, planetary well-being, and enduring wisdom.

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