

KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE**SATISH KUMAR**

Modern education primarily promotes information and, perhaps, to a lesser extent knowledge but unfortunately there is very little room and opportunity in our schools and universities to include experience. It is believed that a pupil or a student is an empty vessel and the responsibility of the teacher is to fill the empty vessel with as much information as possible. This is a mistaken understanding of education. The word education comes from Latin word '*educare*' which means to lead out or to bring out what is already there to unfold what is dormant, to make explicit what is already implicit.

It would be good to compare a student with a seed. A tree is already in the seed, a gardener or an orchard keeper or a forester cannot teach the seed to become a tree. The work of forester is to provide the right soil and conditions so that seed is able to self-realise and become a tree. Similarly pupils and students have a potential to be who they are but their potential is implicit. The work of a school or a college and of the teacher is to provide the right inspiration, appropriate context and good conditions for the pupils and students to discover themselves and be self-realised into mature human beings.

A seed becomes a tree, blossoms and then gives fruit to humans and to other living beings. They give oxygen to maintain life. In other words trees serve the cause of sustaining life without any desire for self-aggrandizement. Trees remain humble and particularly when full of fruit they bend low, they show flexibility. Trees provide a good example. When we are educated we also need to serve the cause of life, enhance the earth community and sustain human relationships. Education is not for self-promotion or self-interest, education is not to get a good job so that I can buy a big house, a big car and other material possessions for my comfort. Education is not for enhancing the ego or desire for name, fame, status and position for myself. Education is a journey of self-discovery and self-realisation in the service of human community and earth. This is an ideal view of education.

Trees grow, blossom and flourish by going through the experience of seasons, heat and cold, rain and drought, no tree has ever escaped the experience of a warm summer and a cold winter. Only by going through such experience can trees become strong and resilient. If a tree was kept in the comfort of a greenhouse and prevented from the ups and downs of climatic conditions they will not be so resilient and enduring. In any case how many trees can be kept in greenhouses? They have to be out in fields and forests to fend for themselves even without a forester or gardener. The wilderness in which trees survive is the source of their strength.

In the modern systems of organised and institutionalised education we have lost that sense of the wild. People who grew up in indigenous cultures knew the art of living using their hands and legs as well as their minds and hearts. They knew how to connect, how to relate, how to appreciate and how to endure. They were self-reliant whereas modern education creates humans who lack the skills and confidence to be resilient and self-reliant and serve selflessly. Modern education creates job seekers and employees and the jobs they do are mostly minding the machines or shifting the papers. Even the farmers hardly touch the soil, plant the seeds, harvest the crops or milk the cows. They mostly sit on huge tractors or combined harvesters driving the machines.

Most of the manufacturing has gone the same way, rather than humans being the masters of the machine, machines have become the masters of humans. Machines have replaced human hands and in the robotic age we are facing the prospect of robots replacing humans altogether. So the modern education is not only responsible for de-skilling but also for de-humanising us.

In order to evolve from information to knowledge and then in to true education we need to introduce the idea of learning by doing. We need to use our head, heart and hands to gain knowledge as well as undergo life changing experiences.

It is time to wake up and rediscover the meaning of education again and transform it into a pilgrimage of self-discovery. That can happen only when we are prepared to embrace uncertainties, ambiguities, difficulties and

hardships. We are prepared to face the problems rather than run away from them. Only when we have problems we can use our imagination to solve them. In the comfort of classroom we can obtain information, in the luxury of libraries we can gain knowledge but experience can be gained only when we are out in the storm of life and in the rough terrain of nature.

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