

# A POST-COVID 19 URGENCY FOR QUALITY EDUCATION TOWARDS CREATIVITY-BUILDING & PROMOTION OF ETHICAL VALUES - THROUGH ARTS/PERFORMING ARTS EDUCATION

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## **Abstract**

*The Covid-19 pandemic brought humanity to a standstill, to breathlessness, a sense of helplessness – despite a well-grounded conviction of the power of the high sophistications of the digital world. A sudden stark drastic reality emerged: ethical values like humanness/empathy have to be tapped for global collaboration and the creative urge of mankind has to be tapped even more than what we had imagined - in order to adapt, to put up with, and survive the laws of nature. This conceptual paper revisits and reflects upon perspectives of some mystics, philosophers/educationists - where arts/performing arts education, being part and parcel of their holistic approach to education, functions as a tool for the development of ethical values and creativity – which is, or rather should be among the emerging priorities of the after-Covid-19 education. This reflection is significant. Although neuro-function processes behind the mechanisms of creativity and processes through arts/performing arts are still being explored, although there is an exponential growth in understanding of the interaction of the arts with the human brain - there exists in parallel, an almost universal converging conviction among mystics, philosophers/educationists, way back down the centuries and across civilizations – that, what the world needs is not a synthesis but an interplay between scientific analysis and mystical intuition- hence the need to merge academic and non-academic (arts/performing arts) learning.*

**Keywords:** Holistic Education, Arts/Performing Arts Education, Creativity, Ethical Values

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Covid-19 pandemic has been interpreted by many, as a grudge and therefore a revenge on the part of nature or the planet against its excessive exploitation by man. Whatever way this phenomenon is being explained, interpreted or defined - the fact remains that she is not the only one suffocating under excess production and consumption, but man is equally suffocating under the pressure of growing inequalities and poverty worldwide. The Covid-19 struggle has made it crystal- clear that a holistic and global approach is the key to proceed on, with the evolution of the human species. A publication of the Harvard Global Health Institute through the World Economic Forum in 2019 had declared that the world has entered a new pandemic era due to problems like deforestation, climatic change, the growing population density, etc. The ocean, the earth planet and our surrounding atmosphere are dangerously at risk. Our planet safeguard depends on quality production in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Quantity production has led us today to this state of mercy at the environmental imbalance. Unless the present young generation rectifies this drastic mentality of reaping and snatching away excesses, which had been provoked by past 'technological wonders', the human race is bound to continue concocting its own apocalypse, this time through present and future 'digital wonders'.

Preparing the young generation through the holistic approach in education and the all-round development concept of the Inner and the Outer man, is urgently needed for Balance - in both, nature/the planet (the Outer) which is almost dependent on that of man (the Inner). Environmental, social and sociological challenges and choices can be approached with cultivation of character and conscience. Empathy and humanness must be at the core heart of production and consumerism. Can global competition be replaced by global collaboration? What were perceived as 'ideals' of education by philosophers from different civilizations down the centuries, have ironically become the after-Covid urgencies in education. Let us re-visit and refresh on some of those holistic concepts of education where integration of the arts/performing arts in education seem vital for creativity development and promotion of ethical values.

**ENGAGEMENT WITH CREATIVITY AND ETHICAL VALUES THROUGH ARTS/PERFORMING ARTS EDUCATION**

Down the centuries and across civilizations philosophical thinkers/educationists have spoken of a holistic education and about the ultimate objective of the arts in education as a creative outlet and medium for the inner expansion of man. The nationalistic Indian figures express the essence of the arts in education. To Rabindranath Tagore, "Creative genius that is creative power working within the artist subtly and skilfully constitutes the fountain head of art.... Fullness in education welcomes fullness of human creativity wedded to curiosity and broadens the vision of human consciousness to explore newer possibilities of mankind and worthier advancement of human civilizations" (Sharma, 1998). Mahatma Gandhi speaks of the craft-centred education from which the child will acquire not superficial literacy, but the real literacy of the whole personality. It provides "an effective outlet for the creative urges innate in every human breast" (Bhatia, 1996). To Sri Aurobindo Ghose, imagination is an indispensable instrument of the mind which has three functions: the forming of mental images, the power of creating thoughts, images and imitations or new combinations of existing thoughts and images; and the appreciation of the soul in things, beauty, charm, greatness, higher suggestiveness, the emotion and spiritual life that pervades the world (Pani, 1997).

Confucian learning was seen as the process where individuals grow in virtue and cultivate human goodness while becoming in tune with other people and this was possible through the learning of Arts (Miller, 2012). As Berling (1996) puts it, if the "outer" side of Confucianism is characterized by conformity and acceptance of authority, the "inner" side can be referred to as cultivation of conscience and character. Through arts, a person of true humanness could show empathy and have the courage to become a righteous person. Furthermore, the internal search for one's moral sensitivity is done by learning the arts. It also improves creativity. Furthermore according to the Buddhist theory of action an impure mind attracts evil results. But a pure mind brings about good results and arts such as dance, music and painting which are aesthetic in nature, are considered to be pure; therefore an aesthetic attitude eventually tallies with the ten transcendental states as according to Buddhism.

Western civilization's educational system and policies draw its essence from ancient Greece. The tendency in Greece was not to glorify mere mechanical skill of the artist who knew painting, sculpting and/or pottery which could be that of an inferior minded person, but quality and not quantity was the test of artistic aptitude. Crayon (1860) further expands saying that "the moral and intellectual standard of a man was the test of the qualifications of the artist and not manual dexterity". Bury (1937) wrote about Plato views - "Imitation of the virtuous is a high road to virtue." Therefore, singing, acting, dancing and drama are means of primary education for a child since they are forms of play which are in symbiosis with a child's natural impulses to which he takes instinctively delight. Therefore, lessons can be taught through these means to a child since it will help in keeping his interest and attention leading to meaningful learning. As per Socrates, rhythm and harmony touch directly the soul so if children are only recipients of good tales they will love what they know that is justice and goodness and will be ignorant of what they do not know like injustice (Dillon, 2004). By forsaking ugly things and appreciating fine ones, grown children will like reasonable speech and live moderately. Musical training is soul cleansing. Aristotelian model of learning Arts focuses upon the perfect unity of intellectual, physical and moral education. Aristotle supported that the cultivation of poetry, painting, music and sculpture was indispensable for mental and moral development (Durand, 1860). This moral or intellectual power of the artist was not determined by his manual dexterity but by quality of the works that he produces.

Dr Allama Muhammad Iqbal - a theorist and barrister in India under British rule, was a Muslim poet and philosopher and later became a national poet of Pakistan. He believed education begins from a sense of ego which undergoes a process of evolution. According to him ego makes learners strive for perfection. Perfect ego is called perfect man and this is the purpose of education. According to him, the curriculum should be based on religion, philosophical subjects, arts and literature, social subjects, history and science and technology in order to develop for instance: i) creativity using directive so that learner is able to think high and bring new innovations that can be used to address the challenges of the present and the future ii) creativity and originality by allowing learner to be in close contact with environment. The learner should learn to suit the environment to meet his purpose and ensure proper individual development. This can be done by reviewing and examining the nature of the individual and the environment. Individual development is not possible without direct contact with the concrete and dynamic environment. There is awakening in learners of a keen consciousness of their manifold relations with the environment which thus stimulates the formation of new and creative purposes. Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi - a 13th century Persian poet, a Sufi mystic and one of the greatest spiritual masters and poetical intellects - was for the arts in education to restore equilibrium between the spiritual and physical existence. It is a process of the purification of the soul and causes spiritual awakening. True education starts from within.

## CONCLUSION

Arts/Performing Arts Engagement with Content, Quality and Standards: “An education in the arts brings many other faculties into play. These include curiosity, wonder, delight, a sense of mystery, satisfaction, unease when quality is neglected, and even frustration” (Business Week, 1996). The idea of quality in the arts stems from the notion of perfection which is the ultimate targeted standard of any work of art. Therefore students will develop a sense of real engagement towards bringing quality results instead of just results on a “continuous improvement” basis. The arts in-builds a sense of quality feeling within individuals and therefore caters for a spirit of continuous improvement. The Arts/Performing Arts Response to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century need for creativity: “An arts education helps lay the groundwork students need to be successful in a world where ability to produce knowledge is at a greater premium than ever before” (Business Week, 1996). Sri Aurobindo Ghose distinguishes between the individual with a rich and varied store of information, concepts, etc - regarded as intelligent; and the individual who uses these units of information in both an original and a constructive way – regarded as creative (Pani, 1997). The latter is the type of educated individual needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century i.e. having the capacity to produce new innovative products, ideas - even if it involves forming new patterns from past experiences. The Covid-19 scenario, throughout the world needs purposeful and goal directed creations and re-creations – be it in the artistic, literacy or scientific forms. Exponential growth in the coming years about understandings of the brain chemistry and the neuro-physiology of thinking and emotion is expected to enhance comprehension about the structure of interactions of the arts with the general capacities of the human brain. The mechanisms of creativity work and the processes of learning through creative expression have not yet really been explored to know what goes on in the mind that creates or confronts art. The processes of reflection which the artist goes through, as he starts from raw material towards shaping his work, polishing and perfecting, makes the individual the centre of the creative process. Yet it is fundamental to know the neuro-function processes behind this inevitability of autonomous cognitive change through engagement in art, i.e., when the mind engages itself metacognitively from block clay to sculpture or from story to dramatized play or dance (Merlin, 2006). It may take decades to obtain these clear-cut scientific answers; arts/performing arts may be considered as among the most unmarketable subjects in education; and above all, they yield results in the long-term. But based on the theories of eminent philosophers/educationists, as seen above, one cannot ignore that the arts/performing arts in education can contribute fundamentally towards rebuilding, reconstruction, and re-invention of the post Covid-19 twenty-first century individual – so that a major shift away from Quantity towards a mentality for Quality progresses and trickles down the coming generations.

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