Volume 20 Issue 33
Originally issued as G5



Global Journal of human-social science: G
Linguistics & Education
Volume 20 Issue 5 Version 1.0 Year 2020
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

A Philosophical Assessment of Non- Possessiveness in Teaching and Learning

By Kumar Neeraj Sachdev

Abstract- Education involves teaching and learning to gather information, improve knowledge, and develop skills. Corresponding value-oriented conduct is required to give a meaningful orientation to such a process. The object of value-oriented conduct as a subject matter of education ethics is to seek the development of a human being as a being capable of understanding, sympathy, and communication with all members of the human race. However, with time, it has been observed that an overemphasis on material interests has created the new uncivilized educated man because material interests and educational interests in such a process of education do not coincide in a meaningful way. Instead, material interests tend to dominate the whole idea of education itself. Given this, I shall be assessing the relevance of non-possessiveness (Aparigraha), which is characterized to be a virtue in Jainism, in education and learning to arrive at a resolution of this problem of the overriding character of material interests to suggest that the purpose of education is to enable a human being to live an informed and enlightened life.

Keywords: education, teaching, learning, value-oriented conduct, education ethics, educational interests, material interests, non-possessiveness, jainism, enlightened life.

GJHSS-G Classification: FOR Code: 930299



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



© 2020. Kumar Neeraj Sachdev. This is a research/review paper, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/), permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

A Philosophical Assessment of Non-Possessiveness in Teaching and Learning

Kumar Neeraj Sachdev

Abstract- Education involves teaching and learning to gather information, improve knowledge, and develop skills. Corresponding value-oriented conduct is required to give a meaningful orientation to such a process. The object of value-oriented conduct as a subject matter of education ethics is to seek the development of a human being as a being capable of understanding, sympathy, and communication with all members of the human race. However, with time, it has been observed that an overemphasis on material interests has created the new uncivilized educated man because material interests and educational interests in such a process of education do not coincide in a meaningful way. Instead, material interests tend to dominate the whole idea of education itself. Given this, I shall be assessing the relevance of non-possessiveness (Aparigraha), which is characterized to be a virtue in Jainism, in education and learning to arrive at a resolution of this problem of the overriding character of material interests to suggest that the purpose of education is to enable a human being to live an informed and enlightened life.

Keyterms: education, teaching, learning, value-oriented conduct, education ethics, educational interests, material interests, non-possessiveness, jainism, enlightened life.

I. Introductory Remarks

I present and discuss in the paper a perspective of education about teaching and learning with a focus upon a few philosophical nuances of education ethics in value-oriented conduct of educators and students. I explore the idea that the object of value-oriented conduct as subject-matter of education ethics is the growth of a human being as a being capable of sympathy and communication with all members of the human race. In the analysis of this idea, I bring to the fore, first, the inevitable co-existence of educational interests and materials interests, and second, the problem of an overemphasis on material interests in the current practices of education. I present some arguments through a philosophical analysis of a virtue of non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) in Jainism to propose a resolution of this problem of the overriding character of material interests to live an informed and enlightened human life.

Author: Associate Professor of Philosophy, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS), Pilani Campus, Pilani – 333 031, Rajasthan, India.
e-mail: kns@pilani.bits-pilani.ac.in

II. A Philosophical Perspective of Education

The term education connotes its broad meaning in conveying the idea of "to bring up." It means to impart knowledge and skills and, even more important to bring up or develop in the student those habits and attitudes with which he may successfully face the future. Moulder informs that the aim of education is "to provide people with the ideas, methods, and habits of mind which they need to evaluate their society; to appreciate everything which makes their lives and the lives of others worth living, and to reject everything which dehumanizes them and the other members of their society." (1975, p. 71) In other words, it represents the idea of leading the man as a student in the acquisition of knowledge, information, and skill by the values or qualities cherished in a society, a nation, or the world. (Gisbert, 2010, p. 199) I may quote in this regard: "to be a good citizen, especially under forms of government that vest considerable power in their citizens, one must exhibit certain traits. Many of these traits are moral in character, such as justice, equality, and respect." (Fenstermacher et el, 2009, p. 15) On a broad note, "The need to establish common values and benchmarks for all countries alike, and to promote ethical principles and standards to guide scientific progress and technological development, is becoming increasingly acute…" (Have, 2008, p. 57).

However, Moulder goes on to point out a bigger perspective of education. It appears in his characterization even though as a rival perspective, but I shall be arguing for this to be complementary to other perspectives. He says, "…there is nothing to be gained from a university education except an opportunity to try to understand what is involved in having been born a human being." (1975, p. 71).

The comprehensive perspective of education about teaching and learning thus encompasses three ends, first, to be able to earn one's livelihood, second, to be able to understand and contribute in the functioning of one's society and nation, and third, to be able to grow as a human being who is capable of sympathy and communication with all members of the human race. It happens most often that the process of education gets limited to the first end or the most second end. With the result, the process instead of helping a human being to develop his faculties to

© 2020 Global Journals

perfection and seek the highest form of happiness in the contemplation of truth, goodness, and beauty, spoils him to become an uncivilized education man. (Gisbert, 2010, pp. 200-203).

It depends upon the older generation of human beings whether to entertain the idea of education from a narrow perspective as to equip students with the intellectual tools needed for earning a livelihood for himself and his inner circle of other human beings or from a broad perspective, to educate the members of community to become enlightened individuals, who in turn not only operate the government in a democratic society but develop faculties to get connected with other human beings as human beings (Rowan and Zinaich, 2003, p. 407).

In this endeavor, there is a need to understand that since, education is a process of teaching, training and learning to collect information, improve knowledge and develop skills; corresponding value-oriented conduct of both educators and students is required to give a meaningful orientation to such a process. Unlike earlier simple societies, education has become formal and entrusted to agencies and institutions, which bring in the need to work for credentials such as certificates and degrees. In this changing scenario, educators and students are expected to show value-oriented conduct in the areas of education and learning. The reason being, educators can play various roles when dealing with students such as teachers, mentors, advisors, counselors, and perhaps even employers. The teacher expects students to listen, read, reflect, question, research, and do other things to learn. It is worthy of note regarding teaching and learning that the aim of higher education is development and protection of students' autonomy or self-chosen identity that is an achievement that may require insight, inventiveness (originality, creativity, imagination), and strength. (Joel J. Kupperman, 2003, pp. 433-441).

a) A Compulsive Co-existence of Educational Interests and Material Interests

Education most often than not and almost everywhere has been appearing to be merely an occupational activity, and as consequence, educators are restricting themselves to conceive it as a narrow cultural pursuit meant to serve material interests. There is hardly evidence to see that it is helping a human being to become a man capable of connecting with others as a man in the world irrespective of biological, social, economic, or other differences. It is enabling a human being, instead, to learn and train in the use of scientific method for material gains, for example, and not to receive the holistic scientific education as such. The scientific or, for that matter, any other form of education such as engineering, business, or liberal arts is to serve all the three ends mentioned above. (Gisbert, 2010, pp. 201-205).

Material interests and educational interests are necessary for a society but they may not coincide. The fact of the matter is that an overemphasis on material interests has created the new uncivilized educated man. With the result, the educators are succeeding in producing specialists with an infinite variety of credentials in their fields such as doctors, engineers, business administrators, who work hard in pursuit of high salaries or general material gains. They are trained to remember but not to understand; disposed to doubt but not really to admire or believe. (Ibid) Nussbaum emphasizes the point of concern in this regard.

We are pursuing the possessions that protect, please, and comfort us – what Tagore called our material "covering." But we seem to be forgetting about the soul, about what it is for thought to open out of the soul and connect person to world in a rich, subtle, and complicated manner; about what it is to approach another person as a soul, rather than as a mere useful instrument or an obstacle to one's own plans; about what it is to talk as someone who has a soul to someone else whom one sees as similarly deep and complex. (2016, p. 6).

Given the above, there is a need to discuss and bring about change in education, especially teaching and learning or, more specifically, the way educators are teaching, and students are learning. I propose to take into account the relevance of ethics of Jainism in general and the virtue of non-possessiveness (Aparigraha), in particular in the analysis of conflicting educational interests and material interests. Jainism is an ancient philosophical school of thought wherein many thinkers propose an idea of a good life that is precisely aimed at not only maintaining non-violent stance in life but keeping material interests in check and thereby controlling negative emotions of greed, anger and jealousy and avoiding attachments with material things, places or persons (http://www.ejainism.com/aparigraha.html). It is an apparent claim that controlling negative emotions and avoiding attachments ought to be learned and practiced early in life during one's stage of education itself, or else they grip one's whole life all through. To elaborate, I propose to build a meaningful relationship between education and ethics of Jainism in the following section.

b) A Characterization of Education through Ethics of Jainism

Earlier elders trained the young in a broad spectrum of knowledge such as literature, history, philosophy, religion, and mathematics. Both educators and students hardly experienced the clash between education and utility because the focus was on a broad and non-materialistic track of learning conceived of as an act of acquiring information, knowledge, and skill and not just confined to compartmentalizing information,

© 2020 Global Journals

knowledge or skill to align with some occupational activity (Gisbert, 2010, p. 205).

The compartmentalizing of information, knowledge, or skill may occur in the human mind itself, which implies a human being happens to utilize the information, knowledge, or expertise for material gains as and when required. Still, it does not affect his way of life as such. A teacher, for example, teaches his students the virtue-theoretic approach of Jainism to earn a living for himself in the workplace. Still, he does not make use of the virtue-theoretic learning in his way of life, which amounts to intellectual comprehension of truth but not practical realization of truth - the basis of teaching and learning. It may be noted in this regard that thinkers of Jainism, or for that matter any other Indian philosophical school of thought advocate practical realization of truth.

Jainism is an ancient system of Indian philosophical thought, which students learn about as a part of their exposure in philosophy and religion. However, it has lost quite a bit of its appeal in the current practices of education, which focuses upon specializations in various occupational fields. It has a historical background, though. It flourished along with other systems, namely Upanishads and Buddhism, in the sixth century BC. Like Buddhism, it has assumed an independent status implying thereby that its followers don't accept the authority of Vedas. Be that as it may, many overlapping ideas are easy to locate and discuss in all the systems of Indian philosophy. The claim of all is common and straight: humans are suffering because of their proximity and attachment to matter, and the solution lies in knowing the ways and means to get a release from this proximity and attachment and be in eternal peace. The meaning of matter includes gross like parts of the human body, sweets or books, and subtle like thoughts, judgments, or feelings (S. Radhakrishnan, 1989; C.D. Sharma, 1960; R. Puligandla, 1997). These insights are relevant in the practices of education because both educators and students need to understand and practice detachment to matter.

The word Jainism derives from Jina – the liberated soul, one who has conquered his desires and passions and dwells in tranquility, knowledge, and power. A human being may resolve to become a Jina provided one is prepared to acquire and live through the right faith, knowledge, and conduct. Right faith lies in the constitution of a belief system that acknowledges the real existence of the universe and the self and to know the real nature without doubt and error is the right knowledge. Jainism is well known for its theory with a strong emphasis on relativity of knowledge as it shows through seven-fold judgment. On a metaphysical level, it is an assertion of many-ness of reality. The students learn to overcome their attachment to thoughts, judgments, or feelings through their understanding and realization of many-ness of reality. (S. Radhakrishnan, 1989; C.D. Sharma, 1960; R. Puligandla, 1997).

In continuation, I emphasize that educators and students in their understanding of five virtues advocated in Jainism, namely non-violence, truth, non-stealing, self-restraint, and non-possessiveness, may learn about the importance of right conduct to live a good life. In particular, they may get to learn that the virtue of non-possessiveness also carries the meaning of non-attachment to worldly things; the practice of five virtues differs in rigor for monks and laypersons, and they are significant to follow anyway.

c) *An Assessment of Non-Possessiveness in Education and Learning*

Educators and students in cultivation of five virtues as mentioned above need to pay attention to non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) in particular because in a variety of acts of teaching and learning they require this virtue to keep their interest alive in the holistic gains of education such as information, knowledge, and skill while maintaining a distance from material interests. Non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) is a purposive disposition. A person cultivates the tendency to control one's passions and practice austerity regarding the possession of worldly objects. If, for example, it is possible for him to live with five shirts, then there is no point in accumulating fifty shirts. Or else, in a more academic domain, a student ought to be disposed to choose his internship or job by his interest and the academic discipline and not by pay packages offered by the recruiting company. And the pay packages that anyway aim at material interests must not create a sense of dependence in the life of a person. The dependence occurs when one tends to seek comfort in material possessions for himself or the people around him. Non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) thus is a vow or his resolve to cultivate this virtuous disposition to gradually minimize the worldly attachment in terms of lowering down the intensity of love or hate for pleasing or displeasing objects of senses.

It is true that non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) is one among five virtues or vows that the teachers of Jainism ask their students to follow but if we look closely into the other four, namely non-violence, truth, non-stealing, and self-restraint we may see that non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) is a fundamental tendency of right conduct that supports the cultivation of other virtues to understand and practice detachment to matter.

The reference to non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) in practice form is not confined to Jainism alone. It is a well-regarded virtue in other systems of philosophy and religion as well. Aristotle, in his Nicomachean Ethics, discusses the need to cultivate self-restraint or temperance to control one's natural desires for pleasant things. He maintains that a

© 2020 Global Journals

temperate man doesn't feel distressed by the absence of such an object. The possessor of this virtue holds a mean position – he enjoys neither the excess nor the deficiency of it. (Aristotle, 1976, pp. 75-81).

And if we look into the life and writings of Mahatama Gandhi, he happens to be a strong supporter and an able exemplar of non-possessiveness (Aparigraha). His life was a life of austerities and numerous experiments that he conducted in his own life to improve the condition of his self, which aim at the control of passions and worldly attachments. (Gandhi, 1940).

d) A View of Non-Possessiveness Overcoming Material Interests

It appears to be clear from the reference to non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) in the above section that an educator or a student may cultivate this virtue of non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) to overcome the overriding character of material interests particularly when they appear to come in the way of educational pursuits. The reason being a person possessing the virtue of non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) will be appropriately disposed to distinguish learning pursuits from material interests and thereby appreciate the holistic benefits of the former that are learning pursuits. For him, learning interests will serve all three ends as mentioned above and not merely the first end to earn one's livelihood or, in other words, as a means to accumulate material possessions.

Furthermore, he will not be treating education as a commodity that can be bought or sold in the market for material gains. Since there is a strong possibility that an overwhelming focus on material interests in education will influence the educator or the student to treat education as a commodity that one uses to realize the first narrowly conceived end, that is to earn one's livelihood. And in cultivation of the virtue of non-possessiveness (Aparigraha), an educator or a student will be treating education as an opportunity to learn to gain the holistic benefits of information, knowledge or skill to live a meaningful human life and not merely a commodity to sell in the market for maximum material gains.

III. Concluding Remarks

Education is needed to live an enlightened human life. Ethical considerations in education bring to the fore the importance of balance between educational pursuits and material interests of a human being in a society. The nature and purpose of non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) are indicative of the fact that non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) is a cardinal virtue in the Indian conception of virtue ethics. It assumes importance in the present materialistic world. Since the materialistic world characterizes a judgment of accumulation of gross objects; the practice of non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) helps an educator or a student to appreciate the holistic benefits of teaching and learning and to live a life of level-headedness. It is a virtue that an educator or a student cultivates to control his passions of love and hate for the pleasing and displeasing objects of senses to live a life of virtuous conduct to realize all the three ends of education. In particular, he cultivates this disposition to live through the third end; that is to say, he would be able to grow as a human being who is capable of sympathy and communication with all members of human community.

Notes and References

1. Aristotle (1976). The Nicomachean Ethics. Translated by J.A.K. Thomson. Penguin Books.
2. Fenstermacher, G., Osguthorpe, R., & Sanger, M. (2009). Teaching Morally and Teaching Morality. Teacher Education Quarterly, 36(3), 7-19.
3. Gandhi, M.K. (1940). An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Translated from Gujarati by Mahadev Desai, Ahmedabad: Navajeevan Publishing House.
4. Gisbert, P. (2010), Fundamentals of Sociology, Hyderabad, India: Orient Blackswan Impression, (Orient Longman Private Limited, Third Revised Edition, 1973).
5. Have, H. (2008). Unesco's Ethics Education Programme. Journal of Medical Ethics, 34(1), 57-59.
6. Kupperman, Joel J. (2003). Autonomy and the Very Limited Role of Advocacy in the Classroom. Ethics for the Professions. Edited by John Rowan, and Samuel Zinaich, Jr., Belmont, CA, and USA: Wadsworth, 433-441.
7. Moulder, J. (1975). Philosophy, Education and the University. Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory. No. 44, 65-76.
8. Nussbaum, Martha C. (2016). Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
9. Puligandla, R. (1997). Jainism. Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy. New Delhi: D.K. Print World (P) Ltd. 23-36.
10. Radhakrishnan S. (1989). The Pluralistic Realism of the Jainas. Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, Paperback Edition.
11. Rowan, John, and Zinaich, Jr., Samuel (2003). Ethics for the Professions. Belmont, CA, and USA: Wadsworth.
12. Sharma, C.D. (1960). Jainism. Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy, New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, 48-68.
13. http://www.ejainism.com/aparigraha.html

© 2020 Global Journals