Objectives of education

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I remember Satyajit Ray's famous film 'Hirak Rajar Deshey' which made two intriguingly conflicting comments on the consequence of education. One view of education was projected as 'Those who read ride the cars' (Lekhapora korey je garighora chorey shey) and the other as 'Those who read die in hunger' (Lekhapora korey je onaharey morey shey). The first view is modern and the other one is feudalistic. The first view encourages education among mass people while the other discourages it altogether. Ray however made the modern view of education win over the feudalistic one. It was consistent with popular expectations, of course.

The claim of the feudalistic view which rejects mass education sounds strange at first approach. Why should a person with education die in hunger? Can't education guarantee food and other necessary stuffs for life? It raises such basic questions, which again invoke the fundamental issue of the objectives of education. Should education be directed to earning and livelihood? Is it the money that should be brought by education? Or, education is there for attaining more lofty objectives? Should it be a way to attaining high standards in morality? Should it be for producing good citizens whose life would be dedicated to humanity? These two objectives, as I realise, are sharply contrasted in modern era. The first one emphasises the practical needs and advocates skill development while the second one stresses ideal necessity and advocates enhancement of knowledge.

The people of our country, as elsewhere, are in a dilemma with the objectives of education. Many people (in fact they are the majority) think that children should be educated so that they can get good jobs and earn money needed to lead a decent life in society. So they opt for educational programs which carry importance in job market. This is in fact engendered by capitalist economy, which is unable to ensure basic needs of life for all citizens of a country. People have to earn and live; otherwise they will be paupers and lead a miserable life. Therefore education is used as a means to ensuring financial security in life. This is the pragmatic philosophy of education.

But the question remains. Is it really possible to combine the two opposite ideals? It would be excellent if education can create the conditions of money generation and moral upliftment. But virtually it seems impossible. When we set the goal of earning money, it is only money, and nothing else, that matters.

On the other hand, some people believe that the purpose of education is making people morally developed. If only money is taken into account, it restricts education to material gains. Money must not be placed at the centre of education because it debases human life, thrusting people into the mire of petty personal interests. Education should be directed towards truth, beauty and welfare, which will be imported through the acquisition of knowledge. It should give people a sense of humanism, which will inspire them to dedicate their lives to others' wellbeing. This is the egalitarian philosophy of education.

Now, which one is to be suggested for our offspring? Should we put them to that sort of education which will bring them employment, or which will make them enlightened persons? Or both? To my personal reckoning, in the existing political and economic reality, education should be directed towards ensuring employment primarily, but it should also lead them to a spiritual awakening. They will be practical men but with humane heart. They will earn, not for earning sake, but with the target of serving. They will live themselves and help others to live. Money or job is the immediate objective of education, but 'being good soul' is its ultimate objective.

But the question remains. Is it really possible to combine the two opposite ideals? It would be excellent if education can create the conditions of money generation and moral upliftment. But virtually it seems impossible. When we set the goal of earning money, it is only money, and nothing else, that matters. In the capitalist world order, anybody would like to earn money even at the woes of others (morality is less important a concern here). On the other hand, being morally high, one may not indulge in the corporate craze of making money by hook or by crook. Therefore, a combined effort of practical and ideal education may ultimately turn into fiasco. Oil and water can hardly be mixed!

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