

EDUCATION FOR CREATIVITY, INNOVATION AND AUTHENTIC LIVING⁹⁶

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Your Excellency Professor Dr. Iajuddin Ahmad, Hon'ble President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dr. M. Osman Farruk, Hon'ble Education Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Mr. Md. Rezaul Karim, Hon'ble Chairman, Southeast University and South Asia Foundation, Prof. Dr. M. Shamsheer Ali, Vice-Chancellor, Southeast University, Deans, Faculty members, Your Excellencies, dear graduates, ladies and gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to be with you and specially to address the young graduates of Southeast University at its first convocation. I am profoundly impressed to learn that this new University provides facilities to the students to specialize in Management Sciences, Computer Sciences, Electronics and Information Sciences, Pharmacy, Textile Engineering, Law, English and Islamic Studies. It provides education not only on its campus but also caters for distance instruction.

On an occasion like the present one, one is expected to give some advice to young men and women who are about to cross the threshold from a protected life to a world full of numerous challenges. However, I do realize that ever since the dissemination of the doctrine of GG i.e. Generation Gap between the seniors and the new generation, the technique of giving advice has become obsolete and instead, in this highly individualistic and competitive modern world, every one is inclined to learn through his/her own mistakes.

But there may be consensus on this point that owing to globalization no nation-state in the third world today can survive without acquisition of the

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knowledge of Science, Technology and Economics. Studies of Science and Technology reveal that through creativity and the development of innovative way of thinking, the working of things and the quality of life can be improved.

It is difficult to define creativity, but any attempt to do so must include innovative and inventive bent of mind along with the elements of wonder and novelty. Generally speaking, in the fields of Science and Technology, the human mind, which has many potentialities, manipulates the existing ideas or external objects and as a result something unusual is produced. Creativity therefore breaks the conventional mode and thereby expands the limits of reason and perception. In fact human creativity, unlike God's creativity, does not create anything out of nothing but it is a result of the assessment and rearrangement of the existing things and knowledge within our environments. But it is sad to observe that the reward of originality is usually received in the form of hostility of our conformist fellow-beings, probably because the conventionalists prefer the maintenance of status quo and are inclined to disapprove anyone who has something new to say.

Usually a challenge in the collective life of a community demands the performance of a creative act for its resolution. Therefore, such a creative act is not only novel but it provides an appropriate solution to a given problem. However, the creative idea in its nature remains not only innovative but it is also exploratory and an adventure into the realm of the unknown. On the other hand, the conformist idea, as it avoids disturbing the status quo, is cautious and methodical. Thus, to quote my respected philosopher friend Professor Khawaja Masud, creativity is iconoclastic whereas conformity is dogmatic. The dictum of the conformist is "why change"? But the principle on which the creative operates is "why not"?

Creativity involves the ability to change one's attitude, approach or prospect in regard to a given problem. We must not forget that every human being is endowed with numerous mental potentialities and happens to be creative in different fields and to different degrees. Consequently the difference between a genius and a common man is not of quality but is essentially of quantity i.e. the imagination, energy or persistence of the genius may be a little more developed than that of the ordinary man. There is

however, another difference which is more important. Agreeing with Prof. Masud, the innovative man starts from doubting the value of the generally accepted paradigm, and his skepticism liberates him from the shackles of conventional belief, while his urge for the new, prepares him for courageously undertaking the responsibility of his creative discovery. Therefore, creativity implies non-conformity. A conformist is less intelligent as compared to a liberated mind. He is less confident of himself and therefore more dependant on others, more rigid and certainly more self-righteous and authoritarian.

I note that this illustrious University offers Islamic Studies as one of its courses. I trust this subject includes the causes of the collapse of Islamic polity and culture in modern times. According to all the eminent Muslim thinkers of South Asia there are three reasons for this decline: arbitrary Monarchy, sterile Mullatism and decadent Sufism. They have proposed that for the renaissance of Islamic polity and culture, Monarchy should be replaced in the world of Islam by democracy, equality for all, respect for Human Rights and Rule of Law as these values are not repugnant to Islamic Injunctions; Mullatism to be replaced by reinterpretation of Islamic laws pertaining to mundane affairs by the elected assemblies of Muslim countries through the process of *Ijtihad*; and the spirit of true Sufism to be revived through the dissemination of liberal modern education among the illiterate masses of Islam. But all such reformist thinkers like Shah Wali Ullah, Syed Jamal ud Din Afghani, Muhammad Abduhu, Rashid. Reza, Syed Ahmed Khan, Allama Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah were declared “Kafirs” by the dogmatic conformists because they dared to say something new.

It is necessary for the progress of the new education method to bid farewell to the medieval system of learning. The times have passed when prescribed text books were expected to be committed to memory and poured out during the examination. Now only that education system will succeed which draws out the creative potential of a student, for creativity comes as naturally to the average student as it comes to the clever and brilliant one. Therefore it is the responsibility of the teachers to encourage the development of original and innovative ideas among the students.

I am so pleased to learn that Southeast University has ventured to adopt a dual mode of education i.e. campus mode and distance mode. This new experiment of imparting distance education should be adopted by all the universities in the third world countries. Owing to the advancement in technology, it is now possible to make use of web-based modules, CD, email besides face to face tuition. It is a technology through which education could be provided and spread to a large number of people, as anyone who desires to be educated in any specific field of studies can learn by joining a campus or while sitting at home. I trust Southeast University takes a further step to establish contacts or affiliation with foreign centers of excellence.

Creativity in fact is self-direction; it is to learn at one's own initiative.' One cannot deny that this is an era of explosion of knowledge. In the modern world, knowledge is developing at such high speed that by the time our dear graduates leave this grand University, what they have learnt so far, will become obsolete. Therefore after leaving your alma mater, it is only through self-education that you can keep pace with the latest developments in your field of studies. I am sure that the creative teachers of this University have launched the graduates on a new voyage of discovery by giving them an understanding of the basic structure of their subjects. This is not an advice but remember, to be creative is to fulfill yourself as a person. Consider this as this has to be, as this is your destiny.

What is authentic living? This is essentially a question of philosophy although it concerns itself with certain moral values which may be permanent in nature or may not be permanent but subject to the law of change in accordance with the changing needs of a person. The conformist's view is that authentic living is not achievable in this world and that by observing religious obligations one should prepare himself for realizing authentic living in the hereafter. The generally accepted view is that education only informs and this is not sufficient; because a student has to be "formed" besides being "informed". It has also been held that what you have gained through your studies so far is not genuinely relevant. Your life at the university has merely been an exercise of a warrior equipped with certain tools. The real battle or trial shall now commence when your skill to handle the tools shall be put to a test and you would be judged also on the grounds whether as a person you are good or bad.

Once upon a time it was believed that authentic living is realized when one becomes “cultured” in the real sense through developing a good understanding of literature, fine arts, philosophy, history etc. Then came a stage when some moralists formulated the view that it was irrelevant to involve oneself in the futile discussion as to how authentic or unauthentic living can be associated with “culture”. The argument proceeded, why one should bother to establish a connection between the Greek versions of the tragedy called “Electra” (written by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides) with that of Eugene O’ Nielle’s “Mourning Becomes Electra”. No one is interested to find out who among Marlowe, Kyd and Shakespeare originally conceived or actually wrote “Hamlet”; or which out of the three proofs i.e. teleological, ontological or cosmological establishes the existence of God. Who cares whether or not you approve the cosmology of Ptolemy, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton or Einstein. The study of literature, philosophy, history etc. or mastering of the classical languages may make one knowledgeable or may even make one cultured, but what has such specialization to do with authentic living?

There is also a view that “Peace” leads to the realization of authentic living. “Peace” is a laudable ideal for which one should aspire although it appears very difficult to achieve. One of my learned colleagues in the Supreme Court once informed me that the Chinese word for “Peace” is pictorially depicted by a roof with one woman under it. On the other hand, “War” is depicted by a roof with two women under it. The wisdom of the Chinese in these picturesque linguistic expressions is obviously indisputable so far as domestic peace and harmony is concerned.

There is another way of evaluating “Peace” as a concept. Ali Hajwari, better known as Data Ganj Bakhsh, the patron-saint of Lahore, in his *Kashf al Mahjub* (Lifting of the Veil) narrates that a young student from Merv once came to him and pleaded that he desired “Peace” for authentic living but since he was surrounded by enemies who wanted to exterminate the saint should pray for their destruction. The saint replied: “you should be grateful to your enemy for he is your best friend in the sense that he always keeps you awake and in a state of preparedness. Authentic living means awareness and alertness, and if conflict or competition is eliminated from your life the result will be apathy and death”.

In South Asia the Muslim poet-philosopher Iqbal's contribution to the cultural renaissance of Islam is his philosophy of the "Self" which is reflected in his poetic and prose works. He believes that man is potentially a creative activity and has a capability to become co-worker with God in the process of progressive change if he takes the initiative. Iqbal desires the rebirth of the spirit of inquisitiveness and defiance among the modern Muslim youth so that their lost station in the field of Science could be recovered.

He demonstrates through an analysis of history that in the sphere of human knowledge the Western civilization is a further extension of Islamic civilization. Everything in the Western thought that led to human progress is an elaboration of those very ideas, theories and debates which were initiated by Muslim thinkers and scientists. Therefore, if we learn those sciences and equip ourselves with that technology in a more developed form today, we will not be receiving something from an alien culture, but taking back what we originally gave to the West. In this way, he attempts to create a bridge between Islam and the West.

The values, on the basis of which Iqbal elaborates his concept of authentic living, are the adoption of such moral attributes as love, freedom, courage, high ambition, and indifference towards the acquisition of material comforts. The cultivation of these attributes in one's character, according to him, is likely to result in the fortification of man's "ego" and the acts of such a person may become creative and innovative. He is of the view that the factors which destroy man's "ego" or "self" arise out of stagnation. Stagnation disseminates passive virtues like humility, submission or obedience as well as fear, cowardice, corruption, begging or asking not only for the means of livelihood but also for ideas from others, imitating and finally servitude.

Iqbal also highlights the symbol of "Eagle" to illustrate his concept of authentic living and advises the Muslim youth to adopt the five qualities which he notes in this regal bird:

(i) it soars high in the sky; (ii) has keen eyesight; (iii) enjoys loneliness; (iv) does not make a nest; and lastly; (v) abhors to eat the "prey" killed by someone other than itself.

In this modern age, since everyone is expected to learn at one's own initiative. My young friends! You are free to choose your own pattern of moral values for determining what is going to be your personal ideal of authentic living. I conclude by most sincerely wishing all of you the best of luck as you leave the portals of this illustrious institution and give you this parting message through the verses of Iqbal.

The passive meandering of the stream,

Creeping slowly within its muddy banks,

Is a sight unpleasant to my eye!

Do not look at it my dear youth!

Turn yourself to the other side and behold

The fountain surging magnificently upwards

By its own inner force.