EDUCATION, FREEDOM, AND SOCIAL HARMONY

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"In a world sharply divided between rich and poor, between north and south, between those who have gained abundant benefits in a globalized world and those who remain in a downtrodden and marginal position, scientifically and economically, "[1] what kind of character of the educated people do we badly need to develop and pursue at our present time in order to understand, and then make all necessary efforts to bridge the gap? If we believe in the concept of the oneness of humanity and the principles of universal justice, that gap should no longer exist in human life, once and forever. But the naked reality has spoken of different and contradictory thing. Therefore, the hope for creating a social harmony in human society with the absent of justice would be only an empty dream to realize and achieve when the gap is still there, locally and globally.

In the past, most of the third world was under European colonial domination for a very long time, the length of which was different from one country to another. The psycho-cultural impact of colonialism on the mind of the colonized has lasted long, even until now. Indonesia was one of those countries which only got its independence just few days after the end of the second World War in August 1945. But the mindset of the people has not yet much changed fundamentally, though Indonesia has tried to develop the so-called national system of education in order to say 'good bye' to old mentality as part of the colonialist heritage.

Not far different from the case of Indonesia, India also suffered from the British direct imperialism and colonialism for around 89 years. The great spiritual leader of India, Mahatma Gandi (Oct. 2, 1869-Jan. 30, 1948), not only outrightly rejected any kind of colonialism and imperialism, even English education in his view was dangerous for the Indians because it enslaved the nation. In the later years of his life, Gandhi was to declare that 'real freedom will come only when we free ourselves of the domination of Western education, Western culture and Western way of living which have been ingrained in us…Emancipation from their culture would mean real freedom for us.'[2]

For Gandhi, it would be a great mistake when we "assess the value of education in the same manner as we assess the value of land or of the shares in the stock-exchange market. We want to provide only such education as would enable the student to earn more. We hardly give any thought to the improvement of the character of the educated."[3] In this perspective, character education should become the philosophical core of educational system of the Indian nation.

Gandhi's idealistic type of society by rejecting all sorts of Western positive element of education is of course not realistic to be adopted *in toto*, because we cannot live in a total isolation. But, his critique of assessing "the value of education in the same manner as we assess the value of land or of the shares in the stock-exchange market" is a brilliant idea that the modern technological world may lack. In the same sense, Erich Fromm in his critique of the present technological society says that it has reduced "man to an appendage of the machine, ruled by its very rhythm and demands. It tranforms him into *Homo consumens,* the total consumer, whose only aim is to *have* more and to *use* more."[4] In this society, men have lost their soul and spiritual dimension and become things. Fromm continues his critique: "This society produces many useless things, and to the same degree many useless people."[5]

Both Gandhi and Fromm have actually the same concern of the impact of modern technology on the fate of man: the loss of freedom as an organic part of his unique individuality. Once freedom is lost, what else remains in him? Nothing remains, but the corpse in the form of a living being. That we need technology to make our life much easier is beyond doubt. But to be enslaved by technology by considering it as the master is a real catastrophe for man, the one who has created it. Here lies an irony, the master has conquered the creator. And, don't forget, both creator and master are the real product of modern system of education. From this perspective, Gandhi had long remainded us to be more aware of adopting Western education that has produced modern technology without thinking critically and deeply.

Social harmony of human communities can only survive in the environment of a real and authentic freedom that does not have enough space in a technological society in which man becomes passive and bored. This passiveness and boredom in many cases have significantly triggered the high rate of self-suicide that may be the true symptom of man's alienation in modern society. "Being passive,"

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[1] Quoted from Ahmad Syafii Maarif, "A Muslim Perspective" in James F. Keenan, *Catholic Theological Ethics Past, Present, and Future: The Trento Conference*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011, p. 28.

[2] See Barry Burke, "Mahatma Gandhi on Education," *http://infed.org./mobi/mahatma-gandhi-on-education/2000.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope; Toward a Humanized Technology*. New York-Evanston-London: Harper & Row, 1968, p. 38.

[5] *Ibid*.

continues Fromm, "he does not relate himself to the world actively and is forced to submit to his idols and their demands."[6] In this situation, man's unique individuality has ceased to exist, the one to be the center of Iqbal's philosophy of education.

For Muhammad Iqbal (9 Nov.1877-21 April,1938), Muslim philosopher, poet, and political leader of India (now Pakistan), the concept of man's individuality (ego) is the kernel and core of educational philosophy according to his understanding of the Qur'an. In one of his lectures, Iqbal said: "The development of inviduality is the objective of education and it can realize itself only in the strenuous action. The acquisition of passive knowledge is wholly repugnant to the spirit of Islamic education. In Islam no passivity is welcome because it makes the individual dead."[7] Quite different from Gandhi's total rejection of everything Western, Iqbal highly appreciates "the West's spirit of research, their sciences, their strenuous striving to gain control of their environment." But, according to Saiyidain K.G., Iqbal "repudiates the merely superficial and sensational aspects of their civilization because they tend to weaken our self-respect and give us an entirely false sense of being modern and progressive."[8] Many Muslims now are suffering from this kind of superficiality when imitating the West that Iqbal is certainly afraid of.

Finally, on Iqbal's concept of individuality (ego). When man has reached a highest point in his endless spiritual-intellectual struggle to develop his individuality in full freedom as the ultimate goal of education, then time will come for him "to see God face to face!" Iqbal's following philosophico-theologico-poetic expression has impressively illustrated our point:

- Art thou in the stage of 'life', 'death', or 'death-in-life'?
- Invoke the aid of three witnesses to verify thy 'Station'.
- The first witness is thine own consciousness--
- See thyself, then, with thine own light.
- The second witness is the consciousness of another ego--
- See thyself, then, with the light of an ego other than thee.
- The third witness is God's consciousness--
- See thyself, then with God's light.
- If thou standest unshaken in front of this light,
- Consider thyself as living and eternal as He!
- That man alone is real who dares--
- Dares to see God face to face![9]

To sum up

If we sincerely and seriously want to see the future of human species in this world split apart in the spirit of justice and authentic brotherhood, in which the idea of social harmony is fully felt and guaranteed for all, the only way open to us is to critically and deeply rethink and requestion of our present educational philosophy by wedding Intellect of the West to Love of the East,[10] as the true manifestation of the concept of the oneness of humanity.

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[6] *Ibd.*, p. 39.
[7] See www.ukessays.com/essays/religion/educational-philosophy-of-allama-mohammad-iqbal-religion-essay.php.
[8] *Ibid*.
[9] Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam.* Kashmiri Bazar-Lahore: SH. Muhammad Ashraf, 1971, p. 198.

[10] See also William O. Douglas, "Foreword" in Hafeez Malik (ed.), *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971, p. x.