

GUEST COLUMN

Arts Education

Akshara KV*



Culture is not something that needs to be 'taken care of' while undertaking development projects.

When we talk about education and equity, we are actually talking about two kinds of equity which are necessary:

1. Equal opportunity for all to get education
2. Equal opportunity for different kinds of and concepts of education

The former is easily understood, and there are at least attempts to achieve it. The latter is difficult to comprehend, and is largely ignored in our context.

Similarly there are two possibilities when we talk of the relationship between arts and education; the major question that troubles me is the choice between "arts education" and "arts-in-education" (or arts for education). Thus nowadays we talk about "theatre education" and "theatre-in-education" and the like.

Arts-in-education is very popular, and is seen as the cure for various diseases today such as for making educational processes more lively, to lure the uneducated into the fold of education etc. It is also a component of the 'holistic' approach to education. Arts education, in contrast, is perceived to be a 'specialisation', and therefore marginalised in our context.

In this context, therefore, my proposition is for arts education, not arts-in-education. The approach at present seems to prioritize the latter, and I find serious conceptual and practical problems here. The rest of my presentation discusses these problems in the context of 'Education/Equity/Arts' relationship.

There are three problems that I locate in the concept of Arts-in-Education as it is conceived and practiced today:

1. Instrumental Use of the Arts

To interrogate and defy some received notions (of 'modernity'), I would assert that arts are NOT carriers, arts are NOT tools. To put it more succinctly, culture is NOT something that needs to be 'taken care of' while undertaking development projects. Other examples within this approach are yoga for stress management. This

is not just simplification, but a conceptual violence. At the risk of sounding like the "art for art's sake" position, one must assert today: Theatre IS education; Theatre is NOT an aid to education

2. Compartmentalisation

The best examples are the western 'Theatre in Education' or TIE models. Specialisation is the major motivation here. Just as medicine: paediatrics, theatre: TIE. It parallels the offer of different kinds of theatres for different age groups. The underlying assumption is that children are DIFFERENT from adults. Therefore, you need different kinds of arts for them. And we have now lobbies for including 'drama' as a subject in schools, and there are TIE projects all over the country. It is like saying 'Indian' way of thinking is different. Children may only respond differently but essentially they are NOT different.

3. Dominance of Literacy

Why only 'literacy'? Why NOT 'musicacy' or 'theatricacy'? Is learning to keep Swara and Tala as important as learning to read and write alphabets? The highhandedness of 'literacy-centred-education' is revealed in, for example, the Union budget where the ratio of money allotments for Education: Culture = 28:1. How many music/dance/drama schools do we have compared to school and colleges? Literacy is thus something like a neo-imperialist tool with its emphasis on primary education and its deprivileging of specialised education. Why? To create CONSUMERS who are LITERATE, but not EDUCATED. Compare Sa-Akshara = literate with Sa-Rasa = one who has developed sensibilities = 'Educated'

Therefore, we need to rethink all the three keywords: Education, equity, and arts/culture

Ivan Illych said: "Modern education has replaced learning FROM the world, with learning ABOUT the world." The recent developments in our context, has gone a step further. We need not even learn about the world, we need to learn only to survive. This is the tragedy of modern education.

Akshara K.V. is a distinguished playwright and writer in the Kannada language. He presently heads Ninisam, the theatre group and cultural complex in Heggodu, Karnataka.

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