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Multidisciplinary Approach in Art Education

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ABSTRACT

The present paper attempts to understand what multidisciplinary approach is and what it means particularly for Art Education in present times in India. Multi-disciplinarity is a word that we hear commonly, now a days in academic circles. Hence the paper discusses whether it is a new concept in Indian education system or has it existed in earlier times as well through a specific case study of College of Fine Arts, JNAFAU, Hyderabad. As the University Grants Commission (UGC) under the Ministry of Human Resources Development has already initiated new rules to implement the Choice Based Credit System or CBCS for Under Graduate courses, the paper will present the various advantages and disadvantages or the problems that were tackled while designing new syllabus and curriculum for the Bachelor of Fine Arts and Architecture Under graduates. Through the study I hope to give an overall understanding of the New National education Policy and its outcomes within the purview of Fine Arts education and Course structure.

Keywords: Multidisciplinary studies, CBCS, Art Education, Interdisciplinarity, Fine art Syllabus

1. Introduction

“No subject can be mastered in isolation to other subjects,” opines Prof. Janaki Bakhle, the author of *Two Men and Music: Nationalism and the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* [1]. She has worked on the cultural and intellectual roots of modern India, its religious and ethnic communities related to Classical music. Although a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, she is one of the team members designing the path-breaking, innovative curriculum of School of Liberal Arts and Basic Sciences of SRM University, Amaravati. She emphasizes the word ‘synergy’ in the whole process. She explains that the team of SRM University wanted to keep appropriate balance among various subjects so as to provide a meaningful multidisciplinary education. This example brings to our notice, the importance of multidisciplinary studies in today’s system of education.

Before we begin understanding the diverse approaches in bringing about multi-disciplinarity in Indian education and syllabus, let us find what do multidisciplinary studies really mean? According to Klassen, “Multidisciplinary study is studying a topic from the viewpoint of more than one discipline and solving a problem using a different disciplinary approach” [2]. Whereas Interdisciplinary studies is about understanding theories that cut across disciplines and highlight the process and meaning rather than combining different discipline contents [3]. Interdisciplinary method uses the knowledge view and curriculum that applies methodology and language from more than one discipline to examine a central

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theme, issue, problem, topic, or experience. Transdisciplinary studies is removing the boundaries between the core disciplines, integrating them to construct new context of real-world themes and introducing a sub-major stream course [4].

Nonetheless these kinds of studies are not new in our country where the Gurukul tradition strived for overall development of a student by imparting knowledge on language, warfare, archery, reasoning, economics, mathematics and other subjects throughout the ages. Religion was however the guiding force in teaching moral values and way of life in this system and hence only a few privileged groups of people had access to this kind of education. The significant contribution of the Gurukul system despite its shortcomings is that the curriculum was designed so as to build a holistic individual rather than a mere expert in a single subject, which seems to be the approach taken in present times[5]. Gurukul Education system focused on holistic development of student and made their pupil responsible citizen of family, society and nation. Pandey also suggests that the Gurukul method centered on all round development of the pupil and shaped them into responsible members of a family and citizens of the society and nation. She points that Gurukul education system is perhaps the need of day with few changes in its methods and functions [6].

Gradually during the Colonial rule, the Western system of education was introduced by the British in the 1813. According to the Charter Act of 1813, English would be taught in the Indian education system although not as a replacement for indigenous languages. In fact, it was suggested that English would coexist with Oriental studies through which moral law could be reinforced [7]. Frederick notes that on the contrary, important urban centers of learning that existed in India centuries ago such as Taxila (in modern day Pakistan) and Nalanda, among others were centers of multidisciplinary knowledge. These institutions systematically imparted knowledge and attracted a number of foreign students to study topics such as Buddhist literature, logic, grammar etc.

The significant role played by British education policies in shaping today's Indian education system cannot be denied. Right from the establishment of Indian Universities Commission in 1902 and the transfer of the education to Indian control in 1921, several outstanding changes in the field of education such as approval of large funds, active role of the State in development of Education, where made through qualitative measures. In 1904, Lord Curzon introduced the bill of Indian Universities Act of 1904. The act played a crucial role in raising the standards of education. Similarly, after the Saddler Commission of 1917, the Government appointed the Calcutta University Commission to make an enquiry into the problems of education system in Colonial India and suggest recommendations to solve them. As advised by the Commission, several new universities at Travancore, Mysore, Delhi, Nagpur, Agra, Hyderabad, Patna, Aligarh, like Santiniketan, Osmania, S.N.D.T, Kashi Vidyapith, Jamia Millia and Gujarat Vidyapith were established. Despite various difficulties in Western education due to English being the medium of instruction, the period of late 19th century and beginning of 20th century is seen as the consolidation of Western education and Indian values [7].

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2. Reforms in Art Education

These Western education policies had a great impact on Art education too. In fact the foremost art institutions such as the Madras School, Kolkata and Bombay followed Colonial art education by introducing subjects like still life, life study and landscape painting. Indian art was till then considered as craft or merely traditional or folk art and hence a coerced ‘modernity’ was imposed through art education. It was not until E.B. Havell, the pioneering scholar and champion of Indian art came to Madras school as the Principal from 1884, and moved to the Calcutta school in 1896, when he shifted emphasis on the Indian style of art instead. Even though Havell studied from the South Kensington School, he opened up to absorb Indian Arts and Crafts into the academic curriculum. Another significant art school, Sir J. J. School of Art was also founded in Bombay by then which followed Colonial art education and industrial arts [8].

Later on schools like Santiniketan in West Bengal, Andhra Jateeya Kalasala in Machilipatnam and School of Fine Arts and Crafts in Hyderabad were established by 1940s. The School at Hyderabad was founded by the erstwhile rulers, the Nizams in 1940 and was earlier called ‘Markaz e Madrassa Fanune Lathefa’ under the guidance of the first principal, Khan Bahadur Syed Ahmed. In 1972, it merged with the Engineering College under JNT University. By 2008, JNTU further divided into four different universities and JNAFAU was formed along with College of Architecture and Planning and College of Fine Arts under the AP legislature Act No.31. Unlike other art institutions, the Hyderabad school neither followed completely Colonial education nor was nationalistic in its ideology. One can say that the outlook was Western inspired modernity but with an amalgamation of Indian craft traditions. Subjects like mural paintings, wood carving, filigree, book designing, batik etc were taught alongside academic naturalism. Thus a unique blend of modern Indian art flourished in this region with an eclectic touch fed by regional Deccani and folk art forms, imbuing both Colonial education and revivalist traditions coming from Santiniketan school. Looking at the syllabus of the Art school, one can notice that the art curriculum was multidisciplinary and intra disciplinary as well, as there were five departments such as Sculpture, Applied Arts, Painting, Photography and Animation which was added much later. Emphasis was given to learn industrial art and traditional art forms like print technology, puppetry, fresco murals etc. Apart from these English and Art history were compulsory subjects. But as the time went by, the departments became more and more exclusive so as to create experts in single field of knowledge. But this has only weakened the skills of the art students. For instance, a student of Painting is not equipped to make Sculpture or to understand the nuances of product designing due to rigid syllabus and non interaction between various departments. The lack of common platforms to interact and learn from different disciplines was amiss until the recent University Grants Commission (UGC) rules had come up with the regulations for Choice Based Credit System or CBCS. According to the UGC, there is necessity to allow the flexibility in education system, so that students depending upon their interests and choice can select multi disciplinary, interdisciplinary or intra-disciplinary courses. This may be possible with the CBCS an internationally acclaimed system. This system not only offers to learn major subjects but also

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gives opportunity to explore and expose to other subjects which were not considered as related otherwise but may help in a holistic development of a student's creative abilities.

Through this system, a student is allowed to choose electives from other departments of the College or online courses from outside the institute which are not in their main course syllabus. Thus, opening wide avenues for the students to explore avenues of their choice.

However the implementation of the CBCS project was not as easy as it sounds. As art educators we faced multiple challenges in executing the UGC rules. For instance we were skeptical about how online courses could be helpful instead of practice based courses. Another challenge was to accommodate students from other departments and courses into our already tightly scheduled curriculum and classes. After several meetings, discussions and revisions the CBCS system was introduced two years ago successfully. Electives such as reverse glass painting, impasto, water color were introduced to students of Architecture and Planning and subjects like Architectural rendering, Interior design is open to Fine Art students. About 35 students chose these electives and produced outstanding art objects that were also displayed and sold during the College Fest.

3. Conclusion

The CBCS is a welcome change to our education system which is constantly degrading and had faced a lull over the past few decades. As the students gain hands on experience on new subjects, their creativity can be enhanced. Once out of the college, they become certified professionals and are ready to venture into innumerable fields and possibilities which in turn will boost their confidence in facing the real world. The choosing of electives of their choice out of the discipline, is however only a revival of a forgotten old tradition which was far more inclusive and constructive for a true holistic development of an individual. Especially for Art education this is a boon as artists need to be aware of multi disciplinary studies in today's context as art cannot be alienated from Social sciences, Politics, Literature, Cultural studies, Design etc. In this regard, the Central Board of Secondary Education's Decision to integrate Art with education can mean a bright future for the Fine Arts academics. This would include art as a mandatory subject to be taught two classes per week in all CBSE schools from First to Tenth classes. The CBSE board hopes that this will enhance experiential teaching methods that improve learning abilities and creative thinking in the students.

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