

"education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance." – will durant essay ...

[Education](#)



**“ Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance.” – Will Durant Essay Sample**

Knowledge, truth, wisdom and intellect are many a times found juxtaposed while mankind tries to articulate the highest goals of a meaningful life. Any living species on earth has knowledge needed for its survival and over the centuries all life forms have adapted and evolved, showing a universal propensity to learn.

Men, of all life forms, have the most developed brains. Their ability to learn, to use the acquired knowledge and to prosper is unmatched. Nature gave all living creatures some natural strength to survive in thickest of the forests. If some had a sharp smelling power, some were quick to run and hunt, some were agile and some strong. Men were probably the weakest and with their multitudinous inabilities, they were probably the easiest prey in the jungle. But it was the brain that made them discover fire, learn to live in caves and paint the walls, learn to speak, and from hunter gathers become civilized and build big cities. One may be amazed to think how the pyramids of Egypt were probably built and how the knowledge of trigonometry and measurement were evolved in those days.

What we seek, while we speculate and meditate is the gradual end to our ignorance. We have come a long way from worshiping the forces of nature to the present day scientific feats of our ability to get high resolution pictures from the surface of Mars. From the speculation of Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Socrates to renaissance of enlightenment ages, we have walked a long road studded with numerous battles, catastrophes, challenges and difficulties.

The society of us men and women, made classes and hierarchies in almost all parts of the world. The sense of the knowledgeable and strong being superior to the others percolated with time as our common sense. Clergy, Nobles and peasants became almost universally accepted rungs of society. Inequality, injustice, slavery and destitution for many amidst opulence, pomp and show of some, time and again made many men to think about the best way of living and social order. Law books were written and treaties of administration were mulled upon by sagely men and women. Many speakers of truth and philosophers of conviction saw the alters of slaughter house. Many Godly men were killed and the strife between the truth and the evil continues till date.

Amidst all this, views like satyamev jayate, and the infallibility of truthful person became accepted as norm. God were seen as beings of greatest knowledge and men had to aspire to be one with God through their penance and sacrifices.

The love for knowledge and the dying desire to know the truth led to numerous religions and scriptures across the world. And while a large section of the masses found these high sounding books of ultimate knowledge as acceptable sometimes because of devotion and on the other because of fear, some divulged and we also see Charvakas and Ajivika sects. The idea of truth being somewhere hidden beyond the skies and in the centers of Universe saw their contrast in the wild naked dance of materialists who saw truth in rejoicing the short life.

Education of men and women by the educated became the well accepted tenet of any society. Education of the religious beliefs, social practices and sciences. Education of moral and ethical values. Education of poetry, dance and cultural practices. Education leading to a light. Education that emancipates and makes one a better being. All this and more became the mortars to hold the building blocks of emerging civilizations. And to communicate this education was need of language. Language has evolved in tandem with this evolution of mankind from age of isolation to present day age of globalization. If Shakespeare wrote ceaseless till his death and Dostoevsky had to hire typists to type his magnanimous novels, today we have come to the age of Twitter, where the 140 word limit captures the thoughts of people worldwide for myriad readers. Language has evolved, with the needs of society and has been the sole carrier of knowledge from one generation to another. Though Indian Philosopher may not totally agree with that and say that knowledge is acquired by four different ways: Intuition, Inference, Comparison, or Verbal testimony (pratyaksha, anumaaan, upama and shabd) yet without language education can be unthinkable.

What do we educate ourselves with when we learn? The mystic poet Rumi may say: you know all already, it is just about seeing that which was left in the dark. And he may be very right. The true role of an educator is many a times, to show the pupil where to look rather than what to look for. If ignorance is darkness, then education is the candle. And what does it illuminates? What comes to light? Our own knowledge that was hidden from us!

When Albert Einstein was sitting at his desk in patent office at Bern and was gazing out his window, he performed his famous mind experiment. He thought what will happen if he walks along the beam of light coming from the clock tower at the same speed. He was stunned to realise that time will not change for him and the whole beam of light will be like a photograph. Whole reality will alter and he will see only one thing for the rest of his life! Was this knowledge new to mankind? Or was it there but no one was looking? What got illuminated by this seemingly simple experiment was a fact that was there with the universe from the very beginning.

Take another example. A match stick in a match box has all the chemicals at its tip that can burn the wooden handle to ashes and yet unless one ignites it through a mechanical stroke against a rough surface, it remains as is. The knowledge of light and fire and the chemical reactions remain hidden. Education has such a role. It ignites our mind and gives us the wings of fire as A P J Abdul Kalam Azad would lovingly say to children.

Education has an enabling role. It enables us to know what we know in a better way and know what we can know by our mental prowess. It can make a student a doctor or an engineer. Both might be equally good and yet both may acquire knowledge as different as needed to perform a cardiovascular operation or to send a robot on moon. Education shines the light on different centers of darkness and we through our mental abilities and motivations rise higher from we stand. Einstein once said that he could see father because he stood at the shoulders of the giants. Each new generation has the privilege to stand on a tall generation and sees a little farther than the previous

generation. If painters painstakingly sketched the surface of moon using telescope 200 years back, today we take high resolution photographs almost every day. If calligraphers copied numerous copies of books all their lives few centuries back, today fast laser printer and publishing houses have flooded the market with numerous books in fine print.

We have been discovering our own full potentials through the torch of education. As this torch marches in this marathon of evolution, we are invention, innovating and discovering plethora of known and unknown knowledge in finer details. We are using our ability to know to predict natural disasters, to make safer vehicles, to study climate changes, to find better seeds, to cure diseases and find vaccines, to increase our life span, to find ways of making the world a better place. We are doing all this and more, in the light of our ignorance of yester years. We are accepting the mistakes and walking ahead.

And yet we also see superstitious practices of dark ages continuing in 21st century. Blasphemy is still considered a crime in many parts of the world according to orthodox tenets and men and women are still stoned to death for surreal offences. Narendra Dabolkars are still shot dead for raising voice against superstition.

Ours' is population of over 7 billion men and women and we surely are not a monolith. We all live in our own wells. Vivekanand asked us to come out these wells and see the ocean of knowledge. It is the long rope of education that can pull us out from these wells of our creation.

Education has an enabling role to play in human prosperity. Many ills of society can be cured by educating men and women. Amartya Sen argues in several of his essays, that educating women and developing the agency of women is directly linked with improvement in IMR, MMR and sanitation problems that we face today. He argues that education is not only a means of achieving our developmental goals it is very much the end as well. For what development is development without building an educated society? Ignorance makes people narrow minded and social ills continue to exist in absence of light. Dowry, honour killing, rape, communal riots etc are major social concerns that we have today in our Indian society. An educated society can be more capable to looking into their own problems and finding their own solutions in an amicable way.

It is this ignorance that is exploited by hard liners and communal haters is spread through propaganda. Media too participates in hurling the masses as herds of sheep in the direction of oblivion under the influence of people having self interests. The sufferings of humanity are many at times rooted in ignorance and wrong perceptions. Only education can be the saviour in these cases.

Gautam Buddha when uttered his first words of wisdom after his revelation of truth, stressed on the eight fold path to nirvana. Right knowledge and right perception is what a Buddhist sage tries to meditate for whole his life. It is the wrong perception because of ignorance that is seen as the root cause of all suffering and strife. Those who are illuminated. Those whose mind sees beyond the dark and light skins of men, speak of equality and sound hopes

of “ we shall overcome”. Those men like Martin Luther King, talk about their dream. Those poets like, Ravindra Nath Tagore talk about a country where the head will be held high and mind will be without fear. Such loving messages percolate only from the clouds of knowledge and knowing.

The lesser men talk like Hitlers and use concentration camps to kill people. At this point, it should be made clear that being educated might have to do nothing with school or college degrees. A civilised America can drop bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and an uncivilised Bushman can save the life of a dying tourist in the jungles of Kalahari. Education can come from observation. Yes, schooling is very important, but ethical and moral values can be inculcated through family. Family, thus is accepted as the first school of a child.

What we must aim at thus, is deepening of the roots of education through collective effort and guidance from higher souls. Nehru understood the importance of education in nation building and the institutions of learning of today’s India owe a lot to his vision. The National Knowledge Commission was recently set up with similar vision, to usher the second wave of institution building in India. Knowledge is going to become the key for any nation that seeks to become a super power in further. A knowledgeable society will be in a better position to tackle with the upcoming challenges of water scarcity, food security and meeting the energy needs of tomorrow. Also, with the spread of Information and Communication Technology, an ignorant society will be easier for the terrorist groups to terrorise and polarise. Education has to play a major role to save our civilization in coming



century. In absence of its light mankind repeats the mistakes and history repeats itself remains one of the oft-repeated phrases in history books.

In India, though the government has given education an increased attention in recent past and passage of RTE Act was a historic moment in our Constitutional history, a lot needs to be done. Ignorance fetters us and cannot walk with our growing population and myriad challenges as we eye towards the future that was once dreamt by Tagore and Gandhi. Education has to spread and women education has to be given increased attention. As we are becoming less and less dependent of agriculture, skill development and capacity building is also a major challenge that needs to be addressed. We have long given reservation to the educationally backwards classes of our society and we need to build institutions to fast track the process. Without an educated society, inclusive growth may remain a distant dream.

And yet, such a talk is self-emancipatory in nature as we seek to remove our own ignorance. Mankind, in a global world, needs to know each other problems and come out with help so as to sustain life on this planet earth and do not burn our house living in wrong perceptions and ignorance. A progressive society must progressively end its ignorance through collective and individual effort.