

Educational ideas of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali and their relevance to the contemporary system of education in India

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Abstract

In contemporary era, Ibn Sina's and Al-Ghazali's educational philosophies are more relevant and their educational values and principles for human development are to be actively promoted among the present generations to help them lay the right foundation for happy and bright tomorrow.

Keywords: educational ideas, Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali, relevance

Introduction

Ibn Sina represents the tradition of Science, which is true for all ages, in which search for knowledge and zeal for acquiring it is unparalleled. At a very young age he showed thirst for knowledge, ability to learn, and mental calibre. His text book on medicine (*Al-Qanun*) was used as a standard reference in Europe for almost 600 years. Muslims had developed the mechanical robots. Science flourished under the Islamic education system. The Muslims were the most advanced in the world in fields such as: mathematics, geometry, optics, astronomy, medicine, physics, natural science, engineering and many others. Today the Muslim world is plagued by astonishingly high levels of illiteracy. As a philosopher and a devout Muslim, he tried to reconcile the rational philosophy of Aristotelianism and Neo-Platonism with Islamic Theology. He also developed his own system of logic, known as Avicennian Logic, and founded the Philosophical School of Avicennism, which was highly influential among the Muslim and Western European scholastic thinkers alike.

For today's thinking on ethics Ibn Sina is prominent in an assortment of ways: he appears both as bridge between West and East, as well as a bridge between antiquity and modernity. Heralding many aspects of modern science, he sees no division between the different fields of knowledge, between science and the environment. Thus divisions were invented by Modern European thinking and this, probably, is the root of today's problems over ethics, yet no one can ignore that during modern times the conception has also been linked to progress in science, technology and standards of living in certain countries. Thinking about Ibn Sina in the present-day context of ethics in science and technology is somewhat like thinking about one's parents in psychoanalysis. Through his stupendous life and works, Ibn Sina thus invites us to effect upon scientific ethics, which both UNESCO and Islamic Republic of Iran encourage, notably by awarding the *Ibn Sina (Avicenna) Prize* for ethics in science.

The main impact of Ibn Sina in India, as it was in Europe, was in medicine. Incidentally, the *Unani* system which was developed in west Asia, was contributed towards by Ibn Sina

to a large degree. Ibn Sina's work continues to provide guidance for humanity today in creatively meeting the challenges of modernity and development. His work is marvellous for coming generations as educational point of view. The UNESCO Courier published a beautiful monograph on this great scholar.

Ibn Sina works made a considerable impact on Indian science and philosophy and were introduced along with *Unani Tibb* after the establishment of the Muslim rule in India. Akbar gave patronage to many scholars and his court became a house of intellectuals including physicians and surgeons. One of his Persian physicians in the court, known as Hakim Ali, who came to India from Gilan and became a personal attendant-cum-physicians to Emperor Akbar, wrote a commentary, *Shah-i-Qanun* on Ibn Sina's *al-Qanun* in Arabic during Akbar's reign. Jahangir has also mentioned this in his Tuzuk. He gave the meanings of the words used in the original *al-Qanun* along with its derivatives and inner meaning and collated information from Ayurveda texts. Another commentary on *al-Qanun* was written by Hakim Fathullah Shirazi who rendered his work into Persian. A few copies of *al-Qanun*, *al-Shifa*, and *al-Najat* are available in different Oriental libraries in India. *Al-Qanun* has also been translated in to Urdu in India. Apart from these works, two commemoration volumes have also been published, one by Syed Tajuddin under the auspices of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Muslim Educational Association of South India, Madras, in 1955, and the other, by Iran Society, Calcutta, in 1956. Since India has connections with Arabic literature for over a thousand years, Indians were proud on this occasion for having an opportunity to pay tribute to the great philosopher scientist, Ibn Sina.

Ibn Sina sees the aim of education as the overall growth: physical, mental, and moral, followed by preparation of the individual to live in society through a chosen trade according to his aptitudes. Ibn Sina's education does not neglect physical development and everything implied by it; Physical exercise, food and drink, sleep and cleanliness. He does not devote his attention to the moral aspect alone, but aims at the formation of a personality complete in body, mind and character. He does not restrict the task of education to create

the complete citizen, but sees that education must also prepare him for a profession whereby he can contribute to the social structure, because in Ibn Sina's view society is built entirely on co-operation, on the specialisation of each individual in a craft or profession and on the mutual exchange of services between its individuals.

National policy on education (1992) lay emphasis on the holistic nature of child's development, viz. nutrition, health and emotional development. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) will receive higher priority and be suitably integrated with the integrated child development services programme, whenever possible.

Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) must aim at the development of the personality of the student. It should be so organised that the creative energy in the student should find proper expression. They should also be trained to appropriate their cultural heritage and acquire constructive and valuable interest. They trained to preserve and conserve their cultural heritage. An all-round development of the personality of the student is an essential aim of secondary education.

Ibn Sina said that the child should be guided against evil, persons having bad character. They should be kept away from all that is obscene and undesirable and should live in the company of virtuous people. This shows that moral aim was very important according to Ibn Sina with this end in view he stressed the teaching of the Quran, Hadith and *Fiqh*. He stressed that the curriculum should be geared to the moral end, for the example only those stories were to be taught to the children which speak of decent manners and good morals, he should not be teach those stories and fragments of poetry which go against religion and are source of disorder and corruption. Fourteen onwards the child should have the knowledge of agriculture, trade and commerce.

The fifth year plan (1974-79) suggests that moral and cultural values should be included in the curriculum; it also considered both its philosophical and practical aspects and made certain valuable proposals for reform.

Regarding methods of teaching, Ibn Sina advised his students to read, investigate and study, and suggest particular reference book for every branch of learning. He also advised them to put the learning in to practice. If the student is studying medicine or science, he should try to apply himself in a practical way to this profession. If he is studying literature, calligraphy and composition, he should try to earn his living by his pen. His intention for the students is to become more responsive to his studies and to have greater faith in their utility as well as perfecting them through practical applications, and side by side learn to earn a living.

National Curriculum Framework (2005): Ibn Sina stressed on constructivism in science teaching which gives account of the social dimension of knowledge and the learner's concept formation; this itself has been mainstay of constructivism of (NEF). Ibn Sina's teaching learning was also revolving involvement of mind, which is why he papered observation, experimentation, investigation etc. This will open the mind of students for creative works and good achievements.

Opinion about the teacher

His opinion about teacher is that, teacher should be an excellent person, discerning the values of society and moral virtues, so that students will follow him as a guide and model. A teacher should be religious minded, pious, intelligent bold,

clean and respectable man. He should know how to teach the child and mould his character. Ibn Sina said the teacher should sometimes stimulate his interest and sometimes take him to task, if it does not produce fruitful results he should give them corporal punishment. He noticed that the teacher not only impart knowledge and facts, but bring them in to contact with those values and ideas in which he believes, and those manners and virtues which he is endowed.

Draft National Policy on Education (1979), while emphasising the importance of teacher, says:

"Teachers have to play a pivotal role in reforming education at all levels in order that they can play this role, they should be inspired by creative idealism and feel pride in their profession, suitable steps should be taken to improve professional competence of teacher at all levels. The academic freedom of teachers to conduct research and more experiments and innovations will be assured. The teaching community should become increasingly aware of the crucial importance of their role in moulding the lives and character of the future citizens committed to the task of national and social reconstruction."

Ibn Sin in his book *al-Shifa* has mentioned six kinds of teaching that the teacher must apply in an appropriate time: mental teaching; in which, the teacher states a general subject for his students and through that general subject changes an unknown to a known. Industrial education, through which, the usage and application of instruments are thought. Inculcation teaching that is applied for learning through inculcation. Disciplinary teaching that means learning the good habits through advices. Imitative teaching in which the student accepts the teacher's words immediately and without reason. Punitive teaching which informs the student of daily observed secrets, reasons, consequences and accidents.

The National Policy on Education (1986) says: "The status of teachers reflect the Socio-culture ethos of a society. It is said that no people can rise above level of its teachers. The government and the community should endeavour to create conditions which will help to motivate and help teachers on constructive and creative lines. The teachers should have the freedom to innovate, to devise appropriate methods of communication and activities relevant to needs and capabilities of the concerns of the community. Ibn Sina describes that: Teacher is not just a transferor of knowledge, but his values and beliefs, characteristics and behaviour, will be transferred to the student during imitative teaching with no efforts made by him or even being noticed. So we should be very careful about the characteristics of the teacher as a role model."

Al-Ghazali's thought and its relevance to contemporary education has made major contributions to the refinement of speculative and metaphysical thought. He was also instrumental in transforming the relevance of the traditional religious sciences for rational, scientific and spiritual disciplines. His ideas and teachings have served to inspire the spiritual and intellectual lives of successive generations of Muslims.

In *Ihya-Ulum al-Din*, Al-Ghazali mentioned that there are two kinds of Sciences, material and spiritual, medical sciences mathematics and other technical sciences belong to learning of this world. The religious sciences are the learning concerning, soul God, His attributes and actions. Ghazali's philosophy of Education gives more emphasis to, spiritual

moral and social values. It is evident from the Kothari Commission report 1964-66 that modernisation does not mean least of all in our national situation a refusal to recognise the importance of or to inculcate necessary moral and spiritual values and self-discipline. Modernisation if it is to be a living force must derive its strength of the spirit. His thought basically evolves from Quran and Sunnah and the essence of his thought in the development of character which includes development of moral and ethical qualities such as obedience, humanity, simplicity and abhorrence of pride, love of wealth and lying. His philosophy of education can make us understand the methodology of inculcating the value education. In our multi-dimensional society education should faster universal and eternal values, oriented towards the unity and integration of our people. In this context the following sub phrases under value education on page 36 of national policy on education 1986 modified in 1992 are quoted here under:

“The growing concern over the erosion of essential values and an increasing cynicism in society has brought to focus the need for a readjustment in curriculum in order to make education a forceful tool for the cultivation of social and moral values.”

Al-Ghazali relevance Contemporary System of Education in India

Al-Ghazali desires that type of education which is for the welfare of whole community; for the awareness and prosperity of the community as a whole. Al-Ghazali in his concept of curriculum clearly stressed on those subjects which emphasise learning to do such as, agriculture science, weaving, mathematics, arithmetic, medicine etc. His philosophy on the whole lay emphasise on the development of personality in which one should also know himself, he quotes a Hadith, saying: ‘One who knows himself knows his God’. Therefore, Ghazali wanted such type of education that can help a person to know himself and his relationship with his God and the world. Education must contribute to the all-round development of each individual – mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic sense, personal responsibilities, and spiritual values.

The above curriculum and subjects which are emphasised by Al-Ghazali are very much in relevance to 21st century as he prescribed rational subjects to be included along with religious subjects.

The fifth year plan 1974-79 suggests that moral and cultural values should be included in the curriculum. It also considered both its philosophical and practical aspects and made certain voluble proposals for reform. The Janardan committee 1992 emphasised that value education has profound, positive content, based on our culture heritage, national and universal goals. The tenth year plan 2002-2007 emphasised that value based education will be imparted which will focus on respect for elders and tolerance for other beliefs. Thus from university education to national policy of education and Sariprakash committee, Janardan Reddy committee all have stressed value education through which there will be promotion of character and moral development this was also the aim of Al-Ghazali’s philosophy of education which stresses upon the religious education for spiritual development, at the same time Al-Ghazali emphasised upon

natural sciences and technological sciences for the welfare of the society.

In Al-Ghazali’s view, “The teacher is like a landlord who has surrendered to the teacher the barren wastes of his soul for tilling and cultivating.” The teacher is generally compared to a luminous body, relating to light and illuminating the darkness of other soul. They are the light houses of towns and cities. Al-Ghazali shares his long experiences as teacher in multiple ways. His eloquent expression has made this dimension of educational activities interesting for students. He says who he acquires knowledge and acts upon to it and teaches it to the people is noble to the angles of heaven and earth. Ghazali mentioned that “a person has three fathers: one who begot him, another who fostered him, and a third who educate him, and the last is the best of all.” It is obvious from this that Ghazali bestowed high profile to the teacher in reconstructing the system of education and community at large. He emphasises that teacher should develop his students’ character; he himself should have such a character that the students will be able learn from and imbibe his good qualities.

National commission on teachers (1983-85) also makes it clear that the formation of character, a character evolves in response to the goals, would constitute his primary task. He will indeed prepare students for examinations and open to them the world of knowledge, but these will count for little unless he has helped them become persons of character. There is the personal aspect of character building to develop qualities like honesty and integrity and there is the social aspect which defines national characters.

The Report of Delor’s Learning The Treasure Within (1993), has recommended that education be organised around the four icons of learning which, through out a personal life, will in a way be the pillars of knowledge. These icons are expressed in terms of four catchy titles:

- Learning to know
- Learning to do
- Learning to live together.
- Learning to be.

The icons are beautifully called the four pillars on which the modern education needs to be rebuilt. These four pillars of education are not naturally exclusive as they have bearing on one another.

Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali’s philosophies of education does encompass almost all the four pillars of education – as Ibn Sina is of the view that education as over- all growth of the individual: physical, mental, and moral. His educational idea does not neglect physical development, and everything implied by it; physical exercise, food and drink, sleep and cleanliness. Ibn Sina was inquisitive to learn and do practical work. As far as learning to do is concerned Ibn Sina’s philosophy of education is applicable to the second pillar of Delor’s learning: “Learning to do.”

Al-Ghazali is of the opinion that education is unending process i.e. education starts at cradle and ends at grave. Al-Ghazali was curious to learn and to know all the subjects. As for as learning to know is concerned his philosophy of education similar to the first pillar of learning “Learning to know.”

Ibn Sina emphasised on group education and believed that child should receive education and training along with their peers. He said “It is appropriate for the child to be with the

other children of elites with good manners and pleasant habits in a school because a child learns from a child. The same has been emphasised by Delor's report in the third pillar "Learning together". The sense of co-operation, co-ordination, sense of work together and sense of competition is developed through group learning.

In Al-Ghazali's view

Education should contribute in every person's complete development – body and mind, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetics and spirituality.

As for as learning is concerned Al-Ghazali educational thought is pertinent to the fourth pillar "Learning to be." "Every individual must be in a position to keep learning throughout his life. The idea of lifelong education is the key stone of the learning society".

According to the article 06 of world Declaration on Education for all which held at Jomtien, Thailand, 5th to 9th march 1990 recommended:

"Learning does not take place in isolation. Societies, therefore, must ensure that all learners receive the nutrition, healthcare, and general physical and emotional support they need in or to participate actively in, and benefit from their education". So it is crystal clear that an Ibn Sina's and Al-Ghazali's philosophy of education has uncountable implications in contemporary educational system.

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