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‘Aesthetic Education’- a medium for social change

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"Beauty in things exists in the mind which contemplates them" - David Hume.

"Aesthetics" refers to the principles governing the nature and appreciation of beauty¹. Beauty is generally associated with visual pleasure. Though it is a subjective attribute, the notion of visual pleasure associated with it is universal. Visual art is one of the most common mediums of representing beauty. From pre-historic cavemen to contemporary artists, mankind from all around the world has been trying to explore aesthetics in the form of visual arts. In the modern world, due to global issues such as pollution, destruction, and warfare, we need to rethink on the implementation of aesthetics in our lives.

We can mainly categorize today's world into developing and developed nations. Apart from the economic and political distinctions, we can see a significant difference between the developed and developing parts of the world – the influence of aesthetics on lifestyle. Developed nations have financial stability and a better standard of living, which allows them to put their resources into the beautification of their surroundings. However, I believe that maintaining the beauty of the surroundings is as challenging as creating it. It requires more than just resources. It requires a mentality that can be shaped through aesthetic education.

According to an educational philosopher Maxine Greene, aesthetic education is "an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what is there to be noticed, and to lend works of art their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful."² Though aesthetic education is important in every part of the world, I believe that it can be looked upon as a medium to bring about social change in the developing parts of the world.

In developing countries like India, where people are brought up in visually unpleasant surroundings, they tend to develop an attitude where that unpleasant surrounding stops bothering them. Eventually they start to become resistant to the perception of dirt laying around, ignore it or create more dirt and move on. As a result, the surroundings remain

¹ <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/definitions/aesthetics.htm>

² <https://maxinegreene.org/about/aesthetic-education>

dirty; the people keep on perceiving and ignoring the same unpleasant environment and the cycle goes on.

Taking further example of India; India has had a great history of aesthetics in terms of visual arts such as paintings, sculptures, architecture, and liberal arts such as philosophy, writing and poetry. All these forms of arts express a matured sense of aesthetics. Though India possesses such a rich tradition of aesthetics, the irony is that many of the Indian cities have one of the most unpleasant living environments. Many Indians don't think twice before littering in public places or even before vandalizing the ancient treasure through immature acts such as writing their names on that masterpiece of architecture. I think the answer to that lies into the lack of aesthetic education and the fact that it needs an able mind to perceive the beauty present in the surroundings.

Learning about aesthetics from a young age might help in changing that mentality. John Locke – a philosopher and an educationalist had associated a young child's mind to a blank slate, indicating that they have no innate ideas. Hence it might be a good idea to gradually expose the children to the meaning and value of beauty and how it would positively affect their lifestyle. This practice can generate a mindset which could motivate them to implement aesthetics in their day to day life.

As an early part of the aesthetic education children could be encouraged to discover and generate beauty in the simple aspects of their lives - starting from how they dress up, how they write, how they organize their rooms or arrange the furniture in their houses, to how they take steps for beautification of the environment outside of their houses. Going on further It would also include an emotional connection with beauty; relating to the idea of how the children would feel possessive and protective about something beautiful that they have created and they wouldn't let anyone else mess it up. This could demonstrate to them the basics of creating beauty and maintaining it.

When the children grow mature enough, they can be trained to understand and celebrate the presence of beauty in the pieces of paintings, sculptures, and architecture. They should be reinforced with the fact that this visual heritage was created by their ancestors with great effort and passion which they should respect and protect. Going a

step further, those interested could dig into exploring the meaning and expression of aesthetics through liberal arts.

The primary challenge with the implementation of aesthetic education is incorporating it into the education system in a country like India, where art is looked upon as secondary. Hence, the vital stakeholders of the education system should be convinced of how aesthetic education will have a positive impact on children as future citizens. Apart from that issue, art teachers themselves must be educated aesthetically before educating the children. They must be trained and convinced to look at aesthetic education as a medium to bring about social change through visual reinforcement. Then and only then will they be able to educate the children effectively.

When this aesthetically educated generation would be grow up, aesthetics would have become the key element of their psychology since childhood. Hence, I believe that they will be able to take up the responsibility and challenge of creating and maintaining beautiful surroundings as per their capacity. If this generation shows the positivity to implement aesthetic education for social well-being, then they will set an example in front of the education system and motivate the system to incorporate aesthetics as a part of it. Furthermore, the positive reformation in the living environment could also affect people's perception of aesthetics. The idea which was once labeled as secondary, will earn significance in the eyes of the common man. In short, this aesthetically educated generation will increase the variety of the education system to make a positive impact on society.