

## **Self-Directed and Participatory Learning: Observations and Reflections**

Mohammad Talib\*

School of Anthropology, University of Oxford  
 Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, Oxford, United Kingdom

\*Correspondence: [mohdtalib@hotmail.com](mailto:mohdtalib@hotmail.com)

This article focusses on self-directed and participatory learning related to nationalist education in India, during the pre-independence struggle. Mahatma Gandhi's conceptualisation of *nai taleem* (new education) forms a pivotal aspect of this discourse, as it placed a significant emphasis on active student involvement in their educational journey (Zakir Hussain Committee, 1938; Sadgopal, 2019). At that time, this educational philosophy was instrumental in nurturing citizens who could actively contribute to the overarching objective of achieving India's independence from colonial rule. In the contemporary era, the invocation of nationalist education serves the purpose of delving into historical reservoirs, and seeking alternative pedagogical and learning principles.

The present enquiry engages with how the colonial educational model, with its top-down approach and a predetermined curriculum, in effect, preceded the actual learning process and outcomes. This traditional educational paradigm, rooted in colonial necessities, perpetuated a disconnection between educational institutions and the broader society, devoid of any active symbiotic relationship between education and the survival imperatives of the wider society. Notably, this top-down educational framework primarily catered to the interests of the dominant and globally entrenched elites, reinforcing existing power structures and inequalities.

In essence, this article underscores the transformative potential of a self-directed and participatory learning paradigm, as exemplified by Gandhi's *nai taleem*, as a viable alternative to the conventional top-down approach. It emphasises the necessity of reconsidering historical precedents, such as nationalist education, to glean insights into innovative pedagogical strategies that can better align with contemporary educational needs and aspirations, fostering a more inclusive and socially harmonious learning environment.

This presentation attempts to address two overarching inquiries. Firstly, it seeks to explain the recent history of self-directed learning and secondly, to explore the concept of autonomous, and sovereign nationalist education within the historical context of Indian education. This exploration invokes metaphors and images from the writings of Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and other education activists critiquing the colonial model that served the interests of the elite and maintained social inequalities.

This paper attempts to shed light on the enduring colonial legacies that persist in our contemporary education system, which is often characterised as “other-directed” rather than embracing the ideals of self-directed learning through active participation. The contrasting modes of learning co-exist in any given empirical situation. The distinct outcomes for a learner in self-directed and other-directed education may be illustrated through a fable from Persian literature:

Once, a deer and a dog embarked on a race covering the same distance. As they reached the finish line, the dog was panting and wet in sweat, whereas the deer appeared as refreshed as a gentle breeze. Curious, the dog inquired about this stark contrast in their energy levels.

The deer replied, “You ran for the master's approval, while I ran in pursuit of my freedom.” In this tale, the dog symbolises other-directed education, while the deer represents the self-directed learner.

### **Metaphorical musings on Equinox and Solstice: A detour for alternative education**

An equinox, a day when daylight and darkness are almost perfectly balanced, and solstices, marking extremes of daylight and darkness, serve as signposts of planetary movements. However, we can deploy these geographical references as metaphors within the domain of education to uncover the dynamics of knowledge (“light”) and its seekers (learners). In the present perception, the interplay of light and darkness mirrors the relationship between textualised knowledge and the wider human experiences beyond its grasp.

#### **Equinox and education**

In the realm of education, equinox can symbolise the ideal scenario where formalised knowledge, akin to daylight, is evenly distributed across society. Here, the balance between light and darkness signifies that the resources for seeking, discovering, or grasping the unknown are proportionate to the task at hand. This normative educational ideal suggests that the tools for uncovering the undiscovered are readily available.

#### **Distortions in the light and dark relations**

However, reality often distorts this equilibrium. Sometimes, the light, that metaphorises formal education, proves insufficient or entirely inadequate in illuminating the vast terrain of darkness marking human experiences and expressions outside the confines of textbooks and curricula. In this scenario, the formal education system lacks the necessary charge to shed light on the darker (actually the not-yet-grasped) facets of human condition. The Government of India's *Report of the Backward Classes Commission* (Popularly, Mandal Commission report (1980) questions the universal reach of educational ‘merit’ (Nanda and Talib, 1998) and the mythical impression that merit as brilliance is an attribute of an individual rather than acquisition dependent on socially supportive conditions. Merit, like the flame of a lamp (*diya*), illumines the world around it, yet perpetuates a world of darkness right beneath the stand upon which it rests. This circle of darkness seems to increase with the spread of the flame's luminosity. This flame of the merit metaphorises the history of enlightened elites, building civilisation upon the vast continents of darkness.

Conversely, there are instances where the domain of light, or formal education, becomes excessively self-referential. It forgets the fundamental purpose of illuminating the spheres of darkness, focusing only on its own perpetuation. This over-formalisation blinds it to the fact that light should serve as a tool for discovering, and not merely a badge of honour for classifying people.

Imagine someone searching for lost keys under the light of a lamppost and not where the key was lost because that's where the light is.<sup>1</sup> If the light of formal education stands for the lamppost, then it may not always illuminate the area where the key, representing the unrepresented human experiences, was lost.

<sup>1</sup> Noam Chomsky uses the joke about the drunk to comment on science quoted in Robert F Barsky. (1998). *Noam Chomsky: A Life of Dissent*. MIT Press.

Furthermore, there are seekers of light in the educational landscape, analogous to individuals in search for knowledge knocking on the doors of the wise (read, educational institutions). However, some providers of light offer it only notionally, leaving these seekers in a state of perpetual darkness, unfulfilled in their quest for enlightenment. This experience is expressed poetically in the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz:

*'For those in pursuit of knowledge's grace,  
within their hunger for books and pen's embrace,  
with open hands, in awe and wonder,  
at the gates of the wise, they dared to wander.  
Lost to their homes, just fixed in their quest,  
innocent as children, their hearts abreast,  
carrying small lamps of boundless curiosity,  
seeking flame, to illumine obscurity.  
Sadly at the gates of those spreading light,  
what they got were the shadows of endless night.'*

From Faiz Ahmad Faiz's *Intesab* (my free rhyming translation from Urdu).<sup>2</sup>

In the metaphorical journey through the equinox and solstice of education, we recognise the importance of maintaining a creative, critical and socially relevant connection between formalised knowledge and the quest to relate to the uncharted territories of human existence. Education acquires its gust and flow within the bounds of a social movement. This allows knowledge and its reflexivity to provide adequate illumination for seekers to discover the undiscovered, ensuring that its light is not confined to familiar paths but ventures beyond the frontiers of existing knowledge harbouring the uncharted human experiences and expressions.

In tracing some key images supportive of the notion of participatory learning, the present argument benefits from the nationalist critique of colonial education. This period prior to 1920 is rich in literary imagination of Rabindranath Tagore's vision of alternative education at the Shantiniketan (Mitra, 2021). As a noteworthy exemplar of the critique of colonial education, Tagore's poetic images and metaphors have their echo in the writings of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr Zakir Husain and their kindred fellows who helped develop an argument for experimenting alternative education at a national scale after 1920.

Tagore compares a student to a glow-worm whose light is part of an inner life process, and not a lantern that can be lighted and trimmed from outside. This image alludes to the idea that a student has an actively creative subconscious, rather than a conscious mind tutored in the mode of passive learning. (Ibid: 28-29).

For Tagore, the absence of an organic relation with nature and society turns the pursuit of knowledge into an imposition from outside. Tagore writes: 'The courses they teach are dull and dry, painful to learn, and useless when learnt. There is nothing in common between the lessons the pupils cram up from ten to four o'clock and the country where they live; no agreement, but many disagreements between what they learn at school and what their parents and relatives talk about at home ...' (Gupta, 1998). Not only the disconnect between the school and the student's home but also a disjunction between the hub of enlightened learning and the wider society, as a contrast between the light and the dark: 'this foreign education is just like the light of a moving train. The train compartment is lighted brightly, but the miles and miles of stretches it crosses through is immersed in darkness . . . Only a group of urban

<sup>2</sup> For the original poem *Intesab* in Urdu (Roman script) can be accessed at: <https://www.rekhta.org/nazms/intisaab-aaj-ke-naam-faiz-ahmad-faiz-nazms>

people get entry in this education system and manage to become respected, rich and enlightened. Behind this light, the rest of the country remains in eclipse.’ (From Rabindranath Tagore (1933) ‘The Radiation of Education’ (*Sikkhar Bikiron*)<sup>3</sup>.

This echoes in Gandhi’s views on textbooks to be neither serving the living world of the teachers nor their pupils (Harijan, 1939 December 9). Writes Gandhi, ‘The true textbook for the pupil is his teacher. I remember very little that my teachers taught me from books, but I have even now a clear recollection of the things they taught me independently of books’ (Gandhi, 1926). This idea is further elaborated in Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* (1908):

“The ordinary meaning of education is a knowledge of letters. To teach boys reading, writing and arithmetic is called primary education. A peasant earns his bread honestly. He has ordinary knowledge of the world. He knows well how he should behave towards his parents, his wife, his children and his fellow-villagers. He understands and observes the rules of morality. But he cannot write his own name. What do you propose to do by giving him a knowledge of letters? Will you add an inch to his happiness? Do you wish to make him discontented with his cottage or his lot? And even if you want to do that, he will not need such an education. Carried away by the flood of Western thought, we came to the conclusion, without weighing pros and cons, that we should give this kind of education to the people.”

### **Educational transformations of society in the National Universities following 1920**

Jamia Millia Islamia’s educational tradition, especially following its year of establishment in 1920, privileged pedagogy over the curriculum. This made teachers and students part of a community of common purpose driven by the principle of the educational reconstruction of their sovereign nation.<sup>4</sup>

Active learning involved a learner’s mind as well as their body and the two were not seen in a hierarchy. Jamia challenged the traditional education that glorified the learning of prescribed books and ignored the rich experiences of learners who worked with their hands that were scarcely recognised for purposes of formal learning.

Various occupations bearing a caste-stigma became part of the school curriculum. The purpose was to activate the dormant scientific resources within an artisanal craft to return them back to the wider society without the attendant caste prejudices. As part of curriculum, a master craftsman, degraded in wider society, acquired the respectability of becoming a teacher at Jamia. The students learnt lock making, shoe making, carpentry, metal work, and cotton spinning. In forming education and wider society as a continuous space, Jamia’s alternative education gained recognition in Gandhi’s *nai taleem*, succinctly put as ‘education for life through life’ (Harijan, July 31, 1937).

Gandhi introduced the value of craft in Indian education. For Gandhi, ‘every handicraft must be taught not merely mechanically as is done today but scientifically, i.e. the child should know the why and the wherefore of every process (Harijan, July 31, 1937).

In *the report of the Zakir Husain Committee and detailed syllabus* (1938), Dr Zakir Husain attempted to ‘draft an “activity curriculum”, which implies that ‘our schools must be places of work, experimentation, and discovery, not of passive absorption of information imparted at second-hand. So far as the curriculum is concerned, we have stressed this principle by

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Mitra, Susmita 2021: 27.

<sup>4</sup> The pre-1947 story of Jamia’s alternative education is outlined in Talib, Mohammad. 1998. Jamia Millia Islamia: Career of Azad Talim. In Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *Knowledge, Power and Politics: Educational Institutions in India*. New Delhi: Roli Books.

advocating that all teaching should be carried on through concrete life situations relating to craft or to social and physical environment so that whatever the child learns becomes assimilated into his growing activity' (Ibid: 49). He further elaborates in the report that the 'teaching of these subjects (Civics, social studies, mathematics, agriculture etc.) spring from actual social situations—the child's home, his village, its occupations, and crafts—and then be extended and enriched by stories of primitive life and ancient civilisations, and by showing how different ways of life and work have developed under different social and geographical conditions' (Ibid: 52).

The wider issue was about breaking the fixity as well as the monopoly of textual knowledge. More generally, this 'fixity' is evocative of Paulo Freire's 'banking' concept of education (2005) in contemporary times where the major expectation of pedagogic authority is that the students' learning remains limited to 'receiving, filing, and storing the deposits' from the prescribed texts.<sup>14</sup> This mode of learning, in Gregory Bateson's words, is 'zero learning'(2000): a case of 'the simple receipt of information from an external event, in such a way that a similar event at a later . . . time will convey the same information' (Ibid:284). Helpful in understanding the internal dynamics of learning top-down, the principle of 'zero learning' lies behind the transaction of knowledge where the learner is merely a passive receptacle.

In contrast, Jamia's emphasis on project methods allowed students to organise their own curriculum with their teachers as facilitators. Pursuing the themes through the project method allowed the students to see how various aspects of their life were interrelated.

The interventions of *nai taleem* in educationally backward regions are illustrative of how no community in the country was seen as 'uneducable' or 'unteachable'. The nationalist movement attempting to educationally reconstruct society had the willingness to harmonise education with the rhythms people's everyday living. Two accounts from the two feedback reports of the national conferences on *nai taleem* held in 1939 and 1941 are illustrative of how institutional autonomy allowed for the pedagogic sensitivity to the pulse of the ground reality.

In the first conference report of Hindustani Talimi Sangh (1938), Asha Devi reflecting on her experiences of *nai taleem* in the village school in Segaon clarified that there was no set syllabus of basic education as it would be developed 'from day-to-day experience of work with children in the village schools.' She had reservations about syllabi that does not naturally develop 'out of the needs and the environment of the village child' (Ibid:154). She asks "Which educationist has as yet gone to the village as the source of inspiration for the framing of a syllabus?" (Ibid:154). Asha Devi pitches the task of syllabus formulation in the backdrop of the condition of Segaon in the Central Provinces of India. The village offered work to the agricultural labour for a limited period of 4 to 5 months. For the rest of the year, the village remained "like a speck of dust . . . hands idle in every home and the fields fallow. . . no river, no tank; no water except from the few dirty wells . . . (guarded caste wise) . . . no hills, no trees . . . no natural playground for children not even the natural fresh water." Asha Devi reflects on how the educational intervention in the village began with the child and the recognition of the learners' basic needs. The two paramount needs were: "1) clean supply of water and, 2) at least one wholesome meal". This was combined with the need for productive work and opportunities for play in an open space with an atmosphere of freedom. Thus, the four main components identified for framing the syllabus were "water, food, work and play". These were connected to the four class rooms "the well, the kitchen, the workshop and the field. . . and the four main subjects: cleanliness, food, work, and play." (Ibid:157). The main subjects, syllabus and the relevant classrooms were considered part making school as 'a cooperative community' where all members, teachers and students, discharged duties and responsibilities, where choices were jointly made, and tasks allocated without a top-down

direction. An organic relation was imagined between the community within the school, the village and the wider independent nation (then part of an indeterminate future).

Asha Devi's view on organic education derives its vital principles from the collective living around education. She was skeptical of setting up syllabus in advance of the people and the place of its application. Her succinct formulation of this idea: "Discard the syllabus, and evolve a syllabus of your own (Ibid: 159).

### **Another insightful story**

In the report of the second basic education conference (Hindustani Talimi Sangh, 1942), Shiv Dayal Singh, a teacher in the basic school in Champaran, reflects over some practical difficulties of drawing students to the school routine (131-134). The account shows how the village faced problems of collecting children for basic schools, and once admitted, the issue of irregular attendance. The compulsion of poverty led the parents to keep the children at home to help them in taking out the cattle for grazing, collecting fuel, looking after their younger brothers and sisters and taking their fathers' midday meals to the fields. The issue was addressed by bringing the timetable of the school to harmonise with the life rhythms of the poor families: the school to be held only in the morning and leave children free in the evenings for their duties at home. Similarly, there were children who took their cattle out for grazing and missed attending their school. Such students were allowed to bring the cattle to school. Alongside that, the teachers persuaded other students to help their classmates by volunteering to look after the cattle, while others attended classes. Similar arrangements were made for students whose attendance was affected due to the child minding they did for their younger siblings. Under the new arrangement to improve attendance, the younger sisters and brothers were let in the school with the students.

### **Queries for observing colonial continuities in contemporary times**

The following questions attempt to capture how participatory learning is routinely preempted. At the same time, the queries clarify the possibilities of alternative education based on participatory learning.

How does participatory learning allow learners to discover the conditions of collective living hitherto ignored in the formal study of society? How does this help understand whether education is widely assumed to be a commodity or a common national good? Who are the stakeholders of education? Who takes the major decisions related to the financial support of the formal transaction of knowledge in a university? Between the state and the university, does university have autonomy to ring fence the educational considerations relevant to the local communities, its routine struggles for survival, and pursue a research lead which the wider society brings to the attention of a university? One underlying assumption in thinking about the institutional conditions about the learner-centered acquisition of knowledge is the practice of 'effective democracy'. This notion derived from Basil Bernstein (1996) unpacks the life of a learner in a university represented in a diversity student's social and cultural contexts. The admission of a batch of students in an educational institution seems to affirm the principle of equality of opportunity in accessing educational goods. This simple principle hides the fact that the educational space is a mere opportunity space and doesn't show how the principle of equality gets compromised. Students in each admission cohort carry unequal baggage of social privileges and historical wrongs that differentially impact their capacity to learn from their university. Here, one would like to know how students could overcome their social framings based on their background and break these unconditionally? Bernstein calls the breaking of boundaries or frames as the right to "enhancement" (Bernstein, 2000). Bernstein sees enhancement as a "condition for experiencing boundaries" (Ibid: xx).

The boundaries that one cannot trespass may be derived from an individual's caste, class or community. Rabindranath Tagore's notion of 'chalk circle' (Mitra, 2021) was a watched out designated boundary in his home which he dared not transgress. For the learners to avail the right to enhancement (or step out of Tagore's 'Chalk Circle') in educational settings is to be able to break the boundary without fear of sanctions.

In so doing, one can imagine the learners encountering the reality beyond the boundaries affording possible futures. To experience enhancement in crossing over the set boundaries is to experience these as tension points. It is going beyond the received frames that a student gains capacity to grasp and work towards new social possibilities. The right to enhancement, according to Bernstein, connects to the condition that makes students confident. Without enhancement, no confidence and without confidence, there is no way one could build trust in the self-directed and autonomous learning and in understanding the relations between the present and the future possibilities.

### **Experimenting participatory learning in Sociology at Jamia Millia Islamia in 1990s**

A group of faculty members grew increasingly discontented with the prevalent teacher-led teaching of Sociology. They felt as though they were teaching sociology in isolation from the real world of society. The society depicted in the recommended textbooks seemed abstract, divorced from the dynamic social reality that once existed.

The curriculum did not address either the societal issues we face or the challenges students encountered. Did the students gain relevant insights into society and history through their courses, enabling them to better understand their daily challenges and concerns? This question remained largely unaddressed. The existing institutional setup did not facilitate meaningful student-teacher interactions for critical reflection on the curriculum or the exploration of their curiosities beyond the formal framework. Academic learning primarily revolved around external pressures to excel in examinations, securing employment in the market, and achieving a desired social status. As a result, the aspiration for learning outcomes that included a sense of commitment and responsibility to the broader society seemed like an unattainable goal.

The experiment in participatory sociology asked how could students interests in exploring and examining the micro context of their life may be kindled, sustained, and enriched. The formulation of 'participatory sociology' course<sup>5</sup> was an attempt to create equal opportunities within the classroom so as to involve students to make their own curriculum. In putting together their syllabus, the students were given the option to choose a theme from their readings in social theory or Indian society. For instance, if the chosen theme was social exclusion, then the student would select a book on the subject for review, and explore their chosen theme in the social science writings or from readings in fiction: a novel, short story, drama, or a film. Subsequently, the students were encouraged to study their questions first hand in a field setting for two weeks during their winter break.

One remarkable feature of running the participatory sociology course for about a decade 1990 to 2000 was that the students showed enthusiasm and joy in doing their assignments. In the

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<sup>5</sup> In lieu of a comprehensive account of the experiment of Participatory sociology which Professor Savyasaachi and I plan to write, refer to its brief illustration in my book chapter (2021). Between (Auto) Biographical and Anthropological: Bearing of the interplay on Teaching and Research. In *Social Scientist in South Asia: Personal Narratives, Social Forces and Negotiations*, by A.P. Tandon et. al. (eds.) London and New York: Routledge, 2021. Also, in continuation (2023) 'Modes of Learning: Some thoughts on the Other- and Self-directed educational practices' In Azra Razzack, Padma Sarangapani, and Manish Jain (eds.) *Education, Teaching and Learning: Discourses, Cultures and Conversations*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan.

early days, the faculty also got a partial respite from the drudgery of a teacher's monologue in classroom. The student's library assignments and other reviews, their reports, and the rich teacher-student interaction generated a change of attitudes towards learning and its articulation. The hitherto laid-back students could gain self-confidence in expressing their views, orally or in writing.

Running the participatory sociology course from 1990 to 2000 yielded a noteworthy outcome. It was observed that the distinctions based on language and social class, which had been prominent in other courses, became less significant. The students' interest and joy were palpable in the participatory learning atmosphere. In the early days, the faculty also found relief from the monotony of traditional lecture-style teaching. Assignments, reviews, reports, and the dynamic interactions between teachers and students all contributed to a shift in attitudes toward learning and its expression. Previously reserved students began to develop self-confidence in sharing their thoughts, both orally and in writing. This brief overview highlights the potential of participatory principles in enhancing students' learning experiences.

In broad strokes, this glimpse of the educational experiment is to show the possibility of the principle of participation in students' learning. The actual story of how the experiment got negated in the administrative rigmarole is narrated elsewhere.

### **Triggers from skill generating courses relevant to human-animal relations**

The education policy 2020 direction on productive skills is limited to the goal of self-employability. The practice of skill and its outcomes turns out to be a commerce between the student and the market. This narrow and a selfish view of educational experience of skill generation may be contrasted with what the German educationist Georg Kerschensteiner calls the altruistic ideal of civic education. Here, the learners are encouraged in the medium of effective democracy to act as both useful and morally free citizens to connect their immediate experiences to a wider interconnected humanity and its shared future survival. He argues how "the preparation for the duties of citizenship is not less indispensable than preparation for a trade" (Kerschensteiner, 1911).

The practice of a vocational skill in the selfish mode is merely focussed on turning the available raw material into marketable goods. The question about the condition of the production and its renewal, its ecological cost remain outside the calculus of the profit seeking entrepreneur. On the other hand, an altruistic mode of the practice of vocational skill would situate various moments in the making of good as well as the civic virtues in fostering community cohesion contributing to society's commons.

The skill enhancement courses (SECs for 2022-23) in Delhi University based on New Education Policy 2020 selects useful insects for practical projects. For instance, the Mulberry silkworm rearing is imagined in terms of developing entrepreneurial skills required in silk reeling as raw material in silk production industry. One wonders why the instrumental use of skill is privileged over a student's skill to observe, problematise silk industry and enquire into the process of extraction of the precious thread and the plight of the silkworm. Observers in this area show how silk production treats silkworms as a plain raw material. The question of their exploitation or suffering is scarcely raised. To extract one kilogram of the precious threads, roughly 6,600 silkworms are boiled or gassed alive within their cocoons. Silkworms may not express pain as humans do, but they exhibit sensitivity. They produce endorphins and react physically to distress arising out of poor nourishment or premature cocoon removal. Who are the beneficiaries of the complex business of silk production? And, whether the

consumption of the precious commodity contributes to the vanity of a social class or provides sustenance to the ordinary human life?<sup>6</sup>

Another skill enhancement course is about honeybee farming imagined again with pure market considerations. The learning motivation in the practical project of bee keeping approaches the living being for extracting a resource as a commodity. The effort of the young entrepreneur gets restricted to collecting and packaging hive products including honey, beeswax and pollen. The same project with holistic consciousness would allow a learner to value honeybees as living beings and not just “things” or instruments for producing honey for sale. Concerned observers point out how beekeeping can harm bees in the wider ecology. Some of these practices include prematurely replacing queens to boost productivity, artificially stimulating egg-laying, and impeding hive formation to maximise honey production. Although these actions might appear less cruel when applied to insects, growing evidence suggests that bees are intelligent, communicative, and capable of experiencing emotions. In comparison, supporting wild, native bees may be both a more ethical and sustainable choice.<sup>7</sup>

Observation and recording of human-animal relations is a skill that may not get directly plugged into the market. However, these are required skills for an active citizen to become an observer who records ecological and market trends and to engage in advocacy and campaign where conditions of the living beings and their shared ecology are threatened. As an illustration, one may take the relevant step in the enhancement of observation in which students select a domestic animal and observe how it is treated in various social contexts. This exploration aims to uncover whether the treatment of these animals bears any resemblance to how society treats humans across the social class and caste divide and whether they are considered equal or unequal. The treatment of different animals in diverse settings varies significantly and stimulate varied curiosities:

- i) The cows, for instance, receive differential treatment across different contexts, ranging from sacred veneration to cruel neglect. Why?
- ii) The dogs owned by affluent individuals receive more affection than some primary human relations. Moreover, the pet dogs have a disproportionately higher per capita consumption compared to unskilled workers in agricultural fields or on a factory floor. Why?
- iii) Animals residing in reserve forests are confronted with the depletion of natural resources, primarily due to the actions of *Homo sapiens*, the dominant predators in these environments. Why so?

This initiative aims to encourage students to examine the relationship between humans and animals in various contexts and contemplate a specific case as a means of gaining insights into the state of social justice and equality. Additionally, it stirs up learner’s awareness regarding their interactions with animals and to view this relationship in a broader, interconnected perspective.

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<sup>6</sup> I have drawn upon this description from *The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals* (PETA) Foundation’s reports. It is a UK-based charity dedicated to establishing and protecting the rights of all animals. Access: <https://www.peta.org.uk/issues/animals-not-wear/silk/>

<sup>7</sup> This description the ethical and ecological considerations in rearing up the honey bees benefits from: <https://abqstew.com/2019/04/12/to-bee-ethical-is-to-bee-sustainable/>

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In an educational setting, the active reading of a text involves awakening of dormant resources of a learner's consciousness, much like converting potential into kinetic energy. This may often take the form of practical participatory learning supportive of engaging in collective rethinking about social and political possibilities. The experience of the present moment can be seen as a departure from established norms, a moment of involvement, an event, or an adventure whose outcome cannot be predicted in advance.<sup>8</sup>

Participatory learning based on effective democracy encompasses both form and substance. It requires change and meaningful content to the learners' actual experiences. Democratic education may be practiced as a mere name tag. This is like having a form expressed in the texts and pre-structured curriculum, without learner's access into real time and social experience, cutting all ties between experiences and genuine transformation. This also means that such an approach disregards possibilities for learners to collaborate with others, explore new opportunities, pose questions, and feel encouraged to go beyond predefined boundaries. Consequently, the experiences of learners pretending criticality get subsumed within the wider socio-cultural norms and authorities in various fields.

The tradition of participatory learning is based on the student's self-directed projects. Its motifs revolve around practical learning activity as a medium that enables a learner to connect to the pressing issues of the collective existence.

In conclusion, the metaphorical musings on equinox, as it graduates from the realm of geography to education, demonstrates the fallacy of the dichotomy between "light" (formal knowledge) and "darkness" (life experiences yet to be represented). In reality, labeling the light as human proficiency is a self-claim. The "dark" contains the untapped illuminations of wisdom existing beyond the scope of formal enlightenment. To transcend the division within the dual domains of the equinox, it is essential to view them as mutually reflective entities, constantly influencing each other. When the metaphorical concepts of light and dark are allowed to impose a hierarchical order, with one dictating the other and defining their respective roles, the essence of their symbiotic relationship is lost.

In embracing the interplay between the light and the dark, the formal representation of both need to move beyond their mere textualised words through participatory learning. This is the initial condition that allows the text to transform into events and showcases the interconnectedness of our collective existence in the real world. This transformation permits knowledge seekers and creators to envision shared possibilities, even if it necessitates challenging and transgressing the officially or customarily prescribed boundaries.

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<sup>8</sup> The present meditation on alternative education gains from Thomas Docherty. (2006) *Aesthetic Democracy*.. It is a thoughtful examination of Aesthetic education and the demise of experience. His remedy is proposed in the revitalization and validation of sensory experience.

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