The Body and the Possibility of an Ethical Experience of Education: A Perspective from South Asia

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The concept of education demands a balancing act between offering a stabilising environment in which the learner grows through knowing and at the same time necessitating a dynamic environment that must continually re-invent itself to push at the very boundaries of knowledge. This task is made even more complex when the question of education is entangled with embodiment. Embodiment as a concept is not new in the philosophies of education in the South Asian region. However, the role of embodiment and its status in education is wrought with several problems given the region's complex socio-historical constitution. Embodied education in the South Asian and particularly the Indian context is marked by colonial heritage. This has resulted in mainstream modern school education systems carrying forward these legacies and categorisations resulting from the syncretic influence of a Victorian education system, instituted in India during its colonisation, on the indigenous education systems existing in the region.

In this chapter, I articulate the relationship between embodiment and the process of learning in the Indian[1] context in an attempt to understand the

[1] I use 'Indian' in this chapter as an indexical geographic term to talk about certain situated traditions that have their socio-political histories entangled with India as a place. The term is not a representative index of the nation's identity which is constituted by various plural metaphysical frameworks from the Islamic, Zoroastrian, Atheistic and Indigenous traditions, which have not been addressed within the scope of this research.

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possibilities of offering an ethical experience of education to learners. In the context of Indian education, the body becomes a highly contested territory which is ridden with colonial histories as well as sociological inequalities. This has led several social reformers and philosophers to actively talk about new imaginations in education as a central goal for social life in India. Some of the foremost thinkers widely discussed in this regard include Gandhi, Tagore, Ambedkar, Phule and J Krishnamurti who were, in turn, informed by varied metaphysical frameworks in subtle or explicit ways (Baniwal & Sharma, 2020). These intersections between pre-modern and modern thinking resulted in the articulation of several contextually specific problems peculiar to the Indian sub-continent.

In the following sections, I first address the problems of embodied education in India by looking at the social process of learning and the purpose of the body in learning. I then explore the relationship between the body and the mind within various metaphysical frameworks, thereby articulating the learner in terms of a body-mind complex. The contemporary conceptualisation of the body, although diverse, is also deeply troubled. The troubled body in the form of the suffering, labouring and discriminated condition of a mere body—separated from the mind—is seen as a violation of the otherwise integrated body-mind ideal. When the capacity to affirm the body as a sensing, thinking, acting body is in the focus, which, once defined and recognised, can enable the pursuit of ethical ideals for the collective 'social'[2] through the experience of education; this does not foremost amounts to an education promising a good life to particular educated learners. The focus is instead on the obligation of education towards the weakest and most vulnerable learner whose integrity as a sensing, thinking and acting body is at stake—a body that has been consistently violated at the cost of education and one that education cannot afford to ignore if it must stay true to its intended purpose.

I am interested in that social characteristic of non-substitutable and unique difference in learners that education often fails to address and yet is currently most required to address in the context of a very disparate nature of 'socials' in India. Before we address the ethical challenge of a person's unsafe social situation, it is helpful to understand the necessary conditions that enable learning.

[2] I employ the term 'social' as used by Guru and Sarukkai (2019) to refer to distinct collectives that emerge through various processes in society.

1 The Social Process of Learning

What happens when learning occurs? If we look at the ample literature on the teaching techniques, methodologies and tools employed in various educational practices, it is clear that there should be a focus on the process of learning and its relationship with the human body. Does the body have anything to do with the process of learning? What does it mean to conceptualize learning in terms of place? More fundamentally, is the mind synonymous with the body? Let us address these questions by first tackling certain foundational conditions, given by society and intended by learners with which education operates.

The first condition is that of difference or radical plurality, that is the inevitability of difference in each learner in the classroom space. In short, the condition of difference makes it imperative for the people in the learning environment to recognise each learner as unique, particular and distinct from the other. This means that the process of learning is an attempt at making certain kinds of universals possible from these particularities that come together in the classroom or any learning environment. The second condition is the potential for transformation, that is learning presupposes transformation and a possibility of change, growth and movement. This transformation, promised by learning, is not possible without a clear intention or purpose of learning. An articulation of the intention will help one understand what exactly does the process of learning do to the learner? Keeping in mind these necessary conditions of learning, I posit further two essential characteristic conditions without which learning cannot take place: one, that we cannot learn without the presence of others; and two, that we cannot learn if we do not know why it is that we must learn something, that is learning must have a purpose.

A possible objection to the first essential condition—the necessity of the presence of others—may be posed by auto-didacticism, wherein one claims to learn all by oneself. However, this objection is quickly defendable in terms of relationality of the learner, suggesting that the auto-didact is inherently dependent on various others as 'sources' of learning and therefore cannot claim to be able to learn in isolation. Auto-didacts often create their own systems of learning and evaluation from these network of recognised sources. In other words, auto-didacticism is only possible through an alteration of the self as multiple learners. This possibility of learning as an auto-didact can be found in the figure of Ekalavya in the *Mahabharata*, who, having been denied formal training in archery from the teacher Droṇā because of his caste, teaches

himself archery by adopting the image of Droṇā as his teacher (Sarukkai, 2018). In this context, Sarukkai (2018) argues that the non-substitutability of the learning subject implies that the only way in which Ekalavya could have learnt anything is by becoming his own teacher and adopting a symbolic image of Droṇā, thereby finding agency of learning in the possibility of becoming an alterity or another self.

A possible objection to the second essential condition, the purposefulness of learning, may come from those who argue for 'learning for the sake of learning'.[3] In the age of innumerable online courses and degrees on offer at the click of a button, 'learning for the sake of learning' is a trend where knowledge is consumed much like in the entertainment industry—one shops around, signs up for a course, one learns something new and then one moves on. This learning, however, does little to transform us in any essential way. By this, I mean that learning which has no intended purpose and that is really not put into empirical practice or application, does little to contribute to an education that seeks to transform us as human beings. Such a lack of purposefulness finds addressal in the educational philosophy of Gandhi where vocation, practice and action play as big a role in the process of an education as textual and verbal knowledge. A purposefulness of learning in order to engage with the world, therefore, necessarily implies giving importance to theories of action and ways of acting in the world. A practice- or application-oriented education is one that uses these approaches as educational methodology. The irony of purposefulness in learning is that the purpose is often conflated with being job-oriented, which defeats the purpose of engaging with learning as a process rather than a commodity, as is often the case in contemporary contexts.

As is often seen across student population in India, learning is geared towards a pre-determined, mostly vocational purpose. Some commonplace examples in India include the straightjacketing of education tracks into disciplines such as engineering, medicine, banking, corporate sectors and so on. The irony of such an approach is that it becomes an instrumentalisation of education, furthering existing hierarchies in the social space. For example, students in India who are considered 'bright' often end up taking science-based courses whereas those deemed 'average' are often implicitly compelled to take up arts-based or humanities-based courses, both determined by a quantitative marking system that does not take any account of differences in the subjectivity of the learners. These strange systems of socially pervasive norms have been so deeply entrenched in the post-colonial Indian socials that

[3] See Bowden and Marton (1998) for an account of the shift in focus in pedagogical vocabulary from teaching and knowledge transmission towards learning and learning environments in education.

a break from these very norms is often considered a radical act, instead of being standard practice.

In response to this problem, various alternative schooling models were set up during Indian renaissance in the 19th century (Mehrotra, 2007; Baniwal & Sharma, 2020). Mehrotra (2007, p. 26) outlines certain common characteristics of the educational commitments of alternative schools in India. These include a focus on overall development of the human being, focussing on the relevance of education, ecological and aesthetic awareness in education, acquiring life skills and particularly paying attention to the needs of learners with different needs. Thus, experiential learning and an emphasis on acquiring creative skills are brought back into focus in these alternative schools. While current trends show a substantial change in students' interests and choices, these changes occur only in very specific niche classes and sections of society that are not representative of the plurality of the Indian social.

The curatorial turn in education signals a shift in focus of education from simply being a business of knowing to enabling experiences of education (Ruitenberg, 2015). This also posits the educator as one who caters and cares for the interest, abilities and possibilities of the learners, thereby being need-based and inherently interested in addressing the distinct differences and particular natures of the learners—something that is gaining currency in contemporary teaching vocabulary as the "student-centric" approach (McKinnon & Bacon, 2015). Acknowledging that student-centrism is a necessary condition and not an added asset of education, learning as a social process cannot ignore the body[4] alongside the mind as an integral constituent of the learning environment. Further, given that learning is dependent on an experiential transformation, it can occur only as an embodied process. This necessary relation between the body and the process of learning has been highlighted by several modern educational philosophers in India, informed by various metaphysical conceptual frameworks.

The history of education in the South Asian context is deeply entwined with the education of philosophy and various practices of thinking at large. This implies that all those who took an active interest in the practices of thinking were also deeply invested in educating others as part of their practice (Baindur, 2020). Given that philosophy as a practice is concerned with the nature of knowing about the world and is in pursuit of understanding the way

[4] I use the mere word 'body' in this context to refer to the corporeal, living, breathing, physical body of us as human beings which is defined by its subjective experiences and has the capacity to have knowledge. The mere body is distinct from the 'body-mind' as used further in the chapter, which is used as a complex concept to refer to the body that senses, thinks and acts.

things are, the purposes of learning often implicitly have overlaps with purposes of philosophies.

In the South Asian context, we can draw instances of purposefulness from various socio-historic trajectories. Philosophical traditions, be it the Vedic, Upanishadic, the 'Darsanas' or the Buddhist or Jaina, have clearly articulated soteriological goals. The ensuing/desired liberation or emancipation was enabled by the process of an education aimed towards enlightenment. While enlightenment also played a key role in post Copernican Europe, bringing about a general cultural renaissance, it is important to note that these two enlightenments were distinctly different in their contextual histories and philosophical presuppositions, each being informed by their own situated metaphysical frameworks (Nola, 2018). This is especially important to note in the context of India's colonial past and its heritage which is still present today.

The education bills established by the British in India were drafted in the hope of being a means for their own colonial ends. One such example is the Education Bill of 1835 articulated by Thomas Macaulay. The bill reflects the colonial interest in 'civilising' the 'natives' through an active education in not just "the poetry of Milton, the metaphysics of Locke, and the physics of Newton" but also English as a language citing that "the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are moreover so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them" (Macaulay, 1835).[5] However, it is not just this colonialism that has pervaded the learning landscape in India. There has always also been a longstanding form of 'internal colonialism', given the social inheritance of inequality in the form of caste and gender, informed by the modern concept of class.[6] This in turn translates into subtle implicit biases that make education in India often a privilege as opposed to a necessity, even today. This form of internal colonialism is tougher to outgrow unless actively and consistently addressed over a long and consistent period of time by both government and social groups.

This complex entanglement between practices of thinking, metaphysical determination upon purposes of learning, effects of colonialism and the

[5] The colonial mission of educating the colonised natives was directly politically motivated with a goal of establishing power. "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Macaulay, 1835). The use of education as an instrumental political device, motivated by intentions that were far from caring in nature, has been recognised, challenged and subverted in the years to come through the innumerable social reformers and educationists that appeared in the small towns as well as big cities of the nation and continue to do so in contemporary times.

[6] See Pinderhughes (2011) for a recent reconceptualisation of internal colonialism.

experience of learning that systems of education offer to its learners are foundationally pinned upon the ways in which the immanent and the transcendent converge in the existence of the learner, his/her/their body and minds. The existence of the learner and education's ethics of engagement with the learner therefore must first be understood through various metaphysical perspectives that implicitly or explicitly have a role to play in how the body is recognised within the learning environment. In the following section, I articulate various metaphysical perspectives on the relationship between the mind and the body in order to make possible the ethical body of the learners in any learning environment.

2 The Body and the Learning Environment: Some Metaphysical Perspectives

One major point of distinction between the metaphysical frameworks from South Asia and Europe is the relationship between the mind and the body. The various ways in which the mind and the body are conceptualised within different paradigms point towards the complex centrality of the body in the discussion of learning. The mind is inherently entangled with the body, therefore learning is embodied. Furthermore, as some contemporary thinkers point out, the mind-body problem appears to have been resolved to a considerable extent with respect to its Cartesian bifurcation (Stoljar, 2017). Therefore, it is not in the restitution of the body in discourses on education but in our understanding of the various imaginations of the embodied mind that we must learn about learning processes as geared towards distinct experiences. This complex of mind and body, henceforth addressed as the 'body-mind',[7] then becomes the foundation for us to imagine an ethical body as the human learning subject and offers a way towards understanding learning as an ethical experience.

There are several stakes involved in scholarship on the body in its attempt to bring the body into the discursive space. The stakes involved include gender, race, caste, class, 'dis'abilities and so on—all of them deeply contingent on the physical body. Several feminist and socio-political theorists like Ásta (2018), Das (2015), Blackman (2008), Westley (2008), Damasio (1999),

[7] Here I refer to the body-mind as a distinct conceptual entity that attributes the mind's capacities to the body as much as it establishes the mind as experientially embodied. This is similar to the processual manner in which Holdrege (1998, p. 347, p. 358) refers to the 'body-mind complex' in the context of transcendence at work within soteriological philosophies but is distinctly different in the context of its usage, which is very much immanent and bound by this world.

Synnott (1993) and Scarry (1985) have theorised the body and its sociality with respect to race and gender as well as its afflictions and crises. In the Indian context, there is a large amount of sociological literature on the role of the body as a political provocateur. However, within Indian conceptualisation, the task becomes slightly complicated when it comes to philosophical thinking on the body, given the complicated syncretic history of India, whereby contemporary theories of the body consider it as a cultural concept while pre-modern theories of the body are radically deterministic.

However, what does metaphysics have to do with the body, if at all? It is necessary for this question to be understood as it is closely linked with the possibility of change and transformation. In other words, would any concept of change ever be possible without the presence of the body? Here I presuppose a radically empiricist idea of knowledge and experience as entangled, whereby it would be impossible to talk in purely epistemological or ontological terms. This lineage of the mind as an integral constitution of what one calls the body takes up various trajectories in different pre-modern metaphysical systems in South Asia.[8]

Some philosophers of the Nyaya-Vaiśeṣika tradition, for instance, consider the mind to be a material entity like an instrument that senses. Thus the presupposition that it is only the body that senses and the mind that reasons is already challenged through this conception. Similarly, the Upanishads considered the human being as a composite of psychological and physical elements, whereby there was an attempt to look at the "agent of normal phenomenal experience" as distinct from "the transcendental" (Laine, 1998). Holdrege (1998, p. 369) argues that the body as a concept within the philosophies of the "Hindu" religion can be either seen as an 'integral body' taking up forms of either "the divine body[9], the cosmos body, the social body and the human body", or a "processual body" taking the form of "the ritual body, the ascetic body, the purity (sic) body, the devotional body, the Tantric body and so on". Each of these taxonomies of bodies are intended to be ways in which the body becomes the ontological location of creation of systems, order or practices that have various purposes. For instance, the body in the Upanishadic framework is ascetic and a teleological object of liberation (Holdrege, 1998, pp. 357–363).

All these conceptualisations bring into the picture the necessary relation between the concept of the self with the body-mind. The concept of the self

[8] See Michaels and Wulf (2013) for an account of perspectives on the role of sense across South Asian philosophical traditions.

[9] See Colas (2007) for more on the imagination of the divine body in Sanskritic logical traditions.

as entwined within the body and the mind is conceptualised differently in Buddhist metaphysics. In Buddhist metaphysics, for instance, the idea of the self is conventional but not essential as encompassed in the concept of the *anātman* (which loosely can be translated the theory of no-self [10]), and therefore, the nature of experience is understood as a causal complex of mental and physical events playing out in relation to each other. Thus, the dualism that we see in these schools of thought is not the Cartesian duality of mind as distinct from the body but the dualism in the kinds of experiences that are registered by the body-mind as a complex (Baindur, 2015b; Gupta, 2009; Flood, 2006; Holdrege, 1998; Griffiths, 1986).

The monistic metaphysical schools imagine the body-mind complex with a particular teleological commitment towards a unification of the mind and body wherein the subject-object distinction collapses. The Sānkhya-Yoga and the Advaita schools imagine the body as kind of 'technology' committed to the well-being of the body-mind through the discourses on practices of Yoga and its associated systems of healing like Āyurveda (Brennen, 2002). Within this framework, the mind and the body are not dichotomous, but co-constitutive (Larson & Bhattacharya, 1987).[11]

For instance, in the Āyurvedic metaphysical system the onus of understanding the body in relation to the world comes from a particular way of looking at the body, whereby the presupposition is that each body is uniquely constituted and thereby it is the body's constitution that is understood in order to determine the nature of 'dis'-ease caused to the body. The threefold categorisation of the human body into 'vāta', 'pitta', 'kapha' bodies largely reflects an intention of imagining the body through certain universal properties. Essential to these systems of categorisation is the understanding that the human living body is defined by its capacity to sense, think and act. The systematic extrapolation of these categories into the ways in which they respond to the environment and conditions around the body points to very different ways in which the concept of disease, for instance, is looked at in comparison to modern medicine. Disease is not looked at as an objective state of discomfort symptomatic to the generic body but a specific case of imbalance between the relation between the body and its environment (Baindur, 2015a; Brennen, 2002; Zimmerman, 1987). In this framework, it is not the state of disease that is targeted for cure but the general condition of the body—thereby putting the onus of well-being on the sensing, thinking, acting body.

[10] This no-self theory does not imply the absence of self but is a theory that is not committed to a permanent unchanging concept of a singular self.

[11] I am grateful to Meera Baindur for her scholarly inputs on this subject.

Two overarching presuppositions can be extracted from such an attempt at determining the body and its relation to its environment within the framework of Yoga—first, that the body is deeply dictated by the metaphysical constructs governing its conceptualisation; and second, that the body and the mind are necessarily connected as a complex system. Given these two presuppositions, we see how the question of education must necessarily take into account metaphysical predeterminations often implicitly influencing the body-minds in any learning environment.

The conditions for learning as outlined in the previous section, requiring the presence of others and an intention to learn, present before us the sensitive task of understanding what makes for a good education. In the Indian context, recent work on pedagogical methods reflects an active interest in understanding how this metaphysical presupposition of the body-mind as a complex influences the kinds of learning traditions that evolved in the South Asian region. These include not just the Sanskritic and the Buddhist, Jaina, Āyurveda traditions as mentioned above but also music, theatre, subaltern performative traditions, tribal education cultures, as well as contemporary education thinkers including Gandhi, Ambedkar, Vivekananda, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, J. Krishnamurti, Phule and many more who left behind legacies of educational institutions (Sarukkai & Akshara, 2020).

Baindur (2020) highlights how learning in the Vedic traditions took twofold forms where the learner was expected to learn through repetition of whatever the teacher taught 'him', and secondly the learner was expected to understand the meaning of the teaching. Dialogue played an important role in the process of learning. Similarly, residential schooling was the norm, with the student expected to imbibe education not merely as accumulated knowledge but through internalised lived everyday experience. Vedic educational systems were thus implicitly informed by the Vedic metaphysics. This included a particular conception of society as being one comprised of immutable caste hierarchies. The redundant elements of Vedic rituals were challenged by Buddhists by negating the notion of an essential self, logically discarding caste as a concept and thereby proposing a conception of a society that is made up of 'conventional' social bodies that are relational in nature. The Buddhist 'sangha' became the site of collective learning just like the 'gurukul' was the site of experiential learning in the Sanskritic traditions. Historically, the major work that Buddhist metaphysics did in its response to Vedic metaphysics was to dismantle the conceptual basis of caste,[12] thereby influencing the learning environment very differently.

[12] See Guru and Sarukkai (2019) for a compelling argument on the bearing of metaphysics on caste.

While these concerns belonged to the pre-modern social in India, the reason I am invoking these here is to point out how the metaphysics percolates over time and implicitly dictates the foundational social fabric of modern-day learning environments in India. For instance, the significance of metaphysics in self-recognition is reflected by Ambedkar when he called for all Dalits to adopt Buddhism in an attempt to annihilate their Vedic inheritance of caste as a concept. In other words, the learning body, when seen in the contemporary Indian context, ridden by such binding presuppositions and ontological determinations, is deeply conflicted. Its heritage dictates the access and experience of education far beyond the ideals of a promised ethical experience of education, further complicated by colonial inheritances.

The body of the learner in contemporary India is far from being an enabled body-mind. With the general decolonial turn (Maldonado-Torres, 2011) taking sway across the globe, the coloniality power matrix of exploitation of people by applying ideas like that of center and periphery and the related body-politics shall be overcome, this is the aim of decolonial education. Then, the need for an account of the ways in which the body-mind is troubled by its metaphysical inheritances is necessary in order to understand the obligation of education to the body in the Indian context. Thus, instead of considering embodiment as some form of distinct educational practice, I want to focus my attention on the need to reclaim the place of the body-mind and bring it back into the learning space by outlining the following three ways in which the body has been displaced from the learning space through contextual forces. I am not concerned here with the training of the body in performative and body-centric education but with mainstream learning environments where the role of the body is often subordinated to the potentials of the mind as well as subject to implicit violations, thereby making the experience of secular contemporary education very disembodied and fragmented and often a futile experience.

3 The Body in Trouble: The Suffering Body, The Labouring Body, The Discriminated Body

The idea of education has been at the heart of several modern and contemporary philosophers in India, especially through India's independence and renaissance. They were not just educationists, but also social reformers, poets, philosophers and political leaders. The emphasis of their philosophies of

education addressed different concerns and pushed towards different urgencies and crises in education including the crises of the body and its presence in the learning environment.[13] The concept of the body-mind in its threefold articulation as a sensing, thinking and acting entity as idealised in the conceptualisation of the pre-modern metaphysical systems mentioned above, fails to translate into the modern social. Instead, the contemporary socials have succeeded more in deteriorating and diminishing the body-mind of the learner, turning it into a suffering, labouring and discriminated body. In other words, the irony of the learning environments is that they do little to address the violence of certain living conditions.

J. Krishnamurti's philosophy of alternative schooling conceptualises the learner as a sensing, feeling body that needs an education not to conform to societal constructs but to set the "mind" free. He gives precedence to processes of perception, observation and paying attention to the world as central to ways of educating oneself (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 10). Education, according to Krishnamurti, is to "learn never to accept anything which you yourself do not see clearly, never to repeat what another has said" (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 11). According to Krishnamurti, an education of the mind is geared towards freedom from the known, which comes about through the process of understanding the known (Krishnamurti, 1975). Krishnamurti's keenness on an aesthetically motivated education reflects the presupposition of the learning body-mind as a sensing body.

The attempt to actively encourage this sensing body despite its pre-given social determination also reflects his understanding of how the body, when it enters the learning environment, is already suffering—a condition which the self might not recognise until it learns about it. In a conversation with the physicist David Bohm on the question of psychological conflict, Krishnamurti wonders whether the root of such suffering stems from the recognition that while the brain can grasp physical time, the mind has a very unpredictable relationship with time: "the mind not being of time, and the brain being of time—is that the origin of conflict?" (Krishnamurti & Bohm, 2014, p. 21). Such a view reflects a dualist understanding of the experiences of the body-mind where the self senses the world physically through embodied cognition, while also being guided by free imagination through a mental grasp of experience. Thus, the suffering body is, in its unlearning, unmediated and metaphysically pre-determined state, unable to recognise, perceive or even

[13] In the fields of scientific and socio-scientific education, systematic efforts in addressing innovative methods of teaching and 'epistemic practices' only highlight the large gaps and incongruences that need to be addressed between lived experience of education as compared to education as knowledge-transaction. For more see Kelly and Licona (2018).

understand that it is in fact suffering. It is the task of education, as seen by Krishnamurti, to re-instate this suffering, i.e. the unmindful body so that it can recognise its condition and come to understand that it is in fact suffering in order to reclaim its body-mindfulness.

Gandhi's philosophy of education, on the other hand, is influenced by Thoreau, Rousseau and Tolstoy and their tenets of naturalist education (Kaikini, 2019). Gandhi's educational commitment is towards practical utilitarianism, laying emphasis on vocation-based learning, or learning by doing, aimed towards self-sustenance that can ultimately enable or empower self-rule (in Hindi 'swaraj'). However, Kaikini (2019, p. 329) observes certain shortcomings in this utilitarian system which placed emphasis on job-oriented learning by pointing out that this experiment was a failure given that schools risked turning into production units, a view acknowledged by Zakir Hussain of the Wardha Education Plan. In addition, Gandhi's 'Nai Tālim' philosophy of education is highly pragmatic where the only way out of colonial dependence was by finding ways to generate one's own revenue and making primary education self-reliant. This came with its own risks, namely possible exploitation of the students by the teacher and becoming an opportunity for vested interests by economic groups in the profits generated by the school. Thus, while Gandhi's philosophy of education is veered overall towards economy, of time and resources, being pragmatic in approach and aimed at "character building and discipline", it turned out to be a failure in practice, as it also harboured the risk of deepening the already pre-determined labouring body's crises by making it harder to emancipate from labour (Kaikini, 2019, p. 335).

This privilege that betrayed Gandhi's philosophy of education was countered by Ambedkar's philosophy of education that has as an educational ideal a promising balance of modernity and progress as well as 'presence' in the form of embodiment, thus making education accessible to the caste-oppressed labouring body who could then hope to emancipate themselves from the lifelong yoke of a caste-dictated life of labour as well as imagine learning as a collective social process where one educates oneself not just for one's own betterment but for the betterment of others (Valeskar, 2012). Thus the labouring body is the second degree diminished form of the reasoning body, one that cannot even hope to sense, let alone think. This desensitised, unreasoning body becomes the discriminated body that continues to bear the brunt of restricting socials.

The crisis of the thinking body is when it becomes pre-determined into the kinds of work it is 'allowed' to do, a case in point being that of the inheritance of the caste social. The caste social categorises bodies in a manner that

relegates the labouring body to the lowest of social orders and thereby farthest from any access to an egalitarian experience of education, if at all (Guru & Sarukkai, 2012). This powerful metaphysical predetermination of the learning body that decides who is eligible to be educated at all and who is not, foregrounds a crater in the social fabric of modern-day India. The champions of a reformist vision that strived to address the caste-ridden cause in education like Ambedkar, therefore, had a distinct vision of educating in order to agitate and bring about social change.

This discrimination has been deeply ingrained in a manner that cannot be directly addressed through certain standardised teaching methods. Instead, there is a need for a complex persistent process of education that is geared towards re-instatement of the completely perceptive body that has rid itself of its discriminatory violence. This violence and discrimination has been carried by Dalit, women, queer communities over generations, resulting in a pinning down of the discriminated self to the sensual body, that is often reduced to the unthinking, unreasoning, grossly explicit body, pushing the mind component of these into oblivion. This reduced body directly affects the ability to be open to and imbibe experiences of learning that help the re-instatement of the body-mind.

Several nineteenth-century social reformers such as Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Pandita Ramabai, Narayan Guru, Iqbal, Periyar and many other leaders, activists and political thinkers of the freedom movement drew inspiration from canonical as well as indigenous philosophical traditions (Baniwal & Sharma, 2020). It is also significant to note that several women reformers played an active role in education reforms towards equality of access and enabling the presence of e.g. the female learner in the classroom space. Basu (2005, p. 184) observes that surveys of indigenous education in Governments of Bombay, Madras and Bengal presidencies in 1820s and 1830s showed a total absence of girl students from the village schools and schools of higher education. These figures, mostly for the lack of adequate records or documentation, are slowly coming to the fore with active archival and documentation work.[14]

Amongst these nineteenth-century reformers were Savitribai Phule and her husband Jyotirao Phule who extensively championed the cause of such gross violence done to the discriminated body in education. The Phules instituted dedicated schools for female students, and for the lower caste community, namely the Mahars and the Mangs, in response to the lack of 'indigenous schools' in and around Poona in West India (Deshpande, 2016, p. 102). An

[14] See Ray (2005).

avid advocate for equal rights for the oppressed, Phule's philosophy of education was actively geared towards bringing about radical change in the system by engaging in dialogue with the Government as well as creating schools in order to address the gross inadequacies of the existing educational mandate in colonial India.

In a memorial addressed to the Education Commission dated 19 October 1882, Phule argues that the Government's education was merely patronising a "virtual high class education" that was meant to cater only to the upper classes and which resulted in a "monopoly of all the higher offices under them by Brahmins" (Deshpande, 2016, p. 104). He further criticises the lack of attention paid to adequate primary education for the masses, urging that there be

> schools for the Shudras in every village; but away with all the Brahmin schoolmasters! The Shudras are the life and the sinews of the country, and it is to them alone and not to the Brahmins, that Government must ever look to tide over their difficulties, financial as well as political. (Deshpande, 2016, p. 105)

In another conversation, Phule draws out a critique of the Vedic monopoly over education from within the system as follows:

> If God had created the Vedic scriptures for the liberation of entire mankind, the 'bhat' brahmans would not have prohibited the 'shudras' and the 'atishudras' from studying the Vedas. The 'bhat' brahmans have thus violated God's commandment and are not the 'shudras' and the 'atishudras' suffering for that? (Deshpande, 2016, p. 188)

Phule poignantly traces the suffering of the discriminated body of the 'shudra' to the basic lack of education in his prologue to *Shetkaryacha Asuud* (1883) (Cultivator's Whipcord):

> Without knowledge, intelligence was lost, without intelligence morality was lost and without morality was lost all dynamism! Without dynamism money was lost and without money the 'shudras' sank. All this misery was caused by the lack of knowledge. (Deshpande, 2016, p. 117)

Phule's sharp thrust is towards a philosophy of education that empowers and enables the learner to be an active citizen of the State, who is able to partake of all his/her rights and to be able to live a life of dignity as an equal.

The philosophies of education discussed above either challenge the pre-given metaphysics marking the body or re-enforce a different kind of metaphysics binding it. Given this deeper relationship between metaphysics and the body and the recognition of the various ways in which we have seen the body in crisis in the context of Indian education, as a suffering, labouring and discriminated body, the foundation of a just education is imaginable only when we make possible an ethical recognition of the body-mind in the learning environment.

4 Education's Obligation to the Body

Having thus far seen how various metaphysical systems a direct bearing upon the perception and constitution of the body-mind within the learning environment have, it is clear that the task for contemporary education is to understand its obligation towards the body and more specifically towards restoring and re-enforcing the body-mind of the learning subjects, in a way that instils and fosters their abilities to sense, think and act in the world.

Speaking about the social context of intellectual hierarchies, Guru and Sarukkai (2012, p. 14) observe that the capacity of knowledge making and reflection—a privilege historically denied to the Dalit community—can be cultivated only in the right material condition motivated by the possibility of innovation and imagination. The Dalit self, historically, was denied the possibility of becoming a body-mind and instead consistently relegated to becoming a mere labouring body that had no freedom to think. Therefore, they argue that a certain kind of freedom from context was essential, particularly for the labouring body, in order to become a thinking body-mind. This was also recognised by Ambedkar who himself took time and detached himself from his constraining working-class context to learn abroad. Moving away from the empirical to the theoretical, according to Guru and Sarukkai (2012, p. 24), is a 'social necessity', as it reverses "the orientalism that treats Dalits, tribals, and the OBCs as the inferior empirical self" in a move towards resisting 'museumising' the Dalit and tribal communities as mere exotic bodies. Thus, a mediated reflective space and time offered to the labouring body, in the form of resources to simply be in order to resuscitate the body-mind, is an essential obligation of education to restore the labouring body into a thinking body-mind.

Similarly, the woman's body in the India has a longstanding history of always being subject to this spectrum of oppression—from being museumised into a

deity figure (e.g. imagining the Indian nation as a mother—'bharatmāta'[15]) to being denigrated as a suffering body confined to the space of the household, thereby becoming a provocation to several women saints, philosophers and wandering 'Bhakti' poets[16] be it Akkamahadevi, Lal Ded or Avaiyyar who broke this mould in order to reclaim their sensing and thinking body-mind. Thus, in the absence of a formal learning environment that could enable this restoration, forms of art, singing, dancing, writing or simply indulging in leisure became radical learning environments for the suffering body to resuscitate itself into a sensing body-mind.

The complex history of caste as a pervasive kind of social particular to India makes the discriminated body the most prevalent kind of troubled body that desires to be restored through education. This discrimination occurs at the fundamental level of the self and its conceptualisation. The self or the individual in the Indian social, as argued by Guru and Sarukkai (2019), is a 'we-self' or a collective self—one which sociological and philosophical theories concerning the individual from Euro-American contexts fail to address in the Indian context. This discriminated self, informed by the metaphysical givenness of caste through certain 'authorless agencies', suffers from a loss of community and identity as well as from a loss of basic social recognition. The discriminated self in formal learning environments often gets marked by social signs like caste-specific surnames, archetyping the body based on colour, odour, dialect and so on (Guru & Sarukkai, 2019, p. 117). These metaphysically sanctioned violations create a deep sense of internalised humiliation in the learner, who, having internalised the discrimination, then assimilates the experience of education as a mere fossilising of his or her violated self as a discriminated body.[17] An example of this can be found in the violations faced by a young Ambedkar in his school where he faced blatant discrimination as an untouchable (Ambedkar, 1993). This discriminated body, in a learning environment, is marked by a lack of recognition and acknowledgement, a forced absence of the body that is further ensured by the overpowering learning environment.

Presence, therefore, becomes very significant for the discriminated body that aspires to a sense of restoration to being, acting and experiencing in a shared learning space with other body-minds. In other words, the obligation of education towards the discriminated body is to ensure and enable its presence and actively resist its erasure through subconscious or internalised social

[15] See Cheema, Zainab (2012) for a critique of the anthropomorphising of the Indian nation.

[16] See Prentiss (1999) for an account of embodiment in Bhakti traditions.

[17] See Guru (2009).

behaviour that pervades learning environments. This shared presencing, therefore, in the spirit of what Guru and Sarukkai (2019) call as 'maitri' makes it possible to recognise the subjects as acting, experiencing body-mind selves that, through sensing, thinking and acting in relation to each other, learn from each other and for each other, making the experience of education first and foremost an ethical experience.

5 Towards an Ethical Experience of Education

In this chapter, I have first articulated the conceptualisation of the body within various metaphysical traditions in India. I then looked at the various complications that, within any learning environment, make these ontologies of the body troubled, be it suffering, labouring or discriminated. The obligation of learning environments is then to work on the process of addressing these differences in a way that restores the learner's embodied constitution as a sensing, thinking and also acting body-mind. Various educationists who have thought about education in the Indian context have asserted the necessity of embodied experience in education while also addressing various problems with the kind of misplaced idealism pervading the education system that was transplanted to India during colonisation. This does not imply that the education system that preceded the period of colonisation which included residential and collective learning systems like the 'gurukul' or the 'sangha' did not have their own problems in terms of caste- or gender-based 'un'recognition of certain bodies.

The models of education proposed by the educational reformists such as Krishnamurti, Ambedkar, Gandhi and Phule strived to generate new syncretic models that addressed the problems, at both systemic social levels and individual levels. While they all had various motivations and commitments in their educational philosophies, what is evident is that the double diminution of the body-mind—firstly into a mere disembodied mind, and second into a mere suffering, labouring or discriminated body—makes the very foundation of the process of education morally dispensable. If education has to be indispensable to human life, then it implies that it cannot be party to prolonging such reductions of the body.

Further, the conceptualisation of the self in relation to the body-mind as a relational complex, thinking, sensing and acting in this world, in the South Asian context, does not necessarily correspond to the singular concept of the self within the Cartesian context.[18] Therefore, the self as an ethical relational

[18] For more on the notion of the 'we-self', see Sarukkai and Guru (2019).

complex must necessarily be addressed as an embodied sensing, thinking and acting body-mind. There is need to articulate and imagine the notion of the self and its relation to embodiment, which I have not addressed in this chapter but merits attention. In this chapter, I have focused only the question of the mind and its relation to embodiment and the place of the body-mind in learning environments. The question that remains to be taken up for further research from this argument is around the relationship between the self, the mind and the body and how learning environments impact the self. The first step in this regard is the articulation of the body and the mind in such environments. It is only when the presuppositions of the body-mind are completely acknowledged, theorised, realised and cared for as a matter of principle within philosophies of education that education can strive to become an ethical experience.

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The Palgrave Handbook of Embodiment and Learning

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"In the Anthropocene, a time when the fate of the planet is determined largely by humans, it has become difficult to differentiate between nature and culture. There is hardly any nature remaining that has not been impacted by humans. In view of this, the body - the place where nature and culture meet - is becoming increasingly important for human identity, our understanding of humanity and the processes by which we live and learn. In our bodies, nature and culture are inextricably interwoven. The body is a clear manifestation of what all human beings have in common, what is different because of culture and what is individual and unique. This is why processes of embodiment and learning are so important both for society and the individual. In the cultural and social sciences, and also in the natural, technological and life sciences, this insight is now widely accepted. This handbook contains contributions by scholars from a variety of academic backgrounds who use different scientific paradigms to examine diverse processes of embodiment and learning. Main references are theoretical and empirical approaches of philosophy, historical anthropology and cultural or social anthropology. In the processes of embodiment and learning, the senses, the emotions and practical knowledge come into their own. Education is seen as the development of the whole person. The handbook makes an important contribution especially to the advancement of educational practice."

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