“It was morning, and the new sun sparkled gold across the ripples of a gentle sea. A mile from the shore a fishing boat chummed the water, and the word for Breakfast Flock flashed through the air, till a crowd of thousand seagulls came to dodge and fight for bits of food. It was another busy day beginning.” Taken from the book Jonathan Livingstone Seagull, by Richard Bach[[1]](#endnote-1) the opening to the book illustrates rather well the world of contemporary humanity as well, jostling and churning for a chance at a livelihood. The book evocatively is about being better and away from the mobs, in being oneself, and together presents us with a nutshell of human reality while the metaphor used here is simply stunning in its appropriateness to our current concern. The story of Jonathan Livingstone Seagull may also capture rather well the world of references pertinent to the ideas of contemporary education, living and the meaning of the human life. But does raise, in the quoted matter above, enough for our current purposes.

Given the salience of each and for one another, including the current task – the idea of education needs to be as examined along the various ideas of life and living it can only be consequential or subsequent to in ordinary circumstances. We reach the two aspects pertinent to education: One, where it only is a product of our past experiences. Two, where it helps determine and impact upon our future, and helping shape a future that is distinctly different than our past. The qualitative analysis of whether for better or for worse is what far too many factors impact and although contained well within the ambit of education, in how we decide and choose between the various aspects that can be taught, remain contained within the desire that education helps us better our worlds and not worsen it than from what it is.

Where dealing with the mob of seagulls form a closer analogy, even if in irony – dodging and fighting for bits of food – to the human condition determines the various aspects of education as well. For the inevitability of contemporary human reality pits the idea of the *human agent* – a singularity of a common conception against the plurality of the nature of the *human agents* that affect it, including in outcomes. If called a diversity, we may be insulting and injuring both the word and concept of diversity unless we examine closely the meanings of cultures, diversities & the UDHR that presents us with a singularity that the idea of the human agent does as well, including in the necessity for it. This brings us primarily to the issue of objectives of & for any education. We need to examine the premises and the circumstances they are responses to, before we can go about examining those circumstances and their subjectivities or inevitabilities, including that what lends them to be so. The ideas of moralities better emerge after we have decided upon the ideas of the good and the bad. It cannot be otherwise. Yet we find that we are often confronted with contending basic ideas about the primary good and bad and their distinctions, including within ourselves – even when entrusted with the function of deciding upon what to leave out and what to include, within any task about selecting topics, subjects and their matter that we include in school curricula, including at the university levels. We also encounter the word “objective” here that come forth in plurals. Education is an almost a pre-determined topic that we seek to use as determining the trajectory of the future. Perhaps we encounter the idea of timelessness here and minus the recognitions of it even if we assume that we had a prior cognition of it – no matter how oxymoronic the idea seems. Within what informs and forms the objective for education – when we determine (or seek to do so) the subjects, topic and their matter that make up curricula – we encounter and come across the various rationales behind education and what it may or would entail, even when faced with what it should entail. A necessary involvement of values and value-judgments in what aspires to pure knowledge, and its applications including in the *human* or social realms. We encounter a plethora of factors and find that they may neither be benign nor altruistic – even as cynicism manifests itself as a new virtue most prone to replace judiciousness that ordinarily marks the human capacity for reason and intelligence, and meaningful choices.

This simply means that we need to first examine the objectives for education while determining even if those are well understood and thus well-executed. This becomes more important given the plurality of human groups *viz* their cognitive universes *do not* present a variety that multi-culturalism envisages. Rather, their notions and ideas of the political, civil & co-existence as a human collective present a challenge better encapsulated in the contrasts in meanings *viz* the idea of the human agency confronting the realities of the human agent marked by this plurality. Needless to say, *viz* the UDHR as well that forms a singularity that we by extension ascribe to the idea of the *human agency*  as well. It is within the those recognitions that one need address the complex aspect of the cultural dimension(s) of the right to education the UN Special Rapporteur has invited views for.

Encapsulated in brief points:

1. The ideas & discussions over negative and positive freedom.
2. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as the current global normal (based upon signatories to it via states – the current normal of human collectives/organizations that are seen as more comprehensive of those – that are members of the UNO) that effectively provides for a working feasible parameter for both domestic penal codes, and attitudes/behavior and conduct considered acceptable as well as desirable and thus the moral codes informing ethics – public and hopefully private as well.
3. The centrality of the UDHR then marks it as an important aspect for determining both the objectives of education as well as how it is conducted. The current concerns of the UN Special Rapporteur falls within this ambit amidst discussing the varying capacities for those amongst the member states of the UNO.
4. The second feature of education and objectives for it mark the ability of education to provide for skills that enable one to contribute meaningfully to human society and enlarge its ambit of responsibility (concerns for whom are already addressed above).
5. The distinctions between the human civil society (a distinction necessitated by the idea of the state – largely Weberian in its legitimate monopoly of violence – seen as power and units within it that are termed as military) and the uncivil society (that may or may not include backward social groups captured in their pre-civil, pre-modern and often pre-social attributes marked by the sociological timelines they more accurately are situated in rather than the common calendar year humanity is assumed to share) is important and continues being an objective for education.

India, for example, is easily captured in a few of its characteristics that its newspapers and news channels cover and which has been sought to be bought over and infiltrated to certain extents. India marks a certain plurality that isn’t political. A necessary condition to consider variety and plurality within aspects such as education etc. For if one merely takes the Indian Railways, a distinct colonial gift, the comparisons do not ease themselves into self-evident self-presentations that the populace of any country or region do so by themselves. If compared to the Railways of even neighbouring China, the diseased trains transmit the sense of dangerous times. But few in India would consider it any different than from when the Indian state came into existence in 1947. Except the trains of Bihar & Jharkhand seem to have grown older, dirtier and more diseased than ever. The disembarking mobs scarcely give any other impressions, than from the local vernacular newspapers of the region that record rapes, murders & terrorist groups. In equal and sickeningly regular measures, and their political *dons* - something which captures the intrinsic crime-terror status of the Indian state in its various privatizations that spell into its various *republics*, the state imagines as its federal units via a successful tax collection exercise. Nothing more because it barely has any cognition at most of its bureaucratic levels of the meaning of democratic governance.

Yet China presents with its own set of challenges that intrigue and enthuse given its creative adaptations at education. Indian debauchery easily presents itself as corrosive though at nearly every of its turns and twists of the labyrinth of its garbage that easily snakes through much of its territory and definitely through many of its regions. The uncivil state comes forth as a simple categorization of the various failures that mark India more as a *Third World Kleptocracy* with all the negative connotations of the term. In India these groups are easily captured in terms of language & region, while a corrosive corruption that is considered pragmatic as well as moral remains a pervasive pan-India phenomena its pre-modern, pre-civil and pre-social status seem to have thrown up in the post-colonial era.

The meaning of education in India gets further diluted in what emerges as the practical nightmare of not its text-books – most designed for the colonial era where coherence is seen – but in the classroom and what mark its student-teacher ratio. The capacity of its teaching-staff is often more conditioned and curtailed by the limitations of the school, college & university administrations although some elite private schools (often called Public schools in error) do present more passable examples of the art and science of education in practice. Its NCERT textbooks though present a coherence and often well-balanced offerings within the Indian context that more often than not pertain to the Indian official position that its department of education presents in written. Done away in most cases by the ground realities that seem to more often than not mock those statements in sometimes worse manners than its political class insults and mocks the idea of democracy and electoral politics. The challenges remain far too many. They are of human resources, cognition and structural as well, within an institutional framework moth-eaten to bare existence in many instances by all of the above and forced to co-habit with ritual corruption, in nearly every sense of the word.

By and large, schools and universities in India present education more as a technical skill that should help with finding jobs. Rarely do they look at education – parents included – as an exercise at personal growth, marking the social birth of the child. Where the technical expertise needed to find them gainful employment is a necessary and consequential part of it and not otherwise. The idea of the cultural dimension and the inclusion of it first needs culture to be expressed, after it gets defined. Given culture marks an aspect of human expression that of necessity does not invalidate civility and Human Rights (say rape and sodomy are considered cultural rights by some – arbitrary and whimsical that applies to any female of the human species the holder of that belief finds a fancy for. What determines and describes it as an impossibility?). Within those basics, the idea of cultural dimensions and cultural inclusion within education is barely there as a studied dimension but occurs more as an unconscious consequence of a structural imperative of shared poverty, hardships & threats that the privatization of the Indian state represents at its every studied mockery of or ignorance about democracy, Human Rights and the political processes that flow from those two recognitions. Given the largely pre-civil status of the Indians including an abject exhibition of it at its legislatures – ignorance seems more of the factor for a cognitively-challenged pre-modern populace struggling with the rituals of a colonial era that an independent India merely has mimicked to some degree minus the substance for it. Reminders cannot be of ignorance given it breeds weird pathologies by itself in what comparisons do to it – with education limited to faring well in classes and report cards. Which, given the region and place, can mean anything. What occurs on paper and what is present at the ground reality present gaps that are far too wide. Just like the officials from India at the UN mark those gaps including in what they eulogize and claim. The qualitative aspects of it present a wide range that varies from its region to region including what government education at the primary & secondary levels mean, to what they mean in reality. In places like Bihar & Jharkhand etc certificates are often said to be for sale for the common populace in the know of the business. More powerful people possibly could (a politician is often that) perhaps get it by sparing the life and limbs of those involved, or by extension their relations. While more a common a phenomenon of its Hindostani regions, this isn’t a state-wide attribute. Often not in private educational institutions of repute, or definitely is not so widely claimed be so should they occur. But these realities juxtaposed with the populace of the regions better mark for the pockets of rots and the pockets of hope within India, including the state-run or state-aided educational institutions. Education, as an aspect, cannot be isolated any more than governance and populace can be from any scenario. The ideas of pedagogy needs to rest upon firm civilities to be meaningful and effective in their various expressions. Moreover with an idea of civility that is commensurate with, if it does not exceed, the necessity of civility and society in place capable of making informed and political decisions. While Mafiosi and their extensions may well complement the various *politics of ressentiment* at place, those derided practices yet need be within the realm of the social and the political. Not crime-terror as the dominant aspect of any given locality, for much of India, with its institutionalized corruption baying in morbid ferocity and whose naked manifestations haven’t been stamped down upon or stamped out as yet. Given they are not only descriptive of what occurs as the political in a ‘society’ made up of such elements, but also constitutive of that what goes for the ‘political’. As a HIV state India presents by and large various curiosities even where education is concerned when not challenged obliquely by its very incapacity for self-governance, leave alone the modern constitutional parliamentary system of democracy it presents itself officially as constitutive of it and its populace. Education as a wonderful exercise that can be used to educate both the child and the parent – in states like India – has been missed out upon by the Indians so far.

Bringing us back to the opening scene of the story of *Jonathan Livingstone Seagull* by Richard D. Bach.

1. Richard D. Bach, *Jonathan Livingstone Seagull* (Harper-Collins India, New Delhi, 2007), page 3.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-1)