

Contribution of Naturalism in the Field Of Education

Mr. Govind Singh

Assistant Professor Venkateshwara College Of Education , Sonipat, Haryana & Research Scholar
(Edu.) Jaipur National University

Email: Govind.Rathee2010@Gmail.Com

Mob. 9396200002

Abstract

Naturalism is a philosophical doctrine. It is opposed to idealism in its interpretation of reality. Naturalism is concerned with “natural self” or “real self”. It contends that the ultimate reality is matter, and not mind or spirit. Naturalism does not believe in spiritualism. It denies the existence of a spiritual universe. The universe of ideas and values. According to naturalism, the material world is the only real world. It is the only reality. This material world is being governed by a system of natural laws and the man, who is the creation of the material world, must submit to them. The naturalists have regard for actual facts, actual situations and realities. For them nature is everything. It is the whole reality. Behind everything there is Nature. It denies the existence of anything beyond nature. Naturalism believes that everything comes from nature and returns to nature. Nature, according to naturalism, is a self-sufficient entity. It is self-determined and governed by its own laws.

Keywords : Scientific, Biological, Historical, traits,

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Naturalism

Naturalism is doctrine which separates nature from God, subordinates spirit to matter and sets up unchangeable laws to be supreme. (Ward)

A philosophy which considers nature (or matter) as ever of spirit can be understood only in the perspective with despotic behaviour of religion and state towards the common people was always the motivating force behind the growth of this philosophy in every age. Thus naturalism has gone through the process of evolution in 2500 years. Several forms of naturalism have emerged during this long period. Some of these forms are discussed here

Various Forms of Naturalism

Atomistic Naturalism:

It is the oldest form of naturalism. Democritus (460-360 BCE) and Epicurus (340-270 BCE) are its chief exponents. This philosophy says just as when we go on dividing a thing, a situation comes when further

division is not possible, similarly when we go on discussing a thing, a situation comes when further discussion is not at all possible. This ultimate indivisible unit or situation is called atom. The universe is composed of such atoms which are different from each other in colour, form, quality and shape. Democritus added that heavy atoms fell down more quickly than the lighter ones and begin to unite with each other on the way. Thus, the creation of the universe is a natural process. There is no role of any metaphysical power here. Epicurus amended the View by saying that atoms have motion and they combine with each other by changing their motion during fall.

Scientific naturalism:

This form of naturalism is the product of early modern period. It was the period when scientific experiments were going on at a fast speed. These experiments proved that both heavy and light atoms fall down with the same velocity. They also divided atoms into electron, proton and neutron and ultimate unit of substance is not atom but energy of electric or electronic power which is embodied in nature itself. This energy is the creator of the nature. Thus, scientific naturalism is totally against the philosophy of atomistic naturalism as far as explanations are concerned but the derivations of

both of them are almost similar. This we can see in two sub forms of scientific naturalism.

Physical Naturalism:

According to it, nature and matter are the same thing. Nature is what that has physical existence and can be experienced directly by our senses. Thus, the study of metaphysics is not the subject of this philosophy. Only physical objects are real. According to it, there is no difference between nature and consciousness. Human activities and experiences are studied in terms of material objects and natural laws. So, all material objects come to the category of consciousness. Since all natural laws are governed by cause and effect relationship, study of this relationship is a conscious study.

Thus by denying the existence of non-material objects, it has denied the existence of God or soul. It is the energy waves which activate the body not soul and this energy wave is also dependent on natural laws.

Biological Naturalism:

This philosophy is based on Darwin's theory of evolution. According to it, man is product of evolution from lower creatures by a gradual process. Darwin put forward three principles to explain his

theory. First is adjustment to environment, i.e., each unit of species tries to adjust to the force of environment in its life. Second is struggle for existence, i.e., it struggles for existence in the process of adjustment. Third principle says that in the process of adjustment and struggle, only the fittest survive and others die out. Darwin has also recognized the theory of change in the nature of living being and theory of use and disuse of organs. According to this theory, if environment changes, the nature of man also changes and if any organ is not used for a longer period, it stops functioning. This is the biggest change in man. Due to this change, the theory of natural selection becomes operative. Darwin further explains that traits are of two types such as original and acquired, Original traits are transmitted to the next generation by genes but acquired traits are not transferred at all. Darwin propounded these theories only in the form of hypotheses but he translated them in such a systematic manner that they were accepted and were later applied in education.

Mechanical Naturalism:

According to Herbert Spencer, the main exponent of this philosophy, the world is like a machine. Man is a small part of this huge machine. So,

he also behaves very much mechanically. As far as the evolution of this universe is concerned, he says that the world is composed of a kind of ethereal dust called 'Nebula'. In the beginning, the entire solar system was full of nebula and water. Having been separated due to the motion of the solar system, they began to revolve round the other centres. Later on with cooling down of the atmosphere, they also cooled and gradually converted into planets. Thus, creation is ethereal and its development is mechanical and purposeless. This machine is still moving. In the movement of this machine, there is no role of any mental or spiritual power. Since man is also a part of this huge machine, his movement is also governed by external stimuli or forces of nature. These laws are temporary one. We have to discover the eternal laws with the help of science. This philosophy led to the development of psychology as Science.

Historical Naturalism:

According to this philosophy, human history is the history of man's struggle on this earth. Accumulation of wealth is the main cause behind all these struggle and wars. Thus, wealth or matter is real and its accumulation is a natural phenomenon. This philosophy later

led to the rise of communist philosophy in the 20th century. The common features in all the above philosophies are that only matter is real. Mind is also a form of matter. Every material object is governed by temporary natural laws. We can find out the reality of matter (or nature) by sense experience and experimentation. If man goes away from nature, his survival will be at stake. The existence of any super nature is only a myth.

Chief Contributors of Naturalism

The chief contributors of naturalism are **Aristotle, Comte, Bacon, Rousseau, Darwin, Lamarck, Huxley, Spencer.**

Principles and Characteristics of Naturalism

Harmony with nature: Every matter including man is governed by natural laws. We should not endeavour to change the route of these laws artificially, i.e., natural light or air is more important than artificial light or air. The personality of the child should be developed but only on natural track. Nothing should be imposed artificially on him. If we try to make the child cultured and civilized, his whole personality will be disintegrated. Nature is our friend, we should go in the direction in which nature is

going. The process of evolution is slow but natural. Child acquires the necessary traits from the environment slowly and systematically. In the absence of harmony with nature, humans will fall a prey to different diseases in the process of struggle for existence and medical (artificial) treatment will be required to get rid of these diseases. Thus, revolt against natural laws hampers the natural development of humans.

Freedom: In the word of Rousseau, 'man is born free and I find him in chains everywhere: These chains are of different forms, political, social and cultural. Despotic rulers are not allowing him to do anything freely. Man is bound with cultural and social taboos also and he has rented his destiny in the hands of some supernatural power. He has become the slave of artificial life style also, i.e., 'big cities are riot proper dwelling places. They are rather grave yards'. Since man is born free, he must be allowed to live freely according to his natural impulses and inborn tendencies. If such freedom is not given, his struggle for existence will be weakened and his survival will become more difficult than ever. Freedom consists of freedom of thought, expression and activity.

Mechanical behaviour of man: Man is a small but complete machine in the large machine-the universe. His behaviour is not conscious. It is rather mechanical. If stimuli are given, response will be there. Response can be accelerated by giving natural stimuli.

Reality of matter: Matter is not the creation of any supernatural power. Physical and chemical reactions have given life to it. This matter can be experienced by our senses, so it is real. Soul or spirit (God) can not be experienced by our senses so it is not real. Thus, only the life of this world is real. Man should try to make this life happy.

Status of man: All the innate tendencies and capacities of man are determined by natural laws. So, he is not absolutely independent in his activities. He will remain free only he does not violate the laws of nature, e.g., sexual desire is an innate tendency; Killing this tendency by unnatural means will hamper the process of development. In spite of that man is the supreme creation of nature because he is evolved out of lower animals.

Unchangeable laws of nature: Natural laws are permanent and are governed by cause and effect relationship. There is no God here to control it, Darwin also proves it but in opposite way by admitting that

change in nature of man is brought about by changes in the environment.

Belief about knowledge:

Only that knowledge is real which is obtained from experience and experimentation. Intuition or philosophical discoveries is not real Knowledge Thus, this philosophy stresses the study of science subjects only.

Educational Implications of Naturalism

Naturalism when applied to education means putting the child at the centre of all educational processes and natural laws will be the teacher to teach the child according to his own nature. Nature of a child is of two types: physical nature and biological (psychological) nature. Former is external and later is internal. For the natural development of the child, the external laws of nature should correspond and coincide with the internal nature of the child. It means that child should be given full freedom to develop his innate tendencies and natural capacities. External environment will not hamper this natural process at all. Thus, naturalism was a reaction to idealism, humanism and formalism which insisted on bookish knowledge to be enforced into the

mind of the child from outside. The credit of introducing naturalism into education goes to Comenius and Francis Bacon but Rousseau and Spencer brought this movement to the zenith.

Principles of Education

This philosophy has propounded the following principles of education:

Follow nature: According to Rousseau, education is not to prepare the child for his future life but to develop him in the present according to his natural abilities and instinct, the help of physical nature is taken for this purpose. Thus, nature is the best teacher of the child. So, instead of artificial environment natural environment in the school is created for this purpose.

Self-learning: Child should be given opportunity for learning through sense experiences in the lap of nature. Bookish knowledge is only secondary.

Child-centred education: This phrase was first used by John Adams. Child is the centre of teaching-learning process. Here, every activity is directed to him. The role of the teacher is only a guide. Even curriculum is not given more importance than the child.

Progressive manner of education:

As a child develops physically and mentally, curriculum is also developed progressively. According to Rousseau, there are four stages of child's development as infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The load of the curriculum is distributed according to the age and mental level of a child.

Complete freedom of the child:

Child is given full freedom to develop according to his natural tendencies. He is not tied with artificial rules and regulations of the school. He is given full Opportunity to observe and experience the matter that exists before him.

Training of senses: Sense organs are the gateway of knowledge. Only that knowledge is real which is acquired through senses. So, these sense organs are trained in such away that acquisition of knowledge becomes a natural process.

Materialistic education:

Spiritualistic education is of no use for a child, Matter (wealth) is everything for him because it can give him pleasure and comforts. Child should contribute to scientific inventions and discoveries to enhance his comforts and reduce his miseries.

Aims of Education

It is very difficult to establish any definite aim of education according to this Philosophy the reason is that nature is neither definite nor certain. That is why when Rousseau says that the aim of education should be to establish harmony between man, nature and substance, the task of an educator becomes very difficult. How can unchangeable nature of objects be harmonized to a changing nature of man. This is really a challenging task. Another difficulty of establishing aims of education is that all naturalists do not have consensus over the aims of education. Different philosophers have propounded different aims of education. Some of these aims which are totally individualistic in nature are given below.

Preparation of child for struggle of life: According to biological naturalism, the aim of education is to prepare the child for struggle in order to adapt to the environment, only then he will be able to survive.

Attainment of comforts and pleasure: According to physical naturalism, the aim of education is to develop the child to attain material comforts through scientific inventions and discoveries.

Sublimation of instincts:

McDougall opposed the view of physical naturalism and said that the aim of education is not to attain pleasure but to sublimate the uncontrolled instincts. If it is not sublimated, the man may distort the natural environment by artificial means and it will be very dangerous for him.

Conditioning of reflex action:

According to mechanical naturalism, the aim of education is to establish reflex action of children by conditioning. When senses and other organs are trained, child's responses get controlled and conditioned. Thus without jeopardizing the freedom of the child, learning by conditioning taught to him.

Adjustment to environment:

According to Lamarck, environment is not always conducive to natural living of the child. So, the aim of education is to strengthen the capacity of the child to adjust with hostile and changing environment.

Development of physical and natural powers:

Naturalism does not believe in any form of idealism as well as the spirituality explained by it. According to Spencer, the aim of education is to develop the physical and natural powers of the child through experience and

experimentation. For this purpose, child is made physically healthy and strong.

Progressive and unrestricted development: The aim of education is to put away all barriers that are there in the path of natural development of the child and provide him maximum opportunity for progressive development

Naturalism and Curriculum

Naturalism considers child and his natural development more important than the Curriculum. Important characteristics of naturalistic curriculum are given below:

- The purpose of education is to develop the child fully according to his innate tendencies and abilities. Wide range of curriculum is needed.
- It favours only that education which is directly related to life. So, subjects taught should be useful for each stages of life.
- Teaching of literary subjects is useless because they cannot give any material satisfaction or pleasure.
- Moral or religious education is also not needed for a child. This education does not prepare him for material life.
- Curriculum should be constructed keeping in view the life stages of the child and his

aptitude. Different things will be taught at different age. Thus, physical education in infancy and training of senses in childhood is emphasized. Subject education should start only in adolescence.

- No books will be recommended in the early period of education. Natural development of the child will be encouraged through physical exercise and activities.

Status of the Child

At the time of birth, the child is fully free from evils. It is the society and the environment that vitiates and corrupts him later on. Thus, there is no role of nature in corrupting the child. If child again is back to nature and he is given full opportunity to develop according to his natural tendencies, he will again be free from evils. Proper education is needed for this purpose. Child is always made supreme in the educational system and everything is done in his interest keeping his needs and abilities into account. By doing so, naturalism favours individualistic education. It means individual is always superior to society.

Status of the Teacher

Natural development of the child is possible only when he is allowed to develop freely a natural environment without creating any hindrance from

outside (teacher). Thus, the role of the teacher is only secondary for students. He is only accepted as a necessary in the class. The lesser a teacher speaks in the class, and the more the students talk, the better. The interference of the teacher should be minimum in the class.

Naturalism and Curriculum

In order to achieve the above mentioned aims, those subjects and activities should be included in the curriculum which can bring about material progress along with spiritual development. For material progress, he advocated the study of Languages, Geography, Science, Political Science, Economics, Psychology, Arts, Agriculture and Industrial, and Technical subjects along with the subjects of Physical Education. This education must not be theoretical or bookish. It should rather be practical. For spiritual development, he prescribed the study of Religion, Philosophy, Puranas and Upanishad; and the company of saints and seers. Religious education should be imparted through sweet impressions and fine conduct of teachers rather than through books.

Methods of Teaching

He prescribed the same ancient methods of instruction which were in practice in Gurukuls. In that

system, Guru and his disciple lived in close association like the members of a family. Other characteristics of this method are given below:

- Practice of Yoga for controlling mind and emotions.
- Deep meditation for the development of mind.
- Self-learning-Guru will work as a guide and helper only.
- Activities for developing creative potentials.
- Lecture and discussion methods for elaborating essential facts.

Influence of Naturalism

Naturalism was the philosophy which influenced not only education but also society, polity and science. Some examples are cited below:

Development of child psychology:

Naturalism for the first time emphasized the development of the child according to his natural tendencies, needs and aptitude. this philosophy led to the rise of psychology as a full-fledged subject. People started conducting experiment on children and lower animals and findings of lower animals were also applied to children.

Rise of scientific study of society:

Man was for the first time given

very much importance. People started studying the impact of society and environment on man and vice versa. This led to the interference of the church in the individual life of man declined.

Rise of democracy: Rousseau advocated liberty, equality and fraternity as three guiding principles for man, which were completely denied by the despotic rulers and the church. Under the impact of naturalism, people rose up against the sociopolitical system. This later led to the rise of democracy -a new philosophy of life of the modern world.

Scientific tendency in education: After declaring only perceptual knowledge as real, naturalism motivated the people to come closer to science subjects and experiments in Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Astronomy gained momentum. This led to many new inventions and discoveries at that time.

Introduction of child-centred activity method: Activity, play way and experience based methods of teaching were accepted in schools. Physical education and sports activities were included in the curriculum and individuality of the child and individual differences were considered important principles in teaching-learning process. All these things made the process interesting and natural,

Kinder Garten and Montessori schools were opened exactly on the line of Naturalism.

Change in the concept of school discipline: Discipline was imposed by repressive methods and by using corporal punishments in schools before the rise of modern naturalism. Students were denied the freedom of expression and action in schools. This philosophy developed the concept of self-discipline which was established by natural consequences of action.

Criticism of Naturalism

It is one sided and incomplete. It describes in detail what not to do but what ought to be done is generally overlooked.

Here achievement is evaluated on the basis of result but whether the result is good, satisfactory or poor cannot be determined by this philosophy. For this purpose, we will have to go to idealism back.

it neglects spiritualism altogether and puts emphasis on nature only. Thus, material attitude of the people towards life may make the people selfish and self centred which is very dangerous for a society like ours.

Mental side of man is more powerful than physical side. Its height and depth is unlimited. So by giving importance to natural tendencies

only, naturalism narrows down the
scape of life.

It also lacks educational aims and
talks about the natural development
of the child only.

Naturalism does not give any
importance to the experiences
gained by the previous generations
and stresses on the personal
experiences only. Thus, a child
might repeat all those mistakes
which were committed by his
predecessors. Moreover, he will be able
to acquire only a small fraction of
the vast knowledge accumulated so
far on the basis of his own
experiences.

It stresses on the present needs of
the child only and neglects his future
needs and problems.

It stresses on the activities and
experiences of the child and ignores
the bookish knowledge.

It gives unrestricted freedom to the
child which may develop arbitrary
behaviour in the child in the long
run. In such case, child will not
consider others at all and will decide
arbitrarily.

It gives very little importance to
teachers in the class. This attitude is
not considered

healthy and sound in modern
democratic countries where various

social and moral qualities are also to
be inculcated by the teacher.

It ignores the development of the
society altogether. ' It makes the
child only a machine.

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