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KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT WISDOM: RUSSELL'S WARNING TO CIVILIZATION

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Abstract

The world is gifted with great many resources. In the contemporary modern world, human being is an important resource of the nation. Human resource has gained much significance due to reasoning and logical ability. Fast changing world has contributed immensely to the existing knowledge and research has become much comprehensive and complex. Bertrand Russell is proud of man's contribution towards knowledge yet, he is concerned about the balance between knowledge and wisdom. In the present essay, Russell raises this crucial question and tries to answer it from his perspective. It is relevant to study this essay at present as the imbalance between knowledge and wisdom is clearly evident. Writer shows how human being is becoming more knowledgeable with less wisdom and narrower feelings. He tries to show path to the next generation to become wise and warns us of the extinction of the human race if it is unrestrained.

Keywords: Knowledge, wisdom, civilization, emancipation, comprehensiveness

INTRODUCTION:

Bertrand Russell was a philosopher and a mathematician known for his intellectual and influential writing. He was for peace and strongly believed that scientific progress needs to be guided by wisdom and ethical responsibility. He opposed war and campaigned for nuclear disarmament. He said "Knowledge gives us power, but wisdom tells us how to use that power for the good of humanity." Bertrand Russell writes in a clear, logical and engaging way. Russell's way of conveying philosophical messages in a simple laymen's language makes him unique.

RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

It is relevant to study the essay in the present context as we are aware of the expanding world in terms of knowledge or information. Yet an important question of having balance between knowledge and wisdom remains unanswered. Though the world has excelled in mounting information in terms of volumes but not in terms of wisdom. He tries to clarify the difference between knowledge and wisdom. It is like getting more marks in the exams without knowing its application in day today life. Despite having

voluminous information and knowledge nations are busy fighting with each other to prove their power and wealth over one another. Russell becomes philosophical and warns the present civilization to refine our character by applying knowledge judgmentally and reasonably before drawing conclusions. He respects the ethical values present in religions, but criticizes the dogmatism and unquestioning acceptance of belief. He believed that critical thinking is necessary for human progress and knowledge should be used for human progress and not for destruction. This is the message the present generation need to understand and act.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to define and understand knowledge and wisdom. Secondly, to know the status of modern man's attitude towards the world with the existing knowledge. Thirdly, to know the ways of bringing balance between the quantity of knowledge with the quantity of wisdom. Finally, the ways to accomplish wisdom and the need for it in the present world.

RESEARCH ON THE TOPIC:

Many researchers have devoted their academic study to discuss Bertrand Russell's broader philosophy of knowledge, ethics, education, peace and individual liberty. Focusing exclusively on his essay "Knowledge and Wisdom" taken from the book "Portraits from Memory and other Essays" and analyzing it from the present context is a new attempt. It is a contemporary analysis of his thought provoking essay. It reflects his perspectives on concrete subject like information or knowledge to abstract subject like wisdom. The present century though rich in terms of knowledge but lacks wisdom. Through the present study, researcher wants the readers to know the gravity of the message conveyed by Bertrand Russell to the world to lead a better life

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The focus is will be on the analysis of the primary sources in the light of relevant criticism on the essay. The emphasis will be made on critical interpretations. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the present status of knowledge and wisdom. The second part deals with the factors that contribute to wisdom and its need. The third part focuses on the ways to acquire wisdom. The last part sums up the essay with a warning and at the same time leaves some questions with the reader. The present paper focuses on the major aspects of knowledge and wisdom in the present context.

INTRODUCTION

Man is a social being he is at an erudite level from other beings with his capacity to think, analyze and act reasonably. Years have rolled and there is a great advancement in all the fields. Every aspect of life is modernized and there is constant improvisation in everything. Bertrand Russell's present extract is taken from his "Portraits from Memory and Other Essays".

Bertrand Russel in his essay '*Knowledge and Wisdom*' proudly appreciates the contribution of man towards knowledge which is mounting with the passing of years. Every research, every advancement is contributing towards knowledge. It is a set of information added to the existing ones. Knowledge is quantitative, whereas wisdom is qualitative. Knowledge applied with a proper proportion at relevant time is wisdom. There are examples of

learned men with lots of knowledge but, we get only limited examples of wise men like Birbal or Tenali Raman of the Indian stories.

Bertrand Russell tries to define and distinguish knowledge and wisdom. Though Russell is proud of man's contribution towards knowledge, yet he is worried about its correlative increase in wisdom. He represents the voices of many and says that, there is a need for us to promote wisdom. A set of information is knowledge and it increases human capacity. The ability to apply knowledge wisely in our day today life is wisdom. Bertrand Russell is of the opinion that there are several factors that contribute to wisdom.

Due to the vastness of the subject, the quantity of information has increased. As a result of it, whenever the problem arises, it needs an expertise to solve the technical problem. Expert has the capacity to take into account all important factors in a particular problem and attach to each problem its due weightage. Now a days things are becoming still more complex due to vastness of the subject and specialized knowledge required in every field.

Russell tries to simplify this by giving the example of invention of some medicine. For a researcher or a scientist, invention of a new thing or a medicine is the ultimate thing. He is engrossed in it and puts all his intellectual energy in inventing one thing. He will not have the time and energy to think and experiment about the bad effects of the invention. The intention of the inventor is good and it will be definitely be a boon to the human race until it is misused.

Wisdom is needed to apply the information/ knowledge you have acquired. Russell always believed that any advancement in science should lead to progress. Directing his idea towards the invention of atomic bomb (misuse of invention for destruction of humanity), Russell says that, when you place these inventions in the hands of powerful lunatics, the result would be disastrous. The two world wars are the best examples that proved the lack of wisdom in humans. He further adds that, wisdom in the sense of comprehensive vision is not necessarily present in specialists in pursuit of knowledge. Comprehensive vision may be lacking with the inventor but for the beneficiaries it is a must. The beneficiaries must know don'ts and dos. The misuse of the inventions are always a great threat to humanity. Therefore Russell stressed that knowledge needs to be guided by ethics and social responsibility. He is of the view that knowledge combined with wisdom will have fruitful results or else will put an end to the civilization.

COMPREHENSIVENESS

Comprehensive vision is an inclusive and holistic perspective. It recognizes inter connectedness of ideas. It also helps to take decisions in a balanced way as it encompasses diverse dimensions of knowledge into a unified understanding. It is expressed through harmonious integration of interdisciplinary thinking for the development of society. Russell says that religion makes us think ethically and every advancement needs to result in the welfare of the society. Comprehensive vision alone is not enough but, we need to know human needs. Human needs are limited but his wants are unlimited. Human needs include physical needs, psychological needs, intellectual needs, social needs, and spiritual needs. Human greed has surpassed his need. As a result of it he has become self-centered and egoistic. Unlimited wants have led to the exploitation of resources. Every aspect of life is valued in terms of money and power. But comprehensive vision addresses all human needs in a balanced and integrated manner. Material prosperity without

ethical values will make society corrupt and religious ideologies without providing basic needs will fail to improve people's lives.

Comprehensive vision integrates all dimensions of human existence. Bertrand Russell tries to illustrate this with the study of history. He is of the opinion that many historians have done more harm than good to the society. They have written history from their own perspective by being partial with a narrow vision instead of comprehensive vision. It did not provide an integrated understanding of reality that harmonizes diverse forms of knowledge and experience. It did not enable human beings to achieve wisdom, self-realization, ethical living, and the collective wellbeing of society.

The comprehensive history written by Hegel, the great German Philosopher glorified Germany and tried to prove it as the most powerful and important nation in the world. In his book, he identified Germany as the standard bearer of the world. Instead of having a comprehensive outlook for the world history, he tried to fragment the world by lionizing one nation. Bertrand Russell is of the view that, the present world is after fragmentation. Every nation in the world is trying to prove its power and wealth over another. Though the world is full of knowledge, unfortunately, all the knowledge in the world is not converted into wisdom. Likewise, though the historians have so much knowledge of the world, yet lack wisdom. History has taught us great many lessons, yet because of narrow minded and unwise historians, we have altered history that had left negative impact on the others nations.

Despite having so much knowledge in the world, we are unable to convert it into wisdom. Bertrand Russell is of the view that we need wisdom not only in public life but also in private life. He says that we need wisdom in the choice of our means and the ways to attain. He remembers the men in the past who wasted their life in search for philosopher's touch stone and the elixir of life. He says, they were unwise as they could have made great achievements instead of wasting their lives in search of fictional things.

Russell gives the example of two men who hate each other and he tries to prove that hatred leads to mutual destruction. At present we read in the daily of the war between USA and Iran that the writer had indicated in the past. Bombarding of nations with missiles and drone strikes and targeting nations is against the Russellian philosophy. He was never in favor of using technology and science for the destruction of humanity. Bertrand Russell himself campaigned for peace and against the use of nuclear weapons. Through the example of Mr. A and Mr. B he warns the humanity of the upcoming dangers and also shows the ways to instil wisdom in men with patience and eloquence. With proper understanding and comprehensive vision we can save humanity. The end of evil deeds will result in destruction, misery, pain, loss and chaos.

ESSENCE OF WISDOM

Russell says emancipation is the essence of wisdom. It grows gradually and one needs to get liberated from it. There are many attachments that bind man to it. Physical attachment; as in the case of a child. Child cries due to physical discomfort and gradually grows and develops intellect and gains knowledge. As the child grows it gradually learns to detach itself from its belongings and so does man. He learns through his experience and slowly overcomes all difficulty by detaching himself from the worldly pleasures. Thus, he tries to learn to get liberated socially, politically, intellectually and spiritually. Time, place and people make him

learn and grow wiser day by day. The environment also contributes to his wisdom and this can be attained through liberation or emancipation. Bertrand Russell is of the opinion that wisdom can be taught and it is one of the aims of education. It makes men wise. He says that moral and religious lessons inculcate wisdom in us. Religions instill a sense of universal brotherhood, kindness, and love for humanity in us.

Russell becomes philosophical and says, it is human nature to hate the one who harm us. But if you hate them, then you will become more harmful for yourself. He says, hatred of evil is itself a kind of bondage to evil. It is only through understanding that we can overcome it. Resistance of evil with the greatest degree of understanding and the smallest degree of force is compatible with the survival of the good things that we wish to preserve. Russell says that, history cannot bear the advocacy of compatibility with vivacity of action. It is the process of building bridges between two opposite ideas or beliefs and systems of different nations. Wise men are needed to bring in harmony between the nations. History tells us that France, England, US were all engaged in war by being unwise and the whole world suffered.

WISDOM CAN BE TAUGHT

Bertrand Russell is of the opinion that wisdom can be taught. The teaching needs to have larger intellectual element than the regular moral instruction. Hatred and narrow mindedness will definitely have disastrous effects. These can be pointed out while giving knowledge. He is also of the view that knowledge and morals need not be separated. Various kinds of specialized knowledge need to be supplemented with the moral education as the best technicians also need to be the best citizens of the world. He wants every citizen to be the citizen of the world. With every increase in knowledge and skill, wisdom becomes more necessary. For every such increase augments our capacity of realizing our purposes. Finally, he says that the world needs more of wisdom as it has ever needed it before. If knowledge continues to increase, the world will need wisdom even more in future than it does now.

The world is teeming with information but it truly lacks wisdom. Earnestly, there is a need for the humanity to be wise. Man is after material wealth and has lost moral values in the rat race of accumulation of wealth and craze for power. Great many philosophers, scientists and knowledgeable people work hard for the progress of humanity. Yet, all their inventions and researches are being misused. It is very unfortunate that all the knowledge that the world feels proud about is not converted into wisdom.

The two World Wars the world has ever witnessed are the evidences that prove foolishness of man. The present wars between the nations in the name of colonizing and dominating one nation over other again and again indicate that man needs to become wise. The horror, pain, death, destruction of the two World Wars were horrendous. Man did not become wise yet, continues to fight with other nations.

TO SUM UP

Thus Bertrand Russell's essay becomes relevant and warns man to be wise or else the days are not far when the whole of civilization will become extinct. In conclusion the essay leaves some questions with the readers. What did man achieve after becoming civilized? What is the use of all the knowledge that he has if he uses it

unwisely? What will be the end of international wars? And finally, when will man become wise?

“The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge”-
Bertrand Russell

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