Critical Thinking: An Indispensable Dimension In The Course Of Sustainable Development

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Abstract

A world to become sustainable necessitates Critical Societies to be built. Critical Societies are a prerequisite for creation of just practices. A Critical Society is an assemblage of people that value and practice Critical Thinking. This is considered to be quite inconsequential now as selfish idiosyncratic goals have taken over the idea of living and sustaining together. The paper emphasizes the instinctive tendency of human beings to selfishly pursue things without bearing in mind the rights and needs of others. In order to deliberately deal with such issues and craft critical societies, Critical Thinking has to be thoroughly understood, practiced and has to be made an innate part of everyday life. Such a comprehensive definition and model for Critical Thinking has been provided by Richard Paul. This paper thus explores the idea of such a comprehensive conception of Critical Thinking so that critical societies can be shaped and sustainable human penchants are sought.

Key words

Critical Thinking, Paul's approach, Sustainable, critical societies, just practices, values

Introduction

The world's population is ever increasing and it is expected to reach the mark of 10 billion[1] very soon. The less developed countries in the race of catching up with the developed countries are increasing their consumption levels. The North/South economic divide and the unequal distribution of the consumption of the planet's natural resources between the world's populations are notable potential causes of tension. Faced with the above situation, the think tank known as the Club of Rome, advocated zero growth[2]. One can't reasonably campaign

for it as it would leave people in poverty. What one could do however, is 'ration' growth to ensure any further drain on natural resources to those who need it most[3].

The key questions that arise from the above context are:

1. Will the 10 billion men and women inhabiting our planet in 2100 be able to live as well as the 750 million people in industrialized nations do today?
2. Where should we focus our effort then?
3. What's worth trying now, and what do I need to prepare for?
4. What can help us to solve the environmental and other massive issues?

The only recourse to the above discussion is sustainable development. There has never been an important time in the human history for the quest of sustainable development. The concept seems to be a key for the all the monumental problems that the world faces today as it not only aims to reduce environmental degradation but also poverty reduction with an inclusive intention of peace and prosperity for the entire globe[4]. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require commitment from all; governments, private sector, civil society and citizens alike to make sure we leave a better planet for future generations

The next set of question that arises from the above context is:

1. How sustainable development goals can be taken forward as they are well planned, drafted and much looked forward to?
2. How can I as an individual make a difference to the above setting?

In order to answer the above question a strong need is felt on the part of all of us

1. To follow the implications of our actions
2. To take command of our thinking so that the implications can be tracked.
3. To develop and use our intellect so that we can take the actions in the veracious course.

In order to track implications as well as use our intellect we need to take command of our thinking process. When human thinking becomes primary interest in the society, critical societies develop[5].

Critical Societies

Critical societies are the societies that promote practices that are reasoned as well as fair[5]. These critical societies are involved in being reasoned, empathetic, autonomous, they examine beliefs, are open-minded, they think about the rights and needs of others. The emphasis of these critical societies is to cultivate intellect of people and thus make citizens aware of their interdependency with nature[5]. These critical societies have individuals that think their actions. The actions are product of thinking and when individuals think on their actions and when the actions don't affect the rights and needs of others then a critical society can develop. The actions that these individuals and together societies take would be sustainable actions. Sustainable actions will be actions that will be just and fair. This will affect the dimension of sustainability.

Critical Thinking

Before we begin the discussion on Critical Thinking and its significance in sustainable development certain questions smear around:

1. What is Critical Thinking and how can it be helpful in sustainable development?
2. What model can be espoused that is pertinent in achieving the extensive meaning of sustainable development?

The above enquiries can be retorted through the below confab.
Every bit in the nature has logic. Every action an individual takes has some logic. But again the questions arise as to

1. Do we ever question or examine our logic for doing various things at various points of times?
2. Do we examine our conduct?
3. Do we examine our thinking?

The answer is rarely. Say for the following instances:

A consumer acts unwisely and uncritically if he happens to see an advertisement on T.V. He never questions about the reliability of the claims that the ad makes or price it

charges or whether he really needs the product. He makes a decision many a times without being a rational human being.

As an individual am I thoughtful enough for my health? Superficially yes, essentially no. We often eat and do things that are harmful for our health. We don't scrutinize the effects of our eating practices and the way it affects our lifestyle. Even if we know that it affects our health we still prefer for unjustified reasons. We do have logic of doing things here but do we ever question and figure out whether it is justified or not? Even if we do, we dupe our mind saying that this is ok or this is not going to affect me so gravely.

As students we fail to understand the concepts at depth. We still believe that we know it very well. We superficially do lot of things in the class and the exams though we know it is not justified, though we know that we haven't understood it very well, though we know that the implications of this kind of shallow understanding won't be very far reaching.

As teachers we know that the classroom practices must be based on questioning and inquiry. Do we foster such practices? How many of the teachers actually like students asking questions while the class is active? According to research conducted by Almeida (2009), teachers spend up to 50% of class time on questioning and that they ask between 300 and 400 questions a day, while each student asks, on average, 1 question per week[6]. Even if teachers ask a huge number of questions per class, the questions posed are consistently of the same kind. Teachers ask typically low level questions, requiring mainly memory. Research indicates that questioning is second only to lecturing in popularity as a teaching method and that classroom teachers spend anywhere from thirty-five to fifty percent of their instructional time conducting questioning sessions[7].

As citizens too often we vote imprudently and uncritically, without taking the time to familiarize ourselves with the relevant issues and positions, without thinking about the long-run implications of what is being proposed, without paying attention to how politicians manipulate us by obsequiousness or vague and vacant promises.

As citizens we fail to examine our individual actions that may affect the natural resources. We use things thoughtlessly. Use of natural resources for extravagant purposes is a critical issue. The above examples are considered to be selfish acts because we fall prey to fast thinking. Dealing with complex mental challenges and drawing complex inferences requires the kind of deliberate, controlled, and effortful thinking characteristic of slow

thinking. Thus, what is required when trying to make a judgment is a conscious attempt to make our thinking more deliberate?[8].

Human mind is obviously engaged on pursuing selfish tendencies as highlighted above. It takes interest in self-indulgence and egotism[9]. Nevertheless, human beings have a strong capacity to think rationally, if thinking is taken seriously[10]. Thinking has to be evaluated consciously for its quality so that it can be transformed for better consequences in the form of decisions. On this view, as you can see; Critical Thinking as the goal which will achieve aims desired by the society and achieve sustainability. It is based on the skills, the insights, and the values essential to that end. It is a method of going about living and erudition that empowers us.

Assessing the dynamic relationship between Critical Thinking, Critical societies and Sustainable development

The concept of Critical Thinking has been evolving from the aegis of Socrates and various authors have worked into the area of Critical Thinking to define it. He contributed to ethics and consideration of thought. He considered critical thinking in the form of pursuing truth. He asked questions to dig beneath the thought processes. This helped the individuals to reflect on thinking processes. Ennis (1987) emphasized upon reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding upon what to do[11]. Mcpeck (1988) as cited in Paul 1999 gave definition that revealed critical thinking as "the propensity and skill to engage in an activity with reflective skepticism". Siegel (1988) as cited in Paul (1999) defines it as "thinking moved by reasons". Such thinking may help here by allowing the individuals to question the actions that they perform. It develops the aspect of introspection of actions of oneself rather than others. It functions at the deepest level of thought to understand the thought processes. These individuals if they think collectively then critical society may emerge and help in sustainability.

When we attempt on the meaning of Sustainable Development Living within our environmental limits is one of the central principles of sustainable development. One implication of not doing so is climate change. According to sustainable development commission, the focus of sustainable development is far broader than just the environment. It's also about ensuring a strong, healthy and just society. Thus the just society can be created

with the help of Critical Thinking and each practice of an individual may result in a critical society i.e. A just society. This just society is the aim of sustainable development.

It is possible and quite effortless to live an automatic life. This automatic life is fast thinking, not based on reasoning and uncritical[12]. It is likely to live a life devoid of actually captivating charge of the individuals we are becoming; devoid of embryonic the skills and insights we are capable of. According to Richard Paul, if we allow ourselves to become unreflective persons — or rather, to the extent that we do — we are likely to do injury to ourselves and others, and to miss many opportunities to make our own lives, and the lives of others, fuller, happier, and more productive[12].

Thus, Critical Thinking is analysing and assessing thinking with a view to transform it. Broadly, it is said that behaviour is a product of thinking. Further behaviour is reflected in actions and many of our current practices are destructive. To achieve sustainability, we need to think. We need to reflect upon the activities and the behaviour that we adopt and consider ways that don't affect the rights and needs of others. We need to change our behaviour in order to avoid ecological problems, and be responsible to acting on what causes the problems. Critical thinking will help in determining what actions cause's problems and helps achieve inferences that will achieve clarity in the implications of the thought.

The answer to the second question is to choose a substantive conception of Critical Thinking

A substantive concept of Critical Thinking will help us to target both analysis of thought and assessment of thought and take into account the affective as well the cognitive dimension of thought. It not only emphasizes the intellectual skills and abilities but also intellectual traits, it also draws attention to the barriers to the development of critical thought, such as egocentric and Socio-centric thought.

Model that promotes the broad conception of Critical Thinking

Richard Paul's model on Critical Thinking incorporates all the above elements in an integrated manner so that the critical societies can be sought. It is based on strong theoretical and philosophical foundations of Critical Thinking. CT according to philosophers should focus on reflection, affective propensities to exercise cognitive skills. Richard Paul also

mentions the aspect of strong and weak sense of CT along with Intellectual Traits of mind. These traits point to affective propensities required to implement the skills[13.]

It mentions the usage of standards of thinking to assess the elements of reasoning to develop intellectual traits[8].

How can the above approach bring change in people's thinking and how can it help to build critical societies?

Standards of Thinking

According to Richard Paul, The Intellectual Standards are used to assess the quality of reasoning. Being able to think critically necessitates a thorough command of these standards, infused in all thinking. We use the Intellectual Standards as a guide to better and better thinking.

The Intellectual Standards include: Clarity which means that the thought should be an understandable thought, it should be close to the reality and should be truthful, it should be precise and relevant. The thinking should achieve depth, breadth, logicalness and fairness

To be accountable for one's actions one must be accountable for one's own thinking process. In order to take command of the thinking process and assess its quality one has to understand standards.

For example; say I am bullying someone or if I am manipulating things for my benefit and I don't consider the rights and needs of others. In that case if I can reflect on my thinking process then can always question me am I clear in my actions? Do I clearly know what is to be done in this situation? Is thinking accurate while I do the action?

Elements of Reasoning

We analyze many things during a day. It might be concepts, textbooks, decision that we took in past or to be taken into the future. We do the analysis implicitly but we don't know the structure of analysis so. There are parts of thinking through which we analyze things. These parts are purpose, questions, information, assumptions, point of view,

inferences, and implications. One usually does it implicitly. But conscious efforts are required to practice these explicitly. This analysis has to be assessed through the standards of thinking.

According to Richard Paul, The Elements of Reasoning (thought) tell us that the thinking that analyses or reasons has a purpose, it also is based on certain assumptions, looked into a point of view, collects information, has implications and generates inferences.

The last aspect of the model is the Intellectual Traits that are required for being the /fair-minded critical thinker. To cultivate the mind, we need command of these essential dimensions, and we need to consistently apply them as we think through the many problems and issues in our lives.

Intellectual Traits

According to Paul, consistent application of these standards of thinking to the elements of reasoning will lead to the development of Intellectual Traits like: Intellectual Humility which means that one should know what one doesn't know, intellectual empathy which means that one should be able to look from others point of view, intellectual autonomy which means that the thinking should be independent, intellectual integrity which means that the thinking should allow one to treat truth because its truth, intellectual perseverance which means that thinking should pursue and should be based on facts, information and data

The Outcome

Constant use of the intellectual traits produces a well-cultivated Critical Thinker who is able to:

- Think on the purpose before acting- because that is the intention with which any thought should begin
- Collect and assess relevant information
- Uncover assumptions governing the thought- assumptions are beliefs taken for granted. They usually reside in unconscious mind. These assumptions need to be justified and uncovered with sound evidence

- Raise necessary questions as well as inquire.

- Arrive at inferences that are based on facts, data and information

- Think within different systems of thought

- Communicate effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problem and

- Continuously use standards of thinking to assess elements of reasoning to cultivate intellectual traits

Conclusion

Research into Critical Thinking proves that thinking is a skill that needs to be cultivated and applied with effort. The human mind has to be trained to think consciously so that it can be developed and used for the right ends. If not, it will lead to distortions and blunders. The concept of critical thinking can give variety of insights in content development and create solutions of long held social and sustainable issues.

Thus, sustainable development doesn't need great names as "sustainable development" to make it successful and implemented. All it needs is little accountability that every being can take up. All it needs is common sense of not using things when not required. All it needs is hard work from each one of us. All it needs is not to wait for anyone to start and contribute towards it. All it needs is the change in the process of thinking: Critical Thinking.

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