



PROCESS of LEARNING, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract:

This Research study paper depicts learning as a process of acquiring knowledge to use and extend it further by associative knowledge thus making the knowledge to be more in-depth and comprehensive. The paper thus discusses about the science of learning. Adequate focus is directed to the challenges encountered while learning to acquire knowledge. Knowledge, information, understanding and memory (short term, working memory and long-term memory) are all the outcomes of the mind involved in learning. We are all our physical bodies, enclosed within each of us is “the mind”, which makes each of us as individual. The mind engages in complex actions of thinking, deciding and planning. While thinking, planning and deciding are done by the mind, the execution of tasks is done by the physical body under the directions of the mind. **The mind is therefore the focused area of this paper.** The paper deals with how the mind when engaged in learning goes about doing it and all the related things that happen as outcomes and challenges and how one can navigate moving forward maneuvering it.

Introduction

Every Human being – nay, every living being – born in this ephemeral world has to learn to live. Living includes and also is ‘carrying out of all activities’. The mind does the ‘thinking and decision making’ that drives the bodily actions. The mind, which is subtle, carries out “thinking”. Mind is therefore a non-physical entity. The physical part of the body that represents mind is brain. The Yogic theories say mind has two levels, the Lower mind and the Higher mind. The lower mind indulges in personal satisfaction and the goals which are closer to one own interests & urges, whereas the higher mind is a plane engaged in thinking about the duties, responsibilities, societal compliance and scriptural conformance. The Psychologists call the Higher-mind as “Super-Ego” (or with a much more evolved nomenclature as deemed fit). It is directed towards Self-realization – the ultimate goal. The higher mind, in fact, is a more noble part of the person. Intentions & actions are often checked from its perspective before actual engagement, and we also call it “the conscience”. Next in the higher plane to Higher mind is the Soul. Eastern philosophy professes Soul as being existent and is beyond the Higher mind. Western philosophers though consider the existence of soul, mean it as just an ethereal part beyond body.

So, Soul according to eastern philosophy is beyond the higher mind / Super ego and is supposed to be “all perfect” and divine, and hence is not a part of this ephemeral world. Advaita Sidhantha professes that the perfect soul of the Jeevathma joins the Paramathma and becomes one with it.

Yoga Sutras, which are a part of eastern philosophy, clearly expose the components in the learning as a

process. It deals very effectively with mind - Citta – as it is called. Mind according to it is the primary reason for existence. Citta vritti is “mind looking out of the self” to learn – learn to see, hear, feel and touch to know about the objects and various things that exist when the self looks outside it. So learning happens primarily through our Gnanendriyas, which are five senses. Anything that is known for the first time, there will be a conscious learning through the “sabda-gnana & then artha process, which is talked about in the Savitarka Samadi in yoga sutras – the initial phase in yoga practice.

So learning is a conscious process that enables systematic accumulation of knowledge which is the culmination of initial knowing, understanding and then seen as a part of the memory – which again is a process. When learning is weak and ineffective the same becomes obscure and forgotten.

Method:

The process stage for steadily moving ahead in the path of yoga – Savitarka Samadhi – is applied to general learning and as a means of knowledge. Literary review and references are the tools used to bring out this paper

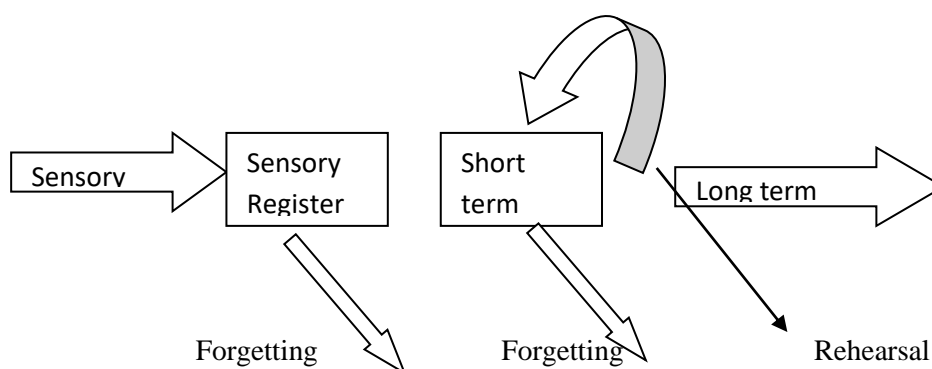
Results & Discussions

Education is a process of learning. It is informing about a subject, a matter, a thing that people should know or want to know. Knowing anything is a process of acquiring Knowledge. Knowledge at all levels – superficial or in-depth, requires conscious learning, engaging one to the task of observing, understanding, thinking, associating and consolidating all the thoughts to form a determined-whole. If the time spent is short and engaged only to

superficial understanding, the result will be only a superficial knowledge. Like, if one claims of having knowledge of a particular language, it is that the person knows or identifies the language if somebody speaks and writes, which means that a hazy understanding of the sounds and identification of the script. It would not be possible for that person to understand beyond the basic level and cannot of course have speaking or writing skills of appreciable level. The knowledge here is superficial, not application level. Application level knowledge is much vast. It is about knowing every major and minor aspect of it. In the case of language learning, if one has in-depth knowledge of the language, it would mean without saying that the person could understand, speak and write the language well.

What we learn in our lives is confined to only three things. One – is knowing about things which are concrete; the second one - knowing about certain action/s / some happenings or even situations, and the third one is knowing about what conjures up in mind as images during sleep – as dreams. They could be thoughts or images with incidents. All these add to our mind modifications. Whether all mind modifications make an impression to become a part of knowledge is again questionable. Since everything learned remains in short term memory for 15 – 30 seconds it would be forgotten unless rehearsal and reinforcement are done for the required period of time at the required intervals for the information to get into longer term memory. (Ref.No.4)

Illustration of “information getting into memory” – the process



Education is also interpreted by different people differently. Some say it is formal education in schools and some say that it is a learning that keeps happening all through life. Some restrict education as learning to acquire knowledge, and some add the skills and the behavioral knowledge. It is also felt that it is training. There are therefore umpteen number of different definitions that could be made, depending upon in which angle it is looked from. (Ref. No.1)

To add one more definition “Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. Educational methods include storytelling, discussion, teaching, training, and directed research” (Ref. No.2)

Education is therefore doing anything consciously with a view to know it or to know about it, it is observing, understanding, thinking, associating and

consolidating all the thoughts that spring up in mind by focusing on – a tangible or an abstract matter – without distraction, picking up every aspect of it one by one – all the features of it, that make it a collective whole.

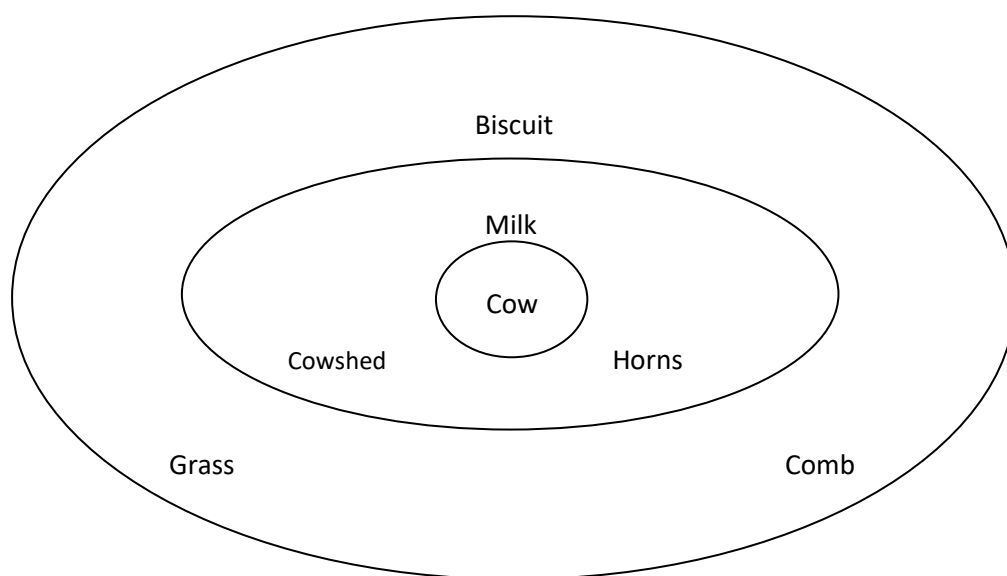
The whole process of focusing on anything totally is well defined in “Savitarka Samadhi” which is a part of the yogic process. Yoga Sutras of Patanjali explain in detail how Savitarka Samadhi initiates travel in yogic training. ‘Tarka’ is known as logic.

‘Savitarka Samadhi’ is the process of attaining trance state, adopting the path of questioning. It is the first of the few very essential steps in the attaining of Samadhi. Human mind keeps wandering behind different objects or thoughts at the same time. The shifting of mind’s attention that keeps happening (when the self does not rein in the mind and discipline it) does not allow learning to happen at all, as adequate attention on any one thing is not there.

The process of Savitarka Samadhi starts with focus on one of them. The span of time focused may be short initially but as it progresses, the spans of time will become larger and larger with continued practice to focus on things physical and mental. It is important to try to hold on to the object of focus for gradual extension of duration of total attention. This becomes easier when we fix our mind on a single object at a given time. Other objects and thoughts will no doubt creep in to disturb the focus, but then one has to reject such image flashes of other objects coming before the mind or even the disturbing thoughts that venture to occupy the mind. The fruits

of Savitarka Samadhi as a process of disciplining the mind will be attainable with repeated practice, every time improving the time span of the focus. (Ref.No.3)

As the idle mind strays and attracts many unnecessary thoughts that creep in, the engaged mind also attracts associative thoughts, which again may be meaningful with 1st or 2nd set of associations, but then, thereafter the thoughts could stray away leading to a totally unconnected thoughts and instances thus disturbing and distracting the mind. This could be explained with the following illustration:



In the diagram above, the object of main focus is COW. When the mind's attention is on the COW, the mind pulls in, certain times, as the first associative images or thoughts keeping cow in reference. You can see in the diagram, the Cow led to Milk (which could also be cowshed or Horns) as the first associative object / thought and then milk led to Biscuit. Here the association chain is Cow – gives – milk and milk is used to make biscuit. In the first association of object from Cow to Milk, the milk is directly associated to Cow, as cow gives milk. And the second associative link is - Milk is used to make biscuit. Here Milk can be directly linked to Biscuit, i.e., Cow is directly associated to Milk and Milk is directly associated to biscuit, but Cow is not directly linked to Biscuit. So there is a large likelihood of the mind getting strayed in getting out of focus of Cow.

few seconds, going out to lose its primary focus and could sometimes not return to the primary focus at all. In the process of learning, there will therefore be a break totally and mind could jump on to an unrelated thought and hence learning through associative thoughts becomes a major draw back. But if the mind is trained to come back to the Cow (in this example) and then proceed back again, so on and so forth, then the understanding of the Cow – through conscious effort – and also through associative knowledge becomes a clear learning path. (Ref. No. 05)

It is to be clearly understood here that even when the mind is engaged to focus on the first object, consciously, there is a possibility of mind, within a

So it is important that in the first understanding of an object or an idea consciously focusing on it to learn everything about it, Sabda-Artha-Gnana based focus is to be adopted. In the above image based example illustrated, Milk is the first object of association moving out of Cow – from the very name “Cow”, which is only Sabda part, which is nothing but name. Keeping focus on name first – i.e. Sabda and anchoring on it, the mind has to observe the Gnana

part – which is ordinary knowledge of the cow. How it looks, what is the size of it and what are the essential body parts and their features, etc. The attention has to be quite strong so that from the name – ie. Cow, the mind does not move out on an associative travel to an aimless direction thereby defeating the purpose of learning. The ordinary knowledge acquiring process has to be completed focusing consciously on the object of focus (the form and the features – the shape, colour, etc) and then the focus has to be shifted to specifics of knowledge (the Artha) which address the purpose for which the product is used, the inherent features, which cannot be seen but realized. The sequence of focus is (Ref No. 05):

Sabda – the sound – the name of the object

Gnana – ordinary knowledge – the size, form, shape, colour – all these fall under Gnana

Artha - The specific purpose of the object or an idea, the inherent features conveying all features which cannot be seen but can be understood and realized.

If one looks at the above picture, the main object of focus is “Cow”. The mind focusing on the Cow may drift in thought and get linked to the object Horns which is a part of the cow’s body, which is the first associative link from the main focus which is cow. And instead of coming back to cow the main focus, the object in mind “Horns” may take the mind to the next associative object Comb. So, the mind though consciously first focused on Cow, moves to Horns and then to comb. It shows that the attention is drifting from one to the other and from that to one other object.

In order to anchor the mind’s attention to the first object that is Cow, the mind has to be directed to follow the “Sabdha Artha Gnana” principle. That is the focused object has to be kept under focus area only. First the object of focus has to be studied. Sabda denotes the name of the object and the sound, then gnana – knowledge in general about the focused object has to be the area of focus. Gnana is the ordinary knowledge or information about the cow. The size, shape and other features of the object, the colour of it, its body parts and all that we could see, touch and feel. Once the gnana part is completed, the mind should be focused upon the artha area, i.e. What is a cow, the qualities of the cow, what it represents and what it is used for and great many details about how we relate to it. Here in the Artha state, the physical features do not form a part. (Ref.No.06)

Thus the detailed knowledge about the Cow is known through:

Sabda – the name of the object – here it is the cow

Gnana – all the features of it, size, shape, colour and what not. – then

Artha - What it does, why it is required, how we relate to it

Through focused attention of the object (cow) following the three areas of knowledge we can understand consciously about it. The learning will be complete. Anything that we start adding to the knowledge about cow, our mind will add it to the appropriate part of the three areas. So knowledge therefore, keeps adding but every additional aspect of the knowledge will be a part of one of the three areas. Focus on the object will be able to unravel information and take it to the appropriate area.

The above is an illustration of the Conscious learning process. We can relate it to any learning. Supposing we want to learn about “Magnet”

Magnet – the name is – Sabda

Piece of iron like metal; shapeless or shaped as required; coloured grey, - Gnana

Attracting property; Used in instruments of direction, part of a Dynamo or a motor – Artha

So conscious learning is a fresh learning of something about which we may not know or there will be areas where seeking of knowledge is yet to be done. In such a learning too, there could be certain aspects knowledge which are derived from associative connections, but the process is a collective whole. There will be learning from “pramana” seeing and learning.

Conclusion:

It is systematically derived thus that learning happens through conscious observation of the physical features one after the other and then the inherent qualities and uses of a thing. Associative information which will be an interactive knowledge with the object of understanding as focus will reinforce the knowledge and also strengthen memory. The conscious method of learning through “Sabda Artha & Gnana” will thus be a never failing pathway to learn anything that we intend to. Any object or a concept could be fitted into this principle of learning.

Limitation:

The topic of research offers limited scope to discuss. Some might feel that the research paper could be much more detailed to explain with more examples. The author however feels that the objective has been sufficiently covered with right concepts and examples.

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