

# The Failure of Educational Norms in the Wake of the Refugee Crisis

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## **Abstract**

Education is considered the fundamental birth right of every child according to the laws introduced by the UN in its 'universal declaration of human rights'. All the modern nations, the member states of the United Nations respect it. Long before the UN charter, Islamic philosophers also recognized the importance of education in the grooming of human mind for a balanced civilization. However the entire concept of education in its traditional sense seems to be losing its value in our age. With the ongoing refugee crisis, constituting now a major agenda for nations to deal with, providing educational assistance for the people who seek refuge and asylum has become a crisis of unprecedented scale. This present article will attempt to present the current situation of these displaced people and their need for education under such difficult conditions. It will try to provide analysis for the present problem and propose methods and solutions to remedy it and achieve meeting the educational needs of the deprived due to the condition they have to go through.

**Keywords:** education, UN charter of Human Rights, Mulla Sadra, refugee crisis, Syrian, Afghan and Turkish children, 'Khan-methodology', universalism and education.

Education as a modern tendency is directly connected with the concept of democracy. It is considered the fundamental birth right of every child according to the laws introduced by the UN in its 'universal declaration of human rights'. All the modern nations, the member states of the United Nations, by and large, respect it. Long before the UN charter, Islamic philosophers also recognized the potent role of education played in the development of human potential and the ripening of human caliber. Mullah Sadra, the great Persian sage of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the most illustrious philosophical mind of the illuminationist wisdom (*Hikamt al Ishraq*) explains in details the soul's need for a materialistic ground for appearance and its inherent desire to attain perfection by the means of education. The important point in the educational system suggested by Mulla Sadra urges upon the need of preparing the ground for human development. Mulla Sadra sees life as a phenomenon where there should always be an existential unity between the subject and the predicate. This is because the subject and the predicate are two different concepts, and what permits predication or judgment is their unity in existence. This unity is achieved through one's efforts in organized ways of receiving systematic education. This unity leads further to the construction of a harmonious unified world view where injustice and corruption will find no scope to thrive.

The world, however as we have known it, is sharply divided between groups, factions, and communities which experience inequities, injustice and exploitation on daily basis. According to one estimate, the UN refugee agencies and NGOs claim, at the moment there are sixty-five million people in the world who are living the lives of refugees, asylum seekers, or are known as the internally displaced persons (IDPs).<sup>1</sup> According the human rights watchdogs, there are around one hundred and fifty million people who are considered 'untouchable' in India. The recent crisis of Myanmar's unclassified refugees had shaken the entire civilized world last year. In their Besides, there are a large number of Roma people (derogatorily called 'gypsies') wandering throughout Europe for at least a millennium without any prospects of future for their coming generations. There are victims in Palestinian territory, in the disputed area of the valley of Kashmir, in several parts of the Balkans, West Africa and Afghanistan (just a few parts of the world to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.google.ba/search?q=how+many+people+displaced+in+world+today>

name) who will never see in their life time the philosophical insights of Mulla Sadra or the magnanimity of the UN charters as game changers. They are doomed by birth to stay deprived in this world which claims rights not just for humans but for their pets as well.

It is generally believed by the entire civilized world that the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)’ is a milestone document in the human history.

‘Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, the Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 (General Assembly resolution 217 A) as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. It sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected and it has been translated into over 500 languages.’<sup>2</sup>

The article 26 of the human right’s charter introduces the declaration regarding the rights all humans have to elementary education.

‘Article 26:

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.’<sup>3</sup>

The charter sounds great in its format but the ground reality has always been very different. Since its introduction in 1948, almost 70

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

years ago, the number of the illiterate people worldwide has increased consistently and despite all the budgets allotted for the cause of education at the moment the official count (which is seriously a modest unrealistic count) suggests that '781 million adults over the age of 15 are estimated to be illiterate.'<sup>4</sup>

In the wake of the unprecedented refugee crisis in the world and the growing concerns of the looming shadows of wars in Western Africa, South Asia, the Balkans and the Middle East, one wonders how education would function in future. And what would be the means that could provide every child with its birth right, a gift from the UN, education. It will be interesting to note that already many nations have budget cuts when it comes to their annual expenditure on education. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sudan, Somalia, Libya, Syria and many other nations have notoriously invested more in arms bargain at the cost of their education budget. It seems that the ever growing refugee crisis coupled with the 'wars in pending'<sup>5</sup> in many parts of the world, education stands very little chance to play in human development as a resource.

Bosnia Herzegovina, quarter of a century after its war of 1990s, has hundred and seventy IDP centers where over 90 thousand people still live in crushing circumstances. The Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan, the afghan refugee camps in Pakistan and now refugee centers throughout South-East Europe, Turkey and in European Union are reflections of the ongoing catastrophe with very little resources available at hand to resolve it. The political turmoil and uncertainty in Turkey recently has given rise to a flux of refugees crossing the borders into South-East Europe on daily basis. The social and economic pressures are felt by all the nations in this region as this sudden outbreak of refugee movement has caught many nations unprepared. In Bosnia for instance the refugee centers are completely packed and governmental institutions are seeking help from private philanthropists and NGOs. In Serbia, the name "camp" is literally used for open parks where refugees stay and sleep without shelter. Bulgaria and Macedonia have the uncountable number of people illegally entering the borders, the people for whom there are no resources available for accommodations.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.google.ba/search?rlz=1C1AVUA\\_enBA781BA781&ei](https://www.google.ba/search?rlz=1C1AVUA_enBA781BA781&ei)

<sup>5</sup> Khan, Shahab Yar, lectures on Renaissance, 2018.

The most disturbing thing that one can observe is the number of unattended children that travel without any protection literally thousands of miles. All the 'forms' for procedural purposes distributed by the UN among the refugees include specific column for unattended children on the move by their own. Sometimes the ages of these children are not more than 10, 12 or 13. And obviously they lack the skills to communicate in any other language but their mother tongues. It takes sometimes weeks and months before the UN agencies manage to find and interpreter who could help these children to tell the story of their catastrophe and then finally apply for asylum. During their tragic journey many of these children, as they happen to be the most vulnerable, are kidnapped and abused by the human traffickers and smugglers. Many of these children who apply for asylums are then sent to rehabilitation centers as well because of their traumatic things they have experienced on their way to seek a future for themselves away from their homelands. The UN agencies try to provide whatever comfort they can in terms of food, clothing and psychological treatments but we can well imagine that if finding an interpreter takes months how conveniently a child psychiatrist, a volunteer teacher or a volunteer family to act as parents can be found.

If one can see the traumatic faces of some of these children who travel alone and even those who are accompanied by their mothers, the women who were themselves abused and tortured on the way, one would realize that education is perhaps the last of the things that these people are bothered with. The matrix and dimensions of life, as a result of this growing crisis, is changing fast not just in the East but in the West as well. The crisis of refugees in general and of these unattended children in particular may become soon the ultimate human disaster and this already economically and ideologically shivering world, might see soon the chaos of an unprecedented nature. These refugee children in another five to seven years will be in their twenties. They will be barely educated, poorly accommodated and hardly appreciated. Their response to the world can be catastrophic and it is possible that when that future crisis begins it could very well be the final crisis faced by the human civilization as well.

In the meantime, the progressive and apparently balanced nations are going through their own civilizational crisis related to education. In his recent article, Professor Shahab Yar Khan has provided details

and solid data to prove that education is on the collapse worldwide. He has quoted at length from *the Guardian* and *the Washington Post* to argue that the best of the best economic powers are unable to cope with their crisis due to their fatigued out and exhausted education systems.

Professor Khan, after defining education as “art of seeking alternative modes of thinking” discusses in detail the hollowness of our educational systems and therefore forecasts the bleak future that awaits the mankind since the educated elite of the world remains as hollow as the systems that produced it. I would like to quote at length from his article to bring round my point that beside the crisis going on in schools and universities another storm is building up inside the refugee camps.

‘The model teachers are the ones who commit to their subject as ideological symbolism, they happen to be their thoughts personified, their vision of the present, past and the future of their communities is not blurred by ambition and desire but remains philosophical and they are the ones who never speak a word that they do not live and never live what they do not speak. The model teacher can bring up a community by freeing it from the illusions of material measures of success and induce a vision where adopted poverty (not inflicted poverty) appears as a matter of grace not shame. The model teacher is a liberator of the community from its narrow goals of acquiring possessions, corrupted spirit of competition of society to own more resources for personal purposes, vulgar and cheap entertainments in the name of ceremony, ritual, fashion or just killing time and guides it towards a set of ideals set by the personal example of sacrifice (the root meaning of the word is ‘sacred’, thus in the wider sense of the term), love, compassion, dedicated commitment, inventiveness, creativity and sense of good judgment and sensibility. However as already observed, this model teacher is not to be found without much pain (if at all) in our ironically developed world.

It seems that it is very easy to be adherent of Socratic principles, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam etc. But it’s somewhat impossible to inherit the traits of Socrates, Buddha, Christ or Muhammed (SA). All the followers of the great masters of the mankind as soon as possible, just to begin with, if start living the lives of the social model of their heroes, the world will improve the following instant. Live the lives of modesty without any quest to increase personal wealth or to acquire material possessions beyond the range of what we may call the ‘necessary’. This in simplest possible words is the definition of the word,

character. Without this character, we cannot have the characteristics of a teacher whose influence revolutionizes the minds of the youth of a community. This is the bond of 'selflessness'. Without this, all shall remain, all the efforts of introducing pedagogical methods and arranging teachers' training sessions mere 'makeup', a wasted effort that must result into the kind of the world we live in.'<sup>6</sup>

I am in full support of the idea launched by professor Khan and I think that the character building program is of the utmost importance instead of ordinary school programs introduced in refugee camps. It has also been noted that in refugee camps concept of examination and grading is of no avail. 'The schooling experience of refugee students in the United States is inherently complex and demonstrates tensions between students' high aspirations and true opportunities present within the host culture'.<sup>7</sup>

This article also demonstrates the problems that a refugee encounters during and after his education in the center. The article introduces a term 'refugeeness', a term that involves a very wide range of cultural, religious and race related issues. This is however for sure that the concept of education in a refugee camp is not essentially accompanied by the promise of happy future life for which a student joins university and academia. The traditional education becomes futile as a concept in the camps as the utility value of education cannot be translated into real life circumstances in the case of these refugee children. It is of utmost significance then to apply, what I may call, 'Khan-methodology' and help these children to groom character through non-traditional ways of education where syllabuses and examinations are simply by passed.

We can divide the refugee children as a subject into further categories. There are a very large number of illegal immigrants from Afghanistan in Europe at the moment. The Afghan refugee children enter Europe normally not accompanied by their parents and they normally come from very poor backgrounds, mostly from the areas where schools have long been destroyed by the extremist groups of Taliban and ISIS. The cultural and social background of these children is in complete contrast to that of the children coming from Syria.

<sup>6</sup> Shahab Yar Khan, *The Signs of Time*, vol. 78, p. 94-95.

<sup>7</sup> <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ej903571> Issues In Teaching Refugees In Us Schools.

Syrian children until recently, before the rise of ISIS in the region, had decent lifestyle with secure education and civilized cultural life around them. Their outlook and perception of the world is different from their Afghan counterparts. It will be an impossible task to educate both kinds of children through some volunteer teacher under one roof.

Even bigger is the difference when we look at the latest wave of the refugees running away from Turkey. Many of these children from Turkey had parents from professional classes and nurtured high hopes for their future life until recently. More than 150,000 people have been detained and some 80,000 including academics, judges, doctors, teachers, lawyers, students, policemen and many from different backgrounds have been put in pre-trial detention since the summer of 2016 by their own government. Many thousands tried to escape Turkey via illegal ways as their own government cancelled their passports. There are currently believed to be a well over two hundred Turkish families living in refugee camps in Greece. There are other thousands who sought refuge in different countries mostly in Europe.

These children from Turkey have never seen war while the Afghan children were born and brought up in the war-zone. In case of the Syrian children, they have only recently encountered it. Since the civil war began there in March 2011, an estimated 100,000 people have been killed, five million have been displaced within Syria and over two million, half of them children, have fled to neighboring countries.

Humanitarian agencies have struggled to reach people in desperate need of assistance in both government and rebel-controlled areas, hampered by ongoing conflict and government-imposed bureaucratic restrictions. During the almost three years of conflict, 22 Syrian Red Crescent volunteers have been killed and several aid workers have been kidnapped, facts that hint that a political or military solution to stop the killings in Syria seems a bit remote and that humanitarian assistance, in addition to the immediate needs, educational needs are also difficult to deliver. It will be impossible to have a make shift classroom in a containers sponsored by the UN and lecture conducted by a fresh university graduate to understand the complexities of minds of these three kinds of refugee children gather together as colleagues.

In the wake of this unprecedented catastrophe all the traditional manners of educating the youth have failed. All the great scholars who have ever introduced pedagogical methods and have ever written on



the essential need for education in grooming young minds seem to be lost in this wilderness of our age. Universalism and cultural context of education seem to be the things of the past. Even the greatest words written by the greatest of the scholars of the modern era, all of a sudden seem losing their meaning and appear to be the call from a distant past.

The following statement about the universalism of education by Bertrand Russell now echoes an age which had the luxury to think and philosophize things. In the age that we live in all the decorum of educational studies and apparent purposefulness have lost value and the entire meaning of education is now centered around the need to have a psychologically restrained mind which can be of less damage to a society that it originally does not belong to. Russell speaks of universalism and we wonder if this ease and luxurious thinking would ever be of value to us again in this world which is on the verge of total destruction.

‘We cannot regard a method of education as satisfactory if it is one which could not possibly be universal.’<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Russel, Bertrand, *On Education*, UNWIN Ltd. 1930. P. 17.

## NEUSPJEH OBRAZOVNIH NORMI U SVJETLU IZBJEGLIČKE KRIZE

### Sažetak

Obrazovanje se smatra osnovnim pravom rođenjem svakog djeteta prema zakonima koje je UN usvojila u svojoj “univerzalnoj deklaraciji o ljudskim pravima”. Sve moderne nacije, države članice Ujedinjenih nacija poštuju to. Dugo prije povelje UN-a, islamski filozofi su također prepoznali važnost obrazovanja u pripremanju ljudskog uma za uravnoteženu civilizaciju. Međutim, čitav koncept obrazovanja u tradicionalnom smislu izgleda da gubi svoju vrijednost u naše vrijeme. S tekućom izbjegličkom krizom, koja sada predstavlja glavnu agendu kojom se nacije bave, pružanje obrazovne pomoći za ljude koji traže utočište i azil postalo je kriza bez presedana. Ovaj sadašnji članak će pokušati predstaviti trenutnu situaciju ovih raseljenih lica i njihovu potrebu za obrazovanjem u takvim teškim uslovima. Pokušat će pružiti analizu za prisutni problem i predložiti metode i rješenja za njegovo otklanjanje i postizanje zadovoljavanja obrazovnih potreba obespravljenih zbog stanja koje moraju prolaziti.

**Ključne riječi:** obrazovanje, Međunarodna povelja o ljudskim pravima, Mulla Sadra, izbjeglička kriza, sirijska, afganistanska i turska djeca, “Khan-metodologija”, univerzalizam i obrazovanje.