

*Light Upon Light*

## **The First Step Towards Decolonization of Art Education in Pakistan**

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I propose decolonization of art education in Pakistan as a counter discourse to the paracolonial imperative. I institute this discourse by a methodology, deployed under the overarching nomenclature of intellectual disruption. I posit intellectual disruption as a remedial intervention, an alternative aesthetic code, situated and embodied to unmask, destabilize, and unnerve the networks of recolonization. To disrupt, I unpack the locus of corporate deceit, initiating in its wake the first step towards decolonization. I understand corporate deceit in its fundamental capacity for knowledge procurement, rapid dissemination whilst shrinking investment flows in intellectual labour. I believe cultural capital fraught in the deficit of intellectual labour is not beneficial to growth. I consider it retrogressive. Positioned within the field of higher education in the Arts, I underscore the need of a correlation between the modalities of plastic arts, the norms of academic inquiry, the conventions of corroboration and verification, that ensure intellectual labour, seeking in its wake the validation of the normative function of art and enabling its connection to life. In the production of art, the absence of intellectual labour results in the disjuncture between materiality, intentionality, experientiality and intelligibility. When intellectual labour is eschewed from the equation, an anomaly is set in motion. Materials are deployed as decoys to substitute the paucity of cerebral content. It produces detritus. The production of art, in the absence of transparency of thought emboldens intellectual promiscuity and theft. Subletting, out-sourcing, rehashing of content and descalation of provenance determinations inflate the intellectual deficit. I believe this is injurious to the integrity of aesthetic inquiry as a means of knowledge production. While the corporeal is embodied, affords the illusion of presence and hence authenticity, the knowledge thus produced is academically untenable and at best an object of gross entertainment to appease the gut. Academic integrity is indispensable to aesthetic inquiry. And aesthetic inquiry is integral to the realisation of individual-collective autonomy. Initiated in Doctrinal Sufism and located within the Hallajian tradition, I invite negative social sanction whilst I propose disruption by intellect to unsettle what I believe profoundly detrimental to academic pursuit.

To perform intellectual disruption in this brief exposition, I give myself permission to dismiss Noorjehan Bilgrami's overtures at the Faisalabad Literary Festival in soliciting the distribution of the Expo 2020 Dubai across the national curriculum. In the interview with an incisive albeit urbane Risham Hosain Syed, Bilgrami labours under a somewhat obscure, verbally perplexing, seemingly didactic regime of truth, wrestling with the notion of culture, society, and the arts. Given the notional uncertainty, theoretical opacity and academic disconnect which her account ultimately presents, I find Bilgrami's discourse reflective of an unexamined hedonistic petulance, a naïve form of nationalism, and a rudimentary and characteristically banal religious tokenism that underscore a dangerous flaw in perception related to the production and curation of artifacts as social

objects of palpable import. Devoid of a sound theoretical matrix, the discussion in its entirety is tedious and facile, largely descriptive, reliant on rhetoric and deprived of philosophical content. Terms such as immersive and experiential are instituted as ad-hoc contraptions bereft of genealogical anchorage, to gloss over content. The discourse is beleaguered by an insufferable sentimentalism, whilst the ideologies it presumes to espouse, largely inauthentic. I believe Bilgrami's pastiche embedded in the arboreal habitat of corporate zeitgeist, in its excessive depth-lessness and lack of concurrent validity is not an option for the national curriculum. Given the academic impropriety and the narcissistic propensities of this mega vision, I caution against an undertaking for education through corporate indoctrination. In her own words, Bilgrami has simply chosen 'the best'. Backed by capital, anything can accrue to this status. The 'best' is sovereign in its self-sufficiency it seems. It appears absolved of the compulsion to validate itself. In its 'supreme ness', the best is a non- negotiable, self-evident truth. The arbitrariness implicit in this assertion warrants scrutiny beyond the civilities of a speculative banter on television. In denaturalizing the chronotopic frame of corporate narrativization, I dedoxify the hubris that appropriates social privilege, commercial advantage, and state apparatus to recolonize and subjugate by occupying the high moral ground of education. I believe, unpacking and de-territorializing corporate deceit is the first step towards the decolonization of art education in Pakistan.

Decolonization of higher education in the arts begins with de-corporatization of knowledge production. I foresee several remedial interventions. My preliminary action entails performing intelligent disruptions. I subscribe to practices in aesthetic inquiry that establish their validity by transparency of thought. Opacity signifies disingenuity of intellect. I believe in decoupling privilege, upward social mobility, individual fiscal advantage, and its accoutrements from legitimacy, authenticity, agency, and intellectual autonomy. I propose to confront the asymmetries of power produced by disciplinary bodies that seek refuge in capital. I resist bodies that seek authenticity from a place of privilege owed to corporate hubris. I distinguish between fiscal deficit and intellectual deficit and prefer the former to greater intellectual freedoms. I seek to question academic authority reposed in bodies that do not hold the normative agency to exercise moral influence. I endorse the alignment of academic merit with requisite academic and administrative roles. I propose to challenge educational bureaucracies, contest discursive mechanisms, to arrest power flows derived from inauthentic, overbearing narratives rooted in corporate advantage and repressive state apparatuses. I advocate deconstruction of all apparatuses that instrumentalize, catalogue, codify, preserve, and objectify histories with the intent to immobilize bodies. I endorse the verification of intellectual content, its relation to aesthetic regimes to elicit correspondences between intentionality and agency, assigning it moral value, its dearth a sign of injustice and moral privation. And finally, I believe in de-seating false authority by a radical evaluation of content in all forms of social endeavour that mediates through education. The purpose of my critique is to resist the carceral continuum, end the cycle of epistemic violence engendered by intellectual misappropriation, and disavow the codes of academic supremacy that rest on the misrecognition of merit.

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