

Creativity and Mental Illness

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Abstract

Creativity involves the use of the imagination or original ideas in order to bring something in existence. Madness has to do with foolishness and things which are not sensible. It includes things done without thought or control. If we combine the two we can come to some very healthy conclusions. First, that we tend to use words, and these include creativity and madness, rather loosely, often, in contrast to what they actually mean, and in contrast to what can take us from mediocrity to greatness. Second, that all sensible human beings want happiness and abundance. People are miserable when their thoughts and deeds are poor. Third, that we have to leave the mentally ill in the care of specialist doctors. It is not a topic we can resolve. Fourth, that every human being is creative. He can achieve great things if he is trained to use his mind wisely. We tend to use madness rather loosely. Most of us clamor to be in madly in love without realizing that mad men cannot sustain love. We are also mad when we indulge in negative emotions. Hysteria is nothing but extreme or uncontrollable excitement. It is a mental disorder. Madness in art and literature is often linked with genius. In reality, it is completely anti-life. Art is selective recreation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value judgment. Literature re-creates reality by means of language. The most important principal of the esthetics of literature was formulated by Aristotle, who said that fiction is greater than history, because history represents things as they are, while fiction represents them as they might be and ought to be. This requires vision and what shape life should take, not for a dozen mad men but for the multitude of humanity.

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1.1 Introduction

We all want success and happiness. Not one among us wants madness. Yet madness does surround us in varying degrees, from the momentary to the prolonged.

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It surrounds creative people even more, though to call those who cannot create abundance for themselves, as creative, is a contradiction of sort.

People go mad or fail because they do not precondition their mind to success¹. The basic principle of success and sanity is to precondition the mind to achieve them. We can actually forecast what our future will be by the way we think in the present.

There is a law of abundance operating in life, and this abundance is for every one of us². Abundance is derived from the Latin *undare*, which means to rise up in waves. When we think and practice abundance we stimulate all manner of good things to rise up toward us in waves.

Creativity invites madness because most of us think it means living on the edge or doing bizarre things. There is a belief that anxiety is the essential condition of intellectual and artistic creation, and everything that is finest in human history. This is simply not true. Though there have been some mad men who have given us exquisite pieces of art, it is also true that a very vast majority of things were given by very sane men. Right from the creation of fire and the wheel to the locomotive and the bulb and to the recent great inventions, all have been creations of very wise and sane human being.

1.2 Creativity

Creativity involves the use of the imagination or original ideas in order to bring something into existence³. Imagination is the ability to form ideas or images in the mind. It includes the ability of the mind to be creative or solve problems⁴.

It is the function of creative men to perceive the relations between thoughts, or things, or forms of expression that may seem utterly different, and to be able to combine them into some new forms. It is the ability to connect the seemingly unconnected and create something good.

We all have the ability to create new forms from seemingly unconnected things. This should be imbedded in the mind of every human being early. All we need is discipline and focused awareness in order to begin the act of creation. We need the discipline of the body, but more importantly, of the mind.

Once we can train our minds to imagine better ways of doing things, we then put ourselves on the path of success and happiness. The Hindu concept of *karma* is nothing but creative functionality. *Karma* is creative action. It must precede *vikarma*, which is a creative thought. When both *karma* and *vikarma* combine there is an explosion of exceptional energy which ensures success without any feeling of tiredness or grossness. This is *akarma*.⁵ *Karma* becomes creative when we work without expectations of the fruits of our actions. This increases our focus and concentration. It creates great thoughts and helps us to act with exceptional excellence. This is creativity at its best.

1.3 Sustaining Creativity

It is often easier to talk or write about creativity than actually practice it. The best way to acquire it is to introduce it in our school education. However, there is a way where adults can imbibe creativity into their lives. All they need to do is create a desire to improve, with every breath, whatever we do. This may be work, sleep, the food they eat, or their relationships. It may even be their leisure time or when they do things which are against their core objectives. The harmful activities vanish once the mind is focused on improvement. They are replaced with great choices and deeds. They may not improve with every breath, but if they improve even a hundred times in their entire lives they shall be twice as happy and fulfilled from what they started.

1.4 Mental Illness

Madness has to do with foolishness and things which are not sensible.⁶ It includes things done without thought or control.⁷ It also includes insanity, which is serious mental illness.⁸ We link creativity to mental illness because we think that mainly painters, sculptors and writers are creative. We link art to living on the edge, using hallucinating drugs and existing in a world of sinful hedonism. All these are illnesses. We must link creativity with the excellence of every human being. A child is an artist. He is curious and creative. He can play without toys and things.

He can smile without jokes and amusement. Then adults begin to influence his life with their fears and limitations. And in due course, the creativity is submerged in a sea of adult pretensions. The world ceases to be pretty.

These children grow up into engineers, architects, surgeons and chefs. They either follow the past or create something utterly useless, which we admire, simply because we cannot understand what has been created. A fine example of this is modern art. It is a product of the untalented, sold by the unprincipled to the utterly bewildered.

It is not a big problem if this madness is limited to art. It becomes a problem if it starts to influence our lives, as do books. There can hardly be a stranger commodity in the world than books. wrote Lichtenberg. Printed by people who don't understand them; sold by people who don't understand them; bound, criticized and read by people who don't understand them, and now even written by people who don't understand them. ⁹

1.5 Creativity and Mental Illness

Creativity does not make us mentally ill. It is the absence of creativity which has been our collective madness. The harm we are doing to each other and to our own selves is so huge that it takes a special kind of insanity to rejoice in it. There is one estimate that 80 per cent of Indians are below the poverty line despite 74.06 per cent literacy rate. Why is education not making Indians capable of earning even a square meal a day? The answer to this is the mechanical way in which we educate our children. Mechanical training leads to mechanical lives. This has started to reflect in every aspect of our lives. India lags behind the world in most parameters of human indices. Corruption and disease, in which Indians excel, are caused by mechanical thinking. Most diseases are psychosomatic, and corruption exists when efficiency is very low. In addition, we are so ill because, by one estimate our food contains 42 per cent toxins. It is like having one tablespoon of phenyl every day. We not only consume it ourselves we also give it to our children. All this madness can change if we bring creativity into education.

1.6 The Human Mind

The human mind is extraordinary. It is many times more powerful than any computer. Yet, children cannot remember five or six books in an entire year, whereas an ordinary Smartphone has millions of books in its data.

Our minds do not fail us. We fail our minds. We use it as we use a computer-without imagination or purpose. The best among us read books and absorb information from a computer, but a very small fraction knows what to do with this information. This lack of ideas to know what to do with information creates anti-life ideas in our minds. We start to think that knowledge is power. In reality, it is not power. We can do nothing by merely knowing something. Can we even bake a break after mugging up the contents of 200 books on cooking? If we cannot, then it is time we created better ideas. They will tell us that we have to use our minds to find ways to convert information into fruitful action. This may require acquisition of skills or using existing skills in a better way. This is when we become wise. It is time we started creating wise instead of knowledgeable children, who know how to evaluate, absorb and use the material relevant to their objectives.

1.7 Creativity and Education

We can change the way we think and act by introducing creativity in education. India has 300 million students out of a population of 1200 million. The world has 1700 million students out of a population of 7000 million. One creative child can influence at least four people in many positive ways.

We can bring creativity in education by drawing out ideas from students instead of pumping them in, as we do today. For this, we shall have create groups of five or six students in a classroom, and give them small portions to read on their own. They should discuss the portion allotted to their group and then present it to the rest of the class. The students of other groups can then ask questions on the portion presented to them. Other groups repeat the above till the entire course material is covered.

The above technique ensures purposeful reading, speaking, thinking, listening and writing, five vital ingredients for true learning. It introduces discussion, brainstorming and questions and answers. It removes stage fear, improves elocution and presentation skills, and ensures peer learning and a spirit of healthy competition among the groups.

The above technique has been demonstrated on two million students in India by Creative Educators, with 99 per cent success rate¹⁰.

1.8 Advantages of Creative Education

Most of what we need to know in order to be rich and healthy is available in books taught in schools. We have lost out on happiness and success because no one taught us to use what is taught to us. A class X book in English for instance, has a chapter which tells us putting our vegetables and fruits in lukewarm water for twenty minutes remove a large percentage of toxins in them. Another chapter tells us to consume 600 milliliter of monounsaturated oil and 300 grams of sugar in a month. Twenty percent of diabetes and heart attacks could have been reduced in India by using just this simple information. Yet, so obsessed our children are in passing an examination that the real virtue of what they learn is lost.

1.9 Definition of Terms

The truth or falsehood of all of man's conclusions, inferences, thought and knowledge rests on the truth or falsehood of his definitions.¹¹ We would have saved a lot of time and inefficiency if all of us had used a dictionary with every line that we read. The meanings of creativity and education given earlier have been extracted from a dictionary. These have been derived after hundreds of years of accumulation of the ideas of the best minds on the subject.

This absence of precision in what words and terms ought to mean is one reason for mediocrity in our lives. We use words as a drug, to numb ourselves and others. It is time they fired our imagination. Words are one of our chief means of adjusting to all situations of life. The better understanding we have of words, the more vivid our imagination is likely to be.

Imagination gives health to all of us. It is also the great instrument of moral good, said Shelley. Wordsworth believed it is the mightiest lever known to the moral world. Einstein believed that imagination is more important than knowledge. The greats of the world have praised imagination throughout the history of our existence on earth. It is time we inspired every human being to use it. That is a better route to success than mere knowledge.

2.0 Good Ideas

It is not enough to be merely good. We have to be good for something which helps to advance our aspirations. This is more relevant to ideas than most other things in our lives. We are wise if we have good ideas and are able to train our minds to constantly bring them forth. Those of us who do not manage to create good ideas are either devoid of them or are obsessed with the ideas of others. This happens in religion, politics, education, health and most other aspects of our lives.

2.1 The Master Mind Club

We need power for success. Our plans are useless till we have the power to translate them into action.¹² Power is the ability to organize and intelligently use knowledge. The word is used here as organized effort, produced through the coordination of two or more people, who work toward a definite end, in a spirit of harmony.¹³

Two or more minds working in harmony to achieve a common goal creates an explosion of energy, which is hundreds of times greater than the minds of those involved. This is the principle of the Master Mind.

Henry Ford started his business in poverty, illiteracy, and ignorance. Yet, in ten years he became the first millionaire on earth because Thomas Edison, John Burroughs and Luther Burbank joined him.

Mahatma Gandhi changed the course of India's history when twenty million joined him for India's freedom.

This Master Mind principle is available to every one of us!¹⁴

2.2 Are we all mentally ill?

Are we all mentally ill? Are negative emotions signs of madness in us? Does fear not become cowardice and phobia if practiced in extreme? Does anger not become hysteria, or does worry not lead to paranoia of the same reasons? Do we not look mad when we are excessively angry or scared?

The psychology of worry and anger are by no means simple, but they do cause fatigue. The important kind of fatigue is always emotional in modern life.¹⁵

This mental fatigue caused by negative emotions can be successfully countered by creativity. Good ideas provide answers. These answers convert negative emotions into positive ones. This is how an ace batsman converts his anxiety into concentration or a soldier converts his fear of dying into a sense of duty for his countrymen and his national flag.

2.3 Using Mental Illness Loosely

We tend to use madness rather loosely, especially when we are in love. Most of us claim to be madly in love, because that is what we have learned from literature, folklore and cinema. Love is a source of delight, but its absence is a source of pain.¹⁶ This means love should give us delight and all the emotions that go with it. This is only possible if there is a fair share of delight from either end. This delight can be sustained only if there is great admiration for a person's qualities. These qualities are available to creative human beings.

Is man creation's masterpiece or is he nature's sole mistake? Is he reasoning or a reasonable animal? Is he a Beethoven or a Hitler? Should we laugh at man or cry for him? Should we worship man or curse him?

The answers to all the above is the difference between a creative and a witless clod and between a man who creates paintings we cannot understand and one who upgrades our minds with his art.

2.4 Madness in Art

Madness in art and literature is often linked with a sign of genius. In reality, it is a terrible thing to have, because it is so much against every parameter of existence. A great artist simplifies things. Art is not a revolt against man's fate. It is ways to resolve the sorrows and failures attached to his fate. It is truth discovering itself. That is why art can never be madness, because it should never let go of what the eyes see and what the ears hear. An artist may interpret what he sees or hears but his starting point is what he acquires through his senses.

Art is selective recreation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value judgement.¹⁷ Literature recreates reality by means of language¹⁸. The most important principle of the aesthetics of literature was formulated by Aristotle, who said that fiction is greater than history, because history represents things as they are, while fiction represents them as they might be and ought to be.¹⁹ This applies to all forms of art.

This change from life as it is to as it ought to be requires a set of rules and a code of ethics laid down by the creative artist. It is the difference between goodness and mediocrity. If we get up a better human being after reading a poem or a novel then we have been part of creative artistry. Otherwise, we have just read something very ordinary and mediocre.

2.5 Conclusion

This representing of things as they might be and ought to be is not an act of madness or mental illness. It is an act of sanity and creativity at its very best. It requires vision and what shape life should take, not for a dozen mad men, but for the entire humanity. Creativity is the indispensable quality for the communication of a moral ideal. It requires both vision and mental discipline. It requires understanding of the universe that surrounds us and the role and aspirations of human beings that exist in it. This is not mental illness. It is sanity at its disciplined best.

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