

## Editorial

*Sapere aude* - “Dare to know” or “Dare to think for yourself” in other words, have discernment/be wise. The words of the Roman poet Horace appear in his work the *First Book of Letters* (20 BCE). In *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2018), Yuval Noah Hariri, the Israeli historian says, “In a world deluged by irrelevant information, clarity is power”. Two scholars, two millenia apart. An idea from twenty centuries ago still has resonance in the twenty first century. How many people have the courage, the clarity of thought and the skills to be independent thinkers free from the shackles of penurious reason? An independent thinker will ideally be someone who is able to think clearly and rationally; to understand the logical connection between ideas and be able to identify, construct and evaluate arguments; who can uncover inconsistencies and errors in reasoning; who can think outside the box. These qualities are what someone with critical thinking skills learns to do. Moreover, a critical thinker trains the self to solve problems systematically, identify the relevance and importance of ideas and by having the capacity to question the self can reflect on the justification of one's own beliefs and values and make accurate decisions. Such a thinker will be able to examine an issue from different perspectives and viewpoints.

A tall order indeed but with training and practice, achievable. Can a rational thinking person be chained by ignorance, superstition, caste and class prejudices, religious bigotry and credulity? In the current climate of bogus information, propaganda and fake news, there is a need for greater alertness and scrutiny for what is often misinformation masquerading as information. Are we living in an era where shared objective standards for truth is fast disappearing? Is the post-truth era upon us? Yuval Hariri points out “But if this is the era of post-truth, when exactly was the halcyon age of truth?” He goes on to say “A cursory look at history reveals that propaganda and disinformation are nothing new, ... In fact, humans have always lived in the age of post-truth. *Homo sapiens* is a post-truth species whose power depends in creating and believing fictions” (232-3).

This is where a generous helping of skepticism is required to sift through the colossal babel of mis/information proliferating on various media particularly on the internet. In the age of post-truth when it is difficult to distinguish truth from lies, one faculty that is of utmost need is critical thinking. Critical thinking is a skill that needs to be nurtured, encouraged and strengthened in the face of the constant onslaught of deliberate twisting and stifling of the truth by agents in the digital and the real world.

The key word here is the word critical. The word 'critical' derives from the Greek word *kritikos* (meaning discerning judgement) and *kriterion* (meaning standards). The word refers to the development of “discerning judgement based on standards”. Tracing its intellectual roots to

the teaching practice and vision of the early Greek philosopher Socrates who established the importance of seeking evidence by a method of probing questioning known as “Socratic Questioning”, critical thinking is a strategy that foregrounds the need for clarity and logical consistency. Plato, Aristotle and the Greek skeptics took this approach further by advocating skepticism, that is, developing a questioning attitude towards generally believed facts or knowledge. From this classical Greek tradition emerged the need for those who aspired to understand more profound realities, who sought a comprehensive, well-reasoned response to broader and deeper thought beyond what is understood on the surface. This tradition of systematic critical thinking has continued through the centuries. It is embodied in the writings and teachings of Thomas Aquinas, in the works of scholars of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment thinkers, Immanuel Kant for one who used the phrase *Sapere aude* in his essay “Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?”

The questioning spirit thrives in institutions of higher learning which aspire towards “intellectual inquiry, critical reflection and scholarly integrity”. It is a quest for truth and educational institutions have a fundamental role to play in the development of critical thinking skills which enable students to develop abilities, capabilities and values which can be applicable to life beyond the boundaries of the classroom. This begs the question – What is the purpose of education and what can be achieved from education? Education is not only the “production and transmission of knowledge”, for one may ask – We gain knowledge for what purpose?

The purpose of education is to teach us values, to be better responsible citizens, to be civilized and contribute towards the growth and enrichment of the human society. It is not the mechanical acquisition of data and information. A true academician works towards the holistic development of an individual who learns to have a deeper and finer perception of his or her world without prejudice. Education, in essence, can liberate a person from the bonds of bias and misplaced beliefs. The vital tool towards the “emancipation of human consciousness from an immature state of ignorance” (Immanuel Kant) is critical thinking.

Without these higher-order skills how will the cultivation of intellectual discipline and standards take place? Poor thinking leads to mistakes, waste of resources, inefficiency and loss. A sloppy thinker creates confusion and illogical, irresponsible, shallow thinking is self-serving in its short-term ends. Institutions of higher education are beset with serious concerns – questions of credibility in terms of the quality of education provided, questions on the competence of teachers, on the worth of a degree conferred to students, political interference, corruption in teacher appointments, in the management and utilization of funds to name a few. These questions should not be left unanswered. Our advancement or growth in a better direction can take place when the questioning mind, with courage, does not shy away from seeking answers in its quest for truth.

The search for truth leads to knowledge. It must be pointed out that, there is no fixed set of knowledge. Knowledge is created by constantly questioning existing knowledge which opens the door to an ever-widening domain of knowledge. In this domain, a corollary to critical thinking is

academic freedom. Academic freedom creates the necessary condition for the development of critical thinking. The two are complementary to each other and our institutions, our colleges and universities would benefit when academic space is created for critical thinking to flourish.

We welcome our readers, contributors and supporters to another edition of the Fazl Ali College Journal. The papers reflect the diversity of thought, approaches and studies which represent the spirit of the journal in its multidisciplinary. They stand as examples of how critical thinking fosters inquiry, reflection, empirical studies, the pursuit of facts and data and the questioning of assumptions made. By thinking across boundaries, they are a sample of the fruit of ongoing projects, adoption of multiple perspectives and the interpretation of data obtained adding to the ever expanding domain of knowledge both *a priori* and *a posteriori*.

## References

Hariri, Yuval Noah. *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. London: Penguin, Random House, 2018.

Joseph, Tinu. “Role of Critical Thinking and Academic Freedom in Higher Education” in SSRN Electronic Journal – January 2017.

Online Sources: “What is Critical Thinking” <https://philosophy.hku.hk/think>