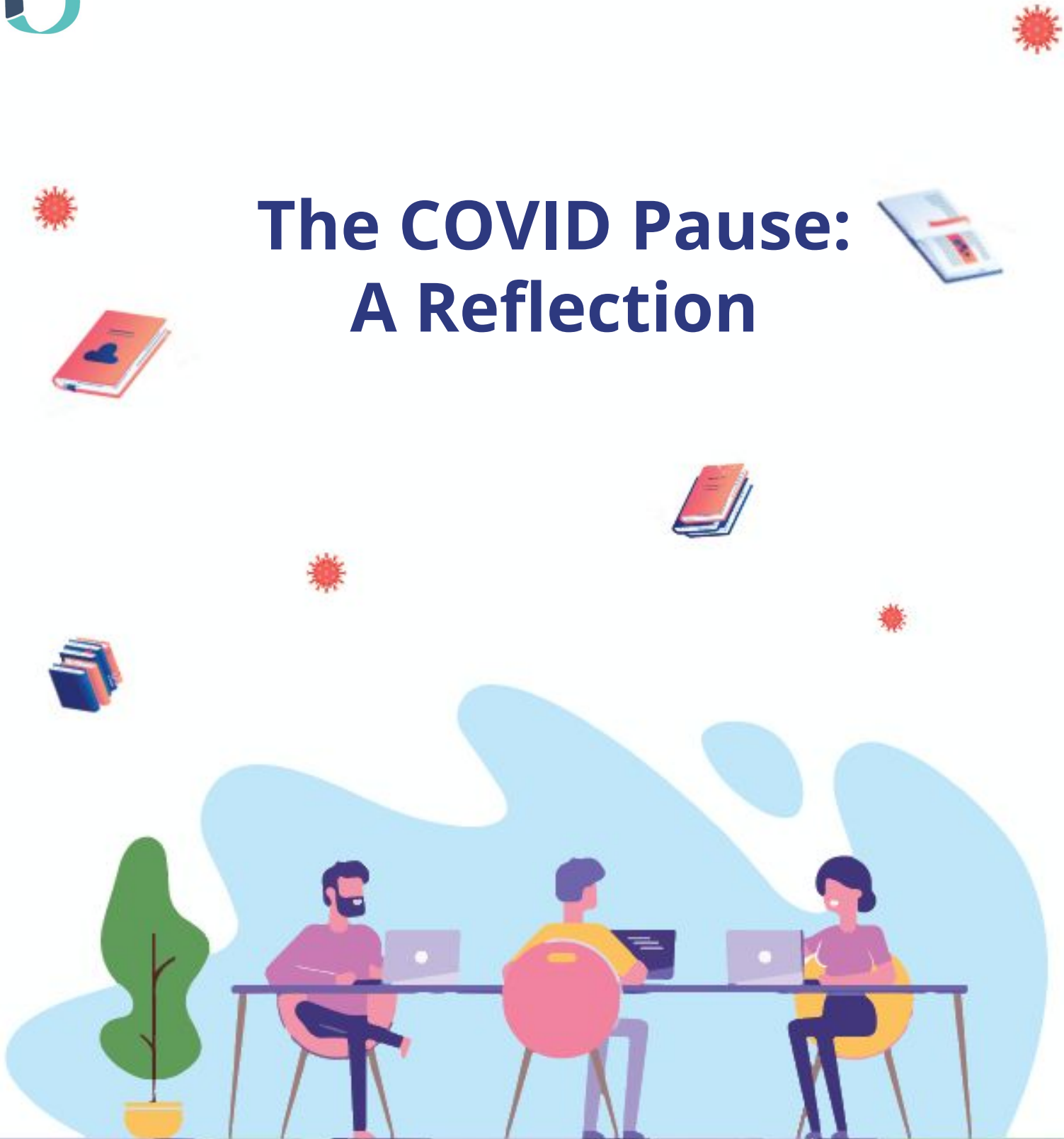




July 2020

The COVID Pause: A Reflection

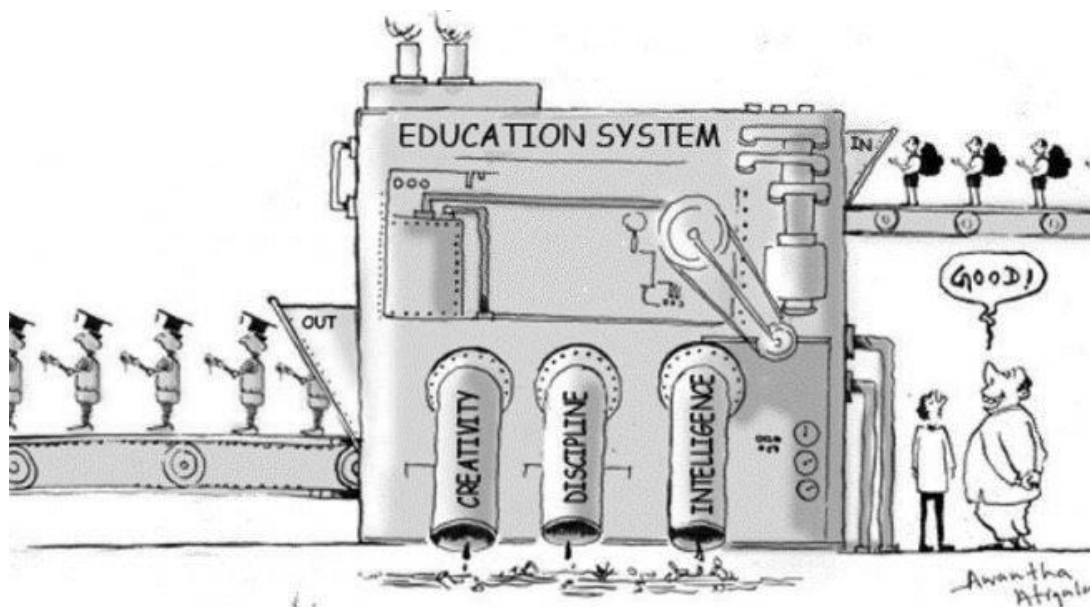


The Fleet Street

With what has been happening over the past few months in the world, it seems quite appropriate for the student media body of a reputed educational institution to talk about our education system. Through the latest survey, we have been able to collect your opinions, which have contributed largely to the creation of this article. Our humble request is that you read this with an open mind. Now is the time to stand back and look at things from a neutral perspective.


-The TFS Team

A well known fact about education is that it involves accumulating knowledge about what humanity has achieved so far, so as to use it for a variety of purposes (Note : It is not representative of knowledge as a whole; we learn to eat, walk, run, etc. at home). There is no doubt that it *is* necessary. Then why, one could ask, is there so much controversy linked with something as sacred as knowledge? Why is it that we criticise the very foundations upon which we have learnt to speak, read, write, learn, connect and question?





<https://bit.ly/2BXFm08>

The answer stays hidden behind a wall of safety which society provides. The existence of taboos (Mental health and sexual well-being, for example), absolute morals (*This* is right and *that* is wrong) and hierarchies of wealth are deemed acceptable by society. As a consequence, when it comes to dealing with the existence of these issues, the education system conveniently diverts from them by keeping students occupied with highly competitive evaluation schemes, systematic rote learning and the ridiculous notion that academic results are synonymous with social status.




The primary motive of learning is to develop rational human beings who can critically think and evaluate choices in their life. The essence of having a classroom is to debate and discuss the contents being taught to us and not just accept them as they are said. This form of learning has slowly died out due to the flaws in the system over the last few decades with emphasis shifting towards just marks and not understanding. Also, Information is so easily accessible now, that we have forgotten what it means to understand different points of view, or to think critically.

COVID-19 has thrown some light on this problem, since it is time to switch to online modes of learning. Teachers now face the difficulty of not having to interact with their students while having to continue teaching and advance their own knowledge simultaneously. Students now worry that their futures will be jeopardized (missing out on internships/placements, inability to travel for academic purposes). It is quite reassuring to see that many educators have used this opportunity to try unorthodox teaching methods to convey information, utilising the power of the internet to overcome barriers which have come up due to the lockdown. *It should now also be quite clear that their intention is to spread knowledge that they have gained on those particular subjects, and not torment students.*



Where, then, lies the problem?

It is the eagerness to evaluate. To follow "Protocol". Human beings have often been known to *not* embrace change, even when change is the answer. Evaluation simply *should not* be our top priority - especially during a pandemic. This point can be argued, day and night, yet it is an irrefutable fact that this is the position in which we find ourselves.





Now that the problem has surfaced, we may give examples from our experiences. In light of recent events, maybe it is time to analyse the decisions that have been made due to the lockdown.



- **Minutes of the Senate meeting:** About 25% of the students were happy with the decisions, and 50% feel that a better job could have been done. We must accept the fact that no single solution can make everyone happy. All things considered, the administration has done a commendable job in taking student's concerns into consideration (bias has been introduced into the new evaluation scheme). They have held rigorous discussions with the student body, and it has been decided to keep off-campus final evaluation: in most courses, students and faculty members have come to an agreement through the class representatives. It is during moments like these, when students and teachers meet on common ground, that we realise that educators cannot be the focus of our blame. It is purely the innate, competitive nature of humans and blindly following protocol that makes the system oppressive.
- **Online evaluation:** The point of final evaluation is to have a means to an end. Ending the semester abruptly, as tempting as it sounds to many students, means that courses come to a stop abruptly and it would not make sense to pass them off as "complete".
The minutes from the Senate meeting conveyed a decision to give weightage to both tests because tests are the *"only clear foolproof evaluation"*. This elicits the system's lack of trust in its students. Society with its preconceived notions has always only questioned the integrity of the students and youngsters while failing to give the space to correct themselves and become better people. The concept of a test is itself an example of lack of trust that the students will do the assignments, term paper and projects with integrity and sincerity.

There is no doubt that the semester workload is high. However, does that imply that we cannot find time for activities outside of the curriculum? How is it that many other older colleges find the time to do so? Could it be our complacency or lack of maturity that prevents us from doing so?

After viewing the responses from the second survey (Quarantine Queries Pt. 2), it is quite clear that many of us have started finding time to do so. Cooking, Painting, Digital art, music and stitching were some of the many interesting and recurring responses that we'd received from you. The lockdown has indirectly proven to be a reminder that we forget some of our interests simply because our education system does not undertake a holistic approach. It is definitely in our best interests to pay attention to that which is not in the hands of the system.

“*The only way to move forward is not by taking two steps forward and one step back. It is by stopping to analyse whether we're going wrong at each and every step, while continuing to move forward.*”

On a concluding note,

From an engineering perspective, we should keep our heads held high, and observe that our role to play in the future, to combat global crises, is of utmost importance. In order to do this, we must break any stigma associated with it and regard it not as a status in society, but as a tool to help overcome our shortcomings from the viewpoint of sustainable development.



The Article

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I enjoy pondering about topics that have shaped the world into what it is today, and I champion critical thinking. I have strong views, going against rules and regulations in our society, and I believe in free speech. I'm currently a 2nd year UG student, studying Electrical Engineering.

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