

The Educational Crisis as Reflected in Russian Literature in the 20th Century

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Abstract. On the threshold of the 21st century, we are witnessing unprecedented demand for higher education, which plays one of the central and crucial roles in the modern world: education is the only “instrument” that translates any nation’s spiritual achievements; it facilitates the development of a profound and harmonious personality: a person who is capable of seeking out and mastering new knowledge, thinks creatively, and makes outside-the-box decisions, which is the keystone of the country’s future social-cultural and economic development. Thus, changes in political, economic, and social establishments define the need for reforming the entire public consciousness and, above all, education as one of the fundamental spheres of human life. The culture crisis that broke out in the early 20th century is associated with the devaluation of common values.

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Introduction

The educational crisis became a characteristic and “universally recognized feature of modern times at the turn of the century”. It is a “crisis that has showed up in the modern world in each sphere of life. It has taken different forms in each country” [1]. The theoretical realization of the crisis goes back to the late 60s-early 70s of the 20th century – the time the book “The World Educational Crisis” written by English scientist Philip Coombs came out. The author saw the essence of the global educational crisis in the rift between entrenched education systems and society’s rapidly changing life conditions. In the modern stage, this issue has been dwelt upon in the works of Y.V. Bodrova, S.B. Nikitina, V.Y. Zakharov, D.A. Karmanova, S.A. Druzhilov, A.L. Andreyev, O.Y. Lebedev, and A.A. Danilov. Researchers come to the following conclusions: in Russia, the crisis took on an especially severe form, since the young generation is forming a pejorative, derogatory attitude towards traditional values and lacks any understanding of the originality of Russia, which tends to be perceived as “backward” and “underdeveloped” [2].

The topicality of this study lies in that amid Russia’s integration into the global educational space, one of the top priority objectives is a comprehensive reformation of the educational system. Over the last decades (the post-Soviet period), attempts were made to carry out educational reforms, which stemmed from the desire to not only reconsider the world-view guidelines inherited from the past but the aspiration to forgo them. Knowledge acquired the status of a commodity, which led to pushing our primary objective out of the forefront – bringing up young people in such a way as to “bring to light the inner

needs of students with a view to beneficially cultivating in them a sense of self-discipline, self-confidence, and responsibility for oneself and others” [3]. Market relations in education became an additional basis for the moral degradation of instructors, which was reflected in their formally indifferent attitude towards their professional duties, which are sometimes combined with instructors’ abuse of discretion, corruption, and careerism. Today, according to S.A. Druzhilov, “many colleges render studying or teaching just unnecessary – you can just pretend you are doing it” [4]. What counts here is the ability to find your way with money flows – the quality of knowledge is the last thing they care about. There is a threat of losing the best traditions of national science and culture.

The entire complex of issues associated with the crisis state of education has found reflection in literature due to the latter’s being a reflection of the era. In the post-Revolution period, issues in education and bringing-up became the subject of theoretical reflexion, having attracted the attention of philosophers, scientists, and, of course, writers. This is evident in emigrant prose, in the oeuvre of G. Gazdanov, A.I. Kuprin, V.V. Nabokov, and M.A. Osorgin – we are presented here with an account of the powerful religious-spiritual component of Russian culture and then again the quest for moral guidelines. The last decade produced a number of works featuring a spectrum of topics on education and the teacher’s place in society – their primary aim is resolving the issue of the moral impoverishment and boosting the status of the teacher (“A Dragonfly Enlarged to the Size of a Dog” (1997) by O.A. Slavnikova, “Little Zacheses” (2000) by Y.S. Chizhov, “A Geographer Drinks a Globe Away”

(2003) by A.V. Ivanov, “The Green Marquee” (2011) by L.Y. Ulitskaya).

Methods

This work mainly employs the systemic-typological and historical-functional methods.

Main part

Revolutions have been a great example of crises in history. The crisis of autocracy and exacerbation of political, economic, and social contradictions in Russian society brought about the revolutions which shook the Russian state in the early 20th century. It was the revolution and Bolshevik’s ascent to power that brought into being such a unique phenomenon as the Russian Abroad, which was the effect of the crisis of Russian culture.

In 1922, Mikhail Andreyevich Osorgin along with seventy other famous writers and philosophers was exiled to Germany and lived in Paris since 1923. Among those exiled were many college instructors and humanities professionals, some of them being of world renown – N.A. Berdyayev, P.A. Sorokin, I.A. Ilyin, S.Y. Trubetskoi, A.I. Ugrimov, M.M. Novikov, and S.L. Frank.

The writer had to enter the years of forced emigration. But he never doubted he’d set foot on his native land again one day. In his works, Osorgin brings up the perennial subject of the teacher and society. He would know firsthand of what was going on with education: he had many friends from professor families. Thus, the reader comes across the images of professors and instructors whose fates are suggestive of other times coming.

In his essay “Professors”, M.A. Osorgin reminisces his law instructors at Moscow University. Each of them possesses a peculiar trait that distinguishes the person from his colleagues and has a success with students, imbuing them with unbounded love for the instructor. Law professor Mrochek-Drozdovsky was telling us about Scythians in a “dim and senile voice, trying to put out a horrible face and be playful” [5]. Roman law professor Khvostov “was a freshman buster at the outset of his career” and “was venomous and ruthless in busting our chops” [5]. Then he suddenly became a “huge liberal and got interested in the issue of women” and “start giving us A’s on the exams” [5]. Each lecture by Aleksandr Ivanovich Chuprov was like a holiday. Students and instructors loved him for his being “a great person, soft, warm-hearted, one of us”. The main character had a “continuous romance with studentship – he was amalgamated with it” [5]. Chuprov was a real Russian intellectual in the most positive sense of the word. To the narrator and his fellow students the words “Chuprov”, “university”,

“autonomy”, “freedom” were synonyms. The main character is a person who loves and knows his stuff. Much hardship also befell the professor’s son, scientist-statistician Aleksandr Aleksandrovich, who “faded away untimely in goddam emigration” [5]. All the teachers in the stories are different, but unbounded love of science and studentship is common to all of them. Oldish Menzbir tells the reader of his long-held dream to “publish a book of his, a 20-year-long opus”. The character is short of money to achieve his dream and plans on becoming a janitor in order to have a regular income. Menzbir utters words that are crucial to apprehending the situation of those times: “And no one needs it (the book). Perhaps I could have it published overseas – I’d love to have it published in Russian” – yes, “in Russian”, since he still thinks in his native language and was happy only when he had a homeland and could engage in teaching. This character is really close to the author – he is the carrier of the author’s thoughts. We observe that both have the same self-perception: there is absolutely no inferiority complex before the West. Fate made them the “Russian French” and “Romans” [6], “the last Mohicans of intelligentsia” [7]. They were fully accepted in Paris and in Italy, but still remained deeply Russian. The main characters call emigration geographic displacement of Russia. Displacement of culture in space. Osorgin is convinced that emigration unites not only those who lost their homeland but Russia which lost talented people. The main characters engaged in teaching manage to preserve their remarkable spiritual integrity: they know how to live for others and face life’s challenges with optimism. The main characters left science against their own will – they had to succumb to the cruel inhumane conditions of the 20th century, the age of the crisis of culture and civilization and an impoverishment of human values.

Osorgin’s later story “The Romance of a Professor” (1937) brings to light the essence of the modern generation reared by a cruel age. The author creates a contrast: the image of a philosophy instructor, a mentor is placed in contraposition to modern youth. The story presents the reader with a psychological portrait of a genuine teacher of Greek philosophy who adores and is highly proficient in his subject. He divides life into two parts – science he knows and non-science, which scares him. The professor is wont to deliver his lectures in an understandable manner and cannot admit the thought that students have trouble understanding him. The protagonist’s goal is to make the quiet and all-accepting eyes of his students light up with delight. While delivering his lectures, the instructor always picks one student that evinces a disposition to follow what he says. One day, his eye is caught by a girl

sitting across from him. It seems to him he feels an understanding in her eyes. Having met her by chance at a dinner party, he realizes that she was never interested in anything and by being attentive in class she was just trying to attract his attention and pass her exams effortlessly. The mirror of her soul, her eyes are a pair of “two holes into space”, empty and “answering nothing” [8]. The professor’s speculations help us notice his inner beauty contrasted with the girl’s spiritual emptiness. The reader can see the protagonist’s tragedy: dreaming of getting his work recognized, of gratitude, he takes the desired for the real and gets spoofed.

However, there are ironic images of teachers in Osorgin’s oeuvre as well. *Intelligentsia*’s main fault, in his opinion, is that they sometimes elevate themselves over reality, are scared to be funny, become misfits, and sometimes, on the contrary, “desire to win over the audience” [9] through exorbitant emotions, although the teacher’s primary aim is not to decry but accept people and help them with advice. The protagonist of the story “Fate” Leonid Viktorovich possesses the talent of a lecturer, has a wonderful voice and great eyes, a refined taste, and is scared to be funny. He writes and reads about the literature and art of the Renaissance but also makes excursions into modern Western literature. His artistic assessments are accurate, clear, and incontrovertible; they are quite in line with the views and esthetic requirements of the artistic elite of the time. The protagonist does not have many friends; people are put on their guard by the dazzling cleanliness of his clothes and refinement of his manners, but all this is just a “mask” that hides a vulnerable person who just dreams of regular, mundane happiness (having a wife and kids, getting recognized).

Education in the 20th century, compared with that of earlier times, became ideologized. After establishing Soviet power, the new government was faced with the task of doing away with illiteracy. The Russian hinterland began to get filled with volunteers or exiled members of intelligentsia, who were revered and highly respected by people. A story by V. Astafiyev called “A Photography without Me in It” (1968) features the image of a village teacher who is “polite, shy, yet not always prepared to dash forward and defend his students, help them in time of trouble, make life easier and help improve it” [10]. As humble, responsive, and hardworking is his wife, also a teacher. The villagers often do their best to help the family, which is not used to village life. In the 30s, teachers were faced with important issues: ill-equipped schools and starving students. But the prestige of the profession was undoubted: children were aspiring to knowledge and treated their mentors

with respect. There is a reason we have turned to works by representatives of “village prose”. According to German Slavist A. Hiersche, village prose is “more than just prose, than a subject – it is an artistically expressed attitude towards life” [11]. This is why issues in bringing-up, intergenerational continuity, and education became key issues in the oeuvre of many writers-villagers.

Constant control of the “political integrity” of pedagogical personnel produced a negative impact on the work and energy of teachers, whose professional activity was complicated by the harshness of the ruling regime. “French Lessons” (1973) by V.G. Rasputin, a story whose scene is now set in the second half of the 40s, features the image of a young teacher, Lidiya Mikhailovna, smart, considerate, and responsive. She is sure that “the most important thing for a teacher may be not to take oneself too seriously, realize that there’s just little one can teach someone” [12]. The protagonist learns about the dire material situation of a talented boy and tries to help him out: first she sits him at the table and feeds him real well and then sends him a basket of produce. However, all her tricks and efforts go for nothing, since the boy’s modesty and self-esteem do not let him not only confess his issues but accept her help. Lidiya Mikhailovna decides to commit a sin – she lures him into a game for money in order to give him a chance to make some money for produce on his own. However, the school’s headmaster, a chance witness in the matter, refuses to know the real reasons behind the “crime”, the act of “vitiation”. As a consequence, the teacher gets fired, but the lesson of graciousness will stay with the boy for the rest of his life.

Russian literature in the second half of the 20th century has many worthy examples of images of teachers possessing great professional and moral qualities. The moral image of a pedagogue is brought to light in a novella by A. Likhonov called “Virtuous Intentions” (1980). The protagonist, Nadezhda, a graduate of a teachers’ college, gets a job as a day-care assistant in charge of 22 first-grade orphans at an educational orphanage. Nadezhda is a pedagogue by calling, since love for children and of the job, selflessness, dedication are her main qualities. She is constantly searching for new paths to children’s souls, while she is well aware that, “ideally, pedagogy should be next to parents” [13]. Thus, the writer turns to issues of orphanage, the interrelationship between adults and children, and bringing up the rising generation. The system of education is faced with the need for preserving intergenerational continuity. This is why, in the novella we come across teachers of different ages but with similar professional views: Nadezhda, who was

a student just yesterday, the school's headmaster Apollon Apollinaryevich, head-teacher Yelena Yevgenyevna, and head of the orphan asylum Natalya Ivanovna. The writer sees the essence of the job of a teacher not only in one's professional preparation but being steeped in what one is doing and understanding that pedagogy is a "form of creative work" [13].

It should be noted that in the Soviet time ideology played an important part in bringing up the rising generation. The rules of the Communist Party were a serious lever for acting on the "morally unstable". The party reserved the right to even intrude into people's private life, which facilitated the entrenchment of common collective values. After the fall of the USSR, these "sluices" were opened. It became customary to look up to the West with its free-wheeling spirit and abandon in everything. This is why democratic trends in portraying teachers intensify by the end of the 20th century.

Writers obtained an opportunity to speak freely about issues regarding present-day education in the post-Soviet period, which brought into being images of teachers of the new time. In Russian literature, there began to appear contrastive images of teachers. Some accepted the requirements of the new era and strived to democratize the learning process through informal trust-based communication with students, while others – out of the conservative desire to fully preserve the achievements of pedagogy – behaved in an utterly old-fashioned manner.

A novel by A. Ivanov called "A Geographer Drinks a Globe Away" (1995) features a geography teacher Viktor Sergeyeovich Sluzhkin. At first, it is the image of a total underachiever: a cheated husband, a forgetful father, and a poor pedagogue, who is despised by his students and colleagues. To his wife Nadya, he is an "alcoholic, a pauper, a buffoon" [14]. Indeed, Sluzhkin aspires to attract attention to himself and his course using irregular and most often openly cheap methods: he drinks with his students, plays card with them, and swears. Without scruple, he tells his students they are not humans and all the more so persons, calling them "dough, a stupid and stinky human mass with no spiritual filling of any kind" [14]. Sluzhkin understands that the former hardshell prestige of a teacher is becoming a matter of the past, and mischiefs of yesterday, which were just capable of inelaborate tricks, are being supplanted by sometimes true minor criminals. But the protagonist's heart is crying for incorrigible F-students, with whom he is doing his best to establish a contact. In search of a way out, with bitter frankness he confesses to his former classmate Budkin: "I'm seeking man, been seeking all my life — man in another man, in myself, in humanity!"

[14]. Sluzhkin persistently tries to stretch between himself and his students "invisible threads of human kinship" [14] for his disciples to "become stronger and kinder without demeaning themselves and without putting down others" [14]. The eventual breaking-point in the students' attitude towards the teacher comes after a joint hike and a taiga river boat ride arranged by Sluzhkin, when the children begin to realize that any liberty is associated with responsibility and independence with obligations.

Thus, through the desocialization of the main character the author brings to light the personality's inner potential and Sluzhkin's best qualities come to the forefront: the ability to feel the joy of life in everyday trifles, susceptibility of nature's beauty, philosophical forgiveness of others' mistakes, conscientiousness, the ability to tell about the world as the highest miracle in a passionate and brisk manner. Eventually, these very qualities become guideposts for the students. A "thick-headed geographer" who drinks and yells in class is a disguise that hides an epitome of true humanity: forgiving, understanding, and loving people. Sluzhkin takes on the role of a mentor and aspires to prepare his students for adult life without drilling book-learned truths into them but making them deal with life's difficulties and laws. He arouses the acquisitiveness of mind, responsibility, and healthy collectivism in his students.

We come across the opposite image of a teacher in a novel by O. Slavnikova called "A Dragonfly Enlarged to the Size of a Dog" (1996). One of its main characters – Sofya Andreyevna – is a head teacher and a "stern literature woman" [15]. She tries to give students flawless knowledge of her subject not out of love for children but the desire to stress the victimhood of her profession: "She just hated most of them: for wild fights, for striving to get to each other in class – with notes, through spitting out chewed paper, for her swollen legs and patched-up stockings" [15]. Note that "Sofya Andreyevna was not ashamed of unpedagogical enmity" [15]. She matches the customary, entrenched image of a strict elderly teacher, demanding but just. Sofya Andreyevna despises everything material. Hence her "arithmetic brat check dress, which she wore to school, where she was no different from other teachers, who had creased dresses and chalk all over them" [15].

Falsehood also makes itself known in her attitude towards the parents of her students, whom she despises for their narrow-mindedness, low speech culture, being disorganized, and bad manners. Bunches of flowers given to her for Teachers' Day make her "heavily pensive" [15].

Thus, her image of a literature teacher is about substitution of notions, when sanctimoniousness is called shyness, haughtiness becomes self-esteem, and not raising her voice and her aloofness are construed as love for children.

Conclusion

Thus, radical changes that took place in the second half of the 80s and the 90s brought about a spiritual crisis in Russian society. The crisis was a result of a painful change of traditional world-view mindsets and cultural and ideological paradigms. The economic crisis and the proclamation of liberty entailed an increase in the crime rate and knocked down the spiritual-moral guideposts. The liberalization of mores and blurring of the boundaries of traditional morality provoked, in turn, a precipitous drop in the population's general cultural level. It is for a reason that Sofya Andreyevna from O. Slavnikova's novel justly notes that "there is no bringing-up for children where there is no bringing-up for parents" [15]. An abyss is growing between parents engrossed in survival amid the economic crisis and children who find themselves abandoned to their fate. As a result, schools receive students who know about their rights but have forgotten about their obligations. This is why, in novels by A. Ivanov and O. Slavnikova we come across the images of students who openly demonstrate their independence from common norms of behavior and make it look like a manifestation of the freedom of man. As a consequence, we get a decline in the prestige of the teacher and the quality of education. And the open intrusion of commodity-money relations into the education system turns learning, which is a long and painstaking process, into a mere product.

Profound internal transformations in the education system are carrying changes in the area of not only the social-economic but moral life of the country, since they affect the sphere of relations and professional ethics. However, we should keep in mind that the primary goal of education in any country is to teach one to follow one's inner voice – therefore, we cannot allow that all spheres of Russia's spiritual life be brought under the control of mass culture. It has been proven that the influence of classic culture is not only not declining but, on the contrary, growing stronger, which means there is a need to turn (if not "return") to the classic system of education. A sociological survey revealed that 36% of Russians are ready to move to new standards of education, 25% had trouble answering the question of whether we need transformations in education, and 39% were not ready to move to global educational standards. This is that very "paradigmatic crisis" situation, of which contemporary researcher Geoffrey

Harpham wrote: "There already have accumulated enough anomalies for the former paradigm or model of cognition to be discredited so much as not to be believed in any more" [16].

Inferences

1. The educational crisis is a manifestation of a deep world-view crisis, when education starts translating cultural purports differently, giving rise to a complex of social problems.

2. The causes behind the crisis of the system of education in the post-Revolution and post-Soviet periods are similar: the destruction of one form of education and adoption of another; the authorities' indifference towards the education sector; the lack of well-prepared, highly-qualified specialists; the so-called "outflow" of human resources, the emigration of learned individuals, during which the Bolsheviks orchestrated a rift with the traditions of the country's centuries-old historical cultural legacy.

3. Education in the late 20th-early 21st centuries is marked with a precipitous decline in the prestige of the teacher. This is due to the fact that spiritual values have been replaced with material and public interests with personal. The teacher is rather concerned with his career and salary, which takes its toll on his relationship with his students ("A Geographer Drinks a Globe Away" by A.V. Ivanov; "A Dragonfly Enlarged to the Size of a Dog" by O.A. Slavnikova). Yet, the reader must be accustomed to a different image of the 20th century teacher: someone who took pains to combat the routine and authoritarian traditions of the academic everyday. It is this that the humanistic pathos of works dedicated to educational issues is about (stories by M.A. Osorgin; "A Photograph without Me in It" by V.P. Astafiyev; "French Lessons" by V.G. Rasputin; "Virtuous Intentions" by A.A. Likhanov).

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