

Educational Policy in India

A Neglected Aspect

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WITH A FOREWORD BY

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FOREWORD

I HAVE gladly responded to the invitation to write a brief foreword to this valuable and stimulating little book, which has been written by my old friend, Mr. F. F. Monk.

For many years there has been criticism of the educational systems of India, especially in their higher ranges. The limited objective of high schools and colleges, the bondage of external and formal examinations, the inadequacy of many of the staffs and buildings, the lack of control over the activities of colleges by universities, the rigid uniformity of courses and curricula were, among other defects, the subject of adverse comment as far back as the beginning of the century, when the late Lord Curzon directed attention to the reform of universities. But the Commission of 1902 were unfortunately precluded by their terms of reference from considering the condition of the schools, while in the sphere of the universities they focused attention mainly on the readjustment of the administrative machinery. Indeed, the main effect of the Act of 1904 was to impose a still heavier strain on the already overlaid machinery. The position of the schools remained untouched.

The next attempt at improvement was in the direction of changing the form of universities, which should no longer be confined to administrative and examining functions, but should become teaching bodies. Though the Calcutta University Commission were enabled by more liberal terms of reference to probe nearer to the root of the matter, and though they recommended a reconstruction of the school system by removing the Intermediate stage from the jurisdiction of universities

and by the institution of Intermediate Colleges, few attempts have been made to carry out these fundamental proposals; such attempts as have been made in the United Provinces, in the Punjab and at Dacca have been imperfectly devised. The main result of the Commission's labours, therefore, has been the creation of a number of unitary universities; but as these universities, in common with the older affiliating universities, were based on the unstable foundation of a wrongly-directed school system, their prospects of success have been greatly diminished.

By the very nature of their enquiry, the Hartog Committee were engaged mainly in considering education from its political aspect. The committee, therefore, strove to examine the primary system in order to ascertain the prospects of its being successful, within a reasonable period of time, in producing a literate electorate; similarly, the committee examined the condition of high schools and colleges in order to gauge whether the training imparted therein was such as would be suitable for 'the directing classes of the future'. The committee made a valuable contribution towards the study of educational problems by their frank and fearless disclosure of the waste and ineffectiveness which persist throughout the Indian educational system. Judged by the test of literacy, the primary schools largely fail in their task, as the number of pupils who complete the course and should thereby gain a firm grip of literacy is almost insignificant in comparison with the total enrolment. Similarly, the class-rooms of high schools and the lecture-halls of colleges are clogged by large numbers of students, whose bent does not lie in the direction of literary studies; in consequence, the methods of teaching and study are not such as to provide that back-

ground of training which is required by the better qualified students. Until these elements of waste and ineffectiveness have been reduced, it was argued, the replies to both questions must continue to be disappointing.

In more recent years still, the Punjab University Enquiry Committee examined the present discontents in closer detail. In the matter of the form of universities, the committee observed that, though the unitary universities had utilized to some extent the advantages resulting from a centralized control and from a less complicated organization, in order to introduce higher standards of examination and teaching their expenditure is greater than India can be expected to bear; nor have they fulfilled the high hopes which had been raised at the time of their establishment. The committee were also doubtful whether the benefits derived from these new universities have been commensurate with the college traditions which they had eclipsed. Moreover, bearing in mind the wide distances and the limited means of communication in India, these universities cannot by themselves meet the growing requirements of a vast population. The committee therefore advocated a federal form of university, which would preserve valuable college traditions, and at the same time weld together their teaching and other resources by means of a closer control by the university. The main contribution of the committee, however, lies in their main contention that effective reform of universities is dependent upon a radical reconstruction of the school system in such a manner that universities shall be enabled to concentrate their resources upon the training of those competent to receive it. Without such reconstruction, real improvement will be impossible.

And thus it is that the system of education has been subjected to criticism from a number of different aspects, but it is the growing volume of unemployment among the educated community which has brought matters to a head and has supplied the compelling force towards reform. Recent convocation addresses, notably those delivered by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru at Allahabad and by Sir Shadi Lal at Lahore, as well as other important pronouncements, have voiced the growing demand for drastic treatment. Perhaps the most significant of these pronouncements is the resolution passed unanimously by the Universities Conference held in Delhi towards the beginning of the year:

A practical solution of the *problem of unemployment* can only be found in a radical readjustment of the present system of education in schools in such a way that a large number of pupils shall be diverted at the completion of their secondary education either to occupations or to separate vocational institutions. This will enable the universities to improve their standards of admission.

It is at this juncture that Mr. Monk takes up the threads of the argument, and with considerable force and persuasiveness describes one direction at least, in which the school system can be reconstructed. In his opinion, education must train for leadership: 'The primary need is to find or to make a ruling class in India which will be not only ready, but competent, to take over the responsibilities long discharged by a foreign ruling race, which has solemnly and frequently asserted that such transfer of rule is its ultimate intention.'

Mr. Monk is fortunately not one of those who appear to think that this important requirement can be met merely by the transplantation of English public schools. He does not plead for 'imitation public schools', but

rather for 'special secondary schools to be developed out of what is already to hand'.

The question arises why Mr. Monk's limited objective of a comparatively small number of really good schools, with manageable enrolments, and with an emphasis on training rather than on mere teaching (or cramming), cannot be attained within the existing system. Why is it that he demands also a drastic reconstruction of the school system? It is in this respect that Mr. Monk's argument may require amplification.

Mr. Monk has not dealt specifically with the question of school ages, but he has quoted with approval the following passage from the report of the Indian Military College:

There does not seem to us sufficient guarantee that boys have always received an adequate grounding in what are usually considered to be the basic subjects of school education. Again, such general education should be given, in our opinion, in a good and well-regulated school, but we observe that many boys pass matriculation at the early age of fifteen (or even younger) and then proceed to a college. They thus lose the bracing stimulus of school life and are denied suitable training in those qualities which are so valuable to success in life. . . . A college education is no substitute for a good school education (with its school discipline, its school games, and its school methods of work) for boys who are on the threshold of professional study.

It may be assumed, therefore, that Mr. Monk regards it as a *sine qua non* that, for the purpose of training in responsibility, boys should remain in a well-organized school at least until they reach the age of eighteen.

Mr. Monk's little book is so excellent both in tone and spirit, that it may appear ungracious to offer a word of criticism, but he appears to contemplate the possibility of boys proceeding from these 'special schools' to the

universities in their present state of congestion; for he paints the picture of 'a steady leavening of the masses (of students), drawn as they still will be from every type of school by the products of these institutions'. Is there not a danger that the flavour of the new wine will be lost in the sediment of the old bottles? It does not seem possible therefore, to localize this new experiment; it is inevitably part of the wider problem, which has already been discussed. The main task is so to reconstruct the school system that the present drift towards matriculation and the university life beyond shall be stemmed by a diversion of boys into other and more suitable channels; but it is not equitable that boys (and girls also for that matter) should be denied the advantages of education, mainly on the ground that they have no bent for a literary form of education. These boys should therefore be diverted, as was suggested by the recent Universities' Conference, either to separate vocational institutions or to practical occupations. It may be argued with truth that vocational institutions cannot by themselves create industries and thereby provide further opportunities for occupation, but it would not be difficult to name a number of occupations, for which training would be both desirable and beneficial; in any case, training of this type would be far more suitable for such boys than is the arid 'grind' which they now endure, much to their own expense and to that of the institutions which they attend. It may also be argued that reconstruction, such as has been suggested, would not necessarily cure the evils of unemployment. There is force in this argument, but a boy of fifteen or sixteen years of age would be far more likely to be absorbed into occupation than is a graduate, or still more a failed graduate,

who has crippled his financial resources and has become wedded to the desire for a sedentary life.

Mr. Monk has placed numberless students in Delhi under a debt of gratitude by his devotion to their welfare; he has now placed a wider clientele under a similar debt by his courageous championship of an ideal. It is possible that, even after a brief sojourn in England, Mr. Monk has not been able to keep abreast of recent developments in India, but it will be a fitting reward to him to know that there are now many who regard it as a privilege to fight under his banner.

GEORGE ANDERSON.

PREFACE

THE following monograph reproduces, with a few alterations necessitated by the lapse of time, a memorandum submitted in 1928 to the Committee on Education which supplemented the enquiries of the Simon Commission. The memorandum was acknowledged appreciatively by members of the committee but their report, owing no doubt to its preoccupation with the more general fields of education, gave no very explicit attention to the questions to which the memorandum drew attention.

Those questions concerned the urgent need for India of a great increase in the 'directing class' and of greater attention to the educational policy and practice necessary in order to secure it. This need has become even more pressing with the acceleration of political advance in the last six years; and the policy and practice advocated in the memorandum, based originally on some eighteen years' experience of the fundamental deficiencies of the school system from which college students were drawn, have been convincingly endorsed by later experience and observation.

While the memorandum was being prepared for publication very weighty confirmation of some of its main contentions was given, from a different angle of approach, by the Report of the Punjab University Enquiry Committee, presided over by Sir George Anderson. Most of the pertinent material from that source has been introduced in footnotes.

The present text has already appeared in three successive instalments in the journal *Teaching*, and reinforced

now by Sir George Anderson's Foreword may claim more authoritatively the attention that the subject deserves.

F.F.M.

London, July, 1934.

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