

THE
BOMBAY PROVINCIAL HEAD-MASTERS'
CONFERENCE

With best compliments for persual.

FIFTH SESSION
24th & 25th DECEMBER, 1949
NASIK

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
DELIVERED BY
JHINABHAI DESAI

Friends,

Our country today is passing through one of its most restless and painful periods. Some say these are the pangs of the birth of a new nation, while there are others who maintain that these are the symptoms of an unprecedented moral disintegration. The truth as usual may lie between the two extremes; but we as teachers can illafford to be passive spectators of our unhinged and perturbed national life. Whether in a bullock cart, a country craft, a bus, a train, a steamer or an aeroplane; whether in a market place, a theatre, a public meeting, a holiday camp, a religious congregation or in the company of strangers during an evening walk, one invariably hears bitter complaints against the general ebb in our moral standards. This in the first flush of our freshly won freedom which had raised high hopes in our breasts is very painful; and when one is reminded of the glorious fact that we are heirs to no less a heritage than that bequeathed by Mahatma Gandhi, one feels bitterly humiliated at our helplessness against the dark forces of public lies, fraud and corruption that are rapidly corroding us from within.

This indeed is a very gloomy picture, but let it not depress us. Let it not make us despondent and helpless; let it be as it were a challenge to our will to live. It is with that end in view that I have selected to preface my address with a general reference to this disturbing phase of our national life.

AN INVASION FROM WITHIN

The period of frustration through which we are passing is not an accident. So long as we were under the foreign domination all that was best in us was pitted against it. The external danger had challenged our will to live and we asserted ourselves by putting lofty ideals of freedom and sacrifice before our people. But with the withdrawal of the foreign rule our internal weaknesses have cropped up. It is as if there were an invasion on us from within. In our fight against the foreign rule we had forgotten that the oppressor thrives on the weakness either inherent in the oppressed or fostered in them by him. When the foreigner came, we had our own weaknesses and he added to them by creating new ones in us. He enslaved us politically, but worse than that happened when he enslaved us culturally also. He weakened us from within by creating his fifth column in our midst viz. the princes, landlords, capitalists and intellectuals. The fortunes of these classes got linked with those of their foreign rulers. But fortunately for the oppressed, the oppressor fails to foresee that when he fosters evil forces with a view to crushing others they ultimately strike him down like a boomerang. You cannot create a Frankenstein and escape him. The parasites that the foreign rule had fostered in us—(we ourselves as intellectuals being a part of them) became jealous of the monopoly enjoyed by it to exploit this helpless land. They got fired with an idealism to fight the foreign domination and the strongest among them—the capitalist and intellectuals—

joined hands in a crusade against the foreign rule. This crusade for a while lifted us above our petty self-interests. Some of us became genuinely fired with a deep love for our people. And from their midst we got some of our great leaders. Thus the hammer that fastened on us our shackles forged for us a sword also which our foreign ruler must not have foreseen. This crusade against the foreign rule tossed some of us on a high pitch of idealism but in others the poison of intellectual and cultural slavery injected by the foreign domination still persisted to live, though dormant, and with the removal of pressure from above it has manifested itself in all its virulence and ugliness. We as intellectuals have to share our own portion of blame for this great internal danger. Let us therefore be self-retrospective and discover what our duty is as an important limb of our nation during this dark hour of internal chaos and confusion.

NEED FOR A CAPACITY TO UNLEARN

As teachers is placed in our hands the shaping of the future of our country. But let us ask ourselves in all humility if we are worthy of this great mission. Our education has as it were made us completely aliens in our land. We speak the language of the people, but the contents that we handle are unintelligible to a majority of them. As between the aspirations, sentiments and thought-symbols of masses and those of intellectuals, there is hardly anything in common. How then are we to re-equip ourselves for our great national duty? We shall have to subject ourselves to the painful process of unlearning

many things which we have been accustomed to prize as very valuable. We may also have to learn and practise those very things which we have been taught to regard as low and petty. This kind of adaptation to a change of values is almost an impossible task, and we would have despaired of it had it not been for an undercurrent of deep and profound love coursing through our veins for our pupils. In the suffocating dark weather that threatens us on all sides this is our strong anchor. It is this love for our young generation that inspires us with a frequent self-retrospection, to which we give a collective expression in gatherings like this, where we resolve to fight against our own weaknesses and plan for a better and healthy future. It is because of this that I see bright rays of hope inspite of the encircling darkness.

WARDHA SCHEME OF EDUCATION

And one is strengthened in one's optimism by the cheering voices from the past of some of the greatest teachers of all times like Tagore, Shradhdhanand, Gokhale, Tilak, Arundale, Gandhi, and many more inspiring us not to be disheartened but to go ahead with our great mission. Their long and hard struggle, which reached its climax in the Wardha scheme of education, has left clear footprints in the sands of time to guide us in the right direction. May we then pause for a while to grasp the significance of our educational heritage as symbolized in the Wardha scheme ! Wardha scheme is associated more or less with primary education, but it has

immense possibilities for all the stages of educational structure beginning with the pre-natal to the post-graduate stage. Let me record here what appears to me to be its most significant aspect. According to its way of approach, every child is born with his instruments of education which are inherent in his physical and social environment; and which need not be borrowed from elsewhere. Not to take note of those instruments or to ignore them is a default both against the child and society; for it involves avoidable waste for both. Thus if a child is born in a desert, the desert has ample educational and didactic materials for the child's growth and education. To make the child explore and utilize these materials is the most natural way of his education, and all that the Wardha scheme aims at is to lead us on to that most natural way of learning.

In the light of this approach to education let us find out where our schools stand. In our schools we have hardly anything suggestive of this ideal. From the very beginning our child is taught to depend on many things beyond his reach or control. And he would have to go without education if his parent's paying capacity were inadequate. This is not the case in the sub-human world. There it is inconceivable that any young one in a normal physical condition would be denied the education suited to its species. There the social heritage of the race is a common property. It is only the human race which has permitted a few to usurp the monopoly of its social heritage denying thereby the right to be educated to all those who lack in

their purchasing capacity. Wardha scheme is a revolt against this social tyranny. It is a unique effort at reestablishing the disturbed social equilibrium. It therefore appears to some who either have not the discerning eye or whose interests are at stake, to be a step backwards. Yes, it may appear to some as such but it is like pulling the string of the bow backwards to send the arrow forwards to its farthest length. In the Wardha scheme we go back from the complexity of our present civilization to the basic needs of life viz. food, shelter and clothing, just to make life richer and fuller than what it is today.

If we accept this as the root of education-and if the testimony of eminent educationists who regard creative activity as the basis of all education were to be relied upon, we would immediately be convinced of the necessity of a total change in our educational outlook. Our schools today are anything but activity centres. Dewey has very graphically described an experience of his which very strikingly depicts the passive atmosphere prevailing in our schools. He was in need of a few desks for his school, but he was dissatisfied with the type of desks he had; so he went from shop to shop in search of the right type of desks, but without success, till he came across a shopkeeper who on hearing his requirement said with a spark in his eyes. "Oh, you want a thing which you will not get in any of the furniture shops in the whole of U. S. A., for we stock listening desks whereas you want activity desks—desks that will give freedom of movement to your students" How true! Yes, beginning with the furniture of our

class-rooms to the educational contents that our pupils get, our entire system is so devised as to make our pupils passive receptacles of educational contents. It hardly recognises the fact that education is experiencing. It makes pupils as it were to live by cramming up what others have experienced. The whole system is as it were a make-belief device which is unnatural, psychologically unsound, and educationally harmful

EDUCATION FOR LEADERSHIP ?

On recognizing this great drawback in our educational system, some educationists tried to give a new orientation to our outlook on education by accepting the slogan "Education for Leadership." This is a very fascinating slogan, but let us be aware of it. The idea of leadership comes to us from Eton and Harrow. It takes for granted a competitive structure of our social order with the logical acceptance of the Darwinian principle of "survival of the fittest." We do not wish to build up a social order where a few thrive on the toil of many. We want to build up a co-operative society without the distinction of high or low where all grow together to happiness in mutual aid, sympathy and understanding. Wardha scheme stands for all this and much more. It aims at evolving a co-operative society of integrated individuals. Our government, fortunately, is wedded to this ideal, and it has given us a lead in that direction by making crafts obligatory in our middle school standards.

PROBLEMS CONNECTED WITH CRAFTS

Let us, however not forget that crafts are merely means, and not an end in themselves. We have also to bear in mind that if we do not accept this addition to our curriculum in a helpful, willing and cooperative mood, if we accept it out of helplessness, it is bound to do more harm than good. Let us also remember that teaching of crafts could either be a luxury beyond the reach of an average school or a boon. This will depend on how they are introduced. Teaching of crafts is a strictly practical affair necessitating teacher's close individual attention and supervision over the work of his pupils. Where an ordinary teacher can handle more than forty pupils, a craft teacher will not be able to manage a class of more than twenty. This would mean an increase in the proportion of teachers per class involving thereby a heavier expenditure. This increased cost of education must necessarily be met with by putting the teaching of crafts on an economically self-sufficient basis—self-sufficiency being restricted to the additional cost involved to the school owing to the teaching of crafts.

Then with the existing type of furniture, our class-rooms cannot serve the purpose of being craft-laboratories. We shall require additional rooms, which perhaps very few schools can afford. If crafts are to be introduced in all the classes, as they ought to be, the class-rooms that we shall require will be about fifty percent more in addition to our existing ones. This involves the formidable problem of space,

building materials and finance. The government should see to it that the schools are properly instructed about these difficulties in the path of the teaching of crafts, and should help the schools in surmounting them by encouraging them to dispense with the existing class furniture. The class-room and the craft-room should be one. This will affect our method of teaching also. The dull and passive atmosphere of our existing class-rooms will give place to one surcharged with the exuberance of creative activities. The introduction of crafts, in short should result in an enrichment of our educational contents, leading on to the development of an integrated personality of our pupil.

ENGLISH : FOR EXPRESSION OR COMPREHENSION ?

Interlinked with the introduction of crafts is the problem of balancing our syllabus. Our government have given us a lead in this respect by shifting the emphasis from English to that on the regional language. Although one of the richest languages of the world, English after all is a foreign language for us and the place it has acquired in our curriculum of being our first language was out of all proportions. That place, as is obvious, it cannot maintain for long, and must acquire the place of a second language. We shall have, therefore, to make up our mind about the place it should occupy in our curriculum.

Learning of a language would be either for expression or for comprehension. Our syllabus so

far has taken for granted the expressional aspect for the study of English. But with the introduction of the regional language as medium of instruction at the high school stage, the standard of English, in spite of the Government patronage, has miserably gone down. Expression as such, our pupils have none, and their comprehension is also very poor. For more than a decade the time and energy spent on English have been a huge national waste and they have lowered our intellectual standard also. It is now time that we faced reality and gave English its natural place in syllabus. Today the place it is given is anything but respectable inasmuch as it is taught in a half-hearted manner just with the object of the candidates getting through the examination. The whole thing is so shabily done that it corrupts our pupils' standard of intellectual integrity. Let us not, therefore continue any more this game of self deception and let us honestly say that we want English not for expression but for comprehension. Since our pupils must learn an international language, we would like them to select English for the purpose; for besides being one of the richest languages English has a historical place in our country. Our pupils must learn it as a second language, and their standard of achievement should be confined to their reading with perfect comprehension and appreciation, selected pieces from English literature. They should be able to express in their regional language their appreciation of the passages studied by them. This kind of approach to the study of English will be a real service both to English and to pupils, for there by

English will not be treated so badly as today and our pupils will have before them a more honest standard.

NEW SYLLABUS AND NEW STANDARDS

With such major changes in our syllabus, we shall have to revise all our courses of study, and it is gratifying to note that a joint committee of the representatives of the S. S. C. E. Board and Board of Secondary Education is appointed for the purpose. But that is not enough. It is now time that the aim of secondary education is redefined. Till now although a majority of our students gave up their studies at the end of the secondary stage, their education hardly equipped them for anything excepting clerical jobs. Our Government have, therefore been attempting at a bifurcation at the high school stage, by providing optional courses in vocational and technical subjects. But so long as the matriculation traditions and glamour for them continue, the new vocational and technical schools do not have an appreciable chance of success. With the introduction of the S. S. C. E. it was expected that things would improve; but so long as there is not a corresponding change in our outlook on university education, and so long as provision is not made in our schools to provide optional vocational and technical courses which are socially useful and are in demand, the S. S. C. E will continue to be the old matriculation under a different label. As for the university, it must be clearly recognized that it constitutes nation's intellectual backbone. But unfortunately for us, we have a different story to record. Instead of being centres of learning

our universities have more or less functioned as passport agencies for occupational purposes. This object should be served by other agencies leaving the universities free for research and intellectual pursuits. To that end admissions to the university should be strictly regulated by laying down a very high standard of intellectual efficiency. This of course would not be possible so long as other active agencies and vocational courses on a universal scale are not instituted. But till then a sort of via media may be devised by instituting an alternative standard for entrance to the university. At present the minimum requirement for entrance to the university is the candidate's eligibility to secure 35 percent marks in the old matriculation syllabus. This standard, besides being unscientific, is good neither for the student of ordinary intelligence nor for the clever one. But accustomed as we are to it for many years, our reluctance for a major change in its structure may be taken for granted. I would, therefore, leave the existing standard undisturbed and would provide an alternative standard giving the option of choice to the candidate. The alternative I suggest would be a grouping of subjects, in consultation with the university, faculty-wise. A minimum number of compulsory subjects for every candidate irrespective of the faculty to which he seeks admission, and the total number of subjects in which he should pass for admission to a university, should also be laid down. Barring the compulsory subjects, the candidate must have a very wide option for the choice of subjects, but he must select at least two subjects

from the group of subjects under that faculty to which he seeks admission. Mere passing by getting 35 percent marks in those two subjects should not be deemed enough. He must get credit marks in them for admission to a university. This alternative system will soften the rigidity of the matriculation syllabus, make it more elastic and will give ample scope to an intelligent student to select subjects of his choice without being obliged to study those for which he has no aptitude. This should not be construed as denying the student the benefits of an all round education for which some subjects should necessarily be taught. All those subjects that have cultural and social values should be taught to the students, but all of them should not be made examination subjects. The S. S. C. E. Board is more or less proceeding on these lines and let us hope there will be close co-operation and co-ordination between the universities and the S. S. C. E. Board to raise our educational standards and secure greater freedom and scope for all categories of our students

TEACHERS AND SOCIETY

So far I have dealt with some problems connected with the contents of our education; but without the active, intelligent and willing co-operation of teachers on whom depend the success or otherwise of all educational projects, nothing can be achieved. This aspect of our social life is gradually being recognized by all concerned and we are indebted to all those who have toiled in this direction, although the results so far are not such as would gladden

our hearts. The economic freedom of the teachers is one of his least requirements, and the Ghate Parulekar scheme while decidedly being an advance on the previous stage has in some respects been a step backward. That the teacher is assured of a definite minimum is indeed an achievement of the scheme, but at the same time it has taken away impetus from those schools which were striving to better the lot of teachers by giving them higher scales. The Department in this respect has always shown a very healthy and helpful attitude. It encouraged all such efforts not by mere verbal appreciation, but by actually sharing its burden in the matter of grant-in aid. With the adoption by the government of the Ghate-Parulekar scheme the government while not encroaching upon the freedom of the school to give higher scales to its teachers, have definitely decided not to bear anything more than their minimum share. I would very strongly request the government to revise their decision and encourage schools to give better and higher scales to their teachers without putting any more burden on the paying guardian. The additional cost involved to the Government will be negligible, and yet the advantage to the teaching world will be immense inasmuch as an incentive will always be there for every school to go farther ahead with the betterment of their teachers' economic condition.

Closely connected with the teachers' economic condition is his social status also. The teacher is an enlightened citizen. The society that fails to trust and respect him as such would always be in the

danger of driving away self-respecting individuals from the field leaving it open for the operation of Gresham's Law in human affairs. Our Government will, therefore, be well advised not to restrict teachers' civic rights by asking them to refrain from the membership of duly constituted political or allied organizations. Having conceded that right to the teacher, the Government will be justified in expecting it of him not to influence his pupils with his personal political views. It is absolutely necessary for the social and political health of any civilized community that the schools remain aloof from party politics. Hence irrespective of the political views a teacher may hold, he must have no freedom to convert his pupils to the views of a particular political party. But outside the school a teacher has his civic obligations also, and it will not be proper to restrict his freedom in that respect. May I therefore on behalf of all of us assure our Prime Minister who is anxious to know our reactions on this very vital issue that we share his anxiety to protect our juvenile community against the corrupting influences of party politics ? But let the behaviour of a few misguided individuals from the teaching community, a species that exists in all other professions as well and thrives under restrictions, be not an occasion for us to be alarmed. Ours is yet a young democracy and with the growing realizations of the opportunities and power that have come in the hands of our people, we shall have an increasing crop of difficulties also. Let these difficulties not deter us, but let them be as it were a challenge to us to pit our best against them with an indomitable will to

overcome them. I hope before long this controversy will have ended leaving the teacher free in his civic rights and responsibilities, and at the same time securing for our young generation healthy atmosphere created by a self-respecting and patriotic community of teachers which, irrespective of the political views its individual members may hold, will be next to none in its loyalty and fidelity to the state in which all differences merge into a life-giving harmony of the whole.

Friends, I have taken such a long time and yet I have not been able to give full expression to our thoughts on various important topics such as playgrounds for schools, the amazing G. R. concerning grant-in-aid to owned buildings, the conditions of teachers and head-masters in secondary schools under municipalities, school-hours, holidays, extracurricular activities and so on. But I trust we shall deal with many of them in the course of our discussions in the conference.

TEACH THEM TO LIVE

Before I conclude a word about the task ahead will not be out of place. With freedom have come to us fresh opportunities, but we have so far not properly utilized them, we are still in the old rut where originality and initiative were rarely needed, where even the best amongst us soon lost their youthful idealism and got resigned to the dull routine of mechanical observance of out of date rituals. That was the be all and end all of our duties as head-masters. Hence very few of us could remain fresh in spirit and mind. But let that now be a story of the past we must forget. We live today in a world where

everyday we hear the clarion call of life asking us to teach our young ones to live. How can we do so unless we ourselves knew how to live? And when we talk of living we do not refer to the biological fact of mere existence. As civilized human beings we must live as a living limb of our society; which would mean our sharing in common with our people their sorrows and joys, their toils and their pleasures, their tears and their dreams. This will necessitate a full application of all our energy, time and resources to our duties of which the first and foremost is that of securing the welfare of our pupils.

This is not an easy task. Just for a while consider the precarious existence our young boys and girls lead. On all sides they are exposed to pernicious influences of all kinds. They are in the midst of whirling currents and cross-currents of public lies, vulgar street songs, slogans and advertisements, immoral screen stories, spurious literature, cheap journalism, rabid political propaganda, communal and racial hatred and what not? What protection do they enjoy either from their parents or from the society? This must often be haunting many of us like nightmare; but let us not lose courage, for a merciful providence has equipped us with strength to protect our young hopefuls. May I in this respect cite the story of Derbyshire springs which has been a source of great inspiration and strength to me?

At Matlock Bath, in Derbyshire, there are remarkable springs of water that turn things to stone. You may throw a pen, a pencil, a glass-tube

a gold ring, a sponge or anything that you like in it and it will be turned into a stone; for the proportion of lime in the water is so strong that anything that falls into it gets coated with a limestone crust. But there is another wonderful thing besides: all around the springs are green ferns, moss, and tiny bushes over which water splashes for all times, and they dance in bright sunshine with joy and happiness without being turned to stones. How does this remarkable thing happen?—one may wonder. The secret of it is that they are protected by the love of mother earth. It keeps them alive and secures them against being atrophied. Let Derbyshire springs be our guiding star in our hour of despondency and gloom. If we could give the sap of our heart—our love—to our children, they will dance with joy like the tiny Derbyshire bushes in eternal sunshine of happiness in spite of all the poisons of the world splashing over them. For the protection of a world in danger there is no charm greater than human love. May our hearts be full of such overflowing love for children and may it nourish and protect them as life-giving elixir!

Vasant Printing Press, Ghee-Kanta Road,
Ghelabhai's Vadi-Ahmedabad.
