



TN3.231

JO

TN3.231
JO
031459

Education

FOR THE MASSES

EDUCATION FOR THE MASSES

Organisation Of System Along New Lines

CHIEF MINISTER ON GENESIS AND TECHNIQUE OF BASIC EDUCATION

"The Government of Bombay has been devoting its attention and resources to the organisation of education on Basic lines. This scheme has had a chequered career since it was first started more than ten years ago. Soon after Gandhiji had placed his ideas about Basic Education before the conference of educational workers convened at Wardha in 1937, the Zakir Husain Committee worked out the educational implications of these ideas and incorporated them in its report on Basic National Education. I trust every one amongst you has already made a careful study of that report because it gives the genesis as well as the ideology and technique of Basic Education. In any case, I have no doubt that now that the Municipal Corporation of Bombay has decided to make a beginning with Basic Educa-

Now all the teachers and educational officers would study this document carefully.

EXPERIMENTAL STAGE OVER

Soon after the Wardha Conference and the compilation of this report, the Bombay Government, which was at the time a Congress Government, undertook to make a beginning with the establishment of a number of Basic schools in certain selected compact areas. These schools have been continually in existence since and they, as well as the scheme on which they have been working, have passed beyond what was usually described as the experimental stage and a time has come when large-scale measures must be taken to place the educational foundations of this State on sound principles.

At present, there are 55 Government and six private Basic schools. Eight Government Primary Training Colleges have been converted into Basic, while another eight have been partially so converted. Next June, we hope to convert these partially converted colleges into full-time Basic Training Colleges and, in addition, convert the First Year Classes in a dozen more training colleges into Basic. The Basic Training Colleges will be sending out 475 teachers trained in Basic training and these teachers will be utilised in converting selected primary schools into Basic schools.

The scheme of Basic Education would, by this time, have made much greater progress both quantitatively and qualitatively. But, as you are aware, the Congress went out of office after a short period of Government and from 1939 to 1945, the country passed through the crisis of its political fight and the Government that was then in power neither attended nor could be expected to attend, to this new educational project that had been started. So, for several years, while the Basic schools continued nominally to exist, the Education Department was not in a position to attend to their needs and problems in an efficient manner and when the present Government came into power again in 1946, it was found necessary to attend to the whole field of Basic Education afresh. Since then attempts have been made to assess the success and achievements of these schools in the context of the handicaps in which they were functioning and, so far as the Education Department has been able to

assess, we are gratified to find that the results have been satisfactory.

Such is the vitality of the educational principles underlying this scheme of education that, in spite of the neglect and even suspicion under which these schools had fallen and in spite of the lack of equipment and trained teachers from which they had to suffer, they continued to provide for their children a type of education which was at least as good—if not better—from the academic point of view as the education provided in the ordinary schools. What is, however, much more important to remember in this connection is the fact that they were able to provide this academic education side by side with the training in crafts and social and community activities which formed an integral part of their programme and which required a considerable part of their time.

A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIMENT

The children who went out of these schools showed that, on the whole, they were socially more alert and intelligent, more resourceful, more co-operative and had a keener consciousness of their relationship to the community. No educationist worth the name, who has any understanding of sound educational principles, would regard the development of these social, moral and practical qualities as less important than the imparting of traditional knowledge or the teaching of traditional skills. The experience that has been gained in other parts of the country confirms and reinforces the experience that we have gained in this State and, therefore, so far as the fundamentals of the situation are concerned, we have not the slightest doubt that the future pattern of mass education in India should be on Basic lines.

NEED FOR RESEARCH

I refer to the fundamentals of the situation in order to bring home to you the fact that, in the working out of methods, materials and techniques there is a great deal of work to be done which requires concerted efforts, intelligence as well as integrity on the part of our teachers. This is no sacrosanct fool-proof method which can be applied by every teacher without careful scrutiny and intelligent adaptation. Even the defective methods of bookish edu-

cation that are in use in our schools have taken many long decades to develop. It would be idle to expect that this method of teaching and the ideology that lies behind it can be perfected within a few years. In fact, I would go to the extent of saying that the more significant and psychologically sound a method, the greater is the need for applying it with careful professional skill and imagination. Moreover, the traditional methods have become so entrenched in our educational system that we cannot possibly replace them till we have developed these new methods in an effective and convincing manner. There is, therefore, great need for practical educational research in the field, and I hope that our Training Colleges and Basic Schools will play their part worthily in promoting this kind of research.

EXPANSION OF BASIC EDUCATION

The Government in the Education Department has been examining the question of expanding the scheme of Basic Education rapidly with the object of replacing the present primary schools by Basic Schools as quickly as possible without, however, impairing efficiency of work. It was necessary to examine carefully the programme for such expansion because, in a matter that is to affect the future of lacs of children, even one false step may have very undesirable consequences. It was possible for us to select one of the two possible alternatives. We could either establish hundreds of Basic schools quickly with half trained teachers put through short courses of training or we could have planned full and efficient training (or re-training) for all our Primary teachers in the technique and ideology of Basic Education so that, when they went out into the field, they should really impart Basic Education in the proper sense of the word.

TRAINING OF TEACHERS

In some States, the first alternative has been tried and from one point of view that looks like a spectacular programme because it would enable the Department to have thousands of Basic schools functioning within a few years. When the matter was, however, discussed by our Advisory Board of Basic Education and our Educational Officers, we all came to the conclusion that in the interest of efficiency and of securing the right conditions for the success of

Basic Education, it was essential that we should hasten slowly. It was consequently decided that no teachers should be put in charge of Basic Education unless they had received the full course of training and were considered competent to handle this new method and technique of education. Therefore, the Board of Basic Education has drawn up a properly integrated scheme for the establishment of Basic Education in the State and the first stage in that scheme is the efficient training of teachers.

BASIC TRAINING COLLEGES

For this purpose we are at present converting all the existing Government and private Training Colleges—which number about 100—into Basic Training Colleges. Three Post Graduate Training Colleges have been established in the three linguistic regions and the staff of the Primary Training Colleges is being deputed there for training in the field of Basic Education before they are entrusted with the responsibility of converting their institutions into Basic institutions. As a result of this step, a number of training colleges have already been converted into Basic Colleges and, therefore, all the teachers who will be turned out from these institutions in future would be fully trained Basic teachers. We are hoping that, within the next two or three years, all the Training Colleges in the State will be engaged in training teachers for our Basic schools. When this part of the scheme has been implemented, it would be possible to train 3,000—4,000 teachers every year for the purpose of staffing Basic schools and we shall then be in a position to co-ordinate the quantitative expansion with qualitative standards.

PROBLEM OF SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

It does not seem necessary for me to discuss at great length at this Conference the basic ideas underlying this scheme of Education because they have been under discussion in educational circles for over a decade now and, in any case, it would be necessary for all of you to study them carefully and intelligently before you launch on the great experiment that you have in mind. What I would like to impress on you at the moment is my firm conviction that the establishment of Basic Education is not to be interpreted as merely a change in the methodology of teaching or in the curri-

culum of schools. From my point of view—and that if I may say so was the point of view from which Mahatma Gandhi approached this problem—the proper organisation of Basic Education is linked with the entire problem of social reconstruction and of moral and intellectual re-orientation in our country. To restrict the scope of education to the teaching of a certain number of subjects, to divorce mental work from manual work, to sever the living relationship between learning and life and to alienate the child from the practical and social realities of the environment in which it is living is to miss the entire point of education. It is impossible, under these conditions, to develop those qualities of initiative, resourcefulness, co-operation, discipline, leadership and practical good sense which are so essential in the world of to-day.

NEED FOR NEW APPROACH

Therefore, when I stress the importance of Basic Education, I am not merely asking for the introduction of a certain amount of craft work as an integral part of school programme but I am inviting all teachers and other educational workers to try and adopt an entirely different approach to the problems and the issues of education in schools. It is only when you are imbued with the genuine spirit of Basic Education as a method for bringing about a re-orientation of the hearts and the minds of the children that you can exploit its full advantages in the best possible manner.

GANDHIJI'S CONCEPTION

I should like to avail myself of this opportunity to invite your attention to the fact that by undertaking this work in the City of Bombay, you will not only be taking a very valuable step for the re-organisation of your own educational system, but you may also be able to contribute something valuable to the whole theory and practice of Basic Education. As you are, perhaps, aware, Gandhiji described Basic Education as the education of village through rural handicrafts and he was mainly pre-occupied with the problem of education in its relationship to the countryside. That is why, generally speaking, Basic Education has been tried all over India mostly in villages, and in the cities there are only a few isolated educational institutions working on these lines. There is nothing, how-

ever, in the nature of the method or of the principles and ideology underlying it which makes it unsuitable to urban areas.

PRACTICAL SIDE OF BASIC EDUCATION

While the actual choice of the crafts to be introduced in particular schools would mainly depend on the local environment and the needs of the children to be educated, the central principle of "learning through doing", of co-ordinating academic work with practical work, of presenting subjects in close correlation with various practical activities—all these are just as true, as relevant and as significant in a city school as they would be in a village school. But the mere statement of a principle does not obviously mean that all its practical implications have been fully grasped. These have always to be worked out in the storm and stress of actual work. You will be dealing with children who are living in a much more complex and complicated environment than the children in villages, whose life is more sophisticated and influenced by a much larger number of stimuli of a technical and mechanical kind than the life of the village child. Moreover, children of the villages have the educative experience of contact with agriculture, gardening, community work, natural phenomena and birds and animals which are available in a village but are not to be easily found in the city. All this implies that you will have to face a large number of new problems—not the least of which would be the problem of finding adequate accommodation for your new "activity schools" for the hundreds of thousands of children—and the ingenuity of all your educational officers and teachers would be fully taxed to meet these demands.

OUTSIDE HELP

I can realise how difficult this task is going to be, but there is no way out of this difficulty. This educational reconstruction is unavoidable and imperative. But, side by side with the magnitude of the problem, you have also the advantage that a large number of workers in different parts of the country have already been grappling with these problems and you will be starting not from scratch but with the wealth of their experience at your disposal. I trust that the Bombay Schools Committee will adopt all the necessary steps to take the fullest advantage of whatever has been done in

this field in this State or outside and gradually establish all over the City progressive and flourishing Basic schools which may become a source of pride not only to this City but to the entire State of Bombay.

AN ASSURANCE

I need hardly assure you that all the help that my Education Department or I personally can give you in this venture will be readily placed at your disposal. We should do our best to win the credit of pioneering in the field of urban Basic Education. We have a number of good Secondary schools and colleges in the City of Bombay; we have also a number of well established and rather expensive Primary schools, conducted by Indians or others for the rather well-to-do children. But we have hardly anything to show so far as modern, progressive and efficient primary schools meant for the masses are concerned. We have been content to let the bulk of our children receive their education in schools which, from the point of view of equipment, staffing and methodology, are at best barely tolerable. We would do well to remember that in this age of democracy, the success of all social services—whether pertaining to education or health or labour welfare or anything else—will be eventually measured in terms of the standard of service rendered to the masses of the people. The Basic Education Scheme is an attempt to raise the standard of education for the masses and as such deserves your most solicitous care and consideration.”

(Presidential address of Shri B. G. Kher, Chief Minister of Bombay, at the Bombay City Basic Education Conference on March 11, 1950)

The End