

Education Today

A
Darjeeling Hill Region

Perspective



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Dick B. Dewan

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TENDER BUDS' ACADEMY

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FOREWORD

Dick B. Dewan has been contributing articles on topical issues which have been published in our weekly Himalayan Observer. He is currently a research fellow under Viswabharati, Santiniketan, and has also chosen yet another important issue—'Education in the Hill Region, Its Development and Present Status' for his dissertation. He is working under Dr. D. P. Mukherji, Deptt. Of Education, Vinaya Bhawan, who is the guide for the project.

After obtaining his M.Ed. from N.E.H.U. (Shillong) he is now teaching at St. George's High School, Pedong. He is hard working and has been utilizing most of his time toward studying his subject mainly on education—its changing theme here in the hills and in national perspective.

These collection of articles have been brought out in book form as his maiden work which may help everybody understand problems and perspectives on education.

The book is a measure of the author's interest, tenacity and sincere application to delve on a subject which has acquired importance in the national scene, and is hotly debated today through various platforms.

Himalayan Observer
June 9, 1984

B. D. Basnet
Publisher

PREFACE

The present work is a collection of my articles contributed to the Weekly, Himalayan Observer, as a humble attempt to analyse the various contemporary issues on education during the past couple of years. I hope the articles bear relevance to our time and particularly to the problems which have surfaced of late in our district and the state. The present book, my maiden work, consists of topical articles written particularly with a view to highlighting some important point on education these days. Needless to add, I have made efforts to give my interpretation and analyse the points in the light of my observation on the issues which seem to evoke some response. I am indebted to those eminent authors whose books and articles I had to consult and from which much of the information had to be gleaned. While preparing the articles my seminar papers of M.Ed. course, and the educational news diary maintained by me from newspaper clippings have come to great help.

As these articles have now been brought out in the present form, I hope it will serve the needs of our readers, policy makers and others associated with the task of educating the masses in the country. I owe Prof. B.D. Basnet, the editor of the Himalayan Observer an earnest gratitude, for his kindly publishing it and encouraging me throughout. With sincere good wishes of all the friends and readers I hope I will, in future, be able to devote my time to bring out some useful writings on the subject.

Pedong

20th June, 1984

A PREFACE (Second Edition)

This is the second edition of my book entitled "Education Today—A Perspective" published way back in 1984. It is to present to you all, now in 25 years, for your kindly accepting it as my benign contribution to our society, it is made available in a new get-up.

As you will see, this has just been only a collection of articles and write-ups, as oft-times reflections, on such ticklish matters and issues as would occasionally arouse our keen responses from an educational perspective. These topics needed to be highlighted by way of our reaction to the dominant elements of Bengal. It is a poignant fact that we, in this hill region, sorely lack any record of the unfair deal meted to us by the policy-makers of Bengal when, in the name of three language formula, the hill pupils were thrust with Bengali as compulsory paper in their Madhyamik level of study for board examination in the last seventies. For no written record as such, even this ill-designed scheme of the rulers is apt to go into oblivion.

It may be well realized that there has been a real dearth of published materials in our educational field for the researchers to refer and quote from observations and records incorporated in some published works. So, it is thought worth its while to bring out at least this one for the sake of acclaiming a publication from this aggrieved hill region of ours.

I hope to derive a great delight if this serves a desirable purpose. I, as well, feel complimented for such humble efforts if it meets the readers' taste and interest.

Pedong
30th April'09

Dr. Dick B. Dewan.

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WILL ENGLISH BE ABOLISHED?

This is February, the month when schools reopen in the hills. After a wintry respite there is expectation all around as new boys and girls seek admission in schools. The children in their new uniform are seen crowding the streets, the playgrounds and the tiny rooms of schools. There is mad rush for new books, pencils and other teaching aids which are costly these days. Some students look for second hand books from those in higher classes, but some schools keep the books changing, and publishers are benefited. Those who get hold of old books at half price are the luckier ones as books are costly and with many children going to school with changing syllabus and texts it becomes a very difficult proposition to meet up the cost of uniforms, the session fees, text books etc. But there is no escaping from the liabilities twice in Kalimpong once when schools reopen and again during the month of August when schools insist that children come out in neat uniforms while participating at the march past at Mela ground—a tradition peculiar to Kalimpong.

Man wants change and change is the law of nature. It is inevitable for men and society. Men however conservative they may be desire some change in outlook, technique, values and life-style. Change is in a way education. We welcome change here and there in every aspect of our life which is acceptable to us. Some changes which are not acceptable to us are forced down upon by circumstances.

We agree that change in school curriculum is also in keeping with the changing needs of society. It is desirable that

curriculum is reviewed after a period of certain interval so that outdated and obsolete subjects are replaced by new ones or at least they are modified in the light of public needs and interests.

In this light today in West Bengal controversy has been raising whether to retain English in the schools or not. The process of abolishing English has started from the primary schools upwards. The patriotic fervour has over-taken the zeal with which English was once taught in the state. According to the decision of the Left Front Government in the State primary school children may not have to learn English from this year. This appears to be the start given by the government with a view to altogether abolishing English from school and colleges. Thus doubt has been lurking in everybody's mind that the present phase of Angregi hatao initiated by the government may finally end up at the college and University level. And, English will have gone for ever from our school and college syllabus.

Although India got her Independence after a long struggle and sacrifice the Britishers left a legacy and that was their language. So we seem to nourish a stigma of being slave to a language of those who were once rulers of this country. The language which we got as a legacy of the British Empire India has, on the other hand, acquired an indigenous status even after 34 years of independence. We inherited the language through generation of learning. It has become a sort of common bond, a link language and in international field, it has helped our politicians, intellectuals, thinkers, philosophers to project the image of changing India.

It appears that English learning is not so much a burden upon our growing ones in the primary schools. It is rather the old method of translation-teaching which is impractical for teaching of the language. "A basic mastery of spoken language can normally be acquired very rapidly during early school years,"

said Dorothy McCarthy, a great educationist. She further says, "The child whose language development is seriously delayed for any reasons labours under an insurmountable handicap in his social and academic relationship. The earlier a child can acquire a facility in linguistic expression, the sooner he is free to reap the benefits of the use of this valuable tool in all his intellectual pursuits."

Although Mahatma Gandhi strongly advocated for the mother tongue as the only effective instrument of one's education, Sunanda Sanyal, in his article (Statesman, December 2, 1980) has mentioned that "in fact linguists have not been able to gather any evidence for the popular belief that education is best received through the mother tongue. On the contrary, psycho-linguistic research shows that, until adolescence, normal children can acquire, remarkably easily, two, three or even more languages provided that nothing happens to arouse their hostility. So if it is possible why should we not equip our children with a knowledge of foreign language from the very childhood so as to enable them to understand or communicate a little with other group or community.

Let us allow our children to come out with some good grounding in at least one foreign language (English) which increases their communication skill and the working knowledge useful for higher and technical learning. By just starting learning fundamentals of the language only from the secondary level may not provide children with enough experience and strength in their ability to speak, read and write in English medium at the University level. As we know, at this time the University Grants Commission is seriously considering introduction of English tests for entrants to universities. The UGC is going to recommend some measures for the improvement of English teaching and has suggested that English be taught as a compulsory subject at least

for two years at the degree level. It feels that 'socio-political attitudes to English have changed and a more objective view of its functions has become possible. This is a clear appreciation of its value in education, and this has helped stimulation of innovation and reform in teaching. The Universities need English as a source language through which people can have access to the vast and growing mass of modern scientific knowledge."

We frequently come across news items in daily newspapers that guardians stand in long queue for hours for admission of their wards to English medium schools, while on the other hand move is afoot for abolishing English from our school curriculum. Sri Promode Dasgupta CPI (M) leader and the main architect of English hatao education policy in defence states, "The LF's move is not for banning English but for propogating widespread literacy which is only possible through the mother tongue. English is not certainly banned it will only be made less of a burden."

As against the stiff opposition to the present move of the L.F. Government's new education policy, we are still wondering whether English will be altogether banned from the primary classes from this year. Opposition to the government's policy has been expressed through various platforms and important leaders and public men have even courted arrest to drive home the point that the government is wrong in banning English from primary schools. On the other hand, more advertisements have appeared for admission into English medium schools which have grown like mushrooms everywhere even in the remotest hamlets of the district.

The guardians are in a fix. They have been unable to decide to follow safe path. The English medium schools will be attracting an ever increasing number of children if the government persists its programme with tenacity any longer. In the ultimate analysis

it is the poor guardians of the rural areas who will be in serious disadvantage as they cannot send their children to the more expensive English medium schools mostly located in towns and cities. Then will there not emerge further distinction and class between the mother tongue knowing and the English knowing child in the country? And how many guardians will be in a position to arrange for special coaching of their wards in order to bring them at par with the English medium taught pupils, although in minority in the state?

People have welcomed the L.F.'s policy of implementing free and compulsory primary education and now free education upto class X. But is it at the cost of depriving the learning of English by our coming generation?

According to eminent educationists no language is imperialist or socialist. English should continue as second language and the medium of instruction may be the regional language in future.

We in the hills are a microscopic minority. We are backward educationally, socially, economically and have no chance unless we learn major languages like English, Hindi and Bengali. But once we implement the mother tongue as the only medium of instruction till the secondary stage, I am sure our boys and girls will find themselves in serious disadvantage in a highly competitive employment market viz. medicine, nursing, army, state and central services. Besides, we are ill equipped as far as books on various subjects are concerned. We do not have adequate number of books with which we can teach our students with felicity as in the case with students learning in their own medium. Teaching at the college level in regional language means Nepali. We do not have books, teachers and authors who would do justice by bringing out all texts in Nepali language. In the matter of Science subjects, we are most backward. It may take another two decades at the present rate to develop a cadre of academicians and educationist who would fill up the posts in

colleges to be able to impart lessons through regional language.

Writes the Statesman in its editorial dated January 10, 1981: "By dispensing with the study of English, or making it optional the Left Front cannot hope to further its professed egalitarian interests or fight the supposedly elitist bias of the English medium education. The demand for admission to English medium schools has sharply increased, the language policy is merely deepening the division between social and economic groups, and perpetuating greater opportunities for the privileged. Nor will this policy promote the study of the mother tongue..."

The intellectuals and the Left Front's political opponents are being blamed for continuing the agitation against the government's educational policy. The above editorial has rightly mentioned that the educational policy has been causing increasing dismay even to the people without any ideological bias.

Today even after 33 years of our achieving independence Hindi has not been able to capture its status of being the official language although it was so desired in the constitution. English, as everybody knows, has been in use as official language. English by tradition has become one of our important languages. For such reason or other English language has been with us. Dispensing of English even at the primary school stage or any attempt to denigrate it will surely be resented by people who have realized its importance and value in our life. There are sycophants or fanatics of this language and even the diehards who hold the language in high esteem not to be parted with this. It does not seem proper for a government to take an intransigent attitude when there is growing opposition to its policies. It would be more democratic if the government takes care to respect public opinion and modifies its policies in that light.

OPEN UNIVERSITY

'Open University', an ambitious experiment to enable the people irrespective of age and qualifications to have higher education, is about to start in West Bengal. It is really going to be a unique opportunity for those who have not been able to get, for some reason or other, a place at the University but may still be seeking to develop their individual potentialities.

It is highly commendable that the West Bengal government has already prepared a scheme to set up an Open University on the British pattern. It is understood that the State Higher Education Minister, Sri Sambhu Ghosh had discussed the scheme with the Union Education Minister Sri S.B. Chavan, and the University Grants Commission. The scheme, the first of its kind in the country, is being welcomed by Sri Chavan. It is said that according to the preliminary survey, this University scheme has evoked tremendous response from all section of people, especially housewives.

Since the scheme of Open University is of British origin as it was being pioneered by Britain a decade ago, it would perhaps be worthwhile to understand it in that context.

It was first publicly mooted in '63 by Mr. Harold Wilson, the then P.M., when it was described as the 'University of the Air', but today it is called the Open University. The University received the stamp of official recognition on July 23, 1969, when it

the gaps in the educational provision through which they can fall. *The existing system*, for all its great expansion, misses and leaves aside a great unused reservoir of human talent and potential. Men and women drop out through failure in the system, through mistakes in their own judgement, through sheer bad luck. These are our primary material. To them we offer a further opportunity."

The Open University is not simply an educational rescue mission but it as well supplements the existing provision in higher education. Apart from being open to people, the university would also be open as to places. It is a university without *cloisters*. It has also been found that the system of *Open University* is relatively cheap to operate and costs about one fourth as much as a conventional university. The remarkable achievements of the Open University in Britain have prompted the United States to start similar experiments in their own country. American workers, with no college degree, but imbued with the zeal to learn, find in the Open University a golden key to the treasure house of knowledge.

The concept of an Open University is now slowly gaining currency. Such University would enable students anywhere to have access to its instructions and degree at a minimum cost which would be within their reach and without affecting their capacity to earn and help their families. Private study receives the most liberal emphasis and it should be open to all individuals to appear at the examination as private candidates.

With such experience of Britain, we, in India, can expect to gain a lot by introducing the system in order to eliminate the several lacunae in our educational system.

CASE FOR EDUCATION ON STATE LIST

The West Bengal government has been demanding that education be restored to the State List, as it was before the emergency when the Constitution was amended to put the subject on the Concurrent List. What the government felt is that the move enabled the Centre to "interfere in the sphere of education in any State, and indulge in politicking through it." West Bengal's Minister for higher education, Sri Shambu Ghosh alleged (Statesman, March 14, 1981) that there was "a political motive" behind transferring education from the State List to the Concurrent List during the emergency. He said it was designed to effect Central intervention in the educational affairs of the States.

The Minister further said, "The Centre had taken no steps for the improvement of education in the state. Financial assistance of the Central government through the University Grants Commission had been curtailed. The cut in the financial assistance from the UGC to the state University of West Bengal during the Sixth Plan would handicap seriously their development."

The Minister complained that the UGC had allotted to the State Rs. 3.5 crores during the 6th Plan, against more than Rs. 5 crores during the 5th Plan. The UGC grant to Calcutta University had been reduced to Rs. 1 crore for the 6th Plan from Rs. 3.7 crores during the earlier Plan. The State government had protested against the cut and demanded Rs. 11 crores from the

UGC during the current plan.

So the demand for restoration of Education to State List, according to the Minister, had become imperative as he thought in his State the Centre had "already begun the game of politicking, and was trying to make it an issue in a bid to destabilize the State Government."

It was quite likely that the demand for inclusion of Education in the State List would figure in the conference of Education Ministers of all States called by Sri S.B. Chavan, Union Education Minister, on June 2 and June 3 in Delhi. One knows that there has always been a controversy regarding Centre-State regulations in Education as defined in the Constitution. Different views and opinions have been held by different groups, parties, committees etc. Education is continuously discussed in Parliament, State Legislatures, journals and newspapers, conference and seminars. Several organizations, including teachers' organizations, have also been taking a leading part in the discussion of educational issues. Among many such teachers' organizations in India it is All Bengal Teachers' Association in West Bengal which has been demanding Education to be put in the State List. The Association has demanded (Teachers' Journal, July 1980) allocation of 10% of Central Budget and 6% of National Income for education, education as a State Subject and grant of more powers and finance to the States to develop them economically, politically and culturally in the interest of the national solidarity and integrity.

The question that is apt to arise now is whether education placed in the Concurrent List has been given a controversial niche by the centre. Also, whether a state may really be able to do much better if education be restored to the State List. Several Commissions appointed till now have already examined the

controversial issue and offered their suggestions on the rightful status to be given to education in our Constitution. It seems, therefore, imperative to look retrospectively to the status that the framers of our Constitution had accorded to education.

It is common knowledge that education was never in the forefront of British Indian administration and was never accorded top priority. The principal charge against British educational administration in India is that it failed to create a national system of education for the country. A new era of transformation in the history of education in India ushered in with the attainment of independence in 1947. New objectives were set before the resurgent nation.

To achieve the promised revolution in education the framers of Indian Constitution gave an important place to it in the new Constitution. A number of important provisions having direct or indirect bearing on education were included in the Constitution. For administrative convenience there has been the division of educational responsibility between the Government of India and the State. That is, for legislative powers, a clear line of demarcation between Central, State and concurrent subjects were drawn.

The Constitution makes Education a State subject (entry 11 of List II, the list of State function) except for (I) education in Union Territories and centrally administered areas (which is a direct responsibility of the government of India) and Entries 13, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66 and 67 of List I (the list of Central functions) and entry 25 of List III (the list of Concurrent functions of the Centre and the States.)

Besides the demarcation of legislative powers the Constitution contains several Articles, which have significant bearing on various aspects of education. Article 45 enjoins the

State to provide free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14. Equality in educational opportunity cannot be denied to any one under 29(2), according to which admission cannot be refused to any one on the basis of race, caste, language in any educational institution wholly maintained by the State or aided by the State.

Also, the five Articles 15, 29(2), 15(3), 46 and 29(1) make it a responsibility of the government of India to bring about equalization of educational opportunities in all parts of the country, and to that end, to give special assistance to the backward areas of the states. Articles, 337, 17 and 31 protect the educational rights of the minorities (the Anglo-Indian community, the untouchables, women and children). There are several such other articles and Constitutional clauses on education, which shows that "in a vast country like ours, the position given to education in the Constitution is probably the best."

Education at all stages, with two important qualifications is a state subject. These qualifications are in respect of university education and technical education. In view of the need for coordination of facilities and the maintenance of standards at the higher levels the Constitution has placed on the Central Government the responsibility in these regard. In view of the heavy expenses involved in scientific and technical education and to avoid any duplication in these fields, the promotion of higher scientific and technical education, is therefore, the Central responsibility. In the existing educational situation of the country the passive role of the Centre is neither desirable nor possible at the same time nor is there any desire to put curb on the energy, enthusiasm and initiative of the states.

Nevertheless, though the Central government has neither any direct responsibility nor any legal or constitutional rights, the larger interests of the country compelled it to play an

increasing role in almost every aspects of education and to ensure uniformity in its aims, objects and standards.

The increasing functions of the Central government in education have further been motivated by some other factors, such as, (1) financial resources of the states are inadequate to implement their educational programmes and look to the Central government for financial assistance, (2) the Central government is the repository of information from all states and from foreign countries and thus functions as a clearing house (3) In the interest of national solidarity, the national policy on education is formulated by the Centre, (4) also, since independence, by and large, state governments have been controlled by the same political party, which wields power at the Centre.

A close examination of the educational provisions of the Constitution cannot help giving the feeling that there is an element of basic contradiction in the role, which the constitution attempts to give to the Central government in education. Prima facie, education is a state subject with a few specified exceptions, the Centre remaining only a policy-laying authority for the whole of the country. Conventionally, however, the Centre has acquired greater authority under the plea of ensuring cultural unity of India. The inconvenient feeling starts when the enumeration of "exceptions" begins. For example, the first exception is the responsibility of the Centre to equalize educational opportunities between different areas or different sections of society. Other exceptions are, (1) the responsibility of the Centre to safeguard the cultural interests of minorities and to see that they have adequate facilities to receive at least primary education through their own mother-tongue, (2) the responsibility of developing the national language, (3) the need for a controlled and coordinated development of higher education and (4) to plan and coordinate all the activities of the state.

On account of high cost, difficulty in securing suitable personnel, the need to obtain foreign assistance etc., the scientific research, technical education and higher types of professional and vocational education—all are assigned to the Centre. Problems like securing foreign assistance (in men, material or money) for education, training of Indians abroad, relationship with international organizations like UNESCO participation in bilateral or multilateral programmes of education assistance with other countries are also with the Centre.

In actual practice while formulating and implementing the five-year Plans, the government of India has been deciding the major educational policies more at the Centre than in the States and distribution of financial resources to different sector of education is becoming more a matter for, a decision at the Central level than at the state levels.

It is believed that the Indian Constitution was out to create a "Strong" Centre. It has, therefore rested most of the important resources in the Government of India with the results that no state has adequate resources of its own to develop education—"the costliest of welfare services". Consequently the Centre, which controls the purse-strings, necessarily has the most dominating voice in the overall determination of policies, priorities and programmes. From this point of view, therefore, education becomes not only a joint responsibility, but almost like a 'partnership' in which the Government of India plays the role of the 'Big Brother'. All these exceptions have naturally circumscribed the State authority on education and made education look like a 'Joint responsibility' than like a State preserve.

There is a view that education is of such great national importance that it ought to have been included at least in the Concurrent list whereas the Constitution leaves it practically in

the hands of the states. On the other hand it is also argued that in a federal policy like that of India, the best position that can be given to education is that which is provided for in the Constitution.

In view of ever increasing role of the Central government, the Radhakrishna Commission and the Sapru Committee favoured the making of higher education as a concurrent subject. Dr. M.C. Chagla, the Union Education Minister, had once remarked—"we made a serious mistake when we drafted the Constitution in making education a state subject." The Kothari Commission, however, averred, "The inclusion of education in the Concurrent List may lead to undesirable centralization and greater rigidity in a situation where, the greatest need is elasticity and freedom to experiment. We are convinced that there is plenty of scope with the present Constitutional arrangement to evolve a workable Central-State partnership in education and that has not yet been exploited to the full. The case for amending the Constitution can be made only after this scope. Intensive efforts be made to exploit fully the existing provisions of the Constitution for the development of education and the evolution of a national education." Notwithstanding these views education has now become a Concurrent Subject.

What All Bengal Teachers' Association feels is that the Parliament with its brute majority during the dark days of emergency forced on the people the 42nd Amendment Bill depriving the States some of the rights so long enjoyed by them. It feels that one of the grievous wrongs done to the State was the placing of education on the Concurrent List which has long been a state subject. Thus the States were deprived of their right to guide, control and develop education according to the needs of the people. In a country of diverse languages and cultures education placed in the Central or in the concurrent list cannot serve the purpose satisfactorily.

Education placed in the Concurrent List becomes a joint responsibility of the Centre and the state but not a sole responsibility of either. As a result, improvement in the field of education suffers because both may not always agree on a point or points. Again, if education be made a central subject, it is not possible for the centre to gauge correctly the popular feelings which vary from state to state and to cater to the educational needs of the states peculiar to themselves. So education should be made a state subject as in the past and the centre should extend liberal grants for the expansion of education. The Centre will still have its vital role to play even if education be restored to the State List like in the past.

Sri Ghosh, the Education Minister, who once met the Union Education Minister, told him that the centre had enough jurisdiction in terms of Article 249 of the Constitution to legislate on education in national interest. "What is the need to keep the subject on the Concurrent List?" he asked.

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Some Published Works

- by Dr. Dick B. Dewan

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