

## **Democracy and Education in India**

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**DEMOCRACY  
AND  
EDUCATION IN INDIA**

Edited by  
**Krishna Kumar**

*under the auspices of  
Nehru Memorial Museum and Library*



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## Contents

|  |      |
|--|------|
| List of Tables   | vii  |
| Contributors   | ix   |
| Preface  | xi   |
| Introduction by Krishna Kumar  | xiii |
| Keynote Address by Marjorie Sykes  | xxiv |
| 1 Democracy and Education: Reflections from the<br>Third World in Late Twentieth Century<br><i>Sureshchandra Shukla</i>              | 1    |
| 2 Education: A Linguistic Impasse<br><i>Sharada Jain</i>   | 14   |
| 3 Culture, Education and Democracy: A Conceptual Exercise<br><i>Narindar Singh</i>   | 23   |
| 4 The "Socialisation" of Critical Thought: Responses to<br>Illiteracy among the Adivasis in Thane District<br><i>Denzil Saldanha</i> | 85   |
| 5 India's Mass Education Programmes: A Critical Analysis<br><i>Anita Dighe</i>   | 113  |
| 6 The Slow Transition from Womanhood to<br>Personhood: Can Education Help?<br><i>Malavika Karlekar</i>                               | 128  |
| 7 Education and Communal Politics in Bengal: A Case Study<br><i>Poromesh Acharya</i>   | 168  |
| 8 Degeneration of Democracy and Education: Reflections<br>on the Indian Scenario<br><i>N. Jayaram</i>                                | 205  |
| 9 Missing Voices in the Sociology of the School in India:<br>An Attempt at Restoring Them<br><i>Meenakshi Thapan</i>                 | 221  |
| 10 School Science in Search of a Democratic Order?<br><i>Anita Rampal</i>  | 245  |
| Index  | 275  |



### **List of Tables**

|     |  |     |
|-----|--|-----|
| 4.1 | Literacy and Villages with Educational Institutions in Talukas of Thane District - 1981  | 109 |
| 4.2 | Comparative Literacy in Thane District - 1961, 1971, 1981                                | 111 |
| 4.3 | Distribution of Students over Standards in Primary Schools, "Kulambi" Village, 1970-1980 | 112 |



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## Preface

Sometime ago, in October 1989, the Nehru Museum organised a conference on the theme, "Democracy and Education in India", which evoked a substantial measure of interest in the scholarly community. The initiative in organising this conference was taken by Professor Krishna Kumar of the Faculty of Education, Delhi University. Professor Kumar was, in 1988, on study leave from the University and a Fellow of our Centre for Contemporary Studies. On our request, Professor Krishna Kumar has now edited the papers presented at this conference in the form of a book. This will enable a wider group to share the sense of intellectual excitement which these papers stimulated when they were first presented.

I am thankful to Professor Krishna Kumar for the trouble he has taken in editing this book. I am also grateful to Dr. N. Balakrishnan and Mrs Aruna Tandan who have extended valuable assistance in seeing this book through the press.

Ravinder Kumar

## Introduction

*Krishna Kumar*

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The main purpose behind organising a seminar on the theme of "Democracy and Education" was to bring together a select number of scholars who have used the study of education as a means of gaining insights into the socio-political processes characterising Indian democracy. By saying "a select number" I may be putting an unnecessary gloss over the fact that Indian scholarship in the social study of education is highly limited. For a variety of reasons rooted in the history of education as a discipline, serious study of education as an area of social inquiry has developed even less than the psychological study of education has in our country. Important beginnings made by scholars such as the late I.P. Desai and A.R. Kamat were picked up very slowly within the field and did not receive adequate attention outside in the broader arena of social studies. Some painstaking work on the distribution of educational opportunity, particularly with reference to oppressed groups such as the Scheduled Castes, opened up educational processes to analysis and commentary from a wider range of scholarly interest. Historical study of education remained confined to the documenting of changes in policy, though Aparna Basu did make noticeable attempts to place educational policy in a political context. Controversies, promising the growth of ideas and method, did arise, but systematic attempts to pursue them still continue to be rare. One, perhaps the most interesting of historical controversies, relates to the state of education in pre-colonial India.

The papers invited for presentation in our seminar offer a modest indication of the kinds of inquiry that are being pursued and also the kinds that are needed. We can group the papers included in this volume broadly under three orbits, each representing a somewhat specialised context of the study of the relationship between education



and society. The first of these orbits covers the conceptual context, presenting both ideas and norms as relevant tools for study. In this orbit, both democracy and education are seen as problematic constructs. Why democracy is perceived as a problematic concept has to do with several fundamental questions including the one about formal versus substantive characteristics of a democratic society. By choosing the formal, and to an extent underplaying the substantive, aspects of a democratic social order, Dewey seems to have paved the way for assigning far greater importance to education than others are usually willing to assign. S. Shukla's paper focusses on this and other problems of Dewey's perspective, especially the problems it invites in a Third World context.

It is only appropriate to discuss Dewey as a very special philosopher because he more than anyone else analysed the full range of educational issues that any agenda of democratisation would bring to attention. And it is only fair to accredit Dewey with the concern and boldness he shows in presenting education as a dialectic between ideas and experience. A reading of Dewey is always a powerful reminder of the fallacy of studying or planning education in terms of one or the other. That the special circumstances of the America of his times permitted him to look so optimistically at the experiential aspect of education without sacrificing its ideational aspect is an important point Shukla makes. Whether or not the circumstances of Dewey's times were an essential element of his construction of the problem of education can be debated. It needs to be acknowledged, though, that Dewey recorded a sharp awareness, verging on disillusionment, of the contradictions underlying America's progress and democratic order not too long after writing *Democracy and Education*. It is another matter that the Dewey who talked about *The Public and Its Problems* is much less read and remembered, if at all, than the earlier, more hopeful Dewey.

The papers by Sharada Jain and Narindar Singh make vigorous attempts to place the relationship between education and democracy in a strictly normative context. Both these writers are concerned with restoring the ideals associated with education to the usage of the word "education". Jain makes two major points: one relating to the importance of the "personal" in a theory of action, and the second about the role of language in clarifying thought. She is anxious about theory-

building; so we can say she accepts that educational reform needs a theory. This is an important point to remember about this paper which, otherwise, might give the impression that authenticity of experience is all that is needed for sounder thought and action. The paper presents a classification of present-day responses to the educational situation, specifically to the dichotomy between the idea of education and the "thing" that is available in the name of education. The first is a cynical response, the second an optimistic and confident one, emphasising the search for efficiency; the third response is radical-activist in its orientation towards a larger political struggle; and the fourth is philosophical, centred around the perception that the impasse in education is basically a linguistic one. Interestingly and somewhat disappointingly, the fourth response entails an abdication of the responsibility of "sorting out" educational problems to the activist or the manager. The plea made is that "a comprehensive theory about action is difficult to work out – to find the links between this larger (rarified) exercise to specific contexts is almost impossible". The despair inherent in this pronouncement from the fourth perspective – and Jain acknowledges that "one can agree" with it – inevitably leads the paper towards its end to an attempt to establish the importance of "innocence" as a means of rejuvenating sense and action. A humbler vocabulary is needed, she says, for "effective thought", suggesting thereby the belief that the fate of thought in the world of events depends on the quality of thought itself.

A similar dilemma surfaces in Narindar Singh's paper. Formal schooling, he shows, does not lead to the "thoughtful thing" which is what the world needs, and that too on a mass scale, in its present crisis. Singh portrays the crisis in no uncertain terms: at stake is mankind's continued existence on earth. The development of scientific technology has reached a point where the end of mankind, or rather the disappearance of the conditions that make human existence possible, has become a "technical possibility". Education, or rather formal schooling, has shared the responsibility of bringing mankind to this pass. It has spread the consciousness embedded in the Cartesian split between awareness and being. Singh spends a considerable part of his paper on the falsity of the ideas and the logic associated with the split, but essentially his argument remains a moral one. It succeeds in persuading us to accept that the role of education has become dysfunc-

tional in that education today does not nurture the chances of life as opposed to destruction. He proposes that a radical model of education can help us. In this radical model education will serve "as the praxis and propagation of non-conformity". A democratic order seems to offer the best chances of such non-conformist education coming into being. The last part of the paper suggests that dysfunctionalities of a crippling nature have crept into the democratic order too. Yet, Singh insists that "a general involvement in the process of decision-making" can salvage democracy and its educational function, specifically the function of dealing with issues in a holistic manner.

The capacity with which the spread of education can fulfil some of the basic conditions of a democratic order in a highly unequal society like ours is deeply concerned with a factor not often recognised: Time. The advantage that dominant groups already have over the weaker, so-called marginalised groups grows rather than diminishes with time; therefore the task before any agency, such as education, which is supposed to equalise opportunity becomes increasingly difficult. Denzil Saldanha's paper on the adivasis of Thane district in Maharashtra sharply brings out this contradiction between a social order supposedly based on equal opportunity and the entrenched differentials of advantage. The study reported in this important paper shows that education does not really carry the same promise to everyone. For those who possess the means of economic well-being education acts as an agency of enhancement and perpetuation of social fortune; for the ones who have been dispossessed, education carries no promise of redemption. Its possible fruit, in the shape of a salaried job for a few, is too remote for most adivasis to deserve coveting in the painful course of going through a long process of daily learning of a curriculum that has little symbolic or functional association with everyday life. The struggle for survival, in the form of indebtedness, exploitation, insecurity and oppression, is far more immediate than any promise that education can offer. This is why, Saldanha says, the adivasi views education with awe – a response that government officials typically interpret as resistance or apathy, rooted in lack of awareness.

This paper also presents frameworks of interventive action. While the broad parametres of intervention that Saldanha discusses and favours are similar to the ones discussed by Sharada Jain, the specific perspective within which Saldanha invites us to assess a strategy of

educational action is that of Gramsci. The moot question asked from this perspective is: "Can an endogeneous system of transmission of knowledge and competence be evolved which critically questions and mobilises into action in the very process of transmitting accumulated human reflection on the socio-economic context of people's relation with their environment?" The question gains enormous relevance as we go through the bleak overview presented by Anita Dighe of India's track record in adult education since independence. The focus of her paper is the co-optive and domesticating role of non-formal education. She shows that the non-accrediting character of non-formal education is not an incidental feature of this system, and that it has little to do with the ideology of "de-schooling". It is related to the social function that non-formal programmes perform by channelising the members of the lower economic strata towards low-paid jobs. Dighe offers sufficient evidence to make this point specifically in the context of women; yet she chooses to go with the theory that educational programmes concentrating on individual mobility and meanings would, in the long run, aggregate to produce the "critical density" required for social restructuring.

Malavika Karlekar's paper covers a wide spectrum of issues related to the conceptual as well as operational aspects of the spread of education among women. The point of departure she chooses is the distinction between two perceptions of "difference" between men and women. One is the perception that men are different from women in a way and to an extent sufficient to warrant, or at least condone, a wider set of options and higher, socially recognised, achievement in the case of men. The other perception is of difference in a self-confined sense, suggesting that the unique characteristics of men and women are of the same order as the unique characteristics of persons excelling in one kind of activity as opposed to another. Karlekar organizes historical and contemporary social and educational data along the lines of this distinction to prove that perceptions of education have moved rather too slowly from holding women as "different therefore inferior" to holding them to be merely different. Her historical data have to do with the personal, autobiographical diaries of upper-caste Bengali women who belonged to the "middle class" *bhadralok* culture of later nineteenth century Bengal. Her analysis of one such diary reveals valuable insights into the conflicts that a literate woman,

exposed to social currents of her time, was facing and with which she perhaps coped better due to the fact of being able to read and write in the process of reflection.

This historical awareness leads Karlekar to question the "progressive" policy pronouncements routinely made in independent India about the importance of education for women in the context of appropriateness. These kinds of pronouncements stand exposed as soon as one notices the social and economic consequences of "appropriateness" of the education made available for women. It ceases to be a harmless pedagogical consideration, favoured ostensibly on the ground that it will further the cause of attracting women to education. It reveals itself to be a smokescreen for the old belief that women are different and therefore require their educational avenues to be carefully tailored. Not just the fact of the tailoring being done by policy-maker men, but the results of such tailoring in terms of lower paid, less prestigious jobs falling in the share of women, emerge as the focal point of criticism in this moving paper. The piety of "spread of education", and the belief and the practices inspired by the idea that any steps taken to increase the spread of education are necessarily beneficial to society come into question. It is possible for a reader to conclude from this paper that oppression merely changes form as history moves from one set of beliefs to another, and further that education is not an adequate weapon to fight oppression. Both these would be valid conclusions, but nevertheless limited. Those favouring expansion of education as a value per se (achieved by offering home science courses for girls or non-formal courses for children of the poor, etc.) can still argue that exposure to education does open up possibilities of participation that did not exist before, and that therefore the socialising part of learning, which may not be satisfactory by standards of equality, can be condoned. The argument necessarily leads to questions related to the speed of change.

Karlekar's pointed criticism of the socialising agenda of women's education does not prevent her from acknowledging the worth of education; in the end she only seems to complain about the slow speed with which its ultimate agenda of socialisation for an egalitarian society is being attained. One finds it necessary to say that speed is not the only problem with the change that education brings about; far graver, from the point of view of democracy and equality, is the



possibility that the slow and subtle change which education brings about invites increasingly more radical forms of oppression. The dialectic between oppression and the means to fight it seems be weighted against the oppressed; for the grounds that education and related processes of social change make available for battles against oppression are accompanied by mental spaces sloping towards compromise and coping. It is in these spaces that the relationship based on oppression finds its next, necessarily more complex set of forms. Karlekar does refer to a proof of this point, without considering the point itself. The proof she refers to lies in the scale at which violence against girls and women has been practised over the recent past. It seems, there is a resurgence of the male attitude rooted in "difference" as a "proof" of inferiority, therefore victimisability, of women, whether in the shape of dowry deaths or sati.

Somewhat less complex-looking than gender is the "difference" rooted in religion. This "difference" has historically received far greater attention than gender has. Poromesh Acharya picks up for documentation an event in which religious affiliations of contending social and political leaders surfaced as the major elements of a problem involving educational policy and administration. The event was the introduction of the Bengal Secondary Education Bill in the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1940. In an attempt to implement the idea mooted by the Calcutta University Commission (1917-19), the Bill sought to establish a Board to look after secondary education in the province. What made the Bill highly controversial was the principle of representation it provided in the proposed Board on the basis of the religious composition of Bengal's society. As Acharya shows, the ideas and forces that the controversy over the Bill unleashed were rooted in Bengal's social history, especially in the development of Bengali language, literature, and education. Acharya argues that the character of Bengal's "nationalist" consciousness and imagination was communal from the beginning, and not in a subtle sense.

We must accept that Acharya is using familiar categories of analysis which counterpose "communal" against "secular" formations. His point that Muslims had a fair grouse against the strikingly Hindu character of educational policies, especially those affecting curriculum and textbooks, can be debated if one decides to break up the category labelled "Hindu" into its socio-economic components.

The debate will permit us to see that vocal elements who uphold the Hindu cause in situations of the kind that the Bengal Secondary Education Bill presented are, in fact, an entrenched upper-caste, mostly landed elites. Whether it pays the social scientist to accept their self-labelling as "Hindu leaders" is a point that future researchers in this sensitive area of contemporary Indian studies will have to seriously consider. Vocabularies used in research writings also perform a legitimating function in the history of ideas. A poorly researched field like the history of education is especially vulnerable to this problem.

The contribution that Acharya's paper makes to this volume is in reminding us sharply that the social meanings inherent in the processes of education cannot be meaningfully studied without a prior awareness of the historical forces shaping the structure and character of the education system. A similar reminder comes from N. Jayaram's paper which focuses on post-independence politics as a matrix for the analysis of India's educational problems. The essential point this paper makes is that state processes, involving both the manner in which state power accrues to certain social groups and the manner in which it is exercised, are deeply involved in shaping the performance of our education system. The analysis of electoral politics presented in this paper may be debatable, but the moot point that India's political life has lent a tragically high amount of venality to the education system and its institutions will probably be corroborated by many. Jayaram also sheds some light on the difficulties involved in evolving a rational agenda of education in a context ridden by conflict of interests. Once again, one is reminded of the inherent limitations of Dewey's account of the roles education can perform in building a democratic society. Dewey did acknowledge the problem posed by social conflicts, but he did not show a great deal of anxiety over the range of influences that social conflicts can have on the functioning of the education system.

Dewey's belief that the history of human endeavour gives as much evidence of conflict as of cooperation tacitly tells us that social conflicts did not carry for him the meaning and weight they may have for us. Dominance as a living variable influencing participation seems alien to Dewey's frame of reference. In the Indian situation, participation as the essence of democratic governance has been tried in many different spheres of civic life. Even in the limited sphere of the governance of educational institutions, let alone the larger sphere of

decision-making regarding the philosophical orientation and structure of education, participation has provided little help in neutralising the role of dominance of entrenched groups, cliques and factions. The adoption and practice of the formal conditions of democracy has not necessarily led to the resolution of problems of substance which relate to equality and justice. Indeed, our record, especially in higher education, shows that democracy in the formal sense alone may merely bureaucratised social exchanges, often making struggles over matters of substance even harder to sustain. The late J.P. Naik — architect of a considerable part of the formal institutional superstructure of India's higher education — used to say in his last days that protest had become far riskier three days after freedom than it was before, indicating that the formal arrangements of democratic governance had grown independently of respect for freedom and justice.

Recent developments in the sociology of education strongly suggest the need to look at the inner world of education in order to assess the real political character of the educational process. The idea underlying some of the most interesting researches made over the last two decades is that the pedagogic process may have as great a role in shaping the political character of education as the opportunity structure embedded in the education system has. The subtleties of method involved in studying the pedagogic encounter between teacher and pupil have understandably received great attention in the wake of this concern, for the older methods of studying the relationship between education and society are not particularly useful for pursuing this concern. The last two papers in this volume are concerned both with the problems of method and the potential for rational action in the direction of reform. Both these papers reflect on specific institutional contexts: Meenakshi Thapan looks at the Krishnamurty school at Rishi Valley, and Anita Rampal at the Science Teaching Programme in Hoshangabad.

Thapan is concerned with the translation of Krishnamurty's emphasis on individual autonomy and choice into institutional behaviour. She analyses the negotiations that take place between teacher and pupils in the classroom. The teacher often uses legitimate pedagogical strategies or applies the resources of her personality to construct a situation in which teaching becomes possible. "It is only when negotiation fails that teachers resort to the use of positive measures to establish



control", Thapan says. On the other hand, "most children realise that they have important 'bargaining power' with their parents, teachers, and peers. If pupils are encouraged to express their opinions freely, as they are at Rishi Valley, they become aware of this bargaining power". This is apparently as much of a recommendation as a social anthropologist could be expected to offer in a field rife with loud recommendations. Those interested in the potential role that education can play in the construction of a democratic ethos can learn from this paper that rational educational action belongs to the space that lies between children's natural abilities and the *awareness* in them that they have these abilities. The manner in which education performs this "awareness giving" function cannot be treated as a norm independent of socio-economic and cultural variables. The fact that children studying at the school Thapan examined come from an elite stratum of Indian society must be assumed to be related to the use they are able to make of their natural bargaining powers. In order to be persuaded to drop this assumption we will have to be presented with a contrasting case i.e. featuring a similar ethos in the midst of children from poor social backgrounds.

Anita Rampal writes about precisely such background forces. She reopens the questions long assumed to be closed, about the efficacy of science education in bringing about a general social awareness linked to "scientific temper". In a bold commentary on what is perhaps the best educational experiment in the country since "basic education", she criticises the child-as-scientist assumption underlying the popular "discovery method" of teaching. Her main contention is that classroom learning represents a complex interplay of children's subjective instincts (carrying their accumulated past experiences and expectations) and the "factual" symbolic knowledge that the teacher and the text are supposed to impart. Rampal takes a plunge into the literacy-theories which distinguish cognitive styles said to be natural to an oral universe as opposed to those belonging to a literate social universe. Her analysis suggests that the gap between the life-world of the children of Hoshangabad and the symbolic knowledge they receive at school in the innovative science lessons may have considerable force in determining the success of such a programme. Her concern is not confined to the surface features of the gap, pertaining to the images, vocabularies and the relevance of the problems selected for inclusion

in science texts. Indeed, at these levels the programme reflects great sensitivity. By referring to the supposedly deeper level of cognitive styles — a concept open to debate, at least in the present state of research — she adds another dimension of the problem of “difference” being used as a ground for dissimilar education.

Accepting the difference of cognitive styles, compounded by acceptance of children’s subjective science opens up a whole set of implications for equality as a value. These implications have a far wider stretch of relevance than the children of Hoshangabad. Even as a focus of pedagogical innovation Hoshangabad has not been unanimously receptive to the science its children have been learning with proven joy. Politicians and other vested interests have time and again hammered on the justifiability of a “different” science being taught to Hoshangabad’s children, suggesting that they are being unfairly deprived of the science taught elsewhere. If we avoid reducing this debate to the cruder issues of content and examination, we can see how real and deep the obstacles in the path to a democratic pedagogy of the kind Dewey would have liked are. Some of these obstacles may have legitimate ground in theory, but even these obstacles need to be placed in the same social universe in which they manifest themselves as problems to be solved.

## Keynote Address

Marjorie Sykes

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My theme today is "Education and Democracy", and talking as I am to professional educationists in a country which is proud, and in some ways rightly proud, to call itself a democracy, I want to begin by defining these two terms rather carefully. Otherwise we may find ourselves talking at cross-purposes because we make different, but unspoken assumptions about what these terms mean.

I begin with "education". We must in the first place get rid of the unspoken assumption that education means schooling. Education does *not* mean schooling; in fact the flavour of the two words is so different that it may very well mean *de*-schooling, as Ivan Illich has insisted. Education means, literally, a "leading out"; I picture someone taking a child gently by the hand, walking alongside at the child's natural speed, encouraging new growth and new adventure, cooperating with the impulses of the child's own nature. But in contrast to this we use the word "schooled" to suggest that the person has been conditioned to do something one would *not* naturally do – some of the poses and movements of ballet, for example. I am not claiming that education and schooling are incompatible; I am not saying that you cannot have them both. But I *am* saying that they are different and that we ought to recognise the difference.

I am also saying that a teacher's first business is not with schooling but with education. A teacher is like a gardener, caring for living plants – an ideal which is expressed in the word *kinder-garten*, a garden of children. A teacher is like a nurse, feeding and protecting the young, providing the right kind of environment for their growth, perhaps in what we call a *nursery* school. And the wise and skilful gardener or nurse both know that there are times, many times, when living creatures should be left alone to get on with their own growing, do their

own thing, while the teacher stands back and watches, concerned to understand but not to interfere.

So much for what I mean by education. Now what about democracy? The formal techniques of "national democracy", like the formal patterns of "school education", are surface phenomena that may, and sometimes do, have very little to do with the essence of the thing. Democracy is a state of things when people, ordinary people, manage their own affairs by agreement among themselves. A basic democracy implies a group small enough for its members to know one another well, to respect one another's gifts and needs, and to understand thoroughly the common needs and circumstances with which they have to deal. The health of democracy at this down-to-earth, grass-roots level is essential to the health of any "national" superstructure which may be built upon it.

Here too is the basic link between democracy and education. A democratic society needs fully mature human beings, and the purpose of education is to provide them. It is to nurture the growth of young human beings into a full maturity of individual and social development. I hope we can all accept this as our basis and starting-point.

Human societies have been historically of many kinds, and education has varied as it has been shaped to meet the needs of various patterns of social living. But whatever its form it has always contained three elements, a teacher, a learner, and some *thing*, some object, skill in dealing with which is the focus of their common interest. Growth in skill, in understanding, in mastery, comes out of this interaction of people with things and with one another. The formal and informal "apprenticeships" by which for so many centuries human skills have been passed on from one generation to the next are important examples of this triangle of learning. But long before the child is apprenticed to any skill or trade, he/she has been a member of the same kind of basic triangle and acquired a growing mastery of the world of earth and water, and a growing mastery of human language and the patterns of human society.

As for books, which we commonly tend to regard, like schools, as necessary tools of education, we should realise that in the whole sweep of human time and space books have played only a minor part in the nurture of the young. When at last society's sacred traditions were written down, the future priest was apprenticed to the holy books as his

fellow-learners were apprenticed to the loom, or the potter's clay, or the craft of working wood. The link survives in the English language of today; our "clerk" and our "cleric" are twin words with a priestly ancestry. It was only as things other than the sacred books began to be written down that the "three R's" became a desirable part of everyone's equipment for a full life in human society. Even now, as I myself would argue, they are neither the first nor the most important part of human education.

Let me say a little more about this side of the educational triangle which I have called the "things". Another way of thinking about it, as I suggested at the beginning, is as the environment. The greatest teachers of modern India, like their great predecessors throughout the world, have insisted on the importance of a rich and stimulating environment in promoting human growth. Tagore felt keenly the pitiful impoverishment of the dreary ugliness of "school" in contrast with the endless stimulus and interest of outdoor life and activity. Gandhi built his whole vision of education on our response to the basic elements of our life-environment: the well-being of our own bodies; the vast physical world of air and soil and water, sun and stars; the social milieu of family, neighbours, peer-group; the economic life of our village and neighbourhood, field and workshop; the spiritual-cultural world of celebration – of beauty, mystery, music, art. Like *all* the great educators he gave a central place to music. All of them did so, which may perhaps make us wonder how it is that we have gone so far astray as either to exclude music from our schools altogether, or to regard it as at best an "optional extra". But it may be more positive and profitable to ask how we may, each in our own place, provide our growing children with the kind of environment which can call out their interest, nurture their skills and develop their full potential.

Finally let us turn to the other two sides of the triangle, the teacher and the learner. One of my favourite quotations, the first sentence of a book on education, is: "We learn best as teachers; we teach best as learners". That is worth thinking about, and so is the title of the book itself, *Born Curious* by R.A. Hodgkin. There is mounting evidence to show that even a very young infant in its first few weeks is actively questioning its environment, and that solving problems (like, How can I make that light go on?) gives the child a keen pleasure. In the light of such revealing psychological experiments we may reflect on Einstein's

comment in his autobiographical essay: "It is nothing short of a miracle that modern methods of instruction have not entirely strangled the holy spirit of inquiry". Have we strangled it in ourselves, or do we still go about asking questions of life, pondering doubts, seeking new truth? If not, are we really qualified to be teachers? Do we welcome children's spontaneous questions, do we find in them some echo of our own? I hope so, because that is what education is all about, about questions and problems and doubts, about things that don't fit into the normal, accepted pattern. If we can think of education as a response to a series of challenging questions, and *not* as the accumulation of a lot of dead facts, then it can become "an exploratory and creative part of a self-renewing culture",<sup>1</sup> a democratic culture in the most basic sense of the term.

Just one more thought to throw into the melting-pot of this seminar. There is a very wide-spread assumption reflected in many traditions that human beings may be expected to reach essential maturity about their sixteenth year. In India we have the famous saying of Manu that from that time your son should become your comrade, equally with you a responsible member of society, able to stand on his own feet and direct his own life. During those sixteen years adults owe it to children to help them to grow into this self-reliance, and to put into their hands the tools of further knowledge. Let them then seek that knowledge as they will, what and when and where they please. The self-education which may then take place, say between the ages of sixteen and thirty, has no limits. And if, at thirty, we are still zestfully asking questions and seeking solutions, perhaps we may become good teachers!

## NOTES

- 1 R.A. Hodgkin, *Born Curious* (Department of Education, Oxford University).





**Democracy and Education:  
Reflections from the Third World in Late Twentieth  
Century**

*Sureshchandra Shukla*

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John Dewey considered education within the rubric of democracy early in this century in the United States. Progressive education of his conception thus took on a new dimension, in fact, located itself in a qualitatively new domain thereafter -- even as Dewey's conceptualisation was merely a (i.e. not necessarily the only logically or historically inevitable) culmination of what had gone on in the earlier three or four centuries. Paedocentrism or child-centred education counting Pestalozzi and Rousseau among its pioneers had, for example, emphasised that *a*) the child was *not a little man* but something qualitatively different, physiologically and psychologically, and therefore learnt differently and different things from adult humans viz. movements, observations, skills, too, and not just words and ideas; *b*) different children were different, they were *individuals*; and *c*) they learnt differently at different *stages of growth*. The *individual child* has thus assumed his autonomy vis-a-vis the book (or THE BOOK), the priest, the parent, the village or the community and, for that matter, in theory, even Cosmos and God. (So, of course, did the individual teacher and school). In the economic and political domain, the growth of industry, the city, the nation state and ultimately political democracy had required the extension of literacy and numeracy to larger numbers of people and the addition of manual and observational skills and capacities as well as social capabilities, to the objectives explicitly aimed at in education. Both of these developments were aspects of "democratisa-



## 2 *Democracy and Education in India*

tion" -- bringing in more people and admission of non-intellectual or non-cognitive development to be legitimate education. Possibly in response to the elements of heterogeneity so introduced -- and to the general climate of movement and change which industrialisation and democracy bring about -- we notice early in 20th century Durkheim's conception of education as reproduction in the social and moral sphere, as an instrument of social and cultural solidarity. John Dewey's trans-Atlantic formulation was "democracy" -- different as much in its history and circumstance as in its values and philosophy. (It is, of course, arguable that the difference is one of style, idiom and temper rather than of substance between a coercive and a co-optive theory).

It is also important to notice that all this happened in today's First World in an earlier period -- the countries of Europe industrialised and developed nation-states, even democratic nation-states, on the basis of surpluses obtained by colonising the rest of the world. In fact, the world system has been constructed so that the domination, exploitation and imposition of undemocratic colonial or semi-colonial regimes on the rest of the world became the basis and precondition of industrialisation and development, and, in some cases, democratisation in varying ways and degrees, of the societies of the West. One can notice practice and then on a theoretical plane. Before outlining this phenomenon, let us notice the limits within which these basic issues were raised and a sort of a relationship between democracy and education established or at least postulated. In "free" America, where immigrants spread further and further out to the West and built autonomous colonies, colonies of immigrant *whites* were being established. Neither indigenous native Indians, nor the later imported Blacks -- initially slaves for a long while -- had a hand in the creation of this decentralised democratic society.<sup>1</sup> White European immigrants themselves were homogenised and Americanised by ensuring, even enforcing, competence in the English language -- a standard English unmitigated by the concerns which today's sociolinguistics or anthropology bring up viz., the legitimacy of dialect, or of folk-languages or "little" cultures. (It is another matter that Americans as a whole developed their own dialect -- the American form of the English language). It is on this homogenisation already enforced by earlier generations and against the background of the urbanising, industrialising North American society and its educational concerns that John Dewey responded to the need and the possibility of a democratic theorisation of education. This conceptualisation does not refer another

pattern too, in this historical development. Early developers e.g. England had the greatest freedom and leeway and, could, therefore, afford more decentralised internal social and political development and did not need so much science and technology in order to be competitive. Later arrivals on the scene, France, Germany, Japan and USSR had to more consciously engineer themselves on the world economic and political scene and, therefore, fashioned more centralised states, more direct national state intervention in economy and education, more use of science and technology -- therefore, greater introduction of it in education too -- and generally a more hierarchical top-downwards pattern of relationships. This meant less "democracy" in education, even less child-centredness even if manual-observational skills and elements were introduced in the curriculum and methods. Democratisation in the sense of wider spread of schooling and admission of non-intellectual/non-cognitive elements in education was not necessarily accompanied uniformly and to the same extent in all cases by democratisation of pedagogic and social relationships within the classroom and the school or of the content and process of curriculum development. Nor was the hierarchical relationship or order as between intellectual and practical education disturbed or even challenged in a fundamental sense. The question of education recreating society in any fundamental manner was also not raised.

It was left to the trans-Atlantic first new nation, the United States of America, to pose these questions, first in merely to the extension of education to larger sections of population.<sup>3</sup> Dewey's thought refers to the content, methods and direction of the educational process, its capacity to influence or help in the evolution of the social process itself and to the openness of the goals of education and of this same social process. Democracy in this context refers to the parity or equality of generations (pupil and teacher), classes (working and middle) their characteristic labour and culture (verbal-intellectual or manual-social-productive) and so on, and to participant or community character of work and learning. In working out this educational matrix the nature of thinking, learning and the goals of education are themselves redefined.

What was happening in the America of John Dewey? As ever new waves of settlers from Europe had come and gone on to newer settlements and colonies, they had the freedom and the need to set up

their own schools and school programmes even as the higher learning in the more conservative Eastern regions followed the English precedents. Here, the rise of nobodies to the status of an Andrew Carnegie, from errand boy to millionaire within the same generation established a climate not only of mobility but also equality in a country which had no established or hereditary nobility (or related priesthood or bourgeois classes), and where the income and related social status of the less intellectual, commercial and service occupations of various kinds were seen particularly in the open competitive (democratic?) context to be more or less equal to the traditional learned and genteel occupations of law, clergy, medicine and higher civil service. In consequence, the hierarchy of learning which the university in Europe had institutionalised, the superiority of the verbal-intellectual over the practical-social which the university as well as the European grammar school, *lycee* or *gymnasium* had symbolised and strengthened, gave way in the American context to the rising though still not too high esteem of vocational education. Also came the rise of the comprehensive secondary school, the development of land grant colleges into agricultural universities which stressed useful and not merely learned knowledge, an emphasis on the extension function of the (agricultural) universities even if as an extension of their research role -- and an expansion of the clientele as well the intellectual span of education at all levels, university, high school and common elementary school.

Even as the domination of capital in the economy and its consequences for the polity and social organisation were working themselves out, and as certain traditional educational preserves of the elite held fast, the breaking down of the traditional hierarchy in knowledge and education by generation, class, type of learning, etc. was the mode. John Dewey's educational theorisations provided the theoretical and ideological overarching as well as foundation for a dynamic which had already been in process in this "new" society for almost a century. The formulations of his *Democracy and Education* provided theoretical basis for breaking loose from old structures and hierarchies. The spelling out of a progressive pedagogy and a method (the project: "problematic act carried out in a realistic setting") offered the instrumentality of bringing together children of widely varying abilities, skills and aptitudes as well equally varying social and economic backgrounds on basis of participant equality in educational work. By not prescribing a predetermined set of aims (even though at the same time

inexplicably and mysteriously expecting democracy to be the result), by not setting the goals of education outside of education but within the process itself, by expecting the educational process to itself set up a dynamic of changing and reconstructing society as in the more radical versions of his school of thought a theoretical basis for pulling down the obstacles set up by the traditional institutions and images of education to social change was provided.

Support for such a conceptualisation of the role of the school and of formal education came -- or at least had the possibility of being obtained -- from the changes in objective conditions of life which urban and industrial organisation of life were bringing about. Children no longer learnt the skills of their future trade from their own parents who, in fact, increasingly no longer plied these trades at home but worked away in factories and offices and left children alone. An explicit enlargement of the role of the school from mere learning of literary and numerical skills to the formation of habits, values and personalities took place. The heterogeneity of occupational and other characteristics of the families the children came from (to school) were called upon to perform a much greater socialising role, and use group-oriented and socialising techniques to a much greater extent. Not quite coincidentally, the science of psychology grew up, recognised that cognition is not just abstract and verbal -- nor is human ability -- and that human beings differed from each other in possessing varying degrees of different types of ability or intelligence and personalities. A more equal importance or significance of these all and a less exclusive reliance on, and esteem for, the merely abstract, verbal cognitive, became more and more necessary, as industrial-technological and political-managerial tasks in society were seen to be not only significant but also requiring cultivation of diversified and varied kinds of human ability and talent. This was seen to be so, as much at the rudimentary levels of the average worker as at higher levels. In principle, the purely objective pedagogical outcomes required in these circumstances are also capable of being achieved through authoritarian socialisation and hierarchical organisation of knowledge and of schools. In the European context with a long-established tradition of social and educational hierarchy, such a tendency has, indeed, been very visible, though of course in contest with the democratic urges in polity, and the egalitarian thrust of the struggles of the middle and later working classes in the arena of education as a corollary of their

economic and political struggles. But the ideal self-image of a struggling or upwardly mobile middle or working class can be -- and in actual fact was -- often fashioned by the dominant tradition. As we noticed earlier, the particular historical circumstance of the North of America, however lent a special edge to democratisation in structure, content and methods and even goals of education. One might comment here in passing that the association of democracy with the small community in the introductory note for this seminar is at best a partial statement which, by itself, would not only be wishful and visionary in character but in fact ignore the very unequal situation it represents in many contexts. It is the dynamic of industrial civilisation and the struggles of the middle and, later, working classes against the established order which provide the possibility of democracy.<sup>3</sup> And of course, let us also note as we did earlier, in parenthesis, as the revisionist historians in United States have tended to emphasise, that the extension of education to the working classes can be viewed as much as a process of their co-optation and ideological subordination as it could be as a victorious outcome of a struggle by these classes to wrest their rights or as a process of provision of skills necessary for the functioning of the economic and political system. (This dialectic of co-optation/struggle applies, too, to the part played by education in the colonial Third World situation).

The story of the journey of Dewey's ideas through other phases and cultures brings out a number of interesting points. In the United States, on the one hand, Dewey himself was called upon to note (see *Experience and Education*) that his methods should not be so interpreted as to be repetitive and non-cumulative in terms of knowledge, concepts or intellectual skills. His radical disciple George Counts ended up by asking "Dare the Schools Change the Social Order?" When, by the time of Depression of the Thirties, the expansive, hopeful period of economic and social picture had come to a close, and established society had no more need for a change-oriented pedagogy to assist in the process of changing the skills and orientations of its human agents. After the Second World War again, Admiral Rickover -- and also a great many others, less illiberal and less jingoistic -- had "discovered" the need for hard grind in the "basics" for America to be great. New psychologies of Bruner and Skinner, among others, and new philosophies of education e.g. Conant following Hutchins of an earlier epoch, had all moved in the direction of "the disciplines" with



its concomitant (though, one must grant, not entirely unequivocal) thrust in the direction of hierarchy in methods, content and structures of education. The not very simple relationship of this matter with equality -- another important element in democracy -- will be discussed a little later. It is of interest to note here that Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, during her Stewardship of education and culture in the USSR in the 1920's toyed with the Complex Method similar to Dewey's projects. They were given up when the USSR embarked on the drive for industrialisation and discipline in the Thirties under Stalin. Hierarchy between generations (teachers and pupils) and the supremacy of the basic disciplines stood restored. Dewey's own journey to the USSR was not particularly gratifying for either side. By contrast, his travels to China in the 1920's were a roaring success judged by the conventional criteria of large admiring audiences and educationists persuaded of his views. Young Tao Zianshi, graduate of Columbia Teachers College, was appointed, after an initial rejection by the conservatives, at the age of 28 to be Director of Educational Sciences at Nanking Higher College, who all through later life was active in every significant movement (e.g. May Fourth, mass literacy, rural reconstruction, war-time education or workers' universities) was an early proponent of (American style) progressive education. But from the actual Chinese experience -- and his own philosophical predilections as well, perhaps -- he turned to a Marxist understanding of the relation of education to society, of people and their culture and life-experiences to education. The possibly only really significant period in China when peoples' culture and lives were proclaimed to be the important principle in determining the content and organisation of education was the much later Maoist Cultural Revolution. It can be characterised as democratic in the sense that the "little" traditions and culture of the people were placed at the centre of the educational enterprise and the "great" culture handed down generation after generation by the elite to its successors was (temporarily) dethroned from its central place in education.

Let us now move nearer home. Gandhi, like Mao, was a visionary of a society which did not, in the event, come about, at least not in his lifetime. Mao did succeed in bringing about an actual political transformation of his own conception, the Chinese Revolution which was victorious and established the People's Republic in 1949. Gandhi, possibly because he had set his sights higher, did not have that

satisfaction. Independent India of 1947 was not a *sarvodaya* society of Hind Swaraj. He did have the experience of trying out a community of people who did manual work for their own living in the *ashram* at Sewagram and of starting the substantial village industries and other "constructive" programmes. One outcome was the work -- and community-centred *Buniyadi talim* (Basic education) which was officially adopted as government policy immediately after Independence for a variety of mixed motives by different sets of people -- Congress Ministers for the reason that it promised to be cheaper to provide, and child-centred or progressive educationists for the reason that it liberated schooling from the tyranny of the book and the rote learning based examination. But we must recognise that neither of these groups accepted Gandhi's *sarvodaya* society and, more important from the standpoint of the present discussion, Gandhiji's Basic education was not democratic education or education for democracy in John Dewey's or any other democratic or paedocentric sense. It was *work-centred* and community centred education; its curriculum, methods, and school regime would derive from the needs and dictates of the work in hand and of the (restructured, hopefully, democratic) community. It was not, in principle, child-centred and did not base itself on less teacher-directed or adult determined methods or curriculum. Nor was its theory directed towards an open future. Of course, for this reason its logic of movement towards the *sarvodaya* future was more clear than Dewey's in relation to democracy. Basic education was expected to reduce, if not eliminate, exploitation and differentials between classes and occupational groups by virtue of the fact that intellectual learning was to be integrally connected with manual and community work which was to be done by all, both while learning at school, and later in life. Less hierarchy between different kinds of learning -- skill, cognition etc. -- was, of course, postulated and in this it was democratic in the sense that Dewey's education was, too. But all this was the theory.

In practice, basic education was only the Indian version of much the same paedocentric and democratic changes in education which the West had seen under other theoretical auspices, offering greater emphasis on non-verbal and non-intellectual or, non-cognitive outcomes of learning and more activity. Only, the spread and depth or intensity of the change were much less, precisely as all other attributes of modern development -- industrialisation, urbanisation, etc. -- and democratisation viz. equality in its various manifestations had been

much less sharp, for reasons well-known, namely that the underdevelopment of the periphery of the world system is a condition of the development of its Centre. Symbiosis carries too harmonious a set of connotations to characterise this situation. Dominance of the Centre and dependency in the periphery nevertheless (or, in fact, necessarily) produce in the latter an enclave of "modernity". In this "modern" enclave, one sees in education, as in many other spheres' manifestations of a change in the democratic direction.

Of the more prominent recognised attributes of democracy would be *a*) equality and *b*) the right and the opportunity to be distinct or different (individuality), appropriately moderated by the demands of community. Paradoxically, the consequences of both can in some ways be in opposition to progressive democratic premises in educational theory. We dwell on these briefly without in any way meaning to deny the basic or in any case substantial congruence in the two spheres. The basic conundrum can be briefly and succinctly expressed (parallel to the American question of the 60's in the context of education of the Blacks: Can separate be equal?) in the question: Can different be equal? Or, to phrase it differently: Must equality mean identity? Questions of diversity of curricula and methods, of adjusting education to individual or group aptitudes, abilities (Are they really different/diverse or is it merely a matter of nurture -- or worse, conditioning?), of goals (Should they be or should they be allowed to be different?) and of ethnicity and social and cultural identity arise here.

To clarify, education functions in a society of more, or less, inequality of status, power or income for persons of different skills and competences. Most psychological and social theory suggests *a*) that human beings are to a great extent trainable and *b*) that a very substantial portion of the observed or measured differences in capacity, intelligence, aptitude among human beings are consequences of circumstances of class, geography, gender, family dynamics and structure, and expectations esteem, and experiences which valued adults (eg. teachers or parents) or groups (or peers, superiors etc.) put an individual through and are not innate, inborn or unalterable. However, only the most extreme environmentalists -- and possibly not even they -- deny entirely the existence of individual differences of potential. One need not accept Jensen's racist psychology to state this. Nor does one have to accept that identical goals must motivate all human beings. In this situation, is it more egalitarian to provide identical



curricula and methods or differing ones? -- knowing particularly that in any given society there are particular sets of skills and attributes which, even though changing and amenable to change by both educational and social engineering, fairly stable over time. Differential provisions are fairer to the individual child in his/her growth and development and could even be (in very many situations are) fairer in equipping him/her for his/her place in this matrix of status/power/income. But they are equally, if not more likely to consolidate the privilege of the privileged (and equally true may be its converse). In fact, the demand of most underprivileged groups always has been *identity* of provision. Mother tongue, work-and activity based education, otherwise differentiated curricula have all more often than not been rejected by them as prescriptions of inequality. So has community based decentralised organisation of education (Even the neighbourhood school, the favourite of Indian egalitarians was seen in the US context as legitimisation of ghetto schools, calling for the impracticable brief spell of bussing).

There is one major exception to this: ethnicity. Except for the colonised peoples' (in fact their elites') enslaved fascination for and bondage to the language of their coloniser, for more reasons than just scientific or cultural ethnic groups (whether defined by religion or "race" or nationality) are keen to be *themselves*. Language, cultural symbol and religious curricular elements are some of the means whereby ethnic entities seek to be different in education and upbringing -- and still seek, assert or even attain equality in the matrix of status/power/income. *Identity* is here the key word. Existence, preservation, strengthening of identities or their admixture and homogenisation into larger identities -- national or other are all promo'able through education and will in turn influence it. That is an essential aspect of the democratic phenomenon in society. Democratic education has to relate to it in often tricky ways. What about the individual who seeks to disown or dilute his/her ethnic identity, persons who do not want religious or denominational educational compulsions to apply to them or their children? Or the similar problem of the relation of the national identity to ethnic identities which are as often sub-national as cross-national. Democracy in the pedagogic or educational theory sense in which the issue was discussed in the early parts of this paper is likely to accentuate the ethnic situation except when the nation has,

as in the American case, already earlier homogenised itself adequately for solidarity and stability, after which indeed, it is in a position to let democratic processes in society and pedagogy have full and free play. It can be afforded -- and may even consolidate nation-hood. As noted earlier, this situation is easier for the First World which has had elbowroom in terms of time, priority and economic surpluses (these cornered initially from the rest of the world) to consolidate itself in relative comfort. Late arrival and/or ex-colony nations find the ethnic phenomenon -- in education as in other social processes a more demanding challenge. But they do not have easy authoritarian homogenisation solutions available. The challenge of diversity, unity in diversity and the strains that arise therefrom appear to have only one viable solution: democracy at least on the pedagogic plane. This may appear to be more hope and faith than reason. But history seems to support this proposition. Though not without some qualification -- even as most recent work in sociology of education e.g. Bourdieu (pedagogic arbitrary as a concept) and Bernstein (the notion of agencies of symbolic control) tends in the opposite direction.

To conclude, democracy in relation to education cannot but be an extension of child-centredness (paedocentrism) to the social dimension. The concrete or specific context(s) of the Third World in later twentieth century offer very much severer challenges in the realisation of it than the easier circumstances of the First World starting out in an earlier epoch and on a different basis/status in relation to the rest of the world. Political and economic dependency, ethnicity and the very paradoxical relation of equality to the problems of uniformity/diversity, centrality/community are issues that democracy faces in relation to education.

### POSTSCRIPT

Educational theory generally -- and certainly in our country and in the broad social-philosophical domain -- has not yet taken cognisance of the electronic revolution beyond noting the unilaterality, alienation and allied phenomena that result. But it will not do to play King Canute when the waves of telecommunication are already upon us. In developed First World and perhaps the socialist, too, a near universal spread foretells a centralised homogenisation as well as

perhaps accentuated feelings of deprivation and reactions of emulation. This drastically changes the circumstances under which democracy intervened in educational theory. In the Third World, where upto half or more of the population are outside the net of communication because they are also below human nutritional standards and are barely participating in the market or literate communication, an even more differentiated and complicated situation has emerged. Most earlier conceptualisations of the relation of education to society, culture, economy and polity must undergo substantial transformation in this situation. Even in the absence of an adequate response or an understanding to serve as the basis for such a response, one cannot but note the drastically changed circumstance.

On a second reading it appears we have not taken adequate note of the dialectic between democracy and nationalism in contexts like our own. The "struggle" of the national intelligentsia for a "Western" Education and its (European) education has been viewed often as progressive and democratic. It must be noted that the spread of Western Education is as much cooperation and indoctrination as it may be a prelude to liberation. Actually it could well be argued the other way round. An inevitable consequence is the legacy of the Western language which divides the nation so completely and creates insurmountable obstacles in the path of real democratisation whether in society or education and culture.

## NOTES

- 1 It may be interesting to note that in Latin American contexts with, e.g. in Brazil lesser preponderance of European white immigrants and greater proportions of Indians and Blacks and in a less vigorous capitalism, similar recipes of homogenised "openness" and democracy did not emerge.
- 2 In fact, as we notice, in the work of revisionist historians of education in United States in the 1970's and later, it is quite possible to view this extension not so much as a democratic victory of the working classes, their success in securing the knowledge and skills with which to press on with their struggle for an equal and full human existence, as, on the contrary, a project of homogenisation or ideological co-optation by the bourgeoisie so as to secure the informed and willing, even quiescent, cooperation of the working classes in their own exploitation and domination in the capitalist economic and social order.
- 3 As do similar national anti imperialist struggles in colonial Third World Contexts. Nationalism gets intertwined with democracy in social life and in education life with corresponding dialectical relationships emerging within education.

**NOTE :** It would be impossible to acknowledge the debt the author owes to all the authors whose writings and all the students, friends and professional colleagues whose discussions over these many decades are reflected in the foregoing reflections. Particular mention must be made, however, of the paper by Hubert Brown of the University of Hong Kong "American Progressivism in Chinese Education; Through the Looking Glass" (Regional Conference in Sociology of Education, Delhi, Central Institute of Education, venue Nehru Memorial Museum August 16-17, 1986) on which I have relied heavily for the references to China. John Fairbank's *The Great Chinese Revolution* (Harvard, 1986) tends to support the reading of the situation presented in this present paper. The author's own ideas on democracy, Basic education and ethnicity have been presented at greater length in earlier writings (1) "Educational Elements of a Socialist Cultural Policy" in Satish Sabherwal, ed., *Towards a Cultural Policy* (Delhi: Vikas, 1975), (2) "Indian Educational Thought and Experiments" in *Comparative Education* Vol 19 No 1 1983 (Carfax) and (3) "Secular and non-Secular Elements in Indian Education" *Naya Shikshak* April-June, 1974 all papers originally written for the Indian Institute of Advanced Study Simla; and in (4) "Indian Muslims and Education" in Zafar Imam, ed., *Indian Muslims* (Delhi Orient Longman, 1975)

## Education: A Linguistic Impasse

*Sharada Jain*

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I doubt if there has ever been a period of history when a greater proportion of people have found themselves frankly puzzled by the way they would react to their best efforts to change it, if possible for the better. We knock down some dilapidated slums and put up reasonably smart new buildings in their place, only to find a few years later that the inhabitants of the area are just as badly off and living in as great squalor as before. We lend considerable sums of money to a tropical country and show it how to organize public health and even provide it with medical staff for some years, and the result is that the level of nutrition falls alarmingly and the babies are dying of starvation instead of the infectious diseases that killed them before. If things go unexpectedly wrong once or twice, that is, one might say rather paradoxically, only to be expected; but recently they seem to have been going wrong so often and in so many different contexts that many people are beginning to feel that they must be thinking in some wrong way about how the world works. I believe that this suspicion is probably correct.

- Waddington C.H. in *Tools for Thought* Janathan Cape Ltd., 1977.

## I

### Context

Had Waddington picked his examples from the domain of educational interventions and focussed on the current Indian scene the "suspicions" about our ways of thinking would have been substantiated even more. The paradox in this context is sharper and more widely recognised. Hopes as well as despair from educational undertakings have affected far greater numbers over a much longer time. Unlike health interventions where "action" has had limited, defined domain -- immunisation, nutrition, family welfare, etc. (leaving the issues of mental health/well-being for the moment out as an "obviously difficult area"), claims built around educational activity have been all pervasive. People have led themselves to believe that the last and final answer to the most persistent problems of society -- poverty, inequality, injustice -- is to be found in Education. This faith, however, is counter-balanced by an equally strong rejection of the "outcome" of the educational system. The educated person, the "product" for the common people, has been, and continues to be, the perpetrator of those very problems which the intervention is expected to solve. He is consistently self-seeking, alienated and oppressive.

The outcome of this paradoxical knowledge has been twofold. At one level, it has inspired ongoing critiques from heterogeneous groups -- intellectuals, parents, children, employers and the unemployed. These critiques have a wide range, from vociferous expression of anger and distrust for policy makers, to more systematic detailing of flaws in educational management. Admission policy of schools; inadequate arrangements for seating, drinking water, and lavatories; non-availability of basic tools for teaching like blackboards, chalk, pencils, notebooks; uninteresting/ineffective curriculum design; unjust wages for teachers -- all have been pointed out time and again. These critiques take the observed scene seriously (as they must) and *find flaws* in the delivery system.

At another level, there is a parallel stream of ideas, expressed more often verbally than in writing, which build around the "ideals" in education. They dilate on the Indian tradition of the non-materialistic notion of educational engagement. The focus in this variety of re-



sponse is on what the teacher "ought to be" -- what the relation ought to be between the school and "people", what a parent should do, and how the Indian people can (ought to) redeem their strength and glory by vitalising their traditional approach to education.

Both these apparently different positions draw their justification from "observation" and "theory". However, they leave the ordinary people who find this kind of reasoning essentially repetitive, leading nowhere near any shift in their areas of distress, as helpless as before. Whether it be theorizing on observation or ordering the observed to conform to theory, what difference does it make for the common person. Everybody understands that the *name* education is not the same as the *thing* education. It is not necessary to resort to the technical labels of descriptive and prescriptive phraseology to make people "understand". They *know* where the problem lies because they have it as a matter of direct experience. The thought-world has proved to be too weak, if not totally ineffective in the world of events. While critiques pour forth armed with choice-phraseology and internal coherence, little dent is made in the actual situation as it obtains. Despite the fact that the "thought" is about the "thing", the connection between them is lost somewhere. This raises some fundamental questions: What is the connection between the "is" and "ought" of education? Where do we find the controls? What has made critical thinking so sterile?

## II

### Response

Despite their diversity, almost all responses to these questions exhibit a remarkable convergence in the initial rejection of this description of the problem. They reject this particular formulation not because it raises wrong questions, but because it focusses on only a "part" rather than the "whole" to which it belongs. Doing this, they argue, deflects the issue. It is only through the understanding of the larger set that we can ever hope to get some insight on this specific subset. Having agreed on this point, we find at least four, very divergent sets of analysis of the "larger whole".

The first, simplest, oft-repeated and popularly shared view is one which traces the educational disorder to the fact of a sick society. The confusion and distress experienced by the members is a manifestation of a larger disease which grips the society as a whole. The analogy is drawn from the human organism suffering from a nervous breakdown, with a complicated set of symptoms crippling almost all the functions of the organism. Such a situation, it is agreed, is obviously difficult to repair and mend at any specific point. Nothing short of "total change" can bring relief to any part of the whole. However, here the analogy ends. "Total change" would necessitate change of the people and the patterns relating them. Hence the solution offered is at best, only a theoretic one. No fresh set of people can be ordered either from Mars or from the people (we would be dreaming or committing blasphemy!). Nor can the habit patterns of the existing ones be tampered with without changing their personal histories. There is an inbuilt hopelessness in the situation. The "is" of the scene has to be suffered; the "ought" can be delegated to the garbage can. There is no connection between the two. Despair is legitimate. Cynical, self-preserving model of social behaviour is a necessary mode in the casual chain. It is also the only recourse. It has to be endured, even if we find it "insufferable".

The second group, in exact opposition to the above, offers a discourse not merely of hope but of supreme confidence. The problem, in its view, is a "transitional" one; also linked to a larger set, and can be handled through efficient management. It requires a more accurate "problem-identification", understanding of constraints, choice of technology, defining of tasks and doing what is "doable". The complex and somewhat disturbing situation has arisen because of a vague and generalised formulation of goals. The observable and measurable issues are the real ones. Shifts in resource-allocation would strengthen the problem solving mission; and technology based monitoring and evaluation would ensure its efficiency. With efficiency thus generated, the "is" would be transformed to the "ought". The actual can become the ideal.

The third approach can be self-styled as the "radical-activist's" position. Here, educational problems are clearly seen as a subset of the larger political problem. The paradox mentioned is nothing but a minor manifestation or symptom of a larger malady generated by asymmetrical power relations in society. As long as there is inequality



(the concept in this view, is self-evident, and therefore comprehensible), there will be injustice. Unless one can organise a struggle against the larger forces of domination and resist oppression, no single symptom can be cured. The educational distress is essentially a part of the larger suffering caused by the control of power (political, economic and knowledge) by a few. Unless the smaller struggle gets linked to the larger struggle, "nothing would happen". The larger struggle, however, can only be through political organisation. The need, therefore, is to join the larger political struggle in order to correct any of the problems faced in the smaller sections (sub-sets). This is the only link between the "is" and "ought" and this alone gives the right controls to alter the situation.

Lastly, there is yet-another, but no-so popular philosophic response and stream of thought. It identifies this specific issue as a version of the classic epistemological trap caused by the bewitchment of language. The fallacy generated by a confusion of the descriptive and prescriptive use of the same words extends to this field as well. This view emphasises the fact that thought not only needs language for expression but also gets moulded by the language it employs. To be meaningful, words have to be related to experience. To carry out a dialogue (argumentation), the language used must rest on shared-experience/accepted meanings. These "accepted" meanings can either be in a situation where words have a "defined" character (e.g. when it is specifically coined to fulfil a specific function like in mathematics or when it is arbitrarily, for the purposes of the argument, consciously limited to a certain use) or when they represent a verifiable experience (i.e., are available for sense perception/observation). The world of "ought" does not fulfil either of the above. Though comprehensible in a vocabulary which is rooted in the factual world, values are not "verifiable" in the manner "descriptions" are. The language used for argumentation cannot take the weight of the normative usages of words. The problem of seeking the connection between the "is" and "ought" in a scientific manner is therefore an insurmountable one. "Ought" cannot be derived from "is" (naturalistic fallacy) just as "is" cannot be understood from "ought", because the latter remains essentially a personal approval. Thus while granting that the educational scenario is disappointing, this group would, without much reluctance, abdicate the challenge of sorting it out to the "manager" or "activist".

This approach would be justified on the ground that here we are taking education as an instrumental value, and if results are not what we hope for, the strategies have to be altered in view of worldly wisdom. A comprehensive theory about action is difficult to work out -- to find the links between this larger (rarified) exercise to specific contexts is almost impossible. The more specific the issue, the further it gets from the philosopher's competence.

### III

#### Analysis

A disturbing feature common to all the above mentioned sets of responses is that despite a fairly clear position taken by them, they have remained benign in either influencing each other or in altering the actual situation in the educational context. Notwithstanding the fact that they are responses to the same perceived phenomena, it is odd that they have not caused mutual "revision" or "expansion" in thought to integrate the counter-position. They appear to be running as parallel views without disturbing each other's autonomy. Had the issue been one of distant categories of thought, the explanation would have been easier. Here is a live disturbing paradox affecting day to day life -- a situation in which some immediate choices have to be made. And yet, the different sets of thinking neither create a dent on each other, nor do they feel alarmed at their ineffective stand vis-a-vis the "thing" -- education. Why have words lost their power? This situation in effect defies the basic assumption of all theoretic enterprise, namely that "thought matters".

At this point, one can make a mundane observation. Despite apparently different views, in matters of fact, the members of all the above groups *behave* in almost the same way, even when it comes to making choices about an educational issue. The ones who are blatantly self-seeking and those who dilate on the merits of grass-roots organisation, mobilisation and resistance to domination can hardly be distinguished in ways of behaviour. In a given choice situation, say regarding schools for their own children or training for themselves, the grounds of their choice apparently do not differ in proportion to the

differences articulated in their theoretic response. The implication from this observed phenomena is that at some level, they all *assume* that *thought* and *things* are different. Also, that belief and knowledge can remain segregated. One can argue in the field of knowledge and act as per belief. Beliefs are rooted in soil which has texture created by personal experience; knowledge is what is distilled out through "learning" in laboratories.

If so, do we really have to get disturbed by the lack of effectiveness of theorising? If we have lacked the power to communicate, it is possibly because we have not communicated to ourselves even at our own intimate level, and therefore what we say smacks of a hollowness in the sounds it makes.

Another common feature of all these groups (barring the first one which remains different because of its cynical stand) is their desire and effort to create their own vocabulary and give a technical form to their discourse. The idiom is not always a freshly coined one. More often than not, it is an appropriation from common language and given a special weight in terms of approvals. This feat enables the creation of a fresh area of *expertise* through fluency and comfort in the use of words which acquire a "mystique" because of their segregation. This also insulates a home-ground for the inner-group. Areas of strength get a protection. Noises from "outside" get muted or even silenced by this isolation. At another level, the newly evolved shared idiom acts as a "bond" to stabilise the group. Their "difference" from others becomes their unifying factor. This difference however, is primarily that of language used, created/devised, and not one that is evolved. All it succeeds in is to give an umbrella protection to arguments of varying merit. One can even discern the use of master-words used as master keys with which we open any lock. They acquire a sanctity within the group for the redeeming function they perform.

Parallel to this trend of using specialised vocabulary, we can also discern an even more damaging situation with respect to language i.e. a co-option of vocabulary. This has finally cut at the roots of theory-building because now instead of meeting a counter-position at its logical grounds, the game has become a quick one of appropriation of terms in one's own vocabulary. The net result is that while efforts at insulation and specialisation are on, as soon as a master-word with loaded approvals is discerned, it gets a usage in the same sentence but

often with totally different intent. Awareness generation, mass mobilisation, conscientization, peoples' movement etc. often, are the ammunition for all. They have been used so with such little reverence, that their apparent sanctity has been reduced to triviality. They symbolise acts of violence to language, a stretching to cover black and white simultaneously.

The crisis in educational theory is certainly a problem of language -- one can agree basically with the philosophic stand -- but it is not the classic epistemic riddle which describes its reality. The problem of language here is only a subset of the larger problem -- the pervasive processes in society of creating vested interests, of mystification and of violence. There has been a conscious and unconscious attempt to strip language of its legitimate meaning and artificially garb it in a pragmatic style. The minimum demands of meaningful discourse -- coherence and authenticity of language -- can hardly be adhered to, as words have become powerless because of the hollowness created through a withdrawal of personal "belief" from them. How can there be a political struggle when the person is out of it?

#### IV

##### Direction

Where do we go from here? If accurate thought needs strong and authentic language to give it a status, one would have to inquire as to how this can be reached. If language must be "meaningful", then it must remain close to experience. If it is to be meaningful for "many", i.e. the larger group of people, then it would have to seek a proximity to their experience. If it hopes to communicate, it would have to make an ostensive gesture to get close to those who are being addressed. If it wishes to be effective, it would have to be *direct*, and without knots. These are the three basic requisites and implications for language which can assist as well as mould thought in matters of concern. In issues where the stakes are not high, where theoretic refinement is the same as gymnastic skills of elegance and perfection of form, the above riders are not that significant. It is primarily in areas of distress, where the numbers affected are very large and the snowballing effect of

nonchalance is frightening, that one needs to treat the matter with urgency and sensitivity. The thinking on the matter must be *relevant*, *clear* and *worth* believing in. These three requirements can be validated simply by the fact that the people understand what is being said, that they listen with attention to the arguments offered, and that there is a minimal alteration in *modes of behaviour*, as much as in their thought as around the subject.

Given this broad sense of direction, one can argue for two subsequent steps. First, we must get rid of a good deal of dead-wood in the form of oft-repeated and now meaningless words and stop using them as categories of analysis. We have cried too long about imperialism and colonialism, as also invested too much faith in mass-movements. A humbler vocabulary describing and recording more directly what is felt, perceived and hoped for is needed. This is the language of the ordinary people, which is transparent enough to reveal any logical cob-web, does not permit the camouflaging which is based on the use of pompous words -- in brief, keeps the clogging out of communication channels.

It is a mistake to believe that all argumentation needs rarified categories. In matters of specific concern, the language in which a problem gets identified should be the language in which it is analysed. The conclusions drawn therefrom would then carry "sense" and no fresh crusade or action-plan would have to be drawn up to "motivate" people. In short such a shift in language would ensure not only cleaner thought but also effective *thought*.

## Culture, Education and Democracy: A Conceptual Exercise

*Narindar Singh*

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Turn your ears to the wind of death,  
Your eyes to the derricks of death,  
Shout BEWARE! BEWARE! as if Ezekiel  
Stood again on his street corner in Jerusalem  
-Aaron Kramer

### I

#### Introduction

Not many people try to take the kind of care which the use of such easily, grossly and in fact *tendentiously* misusable terms as "education" and "democracy" necessarily requires. Besides, and not unoften, even the literati manage only to remain utterly unconcerned with the kind of casualness with which they happen to handle these terms. This is something to worry about. For, such casualness cannot but produce, to begin with, a growing mismatch between the world of concepts and the world of reality and then, and inevitably, an increasing trivializa-



tion, irrelevance and even counter-productivity of the products of intellection. More serious, it enables the ruling, or rather the ruining, circles everywhere to generate a never-ending supply of illusions which they find necessary to remain installed in power.

In order to avoid consequences of this kind, therefore, one would do well to try to handle one's terms with all the care one could muster. To my mind, this must form part of that course in "intellectual self-defence" which Noam Chomsky, for instance, says we must undertake if we are to protect ourselves from manipulation and control.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, all that one has to do to be able to dispel the endemic confusion pertaining in particular to "education" and "democracy" is to put them both in the context of an analysis of what anthropologists call culture and of which their referents are but sub-processes. For, being mere sub-processes, no matter how important, they can be comprehended properly if and only if one takes care to situate them very much *within* the main process which is culture.

This is *not* to suggest that the term "culture" itself is entirely free from ambiguity and confusion. For it is not. Still, it can at least be made to provide the specific context within which *alone* can any meaningful and non-trivial analysis of education and democracy be undertaken. Nevertheless, making culture serve that purpose may not be an easy thing to do. For even the anthropologists who are *all* agreed as to Man being defined as a cultural animal do not seem to be very sure as to how culture itself may be defined. To see that this indeed is the case, one has merely to refer to a well-known and oft-cited review of the concepts and definitions of culture which A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn published way back in 1952. This would be enough to persuade one of the need to put the idea of culture itself in a kind of context which could help one focus on the essentials involved and thus to make culturology shed all the ambiguity it happens now to be heavy with. It seems remarkable that in one part of their monograph, Kroeber and Kluckhohn collected no less than one hundred and sixty-four definitions of culture which had been produced by anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers and others since Edward Tylor's pioneering work of 1871. But their text as a whole carried, as they said, probably close to three hundred "definitions" of culture.<sup>2</sup> I do not know why in the remark just cited, they had to put the word definitions within inverted commas. But considering that they thought the ex-

planatory importance and the generality of application of the idea of culture to be comparable to such categories as gravity in physics, disease in medicine and evolution in biology<sup>3</sup>, such a plethora of definitions could well be a source of some discomfort if not extreme embarrassment. Be that as it may, Leslie White, for one, while reviewing their book in the *American Anthropologist* insisted that with the multiplication and diversification of the conceptions of culture it is confusion and not clarity which has continued to increase.<sup>4</sup>

By this token, since the bateless fabrication of the definitions of culture is not likely to have come to a stop, confusion may only have continued to grow. The reason why lies in the continued concern of social anthropology as of the rest of social science with the small and the trivial to the concomitant neglect of the Grim and the Whole. Therefore, the unending proliferation of the definitions of culture argues nothing but *the continued unconcern* of the professionals in question with the fundamental novelty and the defining fact of our situation. Which is that for the very first time ever in all our evolutionary history, we cannot take the continuation of our species for granted any more. In comparison with a concern with *this* problem, a concern with *just* any other would be, as the late Mrs. Joan Robinson put it once, "totally beside the point".<sup>5</sup> Still, academic social science has managed somehow to ignore what happens to be the Central Issue of our time in order to be able to cultivate all that is "totally beside the point".

It follows that if culture is ever to provide the context for an in depth analysis of education and democracy, it would first have to be cleansed of all the conceptual crap it happens now to be profusely contaminated with. An extremely effective and indeed the only cleansing agent I can think of using is a self-consciously and consistently holistic perception of the prevailing reality. But this demands no less than a complete break with mainline scholarship which has never been persuaded of the epistemological significance of holistic thinking. Rather, entirely unbothered by the earth-killing pursuits of the congealations of morbidly irresponsible Power, and therefore totally unconcerned with the prevailing crisis of political legitimation, it takes care actually to *deny* the very possibility of thinking which is other than reductionist. Differently put, it dismisses holistic thinking as a veritable contradiction in terms. Here, it seems necessary to emphasize



stood as simplification and abstraction is a necessary component of the very process of intellection. But reductionism, understood as an addiction to over-simplification and trivialization, can only paralyse intellection. It begins with an over-simplification of the problem in question, leads to a search for a solution in some techno-fix or other and can only involve reckless and entirely unbridled intellection the consequences of which must necessarily be catastrophic. Thus, for instance, the powers *that ought not to be* and their braintrustees everywhere manage only to perceive security in more or less exclusively military terms and then to seek solutions in ever-increasing acquisitions of weapons systems to the concomitant bankrupting of the capitalist and the erstwhile socialist economies alike. Likewise, economists and economic managers never fail to perceive development as rising income per capita and as little else, and then seek solutions, say, in large dams. These, like the ever-escalating purchases of weapons made by the military strategists, are mere techno-fixes in nature: they would not last beyond sixty to seventy years, but would all the same have destroyed vast acreages of the forest cover for all time to come. But those who sell mere techno-fixes are actually programmed not to see *this*. Verily, and both in theory and in practice, reductionism is nothing less than a serious ailment which in addition to treatment merits a name. Borrowing a term from H.W. Fowler, one may designate it as abstractitis.

One would also do well to emphasize that these days, and entirely unnoticed even by the literati, this disease happens to be very largely Popper-borne, which is intended to suggest that Karl Popper is one of the more influential reductionists of our time. He pleads for the practice of what he calls "piecemeal technology"<sup>6</sup> and what I should like to designate as "piecemeal technomania". But, then, there is little to distinguish between an addiction to the Popperian piecemealism and an abject surrender to what Bertrand Russell once called the tyranny of "the here and the now". Given his utter lack of "wisdom" understood as "comprehensive vision" combined with "a certain awareness of the ends of human life", the piecemealist or the technomaniac disdains to be concerned with anything but the narrow and the immediate. That is to say, he refuses to have anything whatsoever to do with "the there and the later". But from the point of view of the integrity of human habitation, this kind of compulsive narrow-mindedness and short-sightedness can have only the most catastrophic conse-

quences. It is these consequences of their work which scientists in particular must take into account *before* deciding to undertake it. This means that once they accept the integrity of the earth system for purposes of human habitation as a paramount and inviolable value premise which must inform all their life and work, they would have no option but to *refuse* to have anything to do with such ventures as are actually known to promise little but global disaster. Therefore, *any* scientist who acquiesces in their execution and accepts for the purpose what are euphemistically known as research grants allows his work to be conditioned by considerations other than the pursuit of knowledge. It certainly would not be knowledge with wisdom. This can hardly be emphasized and iterated strongly enough. For in order to be able to ensure that his pursuit of knowledge does not degenerate into an extremely expensive and dangerous acquisition of ignorance, the scientist has to be able to say No to the execution of an increasing variety of projects available today. But if he fails to say this and instead manages only to utter Yes and to accept all that the powers that be want him to do, he opts for the cultivation of knowledge without wisdom. To my mind, such knowledge can only be a most dangerous kind of ignorance which piecemealism inevitably and necessarily must promote: one ceases even to be aware of the *kind* of damage one may be doing to the prospects of our species as a whole.

A specific case in point is the unravelling of the mystery of the atom or, having been split, what is the a-tom no more. There was a time when the composition of something taken to be indivisible or the *atomos* as the Greeks called it was an object of genuine scientific curiosity. But that is no longer the case. Indeed, scientific curiosity has long been replaced by *the scientist's responsibility* as the central question. For, as Bertrand Russell once reminded us, "You study the composition of the atom from a disinterested desire for knowledge, and incidentally place in the hands of powerful lunatics the means of destroying the human race".<sup>7</sup> *Once this has happened*, the lunatics take over and, given their command of the funds, come ever more to decide what the scientists shall do and what they shall not. If, then, the pursuit of knowledge is to remain the scientist's ontological vocation and perhaps his prerogative too, he has to be able to say No to a variety of assignments which the men of power may ask him to undertake. A concern with the damage potential of what Albert Einstein once

concern with the damage potential of what Albert Einstein once called "the unleashed power of the atom" demands little but this ability to defy. This point is of the utmost importance. For it is to the scientist's Refusal to Refuse to develop all kinds of horrendous weapons systems today that we can trace the collapse of culture and therefore of education and democracy as well.

It seems evident that only if we put these concepts in the context of the existential crisis of our time can we expect to dispel all the pointless controversy which they are now surrounded by. To be sure, such an exercise could only be expected to generate an exceedingly grim scenario. But, then, as Thomas Hardy would have said, one ought to have "a full look at the worst" so as to find a way to the Better. All that follows is intended to take a sharp and full look at the worst but in the Hope that it may still not be too late to realize the Better. However, if we remain enthralled by reductionism and its fallacies, we cannot perceive the worst in all its gravity. It is in this connection that we would need to undertake a relentless and rather uncommon critique of Rene Descartes. For he is probably the greatest reductionist to be found in the annals of philosophy: a veritable Archangel of Reductionism. Besides, as Gregory Bateson has written, it is at least in part to a sustained *practice* of Cartesian reductionism that most of the problems and perils of our own time are due.<sup>8</sup> Werner Heisenberg, no less, also recognizes the prepotent intellectual influence of Descartes and his reductionism during the centuries since his death. According to him, Cartesianism has penetrated deep into the human mind and it will take a long time for it to be replaced by a really different attitude towards the problem of reality.<sup>9</sup> And, finally, let us not forget that Descartes belonged to the seventeenth century, one which A.N. Whitehead once described as "the century of genius"; and that he also produced a major share of the "capital of ideas" originating during the period.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, if we *now* find that from the point of view of our very existence as a species that capital of ideas has turned out to be disruptive and counter-productive in the extreme, we *have* to demand that Descartes appear for another examination. But since this examination is to take place in an altogether different context, Descartes might find some of the questions to be awkward in the extreme. But this one cannot help.

## II

## The "Illegality" of Rene Descartes

The erosion of the conditions of our existence which I am so deeply concerned with has been a long drawn-out *process* the beginnings of which may well be traced to the rise of Cartesian reductionism. That is why I wish now to spend some time on Rene Descartes's philosophy and try to show how it has led to a yet unnoticed and therefore unanalysed distortion of the civilizational project of the human race. But given the unexceedable importance of this issue and given also the absolute neglect from which it continues to suffer, I have no option but to take, in order to bring it under sharp focus, a route which Descartes himself would have described as both entirely "untrodden" and "remote from the normal way" (CSM-II, 6).<sup>11</sup> For, thus, I hope to be able to establish that if human civilization is going to revive itself so as to dispel the threat of extinction which it now faces, Descartes and his reductionism would have to be buried very, very deep indeed. Besides, such a burial *alone* would help one develop against the prevailing orthodoxy what Humpty Dumpty would call a "nice knock-down argument".

The unabashed, unabating and remorseless scientism which Rene Descartes launched more than three hundred years ago has since then been sold as authentic scientific intellection. Still, it is directly and immediately responsible for most of the ills of our time including the negation of culture and so also of education and democracy. Peculiar and also basic to Cartesianism is a cultivated aversion to the Whole and a concomitant fixation on some Part, which, ironically and because of a total unconcern with its linkages with the Whole, necessarily remains misperceived. Even so, the reduced and the scientific topples the comprehensive and the scientific.

As far as our existence is concerned, this is an unexceedably important point. But surprisingly, no one seems to have been concerned with it at all. So let us try to develop it a little further. The starting point with Descartes is the *Cogito* or the *one* certainty to the effect that he is doubting or thinking. Hence his famous though utterly invalid dictum: *Cogito ergo sum* -- I think, therefore I am. [In CSM (I, 127), it appears as "*I am thinking, therefore I exist*". But I have decided

to use the common though not very exact rendering.] It is invalid because it is a complete inversion of the existential reality and assigns priority to the "I" over the external world. This is something that cannot be done. Aristotle insisted long ago that only a beast or a god could expect to be entirely on his own; and in our own time, Julian Huxley made the same point by affirming that an isolated brain must be a piece of biological nonsense.

Therefore, Descartes could not possibly have intended his *Cogito* statement to be taken as a *literal* claim to the effect that the certainty of his own existence *alone* could be indubitable. Instead, and evidently, he was using it as a *metaphysical* point of departure for *all* his reasoning. Only, it was a point of departure which turned out to be something utterly spurious. Little wonder: for a metaphysical statement proper has to be *both* unprovable and disprovable like the one which Mrs Robinson once cited: All men are equal. It would be impossible to sustain it or to destroy it. Still, it has served as a powerful rallying point for protest against privilege by birth and provides a valid programme for research.<sup>12</sup>

However, Descartes's *Cogito ergo sum* is by no means a metaphysical statement proper. For it satisfies only one of the two conditions for serving as one: it is unprovable all right, *but it is not disprovable*. The reason lies in the sheer impossibility of a private language. For any language *must* presume, as Ludwig Wittgenstein in particular has emphasized, a commonly accepted vocabulary and a commonly accepted set of *public* criteria for a correct use of that vocabulary. This means that no one, not even Descartes, could give any substance to his *Cogito* or could articulate it in writing, in speech or even in silent introspection *without* using *some* language which by definition must be a *public medium*. Therefore, the very moment that one made use of language -- any language -- one would be pre-supposing the *prior* existence of an external world occupied by a community of other human beings -- of other *social* individuals, and *not* so many *cogitos*, each using his own language. One may refer here to Noam Chomsky's suggestion to the effect that the establishment of the existence of "other minds" remained problematic for Descartes and his followers.<sup>13</sup> Little wonder. For to try to find a solution to a problem which cannot even exist but which one has managed to conjure up somehow must perforce remain an unavailing exercise. What is problematic, then, is Descartes's *point of departure* which has a patently ludicrous



metaphysical status. All that this means is that no one could conceivably start from his solitary consciousness which was in any way unsullied and uncontaminated by society and then move outwards in order to establish the existence of an external world. If anything, one would have no option but to presuppose one's own existence as an integral part of an already existing external world and *then* and only then proceed with one's cogitation. This makes it imperative for one to go with the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno, invert the Cartesian formula, and then say "*Sum ergo Cogito*" -- I am, therefore I think. To insist otherwise would mean putting Descartes before the "horse", which means the world, and would thus mean opening the floodgates of reckless intellection.

But the untenability of the Cartesian *Cogito* argues the dubiousness of the Cartesian Doubt in which it happens to be rooted. This is because the Cartesian Doubt, in denying certainty to anything and everything other than the *Cogito*, is not even meant to take any notice at all of any of the iniquities imposed and perpetuated by the status quo. It follows that the denial of certainty to anything other than the "I", even at the metaphysical level, can only mean a complete unwillingness or rather refusal to question the legitimacy of the power of the powers that be. Little wonder that Descartes lacked this power-to-defy more pathetically, perhaps, than any other philosopher that history has ever known. Indeed, his extreme timidity must appear to be almost scandalous even for one with a reputation a lot less formidable than his. The Durants suggest that during a visit to Florence itself, he avoided seeing Galileo.<sup>14</sup> There is no evidence available to the effect that he felt any remorse for this. Rather, it seems reasonable to contend that he could *not* have felt any remorse for this obvious misdemeanor or perhaps for any other, too. For, after all, he was the chief harbinger of the Age of Remorselessness. No wonder that he decided to suppress his *Treatise on the Universe*, due for publication in 1633, simply because he came to learn of the condemnation of Galileo by the Inquisition which had just taken place; and, as if in confirmation of all this, he wrote a letter to Friar Marin Mersenne, his close friend and principal correspondent, saying, "It is not my temperament to set sail against the wind".<sup>15</sup> It follows that having no substantive content, the kind of Doubt in which is rooted literally the *whole* of Cartesian philosophy, is no more than a mere five-letter noise, which may even

be articulated, i.e., if noise *can be* articulated, in such statements as the following: "Thus I shall be uncertain not only about whether you are in the world and whether there is an earth or a sun; but also about whether I have eyes, ears, a body, and even whether I am speaking to you and you are speaking to me. In short, I shall doubt everything" (CSM-II: 409). Given a metaphysics so robust, Descartes had *no* reason to be certain that a fellow philosopher, Giordano Bruno, had been burnt *alive* at the stake for heresy maybe just around forty years before he wrote these lines. But if he *knew* that Bruno had in fact been burnt in terms of what he called "moral certainty" or certainty quite sufficient for ordinary practical purposes (CSM-I: 130; 291 n), then his philosophical conscience seems never to have been morally outraged. And yet this practice of putting men to the stake may not have been very uncommon in Europe at the time. For long before the burning of Bruno, Michel de Montaigne had written as follows: "After all, it is setting a high value on our opinions to roast people alive on account of them".<sup>16</sup> He could say it because, unlike his knees, his reason was "not framed to bend or stoop". But Descartes's reason was not so made and he seems to have used his metaphysical Doubt merely to avoid examining the iniquities which *defined* the world around. Even so, he could be quite certain and knowledgeable when he wanted to be. For instance, he *knew* that his natural daughter Francine got conceived in Amsterdam on 15 October 1634.<sup>17</sup> It was only when it came to questioning Authority that he abandoned his moral certainty and cowered under his metaphysical Doubt, which in conception and intent can be seen to be something utterly dubious. Little wonder that the Cartesian *Cogito*, rooted as it is in the Cartesian Doubt, turns out to be conceivably the very *ultimate* reduction and one which is unsurpassably immoral. Ultimate, because it abstracts away everything other than the "I" -- in fact, even the body in which the "I" happens to be lodged; and immoral, because it is but a way of turning away from the prevailing iniquities.

But, for the sake of argument, let us forget altogether that the Cartesian *Cogito* is something entirely unsustainable in logic and let Descartes have his way. In that situation, the *Cogito* of the world of metaphysics becomes a philosophical legitimation and authentication of even the most pathological Ego of the world of reality. This is how: the "I" is where the Cartesian philosophy begins. Self-recognition is *prior to* the recognition of the world around and of "other minds" in it;

and this to the point that even the existence of the external world cannot be taken for granted and has instead to be *established*. In a way, the entire world is reduced to the status of an object vis-a-vis the cogitating "I" which becomes supreme. When this supremacy is the supremacy not of the "I" of a mere philosopher but that of a captain of industry or even of commerce and *more so* of a collectivity like a giant corporation or a planning commission, too, the consequences can turn out to be catastrophic in the extreme. In fact, they *have* already turned out to be catastrophic in the extreme. For, no matter how the Ego manifests itself, it simply presumes it to be its prerogative to exploit and to manipulate the external world or such segment or segments of it as it can. But when the world being segmented and exploited happens to be a complex and *living* system as the earth system is now known to be, the over-inflated Ego cannot even avoid playing havoc with it. Besides, by the time symptoms of the damage having been and being done begin to appear, the planetary paralysis may already be in a dangerously advanced stage. Rene Descartes with his "I think, therefore I am" and Miguel de Unamuno with his "I am, therefore I think" *both* do not mean a thing in this situation. For, Ego, no matter how considered, knows only the following: "I am, therefore I must grab." I do not know any Latin myself. But I am told that this affirmation gets easily translated into that language: *Sum ergo capio*".

However, this represents a mortal threat, nothing less, to the integrity of the earth system, curtails our ability to *ensure* the continuation of our species and thus signifies a resounding disaster from the point of view of civilization. For the ascendancy of Cartesianism signifies the declension of the humanity in man. As Lewis Mumford would say, *it signifies for us a fall from a human to a distinctly simian level: like the apes, men are impelled to snatch everything*. In short, they get alienated from their distinctly human potential and only naturally fail to produce any equivalent wealth of the mind.<sup>18</sup>

Let us therefore disabuse our minds of the well-known distinction between what Descartes called *res cogitans* or the thinking thing and *res extensa* or the extended thing. To be sure, he did not *invent* this dualism. Still, he gave it a kind of sharpness that it had not had since its initiation by Plato and took it to the sharpest conceivable point by insisting that "the concept of body includes nothing at all which belongs to the mind, and the concept of mind includes nothing at all



which belongs to the body" (CSM-II: 158). Evidently, a distinction of this kind could be maintained only at the conceptual level. But even at that level, no one could reasonably claim that in addition to being *distinct* from each other, body and mind were entirely *unconnected* with each other, too. No one except Descartes, that is. For having taken cognizance at one point of his body and mind being closely connected with each other, he goes on to claim in the very next sentence that he, which means his mind, can still exist without his body: "It is true that I may have (or, to anticipate, that I certainly have) a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of the body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. *And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it*" (CSM-II: 54). But why "accordingly"? It may well be that he was trying merely to affirm the immortality of the soul in the fond expectation that the Dean and Doctors of the Sacred Faculty of Theology at Paris would be suitably impressed and put the stamp of their approval on his *Meditations*. But they remained unplaced and perhaps even unamused.

Still, whatever the reason, I find it to be more than a bit odd that someone who is known as a major rationalist; as one of "the very greatest philosophical intelligences in history";<sup>19</sup> and indeed as the founder of modern philosophy, could make a statement like the following: "From this I knew I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think, *and which does not require anyplace, or depend on any material thing, in order to exist*. Accordingly, this "I" -- that is the soul by which I am what I am -- is entirely distinct from the body, and indeed is easier to know than the body, and would not fail to be whatever it is, even if the body did not exist" (CSM-I: 127. *Emphasis mine*). The italicized part of this passage can only mean that thinking requires no brain or, better still, brains require no brain at all!

I am no philosopher; so I do not know what precise philosophical significance one could assign to an assertion like this. But I do know that John Cottingham, who *is* a philosopher and in fact a leading authority on Descartes today and a translator of some of his philosophical writings as well, finds it to be "simply preposterous".<sup>20</sup> Evidently, in order to avoid any problem of this kind, Noam Chomsky, for

instance, does not speak of "mind" at all but of "mind/brain".<sup>21</sup> But given the kind of historical milieu in which Descartes lived, a recurring affirmation of the identity and autonomy of the mind, of the thinking "I", of the *Cogito* to the point that it was so self-contained and self-sufficient as not even to need a material encumbrance like the brain could well have appeared to him as only a way to dispel the reign of unreason as manifested in the fossilized hierarchies of feudalism, in the concomitant codifications of the Catholic Church, and in the rampancy of superstition in the Europe of his time. But, ironically, the Age of Reason and of Individualism, at the very dawn of which he is generally seen to have stood, would in due course and in our own time degenerate into a Tyranny of Lunacy so extreme that we could not even take the continuation of human history for granted any more.

Be that as it may, Descartes's main problem was to do the best he could to persuade the "soulful" theologians of his time to turn their heat off him and, instead, to begin to patronize him. Still, whenever he could, he did slip in a surreptitious word or two to the effect that "no sane person has ever doubted" that "there really is a world, and that human beings have bodies and so on" and also that the mind, in spite of being distinct from the body, is "so closely joined to it that the mind and the body make up a kind of unit" (CSM-II: 11). Therefore, in spite of his determination to "pretend" that he had no body and that there was no world and no place for him to be in, he could "see very clearly that in order to think it is necessary to exist" (CSM-I: 127). And, finally: "Nature also teaches me, by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, *intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit*" (CSM-II: 56. Emphasis mine). Little wonder that in spite of his full-blooded theism and in spite of his claim that his proofs for the existence of God were of a kind which left "no room for the possibility that the human mind will ever discover better ones" (CSM-II: 4), the Church found it necessary to punish him even after his death, which took place in 1650; and in 1663, it placed his works on its *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* or its list of prohibited books. For it had no use for the intellectualized notions of God like those which Descartes propagated though on occasion, as when talking of animals as automatons having been made by the hands of God (CSM-I: 139), he seemed only to be articulating

the standard religious dogma.

What matters with Descartes, then, is the recognition of *res cogitans* or the thinking thing as a faculty which is absolutely unique to man. "I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason -- words whose meaning I have been ignorant of until now. But for all that I am a thing which is real and which truly exists. But what kind of a thing? As I have just said -- a thinking thing" (CSM-II: 18. Emphasis mine). Here, he can be seen to have come perilously close to actually *accusing* the Church of having kept him and others under its influence ignorant of the unique human gifts of reason and intelligence. Therefore, Descartes's frequent affirmations of the ability of the thinking thing *qua* soul to continue to exist even without the human body, almost certainly meant for the exclusive benefit of the Church that they were, could not possibly have been taken seriously by anyone and perhaps were not taken seriously by himself either. Little wonder that he has often been *and* with some justification accused of hypocrisy, spinelessness and even guile.<sup>22</sup>

Descartes defines the thinking thing as "a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions" (CSM-II: 19). But having paired off "affirms" with "denies" and "willing" with "unwilling", he does not join "*misunderstands*" with "understands" and "*misperceptions*" with "perception" as parts of his *definition* of "the thinking thing". This seems a bit odd. For while referring to it again in the Third Meditation, he includes the following phrase also: "understands a few things, is ignorant of others"; and in the French version, "loves, hates" (CSM-II: 24). Besides, he is deeply concerned with "some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning" having employed "*all his energies in order to deceive*" him (CSM-II: 15. Emphasis mine). So, it is only natural that "*misunderstands*" ought to have been an integral part of his definition of the thinking thing. For, if the demon so chose, he could render the thinking thing to be entirely dysfunctional; and Descartes would be completely helpless and hapless before him. And, incidentally, the kind of predicament we are facing today is evidence enough of the thinking thing having in fact become dysfunctional -- and in a big way, too. But it seems *never* to have occurred to Descartes that when brought into the real world, the thinking thing *could* become

an utterly *thoughtless* thing understood as an embodiment of sheer mindlessness. This transformation or rather degeneration *alone* could explain the kind of fell perils we as a race are now facing.

To be sure, it is only now that *Homo sapiens* is being recognized, though not generally, to have become *Homo insipiens*. But still, mindlessness is not a twentieth-century innovation. Even so, Descartes managed to recognize only *intellection* to be an exclusive and defining human faculty and failed altogether to remember that *misintellection* too is entirely peculiar to man. And there simply is no way in which the two may be made to belong together. For, the kind of the thinking thing belonging to, say, a Mahatma Gandhi cannot have anything whatsoever in common with the kind of the thoughtless thing belonging to his assassin. The one is an exclusive anthropic virtue; the other is an entirely *misanthropic* vice. There cannot possibly be any justification for emphasizing the one and eliding the other -- in particular, because the ascendancy of the misanthropic vice over the anthropic virtue promises now to destroy us as a species. It follows that only an inveterate reductionist and incorrigible over-simplifier could completely ignore the incompatibility between the two and push them both under the carpet called *res cogitans*. This seems hardly acceptable. For, surely, there must be *some* crucial and unignorable difference between the circumstances shaping the thinking thing belonging to, say, the Buddha and that to Genghis Khan; the one to Antonio Gramsci and the other to Benito Mussolini; and the one to Noam Chomsky and the other to Edward Teller. The thinking thing *per se* is something completely neutral in the sense in which, say, a piece of iron is neutral and as such can be used for making either swords or plowshares. Therefore, a philosophy which starts and stays with a neutral and biologically created ability to think and refuses to pay any attention whatsoever to such socio-historical and educational factors as may produce sages on the one hand and scoundrels on the other manages only to continue to stare in the wrong direction. It follows that it must continue to generate no end not illumination and clarification but obscuration and confusion. Also, denied all human contact and thus left entirely to itself and *unnurtured*, the thinking thing would sink to the lowest levels of animality. In sum, one cannot think of a more egregious and *unphilosophical* (which literally means foolish) instance of reduction than Descartes's *res cogitans*.

Descartes's response to this could well be that "reason is a universal instrument which can be used in all kinds of situations" (CSM-I: 140). But, what this ignores altogether is the obvious and inherent vulnerability of human reason to severe distortion -- distortion which in our time holds the macabre promise of the complete extinction of our race but which in Descartes's own time, too, was not entirely devoid of virulence. The most egregious, indeed outrageous, manifestation of Concentrated Unreason, and by which moreover, he himself remained daunted *throughout* his career was the Inquisition. It had been established for the detection and punishment of heretics and death at the stake was one of the penalties it could award. But *all* that he could do, in order perhaps not to have to do anything about the contemporary reign of Unreason, was to describe reason itself as a "universal instrument" that could be used "in all kinds of situations" -- that involving the torture of heretics being one of them. I am not chiding him for lacking the courage of a Bruno -- not many would have it. In any case, *he* had chosen to live in Holland where he just didn't need that kind of courage.

Human reason may well be based on what Noam Chomsky calls "freedom from instinct and from stimulus control" and it may certainly provide for "unbounded diversity of free thought and action".<sup>21</sup> But still we cannot afford to ignore the potential illimitability of the virulence of unreason. In other words, we would do well to go beyond the conception of reason as a unique, species-specific faculty and focus on the fundamental *ontological* question which John Milton posed by defining man as "Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (*Paradise Lost*, Bk III, 99). This demands a sharp distinction between reason and unreason and a dismissal of the very idea of *res cogitans* as a pathetically technicist and reductionist contraption.

But another instance of reduction which may not be *more* egregious and unphilosophical than *res cogitans* but is at least *equally* so is what Descartes imagines to be *res extensa* or the extended thing or matter as *he* designates it. Matter has many properties such as *irreversible* entropic dissipation and unceasing interactions of prepotent significance among different life-forms which inform the earth as a living and life-supporting planet. Three-dimensionality or what Descartes calls extension (in space) is only one of these properties; and even if indispensable, philosophically at least it is *not* the most signifi-

cant one. True, physics came to *formalize* the Second Law of Thermodynamics or what is also known as the Entropy Law no less than around two hundred years *after* Descartes's death and it is only now that Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen has extended it to cover matter also. But at least at the intuitive level, people must always have been aware of the dissipation of matter -- such as soil erosion -- taking place around them so as to make conservation an integral part of their survival kit. It follows that to abstract from the *vital* qualities of both animate and inanimate matter and to define *all* matter indiscriminately in terms of mere *extension* is to indulge in an act of resounding reduction or of over-over-oversimplification which can do anything but enhance our understanding of the world we live in. More likely, it would enhance our *misunderstanding* of it.

Two of the most crucial categories of Cartesian, *id est*, modern philosophy -- *res cogitans* and *res extensa* -- are thus found to be nothing but illegitimate concoctions. It follows that the body/mind dichotomy with which philosophy has been struggling particularly since Descartes is a pseudo problem par *unexcellence* -- if one be permitted to coin an Orwellian expression. Indeed, so obvious is the sheer pointlessness of it that one fails to see how untold millions of words, if not sentences, and countless tons of paper could ever have been wasted on it. But at least now, it can be seen to have lost all meaning it might ever have had. I *have* an alternative dichotomy to propose, too, and one which is particularly important from the point of view of our survival as a race. But that I will do in connection with a critique of what passes for education. For I should first like to see how if at all Cartesian reductionism has brought about a dangerous distortion of culture: a pursuit entirely exclusive to man.

### III

#### Culture

As already noted, anthropologists are *all* agreed that man is a cultural animal. For, among all the animal species which are found on the earth, man *alone* has the need and the ability to do culture. But this agreement among anthropologists on the definition of man in terms of



culture looks to be somewhat of a curiosity simply because they do not and are never likely to agree on a definition of culture itself. Given the hundreds of such definitions which were put together in the 1952 publication referred to earlier and given also the likelihood that many more would have been produced since then, there is little possibility of a consensus among anthropologists over the meaning of what they call culture. And, then, people other than the anthropologists also use this term. Only naturally, then, the late Raymond Williams, for one, thought it to be "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language". It is a word, moreover, which he said is made to stand for "fundamentally opposed as well as effectively overlapping positions." Understandably, therefore, "many unresolved questions and confused answers" continue to bedevil us.<sup>24</sup>

The point of it all is that culture is an extremely and inherently elusive concept so that we would do well to exercise the necessary care while using it. There is no clear-cut semantic boundary surrounding it with the result that it can mean different things to different people as also different things in different contexts. Some of these meanings, as already suggested, may even be radically and therefore irreconcilably opposed to each other; and yet they all fall under the umbrella of "culture". It follows, therefore, that "culture" could well be a more telling exemplification than many, many other words of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen's class of "dialectical concepts". Most of our thoughts, he reminds us, are concerned with forms and qualities which happen to be dialectical in nature so that "each concept and its opposite overlap over a contourless penumbra of varying breadth".<sup>25</sup> But unfortunately, Professor Georgescu-Roegen does not pay sufficient attention to a major hazard involved here. It lies in the enormous ability of the power elite and their ideologues to continue tendentiously to misuse a variety of dialectical concepts like "development", "security", "education", "democracy" et cetera. One such which was sought to be turned into a big vote-getter in India some time ago is "entering the twenty-first century". But it proved to be a damp squib. Dialectical concepts, productive as they may well be of self-deception, are thus an occupational hazard for the rulers, too. In fact, the consciousness of those in power must perforce be false consciousness: it is the consciousness of power but never of the limitations of it. A particularly revolting but by no means the only case in point is the late Romanian dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu. He used to have himself



described as the Danube of Thought, the Genius of the Carpathians, the Great Philosopher, the Conducator, perhaps the Romanian for "conductor", and so on; and his *one* aim was to try to convince the Romanians to the effect that they were about to enter the Golden Age. But, as we know, to little avail, which only shows that plain terror is a far less effective way of selling illusions than hidden persuasion. But illusions are illusions no matter how sold and can only be intended to mystify, to confuse, and thus to *de-educate* those who are made to buy them. Still, the Romanian example also shows that the use of dialectical concepts, no matter how tendentious, may still be prevented from doing unending harm but only if people choose not to be taken in.

But unmindful or perhaps even unaware of their inherent limitations, even seasoned academics, and particularly those in the social sciences, continue to assign to their terms a kind of semantic precision they do not and cannot have. In other words, they continue to treat, to borrow another term from Georgescu-Roegen, as "arithmomorphic" what in fact are dialectical concepts. He has coined this term to signify concepts which are as "discretely distinct" as a single (arithmetical) number in relation to the infinity of all the rest.<sup>26</sup> An arithmomorphic concept does not suffer from any built-in ambiguity and cannot but stand by itself. Therefore, no two of these can ever overlap. For instance, "three" and "four" are discretely distinct from each other in the sense that they have between them an unmistakable semantic distance, a perceivable gap, and at the same time, each of them is also distinct from the rest of the numbers.

Positivism, or the ideology of value-free science, has long sought to sell the idea that science proper can be done only in arithmomorphic terms. This position, according to Georgescu-Roegen, recalls that of the Catholic Church: holy thought can be expressed only in Latin.<sup>27</sup> The cultivated aversion to dialectical and holistic thinking that this implies has produced a "kind of muddle that now plagues large sectors of social sciences: arithmomania". Little wonder, then, that a complex process like, say, economic development has been reduced to a mere number: the income per capita.<sup>28</sup>

"Arithmomania" which is intended by Georgescu-Roegen to signify a total unconcern with qualities and which to me specifically signifies a rejection of the holistic world-view cannot but manifest itself as reductionism in one form or other. As such, it does not let us

see the *direction* in which we are moving and may actually produce an unending variety of red herrings. Consider, for instance, Leslie White's definition of culture as an "extrasomatic, temporal continuum of things and events dependent upon symboling".<sup>29</sup> The intended, but only the intended, concern of this as of other definitions of culture is with *actus humani* or with what man *does*. But since, as far as I know, no school of standard culturology takes a comprehensive enough view of *all* that man *specifically* does and why, we get to know nothing at all about *actus hominis* or what *happens* to man.<sup>30</sup> Yet, since a great deal of what is happening to man today is a direct result of what he has been and is doing, we can afford to ignore it no more. In other words, the mere possibility of an earthwide ecological breakdown or of a nuclear holocaust of a kind that can destroy us as a species obliges us to make *actus hominis* the paramount concern of our time. Indeed, this shift of focus *alone* can help us cognize the *direction* in which we are moving. For obvious reasons, precisely such a cognition ought to become our primary quest these days. For else we cannot expect ever to be able to dispel the kind of hazards we are now facing. In fact, given the sheer gravity of the situation, there can be nothing more intellectually pertinent and ennobling for us to do than to try to initiate what Einstein once called the chain reaction of awareness. That would certainly be the necessary condition of survival and might become the sufficient condition, too.

But the standard position which the academic social sciences take in order to emphasize the distinction between man and other animals is of no help. Here, for instance, is an eloquent summary of this position given by Clifford Geertz: 'Man is the toolmaking, the talking, the symbolizing animal. Only he laughs; only he knows that we will die; only he disdains to mate with his mother and sister; only he contrives those visions of other worlds to live in which Santayana called religions, or bakes those mudpies of the mind which Cyril Conally called art. He has, the argument continues, not just mentality but consciousness, not just needs but values, not just fears but conscience, not just a past but a history. Only he, it concludes in grand summation, has culture'.<sup>31</sup>

Geertz does not let us see that he or the social scientists whose views he has summarized, are at all interested in *what happens to man*

as a result of *what he does*. Nor does he tell us anything whatsoever about the direction in which mankind is *moving*. But suppose that he had written something like the following?

"Man is the only nuke-making, forest-destroying, resource depleting animal. He alone can fabricate, say, the gas ovens of Auschwitz and organize the anti-Sikh carnage of Delhi; he alone can create arsenals and destroy jobs; he alone is so irrational as to spend around \$ 3 billion *a day* on weapons and during the same day to let over 82,000 of his kind die of hunger and malnutrition. He alone has superimposed on the natural order of living and dying what Robert Lifton calls an unnatural order of death-dominated life. He alone *destroys* culture". Having written this, Geertz would have surely been obliged to speak not about the slow transition *to* humanity but about *the mad rush away from it*.

Be that as it may, I am here concerned with culture understood as something which men alone can do and other animals cannot. In other words, I am not concerned with making cross-cultural comparisons nor with evaluating one culture in terms of another. Rather, I am concerned with culture as a pan-human process which gives man his humanity and the distortions of which must make him less than human and may even make him a monster. Thus understood, culture can be seen to have three constitutive elements: cognitive, conative and normative. The cognitive refers to the way people perceive reality; so it embodies their world-views. The conative refers to all the artefacts they fabricate, the art and literature they create, the institutions they form. The normative refers to the criteria in terms of which they evaluate and assess all that they manage to do. Evidently, this is a highly schematized classification. But still the three elements are in fact very closely related. Thus, for instance, when a Joseph Rotblat decides to withdraw from the Manhattan District Project once it becomes known that the Germans are nowhere near making the atom bomb and may not have even begun making it, he is making his cognition of the nuclear hazards yield a criterion in terms of which he decides that the atom bomb ought not to be produced at all. For after all it was the fear of the German bomb in response to which the Manhattan project was launched in the first instance. Likewise, in affirming that whoever could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would

deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country than the whole race of politicians put together, Jonathan Swift is making his cognition of and concern with mass poverty yield a criterion in terms of which a better world might be designed.

Let us consider the act of conation first. For it is this which has sustained us as a species ever since our pre-ancestors became us -- that is, for around 30,000 to 40,000 years. This only means that by and large, conation has so far played a positive role and helped us survive very much in the face of a variety of artefacts and institutions which from the point of view of our own ontology we ought better to have done without and which may still spell our doom. A large variety of weapons which have now become weapons systems and concentrations of vast amounts of power come easily to mind. Besides, the elementary wherewithal designed to help us cope with raw nature seems to have been developed fairly early in our tenancy of the earth and the emphasis of late has increasingly been on the baroque and the ersatz and even the exceedingly bizarre and dangerous. There is a most telling passage in Lewis Mumford which one cannot avoid reproducing in full here:

"Most of the equipment that makes for domestic comfort, the hearth, the chest, the closet, the storeroom, beds, chairs, cooking utensils, drinking vessels, blankets, woven clothes and hangings -- in short, the whole furniture of domestic life -- are neolithic or chalcolithic inventions: mostly before 2000 B.C. If some wicked fairy were to wipe out this neolithic inheritance, leaving us only vacuum cleaners, electric washing machines and dishwashers, electric toasters, and an automatic heating system, we should no longer be able to keep house: indeed we should not even have a house to keep -- only unidentifiable and uninviting space-units, now, alas! massively achieved in current bureaucratic housing projects from Paris and New York to Singapore and Hong Kong".<sup>32</sup>

To be sure, this is a most picturesque way of highlighting the sheer hollowness of what passes for progress. But one ought also to remember that the relentless diversification and proliferation of such gadgets combined with frenzied sales promotion drives would necessarily bring about an accelerated running down of the terrestrial resources and a paralysis of the earth's life-support systems. In other words, there would be no planetary house to keep even without the wicked fairy having taken anything away. Combined with the orgies of con-

sumerism are the orgies of militarism. Overall, there is a global and frightening ascendancy of the culture of violence and a concomitant diminution of the reverence for life. Indeed, violence now informs even entertainment a lot more effectively perhaps than it did during the days of the gladiators; and with the help of the TV it has been brought right into the living rooms where, thanks to the cleverly, designed commercials sponsored by toy manufacturers, it cannot but brutalize the human psyches from the very beginning. Besides, drug mafias and tobacco corporations very much in collusion with the politicians everywhere are promoting a veritable Drugarchy World-wide; so our prospects as a race are becoming exceedingly and increasingly dim. But everywhere, the powers that be, conditioned and even programmed not to think of or be concerned with the Ultimate Worst, remain paralyzed into a state of inactivity by a pathetically imprudent short-term pragmatism -- by the tyranny of the here and the now.

In brief, conation has gone dangerously haywire but perhaps still not completely. For in that case we would not even be talking of these things. Therefore, what we need to do now is to make the normative component of culture help us assess the conative in terms of the *very specific* criterion of the survival of human civilization *in the face of the existential threats that we are now living with*. This criterion of survival does not spring out of a politico-historical vacuum but suggests itself the moment we cognize the critical and in fact the defining dimensions of the prevailing situation. We know the thing at stake when we know that it is at stake, Hans Jonas has written.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, we can at least hope to find a way to escape out of a trap *when we know that we are in a trap*. But if we do not even know that we are in a trap, we can hardly be expected to try to get out of it. And it is this awareness of our race being caught in a trap of unprecedented complexity and virulence which suggests a definition of culture entirely specific to our own situation. This situation, to my mind, is defined by the emergence and consolidation of gigantic congelations of irresponsible Power; irresponsible, for it must perforce produce delusions of grandeur and then, and necessarily, individual and national paranoia. In the circumstances, the conative component of culture must include a relentless political struggle and activism intended to delegitimize and attenuate Power. For thus alone can it be made to play a positive role in the affairs of our race and dispel the threats to its existence which have already become menacing beyond measure.



Arthur Koestler once made the point that if he were asked to name the most important date in the history of the human race, he would answer without hesitation, 6 August 1945. From the dawn of consciousness until that day, he added, man had to live with the prospect of his death *as an individual*. But "since the day when the first atomic bomb outshone the sun over Hiroshima, he has had to live with the prospect of his extinction as a species" as well. The sixth of August also happens to be the day each year when Christians celebrate the transfiguration of Jesus into pure redemptive light. In contrast, with the Hiroshima bomb, transfigurative that it also was, began a permanent encounter of the race with death immersion and paranoia around the world.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, *each member of the human race* became a *hibakusha* -- a term which the Japanese coined at the time to signify an explosion-affected person. In other words, *Homo sapiens* suffered an instantaneous degeneration into *Homo hibakushicus*. It is only natural that the Hiroshima Day should mark the beginning of a new calendar. Which means that we are now living in the year 48 A.H.<sup>25</sup>

Evidently, the situation now prevailing is completely unlike any situation which might have prevailed in the centuries and years Before Hiroshima. Evidently also, in this situation, no definition of culture other than the one I have proposed, could make any sense even if it might have made some before. Besides, struggle for the attenuation and even delegitimization of Power would be a basic element of culture as I understand it. The conclusion is obvious: only that concept of culture can be non-trivial and relevant now which seeks to put it clearly and firmly in the context of our own tormented times. Indeed, any other concept would necessarily promote a dangerous diversion from the tasks of profound urgency. In sum, culture, to be itself, must perforce become an effective neutralizer of Power *in addition to being what it has always been*: mankind's mode of coping with nature.

But mainline anthropologists are not likely to accept this view. For they take culture only to be a unique ability which helps mankind to impose new structures on the world of nature which it has to, in order to be able to live with it. From this, Zygmunt Bauman, for one, draws the conclusion that human praxis, viewed in its most universal and general features, consists in turning chaos into order, or substituting one order for another -- order being synonymous with the intelligible and the meaningful. For, in the semiological perspective, he

affirms, "meaning" means order and order alone.<sup>36</sup> The "cultural" and the "semiological", being both concerned with symboling, are but two sides of the same coin. Only, thanks to the relentless ascendancy of the military-industrial chaos over the last many decades, the coin itself has been irredeemably devalued. Indeed, slightly to vary a famous phrase of Lord Zuckerman's, the establishments of the two superpowers made the men of their nuclear weapons laboratories create "a world with an irrational foundation". Such a world can be nothing but an embodiment of chaos itself even after the collapse of one of the superpowers and to imagine, as Bauman for instance does, that human praxis is turning chaos into order or one kind of order into another is to abstract from the fundamental and indeed the defining fact of our time, which, as already indicated, is that the continuity of human history cannot be taken for granted any more. Total extinction of mankind is very much of a technical possibility now and it cannot possibly be made to signify *any* kind of order whatsoever. In any case, to assign human praxis with the power to create order and at the same time to ignore the absolutely unavoidable concomitancy of the ever-accelerating entropic *disorder* is to indulge in a most misleading kind of reductionism. More so, because it is the disorder manifesting itself in ecological erosion in one form or other which is coming ever more to cast ominous shadows over the future of our race. Indeed, even if one were to ignore altogether the *ever-proliferating* rampancies of contemporary militarism, the *built-in* and perhaps intensifying energy prodigality of the *civilian* sector of a modern industrial economy could be seen to promise *on its own* a catastrophic collapse before long. The United States provides a typical example. The chemicalization of agricultural production and the commercialization of food processing are together a source of enormous thermodynamic losses. As a result, by 1970, as many as *ten* kilocalories of inputs were being used as against five in 1945 -- in production, processing, distribution, storage and cooking -- to provide just *one* kilocalorie worth of food on the dinner table.<sup>37</sup> Yet, ignoring wastes of this kind, which must be truly monumental and increasing, professional and even Nobelized economists such as Paul Samuelson, who consider waste-elimination to be a part of the *definition* of a market economy, continue to extol its power to promote what they call efficiency. This in turn is defined as the "absence of waste" and a resource-utilization so effective that the economy cannot produce more of one good without producing less of



another.<sup>38</sup> They fail invariably to see that not a few of what they presume to be goods are in fact environmental and even societal *ungoods* and ought not to be fabricated in the first instance.

This is not to suggest that all human activity should cease, for it cannot and need not, but rather to submit that it should get and *remain* confined to the limits prescribed by the Entropy Law, which seeks simply to emphasize the relentless dissipation and loss of available energy. As already noted, Georgescu-Roegen is now pleading for a law-like *formal* recognition of the entropic dissipation of matter as well. Barry Commoner considers this law to be our most fundamental insight into the way nature works and Albert Einstein affirmed once that it would never be superseded. Therefore, no civilization which continues to *refuse* to pay much heed to the constraints imposed by this law can last very long. In other words, should the imperatives of entropy continue to be violated as they have long been by the military-industrialism of our time, Raymond Williams's conception of culture as a "process of human *perfection*" will continue to become ever more indefensible. Indeed, even the relatively modest conception of culture as a "process of human *evolution*" which he equates with a "process of general growth of man as a kind"<sup>39</sup> collapses the moment we try to match it with the world of reality. For what we are experiencing now is not *evolution* which means "opening out and expansion". Rather, what we have to contend with is *involution* which means "curling inwards or contraction". Such involution manifests itself most obviously in a relentless running down of the earth's reserves of non-renewable and therefore finite resources. But concomitant with this intensifying and also unsustainable consumption of the terrestrial capital is the other manifestation which is called pollution and which is but a *continuing destruction of the renewability* of such resources as have all the time *been* renewing themselves.

In the light of all this, we would do well to make as sharp a distinction as possible between (a) all that helps us cope with the world around and to *ensure* our future as a race and (b) all that makes us curtail our future as a race. I assign the term "culture" to (a) and "counter-culture" to (b).

As already indicated, culture is a set of concepts, artefacts and institutions which, neither found in nature nor genetically transmitted from generation to generation, help us make models of and cope with

the world we live in. Depredations of concentrating Power which of late have greatly distorted and disfigured reality and which have still to be taken adequate note of by mainline scholarship impel us to include Dissidence and Non-conformity in a *definition* of culture. Evidently, in the very face of all the supersititions like beliefs in magic and misperceptions like the geocentric theory which have flourished in the past, culture *has* helped us basically to preserve the external environment over most of the human time on earth and to preserve ourselves as a species, too. Else, we simply would have vanished long ago even if, in the first instance, we would somehow have managed to be born. It follows, therefore, that it would be impossible to imagine ourselves without culture; indeed, it is something entirely exclusive to us, too. Differently put, only culture produces human beings and only human beings produce culture. To be sure, birds also make nests and bees make hives. But they are driven by instincts so that making nests and hives does not make them "better" birds or bees or even "worse". The tiger, as Jose Ortega y Gasset has said, does not "de-tigerize" itself. But given our unique gift of foresight, culture is a very conscious pursuit, and remains stamped as "exclusively human", to borrow a phrase from Karl Marx who, in a very famous passage has the following to say: "A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality".<sup>40</sup> It is *this* which makes us human though the excesses of irresponsible economic and political Power can destroy our humanity and make us, as Marx put it, "unmen".

But one ought also to take care to emphasize that we *alone* need and fabricate shelter against the elements; we *alone* need and make utensils to cook food in; we *alone* need and have devised elaborate arrangements for our governance; we *alone* can think of such things as, say, freedom, survival and poetic justice. Indeed, it is the components of culture like these which give to us our humanity and enable us to manage the raw environment. In sum, culture is a uniquely human and also a humanizing pursuit which signifies our propensity and power to create a distinct sphere of human activity but still entirely *within* the biosphere. Borrowing a term which Pierre Teilhard de Chardin coined, one may call it the noosphere or the sphere of the mind -- "noos" being

the Greek for mind.

Nevertheless, it seems necessary to submit that the meaning I assign to this term is rather different from the one Teilhard de Chardin does. As far as he is concerned, this "sphere of reflection, of conscious invention, a felt union of souls": this "irresistible tide of fields and factories, this immense and growing edifice of matter and ideas": this "membrane in the majestic assembly of telluric layers": this "thinking layer" remains very much "outside and above the biosphere".<sup>45</sup> But this conception of the noosphere as the "felt union of souls" can mean not a thing in a world characterized by the exploitation of the many by the few and one which is also perpetually riven by extreme dissensions. Besides, the "growing edifice of matter" must *consume* a great deal of the terrestrial capital. More serious, the noosphere must necessarily continue to draw upon the resources of the biosphere into which, moreover, it must dump all the toxicity it produces. Therefore, as far as I am concerned, even the question of the noosphere in any way remaining "outside and above the biosphere" does not arise. Rather, it must perforce remain for ever *contained* within the biosphere. Besides, it is to the growing incompatibility between the two that most of our woes of today are due. In other words, the sphere of the mind has very largely become the sphere of sheer mindlessness. This also merits a name. The one I should like to give it is "anoosphere"; and it is patterned on such words as "a-tom", "a-theist", "a-gnostic" and so on. I am not just interested in coining a new term but in focusing on the sheer ascendancy of mindlessness in our own time -- a *kind* of mindlessness, too, which may even spell our annihilation as a species. Since the noosphere is now known to be choked with sub-processes which far from helping us cope with the raw environment actually expose us to such unprecedented threats as those of an inexorable ecological paralysis and a more or less sudden nuclear holocaust, it seems necessary to think of the "anoosphere" as well.

This means that we ought now to get concerned with counter-culture. Incidentally, Theodore Roszak who, to my mind, was the first to use this term, intended it to be significant of all forms of dissent against and deviation from the dominant mores of an advanced industrial society like the United States. But my use of the term has nothing in common with Roszak's. For, I wish to make "counter-culture" stand for such misanthropic obsessions of our time as promise to render the biosphere unfit for human habitation and thus to

destroy the noosphere, too. In sum, while "culture" signifies precepts and processes of unexceedable existential value, "counter-culture" signifies the immanence of all the fell perils that we as a species are now known to face.

Ironically, culture to which we trace our wisdom and on account of which we designate ourselves as *Homo sapiens* itself does not have any built-in defences against unwisdom so glaring that we or at least our "decision-makers" may already have become *Homo insipiens*. Indeed, there is nothing in the nature of culture, however understood, which would prevent its inversion into counter-culture or necessarily ensure its compatibility with the terrestrial ecosystem. But since it is on the essential integrity of this system that our very existence can be presumed to depend, and since the artefacts we produce and the institutions we create may or may not be compatible with the basic conditions of its integrity, we can easily manage, as a species, to get into exceedingly serious trouble. There is a great deal of evidence already available to the effect that we *have* got ourselves into precisely that kind of trouble.

I may be dubbed an obscurantist. But I cannot help submitting that the predicament we are in can be traced directly to the kind of knowledge which the military-industrialism of our time has managed to generate. It is true that just any number of examples could be cited to establish a very long tradition of even the most eminent scientists working for the military. In fact, Isaac Newton himself was commissioned by the British War Office to do work which would improve the accuracy of guns; and his Laws of Motion were an incidental product of that work. However, it ought to be obvious at least now that to generate knowledge through work for the military is not the most economical or even the safest way of doing things. For what we get in the process can only be what Bertrand Russell would have called "knowledge without wisdom" and Robert Redfield, "darkened light". It follows that if culturology is to be of any relevance today, it can do little better than to examine the process of knowledge generation and indeed to undertake an analysis of all that passes for education. It is only in doing so that it can hope to explain how we got into the kind of trap we find ourselves in and also to show how, if at all, we may expect to escape out of it.

## IV

## Education

Indeed, education, however understood, cannot but be an integral and important sub-process of culture. Therefore, it is only in the context of an analysis of culture that we can expect to comprehend the essential nature and significance of education. To begin with, education is *not* and cannot be an arithmomorphic concept just as culture is not and cannot be one. Therefore, we must try to be as specific as possible about what we mean by it. "Education" is derived from the Latin word *educare* the primary meaning of which, Fowler tells us, is to bring up, to educate. In other words and broadly understood, education is a process through which every society seeks to perpetuate itself by making its young internalize its values and mores. Formal schooling is only a minor component of the main undertaking but one which in terms of the human time on earth is an extremely recent innovation and one which is now turning out to be extremely expensive, as well. According to Ivan Illich, the first men who arrogated the educational functions to themselves were the early bishops who led their flocks to the *alma ubera* (milk-brimming breasts) of Mother Church from which they were never to be weaned. "This is why they, like their secular successors call the faithful *alumni* -- which means sucklings or suckers, and nothing else".<sup>42</sup> We have more than a hint here as to why formal schooling at higher levels in any case is essentially a remorseless parasite which cannot but devitalize and perhaps ultimately kill the "host" it feasts on, i.e., the society in question and even the race as a whole. Little wonder that it has already provided the brain-power for the creation of the material means of complete annihilation. In other words, formal schooling has helped create the means with the help of which the powers that be have acquired the power to disrupt human civilization and indeed to destroy it altogether. In fact, as early as 1940, when the possibility of total annihilation of our race had not yet occurred to anyone, Bertolt Brecht was saying:

Out of the libraries come the killers.  
 Mothers stand despondently waiting.  
 Hugging their children and searching the skies.  
 Looking for the latest inventions of the professors.

The point of it all is that if education is a process through which, as indicated above, every society seeks to perpetuate itself, then formal schooling is a sub-process within education which has come to provide human society with the macabre promise of its own disruption and destruction. Therefore, formal schooling has at least turned out to be the catalyst which facilitates the conversion of education into counter-education and indeed of culture into counter-culture. If well over half a million highly trained scientists and engineers happen to be engaged in military R & D worldwide and if the global bill for it happens to be at least 80 billion US dollars per year, they can only be making our race to get ready for extinction. Already, the recently developed "conventional" weapons "promise suffering and slaughter on a scale never before known to civilization".<sup>43</sup> That is why I should like to designate *military* R & D as Roguery and Devilment and avoid the most misleading euphemism which is commonly used. Let me submit in support that when the construction of the hydrogen bomb, also known as the Hell Bomb, was being considered, P.M.S. Blackett, citing Ludovico Ariosto's Renaissance classic *Orlando Furioso*, described it as a "curs'd device" and a "base implement of death" which would be designed by Beelzebub's malicious art and which could "ruin all the race of human kind".<sup>44</sup>

As far as I know, not many have blamed education or rather formal schooling as such for the apocalyptic situation we happen to be in. But the one who can be seen to have argued emphatically along the lines comes to mind: Aldous Huxley. Indeed, soon after the end of the Second World War, he chastised the dispensers of what would commonly be known as education in terms which ought to have obliged them to re-examine the very assumptions of their craft. But what he said has been all but forgotten: "The benefactors of humanity deserve due honour and commemoration. Let us build a Pantheon for professors. It should be located among the ruins of one of the gutted cities of Europe or Japan, and over the entrance to the Ossuary I would inscribe, in letters six or seven feet high, the simple words: SACRED



TO THE MEMORY OF THE WORLD'S EDUCATORS. SI  
MONUMENTUM REQUIRIS, CIRCUMSPICE".<sup>45</sup>

When I first saw it, the concluding phrase in Latin was all Greek to me and could well be so to many others. Therefore, I should like to add that this is what it means: "If you seek (his) monument, look round you". At the time Huxley wrote these words, the looking round would have helped one see the following and a lot many other things as well: In Germany, a firebombed Dresden which suffered as many as 135,000 dead during fifteen hours of saturated air raids; in the Soviet Union of that time, a staggering "body count" of twenty million dead; and in Japan, the charred remains of Hiroshima and Nagasaki each of which took a moment to die and has got branded on the human psyche ever since. Similarly, the looking round *now* would help us see things which are grimmer than ever before. They would, above all include a world which cannot even take its existence for granted any more and may well be merely waiting to be blown to pieces.

This is a world, moreover, which spends around a thousand billion dollars a year on *preparing* itself to be blown to pieces and during the same period lets about thirty million people die of starvation and other poverty-related diseases. This gives a tally of over 82,000 people a day. Already, therefore, our world is experiencing one Hiroshima every day. What is taking place more or less unnoticed and unbothered about by a vast majority of the highly educated is, to borrow a term from Johan Galtung, the Silent Holocaust of our time. It does not just consume but continues to consume people no end. Unlike the Hiroshima holocaust of 1945 which lasted a mere moment or unlike even the Nazi holocaust of the Jews which exhausted itself in a relatively limited number of years, the Silent Holocaust promises to go on and on so that the world may be able to make enough resources available for the Final Bang, which, incidentally, it became able to trigger quite some time ago. But the powers that be seem determined to acquire ever more of what is called the "Overkill". However, and as Lord Zuckerman puts it, this is a world which with all its perils has been created by *the scientists*.<sup>46</sup>

To be sure, the scientists were doing their masters' bidding; for they could *not* have done what they have done without the resources which the latter *alone* could have made available. Even so, having consented to do something which they very well knew could only bring



disaster in its wake, they must necessarily share a major part of the responsibility for the kind of situation we happen to be in.

But it means something more and at least in the present context, one would do well to emphasize it: The scientists' continued refusal to refuse to take part in the plans for the annihilation of our race signifies, more than anything else, a catastrophic failure of education *per se*. For, education, properly imbibed, would have helped them rise to higher levels of perception and thus also of culture and would, as a result, have made them wary of playing with fire. In other words, authentic education must perforce have prevented their desensitization to violence and thus have promoted peace in the world. Cherishing some such hope perhaps, Edward Gibbon made the point around two hundred years ago that Europe would never have a barbarian conqueror again. His logic was simple. What would to him be "modern" war required knowledge of a large number of arts and sciences. In order to excel in war, therefore, the barbarian would have to acquire this knowledge and in the very process he could not but cease to be barbarous or in other words he would necessarily become averse to fighting wars.

As Gibbon saw it, then, the only antidote to barbarism that mankind had and could have was education, which means that the inexorable ascendancy of barbarism would signify to him as it should to us the concomitant paralysis of nothing else than education itself. Now, to be sure, Europe never again suffered the kind of barbarian conquest which Gibbon was worried about. Nevertheless, barbarism as such continued to flourish in Europe and in other parts of the world including those colonized by the Europeans. In support, one may refer to the intensifying violence and virulence of the wars of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Therefore, and remembering also the possible termination of human history that we have now come to live with, we have no option but to reject Gibbon's famous "pleasing conclusion" that "every age of the world has increased and still increases the real wealth, the happiness, the knowledge and perhaps the virtue of the human race".

Education, to my mind, *can be and ought to be* understood as the only way that the successive generations of mankind bring up the ones following so as to ensure its perpetuation and propagation. Therefore, if such perpetuation cannot be taken for granted any longer and if

instead the threat of total extinction of the race has emerged as a distinct technical possibility, then something must be presumed to have gone wrong with education to the point of absolute dysfunctionality. In other words, education may well have suffered a fault of no less than geological dimensions. It follows that the praxis of education can do little better today than to identify and focus on this fault and to rectify it, too. Thus alone can education be made to do what it ought to have been doing all the time. Indeed, this may well be the only way we can hope to be able to plan for the restoration of human history.

In order to be able to move in this direction, *and given in particular the kind of world we are now living in*, we would do well to emphasize a distinction or a division *not* between the Cartesian *res cogitans* and *res extensa* but between what might be called the *thoughtful thing* and the *thoughtless thing*. The corresponding Latin terms, I am told, would be *res curans* and *res incurans*. I should like to define them as follows:

The thoughtful thing or *res curans* is the thing which cares; the thing which heals; the thing which is concerned; the thing which is aware of and is sensitized to the woes of the world today; the thing which is committed; the thing which is anxious and so on. In contrast, the thoughtless thing or *res incurans* is the thing which refuses to care; the thing which is either unaware of the woes of the world today or is in any case utterly desensitized to them; the thing which vitiates; the thing which is unconcerned; the thing which is indifferent; the thing which is complacent and so on. The dualism I am proposing is not an abstract philosophical fantasy but something suggested by the very terminality of our situation itself and something which *alone* can help us dispel the crisis we are facing. *Res curans* of my conception, unlike *res cogitans* of Descartes's, does not just involve the mere ability to think but the exact nature of the thoughts it comes to think. Being sensitized to the sheer gravity of our predicament today, it is profoundly concerned with all the inequities engendered by the existing congelations of irresponsible Power. Therefore, and only naturally, does it seek to keep the spotlight on the legitimation crisis which the pyramids of power have long been confronted with and which the ideologues of power take every care to elide. Besides, utterly unlike Descartes's *res cogitans* which may well become in a multitude of specific cases an obvious embodiment of sheer mindlessness, *res curans*, as I conceive it, is intended to be and remains the only antidote

to *res incurans* or the thoughtless thing. And, finally, unlike *res cogitans* again, *res curans* cannot possibly signify a self-contained *Cogito* but is the product instead of a well thought-out and carefully executed social and introspective activity called education.

In contrast, *res incurans*, being either ignorant of or unconcerned with the existential perils produced by paranoid power today, necessarily and relentlessly remains obsessed with issues which are trivial and even spurious in the extreme in preference to those which happen to be vital and fundamental. Also, given the kind of technical means which are now available and given their extreme potential for evil, *res incurans* can and indeed already has become exceedingly virulent to the point that it may spell nothing less than the total extinction of our race. Therefore, no one who imagines himself to be practising education can possibly continue to cultivate the thoughtless or the desensitized thing.

Involved here are not just two levels but two *kinds* of consciousness: naive and critical. These terms are Paulo Freire's<sup>47</sup>, but in using them here I have taken some liberty. Naive, uncritical or reductionist consciousness, in my usage, signifies in effect a state of somnolence so heavy that one suffering from it cannot perceive the misdoings of the status quo. Rather, one who is only naively conscious cannot but get co-opted into the prevailing order to the point of taking its legitimacy for granted. University degrees and even positions of academic importance provide no protection against the malady and may actually help accentuate it. For, they increase one's stake in the continuation of things as they are. Indeed, if the universities everywhere had taken care to dispel naive consciousness and to make the cultivation of self-consciously holistic criticality their primary profession, we would not be facing the threat either of the coming ecodoom or of a global holocaust. Be that as it may, naive consciousness can only increase our vulnerability to and defenceless against the hazards of contemporary military-industrialism. In particular, because for the production of naive consciousness, the ruling circles everywhere have available a truly vast and expanding "armamentarium" of newspapers, glossy magazines, TV, radio and so on. Little wonder that such consciousness must become "falser and falser" and what passes for education degenerate into a mere exercise in the assiduous cultivation and promotion of conformity. But, given the sheer ultimacy of the existential crisis we

are now facing, such conformity is not just a case of the underlying populations coming to introject or subconsciously to incorporate or imbibe the ideas and values of the ruling minorities as, for example, they do in the Freirean situation. Rather, it is a case of the ruling minorities also, no less than the rest, getting immersed in a situation which promises nothing but the extinction of our race. Masses of people so immersed can only fall to the level of what is sometimes called "the vegetative soul" or "life not aware of itself". This *alone* could explain why Death Immersion has become a menace of global dimensions.

In contrast, critical consciousness signifies a state of awareness so acute that one never can fail to perceive the counter-existential pursuits and propensities of the managers of the status quo. For this to become possible, Doubt has to be installed as a fundamental methodological principle. But here, it seems necessary to submit that Doubt as I take it, has nothing to do with the Cartesian Doubt, which as we have seen, is noting but a metaphysical point of departure. But since, in terms of strict logic, it does not happen to be *irrefutable*, it cannot possibly serve as a legitimate point from where to begin expounding one's position. For an argument rooted in a premise of doubtful validity must perforce be irredeemably spurious in nature.

This epistemological position may be summed up like this: It is in order to avoid infinite regress that one *must* take *some* position for granted without having to justify it in any way. But it must not be a position which someone else can prove to be wrong. As far as I am concerned, it is human survival and not Doubt which is taken as a point of departure. Doubt comes in for purposes of *examining* the credentials of the status quo which is perceived as a threat to survival. This explains why the doubt of *my* conception is intended to be focused on the *bona fides* of the prevailing system which I take to be in constant need of verification. Therefore, while Descartes's Doubt necessarily produces political conformity, my Doubt impels me towards non-conformity. Besides, this seems to me to be the only way that one can hope to acquire and develop the faculty of critical consciousness, which means making a quantum jump and not just undergoing a gradual transition from a state of naive consciousness. One gets transformed into an "intellective soul" and becomes a bearer of "thinking life". Still, Doubt can produce criticality if and only if one

takes into account *everything* that can be shown to be significant in the given context, that is, if and only if one takes a holistic view.

On the face of it, this might seem to be a pointless assertion to make. For who would actually *say* that one ought to leave out of account anything and everything that could be shown to be significant in the given context? But if only we take care to remember that mainline scholarship manages always to elide all that is significant and at the same time never fails to focus on whatever is trivial, the epistemological importance of the holistic viewpoint of my conception becomes self-evident. Our concern at the moment is the elimination of the threat to our existence, and the *primacy* of this concern has to be taken for granted. For, it is a fundamental value premise which, to borrow a telling expression of Einstein's, "reason cannot touch".<sup>48</sup> Rather, *all* reason must flow from it. It is in this connection that a relentless critique of Cartesian reductionism assumes overriding importance. For more than just anything whatsoever, it can be shown to have caused a massive erosion of the existential, that is educational, defences of our race and at the same time has made us suffer a loss of intellectual and moral vitality which, as a race, we cannot do without. Therefore, as I see it, the only antidote to the current crisis would be a complete replacement of Cartesian reductionism with a self-consciously holistic world-view.

This argues the unexceedable importance of Holism in the context of education. Indeed, in Paulo Freire's formulation, no intellectual exercise can have *any* educational value *unless* it is critical, and it cannot be critical, unless it is holistic. In his own words, "the investigation will be most educational when it is most critical, and most critical when it avoids the narrow outlines of partial or 'focalized' views of reality", and sticks to the comprehension of reality as a whole.<sup>49</sup> In view of the extreme dangers which the prevailing reality is known to be heavy with, the greater the number of people who undertook this kind of an educational exercise the better would it be for our race. For this could well be the *only* way we could begin to generate what Freire calls "conscientization" on a world scale and thus to escape out of the present situation. In other words, this could well be the only way we could hope for a reconversion of counter-education into education and of counter-culture into culture: the only way, that is, that the sword called *res incurans* could be beaten into a plowshare called *res curans*.



In any case, there seems little else that we can do to ensure our survival as a race.

Leslie White, for one, would have been scandalized by a claim of this kind.<sup>50</sup> He saw education as a mere sub-process of culture and *as such* it could not, he insisted, be expected in any way to influence the latter by which it had to be influenced instead. Still, just as one does not expect meat packers to preach vegetarianism, he said, one may not expect accredited educators to plead for any less of schooling. Nevertheless, he was not willing to accept the claim that education would cure the ills of society.

The trouble with this position lies, I think, in the treatment of education as a single-valued arithmomorphic concept and in its implicit and virtual identification by White and most mainline academics with schooling. To be sure, formal schooling by and large defends the status quo and is very much a creation of what White calls culture; so it may not be expected to usher in any great changes in the affairs of men, and may instead be merely a way of keeping things as they are. But the situation is not as hopeless as this might suggest. For, education may also take the form of social criticism, intellectual dissent and a variety of protest movements particularly those at the grassroots level. Thus considered, but only thus considered, can education be expected to supply what Bertrand Russell once called a "leaven of rebels". No society can be progressive without such a leaven, he said. But he also made a point to the effect that a proliferation of the products of modern technology "makes it more and more difficult to be a rebel".<sup>51</sup> That is to say, the co-optation of people into the status quo becomes more likely than not a major purpose and consequence of education. Indeed, as the spectacles of modern technology continue to become ever more spectacular, even the literati begin to lose the power to perceive the fell perils these products must necessarily conceal. Instead, they get hooked on the modus quo and then, and inevitably, get sucked into the status quo.

Therefore, if education is ever to play a positive role, it must take care to demystify modern technology, even the technology ostensibly intended to have nothing to do with war. Else, it would never be able to produce any leaven of rebels. A leaven is necessarily used in extremely small quantities but given the necessary physical conditions never fails to transform the substance it is mixed with. A human leaven



may not be as effective or irresistible. Nor may its successes be irreversible. After all, revolutions do often go awry. In any case, even though non-conformists have always *been* around, humanity has managed somehow to be driven into the throes of a kind of crisis which history has never known. Therefore, education must become more than ever before a concerted exercise in the extrojection of all ideas and illusions which are now known to be disruptive of the very basis of human existence. As used by Paulo Freire, the term "extrojection" signifies a conscious rejection by the oppressed of the ideas and values sought to be perpetuated by their oppressors. But, given the sheer novelty of our situation in which literally every single member of the human race has become an explosion-affected person, a hibakusha, and therefore faces the threat of annihilation, extrojection must *now* signify a self-conscious rejection by all -- the exploited and the exploiters alike -- of the prevailing culture of disruption. This means that the kind of critical unmasking which I wish education to undertake is a lot more profound than, say, Paulo Freire would wish it to undertake. For he would have the politico-economic power system examined but leave the technostucture unquestioned. I would have *that* examined, too. As I see it, then, a kind of critical unmasking which I am pleading for is an educational undertaking *par excellence*: indeed, the only way to initiate the Einsteinian chain reaction of awareness and thus to produce the thoughtful thing on a mass scale; and, in turn, to create at least the *necessary* condition of survival.

It follows that the need for a leaven of rebels can never be over-emphasized. For nothing less than the very existence of our race is at stake. Formal schooling, as Leslie White would insist, may not be the best way to bring about the *kind* of social change we so urgently need now. But radical education, understood specifically as the praxis and propagation of non-conformity might still be expected to do the job. For thus alone could a continuing generation and proliferation of *res curans* be ensured. Merely because quantum-wise, and at least to begin with, it would have to be much, much smaller than what it is meant to transform need not matter much. For it is in the very nature of a leaven to be no more.

The need for education to become a *sustained* praxis of non-conformity *at least now* cannot be over-emphasized. For in a world already bursting at the seams with weapons having cosmic powers of

destruction, the haven of rebels, to be effective, can never hope to be able to make any sensible use of what Marx once called "the criticism of weapons". Rather, it would have to continue to develop, more than ever before, what he would call its "weapon of criticism". But in order to be able to do so in a world already overstocked with weapons of unheard of lethality, we should do well to make Doubt and certainty change places. This might seem intriguing. But, as Hans Jonas has suggested, the kind of predicament we are now in impels us actually to reverse the Cartesian procedure, and, for purposes of decision, to *treat as certain* what is *possible* but may still be *doubtful*.<sup>52</sup> One such technical possibility which we would do well to *consider as if it were certain* and then try to prepare ourselves adequately in order to ward it off is the nuclear holocaust; a global ecological breakdown is another. In other words, those who persist in the belief that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds and, therefore, continue to dismiss such concerns as mere "crying wolf" must themselves be dismissed as throngs of impervious indifferents.

The point of it all is that from a specifically educational point of view, the kind of reduction and over-simplification which Descartes indulges in could not but be unmitigably dysfunctional. Ironically, the way he uses the thinking thing to generate what he thinks is *certain* knowledge turns out in a most vital area to be *a complete inversion of reality*. More so, because what Bernard Williams calls Descartes's "pre-emptive scepticism" was intended actually to generate fundamental general truths about the world.<sup>53</sup> In fact, as part of a pure thought-experiment, he invented the well-known malicious demon of his and also *made him* hell-bent on deceiving his own creator, i.e., Descartes. We have already had a brief encounter with this arch deceiver and would try now to see him as an arch enemy of epistemology and *therefore* of education as well.

Since the working of the Cartesian demon can never be detected, the very idea must continue, as the late A.J. Ayer put it once, to be an empty hypothesis. Still, he thought it to be a picturesque way of saying that intuitive conviction is not a logical "guarantee of truth".<sup>54</sup> But if that is all that there is to it, and there seems to be nothing more, then Descartes can be seen to have misperceived and underrated nothing else than the potential and the propensities of the human psyche itself. For a relentless pursuit of a "logical guarantee of truth" produces not

comprehension of the world we live in but an obsession with what Einstein once called "measuring accuracies" and a complete deafness "to the strongest argument".<sup>55</sup> Some such realization must have persuaded the poet E.E. Cummings to defy the prevailing fads as follows:

While you and I have lips and voices which  
Are for kissing and to sing with  
Who cares if some oneeyed son of a bitch  
Invents an instrument to measure Spring with?

The point of it is that even if Intuition, which some one-eyed Popperean "piecemealists" might dismiss as something poetic, fails to guarantee the logicity and exactitude of mere bits and pieces of information about the existential reality, it still is our only guarantee of being able to comprehend the Whole of it and thus to ensure our survival, too. Else, we would all be like a well-known but unnamed American physicist who, as Einstein once put it, "could know so much and understand so little".<sup>56</sup>

One may refer here to Goethe, the great poet who was also a scientist of considerable standing and a Fellow of the Kaiser Leopold German Academy of Scientists, too. He took it as a *first article of faith*, that is of *intuition*, that there is a "perfect correspondence between the inner nature of man and the structure of external reality, between the soul and the world".<sup>57</sup> Here, to my mind, the inner nature of man signifies the kind of constraints which *all* human cultures with the solitary exception of the military-industrialism of our own time have managed to observe over the ages and, of course, in purely *intuitive* recognition of the physical constraints defining the earth system. For instance, there are the inviolable limits which even unlettered tribes never failed to impose on their hunting expeditions. Indeed, in the absence of such discipline, sheer survival even for a fraction of the human time on earth would have been inconceivable. Ironically, therefore, it is only the highly lettered and presumably educated societies of today which, by corrupting the inner nature of man through bateless orgies of consumerism and militarism, have managed to destroy its correspondence with the structure of the external reality and have thus come to imperil nothing less than his survival as a race. For instance, what matters to McDonald's, the largest buyer of beef in

the world, is the sale of a mind-boggling total of as many as three billion hamburgers per year and *not* the continuing destruction of vast acreages of rainforests in Central and Latin America for raising 300,000 heads of cattle for the purpose.<sup>58</sup> But the destruction of forests on a scale like this can only mean an intensification of the environmental crisis of our time.

Thus what Goethe managed to perceive purely intuitively had helped us survive over the ages. But what may be called Descartes's *intuition against intuition* has become a major source of misperception, and only naturally therefore of miseducation, and thus an existential threat as well. We have it on an authority no less than Albert Einstein's that it is the "free", i.e., *intuitive*, "inventions of the human intellect" which help us generate *non-trivial* knowledge. Further, as a famous and oft-quoted passage of his has it, "the supreme task of the physicist is to arrive at those universal elementary laws from which the cosmos can be built up by pure deduction. There is no logical path to these laws; only intuition, resting on sympathetic understanding of experience, can reach them".<sup>59</sup> A "particularly fine example of the truth that knowledge cannot spring from experience alone but only from the comparison of the inventions of the intellect with observed fact" is, as Einstein reminds us, the formulation of Kepler's Laws.<sup>60</sup> *O me ridiculum!* Johannes Kepler is reported to have said when he perceived the outlines of a new unifying principle, a new definition of reality. And his cry "Oh, how ridiculous of me!", which opened entire new vistas of comprehension must have been uttered time and again in the annals of science. This means that it would not always be possible or even necessary for the scientist actually to be able to *explain* how he had come to a particular conclusion. Thus, occasionally, Enrico Fermi, when confronted with "But really, how? Show me", would merely say, "I know it on c.i.f." Expanded, in Italian, c.i.f. means *con intuito formidabile*: with formidable intuition.<sup>61</sup> And, of course, one of the most formidable instances of intuition having been instrumental in producing fundamental knowledge is Niels Bohr's Principle of Complementarity in physics. He is reported to have first thought of it in connection with having to punish his son for what was a patent misdeed. Could he, bound both by his duty as father and by his fondness for his son, *know him simultaneously* both in the light of love and in the light of justice?<sup>62</sup> But no account of intuition-generated insights could

be complete without reference to Einstein's famous  $E = MC^2$ . For the theory of relativity is said to have had its inception when the young Einstein performed his epochal *Gedankenexperiment* of imagining himself to be travelling along with a wave of light at 186,000 miles per second.<sup>63</sup> It follows that in asking Coleridge to "explain his Explanation", Byron could well have been asking for the impossible.

In other words, circumscribing intuition or doing away with it altogether, should amount to nothing less than "gnosticide" -- a term which I have coined to signify "the murder of knowledge" which continues to be committed in the name of learning. And to my mind, this *alone* ought to be of unexceedable concern to education and to its philosophy as well.

For the gnosticide I am talking about did not just mean the murder of knowledge but, and far more serious, the destruction of the very possibility of education, too, which in turn has culminated in the bizarre fallacy of the military-industrialism of our own time being allowed to pass off as the very quintessence of modernity and cultural advancement. All this, I contend, is traceable directly to Descartes's rejection of the synthetic and *intuitive* perception of life in favour of a world-view which happens to be *analytic and mechanistic* to the point that life itself ceases to exist as a distinct phenomenon. Thus, towards the close of Part Five of his *Discourse on the Method*, he argued that animals were but automatons or moving machines made up of a "great multitude of bones, muscles, nerves, arteries, veins, and all the other parts that are in the body of any animal" (CSM-I, 139). Only, having been made by the hands of God, any automaton would be "incomparably better-ordered" and would also contain in itself movements more wonderful, than those in any machine devised by the hands of man. Still, what matters is reason; and automatons do not have just less of it than men but none at all (CSM-I, 140). Besides, just because some animals show more skill than men in some of their actions does not prove that they have intelligence. For, it is only the disposition of their organs and not intelligence which enables them to do some thing better than us. In the same way, a clock, consisting only of wheels and springs, but having no intelligence "can count the hours and measure time more accurately than we can with all our wisdom" (CSM-I, 141). Nevertheless, animals other than humans lacking intelligence in no way justifies the claim that they are machines; and yet *this* is the



reduction which in promoting an irreverence for life and a mania for the vehicles of violence accounts for most of the frailties and vulnerabilities of the world order of today.

But it is not non-intelligent creatures alone which are treated as automatons. Even sentient beings fare little better and in the Sixth Meditation we find Descartes making his well-known and to my mind exceedingly revolting comparison "between the idea of a sick man and a badly made clock and the idea of healthy man and a well-made clock" (CSM-II, 59). This deliberate denigration of life was not allowed to go unchallenged even in Descartes's own lifetime. Indeed, it was dismissed as a "deadly and murderous sentiment" by none other than Henry More, a contemporary and one-time idolizer of Descartes's from England. On this count alone More felt that the gleaming rapier-edge of Descartes's genius had become "the sharp and cruel blade which in one blow, so to speak, dared to despoil of life and sense practically the whole race of animals, metamorphosing them into marble statues and machines".<sup>64</sup> Or, as R.S. Westfall, a historian of science, sees it, Descartes and his followers tried, even if at the cognitive level, to banish "life itself from the universe".<sup>65</sup>

To my mind, the existential crisis we are facing today, and of which moreover the crisis of education is but a part, *can be explained in terms of this denigration of and irreverence for life*. This is easy to see. To consider individual living beings as mere mechanical automatons, to consider, say, a dog as a mere barking machine, is to misperceive organic and integrated wholes as so many assemblages of detachable parts. But this misperception leads to another and a far more serious one. For the earth system itself ceases to be recognized as a complex, living and organic Web. Instead, it comes to be treated *in effect* as a mere *collection* of automatons, even if made by God, and chunks of inanimate matter, which can be ravished with impunity; more so because in Henry More's terms, matter is "inert and stupid of itself".<sup>66</sup> But ancient wisdom had *intuitively* cognized and the modern science of ecology has conclusively established the earth system to be a *single and integrated super-organism*. Indeed, our very existence now depends on our ability to preserve its integrity *as a super-organism*.

Evidently, it was only on the basis of intuition that men had long taken the earth to be a *living* system. For had they failed to take it so, they would hardly have survived for the 40,000 odd years that they are



now known to have occupied this planet, or, indeed, even for a much shorter period. The idea of a living earth has therefore been one of *the basic and sustaining though intuitive insights of the human race*. Still, this was only a *feeling*, no matter how strong; and by no means could it be used to *prove* the earth to be a living system. Nevertheless, it persuaded the ancient Greeks, for instance, to consider the earth as goddess and also to give her not one but *two* names, Gaia and Ge. The idea has now been revived by James Lovelock, the father of the famous Gaia Hypothesis. But like a religious belief, he says, the feeling that mother Earth lives always was and remains "scientifically untestable and therefore incapable in its own context of further rationalization".<sup>67</sup>

Persuaded perhaps by that malicious demon of his, Rene Descartes would have been scandalized by a statement like this appearing in a book by a hard scientist who happens to be a Fellow of the Royal Society, too. Little wonder that he did all that he could to destroy the prescriptive legitimacy of ancient intuition and thus of the very concept of the earth as goddess or Mother. In his own words: "Note, in the first place, that by 'nature' here I do not mean some goddess or any other sort of imaginary power". (CSM-I, 92). Nature, he goes on to add, is just matter; and matter to him, we know, is mere extension in space; that is, it is just three-dimensionality. As such, men need observe no restraint while vivisectioning or assaulting nature nor fear any consequences for which they may have someday to feel sorry.

But with the benefit of hindsight, though, we now *know* that things have *not* turned out that way. To the contrary, in fact, which is why we *have* to feel sorry for a variety of exceedingly grim consequences which could not but flow out of the sustained and mindless disregard for the inherent inviolability of Life *per se*. It follows that living organisms ought not to have been taken to be mere mechanical automata, for this act *alone* would be enough to cause *even the earth system as a whole to be taken as a mere collection of automata without any organic structure of its own*. In turn, this would destroy the intuitive insights accumulated over the ages and at the same time produce the most horrendous kind of ignorance and illiteracy about the essential nature of our habitat. This also means that no amount of supposedly scholastic and highfunded effort which failed to or did not even try to dispel such ignorance and illiteracy and instal an essential reverence for life as an end in itself could ever be allowed to pass off as education, the

flamboyant pretensions of those "in the business", notwithstanding.

The point of it all is that education, *to be authentic*, must become a sustained praxis of an existential ethics for our tormented and traumatized times. That is, it must become a plan for the proliferation of the *thoughtful thing* and for the concomitant attenuation and then elimination of the *thoughtless thing*. It is in this context that the very idea of exploitation, of men and of nature, would have to be seen as counter-existential and therefore dismissed as irredeemably unethical. Indeed, one in a position to exploit must perforce remain unmindful of or unconcerned with the Whole and get fixated instead on the immediate and the narrow. Reductionism could mean little else — *certainly the actual practice of it*. Those who rape the earth and those who rape women have the following in common: a blind obsession with the gratification of the moment plus a morbid unconcern for the fate of the victim. What they presume to be dealing with are not living subjects but lifeless objects. However, if the earth continues to be treated as a lifeless object, it will cease to be the Home for us living subjects before long. This cannot but spell, among other things, a crippling of the existential ethics which we otherwise need so badly. For, as Carolyn Merchant has written, as long as the earth was considered to be alive and sensitive, it could be considered a breach of human ethical behaviour to carry out destructive acts against it.<sup>68</sup>

But the rise of reductionism does not accompany just the fall of ethics; it accompanies the fall of education as well. For, much of what passes for education today is but a programme for inexorable specialization and as such may well be a programme for the actual *animalization* of man. This is easy to see. For

"If we remember that the animal is a specialist, and a perfect one, all of its knowing-power being fixed upon a single task to be done, we ought to conclude that an educational programme which would only aim at forming specialists ever more perfect in ever more specialized fields, and unable to pass judgement on any matter that goes beyond their specialized competence, would lead indeed to a progressive animalization of the human mind and life". In a word, "the overwhelming cult of specialization dehumanizes man's life".<sup>69</sup>

Not just dehumanizes it but has come now to threaten it with extinction as well, which is why I have suggested above that a non-spurious conception of education would do well to take it as part of the

human project of self-perpetuation. It follows that if the prospects for such perpetuation can be seen to have become bleak, as they very well can be, education may also have become counter-itself. It seems to be of some interest to note here that counter-education, no matter how high it may be taken to be, does not even call for the full thinking powers of those dispensing it or of those imbibing it. In fact, it puts no more than one half of one's brain to work and at the same time puts the other and the more imaginative half, too, to everlasting sleep.

Lest this should sound intriguing, let me make a brief reference here to the work of a well-known psychobiologist, Roger Sperry. He has shown and won a Nobel Prize in the process that each of the two hemispheres of the human brain, the left and the right, is the locus of a distinct and specialized *kind* of intellection. According to him, the left is highly verbal and mathematical, and performs with analytic, symbolic, computer-like sequential logic. The right, by contrast, is spatial and mute, and performs with a synthetic and spatioperceptual kind of information processing not yet simulatable in computers.<sup>70</sup> The chapter in which this occurs begins with a quotation about "where really our values come from". The burden of Sperry's argument is that the right hemisphere is the only "ethicizer" we have.

Since I am not a biologist nor even a psychologist, I am in no position to go into the *technical* details of this argument. Even so, it does seem to yield a very reasonable inference, which is that *the articulation of values* can now be recognized to be an entirely legitimate and indeed a perfectly respectable kind of intellection; and also that a synthetic and therefore a holistic mode of thinking *alone* can yield values which would be particularly appropriate to what Robert Oppenheimer once described as a "pretty restless and a tormented world". However, as far as I am concerned, the "left hemisphere" does not and cannot signify the left segment of the cerebrum as such but a pathological fixation on reductionism and thus on the relentless cultivation of *res incurans*. Likewise, the "right hemisphere" signifies to me nothing but a profound predilection for a self-consciously holistic and *therefore* value-oriented intellection, i.e., for the cultivation and propagation of *res curans*. It follows that the educational, philosophical and in fact ontological value of Professor Sperry's insights into the working of the human brain can never be emphasized strongly enough.

## V

## Democracy

It is only natural that an Age which has produced the negations of such existential imperatives as culture and education should also have produced a caricature of democracy for the mismanagement of its affairs. But let us be reminded right here that like culture and education, democracy, too, is *not* an arithmomorphic concept; so like "culture" and "education", "democracy" too is a sort of conceptual holdall. Nevertheless, of all the meanings that it can be made to hold, the one which identifies it with universal adult suffrage *per se* is the most reduced, i.e., the most over-simplified and therefore the most misleading; and *not* incidentally, it happens to be the most widely accepted, too. This being so, one would do well to examine the dangerous implications of this particular reduction which academic political science has been selling successfully for long.

Evidently, such an examination the mainstream of opinion cannot undertake. For it merely presumes universal adult suffrage to be a condition both necessary and sufficient for the existence of democracy and manages to pull off a major ideological coup thereby. For, what it manages thus to conceal is a crucial fact, which is that mere suffrage, no matter how inclusive, is not necessarily incompatible with a *total exclusion* of the people from any share in power and decision-making. Indeed, at stake in the elections is not any fundamental *structural* transformation of the polity in question. At stake instead is the assumption of power by any one of the contending coteries of politicians commonly known as political parties, or if necessary and possible, by some coalition of convenience that they may come to constitute. Involved here are persons and, despite loud claims to the contrary, not principles. So it is only natural that the exercise called election should assume the dimensions of a farce which has a set periodicity but which, as far as the historical process is concerned, means not a wee bit. For all that it involves is the management or rather the mismanagement of the status quo *not its transformation*. Still, from the point of view of the fortunes, more literal than metaphorical, of the politicians and the business houses which finance them, this exercise, even if farcical, has great significance.

This very largely explains why, say, in India, the contending elites do not mind spending all the money they can, and, if necessary, actually capturing the booths as well. And, about the latter predilection, Mrs Nalini Singh, for one, has some telling revelations to make. She says that even in 1980, she saw a "total hijacking of democracy" with "wads of ballots being stamped without even the staples being removed". Aghast, she asked the candidate, who was to win this election and become a cabinet minister, too, to have it stopped. His cynical reply was: "Where is it written in the Representation of the People's Act that this is illegal"?<sup>71</sup> Booth-capturing, particularly in some of the more notorious regions of the country, is a veritable profession, a *pesha*, and evidently requires a great deal of pre-meditation and planning. Besides, not being a very genteel pursuit, it requires an ability to pressurize people into "voting" for a particular candidate and, if necessary, to use physical violence as well. This, then, is the sinister meaning of the expression "muscle power" and, together with other forms and modes of mass manipulation, it defines the essential nature of what is often described, with more than a mere modicum of vainglory as also with a great deal of cynicism as the world's largest democracy.

To be sure, those who take turns in actually running this system would perforce have their differences; which not unoften might appear to be acute and even irreconcilable. But they must take every care to see that these differences, no matter how sharp, remain entirely *within* the limits determined by their acceptance of the basic legitimacy of the prevailing system. Little wonder that "Across the ideological spectrum, from the BJP on the right to the CPM on the left, the established [political] parties [in India] have turned a blind eye to the continuing impoverishment of our natural resource base, and the threat this poses to the lives and livelihood of millions of poor peasants, tribals, nomads and artisans". So, continues Ramachandra Guha, it is only natural that "the Parties have uncritically supported resource-wasteful, ecologically inappropriate and centralizing technologies such as nuclear power and large dams".<sup>72</sup> This also seems to suggest at least one reason why the BJP and the CPM did *not* find it impossible, much less inconceivable, to lend *joint* support, even if only "from outside", to the short-lived minority government of V.P. Singh. I have a feeling that even if V.P. Singh had managed somehow to survive through the full term of the last parliament and even win an absolute majority in the



next, he could at the very best mean *less of the same* and by no means would he be different enough to bring about a radical improvement in, much less a fundamental transformation of a polity neck deep in corruption and mismanagement. Hoping that even this could and perhaps actually would bring about *some* attenuation of corruption and "kickbackracy", it would not be a minor blessing to pray for. But V.P. Singh was but a part of the ruling elite of India the individual members of which can at the most take turns at being in and out of power. He would, therefore, not even be expected to question much less reject the essential legitimacy of the basic structure of the prevailing system. Only naturally his *personal* allergy to corruption, no matter how intense, must perforce remain to be *ultimately* unavailing.

One may refer in this connection to the extremely notorious gun deal between India and Bofors of Sweden. Within a few days of assuming power, V.P. Singh decided to block all *future* purchases of weapons from Bofors, and even threatened to order a review of the howitzer deal itself if the company failed to reveal the identities of those whom it paid the money and to reimburse it to this country. In other words, what was being questioned was the propriety of circumstances which were simply presumed to have been merely *incidental to a particular deal*; and at the same time left entirely unquestioned was the *inevitability* of kickbacks being but be an *integral* part of a system almost defined by a frenzied acquisition of weapons. In this situation, the pursuit, no matter how enthusiastic, of the slush money said to have been involved in *a certain specific gun deal*, must remain from a *historical* point of view to be an exercise in futility. More serious, it could well turn out, at least in effect, to be an exercise in mass mystification. Whether it was actually intended to be so or was only intended as such is *not* the issue. *This rather is the prevailing obsession with weaponization*: ostensibly, for the defence and security of the country, no doubt, but in reality for filling the coffers of the veritable hordes of brass hats in politics, bureaucracy, military forces and, of course, in business -- not just the contractors and manufacturers involved but also those who specialize in handling the slush funds in India or in numbered accounts elsewhere on behalf of the recipients. All these gentlemen see in a *system* of unending military orders and supplies nothing less than a cornucopia of enormous and entirely unprecedented proportions.



This is suggested directly by specific instances like the one which follows: In November 1989, an Austrian Parliamentary Committee began an investigation into the export operations of Voest-Alpin Company -- significantly a state undertaking manufacturing weapons. Papers seized from it showed a "down payment" of about four million US dollars made to Indian authorities in 1984 in order to have its proposals just *examined* by them. But eventually, it came to forty million dollars in "commissions and grease money". According to Peter Unterweger, a former Managing Director of Voest-Alpin which was one of the companies competing with Bofors for the howitzer order, "It is absolutely normal to pay the generals and the politicians if you want to win the contract. You do it everywhere in the world; and you will be a fool if you do not." Explaining why Bofors got the contract ultimately, he said, "Obviously because they offered to pay more than we did".<sup>73</sup> Besides, evidence is now available to show that even the sainted Olof Palme made Bofors "donate" fifty million Swedish kroners to the Bergslags Fonden on the assurance that they *would* get the Indian order. However, this Foundation is not known to be doing anything in particular; and since the sum involved was rather marginal by European standards -- "just cream on the mashed potatoes" -- some other "donation", as yet undisclosed, could also have been obtained.<sup>74</sup>

Whether Palme got this money for his personal or political purposes is not the point. The point rather is that this messiah of peace and of the poor made the *Indian* taxpayers pay still more for a weapons system which the power elite in this country were hell-bent on getting although for reasons exclusively of their own. For after all, Bofors like any other vendor of any other ware would have to pass on the burden of slush payments to the buyer in the form of higher prices. Economists often make a distinction between the impact of an indirect tax and its incidence. The impact is on the manufacturer who has to make the payment to the revenue collector in the first instance. But the incidence falls ultimately on the consumer who has to pay a higher price. Likewise, the impact of slush payments might be on the maker of guns. But the incidence necessarily falls on the state making the purchase and therefore on the people who would have to pay more taxes and suffer the burden of inflation and deprivations. But the fish-blooded "decision-makers" operating at different levels and ever so obsessed with the quantum of their coffers, remain entirely unconcerned with

the plight of the people. Therefore, and given also the endemicity of kickbacks in the realm of military deals, they must be *presumed* to have been paid and received unless proved not to have been. This means that any radical analysis of the contemporary polity must keep the spotlight on the phenomenon of corruption or rather on the *institution* called corruption.

Indeed, the sheer gravity of the prevailing situation impels one to affirm as follows: It is *not* the military orders which produce kickbacks. Rather, it is the prospective kickbacks which induce extravagant military orders. It is easy to see that the kickback connection must necessarily mean a drastic erosion of authentic democracy *and*, in effect, an insidious militarization of the political process itself. This also must mean a radical hiatus, impossible to close, between the *perceived* interests of the managers of an over-armed and over-arming state like India and the requirements of genuine as against spurious democracy. The interests just referred to happen to be perceived and not real because the militarization of the kind now taking place cannot but pauperize the country to a point that the managers themselves will be left with little to manage.

All this argues the utter inanity of an exercise intended *exclusively* to force Bofors into reimbursing the amounts involved to India and also into disclosing the identities of the recipients. Indeed, if it is to mean anything at all, it must be made an integral part of a plan designed primarily and drastically to slow down the merry-go-round of military purchases. But if *this* remains undone, what manages *now* to pass for democracy may cease to be the *rule* of the demos or of the people. Instead, it may become, through a reckless depletion of resources caused by an open-ended military spending, their veritable doom. This only means that democracy may well degenerate into "demodoom". It is a grotesque coinage, to be sure. But so is the situation it is intended to denote. Basic to this situation is an *effective exclusion* of vast masses of people from anything like "decision making" *and* a corresponding supersession of their vital interests by the dangerous obsessions of the overlying minorities. All that is left is a naive identification of democracy with a periodic *ritual* called elections, manipulated, though, with extreme care. A more reduced, that is a more over-simplified or rather over-caricaturized conception of the rule of the people, by the people and for the people would be impos-

sible to imagine. Indeed, a conception like this could almost cause Rene Descartes himself to come back to life. In any case, his ghost must be applauding somewhere around. So, while his *soul* may or may not have been immortal, at least his reductionism seems to have turned out to be.

Any number of specific examples could be cited to show that *everywhere* the really fateful and even fatal decisions are made by extremely small coteries of men including in particular those more or less faceless men whom Noam Chomsky once described as "The Backroom Boys". Having taken the decisions, they manage also to take the demos-sans-crazy and even the supposedly powerful Heads of State for a variety of rides. Thus, Harry Truman, who liked to believe in all seriousness perhaps that it was with *him* that the buck stopped, was to General Leslie Groves "like a little boy on a toboggan". The simile is telling in the extreme. For, like someone riding a toboggan, it pictures Truman going downhill without, like a little boy, having any control over the prevailing situation. And just like a little boy again, who cannot see anything in front because the toboggan happens to be curved upwards, Truman could see not a thing which lay ahead of him in history. Seen in retrospect and in the light of the nuclear spectre looming very large on the horizon now, this has turned out to be an exceedingly precise similitude. In any case, as far as Groves, the Director of the Manhattan project, was concerned, it was only the *primary responsibility* with regard to the bombing of Hiroshima which was Harry Truman's, which means that his *decision* was primarily "one of non-interference -- basically, a decision not to upset the existing plans",<sup>25</sup> i.e., plans with the preparation of which Truman had nothing to do or rather would not be allowed to.

If that was the plight of an elected *President* reputedly one of the more powerful ones too that America has had, the plight of those who had merely elected him could not be expected to be anything but much worse. In support, one may refer to the decision to build the American hydrogen bomb or the Super as it used to be called. On one side of the debate were those whom Herbert York describes as "hawks". They argued that the United States ought to accelerate both the development and the production of "ordinary" atomic bombs, but insisted that it should forgo the development of the Super. On the other side were the "superhawks" who were completely sold on the Super. But *together*

they constituted "an elite in-group exclusively privy to all of the relevant facts". This group, York tells us, contained less than one hundred people.<sup>76</sup> (Incidentally, not many more people may have been involved in the decision to make the Soviet Super, perhaps less.) Here, it seems worth noting that the final meeting at which Truman initialled the decision to go ahead with the construction of the Super and at which probably not more than six people were present lasted *just seven minutes* -- far too few for him at least formally to have taken the second of the most momentous decisions of the nuclear era: the first being Franklin Roosevelt's to develop the atom bomb.<sup>77</sup> I am not sure as to which was more momentous of the two. But certainly either was more momentous than any other and each made human history suffer a kind of convulsion which it has not been able to recover from so far. But our primary concern here is with the moral that the institution of formal democracy is by no means incompatible with a most brazenly rampant oligarchy. No less important is the implication that in view of the kind of resources they can command and squander, the oligarchs of our time are exceedingly more dangerous than the oligarchs of yore. C. Wright Mills seems to have had something like this but not exactly this in mind when he said,

Caesar could do less with Rome than Napoleon with France; Napoleon less with France than Lenin with Russia; and Lenin less with Russia than Hitler with Germany. But what was Caesar's power at its peak compared with the power of the changing inner circle of Soviet Russia or of America's temporary administrations? The men of either circle can cause great cities to be wiped out in a single night, and in a few weeks turn continents into thermonuclear wastelands. That the facilities of power are enormously enlarged and decisively centralized means that the decisions of small groups are now more consequential.<sup>78</sup>

This was first published way back in 1956 and since then the facilities of power have continued to get enlarged so that the decisions of extremely small groups of men have become both actually and potentially enormously more consequential *and* more dangerous than ever. Even so, Wright Mills did manage to miss a most crucial point, which is that puny though it was in comparison with the power of the mighty oligarchs of our own time, the power of, say, Caesar was,

militarily at least, not unfunctional. In contrast, prodigious though it no doubt is, the blast power available to the latter-day oligarchs cannot even be put to any conceivable military use. Some seventy years ago, Walter Lippmann spoke about the "manufacture of consent" which could be "refined" to the point of causing a veritable "revolution" in the practice of democracy. But, albeit with the benefit of hindsight, we now know that the techniques of manufacturing consent have been developed and honed far beyond anything that Orwell could have imagined. Needless to say, they have all been intended not to bring about a revolution in the practice of democracy but a counter-revolution; and these have all turned to be, as Noam Chomsky puts it, "highly effective in protecting us from seeing what we observe, from knowledge and understanding of the world in which we live".<sup>79</sup> But formal and more or less ritualistic terminology apart, only oligarchies and not authentic democracies could possibly require anything like artificial consent-making through means of coercion or persuasion.

Put in this light, the decision to make, say, the hydrogen bomb can be seen to suffer a total lack of legitimacy *both* because only tiny in-groups have been involved in taking it alike in the US and the erstwhile SU, *and* because penalties are imposed, with a promise of total doom, too, on our race as a whole. But not unoften this illegitimacy remains unperceived even by the literati. For instance, none other than Enrico Fermi and Isidor Rabi who in a joint statement had spoken of the Super as something which could promise nothing but "very great natural catastrophes" and which was "necessarily an evil thing considered in any light" continued nevertheless to be associated with the work on it in one capacity or other. The justification in each case was specious in the extreme. For according to York, "Both believed that in a democracy, once the system has considered the issue and reached a conclusion, the matter is, in the main settled".<sup>80</sup> But both ought to have seen that a conclusion reached by a small in-group even in a juridical democracy remained basically undemocratic particularly because its costs had to be borne and consequences suffered by vast masses of people who had no hand at all in the reaching of it.

But such is the conceited insensitivity of the ruling and the ruining circles of even a democratic America that they have continued to produce a kind of blast power which can only be accumulated but not expended. The only way it *can* get ignited is by what is commonly but erroneously known as an accident. Erroneously, because *first* to create



a situation in which even an entirely unintended triggering of the nukes cannot be ruled out and *then* to dismiss the feared act itself as merely accidental is but an insult to intelligence.

Be that as it may, even if the nukes continue to remain unfired for *all* time to come, the demos would have a great deal to worry about, their "crazy" notwithstanding. Indeed, and paradoxically, the primary explanation of some of the major problems peculiar to our time lies in the nukes being utterly "unfirable", at least intentionally. For it is because of their "unfirability" that a complete break occurs between genuine military necessity on the one hand and military spending on the other, the latter becoming absolutely open-ended. Their very existence creates an "umbrella" for a truly limitless proliferation of their own and of the increasingly "smart" conventional weapons as also of space weapons. Little wonder that from 1960 to 1990, the world spent no less than \$ 21 trillion (or \$ 21 million million) in 1987 dollars on what passes for "defence".<sup>81</sup> A pre-emption of resources on a scale so vast can only mean a corresponding withdrawal of resources from the civilian sector and a consequent destruction of opportunities for people to be gainfully employed. What prevails, therefore, is "a terminal sense of the extinction of work itself", as Jeremy Seabrook calls it. The OECD unemployment, for instance hovers around 9 per cent these days, the total number of people without jobs being 31 million, 19 million of them in Europe.<sup>82</sup>

Altogether ignoring the ever-mounting military spending and a denial of job-creating resources to the civilian sector that this cannot but mean, not a few economists try to explain this tenacious redundancy of human beings in terms of automation *alone*. Wassily Leontief is a typical example. According to him, "the process by which progressive introduction of new, computerized, automated, and robotized equipment can be expected to reduce the role of labour is similar to the process by which the introduction of tractors and other machinery first reduced and then completely eliminated horses and other draft animals in agriculture".<sup>83</sup> But failing to perceive the essential nature and the true gravity of our predicament today, Leontief merely recommends work-sharing or a drastic reduction in working hours as the only way out of this situation.

However, redundant *men* pose an altogether different *kind* of a problem than redundant *horses*. For, the inexorable extinction of work and therefore a corresponding intensification of idleness, poverty and



alienation in one form or other can only signify a ceaseless attenuation of the essential content of democracy and indeed of our very existence itself. But merely to describe poverty as "a moral outrage" and also to choose *not* to specify unbridled automation and open-ended military spending as the underlying causes, as many in the academic social sciences manage to do, is to confuse and not to clarify the issues. It follows that in making a fetish of technique in the name of progress and of military spending in the name of national defence, the ruining circles everywhere can only promise *mounting burdens and vanishing freedoms*. However, as Noam Chomsky would say, to those in power, it seems obvious and indeed natural that the population must be cajoled and manipulated, frightened and kept in ignorance, so that they themselves can continue to operate without hindrance in the national interest as *they* choose to define it. Besides, Maxwell Taylor, for one, would insist that the citizen should be informed only of "the things he needs to know to be a good citizen and discharge his functions".<sup>84</sup>

Unfortunately, the counter-culture of the congelations of violence which manifest themselves in a variety of ways is not confined only to some parts of the globe but is rampant all over. Indeed, its rampancy is the proof, if one were needed, that the economies and societies of the "developed" and "developing" countries, as they get uncritically and misleadingly designated, are quite thoroughly integrated. They are *so* integrated, too, as to enable congeries of political, economic and military managers to make money while they can and to make as much of it as they can. Above, we have seen the arrangement at work in India to which, of course, it is by no means confined. Lobbyists and influence pedlars of all sorts sprout from nowhere to secure orders for the corporations and kickbacks for those in power. In the process, they cannot but destroy the very foundations of democracy in the "developing" country concerned even if in the first place it had ever got instituted there. Kickbacks become the reason, then, and not genuine military needs, why weapons, for example, come to be acquired in ever larger quantities. Specifically, since the money garnered is used at least in part for fighting elections, and since kickbacks are, after all, a "product" of the purchase of weapons, we *can* say that what is taking place is, at least in effect, a supersession of political democracy by military rule or in any case by a highly militarized counter-culture. The sheer costs of this process, extreme and ever-

mounting, cannot but devitalize the politics and economies involved. But different sets of the powers that be and their respective ideologues see in it only unending empowerment. Each set must therefore conjure up vicious demons appearing in the form of ill-meaning neighbours and procure still more weapons to counter their acquisitions. In the process, each set must create conditions in which it has to suppress and then fear its own people. Each is impelled to dilute and even destroy local autonomies in the mistaken hope that it will be able thus to create and consolidate a strong and stable centre. But each manages only to produce further fragmentation and unleash brutalization, too. Each needs for its very viability as an identifiable national entity ever more of decentralization, of authentic democracy, of economic and political inclusion of the masses in the mainstream of life, of participation, of what Rajni Kothari calls the "empowerment of the peripheries". But each takes care to shun a "democratic crystallization" of this kind. Still, it is "the struggles of those who are excluded and the concerns of those who recognize their condition"<sup>55</sup> which together constitute our only hope for a viable and a humane future. However, essential to the realization of this hope is a self-conscious denial of legitimacy to the mindless pursuits of the predators of our time who promote the alien eucalyptus and do not mind killing the native forests, who build dams and remain unconcerned with killing the rivers. It is only natural, therefore, that their pleas for the protection of ecology, no matter how loud and insistent, must continue to ring hollow. For, to borrow an expression which Amartya Sen has employed in a different context, they forget that "we reap as we sow, and in particular we do not reap what we do not sow".<sup>56</sup>

The point of it all is that to continue to ignore it all and also to insist instead that it is the universality of suffrage *alone* which makes us or some others a democracy is to do unexceedable violence to reason. The vote certainly does matter. But what matters even more is a general involvement in the process of decision-making. To be able to make this possible, we have no option but to try to perceive the prevailing reality as a whole and to dispel all sorts of illusions and misconceptions. However, that exactly is what accredited political science, having committed the fatal error of identifying democracy with universal adult suffrage and with such suffrage *alone*, continues to do. In other words, it continues to be obsessed with issues which, particularly in the context of the existential crisis of our time, can only

be pathetically puerile and pseudo. This being so, the academic pursuit called political science merits a new name; and the one which suggests itself is "pseudomy". Evidently, the practitioners of it can only be designated as "pseudomites". These are not very genteel terms, to be sure. Quite to the contrary, in fact. For, they are actually *intended* to shock the otherwise unshockable in the desperate expectation, of course, that they would find at least something to be shocking enough to try to come out of their cocoons of complacent and callous conformity. Besides, and this I mean in all seriousness, simply because they might shock the literati into reconsidering their positions, the terms I have proposed must be credited with an educational potential of the very highest order, their lack of gentility notwithstanding.

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**The "Socialisation" of Critical Thought:  
Responses to Illiteracy among the Adivasis in Thane  
District**

*Denzil Saldanha*

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Creating a new culture does not only mean one's own individual "original" discoveries. It also, and most particularly, means the diffusion in a critical form of truths already discovered, their "socialization" as it were, and even making them the basis of vital action, an element of co-ordination and intellectual and moral order.

-Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (1971: 325).<sup>1</sup>

This paper attempts to focus on some of the efforts of non-party political groups in Thane District in the field of education. Their attempts at evolving an educational programme in the context of a democratic struggle and in tune with the felt-needs of the adivasis, are discussed within the wider scenario of adivasi illiteracy in the region and the relatively unsuccessful efforts of the state and voluntary social welfare agencies<sup>2</sup> to change the situation. One might visualise two possible factors leading to a change in the status of adivasi illiteracy in the future. On the one hand, the state-sponsored developmental process -- of dams and irrigation projects along the eastern belt of the district, and the setting up of industrial estates along the western railway line and highway -- could lead to intensive multi-cropping,

capitalist cultivation in agriculture and an industrial and urban spread along the coast. This could possibly result in a demand for formal education spurred on by a change in the economy, with the adivasis being integrated into the lower ranks of an unequal society, as clerical staff and wage labourers in agriculture and industry. On the other hand, the political assertion of economic rights and the accompanying process of the socialization of critical thought among the adivasis promises to create a social basis for the need for literacy. The political groups working in the region are part of the latter process which ideologically hopes to influence the trajectory of development in the region and to direct the social history of the adivasis within a more egalitarian society. This paper shares that hope, and is as contingent and tentative as that process.

A brief social history<sup>3</sup> of the region would be in order and of help towards the understanding of the socio-economic basis of present adivasi illiteracy. Thane district lies north of the Bombay metropolis and south of the Gujarat state. The region came under British rule in 1818. During the first half of the 19th century, the British land and forest policies resulted in converting the hunting, food gathering and shift cultivating adivasis into settled agriculturists. Throughout the 19th century and especially during the latter half, there was an influx of traders, money-lenders and liquor vendors resulting in the alienation of adivasi lands and their becoming tenants and bonded labourers; victims of forced exactions, indebtedness, torture and sexual oppression. Symington, a British official with a particularly keen insight into the problems of the adivasis in Thane, while writing in 1939, cited another official statement by Orr made in 1895 and in the process underlined a basic relationship between education and the economy of the adivasis which is valid even today. These officials expressed their concern at the impact of the British land and forest policies on the adivasis and their scepticism about education, in isolation, as a solution.

We are sometimes told that in the triumphant march of education these backward tribes will some day learn to protect themselves against the people who are now robbing them of their lands. But long before "education in its triumphant march" has got anywhere within reach of the Warlis, every inch of their land will have passed to their masters, and they will have no land on which to

illustrate the advantages of education. Besides, it is their very poverty, resulting from the enormous share of the produce of the soil that they must give to their masters, that bars the advance of education: they must be constantly in search of their daily bread so that they cannot spare time for education.

And Symington himself added in 1939:

Mr. Orr's prognostication regarding the march of education has been only too unhappily fulfilled; but nothing as yet has been done to stay the process of the land passing out of the ownership of the old inhabitants or to save them from oppression even as tenants.<sup>4</sup>

A militant phase of adivasi struggle began with the entry of the Kisan Sabha in 1944 and continued till 1948. The dialectics between peasant organisations in the region and the post-independence, state-initiated land reforms and development measures have resulted in a predominantly poor peasant and agricultural labour, subsistence economy in single-crop, rain fed agriculture for the present day adivasis. They are dependent on the state and a class of landlords, capitalist farmers, traders and creditors for employment, inputs into agriculture, and for credit for tiding over the lean months. Alienation of adivasi lands continues, with increasing deforestation and restrictions on the use of the forests. The adivasis numbering 729,424 formed 21.76 per cent of the total population of the district which was 3,351,562 according to the 1981 census. Over a period of a little over a 150 years, today's adivasis have been hustled through several modes of production to suit the hegemonic interests of the larger economy -- from hunting and shifting cultivation to settled agriculture and then to tenancy and bonded labour; and finally, in the present, to indebted poor peasants and agricultural labourers. This social history was surely not the appropriate basis for the demand for literacy to arise.

The comments of Symington made in 1939 are still valid today, with the difference that from being tenants and bonded labourers the adivasis have been converted to becoming indebted poor peasants and agricultural labourers. Illiteracy is an expression of the subordinate status of the adivasis within this trajectory of development. And yet, literacy is undoubtedly an important factor in a process of change in

this position of the adivasis. In a subsequent section, one suggests that the efforts of the political groups in the region are a possible solution to this contradiction.

### **The Scenario of Adivasi Illiteracy**

Table 1 presents a picture of the position of literacy among the adivasis as compared to that in the total population in Thane district according to the 1981 Census. It also indicates the availability of educational facilities in the villages. While the literacy rate in the total population in the district is 50.50 per cent, higher than that of the state (47.18%), the adivasi literacy is only 14.4 per cent, even lower than that for adivasis in the state (22.29%). Whereas the former may be explained by the relatively better performance of female literacy within that for the general population in the district, the latter represents a dismal picture of both male (22.34%) and female (6.29%) literacy among the adivasis in the district. The talukas of Palghar, Dahanu, Talasari, Jawhar, Mokhada, Wada, Shahpur and Murbad which extend into the interior forested and hilly belt of the district and have a greater proportion of adivasis, display poorer levels of adivasi literacy than the talukas of Thane, Vasai, Kalyan and Ulhasnagar which are more urbanised and have a pre-dominantly non-adivasi population. Rural-urban differentials in literacy rates vary sharply and the concentrations of adivasi population in rural areas reinforces this difference. Against a literacy rate of 38.58 per cent in the general population in rural Thane, the same stands at 65.46 per cent in urban. Female literacy among the adivasis follows the above rural-urban pattern, being extremely low in general (6.29%) and comparing unfavourably with that of the males (22.34%).

There has been a remarkable increase in the rate of literacy for the total population in the district. The progress has been tenfold from 1901 (5.31%) to 1981 (50.50%); with a doubling of the rate since around the time of independence in 1951 (24.34%) and a near tripling of the rate of female literacy from 14.19 per cent to 40.15 per cent, for the same period. This has been primarily due to the urbanisation and industrialization of the district with an influx of a non-adivasi population. In fact, the proportion of adivasis decreased from 30.29 per cent in 1961 to 21.76 per cent in 1981. Another important factor responsible for the general progress in literacy has been the increase in the

number of educational institutions. The number of primary schools increased from 1775 in 1960-61 to 2562 in 1980-81 and the secondary schools from 83 to 261 for the same period.<sup>5</sup> Table 1 indicates that by 1981, 95 per cent of the villages in the district had at least one educational institution. At present there are 183 balwadis, 76 ashram schools and 830 adult education centres in the district and they have the adivasis as a special focus of attention.<sup>6</sup>

However, the slow progress of literacy among the adivasis stands in sharp contrast to that in the general population and has remained so despite state efforts in education. Table 2 gives a sharper picture of the comparative rates of literacy for the general population excluding the scheduled castes and tribes, and for the latter, for the years 1961, 1971 and 1981, for which some comparable data are available from the Census. The literacy rate for the general population excluding scheduled castes and tribes shows a marked increase over a higher range from 42.32 per cent in 1961 to 61.09 per cent in 1981. The scheduled tribes, in contrast, are able to build on an extremely low base of 4.67 per cent in 1961 to achieve a rate of 14.41 per cent in 1981. The poor rate of female literacy among the tribes is all the more apparent when one compares it with that of the scheduled castes and the former category, especially for the period 1961-71. The scheduled castes have a low proportion in the total population of the district and are mainly found in the urbanised talukas.

It seems clear that this relative stagnation in adivasi literacy is not for lack of an infrastructure of educational institutions. In Fact, Table I reveals that the very talukas of high adivasi concentration are the ones that are relatively better off as far as the availability of educational institutions is concerned. The adivasi pattern of living in scattered hamlets within a demarcated village and the consequent distance from the village school might partly explain difficulties in access. But this in no way explains the evident adivasi "resistance" to education and the persistence of illiteracy despite state efforts by way of an infrastructure of schools and teachers. The number of teachers in the rural areas of Thane district which stood at 8,815 in 1981 and gave a ratio of teachers per 1000 of rural population of 4.73, does not compare unfavourably with the ratio for the state which was 4.90.<sup>7</sup> The symptoms of adivasi non-enrolment and drop out from educational institutions, cumulatively manifested in illiteracy, might be more

meaningfully explained by (1) the continuing subordination of the adivasis within a subsistence economy and their inability to withdraw labour power -- even though it be that of the children -- from the production process and to invest it in education, (2) by their uncertainty that even if a deferred economic gratification were made through present investment in education this would eventually bear fruit in a context of constrained employment opportunities and, finally, i.e. the content, context and mode of transmission of knowledge within educational institutions and its conflicts with the adivasi way of life.

Data collected in 1980<sup>8</sup> on two primary schools run by the Zilla Parishad in a village in Talasari taluka provide a micro-view of some of the immediate factors that might still be contributing to the poor educational level among the adivasis at the district level. Both the schools taught till Grade IV, the one in Patil pada starting in 1953 and that in Wadi pada being established earlier in 1949. Of the 70 children registered in the two single teacher schools in 1980, only 3 were girls. Table 3 gives a distribution of the students in the schools over the 4 classes and for the period 1970 to 1980. The teacher reported that only 25 per cent of the children of the appropriate age group were registered. Only 45 of the 70 children attended regularly. Poor economic conditions, the need for child labour and the lack of a tradition of education were some of the reasons for poor attendance, given by teachers and parents. While books, pencils, slates and a set of clothes were supposed to be given free of charge by the Zilla Parishad to the adivasi school-going children, only 5 and 10 out of the 34 in the Patil pada school benefitted from slates and clothes, respectively. Girls generally studied till Grade II, and dropped out, their education being considered as a burden in depressed economic conditions and anyway of not much use later. The data from the table indicate that as a general trend only about 25 per cent of the children who entered Grade I, were to be found in Grade IV. Only 37 children from the village schools passed Grade IV, over the ten year period. Opportunities for study beyond Grade IV were, at the time, by way of an Ashram Shala which taught till Grade VII, in a nearby village. 15 students from this village were reported to be making use of the facility. Only 8 children in the village were reported to have passed Grade VII over the past years, and another 5 the high school. Two of the latter were attending college. According to the 1981 census, the male literacy was 21.12 per cent, the



female literacy 1.02 per cent, and that of the total population 9.85 per cent, in this adivasi village.

P. Prabhu and V. Suresh<sup>9</sup>, based on their close contact with the field, describe the poor state of government-sponsored formal education of the adivasis in the region:

By their (educational authorities) own admission, less than 15 percent of the state-sponsored schools function. Most schools exist only on paper. Children are enrolled, taught, examined and promoted in the records alone. Less than 10 per cent of school going children enrol in school. Of these, less than 10 per cent finish higher school. In a population that is 90 per cent illiterate, schooling is not at a premium. Sending a child to school means sacrificing a working hand. Sustained schooling is possible only in the better-off families. As for the 60 per cent of the families who migrate for work, schooling is impossible. Schools have failed because the tribal does not demand education as a right. The curriculum has no relationship with his life at all. The motivation of teachers is low, even those who are tribals from the area. The reason why education has failed as a development strategy is because the tribals never wanted it in the first place. The rich families took to it because it promised a job. When only one per cent of the children in the school-going age finally complete schooling, education cannot even be considered a mixed blessing. One could call it a disaster.

The reason given for this pessimistic assessment of the condition of the few educated adivasis is the alienation and the schizophrenic existence that awaited them in urban contexts for which they were so inadequately prepared.

The dismal scenario of adivasi education in the district prevails despite the efforts of several voluntary social welfare organisations. The western talukas of the district have, in particular, been well served by the zeal of these organisations which have been motivated by a mix of humanitarian concerns, religious and political ideologies and innovative educational philosophies. A few examples may be mentioned: Pragati Pratisthan (Jawhar taluka); Balkanji Bari (Bapgaon, Dahanu taluka); Vishva Hindu Parishad (Talasari taluka); Maharashtra Gopalan Samitee (Sutrakar, Talasari taluka); the institutional complex of

Grammangal (Dabhon, Dahanu taluka), and Gram Bai Shikshan Kendra (Kosbad, Dahanu taluka), moved by the inspiration of Tarabai Modak and Anutai Wagh; the educational network of the Gokhale Education Society's Agricultural Institute (Kosbad, Dahanu taluka); the Catholic Church, Jesuit mission inspired, Gnanmata Sadan (Talasari taluka) with 11 elementary schools and 1 high school; M.D. Society (Vadoli, Talasari taluka); Samajvadi Mahila Sabha, (Masvan, Palghar Taluka). The ideological and educational orientations of these institutions with their social impact within the contending hegemonic processes in the region, could be a subject of a study by itself. What is clear is that they have not made a major impact on adivasi illiteracy. We might now turn to the activities of some political groups which offer a contrast to the foregoing institutionalised educational programmes of the state and of voluntary agencies with a welfare orientation.

### **Education as Political Action**

I have chosen three organizational formations: Vana Niketan -- Shramik Mukti Sanghatana, Vidhayak Sansad -- Shramjivi Sanghatana, and Kashtakari Sanghatana, because in their history, over the last 10 years or so, they illustrate movements overlapping strategic options that are available to voluntary groups. The first two initiated their activities with a developmental and perhaps even a welfarist orientation and then shifted emphasis towards political action for an alternate process of development. The third appears to have launched itself quickly onto the plane of political action. All three viewed education as part of concerted action for social transformation.

The *Vana Niketan* was established as a rural development project in Murbad taluka, Thane district, in 1981 by four professional social workers. This was a follow up to the field placement of students from the College of Social Work, University of Bombay, in 1979-80. The first few years were spent on surveys relating to education, encroachments on forest lands and practitioners of herbal medicine. Cultural festivals for the adivasis, exhibitions and adult education centres were some of the activities during the early phase. In 1985 a people's organisation, *Shramik Mukti Sanghatana*, with a collective agitational thrust was formed and in early 1986 the *Vana Niketan* discontinued its

relation as a demonstration project of the College of Social Work, but continued as a newly registered development organisation.

The organisation has presently spread its influence from Murbad taluka over the neighbouring Kalyan and Shahpur talukas and works among the Thakur, Katkari and Mahadev Koli adivasis, in that order of importance. It works in 90 hamlets spread out over 40 villages through Shramik Mandals or village committees. Four adivasi full-time activists, apart from five adivasis who work part-time and three middle class activists, devote their energies to the organization. Much emphasis is placed on popular initiative through collective decision making, where the process of forging a "strong people's movement with enlightened local leadership" is considered more important than the outcome of that process in immediate economic gains. The organisation is active on issues relating to land, rights to the forest, enforcement of the minimum wage, the employment guarantee scheme, the freeing of bonded labour, drinking water facilities in adivasi villages, health and culture. Apart from the social awareness generated on these issues through village meetings and demonstrations, education is carried on in a more structured manner through 10 non-formal educational centres and five balwadis, in cooperation with the Gandhi Trusteeship Foundation, Bombay. Fifteen training camps for adivasi youth and eight for women in particular have been conducted. Science awareness marches have been organised with the assistance of the People's Science Movement, Bombay. The focus of these marches is on ending superstitious practices, environmental education and on fostering a scientific outlook.<sup>10</sup>

A recent joint initiative of the Shramik Mukti Sanghatana and the People's Science Movement has resulted in preliminary work towards setting up a "school" -- Jeevan Shikshan Shala -- for non-schoolgoing adivasi children, 12 to 13 years of age. By this age most children are forced by circumstances to become regular agricultural labourers in the region. The aim of the "school" is "to give opportunities to the children who have been deprived of education, to prepare them to face a life full of struggles at all levels and to take decisions of their own to solve the problems of the community".<sup>11</sup> The work will initially concentrate on Murbad taluka and hopes to spread to the district with the assistance of other mass-organisations. The total duration of schooling will be 30 days, split up over four units of six days each, held in

different hamlets, followed by three follow up camps of two days each. Twenty boys and twenty girls have been selected for training during a workshop for children held from May 9-16, 1988, when about 60 children had turned up. The topics selected for the "school" are:

Literacy and numeracy that will provide basic reading ability and the arithmetics of adivasi monetary transactions, measurements of length, area and time and map reading;

The anatomy of humans and animals leading to an understanding of health, illness and medicine, Man's relation with the environment and the issues of health and deforestation ensuing from a break in these relations;

The social history of the adivasis, their cultural traditions, Man the producer, forest and agricultural practices and government schemes for the adivasis.

The themes, as may be observed, cover the broad framework of literacy-numeracy, basic functionality and social awareness, and in a manner that would be relevant to an adivasi context. Fortnightly meetings and field visits for the volunteers of the People's Science Movement are being held from July 17, 1988 as a preparation for the non-formal "school" that will be held in four sessions, from December 1988 to May 1989.

The *Vidhayak Sansad* is a registered trust started in 1979 with the aim of rural development with social justice. Starting as a health centre based in Dahisar village and serving 12 villages in Vasai Taluka in Thane District, the organisation has spread its activities to the Bhivandi and Wada Talukas, in addition to Vasai. Its work is among the Warli, Mahadev Koli and Katkari adivasis, in that order of importance. Apart from the health centre, a creche for the children of working women, balwadis, libraries for children and adults; income-generating schemes like basket-making and goat-rearing were a feature of the first phase of the programmes.

This social welfarist approach with individualised assistance to beneficiaries was soon confronted with the socio-economic context of the lives of the adivasis. The major problems was at the level of the social relations of production: the question of bonded labour and indebtedness among the adivasis. A sister organisation, *Shramajivi*

*Sanghatana*, was registered as a trade union in 1982. It addressed itself to the problems of agricultural labourers and marginal farmers. So far, 496 adivasis have been released from debt bondage through a mix of agitations, writ petitions, appeals through the media and the legislature, and supportive measures for the released adivasis. The thrust of intervention gradually shifted from an individualised welfarist approach to a developmental approach which, while attempting to provide inputs to raise the forces of production, confronted the exploitative social relations through collective self-assertion. The data on the organisation suggest that accompanying this conflictual process, cooperative forms of alternatives to individualised, agricultural subsistence were attempted by way of cooperative production units for brick-making and horticulture, grain-banks to tide over the lean months, and social reform measures like group marriages and drives against alcoholism to counteract indebtedness. To encourage local participation and leadership, 102 village committees have been set up and training camps have been initiated. The organisation has, at present six full-time adivasi activists and four non-adivasi ones from the urban middle class.<sup>12</sup>

How does the foregoing relate to education? I think it is through the generalised critical social awareness that is generated through the process of struggle for collective development and the specialised study camps for adivasi leadership. These camps were organised in the months of September, October and November from 1985 onwards for three days each month. A total of 122 adivasi activists have been trained, the vast majority of whom are illiterate and without any formal education. A participatory approach based on a collective critical review of social experiences was a characteristic of these camps. It had the advantage of generating solidarity in the process of a search for solutions and directions. By moving from the concrete to the abstract in a collective process of critical thought, the camps attempted to, and from all indications, succeeded in, bridging the gap between the individual and the collective, between thought and action in the process of transforming the actual situation. The broad topics covered, and in an order of abstraction and generalization, were questions related to land, issues in dealing with the police and the courts, the government's development schemes, and local geographical knowledge. The local self-governing bodies such as the gram panchayat,

panchayat samity and zilla parishad and the mechanisms of exploitation were a second set of subjects of greater complexity. The sessions would end with an introduction to scientific observation through dissection of animals and the use of the telescope and microscope. Selected activists trained in one programme served as trainers in succeeding camps. The trainees were given action-oriented tasks to be performed at the police station, gram panchayat office, the revenue office and the village school.<sup>13</sup> The trainees who emerged from the camps were centres of a ripple effect which spread at the village level to varying degrees through informal discussions and meetings with the village committees.

There is no direct emphasis on literacy at the camps, except for the capacity to sign one's name. The walls of the huts around the training camp are covered with symbols, models, graphs, slogans and pictorial illustrations. The adivasi trainees, the vast majority of whom are illiterate, are given a pencil and notebook and encouraged to fill it up. This provides an initiation into the symbolic systems implicit in literacy and numeracy. Group songs, games, group report-writing, role plays and dramatization are other modes of instruction that are used in a context of illiteracy and a consequent limited capacity for abstraction. The non-adivasi activists of the Shramjivi Sanghatana believe that critical awareness creates the social basis for a felt need for literacy. That basis exists at the moment and the next step would be to move on to literacy. The trainees have already experienced the need for literacy and seek it out through literate members of their village community. As one literate activist put it: "If social awareness is lacking, consistency in attending a literacy programme becomes difficult for the adivasi. If we organise the literacy classes now (i.e. after the social awareness training) we will get a tremendous response".

Education understood in its most meaningful sense, as the generation of a critical social awareness, is intimately interwoven with the activities of the *Kashtakari Sanghatana*. The organization sums up its activities in "five basic concepts: Janashikshan, janajagriti, janakarya, janasanghatana, janashakti: people's education generating people's awareness expressing itself in people's action leading to people's organisation and finally culminating in people's power".<sup>14</sup> The organization was initiated in a context and, to a large extent, as a result of "people's education". It continued for the first few years, after



its founding in 1978, with an intensive educational programme linked to action. Repression from the state, the dominant landlord-trader-moneylender class in the region and from an unexpected quarter, a competing and earlier mass organization in the region—the Kisan Sabha (CPIM), forced it to cut down on many of its activities and to take a defensive stance after 1982, especially in Talasari taluka. Innumerable court cases have also contributed to draining the energies and the meagre finances of the cadres, diverting their attention from more urgent tasks. Its influence is presently to be found in the Dahanu, Jawahar and Mokhada talukas and predominantly among the Warli adivasis.

During the initial years, weekly meetings used to be held in the villages with the adivasi men and women. The discussions would be in the form of a collective analysis of the context and causes of poverty, an understanding of self-worth and the need to take individual and collective responsibility for changing one's conditions. Two-day camps, youth festivals of a longer duration, special camps for women and meetings with other activists/organizations, such as the Bhoomi Sena in Palghar taluka and the Shramik Sanghatana in Shahada taluka, Dhulia district, were some of the activities during the early phase. The organization visualised adult literacy, health camps and agricultural training camps as building on this social basis of critical awareness, responsibility and action. It explains its educational philosophy thus:

The fundamental objective of all this education has been to encourage the people to posit an act of freedom. The free process of education does not domesticate the mind and the will of the learner as happens in the course of formal education. We want our education to be the starting point of freedom. The awareness which takes place in the process of people's education, that takes place continually, is also understood in an act of affirmation, the act of affirmation of confidence in oneself. Hence the awareness begins with the discovery of each person as a dignified human person. In the festivals we call it the theory of self image. The image the people have of themselves is what determines their behaviour and so a people acting for freedom must begin to understand themselves as free human beings, people whom the bondage of poverty and deprivation, the marginalisation and

dehumanization will not crush. The awareness of the human person leads to the discovery of the dignity of the other person as well.<sup>15</sup>

Action resulting from understanding led to a second act of affirmation, that of a sense of identity with the Kashtakari Sanghatana. The organised or spontaneous actions of the people have been classified in the following manner:

- a. stop illegal money-lending
- b. recover money illegally taken from the people by moneylenders, shopkeepers, merchants, etc.
- c. recovery of unpaid wages by grass merchants, forest contractors, labour contractors, etc.
- d. resistance and demand for stopping acts of beating, harassment by shopkeepers, merchants, etc.
- e. resistance to highhanded behaviour of shopkeepers, supervisions of landlords, etc.<sup>16</sup>

Other types of issues/actions have been "to establish rights that are due to the people under the various development schemes of the government", to resist the extortions of government officials, especially those of the police, revenue and forest departments; the alienation of adivasi lands to the landlords and traders; to ensure work and wages under the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) of 1977; issues related to the forest, i.e. the regularization of adivasi encroachments on the forests, commercial deforestation and social forestry; the formation of common platforms with other organizations on issues relating to the EGS, state repression, on the women's question and on the regularization of forest lands; the anti-drunkenness drive; and finally the attempt to establish alternate forms of cooperative activity through committees to settle internal disputes, through grain banks, mutual labour assistance, joint cultivation and group marriages. All these actions have been accompanied and followed by reflection in informal village groups, in meetings of village committees and in those of the coordination committee of the organization.

The methods of education are lectures, group discussions, case

study, simulation exercises and role-play. Skits, songs, recitation of stories and the use of symbols are cultural activities that are integrated into the educational programmes. The following is a vivid record of one of the simulation exercises that has been used to stimulate analysis of concrete every-day experience and action:

A skinny, scantily dressed woman joins the group. She walks noiselessly and coveringly around the circle, clutching a lump of earth protectively. She stumbles once or twice, manages to regain balance. The third time she slips, she falls, the lump of earth from her hands goes crashing to the earth and crumbles. Frantically she tries to draw the fragments together but is unable to do so. In desperation she makes four piles: near one she places a bottle; near the next some money, besides the third she places a few grains of paddy and the fourth she retrieves and holds carefully to her bosom. She lies prostrate for sometime and then withdraws.

The effect is electrifying. The participants watch in stunned silence, from somewhere in the circle, a stifled sob is heard. Slowly and painfully they begin to respond. One crushes the money beneath his heels, symbolic of driving the moneylender away, another kicks the bottle, doing away with drink, a third attempts to collect the mud, he is joined by another and yet another -- symbolic of the collective attempt to regain the land. To Somwari and the others, the challenge dawns: take responsibility for your own life, unite to change the present, to ensure a better future. There is no indecision. Somwari becomes one with the Kashtakari Sanghatana.<sup>17</sup>

The organisation places heavy emphasis on collective participation in the process of planning, execution and reflection on actions, seeing it as a "process of peer group learning rather than a programme from the top." The non-*adivasi* activists in the organization are aware of the problems of political education in the context of a culture of illiteracy reinforced by socio-economic exploitation, as may be seen from the following record:

With the bulk of the members and a considerable proportion of the village cadre being illiterate, the theoretical formation of the

cadre and the political education can take place only by word of mouth. Further the adivasi language being relatively simple with few if any conceptual terms, communication of concepts becomes difficult. The third factor being the simplicity of the people which necessitates the over-simplification of complex theoretical matters. The combination of the three making the process of political education tedious and slow. Every matter needs to be explained, nothing can be left for private reading and study.<sup>18</sup>

In August 1986, the organization arrived at a political understanding with the Lal Nishan Party.<sup>19</sup> This has effectively given it some legitimacy in the eyes of the rival organization, the Kisan Sabha (CPIM), and has reduced the tension between the two. The Kashtakari Sanghatana has recently proposed to build on the basis of the political awareness gained in the process of struggle for the eco-political rights of the adivasis, through a more intensive focus on alternatives, especially in the area of adivasi medicine, forestry and education.

As a step towards an alternate cooperative health programme, the organization plans holding a training camp from March 25 to April 24, 1989. Two representatives from each of 10 village health collectives consisting of 20 families each would have an opportunity of interacting with practitioners of ayurveda, acupuncture and homeopathy, so as to supplement their traditional skills in jungle medicine. This alternative which is considered "meaningful, based on peoples' resources and manageable by the people", hopes to incorporate the skills of the "bhagat", the adivasi medicine man.<sup>20</sup>

The organization also visualises a non-formal educational programme that would be close to the cultural and economic context of the every-day life of the adivasis. Fables that are part of the oral tradition among the adivasis and illustrate the conflicts faced by them, have been picturised by the adivasis in their local art form. These will be used as the medium and the basis of a literacy programme that will be articulated with the informal teaching-learning situations and socialization processes in the culture of the adivasis, and the conflicts experienced at the level of the social relations of production. The following are samples of two fables which convey the popular understanding of how, through liquor and money lending, two communities of non-adivasi settlers in the region expropriated the adivasis of their possessions and their very persons:

A tribal managed to keep the messengers of JAM (God of death) at bay. The forest was his ally in the task. JAM angered at the disappearance of his messengers, was intrigued as to how it could have happened. But he was at a loss as to how it happened. He decided to come down to earth in the form of a Parsee. He set up a KHOMAR (liquor distillery and shop) in a tribal village and offered liquor to the tribals. News of his munificence spread far and wide and there were willing guests. The tribal together with his father in law heard of the Parsee's bounty and decided to visit the liquor shop. While they sat and drank, the Parsee listened to the idle chatter of his guests. From the boasts of the drunk tribal he learnt of the trick by which the messengers of JAM had been fooled and imprisoned in the forest. The Parsee challenged the drunk tribal to give proof of his feat. In a stupor, the tribal led the Parsee to the forest and revealed the secret. The Parsee then shed his disguise, his messengers rushed out and grabbed the spirit of the tribal and went back to their heavenly abode.

The Marwari or Vani money lender is portrayed as a bandicoot who meets a woman returning from the forest with a headload of firewood. He requests the woman to take out a thorn embedded in his tail. While taking the thorn out, the rat's tail breaks. As compensation, the rat takes away her sickle. He offers the sickle to a man splitting bamboo with his teeth. When the sickle breaks he takes away the baskets that the tribal man was weaving. He offered the basket to yet another tribal farmer who was carrying the grain from the threshing floor in a leaf. When the basket breaks after use, he takes away the drinking water pot. The pot is offered to another set of farmers who lack the means to carry water to their fields. On breaking the pot, the rat takes away the produce of the fields which he offers to yet another family who are starving. The food is consumed, and the rat takes their cattle in exchange. He comes across yet another tribal who is forced to use his wife as a beast of burden to pull the plough. He offers a bull. When the bull finally dies, the rat walks away with the tribal's wife.<sup>21</sup>

It is hoped that a literacy programme based on popular "common sense" and linked to the ongoing struggle for exercising political

control, will be an added weapon in the process of social transformation.

### Conclusion

The theoretical argument which emerges from the foregoing data gathered from field visits, interviews, observations and secondary sources, may be briefly stated as follows:

The vast majority of the adivasis in Thane district, as a result of a historical process of economic domination by landlords, traders, forest contractors and creditors, find themselves today as indebted agricultural labourers who are seasonal migrant workers in grass-cutting and in the industrial informal sector; as poor peasants who are unable to eke out a subsistence level of living from their uneconomic holdings in single crop, rain fed agriculture; and finally as labourers who are bound in various forms of contractual arrangements as a result of indebtedness. The inequitous relations at the economic level are paralleled and reinforced by a process of cultural hegemony, of which education must be seen as a part. While this hegemonic process fails to entice and allocate the vast majority of adivasis within a trajectory of capitalist development of agriculture and a structurally unequal industrial society, it results in a gradual destruction of adivasi identity and a commercialization of adivasi culture. In culturally hegemonic and socio-economically polarised contexts, the process of transmission of knowledge in effect becomes an implantation and, thus, alienating. The few adivasis who are able to attain the certification levels of this alien educational system are allocated to lower middle class positions in the government administration, in the social welfare programmes and in the educational system itself.

Formal education undeniably provides a certain competence within this adivasi context, a major aspect of which would be an initiation into middle class status and functioning especially for the few who are second generation, learners in the formal system. The vast majority of adivasis look on the formal education system with awe, as a ritual that they can ill afford because it is irrelevant to their immediate needs. The symptoms of this stance are the incidence of non-enrolment, stagnation and drop-out, cumulatively manifested in illit-



eracy. Illiteracy, in this particular adivasi context, may be seen as a rational strategy for survival in the context of subsistence agriculture; a withdrawal from an alien system which in its context, content and mode of transmission of knowledge is considered unrelated to immediate eco-cultural demands; and as an act of resistance and preservation of cultural identity.

The majority take recourse to the more spontaneous, unstructured teaching-learning processes that are built into their every-day life socialization and their strategies for survival within conditions below subsistence. These are, for instance, the transmission of agricultural, food gathering and forestry skills within the domestic sphere, at the level of economic production; the gynaecological and child-rearing skills transmitted through the "dai", at the level of biological and social reproduction; and at the level of cultural reproduction, the role of the "bhagat" in giving a sense of ethnic identity to the people through rituals at various ceremonial occasions, enchantations related to the agricultural cycle and through his practice of herbal medicine. P. Prabhu and V. Suresh<sup>22</sup>, activists of the Kashtakari Sanghatana, observe that socialization of the adivasi children is free from enforced discipline and corporal punishment. Organic learning takes place in the company of older children and adults. At the age of 4-5 they function as "balgyas" (child sitters), then become "govari" (cowherds) at the age of 8-9. The boys soon graduate to being "nangrya" (ploughmen) and fishermen and the girls to mature female roles such as collection of fodder, firewood and manure, sowing, weeding, transplanting, harvesting and winnowing. Disputes and negotiations are settled publicly, thus providing a learning experience at a tender age. These informal teaching-learning situations involving the communication of knowledge are considered directly and immediately relevant.

There exist a range of educational efforts attempting to confront the problem of adivasi illiteracy in Thane district. There is no basic difference between the formal educational institutions of the state/local self-governing bodies and those of the voluntary social welfare institutions. A social welfare approach that visualises education as a rescue act, an exercise of patronage of individualised beneficiaries who are objects of a process of transmission of knowledge, is a common characteristic of both these efforts. Among the latter institutions, one might find a few noteworthy attempts to bridge the contradictions at

the level of culture, by integrating elements of adivasi practice into the educational programme and to relate education to the economic needs of the adivasis by taking education to their doorsteps and imparting training in functional skills. Some of them are marked by their humanitarian concern for identifying and nursing a minority of adivasis through the educational system. Religious and political ideologies play an important part in these educational efforts from above, and the adivasi objects of patronage become show pieces and dependable clients entrusted with the task of winning over a wider circle of clientele from among the adivasis. However, both state and voluntary social welfarist efforts in education in the region have in common a near total neglect of the contradictions of the social relations of production which form the real context of adivasi agricultural subsistence. These contradictions find no reflection in the context, content and mode of transmission of knowledge in formal education. In fact, despite the humanitarian concern, the effective thrust is towards weaning away a minority from the process of resolving these contradictions. Voluntary effort in institutionalised education in the region may be seen, in effect, as a more efficient instrument than that of the state, for the social reproduction of the relations of production along the lines of the state-sponsored strategy of development.

If the essential components of the Adult Education Programme -- literacy-numeracy, functionality and social awareness -- may be understood in a general, conceptual and symbolical manner, as the basic windows to fields of knowledge and hence as integrating principles of even the formal educational curriculum, then the educational efforts of state and welfare agencies may be seen as having a major focus on literacy-numeracy, with some degree of functional allocation, within a differentiated and alien system, to the total neglect of action for social transformation based on critical social awareness and political assertion of identity. The foregoing analysis and what follows might suggest an implicit continuum within the educational process:

1. From the ritualization of a symbolic system and its knowledge content involved in the transmission of "literacy-numeracy", and a special area of focus of the state's social welfare approach to education;
2. to the communication of a "technologically" relevant knowl-

edge with the function of allocating to middle-class professions within an inequitably structured status quo, as may be found in a few innovative attempts in voluntary welfare agencies that combine literacy-numeracy with some degree of "functionality";

3. And finally, and in a manner suggesting a break in the continuum, the generation of awareness of the conflicting context of survival for the adivasis, its causes and alternatives as implicit in "social awareness", and which forms the primary concern of the non-party political groups in the region. One might then see that the levels of voluntary mediation between state and society correspond to preferred educational/developmental thrusts.

In contrast to the social welfarist approach to education, one sees the educational efforts of the non-party political groups in the region focussing on "social awareness". The former is confronted with the dichotomy of, on the one hand, providing the adivasis a selective access to an "elitist", "good" education, geared to and emanating from industrial and urban contexts (an example is the Navodaya Vidyalaya approach), within the constraints of finance and the limited capacity of the economy to absorb this educational output; and on the other, in its search for relevance, offering a watered down education, "appropriate to the needs of adivasis in their present location within a sharply polarised rural and agrarian structure. The approach of the political groups offers a perspective for resolving some of these contradictions which are confronted by the more institutionalised formal educational process at the cultural and economic levels of adivasi existence by linking education to the political act of social transformation along the lines of an alternate development strategy. They see their educational programmes as offering a critique and a possible corrective to the more formalised processes of transmission of knowledge. Some of these organisations-Vana Niketan/Shramik Mukti Sanghatana, Vidhayak Sansad/Shramajivi Sanghtana have initiated their efforts on an economic developmental plane by attempting to provide training, technological and organisational inputs within the stagnant forces of production. This has been done in a participatory and collective manner. They soon moved to a political plane as they were confronted with the need to resolve, through agitational means, the contradic-

tions of the social relations of production which enmeshed the lives of the adivasis. This demanded a change in organisational structure and linkages, with sister organisations being created. The Kashtakari Sanghatana appears to have started directly with a more political and agitational thrust, resulting in heightened repression. All these organisations laid heavy emphasis on the generation of a critical social awareness through group discussions in the adivasi villages and training camps for activists.

These processes are not self-consciously "educational" in character in a "formal" sense, but contain an inbuilt component of transmission of knowledge, technological skills and social awareness as part of a "formalised" process of social transformation. They have visualised knowledge to be not only an instrument of harmonious control over the environment for greater economic returns, but also as a means to empowerment through critical awareness and participatory organisational forms. Social transformation is itself seen as an "informal" process of education. The very relevance of these developmental processes and their immediacy to the needs of the adivasis renders them articulated with the life of the people, so that ironically they no longer may appear as "educational".

The non-party political groups -- by mobilizing around adivasi cultural identity on economic issues related to their subsistence agriculture and through critical awareness, organisation and political action for social transformation -- attempt to link the political with the cultural and economic. They thus offer a perspective for resolving the contradictions, between and at these levels, faced by formalised adivasi education. Above all, they create a climate of critical social awareness and political action which generates a felt-need for literacy-numeracy and functionality, in a more relevant formalised educational programme. The major question is: Can an endogeneous system of transmission of knowledge and competence be evolved which critically questions and mobilizes into action in the very process of transmitting accumulated human reflection of the socio-economic context of people's relation with their environment? One sees the efforts of these political groups as a tentative answer to this question. These non-formal educational processes in adivasi regions suffer from an illegitimacy in comparison with the more formalised systems of education. They are, after all, attempting to set in motion an alternate

hegemony whose future will be decided by a historical process. "Science" can definitely lend its critical support to these "common sensical" approaches to the "socialization" of critical thought.

## NOTES

I am grateful to S. Parasuraman and K. Ravindran for their assistance with the tables and S. Sreenivasan for her comments on the paper. Needless to add, I alone bear responsibility for the errors that persist and the positions taken.

- 1 The theoretical formulation underlying this paper has been inspired, in part, by a reading of A. Gramsci, especially the *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith, New York: International Publishers, 1971. The concepts of hegemony and of science in its relation to common sense are used in the Gramscian meaning of the terms, interpreted in the context of the field situation in Thane district. For a theoretical and methodological discussion of the use of these concepts, see D. Saldanha, "Antonio Gramsci and the Analysis of Class Consciousness: Some Methodological Considerations", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23, no. 5, January 30, 1988.
- 2 I have drawn on the classification of voluntary agencies provided by Harsh Sethi, "Groups in a New Politics of Transformation", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 19, no. 7, February 18, 1984, which is: a) relief and charity organisations; b) developmental groups; c) groups engaged in mobilization, organization, politics and political education; d) protest groups and related activities. I have modified the classification to suit the region, as will be seen in the text. The classification a) might be better termed as social welfare agencies and, in practise, seen as an extension of state functions. Category b) developmental groups has been retained and c) and d) might be better understood as converging into non-party political groups. The classification is not static and exclusive, as has been pointed out by the author, with a tendency of movement from b) to c), in particular, and as seen in the organizations discussed in the text.
- 3 For a detailed social history of the adivasis in Thane district, see D. Saldanha, *A Socio Psychological Study of the Development of Class Consciousness*, Department of Sociology, University of Bombay, 1984, p. 160 ff (Ph.D. thesis).
- 4 D. Symington, *Report on the Aboriginal and Hill Tribes of the Partially Excluded Areas in the Province of Bombay*, Bombay: Government Central Press, 1939, pp. 47-48.
- 5 Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Maharashtra, *Socio Economic Review and District Statistical Abstract of Thane District*, Bombay, 1981-82, p. 24.
- 6 Data provided by the Education Office, Thana Zilla Parishad, Thana, 1989.
- 7 Directorate of Education, Maharashtra, Pune, General Population Tables, Part 11 A, 1981.
- 8 D. Saldanha, 1984, n. 3, pp. 502-505.

- 9 "Transcience and Transition in Social Institutions: The Warli Experience", Kashtakari Sanghatana, 1987, pp. 31-32 (unpublished).
- 10 This information is gleaned from Van Niketan, *The New Man has to be Created*. Mumbai: Van Niketan, 1988 (a booklet in Marathi) and interviews with I. Tulpale and V. Sathe. A video documentation of the activities of this and the other two organizations is also being undertaken.
- 11 Circulars from People's Science Movement, Bombay, "Jivan Shikshan Shala", dated 6-7-88 and 22-8-1988.
- 12 The foregoing information is drawn from Vidhayak Sansad, *Rural Reconstruction, A Joint Venture of Vidhayak Sansad and Shramjivi Sanghatana*, Dahisar, Tal Vasai: Vidhayak Sansad, 1986 (approx.).
- 13 This brief description is derived from D.G. Prabhu, "Activists' Collective Study Camps, Effective Weapons for Social Change", *Sad Padyanor*, Vol. 1, no. 6, May 1987 (in Marathi). Interviews with V. Pandit, D.G. Prabhu and observations of group discussions and training camps, helped to complete the picture.
- 14 This and the following quotes and information on the Kashtakari Sanghatana are drawn from The Kashtakari Sanghatana, *Review of the Past Twenty-two Months: Historical Survey of the Activities of the Sanghatana*, 1980, p. 1 (mimeographed).
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 17 P. Prabhu, "Breaking the Silence (Aakrosh)", 1981 (Approx.), mimeographed article from the unpublished files of the Kashtakari Sanghatana.
- 18 The Kashtakari Sanghatana, *The Perspective*, 1982 (approx.), p. 28 (mimeographed).
- 19 "Kashtakari Adivasi Brothers and Sisters of the Thane Region: A One-Hearted and United Call of the Lal Nishan Party and the Kashtakari Sanghatana", August 1986, (a leaflet in Marathi).
- 20 An undated leaflet on the subject, brought out by the Kashtakari Sanghatana.
- 21 P. Prabhu and V. Suresh, "Transcience and Transition in Social Institutions: The Warli Experience", Kashtakari Sanghatana, 1987, pp. 20-21 (unpublished).
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 9.



**Table 4.1 LITERACY AND VILLAGES WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN  
TALUKAS OF THANE DISTRICT - 1981**

| Talukas  | Literacy in total population |                   |                   | Literacy in scheduled tribe<br>population |                  |                 | Scheduled tribe<br>population and<br>% of total<br>population | No. of % of<br>villages having one<br>or more educational<br>institutions |
|----------|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|------------------|-----------------|---|---|
|          | Persons                      | Males             | Females           | Persons                                   | Males            | Females         |   |   |
| 1        | 2                            | 3                 | 4                 | 5   | 6                | 7               | 8   | 9   |
| Thane    | 406199<br>(63.60)            | 251042<br>(71.57) | 155157<br>(53.90) | 9138<br>(35.24)                           | 6088<br>(45.34)  | 3050<br>(24.39) | 25931<br>(4.06)   | 75<br>(89.29)   |
| Vasai    | 159976<br>(57.42)            | 95249<br>(66.14)  | 64727<br>(48.08)  | 10423<br>(19.49)                          | 7524<br>(27.85)  | 2899<br>(10.95) | 53486<br>(19.20)  | 82<br>(89.13)   |
| Palghar  | 120236<br>(45.53)            | 74864<br>(54.76)  | 45372<br>(35.62)  | 14884<br>(15.55)                          | 11880<br>(24.06) | 3004<br>(6.48)  | 95710<br>(36.24)  | 215<br>(95.13)  |
| Dahanu   | 61306<br>(27.59)             | 40620<br>(36.10)  | 20686<br>(18.86)  | 15791<br>(10.82)                          | 13230<br>(18.04) | 2561<br>(3.52)  | 145984<br>(65.69)   | 151<br>(92.07)  |
| Talasari | 10788<br>(16.09)             | 8408<br>(25.56)   | 2380<br>(6.97)    | 7185<br>(11.81)                           | 6128<br>(20.58)  | 1057<br>(3.40)  | 60863<br>(90.76)  | 27<br>(100.00)  |
| Jawhar   | 18783<br>(17.16)             | 13352<br>(24.45)  | 5431<br>(9.90)    | 10728<br>(11.38)                          | 8535<br>(18.26)  | 2193<br>(4.61)  | 94307<br>(86.14)  | 122<br>(100.00)   |
| Mokhada  | 10785<br>(16.79)             | 7886<br>(24.31)   | 2899<br>(9.12)    | 8823<br>(14.81)                           | 6957<br>(23.17)  | 1866<br>(6.31)  | 59570<br>(92.74)  | 77<br>(97.47)   |
| Vada     | 36382<br>(38.04)             | 23437<br>(48.54)  | 12945<br>(27.33)  | 7540<br>(15.43)                           | 6066<br>(24.56)  | 1474<br>(6.10)  | 48863<br>(51.10)  | 160<br>(96.39)  |
| Bhiwandi | 184459                       | 127720            | 56739             | 5044                                      | 4005             | 1039            | 35124   | 206   |

Cont....

| 1           | 2        | 3        | 4        | 5       | 6       | 7       | 8       | 9       |
|-------------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|             | (46.53)  | (56.42)  | (33.36)  | (14.36) | (22.13) | (6.10)  | (8.86)  | (97.17) |
| Shahpur     | 63724    | 43626    | 20098    | 6402    | 5272    | 1130    | 53833   | 198     |
|             | (36.88)  | (49.45)  | (23.76)  | (11.89) | (19.04) | (4.32)  | (31.15) | (97.06) |
| Murbad      | 41916    | 29936    | 11980    | 3701    | 2983    | 718     | 26848   | 167     |
|             | (36.33)  | (51.38)  | (20.98)  | (13.79) | (21.69) | (5.48)  | (23.27) | (98.24) |
| Kalyan      | 316500   | 187059   | 129441   | 2587    | 1748    | 839     | 12589   | 101     |
|             | (66.67)  | (73.38)  | (58.89)  | (20.55) | (27.25) | (13.89) | (2.65)  | (90.18) |
| Ulhasnagar  | 261406   | 158192   | 103214   | 2840    | 2000    | 840     | 16316   | 82      |
|             | (57.81)  | (66.02)  | (48.55)  | (17.46) | (23.60) | (10.82) | (3.61)  | (93.18) |
| Thane       | 1692460  | 1061391  | 631069   | 105094  | 82416   | 22678   | 729424  | 1663    |
| District    | (50.50)  | (59.64)  | (40.15)  | (14.41) | (22.34) | (6.29)  | (21.76) | (95.25) |
| Maharashtra | 29620806 | 19056503 | 10564303 | 1286765 | 946747  | 340018  | 5772038 |         |
| State       | (47.18)  | (58.79)  | (34.79)  | (22.29) | (32.38) | (11.94) | (9.19)  |         |

Source : *Census of India, 1981, Series - 12, Maharashtra, Part 13-B, Primary Census Abstract.*

Note : Figures in brackets in columns 2-7 are literacy percentages of the respective populations.

**Table 4.2 COMPARATIVE LITERACY IN THANE DISTRICT - 1961, 1971, 1981**

|      | Literacy in general population<br>excluding scheduled castes<br>and tribes |                   |                   | Literacy in scheduled<br>caste population |                  |                  | Scheduled caste<br>population and %<br>of total population | Literacy in scheduled<br>tribe population |                  |                 | Scheduled<br>Tribe pop-<br>ulation and<br>% of total<br>population |
|------|--|-------------------|-------------------|---|------------------|------------------|--|---|------------------|-----------------|--|
|      | Persons  | Males             | Females           | Persons                                   | Males            | Females          |  | Persons                                   | Males            | Females         |  |
| 1    | 2  | 3                 | 4                 | 5   | 6                | 7                | 8  | 9   | 10               | 11              | 12   |
| 1961 | 477917<br>(42.32)  | 331629<br>(55.68) | 146288<br>(27.41) | 3435<br>(15.12)                           | 2425<br>(20.37)  | 1010<br>(9.34)   | 22722<br>(1.37)  | 23353<br>(4.67)                           | 19799<br>(7.81)  | 3554<br>(1.44)  | 500558<br>(30.29)  |
| 1971 | 860573<br>(51.66)  | 551089<br>(61.74) | 309484<br>(40.01) | 13404<br>(37.06)                          | 9085<br>(47.86)  | 4319<br>(25.13)  | 36170<br>(1.59)  | 53457<br>(9.22)                           | 46330<br>(15.79) | 7127<br>(2.49)  | 579538<br>(25.40)  |
| 1981 | 1550731<br>(61.09)   | 954911<br>(69.90) | 595820<br>(50.83) | 36635<br>(43.70)                          | 24064<br>(54.08) | 12571<br>(31.97) | 83825<br>(4.71)  | 105094<br>(14.41)                         | 82416<br>(22.34) | 22678<br>(6.29) | 729424<br>(21.76)  |

Source : *Census of India, Maharashtra*, for various years

Note : Figures in brackets in columns 2-7 and 9-11 are literacy percentages of the respective populations

**Table 43 DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS OVER STANDARDS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS,  
'KULAMBI' VILLAGE, 1970-1980**

| Grade                            | 1970 | '71 | '72 | '73 | '74 | '75 | '76 | '77 | '78 | '79 | '80 | Total |
|----------------------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| <b>Patil pada primary school</b> |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |       |
| I                                | 10   | 12  | 13  | 13  | 15  | 12  | 15  | 17  | 15  | 18  | 22  | 162   |
| II                               | 7    | 6   | 4   | 4   | 6   | 9   | 8   | 3   | 9   | 7   | 8   | 71    |
| III                              | 4    | 1   | 4   | 4   | 4   | 4   | 9   | 4   | 4   | 4   | 2   | 44    |
| IV                               | 2    | 3   | 4   | 4   | 5   | 6   | 3   | 5   | 4   | 1   | 2   | 39    |
| Total                            | 23   | 22  | 25  | 25  | 30  | 31  | 35  | 29  | 32  | 30  | 34  | 316   |
| Appeared for 4th Exam.           | 2    | 3   | 3   | 4   | 5   | 4   | 2   | 5   | 3   | 1   |     | 32    |
| Passed 4th Exam.                 | 2    | 1   | 1   | 3   | 3   | 3   | 1   | 3   | 3   | 1   |     | 21    |
| <b>Wadi pada primary school</b>  |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |       |
| I                                | 8    | 8   | 8   | 13  | 13  | 17  | 15  | 13  | 15  | 18  | 17  | 145   |
| II                               | 10   | 8   | 5   | 5   | 6   | 6   | 8   | 11  | 6   | 6   | 10  | 81    |
| III                              | 7    | 8   | 5   | 4   | 4   | 4   | 6   | 4   | 5   | 4   | 6   | 57    |
| IV                               | 3    | 4   | 8   | 3   | 4   | 3   | 3   | 4   | 4   | 2   | 3   | 41    |
| Total                            | 28   | 28  | 26  | 25  | 27  | 30  | 32  | 32  | 30  | 30  | 36  | 324   |
| Appeared for 4th Exam.           | 1    | 4   | 8   | 3   | 1   | 3   | 2   | 4   | 2   | 1   |     | 29    |
| Passed 4th Exam.                 | 1    | 1   | 2   | 3   | 1   | 2   | 1   | 2   | 2   | 1   |     | 16    |

Source: "Primary Schools in 'Kulambi' Village", in D. Saldanha, *A Socio Psychological Study of the Development of Class Consciousness*, Department of Sociology, University of Bombay, 1984 (Ph.D. thesis), p. 503.

## India's Mass Education Programmes -- A Critical Analysis

*Anita Dighe*

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Democracy is unique among the various forms of government in that there are special links between it and education. It has thus been substantively argued that there is a political requirement that the citizens of democracy should be educated. All regimes, in order to sustain and survive, require some means for socializing the young in the roles they are expected to play in society. "Despotisms, for instance, would seem likely to function more efficiently if the habits of fear and obedience are inculcated from an early age. Politics based on distinctions of class require habits of deference and respect, religious and totalitarian states depend on indoctrination into the official faith and so on"<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is characteristic of undemocratic regimes to regard education as unnecessary or even subversive. While it might be possible that some monarch or dictator might promote some form of education out of benevolence or idealism, yet the very notion of a monarch or a dictator would imply that this would not be necessary. By contrast, democracy could only be so described if the citizens have some measure of education. According to Wringe, education would almost be as fundamental a requirement as the existence of a system of voting for its citizens which would mean a process of making a choice, and expressing judgement on the basis of information gathered and assessed. A largely illiterate and uneducated electorate would thus pose far-reaching social and political problems in the working of

democracy. The present paper attempts to trace the development of the mass education programmes in India and to examine how, particularly the adult and non-formal education programmes, have contributed to or hindered the building of a democratic order in this country.

### **Mass Education Programmes in Post-Independence period**

The school system that developed in India under colonial rule was essentially alienating. "Because there was a lack of clarity regarding which society and what place in society students were being prepared for, colonial schools did not necessarily prepare for leadership in the indigenous society nor for leadership in the colonial society. They were designed to fit people into a world different from that in which they were born and in which their parents lived and worked."<sup>2</sup> And yet, ironically enough, it was the same system of education that hastened the end of the colonial rule. In India, as in other colonial territories, it led to the training and education of indigenous elites who were later to become the leaders of independent India. But at the same time, the elites and those who were products of such a system of education, became divorced from the real needs, problems, aspiration of the rural masses. The educational system, as the Indian society at large, retained intact its hierarchical and inequalitarian character.

Tagore was among those who realized the growing estrangement between education and life. According to him, an educational institution had to have a close association with all aspects of life -- economic, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual and had to have organic links with its surroundings.

It must cooperate with the villages around it, cultivate land, breed cattle, spin clothes .... it must produce all the necessities, devising the best means, using the best materials and calling science to its aid. It's very existence should depend upon the success of its industrial activities carried out on the cooperative principle, which will unite the teachers and students and villagers of the neighbourhood in a living and active bond of necessity.<sup>3</sup>

Tagore aimed at the education of the whole man and set as his background, the whole of humanity. According to Sarkar, it was



characteristic of him that he made life the centre, not the life of this child or that, nor even a particular aspect of human life in preference to some other, but life as a whole, and it its richest and best, jointly lived by teachers and students.<sup>4</sup> Hence the creation of a small but active unit, the centre of Shantiniketan, but a centre that does not find a replication anywhere else.

During the Pre-Independence phase, there was considerable interest in the problem of mass education in India. It was recognized that the high rate of illiteracy (90%) was incompatible with democracy and with India's aspirations to become a modern state. While there was a general consensus that in order to attack the problem of illiteracy a two-pronged strategy of an adult literacy programme on a mass scale along with rapid expansion of primary education was necessary, lack of adequate financial resources became a serious constraint. As a result, the then existing educational system was criticized by all, but there was a dearth of possible alternatives on how to expand elementary education within the available resources. It was Gandhi who brought in the concept of "basic education" and thereby ushered a new era in the field of education.

The main characteristics of basic education were:

1. free and compulsory education for 7 years on a nation wide scale.
2. medium of instruction to be the mother tongue.
3. all the subjects to be taught through a central basic craft chosen with due regard to the environment of the child.

Socially, Basic education was to break the existing barriers of prejudice between children of the well-to-do upper caste groups and those of the lower caste groups by making them learn the same craft. It was thought that by doing so, gradually they would realize the importance of crafts in our culture as well as, imbibe egalitarian values. One of the special aspects of basic education was productivity, for apart from its economic, value productive work had a social and moral significance. For by producing something that was useful to society, the child would learn to become a useful member of the community. "Basic education was based on the sound sociological principle that each individual member of society must learn to produce and share the fruits of education and culture."<sup>5</sup>

After 1947 the basic system of education was largely accepted at

the elementary stage. During the five-year plans, a systematic effort was made either to convert the traditional primary schools into basic schools or to establish new ones. Efforts were made to introduce important features of basic education in non-basic schools, orientation programmes were organized for teachers to reduce differences between basic and non-basic education, a National Institute of Basic Education was set up in 1956. But in spite of various measures, compulsory and universal elementary education was not successful. The problem of stagnation and wastage assumed gigantic proportions. The confusion created in the sphere of elementary education over the term "basic" persisted. The 4th plan did not show any enthusiasm for basic education and as such no serious efforts were made beyond strengthening it in carefully selected schools. By the 5th plan, the concept of basic education was largely ignored. Kurrien elaborates on the reasons for its failure:

the conceptual framework necessitated 8 years of full-time schooling, small teacher-pupil ratio, and extraordinarily highly trained teachers, which the country was not capable of producing en masse. This, in addition to the capital and maintenance costs of crafts equipment, raw materials and larger schools, raised the cost of education. These expenditures were not offset appreciably by the sale of handicrafts, made it more expensive than the traditional system and effectively cut short any potential it had for becoming a model of mass education.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequent efforts at providing free and compulsory education to children have been largely unsuccessful as the problems of wastage, stagnation and high drop-out rates have persisted.

The same could be said of the universal education of adults, action on which was also started about fifty years ago. In the thirties, there was considerable concern over the problem of illiteracy among the masses. But there was soon the realization that mere literacy was not enough and that it was necessary to develop programmes of adult education. Very soon, with the discovery that adult education could not be divorced from attempts to bring about social change, the programme was renamed social education. For a while, concepts such as "functional literacy" and "fundamental education" came into vogue. Sud-

denly, the concept of non-formal education caught the fancy of the policy makers and planners in the early 70's. It was, however, only in 1978, that the adult education programme received some priority attention for the first time and became the National Adult Education Programme. The New Policy on Education (NPE) has once again stressed the need for a two-pronged strategy of universalization of elementary education through formal and non-formal education, as well as adult education. Despite all efforts, however, the fact remains that 64% of India's population still remains illiterate and of these, 75% are women. Even more disturbing is the realization that with the growth in population, the absolute numbers of those illiterate are also increasing and that according to a Unesco estimate, by the year 2000, India alone would have about 50% of world's illiterate population.

As mentioned earlier, it was in the early 70's that the concept of non-formal education gained wide acceptance. It was the Report of the International Education Commission set up by Unesco which was published in 1972 under the title *Learning to be* that highlighted for the first time, the failures of the formal education system and the need for developing non-formal education programmes. It is important to mention here that the origin of non-formal education also coincided with the overall disenchantment with the existing models of development and a search for an alternate model. As the policy makers and planners began to realize that the formal education system made only a limited contribution to development, they pinned their hopes on non-formal education which they thought had the potential of contributing effectively and quickly to the process of development. In this respect, non-formal education owed its origins more to the development planners than to educationists as such. It was felt that in developing countries that had to grapple with the staggering problems of population, food, health, unemployment, poverty, non-formal education would provide the educational and development solutions. The immediate objectives for promoting non-formal education were thus seen as

to reduce the costs and improve the efficacy of the system of formal education, to make education available to those social groups (especially the underprivileged and poor people) who are now outside the educational system and to relate education more effectively to development, especially in its immediate and long term aspects.<sup>7</sup>

The experience of the last ten years and more has shown that the initial euphoria with non-formal education and about its potential, is now almost over. In many ways, the non-formal education programmes, especially for children, have largely been non-starters or in cases where they have got off the ground, they have mainly been poor imitations of the formal system of education they were meant to displace. Even with regard to the adult education programme, the initial phase of admiration of Paulo Freire and for the relevance his pedagogy has for Third World countries seems to have been replaced by a phase during which Freire has been coopted in various subtle and not-so-subtle ways. In a study reported in the early eighties, Kidd and Kumar wrote: "The cooptation of Paulo Freire is an important aspect in the political economy of education in the Third World today. Our study shows how a philosophy of liberation which originated in a Third World Country, can be used as a strategy for perpetuating dependence."<sup>4</sup> It would not be incorrect to say that, leaving aside some voluntary organizations in the country that have made genuine efforts to understand the concept of non-formal education -- whether for children or for adults -- and to organize programmes that would bring about a change in the lives of the poor people, the government-run programmes have belied hopes of any major structural change being brought about due to non-formal education. The mass programmes thus far, whether for adults or for children, whether formal or non-formal, have been sporadic, localized, or of short duration, and have by no means democratized education nor promoted democratic consciousness among those who have received such education.

To understand why this is so it is necessary to examine whether the mass education programmes run by the government have developed democratic consciousness among those who participate in such programmes. In this context, it is worthwhile to examine what Paulo Freire has said about Brazilian society. For what Freire has said about Brazil would, in a large measure, be equally applicable to the Indian experience. According to Freire, it is the lack of democratic experience that is one of the major obstacles to the process of democratization. And if in a society which lacks democratic experience and is characterized by a feudal mentality and sustained by a colonial economic and social structure, a formal democracy that requires dialogue, participation, political and social responsibility is ushered in, then expectedly certain major problems crop up. It then becomes the special task of the

educator "to help people learn democracy through the exercise of democracy: for that knowledge, above all others can only be assimilated experientially".<sup>9</sup> In other words, people learn what participation means through actual participation whether in the decision-making process or as members of organizations, learn social and political responsibility by actually experiencing such responsibility. In the adult education programmes, however, the common experience is that constantly an attempt is made to transfer knowledge to people verbally so that while the terms "dialogue", "participation", "mobilization" are used, it is as if lessons in democracy have to be given without allowing people an experience of what it means to participate and to exercise power.

Mannheim has said that in a society in which the main changes are to be brought about through collective deliberations and in which re-evaluations have to be based upon intellectual insights and consent, a completely new system of education would be necessary. For Freire, the special contribution of education to the birth of the new society would be a critical education which would enable people to progress from a state of naive consciousness to a stage where men and women assume an increasingly critical attitude towards life around them. In elaborating on the pedagogy of the oppressed, he says "the oppressed unveil the mould of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation".<sup>10</sup> What this means is that those who recognize, or begin to recognize, themselves as oppressed must be among the developers of this pedagogy. To quote Freire again, "no pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distinct from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption".<sup>11</sup>

The case study by Kidd and Kumar<sup>12</sup> showed how pseudo-Freirean method has been used to co-opt Freire. Likewise, it is important to examine the content of the literacy primers that are used in the adult education programmes in order to see whether they enable the learners to develop a critical consciousness of the reality around them. Bhasin has commented on the sheer irrelevance of most literacy primers that do not deal with the real issues and problems of the poor, their hardships, deprivation, exploitation and poverty. In most primers, the village community is shown as a harmonious one, with no strife and rivalry.



The conflicts, the perpetual exploitation by one class or caste of another are not even mentioned. Government plans and programmes are shown as functioning smoothly and faultlessly. Every Government servant is shown to be serving the people with total honesty and dedication. Such depictions hardly reflect the realities of life in rural and urban areas.<sup>13</sup>

An analysis of the literacy primer for women "Nai Rahe" that is being used for a pilot project in U.P. showed that the reality depicted in the primer was not the reality of the poor rural women, majority of whom are engaged in agricultural labour. It is the middle class biases and the middle class values that are sought to be propagated and imposed on the poor. At best, the primer provides a little general information but raises no questions and certainly would not inspire self-confidence and self-respect among the poor rural women. Apart from questioning nothing, least of all the existing socio-economic reality that is so oppressive and exploitative, the tone of the primer is decidedly condescending and demeaning, as adults are often treated at the level of children.

According to Krishna Kumar "a realistic curriculum for adult literacy cannot be developed without acknowledging the presence of deep-rooted injustice and conflicts in rural society". But his overview of literacy programmes carried out in various Third World countries showed that there were some recurring themes of a "mythology" that was perpetuated that in no way questioned the existing system.<sup>14</sup>

The point that is being made is that the curriculum content of most of the adult education programmes, rather than raising the critical consciousness of the people, would probably further domesticate them. In other words, they would not foster democratic consciousness among those who participate in such programmes.

In order to understand why this is so, it is important to place non formal education programmes in a broader framework. For non-formal education must be understood not only as a social agency but as an agency that is linked to the formal schooling and other institutions of the state. In other words, non-formal education has to be placed within a larger socio-political context.

The formal school system has been a colonial legacy that is Western in its orientation and assumes a linear progression for children from one grade to another systematically and during a certain number of years. One of the characteristics of this system is that it



polarizes society and this is in part because of the role it plays in the formation of new elites. While on the one hand, problems of wastage and stagnation continue, on the other, the system is extremely uneven in its impact for there are great contrasts within the country, between class and caste groups and urban and rural areas. Such contrasts have eventually meant creation of a new educationally privileged urban elite. In the rural areas, children who go to school expect to become white collar workers for jobs which simply do not exist. Such a system "uproots and isolates youngsters from their home environment, creates in them an antipathy to manual work and denies to all save a favoured few any chance of advancement".<sup>15</sup>

The elite groups on their part have developed vested interests and are unwilling to modify the existing school system radically "because it helped them to reach power, because it is familiar and because it can help to sustain them in power by producing similar types for leadership".<sup>16</sup> As a matter of fact, non-formal education programmes become attractive because of the role these programmes play in diffusing potential discontent among the unschooled and the illiterate, thereby enabling the privileged classes to maintain power and authority. Bock's political analysis of non-formal education draws heavily on the legitimization theory that suggests that non formal education may be serving the state as a coping mechanism for the consequences of an expanded school system that has outpaced the economy's capacity to absorb graduates. To quote Bock,

for the state, non formal education offers the possibility of an institutional means of resolving the rival needs of extending and consolidating state authority through the expansion of schooling while, at the same time, limiting legitimate demands upon the economic and political system without creating political unrest and instability.<sup>17</sup>

There is yet another factor that needs to be taken into consideration in understanding why the mass education programmes have not democratized education. This relates to the very nature of the non-formal education programmes. According to the reproduction theorists, the schools reinforce the division of labour in society by maintaining class, race and gender inequalities.<sup>18</sup> What is stressed by the

reproduction theorists is the need to do a thorough analysis of the role of education in class formation and in reproducing and legitimizing economic stratification and capital accumulation.

An examination of the adult and non-formal education programmes shows that an overwhelming majority of them are directed at the low paid segment of the labour market. They are generally so designed that they provide a limited mobility by not awarding the socially valued certification or relevant skills for gainful employment. "Thus non-formal education as an institution for socialization locks men as well as women into the lower levels of the occupational structure and provides them with limited avenue for social mobility".<sup>19</sup> This is particularly true in the case of women's programmes. In recent years, a new type of activity viz. an income-generating activity, has emerged as a necessary adjunct for a literacy programme for women. The rationale given is that in conditions of poverty and deprivation literacy per se is not an attractive enough proposition for women. An income-generating activity is presumed to provide the necessary motivation to women to come to the adult education centres. The income-generating activities most commonly pursued are sewing, tailoring, embroidery and similar "feminine" activities.

Besides being sex-typed, they are mainly fragmented activities with no efforts made to enable women to exercise control over their planning, operationalization and management. Nor are efforts made to enable women to question the gender-based division of labour in society that is responsible for women pursuing only certain types of occupations and getting relegated to the home-based, informal and unorganized sectors of the economy with no, hope whatsoever of upward social and economic mobility. While it has been said about the formal schooling that it serves as a systems support for maintenance of inequality and maldistribution, in the case of non-formal adult education, it is an even more effective means for limiting cross-segment mobility. For according to Bock, it does not provide the accepted and socially valued certification that is the gate-pass for better paid jobs.<sup>20</sup> Even in the case of the pilot project titled "Mahila Samakhya," a programme of education for women's equality that is being implemented by the Government in three states, the level of education that is presently envisaged for women would automatically siphon off a vast majority of poor women who would continue to be relegated to the low-prestige and low-paid jobs. For as an analysis of the 1981 Census

data has shown, as much as 87.3 per cent of rural women were listed as cultivators and agricultural labourers, or the primary sector. Only 6.4 per cent of them were classified as working mainly in household and non-household manufacturing and processing jobs (secondary sector). The least number of working rural women (4.1%) were to be found in the tertiary sector.

According to Kurrien, the distribution of this rural female workforce by their educational status indicates that for every increase in educational qualification, there was a shift in the labour force participation from the primary sector to the tertiary sector.<sup>21</sup> A clear-cut shift to the tertiary sector occurred only when women had high school qualifications. Illiterates were almost entirely concentrated in the primary sector (91.9%) and agricultural labour (52.6%). These women, especially those in the latter category, were likely to form the vast majority of the poorest strata of Indian society. Their work would be crucial for their individual and family sustenance and survival.

On the other hand, for both rural and urban working women, the participation rates were highest for those with technical and other diploma and college degrees. In both urban and rural areas too, the lowest participation rates were those for literate women whose formal qualifications were less than a high school certification. Given the fact that certification is not guaranteed under "Mahila Samakhya" presently, and parity with the formal system is not envisaged, rather than equalizing opportunities, what is likely to happen is that women's mobility between segments would be inhibited and they would continue to be denied access to higher income and higher status jobs in the labour market.

The real problem with the adult education programmes is that they subscribe to the "individual deficit" viewpoint according to which the root of the problems of maldistribution of power and resources lies within individuals and is not due to structural inequalities. Implicit in this viewpoint is the assumption that "change comes about evolutionarily as a consequence of raising through education the competence and consciousness of individuals who in turn bring 'enlightened' pressure to bear for structural reform".<sup>22</sup> It has been said even about Paulo Freire that conscientization advocated by him tends to be centred around an individual or a group because the emphasis is on changing the attitudes and behaviours of individuals. For as Zachariah says, conscientization attempts to awaken or reawaken in a person or

a group the ability to analyze the causes and effects of an oppressive social system: the analysis leading the person or the group to take responsibility for making changes in their lives and their society.<sup>23</sup> The assumption here is that by changing characteristics of individuals, it would enable them to bring about systemic changes. For structural determinant theorists, on the other hand, the attempt to bring about social change by altering individuals values and attitudes would be futile when what is needed is a fundamental restructuring of the entire society. According to them, inequality of opportunity is the result of the social and political structure of the country. There would, therefore, be a decidedly social and political character about adult education programmes. Such a holistic approach would emphasize linkages between individuals, institutions and environment and would necessarily highlight the limited role such programmes would have in bringing about any significant change in society.

What have been some of the goals sought to be achieved by the adult education programmes in India? Primarily it was the delivery of educational services to the poor and the disadvantaged—for those adults who had been bypassed by the formal system of education. The adult education programme held for these people the chance to achieve basic literacy and numeracy, the opportunity to learn some functional skills and a means for participating in the process of development. With an emphasis on awareness -- raising, what was envisaged was that the less advantaged would be able to organize themselves, articulate their needs and demands, put pressure on the existing political and economic structure and thereby initiate a process for a more equitable distribution of wealth and opportunity. In other words, the adult education programme was expected to not only reform education but to have a substantial impact on the structure of society as well.

To what extent has the adult education programme in India achieved any of these goals? The limited achievement of the adult education programme, and that too only restricted to acquisition of literacy skills, is now an acknowledged fact.<sup>24</sup> Bock and Papagiannes, in ascertaining the overall effectiveness of the non-formal education programmes in bringing about development, come to the conclusion that such programmes become institutionalized as educational diversification strategies to serve regime interests and do not fulfil their idealistic initial goals of raising critical consciousness and developing

self reliance among the poor and the disadvantaged.<sup>25</sup> And yet they do not take the stand taken by the structural determinant theorists about the futility of the non-formal education programmes in bringing about social change. For, according to them, there is a significant body of recent literature that shows that education can bring about shifts in self-definitions and awareness that are potentially disruptive to the continued maintenance of the existing social order. "When changes in individuals' social meanings and awareness aggregate to produce certain 'critical density', there comes into existence potential for assertive, even organized political action that was not there before and that may create preconditions for social restructuring".<sup>26</sup>

Mention needs to be made here of the growing body of literature that is now available on participatory initiatives in education and development. Thus attempts to bring the benefits of education and training to the poor and the illiterate have centred on participative approaches in educational goal setting, planning, programme implementation, evaluation and research. Proponents of participatory research<sup>27</sup> have argued that this approach leads to the empowerment of poor people. Rahman has documented four cases from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Philippines and India to show how a systematic process of social research was initiated by the people themselves so that a collective investigation and analysis of their social reality was carried out, leading to organized action on their part.<sup>28</sup> Orlando Fals Borda's synthesis of participatory experiences in Colombia, Mexico and Nicaragua makes a major contribution to the understanding of the ways in which participatory investigations can be pursued in different socio-political contexts. Acknowledging the political dimension of participatory action research, Borda argues that it emerges

as a scientific methodology for productive work (and not only research) which includes the organization and promotion of grassroots social movements functioning as wide-based fronts made up of the working classes and various groups in the struggle to achieve structural change. Researchers and animators become increasingly committed to such movements so that it becomes difficult to distinguish between study and militancy in such struggles.<sup>29</sup>

Rahman derives the principle from his case studies that the rural poor must form some type of organization and must themselves

determine the tasks to which their collective endeavours would be addressed.<sup>30</sup> He further argues for the need for continuing educational effort and says that however small the beginning, there is need to eventually become part of a wider movement of similar interests.

In other words, there is a necessity to associate adult and non-formal education of the oppressed groups with the wider on-going class struggles and socio-political movements. The participatory process of adult learning has tremendous pedagogical advantages. But in the absence of linkages with wider on-going class struggles, the highly cherished goal of the empowerment of the oppressed cannot be brought about. According to Parajuli and Mathema it is not conscientization which is a precondition for political action but probably the reverse.<sup>31</sup> Freire showed how his literacy work evolved in response to worker and peasant struggles in north-east Brazil and it was not the conscientization programme that triggered off the peasant and workers' struggle.<sup>32</sup> Thus, conscientization could become an additional tool for deepening class consciousness, sharpening the perception of the contradictions in the social relations of production and heightening workers' struggle. But for this to happen it is important to associate adult and non formal education of the oppressed sections of the population against the hegemony of the modern state. Unless this happens any effort to democratize education would remain an unfulfilled goal.

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## The Slow Transition From Womanhood To Personhood: Can Education Help?

*Malavika Karlekar*

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### I

Looking back on his days of solitary confinement in a concentration camp, sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf commented that it was then "that an almost claustrophobic yearning of freedom was bred, a visceral desire not to be hemmed in either by the personal power of men or by the anonymous power of organizations".<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising then, that he went on to become a major theorist of industrial society, analysing in detail the nature of class conflict in democracies.<sup>2</sup> Dahrendorf's poignant description of a primeval human instinct is, in a pragmatic, business-like manner, the basis for democracy: very simply, participation and self expression by citizens in the commonweal, in decision-making, in the polity, work place, educational institutions and so on, is regarded as fundamental to a democratic order. Certain rights and entitlements<sup>3</sup> are laid down in a constitution, and their realisation is based on reciprocal obligations. Without obligations and duties there is every likelihood of the Hobbesian state of nature taking over. Yet modern democracies are the arena of increasing discord where questions over rights result in violence as competing groups vie for what they perceive to be their legitimate due. In large part, this

hiatus between reality and the ideal is caused by differences between individuals and groups. In time these differences acquire an emotive quality and a rank ordering. The following discussion should help explain this process a little more.

The early idealists of post-Independence India pledged themselves to justice, liberty and "equality of status and of opportunity". There was to be equal pay for equal work for men and for women, and "special care for the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people" and so on.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to observe the interface between legend-making and reality almost forty years after the worthy gentlemen (and a smattering of women) of the Constituent Assembly provided us with a constitution. Post-colonial society did not succeed, as was expected, in destroying elite structures and establishing egalitarian ones in their place. Rather, existing injustices had now to contend with new inequalities, brought about paradoxically in many cases by "modern" institutions introduced by the British such as the educational system, legal structures and the bureaucracy. Operating the state apparatus, the corporate world, the administration and so on are what Nigerian author Kole Omotoso calls the Westward looking English-speaking "trans-ethnic elite".<sup>5</sup> In India, as in many of the newly independent states of Africa, millions live hundreds of years away from the few thousand trans-ethnic elite who run this economic and political system of neo-colonialism based on supposedly democratic values. In actual fact, new inequalities now contend with old ones. The British brought not only the school, the railways and a network of roads, but also a value system which stressed science, rationality and mechanical order. Indians were regarded as mystical, unscientific and irrational, and therefore in need of immediate redemption. The educational and legal systems maintained by a bureaucratic hierarchy were to be agents of this new order. Education was to bring about social change if not equality. However, these assumptions were based on an inadequate appreciation of the tenacity of hierarchy and of traditional belief systems. In other words, the ideology of entitlements based on the principle of equality had to contend with the ideology of hierarchical ordering based on the principle of difference. What is relevant here is not the denial of difference but the implications of this difference.

Depending on one's perspective, there can be at least two ways of analysing difference as inequality and, what I will call, difference as a

positive value, which may or may not include the demand for equality. I am aware that these two conceptualisations of difference involve the use of highly emotive terms, the defence of which may not always be easy or logical. Difference as inequality (which could also be interpreted as hierarchical oppositions) would logically lead to the construction of a world view based on deprivation, injustice and of the woman-as-victim. It would imply a world which incorporates ethnic, religious and sexual differences as well as a liberal, if not radical, reaction to these differences. It is in fact a yardstick of contemporary *real-politik*, of societies based on domination and surrender. Difference as a positive value would question a system which grades qualities on a scale and argues that it should be possible to judge individuals and their situations on their own merit and not in the context of their social position or gender. It points out that there can be a plurality of views which attach greater importance to some individual response and collective organisation than to others, though often within the framework of overall inequality. Feminist scholars as well as activists have been deeply interested in the notion of difference as a positive value. While I am not competent to give an account of all the relevant theories – some of which are extremely difficult to comprehend – there are certain themes which are of direct relevance here. In the main, the manner in which difference has been treated by various intellectual streams is vital to an understanding of how women have perceived and used this difference. Observers of women's history have pointed out that the tendency, however well-intentioned, of viewing women as victims is counter-productive: As Gerda Lerner says "the true history of women is the history of their on-going functioning in that male-defined world *on their own terms*. The question of oppression does not elicit that story and is therefore, a tool of limited usefulness to the historian." Oppression as a logical corollary of difference would tend to bring the argument back to variations between male and female qualities. Not only would this constrain the scope of analysis of difference but also impose an ideological framework based on assumptions of male superiority and authority. It is important to remember, argues Amartya Sen, that women are not patients, but contributors to development and growth.<sup>6</sup>

The implications of sexual difference have been of considerable interest to Western feminists in a range of academic disciplines and with varying political and social commitments. A dominant group of

French feminists have experimented with a separate language -- *écriture féminine* -- as they feel that existing language represses the female voice and experience; expectedly, this results in a glorification of femininity, of the female body and psyche.<sup>7</sup> In the U.S. whether it is the cultural feminists<sup>8</sup> with their similar emphasis on women's nurturant, caring spirit or psychologists who stress the individuating principle of attachment (as against the male tendency to separation), the overall trend is towards emphasising the strengths inherent in differentness.<sup>9</sup> Thus a number of Indian feminists believe that a more comprehensive view of the world needs to encompass the woman's experience as not only that of one who has been oppressed but of an individual capable as any other of facing and taking on challenges of various kinds. A history of oppression is not denied, nor should its implications for the relations between genders be under-estimated. What is being stressed is the view that women are not only victims. Here, one might add, the so-called victim displays unexpected reserves of strength and energy. However, there is always the danger, of course, when women speak of the need for a more caring, sympathetic approach to life, to teaching as well as to learning, of leading back to biological determinism. What is the guarantee that difference will not be interpreted as excluding other so-called male qualities such as rationality, decisiveness, pragmatism and so on? How can women's contribution be judged on their own terms, and not in relation to external standards? And who will be the judges? A close look at women's lives provides numerous examples of how in fact individuals have, while acknowledging differences, resisted succumbing to the victim or women-in-head syndrome.

Nonetheless, the relationship of difference with inequality is much more readily understood as it is the organising principle in most spheres of activity. On the other hand, for difference to be recognised as a positive value either in operational or philosophical terms is not nearly as easy. It involves a conscious process, an effort to strive for its acceptance and legitimacy; the natural tendency is to gravitate to a position of inequality, where differences are emotively ranked on a scale. Those who argue for difference as a value would say that no ranking is valid as one kind of activity or attribute is as important or unimportant as any other. This position acquires particular significance in contesting the well-entrenched theory of differences between the natures of men and of women: it is argued that a woman's nature

inclines her to certain activities and interests while that of men makes them more amenable to others. As we shall see, such arguments lie at the basis of inequalities between the two sexes and have been sanctified in an educational system which treats boys and girls unequally. In principle, however, the educational system is supposed to do quite the opposite, namely legitimise difference as a value, to make those designated as unequal more equal through enlightened policies, classroom strategies, and committed teachers.

This paper will look at how difference as inequality has led to gender differences in the use of education. I will then present a case study of one of the first Bengali woman to write her autobiography: if Kailashbashini's life appears incongruous at the end of a litany of injustices it is only to prove that difference as a value can – and did – put down early roots in a hostile environment. Acknowledging her subordinate position in a male-dominated society, Kailashbashini used the skills of literacy effectively. The wife of a Bengali official with reformist tendencies, she was taught to read and write by her husband. In time, she described in great detail her life; her powerfully reasoned arguments only proved that those regarded as unequal and subordinate could in fact match many in their logic and rationality. Here, the informal, self-taught skills of literacy equipped Kailashbashini to express herself, her pain and her hopes through a long life. The therapeutic value of such an exercise cannot be underestimated in a highly segregated, herarchical society. However, before going further into the role of literacy in facilitating individual self-expression, it is necessary to explore further the relationship between difference and inequality. For it is against this backdrop that the former acquires a particular significance and relevance.

Irrespective of political ideology, in recent years, there has been a growing concern with difference and inequality, and by implication, with difference and social categories. Broadly speaking these differences have a material as well as a non-material base. Societies are divided on the basis of class, caste, ethnic groups and gender: some groups more than others own capital, productive resources and assets of various kinds which give them access to employment, education and a range of skills. Occupations are graded accordingly with menial, unskilled work being invariably clustered at the bottom of the job hierarchy. The working class, Blacks, women and in India, the Scheduled Castes have traditionally been the assetless and hence low status



groups. Of equal, if not greater importance however, is what I have called non-material differences. Undoubtedly, the two are causally linked, and in fact it may be difficult to differentiate prejudice against a Black woman from her material position. At the same time, it is important to make the distinction though often self-images and self-perceptions are formed by the conjunction of both material and non-material differences. In this context, Robert Merton's development of the notion of relative deprivation describes well the psychological and emotional traumas faced by deprived groups.<sup>10</sup>

What factors then cause a Scheduled Caste woman to feel materially deprived as well as socially isolated and stigmatised? Material deprivation is the result of poverty; but what makes a difference in caste ranking associate ignorance, squalor, low morals with one group rather than with another? Even when members of the Scheduled Castes are successful, it is not unknown for caste Hindus to make under-the-breath-comment on their style of life or belief systems. It is my basic argument here that a set of rules, regulations and taboos govern inter-gender relations as much as they do inter-caste and inter-religious interactions. These reaffirm the philosophy of *superiority, exclusion and separateness* and manifest themselves in an oppressive and institutionalised hierarchical relationship in the domestic as well as social arenas. As in inter-caste relations there is the "public face"<sup>11</sup> of dependence and mutual cooperation. In actual fact, an exploitative network based on exclusion from ownership, control over and access to productive resources, and in the case of women, lack of control over their reproductive capacities as well, operates. Women and the lower castes are to be controlled, managed and worked on, in a manner not dissimilar to property and other assets.

It is a truism that the main difference between men and women is physiological and apart from the rare cases of sex change, this difference cannot be overcome. Under what circumstances, then does this basic difference incorporate differences of other kinds, namely differences -- and hence inequalities -- in mental attributes and aptitudes, emotional qualities and so on? How and why do evaluative scales become operative? If it is accepted that, as Andre Beteille<sup>12</sup> says, these scales "are not given to us by nature and are culturally constructed by particular human beings under particular historical conditions", what circumstances lead to these constructions? This paper cannot attempt to answer these questions: the relationship between difference and

inequality is too complex and difficult to unravel here. I shall focus instead on one aspect of the difference between Indian men and women, namely inequality in access to education and how limited availability and use historically have been justified in terms of differential aptitudes and a women's nature and basic roles. I will then go on to show how, parallel with this dominant trend, has grown the questioning mind, which reiterates the primacy of difference as a value. This mind too, is the product of education; the subordination and encapsulation of the latter within the wider social fabric has limited its role in the creation of more such minds, of belief systems committed to humanism. Yet, in collaboration with other emancipatory movements the educational system can increasingly play a vital role in ensuring rights, entitlements and individual self-expression.

Before proceeding further it is necessary to have a workable definition of equality in the context of education. Does it imply *equal education* for all or does it mean *equal opportunity to be educated*? There is a world of difference, as Mary Warnock says,<sup>13</sup> between the equal right to education and the right to equal education. In most societies the former is the analytical and operational problematic. Rootingsquarely for the relationship between difference and equality, Isaiah Berlin<sup>14</sup> has pointed out, that "so long as there are differences between men some degree of inequality may occur" and as "equality is a value among many", it has to be compatible with "other ends". These "other ends" may well mean conflicting claims in a society divided on the basis of the privileges of the few which work against the rights of all. According to J.P. Naik,<sup>15</sup> an important educational administrator of post-Independence India, in an inegalitarian society like ours, equality of opportunity means equal opportunity to try for education; even here "it is never really possible to give 'equal' opportunity to all the underprivileged.... There is very little possibility of solving the problem through equality of educational opportunity alone unless simultaneous efforts are made on the political and economic front, to destroy privilege itself". In most developed countries, the issues raised relate increasingly to what happens to children who have access to the assorted educational bread basket.

Once within the system, can everyone expect to have a piece of bread of the same size and quality? Or will some, because of certain advantages, be able to stake a claim for a bigger and better slice? To put it more sharply, once within the system, the distribution of bread is

determined by causes which may have nothing to do with the basket itself. There are factors which work in favour of some children and against others. Among other things, this is manifested in a higher rate of drop-out and unsatisfactory performance in school among those from socially and economically underprivileged groups; the better quality bread goes to those who came to school within inherent advantages. In present-day India, a commitment to the ideology of inherent advantages, of hierarchy and separateness is exemplified in the approach to women's and girl's socialisation, education, and employment. Here too an alienated trans-ethnic elite passes judgement on what society should be like without taking adequate cognisance of existential realities.

## II

The contemporary higher education scene for girls is a good example of how restrictions in access are justified on grounds of supposed differences between men and women. College-going women in India are a tiny percentage of the population; an increase in this number is linked to societal perceptions of femininity. Often, a girl's educational choice is determined by what is regarded as fit for her and not by her ability or aptitude. As we shall see later, aptitudes too are largely socially conditioned. Boys too have to face pressures of various kinds as well when making choices, and the stresses imposed by the syndrome of achievement, competition and selection are not inconsequential. These are of a qualitatively different nature from the problems affecting girls. The basic premise of the educational system is one of freedom of access to a wide range of courses, to be achieved through open competition. Theoretically too girls are supposed to have access to the same courses as boys. In actual fact, they tend to flock to a few selective "feminine" areas of study. Boys are socialised to compete and succeed, and girls to accept and follow well-demarcated educational realms.

From 1947 onwards, the liberal reformist tradition of successive governments emphasised the need for increasing educational opportunities for the underprivileged, of whom women soon formed a recognisable segment. Most policy statements attempt to soft-pedal

deeply ingrained prejudices and project instead a progressive-looking official position. Thus each annual government report states that there are more and more girls going to school each year; yet, the dropout rate continues to rise. The latest government figures show that for every 1000 illiterate men, the number of illiterate women went up from 1250 in 1961 to 1322 in 1981; by and large these differences have been accepted as facts of life, though ever so often commissions and committees have been appointed to look into problems affecting women's education. However, none of these have been able to conceal successfully the fundamental conviction that a girl's nature requires a special type of education which will not threaten her primary role of home-maker. Consequently, it is somewhat meaningless to talk of a democratic and equitable uniform educational policy for the country as a whole: just as it is necessary to accept that the administrative, professional and industrial elite with a very specific world-view comes from a handful of educational institutions, it is equally important that those in positions of authority recognise that the latent function of girls' education is fundamentally different from that of boys.

At this point it would be useful to adapt Pierre Bourdieu and J. Passeron's<sup>16</sup> argument that the elite in France has labelled as prestigious some abstract and esoteric courses as well as specific educational institutions, so as to maintain their control over social reproduction. The authors had in mind a homogeneous socio-cultural elite; however, if this group was further divided on the basis of sex, the authors would have found that boys tended to dominate the prized institutions while most girls had to rest content with access to less taxing -- and less prestigious -- arts courses. In so doing they would be sharing choices with boys from a less privileged social class rather than with men of their own socio-economic background. In India, there is a distinct dividing line between high status and extremely competitive educational institutions such as the medical colleges, institutes of technology and of management, engineering and other professional colleges, and the bulk of higher education consisting of the proliferating arts and science undergraduate colleges, Industrial Technical Institutes, polytechnics and so on. While the former are the preserve of boys from certain privileged homes, the latter cater to girls from such backgrounds as well as for boys who are by and large unable to succeed in the highly competitive admission tests which often assume a fluency and familiarity with a certain culture as well as the English language.

Thus the dual system of higher education with a select, self-perpetuating elite and a large number trained in indifferent institutions is divided not only on the basis of socio-economic class but also on the basis of gender.

Why has it continued to be regarded as important to channelise women's access to education along certain restrictive lines? A vital reason for this variance in approach to the education of boys and that of girls relates to a conflict of values. The purported aims of education which are to create a democratic spirit of inquiry, an independence of judgement as well as an interest in the acquisition of knowledge of different sorts come into conflict with the ideals of womanhood: a girl is socialised to be obedient, committed to the family unit and above all to be modest in demeanour, and to value chastity and purity greatly. There is little significance attached to independent action in most girls' lives; if a certain kind of education ends up by changing this well-structured frame of reference, it is clearly to be avoided.

For their survival and unity most Indian families need to stress the nurturant and benevolent aspects of femininity. Higher education of a certain kind as well as jobs of the technological era can be regarded as potentially disruptive if not destructive of family harmony of which the linchpin is the woman. With equal access to education, control over women's lives may be marginalised and the new educational and work ethos may come into conflict with the demands of the family network. By and large, whether the formal structure of the family is joint or nuclear, the ideological basis is that of a joint family with a strict hierarchy of authority and patterns of control of women, particularly of those in the reproductive age. Undoubtedly, families have to take some risks as soon as they concede that girls have a right to be educated together with their brothers; however, these are based on the assumption that education and educational institutions of a certain kind will be able to minimise these risks. It is in this context that differentiation of curricula assumes critical importance, substantiated as it is by certain views on women's intellectual capacities and inclinations. Assumptions on inclinations are based on the view that women have a distinct nature which is different from that of men. Again it is argued that a woman's nature is formed by, among other things, intellectual capacities and interests. Historical evidence has been selectively used to show how these capacities are different, if not



inferior. It would perhaps be appropriate to look at the evolution of some of these notions.

Views that women had distinct nature, separate and distinguishable from that of men, were vital in determining Nineteenth Century thinking on the kind and extent of education to which they were to have access. In 1820, Rammohun Roy felt that men took advantage of women's "corporeal weakness" to deny them access to certain "excellent merits" and thereby concluded that "women are naturally incapable of acquiring those merits". He had in mind depriving women of the kind of opportunities which would allow them to display their intelligence and understanding of situations. At the same time, Rammohun was full of praise for women's long-suffering endurance of their husband's often appalling behaviour. He noted approvingly that "all this pain and affliction their virtue alone enables them to support".<sup>17</sup> Perhaps Rammohun's personal life helped him paint a convincing picture of the anguish of women in polygamous marriages: he had three wives and a powerful mother with whom he entered into a long legal battle over property. Reaction to his strong and wilful mother undoubtedly resulted in his ambivalence: his writings on *sati* stress women's strength of character and physical courage. At the same time, he was convinced of their virtuous commitment to duty, which lead them to obey the dictates of a harsh patriarchal order. Like John Stuart Mill who was to argue for women's equality with men in 1869,<sup>18</sup> Rammohun also believed that the implications of this attribute were not to be tested in the job market, but were to be cultivated for women's greater fulfillment within matrimony. It was to help them to become better wives and mothers.

When Rammohun wrote, studies in phrenology and physiology aimed at identifying sexual differences were yet to be undertaken. From the second half of the Nineteenth Century there was scientific corroboration for arguments on differences in natures, and consequently in destinies. Studies in Britain and Europe had added a new dimension to debates on sex-related characteristics. In the 1870s it was believed that intellectual functions were located in the frontal lobes of the brain, and as men's lobes were larger, they were naturally intellectually superior. However, by the end of the century, the intellect was thought to be located in parietal lobes, which were again more pronounced in men.<sup>19</sup> For instance, the views of the French professor of education and one of the founding fathers of modern sociology, Emile



Durkheim, were shared by many of his intellectual peers. In his classic, *The Division of Labour in Society* he pointed out that even when women and men participated in intellectual activities, "woman carries out her own nature, and her role is very specialized, very different from that of man".<sup>20</sup> These differences were accentuated not only by physical variations but also by differences in sizes of the crania. This affected the potentialities of the two sexes differently. While he did not spell it out, for Durkheim, this difference implied a higher level of performance by men in certain socially valued areas such as science and rational inquiry. Such differences justified the sexual division of labour, initially within the family.

A steady dissemination of ideas from the West which spoke of women's superior intuitive faculties, and stressed that "learning interfered with the functioning of intuition because it trained women to reason"<sup>21</sup> had begun by the 1850s. Marriage, and not employment, was a woman's vocation and thus anything that detracted from basic feminine virtues was to be avoided. Nonetheless, as home management required training, girls were to be accordingly instructed by their mothers, and school was to only teach those subjects which enhanced feminine traits. As a twentieth century student of such discussions in Britain has pointed out,

men feared that contemporary teaching with its emphasis of French, music, and art was responsible for the neglect of truly feminine subjects. Matters would surely become worse if women were encouraged to study Mathematics and Latin. What was needed was a revitalisation of the traditional feminine subjects.<sup>22</sup>

Studies in phrenology only consolidated the arguments in favour of women's nature and aptitudes: men were thought to be better equipped to perform certain strenuous and complicated mental exercises while women were more competent in expression, both literary and artistic. What caused equal if not greater concern were the studies which dealt with the relationship between a girl's reproductive functions and mental activity. It was believed that at puberty, girls needed considerable energy to develop their reproductive organs, and thus, the energy which remained for learning was accordingly reduced. Or, "only by robbing their reproductive organs of essential resources or

energy could they continue serious study".<sup>23</sup> As a woman's primary role was to be wife and mother, there was clearly no question of even a debate on priorities. Education for girls was certainly desirable, but it had to take secondary place to considerations arising out of the physical strain of education. There was also the issue of what too much learning would do to a girl's personality: there was a general apprehension that girls trained in Science, Logic and advanced Mathematics would develop the spirit of inquiry as well as become argumentative, competitive and generally difficult to mould: such an education may even threaten the carefully maintained sexual division of labour.

What is most significant for the present study is the emphasis on distinct natures; in one form or another, references to a woman's nature seemed to underlie discussions on their social and familial roles. Scientific theories lent credibility to accepted role differentiations; Victorian notions on a woman's physical frailty and lack of strength had been cited as factors contributing to feminine inferiority from the beginning of the century. Around the same time, evangelicalism had sanctified the "passionless" woman, and fictional depictions of sexual promiscuity as the cause of the downfall of the gentry became popular. Sexual control, particularly among women, was stressed as the ideal; emphasis on the image of the virtuous, devoted wife was gradually being strengthened.<sup>24</sup> It is equally interesting to note that mid-Nineteenth Century British records showed that women constituted a majority of patients in the public lunatic asylums.<sup>25</sup> Late twentieth century feminist interpretations have spoken of the need to look more closely at social definitions and representations of madness; they also point out that the prevalence of mental ill-health, hysteria and tension indicated that women were reacting to social expectations and a moulding of their behaviour.<sup>26</sup>

The verbalization of such stereotypical expectations was essential for the emotional stability of upwardly mobile groups: a restful, non-threatening home environment was regarded as vital if men were to cope with the stress of change and competition. It may be useful to take a look at Bengal in the nineteenth century; as the venue of early debates on women's education, many issues were thrashed out at home, in institutions and in the print media which are relevant and alive even today. The notion of separate curricula for boys and for girls was related to distinct roles and obligations, as well as to distinct and separate life styles within the same home. In the Bengali context,

emphasis on the plight of the woman, her ignorance, ill-health and unhygienic life style within the *antahpur* or inner rooms of the home were vital for the construction of the new femininity. Controlled access to education had an important role to play in this construction.

The environment in which these inequalities were primarily worked out was the home. Strict segregation of the sexes was maintained by physical division into the private and basically feminine spaces and the public or male areas. The former included the kitchen, a court-yard, roof, and perhaps an inner room or rooms depending on the resources of the family: in the outer *baithakkhana* or sitting room men discussed everything ranging from new job opportunities to the implications of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's 1855 petition on widow re-marriage. It was usually the hub of the public area, open to men from a range of backgrounds and occupations. The sleeping quarters, where men and women met for a few hours in the night were usually serviced by both male and female domestic servants. Until they reached puberty, or were married, girls usually had access to both the public and private spaces. Traditionally adult women did not come out of the *antahpur* to which only a select number of men had access. Veiling or covering the head and part of the face known as *ghomta deowa* was obligatory for married women, particularly in the presence of older women, the husband and his senior male relatives. It was usual for a woman from even the wealthiest of homes to wear only a single piece of cloth, the unstitched *sari*. Consequently, dress reform for women became a relevant issue in the latter part of the nineteenth century: women and young girls could hardly be presented to mixed company or even go to school if they were not adequately clad.<sup>27</sup>

In Britain, a demarcation of space was not always essential for the notion of separate yet complementary spheres which was firmly established by the nineteenth century. In Bengal, however, the separation of areas in homes was symbolic not only of two completely different worlds of physical experience and quality of life but also of varying norms and expectations which affected relationships between the sexes. As in Western cultures, the feminine world was regarded by and large as an essential appendage of the male sphere. Paradoxically, inequalities and deprivations imposed by the dominant world of men were in fact the cause of the *antahpur's* inferior status. Yet, views that women in the *antahpur* were knowingly indulging in practices leading to illness, were wilful and chose to remain illiterate and limited in their

understanding of situations were widely accepted; the fact that *sati*, child marriage, *kulin* polygamy and a host of other restrictions imposed on women were regarded as essential for the preservation of family honour and the purity of the lineage were often conveniently overlooked. It was almost as though the newly evolving *bhadra samaj* or civilised society was looking for a scapegoat for its past misdeeds in the image of foolish and untutored woman in the *antahpur*. Whether such an assumption is valid or not, there is enough writing to suggest that the urgent need to educate women had roots in this characterisation of them.<sup>28</sup>

An important point of reference for the nineteenth century reform movement in Bengal then, was the position of women; self-conscious embarrassment over the institutionalised practices of *sati*, child marriage and polygamy undoubtedly contributed to the growing enthusiasm for change across a wide spectrum of opinion. Equally, there was the need to protect the lineage, and its women. At the same time, an influential lobby felt that women as much as men had the right to the new learning and knowledge systems. While the Victorian ideal of the intelligent helpmate and competent and enlightened mother was gaining ground as a useful role model, modes of realising this ideal had to be worked out: codes of conduct and expectations were radically different for men and for women.

In this context, Sumit Sarkar believes that social reformers were motivated more by expediency than by a commitment to essentially liberal values. A "limited and controlled emancipation of wives" had to be seen in the context of traditional commitment to casteism, patriarchy and *shastric* functions.<sup>29</sup> Access to controlled education seemed like a good solution to this dilemma; sections of the *bhadralok* were indeed caught in a double bind. Logically, exposure to a liberal education should have meant a questioning of inequalities based on caste, class and gender. However these very questions could threaten the foundations of a well-worked out division of labour and double moral standards. Men may have balked at the performance of women's rituals such as their fasts and *bratas* yet they were aware that the underlying ideology was vital for the survival of family dignity, tradition and even honour. The way out was clearly to choose an educational system, texts and curriculum which would keep basic values intact while exposing women to a new world of experience and opportunities, however limited. Home tuition or later the *zenana* system of

learning, well chosen syllabi and a body of supporting literature were developed as suitable ways of mediating between the extremes of *antahpur* culture and values and the lure of emancipation. Tuition by men in the family was the earliest and most popular form of education for girls and women. By the middle of the century, peripatetic missionary tutors used to go to the *antahpurs* and teach women either singly or in groups. Considerable thought was given to the curriculum which was to be quite different from that of boys. The cultured *bhadramahila* or gentlewoman was to take what was supposedly the best for her from both worlds: yet she was not free to make the choice, not decide on options. Nor were these options easily or readily come by and involved years of debate and discussion.

That the principle of differentness is still a live issue is apparent if we look at quotations from two policy documents on education, separated in time by almost a century and a half: in 1984, the Commission for Planning of Higher Education in West Bengal set up by the CPI(M) government submitted its voluminous report without so much as bothering to give a sex-wise breakdown of those in various educational courses. Further, a sub-section of the chapter on "Courses of Study" which deal with "Home Science Education for Girls" laments the fact that there are only two home science colleges in the state which necessarily limit admission to an elite. There was an urgent need to expand home science education as it was a course which educated girls "to rebuild homes consistently with the demands of modern life, *teach to create an atmosphere of peace, happiness and moral and spiritual well being in the family*" (emphasis added). Further, and it is not clear how this goal fitted in with the earlier home-oriented ideal woman that home science was to create -- it would make girls "economically independent and capable citizens of the community".<sup>30</sup> Out of its 228 recommendations, there were only two which related to women, namely a plea for the expansion of home science and polytechnic education.

The spirit of this document does not appear to be too different from that of the Woods' Educational Despatch of 1854 which stated that

The importance of female education in India cannot be over-rated; and we have observed the evidence which is now afforded of

an increased desire on the part of the natives of India to give a good education to their daughters. By this means a far greater proportional impulse is imparted to the educational and *moral tone* of the people than by education of men<sup>31</sup> (emphasis added).

Both stressed the role of education in training women to build a moral and peaceful home environment. On the other hand, men are supposed to be trained for competition, performance and achievement in a range of modern courses and occupations: not only do girls rarely have access to many of these but also their performance in education is judged in relation to their accomplishments in other roles.

Through the decades, whether girls should be allowed to study in co-educational institutions, read science or only literature, prepare to earn a living or be good housewives and so on have been looked at by leading citizens as well as administrators, educationalists and policy makers. Each year more and more girls are entering the formal system of education and whether or not to send a middle class girl to school is now rarely a matter for family debate. Yet, attempts at ensuring sexual equality in access founder once more against ingrained prejudices. As individual talent accepts the mandate of the collectivity, an increasing number of girls go to college, training to be school teachers instead of scientists, librarians rather than doctors. There is no value judgement involved in saying that girls become school teachers, librarians and typists in large numbers; the question really is, given the right environment both at home and the educational system, would not some of these girls move into non-feminised areas of study and work?

### III

It is necessary then to look briefly at what schools teach, how they do so and what their basic ideology is. This would mean an examination of not only curriculum and syllabus but also modes of transmission of knowledge and the atmosphere in which it is done. It is now being increasingly recognised for instance that the text-book, whether it teaches English or mathematics, can, through the use of characters



and symbols in certain situations become a powerful medium for the perpetuation of stereotypes and role models. For instance an NCERT-sponsored study of Hindi text-books which are widely used in the country found that the ratio of boy-centred stories to girl-centred stories was 21:0. Again when the books made biographical references, 94 out of 110 relate to prominent men. In the thirteen English language text-books published by the Central Institute of English, Hyderabad, boy-centred stories outnumbered girl-centred ones by eighty-one to nine. Further, the general tenor in books in both the languages was to portray boys as courageous, achieving and interested in science and technology; girls and women were rarely portrayed in roles associated with economic activity or independence. A study of Marathi text-books found that even when girls were seen as being employed they were invariably portrayed in menial and subordinate roles.<sup>32</sup>

Taking note of the fact that such gross deviations from reality could indeed affect self-perceptions, the Women's Education Unit in the NCERT a few years back undertook projects to devise handbooks on how text-books should be written so as to improve the status of women. The handbook for mathematics demonstrates aptly how change in attitudes can be introduced through a supposedly value-neutral subject. Thus, where earlier, problem sums would deal with shopkeeper Joshi's purchases at the wholesale market and the monthly expenses of Mr. Sathe, the suggested problems ask students of Class III to work out how much Lakshman had in his bank account before he distributed equal sums to his daughter and to his son. At the middle school level, ratios, graphs and equations are introduced through the biographical details of women scientists and mathematicians. Of greater importance than the sums themselves are the instructions to teachers who are asked to weave in the text while teaching students how to solve a problem.<sup>33</sup>

The originators of these innovative handbooks are well aware of the fact that unless the teachers are convinced of the need to teach more imaginatively, children will concentrate on the solution only and not on the text. Clearly this is the crux of the problem: teachers are by and large a conservative force, who are not easily convinced of the need to teach or preach greater equality between the sexes through mathematics, physics or Hindi. Extensive courses to be covered in a set period of time limits the scope for innovative teaching. Nor is it easy

to start the process of text-book revision or ensure that the same text-books are to be taught in all the schools in the country. Further, text-book writers themselves are singularly resistant to change as they feel that radical deviations would clearly disturb the well-entrenched expectations of both the school community as well as the family.

One major advantage of the 10+2+3 system (where 10+2 refer to the years in school and +3 to the time spent on a first degree) is that it makes the learning of science and mathematics obligatory for all students upto the Class X level. Yet, though this pattern of education was officially adopted in 1968, it has still to be accepted in a few states. Consequently, under the old scheme, schools continue to offer home science and art for girls rather than science and mathematics. However, we also find that schools under the new scheme find ways of countering the system due to the professed inadequacy of teaching staff. Thus in the Jama Masjid area of Delhi, which caters to a largely Muslim population, girls' schools are unable to offer science and mathematics because qualified women teachers are not available. It is also not improbable that such schools are in fact catering to the demands for education of a certain kind for girls from an essentially *purdah* society.<sup>34</sup>

That the notion of what is right and proper for a girl to study permeates the educational system in general, is evident from the kind of choices that girls make at the +2 level, that is, for Classes XI and XII. A recent study of Delhi schools indicated that while girls constituted about 60 per cent of the arts stream and about 30 per cent in the science and commerce streams, over 40 per cent flocked to the relatively new vocational stream. Further, the subject-wise breakdown of vocational options showed that girls were concentrated in typing, weaving, textiles, health-care and beauty culture while boys chose opthalmics and optics, auditing and accounting in addition to office management. Again, for the "Socially Useful Productive Work" options in a non-academic area which children can opt for in Classes IX and X, choices are "markedly sex-typed and girls continue to do the same tasks in school as are assigned to them at home".<sup>35</sup> However, a look at the performance of girls in school-leaving examinations in various parts of the country indicate that not only is the pass level of girls higher than that of boys but also those who have opted for the science stream often fare as well-if not better-than their male peers.<sup>36</sup>

The scientific aptitude of girls is represented in school leaving results. However, two important questions need to be asked here: first, how many girls who fare well in science at the Class X examinations do in fact opt for it at the +2 stage and second, how many of those who offer science for the final school leaving examination continue with it or with related subjects at the degree level? While it is difficult to give precise answers there are indications that in some of the best schools in the country there is only one girl to four boys in the science section. Further, classroom observations of trainee teachers show that these girls are quiet and reserved non-participants. While they are diligent about their home-work and performed well in unit tests, they rarely take part in discussions which are dominated by the boys.<sup>37</sup> The fact that they are in a minority may have accounted for their low degree of participation. Nonetheless, those who taught Classes VI and VII found that girls were as assertive and definite in their point of view as boys, indicating that adolescent girls soon internalised the need to be submissive and obedient, rather than be questioning and argumentative, particularly in an environment where boys are in a majority.

It would appear then that far fewer girls do in fact go in for science and technology than would be reasonable to expect from their school-leaving results.<sup>38</sup> Clearly then, there are important non-academic factors which influence choices at the ages of sixteen or seventeen. These are related to social and familial expectations of what a girl's basic role in life is to be; if, as in the majority of cases, it is assumed that she is to be a good wife and devoted mother, who may, if she has time, work as a teacher or as a clerk, there seems little point investing time and energy on a career in science and other related areas. Again, if it is a question of investment of scarce resources, these are invariably invested in a boy: even if his sister has similar aptitudes, she more often than not, redirects them to traditional feminine-oriented courses. Underlying many of these decisions is of course a deep-seated conviction that a woman's basic nature equips her to perform better in certain areas than in others. Even when school results point to the contrary, families -- and indeed girls themselves -- choose to believe that there can be no true fulfilment in combining too many roles, or in competing to enter male-dominated disciplines.

A survey of parents<sup>39</sup> conducted in a private co-educational school in New Delhi found that 25 per cent said that they would not discriminate in role distribution between sons and daughters; on the other

hand, work outside the home such as fetching eggs and bread from the market, taking the dog for a walk or running an errand at the neighbours' were regarded as the boy's legitimate area of activity. Thus, only 1 per cent expected their sons to help in the kitchen, while 58 per cent felt that this was a daughter's function. She was also expected to sweep the floor, dust furniture and wash the occasional dish in many more instances than was the case for a son. Another questionnaire circulated among 66 teachers (44 women and 22 men) indicated that "male teachers display a traditional expectation of role behaviour from girls, whereas the women teachers believe in a definite personhood being given to girls and *ascribe roles to girls that are incongruent with our society's expectations*"<sup>40</sup> (emphasis added). Interestingly, though teachers of both sexes expected girls to be good at studies, there was greater variance regarding their social role.

This data is from an urban, progressive school, where the environment is organised to encourage the development of a girl's individuality and talent. The situation in the country's many co-educational and girls' only schools is very different: dominant patterns of socialisation both at home and in the school stress feminine docility, chastity and obedience. Girls are expected to study and even to perform well; however, they are not to be excessively competitive or demand the freedom of thought and expression that is essential for the development of *personhood* and not merely *womanhood* along prescribed lines. Krishna Kumar's<sup>41</sup> experiences of "growing up male" is amply substantiated by Leela Dube and Sudhir Kakar's<sup>42</sup> studies of male and female socialisation in India: thus watching girls heading straight home in "silent clusters" from school caused Kumar to believe that "girls are not individuals".<sup>43</sup> As boys, they were free to spend time on the road, experiment with their cycles and watch the world go by. Such small joys are rarely available to a large section of middle class girls; in fact, whether or not to allow talented gymnasts, debaters and actresses to participate in activities after school hours often becomes the cause of some tension in many homes. Parents raise legitimate questions of the dangers implicit in using public transportation, of girls coping with other participants and of the world at large. Then there are always the queries of curious relatives who want to know why Mina is not there to serve tea to them; such disapproval is invariably accompanied by approving noises at Rajesh's success at the computer and at football.

## IV

In nineteenth century Bengal, controlled and carefully monitored education for girls was an essential part of the reformist package. It was supposed to provide a life of dignity and genteelity to those hitherto exposed to violence and indignities within the home. Ironically in the closing years of the twentieth century, improved educational and occupational facilities for women have been matched by increasing violence against them, much of which is focused in and around the home.

Roop Kanwar, the young Rajput girl who was burnt on her husband's funeral pyre on September 4, 1987 has created history in recent times. While she has passed into the realm of mythology, an object for various academic exercises, the event raises several important issues. For instance, at her *barsi* ceremony in 1988, after the *Gita Path*, glorification of *sati* began "as those attending the *path* including the parents and in-laws of Roop Kanwar started raising pro-*sati* slogans".<sup>44</sup> Women are reported to have raised slogans such as "jo *sati* ko satayga, *zindagi bhar* pachtayega" (he or she who troubles *sati* will regret it all his or her life). While the following day 45 arrests were made, the incidents only highlight the strength of deep-seated social attitudes toward femininity. Of particular relevance is the participation of women in the glorification of *sati*; at the same time, the documentary film "From the Burning Embers" provides us with accounts of articulate village women who felt that Roop Kanwar had been forced on to the funeral pyre.<sup>45</sup> They also questioned why men were not expected to immolate themselves, and why women alone were subjected to various indignities and anguish. At the same time, a socially conscious college teacher was totally unprepared for the responses of some of her students. Roop Kanwar, they felt was right after all, as woman's essence lay in sacrifice and devotion. It would be simplistic to attempt an analysis of the variance in these women's attitudes as clearly different situations evoke different responses; of importance nonetheless is the fact that in parts of rural Rajasthan, the woman's essential role has become a matter for some debate.



Roop Kanwar's death, the suicide by hanging of three educated sisters in Kanpur, the 1319 officially reported "dowry deaths"<sup>46</sup> in 1987, endless cases of molestation, kidnapping of women and children are only part of the growing violence against women. At one level these can be variously viewed as symptomatic of increasing criminalisation of the urban lumpen, the outcome of an amoral cinema industry which breeds frustration and anger, a burgeoning population with growing aspirations and so on. At another, more fundamental level, the acts of physical or other violence against women -- and against other weaker sections of Indian society symbolise an entrenched commitment to a gender-biased, hierarchical order. This commitment manifests itself on the one hand in the glorification of motherhood, of the *sati* or chaste woman, and on the other, in the brutal suppression of a belief system based on the dominance of an upper-caste, middle class male Hindu elite.

Analysing 147 reports on marital violence since 1979 in the journal *Manushi*, Madhu Kishwar<sup>47</sup> concluded that the demand for more dowry was not the only or major cause of violence: "in their own accounts, women tended to emphasise that the husband's and in-law's cruelty was causeless." Further, violence "could be triggered off on any pretext and was essentially non-negotiable".<sup>48</sup>

Ashis Nandy has made a distinction between "*sati*-as-an-event and *sati*-as-a system".<sup>49</sup> The event shocks, horrifies and results in people taking up positions which they fiercely defend; in time, the arguments are forgotten, lost. Of greater relevance is the notion of *sati*-as-a-system, or as I understand it of the ideology of *sati*, which manifests itself in the oppression and subordination of women. Particularly significant is the fact that most women themselves internalise many of the values arising out of this ideology. They accept the ideology of difference as inequality; yet there are a growing number of instances of those who question, and, in their own way, argue for difference as a positive value. Such instances are to be found not only in the intellectual arguments of concerned scholars but also in the lives of ordinary women. Some go to *Manushi* with tales of anguish, others write about personal experiences and views and a handful fight for their rights in the courts of law. Here I shall go into the details of only one woman's life; in the concluding pages I will discuss my reasons for doing so as well as try to draw some implications of Kailashbhashini's life for women in the late twentieth century.



## V

In the nineteenth century, growing industrialisation and a cut-throat market economy encouraged the British middle class to reinforce, through various sources, the image of the female home-maker *par excellence*. Soon in India, the emergent Bengali middle class or *bhadralok* culture<sup>50</sup> fast realised the merit of a sympathetic home environment based on the willing cooperation of the woman. As we have seen in earlier sections, in order to create this compliant and understanding woman and bring her away from the culture of the *antahpur*, it was essential for her to have the right kind of education. Thus learning and writing for women were primarily introduced for the creation of accomplished housewives and daughters. The word was in many senses, an instrument of power and control over women ensuring as it did their development within a prescribed format. However, though men may have been the owners of what they wrote, they could neither control interpretations of their work nor fully monitor women's access (however limited) to the preserve of male power; a few used their skills to express themselves frankly on prevailing social injustices. Women wrote novels, essays and about themselves, providing valuable insights into their lives. The articulation of such views often acted as a catharsis, triggered by the unequal encounter between the sexes and between cultures. With access to learning and writing women started examining hierarchical family relations and their own roles. They were helped by an environment which increasingly stressed the need for social, physical and occupational mobility. The East India Company and later, the British empire, provided substantial scope for ambitious and adventurous men who wanted to be freed of the feudal frame of reference and complex family obligations.

In some cases, and this is particularly true of the autobiographical writings of women, the act of putting pen to paper or recounting one's existence is like a cry of anguish against a life of oppression. The dictated life of Sharadasundari Debi, mother of the eminent social reformer, Keshub Chunder Sen, is a long and sad narration of ill-treatment by her in-laws after her widowhood, at the age of nineteen.

But it is also the story of a strong-minded and determined woman who was successful in creating space for herself in a segregated and hierarchical society.<sup>51</sup> Between 1876 and the nineteen seventies, there is a record of at least fifty autobiographies and autobiographical sketches having been written by Bengali women. The earliest was by Rassundari Debi, the wife of an East Bengal *zamindar*, who was born in 1811. Unlike many of those who followed her, the self-taught Rassundari received little encouragement from her family, and recounted how she used to hide pages removed from her son's books within the folds of her sari. Rassundari wrote her autobiography in two parts; the earlier part which was written in the late 1870s gives a more comprehensive account of her life. She felt strongly about being denied education, and reflected, "women were indeed unfortunate, and could be counted as being like animals". But "my mind would not accept this, and it was always restless with the urge to learn".<sup>52</sup> *Amar Jiban* or *My Life* is the account of this amazing woman's quest for learning.

In the early years it was not unusual for illiterate or semilliterate women to talk about their lives to scribes; these were published sometimes several decades later. After the middle of the last century, when newspapers, journals and public meetings discussed women's education, spoke for or against child marriage, widow remarriage and the system of *purdah* or female seclusion, women from *bhadralok* families started writing about their lives as well as commenting on the above issues. In addition the role of the *bhadramahila* in changing Bengali society, relations with her husband and the need for greater awareness on health, hygiene and child-care were discussed in the growing number of women's journals and magazines.<sup>53</sup> Kailashbashini Debi's *Janaika Grihabadhur Diary* (A Certain Housewife's Diary)<sup>54</sup> is in the form of reminiscences of her life between 1846 and 1873 and was put together and published only in 1953. It would appear that she kept rough notes which she organised only after her husband's death in 1873, when she was 44 years old. As experiences of over a quarter of a century are compressed in a little over thirty printed pages, clearly she wrote selectively on issues which she remembered well and had been influenced by. An important theme in Kailashbashini's writing is her evolving relationship with her husband, Kissory Chand Mitra, whom she married when she was 11 and the tensions his reformist tendencies created in her mind. Kissory Chand and his brother Peary Chand were both deeply influenced by the ideology of the Brahmo reform move-

ment as well as by Derozio's Young Bengal group. They reacted against polygamy and believed firmly that women should be educated. Accordingly, Kissory Chand taught his wife himself and later arranged for an English woman tutor for her. He was a man of letters, being the editor of the *Indian Field* and a regular contributor to the *Calcutta Review*. While it is not clear whether he actually joined the Brahmo Samaj, he was greatly impressed by many of its tenets and had several friends who were its members. His premature death was attributed to intemperance in food and drink.<sup>55</sup>

Though Kailashbashini did not mention how her husband died, the last few pages of her *Diary* reflected a certain helpless sorrow. She mentioned more than once her reservations about the company that he had started keeping on their return to Calcutta after a happy life in the districts. The fact that Kailashbashini wrote as freely as she did on her friendship with her husband as well as about her anguish over his last few years is indicative of a degree of candour not expected of a Hindu widow. But then, Kissory Chand Mitra's wife had been exposed to much more than most average middle class Bengali women. In addition, through education she had acquired the ability to express herself freely: her *Diary* was her confidante in later life. She was also in many ways a fitting example of a *zenana*-educated women. A certain degree of fluency in both English and Bengali meant that she was able to read fairly extensively -- as well as to liken her at times lonely *mofussil* (district) life to that of Robinson Crusoe's. She was also able to teach her young daughter, Kumudini. Unlike other educated women of her day, Kailashbashini decided to write about her life. Though we are given no reasons for her wanting to do so, the *Diary* clearly fulfilled an important role in her later life: through its pages she freely expressed the dilemmas faced by a woman caught between tradition and the inexorable forces of changes during those action-packed years.

In many ways, Kailashbashini's conflicts reflected, in microcosm, the drama being enacted on a much bigger stage. When, in around the 1830s, Kissory Chand Mitra was first attracted to the reform movement, it was entering its most dynamic phase, by the time he died, the movement was deeply divided, one of the major controversial issues being the role of women and how they should be equipped to face change. Not unexpectedly, the nature and extent of women's education was an important talking point. While the more orthodox, and certainly dominant sections of Hindu society were unwilling to edu-

cate their womenfolk at all, Brahmos too were not united on this question. For most, the ideal was *zenana* education which conveniently combined the notion of feminine seclusion with a modicum of basic learning. By and large, opinion on the education of girls was divided along the following lines: while Dwarkanath Ganguly, Sivanath Sastri and other radical Brahmos felt that as both men and women should have equal chances in life, there was no justification for the study of separate subjects or limits to the level to which girls should be educated, mainstream Brahmos, led by Keshub Chunder Sen and Umesh Chandra Datta, editor of the influential *Bamabodhini Patrika* (Journal for the Enlightenment of Women) as well as a section of more enlightened Hindus were advocates of limited education for girls, with a separate curriculum. On the other hand, conservative Hindus, most of whom were, at best, prepared to allow a modicum of *zenana* education, were greatly concerned with the harmful effects of education, which they felt would make women negligent of their families and lax in housekeeping. In the early 1860s, the *Bamabodhini Patrika* (which was founded by the followers of Sen) had started a scheme of education for girls and women through correspondence known as *Antahpur Shiksha* (home education). As a feasible alternative to a few years of schooling in a formal institution this course provided the opportunity for girls to continue with learning even after they were married.<sup>36</sup> *Zenana* education through the columns of the *Bamabodhini Patrika* as well as from home tutors continued to be the most popular method of education of girls for several years.

Kailashbashini was initially taught by her husband, and later, when the couple moved to Calcutta, became a student of the *zenana* system. Her reflections on life were clearly influenced by contemporary events as well as by all that she had been through personally. For her, reform had been a bitter-sweet experience: on the one hand while it had meant personal emancipation and the evolution of a meaningful marital relationship, it had, on the other, also involved putting up with a style of life which ultimately spelt destruction for her immediate family. Kailashbashini who was 11 years old when she was married had a great eye for detail, dates and names, the description of each incident or occasion was accompanied by meticulous information on the day, month and year as well as of the persons encountered. Her ability to enjoy the countryside and the experience of travelling for days on and along the waterways of East Bengal are evocatively described. Her visit

to Plassey -- "where the British and the *nawabs* first fought" -- was an exciting event: she wrote "even though at that time I felt the loss of my son acutely, I experienced a deep sense of satisfaction when I came home". After the birth of her daughter in 1847, she wrote: "My mother-in-law was very sad. She said, I have lost gold and got glass instead". Kailashbashini did not dwell on her mother-in-law's feelings much but goes on to describe Kissory Chand's responses, and the discomforts of her confinement. Her husband wrote to say that he was very happy and that "you should feel no sorrow. All are the same in the eyes of the *Jagatpita* (father of the world, or God). We should also treat all equally. I am awaiting the time when you will be able to write to me".<sup>57</sup> But it was a long time before Kailashbashini could reply, confined as she was to a room which she likened to "a kind of jail room". For almost a month the upper-caste post-partum woman was not to touch anything nor communicate with others except functionaries assigned specific tasks. With their young daughter Kumudini, the couple soon started touring the *mofussil* areas together, often spending long days on the river "when we played cards and chatted". Kailashbashini kept track of her husband's work and proudly reported the establishment of a hospital or a school. Wherever possible, she made friends with other Bengali women. While family members used to visit the districts occasionally, the young couple spent most of the time on their own. On her visits to either her parents or her in-laws, Kailashbasini recounted how she used to be counting the days for her return to her husband. Kissory Chand used to teach her English, and in 1852 when he was posted to Calcutta, he engaged an English woman, Miss Tugod, as tutor for his wife. This lady used to teach two other *bhadramahilas* also, and was paid Rs. 25 by each family. Kailashbashini added "and there was tuition from the home guru (her husband) as well. In this way a certain amount of knowledge was acquired".<sup>58</sup> In Jahanabad there were not many women whom Kailashbashini could befriend:

My daughter and my husband were my only support. I did not see the faces of any other living being. Not that this caused me much discomfort. When he used to go to the *mofussil*, I used to live like Robinson Crusoe. I ate, slept, read and did needle-work. I also taught my daughter and wrote this book. And I used to count the

days for his return. When my husband came back, I was greatly relieved.<sup>59</sup>

Life changed for Kailashbashini when her husband became a Junior Magistrate in Calcutta; the last few pages of her brief *Diary* make frequent mention of her husband's growing attraction for the more Westernised, liberal Bengalis, many of whom were Brahmos. Kissory Chand obviously enjoyed the ideas of his new friends, where no doubt discussions were carried out over a glass of port or wine. When Kaishbashini objected, her husband chided her affectionately, but did not give much attention to her protestations. As her husband's interaction with social reformers increased, Kailashbashini too started mixing with their wives. At the homes of eminent Brahmos Ramtanu Lahiri and Ramgopal Ghosh, she ate food prepared by a cook and served by a Muslim bearer. Though she clearly found the situation somewhat unusual, strong conviction of the validity of her own way of life left her unaffected. She reported:

I told Babu about Ramtanu Babu's wife. Babu asked "where did she eat"? I replied, "Why, with everyone else. After all who am I or who is she, or who is anyone for that matter"? Babu replied, "that indeed is true and it is only Bengalis who make an unnecessary fuss". I don't believe in Hindu rituals, but nonetheless, I observe them. The reason for this is that if I slacken even a bit, my husband, will cease being a Hindu. The Hindus are my closest relatives. I cannot give them up and hence I observe all the rituals. My husband can do what he likes, there is no problem in that. Bengalis observe this religion, and hence those who have brains, do not observe the Bengali religion. I don't believe in it but I will never tell my husband this. If Babu heard this from my lips I cannot describe how happy he would be.<sup>60</sup>

While Kailashbashini was not actively hostile to the Brahmo faith, she was reluctant to give up what she had been brought up to believe in. In a particularly dramatic passage she described her discussion with Kissory Chand regarding their differing beliefs. She told her husband that as from childhood he had been teaching her as one would teach a pet bird to speak, "I cannot have any views that are basically different



from yours. But I will not leave Hinduism and I have given you the reasons why". Her husband retorted "do you have so little belief in me"? To which Kailashbashini replied, "No, that can never be; but I do not believe in your style of life". Finally, "Babu understood and did not say anything more".<sup>61</sup> Kailashbashini's questioning and sceptical mind was critical of some aspects of Hinduism and she clearly had a growing interest in the Brahmo faith. However, on balance she felt that it was her duty to uphold certain Hindu values at a time when families were being torn apart by religious and social dissensions. This decision was not free of tension, and the dilemma comes through in her writings. As an obedient wife she knew that it was her duty to follow her husband and his commitments. Yet, she ultimately chose to abide by her own beliefs -- not only because she was convinced of their basic validity, but also through an intuitive conviction of the stability of staying with the known and tested.

The year that Company rule ended "there was a comet sighted in the sky and in the month of *Aswin* (September), there was a terrible earthquake". It also brought to an end Kissory Chand's employment with the British and he was unceremoniously stripped of his title of *Rai Bahadur*. In the days that followed, Kailashbashini consoled him and even suggested that she could contribute to the family income by selling her needlework. Her husband was apparently appreciative of her support and understanding:

Babu said "I have gained great courage from your words... From your words I realise that you are as brave as I am, that you are as intelligent as I am and in fact that your staying power is greater than mine. In knowing this all my pain has gone".<sup>62</sup>

The pages of Kailashbashini's *Diary* are alive with descriptions of her relationship with her husband, which among other things was characterised by a strong sense of companionship and mutual respect. They not only played cards with each other, read together but also argued on matters of considerable social and religious significance. Kailashbashini's writings give the distinct impression that not only were the discussions frank and forthright, but also that Kissory Chand often accepted his wife's point of view and reasoning. Despite her maintenance of strict *purdah*, travels in the districts of Bengal gave

Kailashbashini insights into different ways of life. The fact that Kissory Chand had chosen to keep his wife and child with him provided for the development of a strong family bond where both partners looked upon the home as a refuge from the fast changing world outside. Judging by the narration of events, neither Kailashbashini's family nor that of her conjugal home had much of a role to play in their lives. Though as a dutiful daughter-in-law she attended every important family function, Kailashbashini never failed to recount how both she and her husband were counting the days for her return.

*Janaika Grihabadhur Diary* is remarkable for its candour and insights. It describes in some detail the life of an Indian working for the East India Company through the eyes of a woman who was educated enough not only to teach her child, be familiar with the scriptures of other religions but also to write lucidly on moral and social issues. At the end of the *Diary*, the editors have included a page of monthly accounts and details of jewellery, both of which were meticulously maintained by Kailashbashini. Without the all-encompassing purview of older family members and in-laws, Kailashbashini developed a strong sense of personal identity and was quite clear, particularly in the early years of her marriage, on her role in preserving domestic harmony: though she did make occasional statements about the limitations of a woman's mind, her well-reasoned response to Hinduism at the level of ritual and behaviour convey the impression of a balanced, independent-minded woman.

Kailashbashini's *Diary* starts in the year her son died and ends with the death of Kissory Chand in 1873:

Oh reader, here my book ends. Today my life is finished... I came back a widow. When this name (widow) comes to my ears, it is like a thunderbolt. Alas, what a frightening name (word) -- hearing it is like having a heart attack!<sup>62</sup>

It is possible that Kailashbashini's apprehensions of widowhood were based on an awareness of the singularly oppressive and limited life of a Hindu widow. What is more possible however is that her agonised words lamented the premature end of a life of companionship and mutual trust. This evolution of a husband-wife bond with limited interference from the larger family collectivity was not usual in

nineteenth century Bengal. To characterise it as a marriage based on the "romantic love" notion which was growing in the West would also perhaps be inappropriate. It would be more realistic to liken Kailashbashini's attitude to Kissory Chand as being one of *bhakti* or devotion, of thanksgiving to a man she admired, and who had done much for her. But her account is not free from a certain implicit regret and a feeling that after a point of time, situations had overtaken her. While she did not express openly her resentment at this turn of events, it is implied in many of her musings. Kailashbashini was an independent-minded woman, who nonetheless knew when and how to give in. She was a fine strategist who combined tact with a degree of firmness. Yet, in the ultimate analysis, she was a helpless and lonely figure in a world where men and the male way of life determined the fate of families.

Written from the point of view of one deeply affected by social change, Kailashbashini's *Diary* provides insights into how an individual woman responded to the events influencing her life: her story is neither a paean for change, nor an indictment of it. Rather, it gives a realistic assessment of how she was affected and influenced. Using the tools of literacy provided to her by these very forces of change, Kailashbashini gives us a fairly vivid idea of her life and its concomitant tensions. She started reading and writing in her mid-teens by which time she had been socialised into the ethos of the *antahpur*; nonetheless, she looked eagerly to the male preserve of learning, combining her innate commitment to order and continuity with her desire for access to the new knowledge. Her education gave her the skill to express on paper; learning did not merely create an unthinkingly devoted helpmeet but also a questioning, and at times troubled mind. In part, Kailashbashini's apprehensions regarding the social reform movement indicated a willingness to question some of the values of the Western-oriented yet staunchly male-dominated society. Ultimately, her tenacity in sticking by tradition was of little use as she became a helpless witness to her husband's self-destruction. As a woman, she was in no position to impose her will on his: though she had in some areas resisted Kissory Chand's dominance, she was, by and large, his creation, his willing student. Not did Kailashbashini write openly on her ultimate anguish, of her suffering as her life's companion abandoned an existence of simple pleasures for the more compelling intellectual stimulation and way of life of his peers.

Education did not result in too many Kailashbashnis; what it did do however, was to provide those who were interested, access to new kinds of information as well as to a certain way of thinking and of analysing situations. Most importantly, acquisition of the skill of writing helped not only in documenting events but also in giving expression to feelings and emotions.

With their return to Calcutta, Kailashbashini clearly found certain social relationships strenuous: while she could not accept her husband's new life style, nor his associates, she was not free to ignore their implications either. It is possible that she often sought refuge in the pages of her *Diary*. In its present form, the *Diary* reads as a subsequent re-casting of earlier events. Though Kailashbashini did not give any reasons for keeping a journal, it was evidently a source of great comfort to her. For instance in the passage where she described the reasons for remaining a Hindu despite a basic sympathy for the reformist cause, Kailashbashini was clearly using writing as a medium for externalising a deep-seated conflict. By doing so she was able, presumably to cope with the situation better.

Writing fiction, poetry as well as about themselves were forms of self-expression at which a small number of *bhadramahilas* soon became quite adept. Life in the *zenana* undoubtedly provided women with the opportunity to share the joys and their anxieties with female affines and relatives; yet such communications had their limitations as well as structural constraints. For some, literary writing provided a newly acquired freedom, creative yet not threatening. Descriptions of delicate manoeuvrings, strategic negotiations as well as outright frustration all find their place in these texts which range from well-organised books and articles to random and somewhat haphazard jottings. A reading of these texts becomes meaningful for a better understanding of the impact of social forces on women's lives; in the present context, such writings are examples of the liberational potential of education.

By the middle of the 1850s, upper middle class, upper caste Bengali women had started writing in journals, and newspapers, while a handful also wrote full-length books. Not all had Kailashbashini's determination or strength of mind; many wrote in a manner which clearly indicated a dominant male influence. Their aim was to reiterate the new goals of womanhood which neither the *antahpur*, nor interestingly enough, education was to disturb or threaten. Women who wrote

had been educated at home, or may even have spent a few years in a girl's school. As we have seen, a well-monitored curriculum and access to a limited number of texts was controlled by men in the family and in educational institutions. By the end of the century, a steady trickle began entering the highly recommended feminine profession of teaching; a few became doctors, others became involved in the national movement and in social work. Most, of course, remained enlightened housewives, trained in the art of modern home management.

The educational system, then, has performed its role well in the creation of the ideal women; yet Kailashbashini and her spiritual heiresses in the present century are also the products of the same system which, by granting individuals certain skills, has equipped them to be considered as persons in their own rights: by drawing a distinction between womanhood and personhood, I am re-stating in another way, the two conceptualisations of difference. Difference as inequality celebrates sexual difference which is graded on a scale, while difference as a value celebrates sexual difference for the sake of this very difference. Difference as inequality implies belief in a distinct manhood and a womanhood, while difference as a value views individuals as persons. Persons, whether they are men or women have specific attributes but there is no necessary stereotypification or ranking involved. In fact, there is, as Kailashbashini's life has shown, a questioning of stereotypes and of an unequal hierarchical order, and a demand to be considered as separate, but equal. Of course, such notions are mere thoughts hinted at in Kailashbashini's writings; in contemporary India they are the mandate of a growing number of women who are becoming more aware of their *rights as persons* and not merely of their *obligations as women*.

Legal intervention,<sup>64</sup> the work of voluntary organisations and a number of groups committed to the creation of awareness are playing an increasingly important role in this process of consciousness raising. The natural tendency of the educational system would be to perpetuate inequality; in earlier sections, discussions of existing policies as well as of practices have shown how easily education becomes a handy tool in a stratified society. But there is also the other, more subtle, if not covert process at work: that which creates the mind which questions. The inquiring mind is supposedly one of the chief goals of education; yet, training by rote, an uninteresting curriculum and disinterested teachers do not encourage the spirit of discovery or of

inquiry. There is in all of us, however, the Dahrendorfian urge to be free, and questioning is but one part of a mind that scales freedom and self-expression. This paper has attempted to show how education provides the training and skill for expression, inquiry and an intellectual search for options. The manner in which individuals use these is a function of their socialisation and commitment. Often, one's socialisation may be at variance with a deep-seated commitment to change. The choices that one makes then are very much a product of one's ability to stake a claim for one's convictions and beliefs.

### NOTES

I am grateful to Aparna Basu, Sureshachandra Shukla, Vina Mazumdar and Hiranmay Karlekar for comments on an earlier version of this paper.

- 1 Dahrendorf discusses his views on liberty in the Reith lectures put together in *The New Liberty* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975). This quotation is from "From Expansion to Improvement: Changing the Subject of History", p. 3.
  - 2 See his *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).
  - 3 In the present context, Amartya Sen's discussion of entitlements within the family and in society is most appropriate. See in particular his "Gender and Cooperative Conflicts", Discussion paper number 1342, October 1987, Harvard Institute of Economic Research, Harvard University.
  - 4 The Preamble to the Constitution establishes a commitment to liberty and equality, as well as "Justice, Social, Economic and Political". Article 14 deals with equality before law, Article 15 prohibits discrimination *inter alia* on grounds of sex. Part (3) of the same article permits the state to make special provision for women and children. Article 16 provides for equality of opportunity in terms of employment. In 1976 an amendment to the Constitution added Fundamental Duties in Article 51A. Relevant here is clause (c) which lays down the duty of renouncing "practices derogatory to the dignity of women".
  - 5 In my "Education and Inequality" in Andre Beteille's *Equality and Inequality: Theory and Practice* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982). I have looked at how education has brought about new inequalities among certain groups including women and the Scheduled Castes.
- Kole Omotoso, "The Language of our Dreams or the Dreams of our Language" in *Criticism and Ideology -- Second African Writer's Conference* (Stockholm, 1986), edited by K.H. Petersen, Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1988, p. 57 deals eloquently with the forces of neocolonialism as does Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind*, (London: James Currey, 1986).
- 6 On p. 45 of his "Gender and Cooperative Conflicts" (Discussion paper No. 1342,



Harvard Institute of Economic Research, 1987) Amartya Sen draws attention to the consistent tendency of viewing women as patients rather than as agents within the family and in society as a whole. Reiterating his well-known position that bargaining relations in the family result in cooperation for survival within the overall environment of conflict, Sen shows that it is important to understand the role of "perception and agency" in determining women's general well being. A number of Indian researchers have been considerably influenced by this conceptual approach. Gerda Lerner's "Placing Women in History: Definition and Challenges" in her *The Majority Finds its Past -- Placing Women in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) discusses the trend in American History of "contribution" history which while documenting the roles of important women nonetheless ends up "treating women as victims of oppression" which again places them "in a male-defined conceptual framework" (p. 148). The quotation in the text is also from the same page.

- 7 Any brief assessment of theory exposes itself to the accusation of misrepresentation; this is particularly true when dealing with a complex area such as French feminist thought in the post-1968 period. In this context, Toril Moi's "Introduction" to her *French Feminist Thought* is an excellent overview of themes; Chapters by Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and others, all foremost exponents of *l'écriture féminine* discuss the use of a language, written in the white ink (i.e. woman's milk) of difference, where differentness resides not only in themes and approaches but in how women form a language out of their physiology. Drawing on the work of neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and the Deconstruction of Jacques Derrida, these abstruse theorists make the important political point that as a woman thinks, writes and experiences life differently, "phallogocentric Western thought" and all that it stands for needs to be rejected and replaced by a woman's experience which lives through her metaphors and her language. For an earlier English introduction to these writings see Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, *New French Feminisms* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979).
- 8 For instance, foremost exponents of this school of thought such as Mary Daly (*Gyn/Ecology*) and Adrienne Rich (*On Lies, Secrets and Silence*) ask for a return to femaleness, to a basic female essence. Such theories can, without much difficulty, lead to a reductionist essentialism; they also lend credence to a male/female opposition which can be conveniently ranked on a hierarchy of male: culture: superior in opposition to woman: nature: subordinate. See Linda Alcoff's "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *SIONS: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1988, for a discussion of cultural feminism and Deconstruction.
- 9 In her well-known *In a Different Voice* Carol Gilligan discusses male and female differences in perceptions to rights and responsibilities; based on data from 3 empirical studies, she concludes that women appear to temper responsibility with caring while men are more concerned with fulfilling their obligations without getting unnecessarily involved. Women students also appear to respond better to what Mary Field Belenky *et al* call "connected teaching" (*Women's Ways of Knowing*, New York: Basic Books, 1986) rather than to impersonal, "separated teaching."
- 10 See his *Social Theory and Social Structure*, (New York: The Free Press, 1968) for a detailed elaboration of the notion of relative deprivation and its implications.

## 164 *Democracy and Education in India*

- 11 In his *Stratagems and Spoils* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), F.G. Bailey discusses the public face of politics and the private wisdom of participants in the context of a few case studies based on his field observations.
- 12 Andre Beteille, *The Idea of Natural Inequality* (London: School of Economics 1980), p. 60. In his "Race and Caste: A Reconsideration", (mimeo 1989) Beteille makes the point that Women's Studies can contribute not only towards "a fuller understanding of relations between the sexes but also for a deeper insight into the general problem of inequality" (p. 6). His acceptance of the role of Women's Studies in widening the social scientists' epistemological base marks a major shift in the position of a leading sociologist. From another discipline, psychologist Carol Gilligan raises similar questions on the association of difference with qualities ranged in a hierarchy. See *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
- 13 See p. 26 of Mary Warnock's "The Distribution of Education" in her *Schools of Thought* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977). The author discusses with great clarity the notions of equality and egalitarianism in this essay.
- 14 Quoted on p. 30 of Warnock, *ibid.*
- 15 From p. 177 of J.P. Naik's "Equality, Quality and Quantity in Indian Education" in the *International Review of Education's* Jubilee Number, 1979.
- 16 Pierre Bourdieu and J. Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1976).
- 17 Rammohun Roy put forth his views on women in five pamphlets, two petitions and a number of letters. Written originally in Bengali, he translated these into English so as to make them available to a larger reading public. These quotations are from his second tract on *sati* entitled "A Second Conference Between an Advocate for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows Alive" as it appears on pp 51-2 of Sophia Dobson Collet's *Life and Letters of Rammohun Roy* (Calcutta: A.C. Sarkar, 1913, edited by Hem Chandra Sarkar).
- 18 See in particular chapters I & II of J.S. Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971) (1869).
- 19 In their "Sex Differences and Cognitive Abilities: A Sterile Field of Enquiry?" Dorothy Griffiths and Esther Saraga give a competent overview of these scientific trends. Their essay appears in Oonagh Hartnett, et. al's, *Sex-role Stereotyping* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1979).
- 20 Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1964) (1933), p. 60.
- 21 Joan Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (London: Croom Helm Ltd. 1980), p. 37.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 38. In particular, Chapters 1, 2, 4 & 5 deal with notions of femininity and emerging ideas on women's capacities.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 24 See for instance Nancy F. Cott's "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850" in *SIQNS*, Vol. 4, no. 21, 1978, pp. 219-236 for the growth of these ideas on feminine sexuality.
- 25 From p. 3 of Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

- 26 Part One of Showalter's book is full of interesting information on Victorian notions of women's mental disorders.
- 27 See the Bangladeshi historian Ghulam Murshid's most informative *Reluctant Debutante: Response of Bengali Women to Modernisation 1849-1905* (Rajshahi University Press 1982), and Meredith Borthwick's *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1885* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) for considerable material on the lives of women and on attitudes to and of women during this period. Borthwick categorises the *bhadramahilas* as the women from *bhadralok* homes and deals at length with their responses to education, the family, marriage, dress reform and so on.
- 28 While men wrote extensively on women in the *antahpur* similar writings by women were not unknown; the two most noteworthy are Bamasundari Debi's *Kā Kā Kasanskar Tirohitha Hoile Desher Sri-bridhi Hoibey?* (Which are the Superstitions that Need to be Removed for the Country's Prosperity?) published in 1861 and Kailashbhashini Debi (Gupta's) *Hindu Mahilaganer Hinabastha* (The Lowly Position of Hindu Women) published in 1864.
- 29 Sumit Sarkar, "The Women's Question in Nineteenth Century Bengal" in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid's edited *Women and Culture*, p. 160.
- 30 Government of West Bengal, *Report of the Commission for Planning of Higher Education in West Bengal* (New Delhi: Government of West Bengal, 1984), p. 144.
- 31 From Selections from Educational Records, Calcutta, 1922, Part II, p. 388.
- 32 Kamlesh Nischol, *The Invisible Woman* (New Delhi, Amaltas, 1978) and *Women and Girls as Portrayed in Hindi Text Books* (New Delhi, NCERT, 1976). In Vasudha Dhanagwar's "Women Who Use the Marriage Act", *India International Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 1 1985, Marathi text books have been analysed.
- 33 NCERT has brought out three handbooks on textbook writing, namely Status of Women through Curriculum, Elementary Teachers Handbook, 1982, Status of Women through Curriculum, Secondary and Senior Secondary Stages, 1984, and Status of Women through Teaching of Mathematics -- A Teacher's Handbook, 1984. All three are interesting and informative.
- 34 *Challenge of Education* (New Delhi, Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1986), p. 43 discusses the non-implementation of the 10+2+3 system particularly in respect of the education of girls. Observation on schools in the Jama Masjid area were made by a Muslim girl student of Jamia Millia Islamia who has studied in one such school.
- 35 Usha Nayar, "Education of Girls at the Secondary Level in India," unpublished paper, 1983. It gives a detailed analysis of streaming of students in different disciplines in Delhi schools.
- 36 *Patriot*, New Delhi, 25 May 1985; this report merely confirms what national data in *Education in India* volumes clearly show.
- 37 Jamia Millia, observation of B.Ed. student.
- 38 Rajani Kumar, "Secondary Education for Girls: The What and How", *Education Quarterly*, October 1982, Vol. XXIV, No. 4. Her analysis of Delhi applies equally to the rest of the country.
- 39 From Vibha Parthasarathi's "Socialisation, Women and Education: An Experiment" in Karuna Chanana's edited *Socialisation, Education and Women* (New Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1988).

- 40 Ibid., p. 211.
- 41 Krishna Kumar, "Growing up Male", *Seminar*, 318, February 1986.
- 42 Leela Dube, "On the Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Review of Womens' Studies, Vol. XXIII, No. 18, 30 April 1988, p. WS-11. See also Sudhir Kakar's *The Inner World - A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981). His later *Mystics Shamans and Doctors* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984) gives interesting case histories of how traditional society copes with psychic stress among women.
- 43 Kumar, n. 41, p. 22.
- 44 From the *Times of India*, New Delhi, 23 September 1988.
- 45 This is a 40 minute documentary made by Mediastorm, a group of five young women trained in video technology. It deals with the aftermath of the Roop Kanwar incident as well as with the response of activists and politicians.
- 46 From p. 32 of *Parliamentary News and Views Service*, Budget Session 1988, quoting Minister of State for Home Affairs, P. Chidambaram's response to a question by Syed Shahabuddin.
- 47 Madhu Kishwar analyses reasons for increasing domestic violence in "Battered!" in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 24 September 1989, pp. 12-19.
- 48 Ibid., p. 14.
- 49 Nandy makes this point in his "Sati as Kaliyuga", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIII, No. 38, 17 September 1988, p. 1976.  
 Apart from "Sati: A Nineteenth Century Tale of Women, Violence and Protest" in his *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), Nandy has also written, "The Sociology of Sati", *Indian Express*, 5 October 1987; and "The Human Factor", *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 17 January 1988. See also, Imrana Qadeer and Zoya Hasan, "Deadly Politics of the State and Its Apologists", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 November 1987; and Sujata Patel and Krishna Kumar, "Defenders of Sati", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23 January 1988.
- 50 For a discussion of the term *bhadralok* see J.H. Broomfield's *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 13. While Broomfield envisaged the *bhadralok* as a distinct category, Rajat Kanta Ray in his *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal 1875-1927* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), is more inclined to conceptualise the *bhadralok* as comprising "respectable society" rather than a homogenous group.
- 51 Sharadasundari Devi dictated her life to her grandson-in-law Jogendralal Khashtigir. It was published in Bengali as *Atmakatha* (Autobiography) in 1913.
- 52 From p. 28 of Rassundari's *Amar Jiban* included in Vol. I of Nareshchandra Jana et al.'s *Atmakatha* (Calcutta, Ananya Prakashan, 1981).
- 53 See Borthwick, n. 27, Chapters Three and Eight.
- 54 Kailashbhashini Debi's *Janaika Grihabadhar Diary* was serialised in the Bengali monthly, *Basumati* in 1953 and has recently been put together in the Bengali literary and cultural journal *Akshon*, special issue of 1982, pp. 8-46. Present references are from this version, and I have done the translation.
- 55 While there is no biography of Kissory Chand, I have gleaned these details on his life from various sources as well as appendix II, pp. 170-1 of Roper Lethbridge's *A*

*History of the Renaissance in Bengal, Ramtanu Lahiri: Brahman and Reformer* Calcutta, Editions Indian 1972 (first published in 1907).

- 56 In Appendix Two, Murshid describes *zenana* education in full. While a number of journals for women had started appearing by this time, *Bamobodhini Patrika* and *Tanabodhini Patrika*, and later Dwarakanath Ganguly's *Abalabandhab* were the most important journals for women. Earlier in Chapter I, he discusses attitudes to women's education. See also Borthwick, Chapter I.
- 57 Kailashbashini Debi, n. 54, p. 10.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 32. From page 31 onwards, Kailashbashini starts discussing in some detail the dilemma facing her.
- 62 *Ibid.*, pp. 14-35.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 64 For recent studies on judicious intervention see Lotika Sarkar's "Women and Law" in the Annual Surveys of Indian Law Published by the Indian Law Institute, New Delhi from 1985 onwards.

## Education and Communal Politics in Bengal: A Case Study

*Poromesh Acharya*

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### I

This paper deals with the communal controversy and tension that overshadowed the political and social life of Bengal with the introduction of the Bengal Secondary Education Bill, 1940, in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, during the period of provincial autonomy. This paper does not intend to deal with the problems of theorising communalism as such. Yet it may throw some insights into the problem.

The relation between educational development and communal politics in Bengal during the 30's and the 40's in the present century makes a fascinating study. This aspect, it appears, has not as yet received the due attention of the scholars who have dealt with Bengal politics or development of education in Bengal. Communal politics in Bengal has been generally studied from the standpoint of land relations as an expression of land politics. Admitting the validity of this approach it can safely be said that this only partially explains the problems of communalism in Bengal. Communal confrontation cutting across the class structure sometimes is seen as the politics of manoeuvre due to the inner contradictions of the dominant classes. Communal differentiation as rooted in the realm of cultural identity



remains still an autonomous reality which needs to be taken into account particularly in dealing with issues like education. In fact, the history of education in India shows that education, even after the introduction of Western education, was never a culture-neutral education.

It is interesting to note that the denial of this reality by the nationalists gave rise to the communal politics of education in Bengal during the first half of the present century. It is all the more interesting that nationalism in Bengal showed clearly Hindu moorings and developed on the basis of a Hindu cultural identity in spite of all claims of nationalism as a secular ideology.<sup>1</sup> It was no wonder that Muslim intelligentsia in Bengal did not find much difference between Congress nationalists and Hindu nationalists. In fact, the only difference was that while Hindu nationalists consciously interpreted Indian nationalism in terms of Hinduism, Congress nationalists tried to interpret Hindu nationalism as a secular ideology. It was easy for the caste Hindus of Bengal to resolve the question on their Indian identity through Hinduism. But for Bengali Muslims it was a crisis.

The crisis of Bengali Muslims can be traced back to the last century when modern Bengali language, literature and system of education were being shaped by the stalwarts of the caste Hindu community variously known also as rationalists, or radicals or liberals. Obviously, a Hindu bias crept in and a feeling of alienation grew among the educated Muslims in Bengal. Bengali Muslims rejected the *dobhasi* literature and refused to accept Sanskritised or Hinduised Bengali. Bengal Government took note of it and in a letter in 1872, to Government of India wrote "It is certain that they would have no desire to be instructed in an artificial Sanskritized Bengalee such as some Bengalee scholars effect".<sup>2</sup> Some *asraf* or higher caste Muslims in urban areas prescribed Urdu as the medium of instruction for Muslims in Bengal. But that was not acceptable to Bengali Muslims in general.<sup>3</sup> However, with the rise of nationalist movement this crisis of Bengali Muslims aggravated. Failing to find a Muslim idiom of Indian identity Bengali Muslims gradually took recourse to pan-Islamism.<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, they were rather pushed to such a situation by the denial of the nationalists of the cultural roots of communal differentiation.

Bengali Muslims, however, could not resolve their crisis by taking recourse to pan-Islamism and accepting Pakistan. It was only after the

formation of Bangladesh that the problem could be somewhat resolved. But that is another story beyond our topic of discussion.

## II

By the turn of the century Muslim public opinion became vocal against the Hindu domination over the system of education. They at the same time blamed themselves for not taking initiative but leaving it to Hindus to shape the system of education. They however, identified three major problems of education. These were; *i*) language problem *ii*) problems of religious education and *iii*) Hindu bias in the existing education. Government of India in a letter to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal stated, "The reasons which have retarded the spread of secondary education among the Muhammadans are the poverty of the community, the linguistic difficulty, the demand for religious instruction and want of Muhammadan representatives on the Governing Bodies of educational institutions".<sup>5</sup>

In the year 1915 Bengal Government constituted a committee to consider questions connected with Muhammadan Education. As a general policy the Committee recommended that

while it is necessary to maintain special institutions for Muslims it is undesirable to develop further a system of education for this community separate from that of other communities. The existing system should be carefully examined to see where they fail to satisfy members of the community and necessary modification should be introduced.<sup>6</sup>

The Committee further recommended that "the adequate representation of Muslims on the managing committees of High Schools should be made a condition of receiving grant-in-aid from the public fund" and that "the University should insist on the adequate representation of Muslims on the managing committee, before granting recognition to any new school".<sup>7</sup> It also recommended that, in all Government Schools 15 per cent of the places be reserved for Muslim boys. There should be more Muslim Headmasters and assistant teachers

and adequate provision should be made for Arabic, Persian and Urdu teaching.<sup>8</sup>

It appears that the Committee could not resolve the problem of language study to the satisfaction of all. It recognised that "Bengali must be the medium of instruction" in primary "schools attended by children whose vernacular is Bengali".<sup>9</sup> At the same time it felt that "Muhammadan boys should have the opportunity of learning the elements of Urdu to facilitate their study of the Koran."<sup>10</sup> For the secondary level they suggested a three language formula of English, Bengali and Urdu. It stated:

we have carefully examined this question of languages to see whether the number of languages cannot be curtailed, and the general conclusion at which we arrived was that only one of the three languages (Persian, Arabic and Urdu) need necessarily be studied thoroughly.<sup>11</sup>

It may be noted that this emphasis on Urdu was not without reason. According to the Committee, "Urdu is a language which is not only spoken by the Muslims of other parts of India but has also come to be regarded as the *Lingua-franca* of the whole country".<sup>12</sup> In fact by introducing Urdu Bengali Muslims wanted to resolve their problem of Indian identity.

Calcutta University Commission, 1917-1919, also considered the problems of education of Bengali Muslims. The Commission received several Muslim deputations and summarised some of their grievances. A few revealing grievances were as follows:

- a) The encouragement by the University of a Sanskritised Bengali, which is difficult for Musalmans to acquire,
- b) The use by the University of books which are either uncongenial to Musalmans as being steeped in Hindu religion and tradition, or even positively objectionable to them, because they contain statements offensive to Muslim sentiment. Elphinstone's History of India is cited as a case in point.
- c) The requirement that each candidate should write his name, instead of giving a number, on the answer books shown up at

university examinations. It is suggested that this practice operates to the prejudice of Muslim candidates.

- d) It was alleged that "out of 895 examiners appointed by the Calcutta University in 1917 in subjects other than Urdu, Persian or Arabic, nine only were Musalmans". As such they demanded "fair share" in the appointment of University examiners.<sup>13</sup>

The claim for "fair share" in educational management became the main issue during the period of Diarchy. Hartog observed, "the transfer of the Department of Education to popular control, as represented by a Minister, both increased the public interest in it and made it more sensitive to the currents of public needs and public opinion. Muhammadan community particularly had awakened to the need and possibilities of education".<sup>14</sup> In fact, during the period of Diarchy certain concrete measures were taken for the extension of primary education in Bengal. A centralised and uniform system of primary education was being introduced in Bengal for the first time. As a result primary education made a certain degree of progress. Interestingly, Muslims formed nearly 54 per cent of the total roll strength, and the Hindus and other communities together formed 46 per cent. Muslims, however, were still lagging far behind in secondary and higher education. They strongly believed that the Hindu bias in the present system was a major if not main, hindrance to their education. And to change it they need to achieve some control over the system of education.

There was a very strong resentment among Bengali Muslims against the prescribed text-books and the Sanskritised Bengali language. The Report of Dacca University Committee stated in this regard that "Bengali literature as at present permeated mainly by Hindu ideas, and there is a great paucity of literature on subjects derived from authentic Arabic or Persian sources such as will interest Muhammadan students." It suggested that "the Government or the University should encourage authors to publish Bengali books of a Muhammadan character, and that such books should be included in the works prescribed as models of style".<sup>15</sup> An analysis of the Muslim public opinion as reflected in journals edited by Bengali Muslims will show the depth of this resentment. It was even alleged that books authored by Muslims were not selected, as the text-books selection

committees were dominated by the Hindus.<sup>16</sup> Abul Monsur Ahmed, a writer and a political leader of repute, alleged that one Hindu publisher refused to print his book as he used the word *pani* instead of *jal* -- meaning water. He also alleged that his book *Naya Para* was not approved by the Text-Book Selection Committee on the ground of too many Arabic and Persian words. It happened when Fazlul Huq was the Education Minister.<sup>17</sup>

Azizul Huq, Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University and the Speaker of Bengal Legislative Assembly in his note to Kamal Yar Jung Education Committee wrote,

with the beginning of the new reaction Bengali of the fifties and sixties of the last century contained such stiff Sanskritised words and phrases that it is doubtful if any average Bengali, unless he is a good Sanskrit scholar, can even understand them. No doubt the language has thereafter been liquified to some extent in process of time. But it still contains many hard Sanskrit Words specially in some of the school and college text-books.... It is with this inherent disadvantage that the Musalman student has to join the present system of education. But he has also to contend against the syllabuses, schemes of study and text-books. He reads literature and he becomes conversant with *Dev, Devi, Avtar, Namaskar, Puja*, the conception of life, birth and rebirth, the pantheon with all the doctrines of *Veda* and *Vedanta, Purans* and *Gita*.... He hardly comes across the conception of *Allah, Rasul*, or the meaning and import of *Namaz, Haj, Zakat* or the principles and doctrines of Islam in Quran or Hadis."

In regards to History text-books he writes,

he reads ancient India as a study of culture in a picture of its inspiration and ideals... Coming to the mediaeval period he immediately falls into a narration of wars and conquest, slaughter and carnage, destruction and demolition of India's past, amidst patricidal and fratricidal struggles and disputes....

He concludes,

Let it be remembered that this is what a student in the most formative period of his life has to read in a school. It is bound to create communal discord and deep-rooted hatred. No wonder the Muslim culture and social order have disintegrated under this system of education and India has not yet been able to solve the Hindu-Muslim problem.

Azizul Huq surmised that

the consensus of opinion among educationists is that there are two and only two alternatives. Either the present system of schools and university studies must have such syllabuses and themes that the Hindus, the Muslims and all other creeds and communities can meet on an essentially common platform with no influence, tendency or bias in favour of the one or the other, OR, educational India must be a federation of two or more types of educational organisations, each trying to develop its own culture and heredity, but in a spirit of catholicity and good-will to others. I hope and pray that wisdom and sense will still prevail and their will be a common and unified plan and programme of education.<sup>18</sup>

We could not help quoting him elaborately as he represented the comparatively liberal section of Bengali Muslim middle class. Opinions of Bengali Muslims, particularly liberal Muslims like Azizul Huq and Fazlul Huq, one time Premier of Bengal, in regard to Wardha scheme or Basic education may be revealing. Both of them and Bengali Muslims in general rejected the scheme.<sup>19</sup> They were doubtful, like their Hindu counterparts in Bengal, in regard to certain aspects like self-supporting nature and the role of *takli* and *charkha* as was proposed in the scheme. But the main objection of the Bengali Muslims, it appears, was that the schools under the scheme would turn into *Ashram-schools* like *Vidya Mandir* and preach Hinduised Congress cult in the form of *Bharatmata*, *Bande Mataram*, non-violence and Gandhi cap.<sup>20</sup> It was also feared that a reformed Hindustani would be forced upon Muslims and this would drive out Urdu. Azizul Huq wrote, "there was genuine misapprehension that this new teaching would inevitably lead to inculcating the same brand of 'nationalism' with which India has been too familiar to-day in some of the 'nation-



alist' newspapers".<sup>21</sup> It may be noted that not only the scheme but the bonafide of those who would be entrusted to implement the scheme was also in question.

It is apparent that Muslim leaders of Bengal were apprehensive of the design of the nationalists. This apprehension of the Muslims of Bengal was however, not totally unfounded. A distinct Hindu bias was quite observable in the attitudes and activities of the nationalists in regard to different vital issues during the period of Diarchy and provincial autonomy. Bengal Secondary Education Bill 1940, was one such issue and perhaps the most significant one. Before we come to our main topic it may be necessary to say a few words about the Hindu mind of the time, particularly about how *Hindutva* was defined by Hindu nationalists.

### III

The first Hindu Sabha which was established in Panjab in the year 1907, stated this as its object: to promote brotherly feelings amongst the various sections of the Hindu community and to improve moral, intellectual and material conditions of Hindus.<sup>22</sup> When Hindu Mahasabha was organised in all India basis it became necessary to define Hindu and *Hindutva*. Hindu Mahasabha maintained that

it was not a religious organisation. *Hindutva* or Hinduness which included Aryas, Brahmos, Buddhists and Jains, was not a religion but a nationality. *Hindutva* did not depend on a particular spiritual belief or a system of philosophy. Before the advent of the Muslims and Christians all Hindu secular institutions, traditions, customs were Hindu because they were Hindustani or Indian.<sup>23</sup>

By implication Muslims and Christians were excluded as they had denationalised themselves by accepting a foreign or non Hindu creed culturally. The All India Hindu Mahasabha in its 21st session in Calcutta defined a Hindu thus: "Every person is a Hindu who regards and owns this *Bharat Bhumi* i.e. land of the origin of his religion, the cradle of his faith".<sup>24</sup> Earlier in its 20th session Hindu Mahasabha declared that "Hindī that is based on and drawing its nourishment

from Sanskrit vocabulary is and rightfully deserves to be the National Language and Devnagri as the National Script of Hindusthan".<sup>25</sup> In its 21st session Mahasabha announced that, "it is our bounded duty to oust out ruthlessly all unnecessary alien words whether Arabian or English from every Hindu tongue -- whether provincial or dialectical".<sup>26</sup> As example they cited the Bengali language and said, "Our Hindu brethren in Bengal are especially to be congratulated upon in this connection because the Bengali literature is admirably free from any such uncleaned admixture of unnecessary alien words which cannot be said regarding our other provincial tongues and literatures".<sup>27</sup> Hindu Mahasabha wanted "*Sanskrit nistha*" Hindi as it is in vogue now. In Bengal this process was almost complete in the 19th century by the grace of caste Hindu stalwarts like Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya. Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya was also in a way, responsible for introducing Hindi in the education system of Bihar. Even "A Plea For the People's tongue" by no less a person than George A. Grierson, the linguist, could not make Bihari "dialects" as media of instruction.<sup>28</sup> And thus Bihar was also included in the Hindi belt.

It is also a fact that modern Bengali literature developed in the wake of Hindu religious revivalism in the second half of the last century. The ethos of Hindu revivalism was best expressed in the writing of Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya, Ramesh Chandra Dutta and above all Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya. All of them wrote novels in historical settings with Muslim characters. Muslim characters generally appeared, with few exceptions like Osman Khan in *Durgesh Nandini*, as degenerate and inferior. It was alleged that historical events were wrongly portrayed to glorify Hindus and undermine Muslim characters.<sup>29</sup> There is no doubt that Muslim sentiment was seriously hurt.<sup>30</sup> The authors, however, were inspired by the nationalist spirit. This identification of nationalism with Hindu glory made it difficult for Muslims to accept Indian nationalism a secular ideology.

Absence of the Muslim world in the Bengali literature of the latter period is perhaps more significant. The voice of silence is louder. One may go through the entire literature by Rabindranath Tagore and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya, the two greatest authors of this period, yet one may not get a glimpse of the truthful Muslim world. Here and there may be a few stray characters looked from a distance. The only exception may be a short story *Mahesh* by Sarat Chandra Chatto-

padhya. It only shows the lack of interest on the part of Hindu intelligentsia to know intimately the world of the majority community.<sup>31</sup> This exclusive character of the Hindu community of Bengal is also clearly reflected in their attitudes towards the issues of education. An examination of the educational ideals developed by educationists and nationalists in Bengal, who were predominantly Hindus, will show the Hindu orientation of their mind. It was no wonder that Tagore's Santiniketan Ashram was also not free from that bias in spite of his international out-look. Muslim response as a result, could not be very kind. This was how the stage was set on which the drama of Bengal Secondary Education Bill, 1940, was enacted.

#### IV

On 21 August 1940, The Premier of Bengal, A.K. Fazlul Huq, who also held the education portfolio, introduced The Bengal Secondary Education Bill 1940 in the Bengal Legislative Assembly to provide for "the regulation and control of secondary education in Bengal" and moved that the Bill be referred to a Select Committee of twelve members which should submit its report by the 30th of November 1940. He had proposed to include in the Select Committee leaders of all the different opposition groups like Syamaprasad Mookerjee, Harendra Nath Chaudhuri, Pramatha Nath Banerjee, Kiran Sankar Roy and Atul Chandra Sen. But as they refused to serve on the Select Committee he proposed a committee of 12 members including only representatives of different groups which formed the Coalition Ministry. In his introductory speech he claimed that the Bill was not a hurried piece of legislation undertaken in order to transfer power from one Body to another (meaning Calcutta University to a Board of Secondary Education), or designed as a political measure, but a measure to ensure educational reforms that had long been needed and the urgency of which had been stressed by educationists for over twenty years.<sup>32</sup> But the Bill caused unprecedented communal tension and the Legislature was divided along clearly Hindu-Muslim lines. The only other Bill as bitterly fought on communal ground, was the Calcutta Municipal Amendment Bill, 1939.

The idea of a separate Board of Secondary and Intermediate

Education was mooted in the Report of Calcutta University Commission 1917-1919.<sup>33</sup> In 1923 Government prepared a Bill proposing establishment of a Board for Secondary Education and sent it to the Calcutta University for opinion. The University rejected the Bill on the ground that the Bill proposed "absolute control of the Local Government" over the "whole organisation relating to secondary education".<sup>34</sup> A tussle ensued and continued till 1937, between the Government and the Calcutta University mainly on the issue of control of the proposed Board. Both sides made several proposals in successive years till 1937. Calcutta University maintained that the Board of Secondary Education, if established, should be under the general supervision of the Senate or be a constituent body of the University to look after secondary education.<sup>35</sup> Government on the other hand, was agreeable to concede certain consultative power to the University but would retain ultimate control over the Board. But in 1937 the question of communal representation came to the forefront and the entire issue took a communal turn as the revised Bill was sent to the University for its opinion.

In 1937 N.A. Jenkin, an officer of the Education Department drafted a Bill for "the establishment of a statutory Board for the regulation and control of Secondary Education in Bengal." The Government of Bengal sent the Bill to Calcutta University "for the views of the University." This Bill stirred the Hindu public opinion and made it a public issue presumably for the communal safeguards included in it. The Calcutta University Syndicate appointed a committee to consider the Bill and submit a report. Meanwhile, the Government withdrew the Bill in June and in November sent to the University a revised Bill. The Committee considered the revised Bill and gave its report in December 1937. It opposed "the establishment of a Board that will be in effect an element in Secretariat administration" and supported the "establishment of a Board of Secondary Education under the general control of the Senate." In the opinion of the Committee the Bill "is not a sound educational measure." It opposed the "communal representation as embodied in the Bill" and maintained:

as a university we are against communal representation as such. We look upon this part of the Bill with considerable anxiety and disfavour. We believe that while framing the scheme proper rep-

resentation of the educational interests of all communities can be secured without making statutory provision for representation on a communal basis.<sup>36</sup>

It is interesting that till 1937 Calcutta University did not raise any objection against communal representation though there was provision for it in the previous bills also. It may be noted that in 1926 there was provision for only 14 per cent Muslim representation. In the 1937 draft it was increased to 17 per cent, while in the revised Bill 41 per cent of the seats were reserved for Muslims. It may also be noted that in Bengal at that time, of the total population nearly 54 per cent were Muslims, and Hindus and others constituted only 46 per cent. In the Bengal Legislative Assembly though no political party had absolute majority, Muslims constituted the overwhelming majority. As such Muslim domination in the Ministry was a settled fact. On the other hand, Calcutta University was overwhelmingly dominated by Hindus. In such a situation controlover the Board by either party was likely to have a communal overtone. Besides considering the grievances by Muslim deputationists to the Calcutta University Commission and the opinions as reflected in the journals edited by Muslims it can reasonably be concluded that Muslims in general, believed Calcutta University to be biased in favour of Hindus. There is no doubt the issue of the Secondary Board turned into a communal issue even before the introduction of The Bengal Secondary Education Bill, 1940 in the Legislature.

In 1938 a conference was called to resolve the differences of opinion but without any result. Bengal Government, however, could not move a Bill in the Bengal Legislature dealing with secondary education without amending Calcutta University Act 1904 which vested the power of controlling Matriculation Examination in Bengal, Assam and other areas outside Bengal with the University. Besides, the Bengal Legislature had no legislative jurisdiction over Calcutta University. Government of India Act 1935 was also required to be amended to bring Calcutta University under the legislative control of the Bengal Legislature. The Bengal Government now moved the Central Government for necessary amendments. A resolution adopted by the Calcutta University Senate on 12 December 1936 made the job easy for the Government. The resolution stated:

The Senate is of opinion that the Calcutta University should be treated as Provincial subject. If however, there are serious difficulties regarding the position of Assam, then only with regard to future legislation affecting the University, the Federal Legislature may be given the necessary jurisdiction.<sup>37</sup>

It took some time to make necessary amendments and from 1 April 1940 Bengal Legislature was vested with the legislative power over the Calcutta University.

A.K. Fazlul Huq while introducing the Bengal Secondary Education Bill, 1940, stated,

The Bill proposes to establish a large Board of Secondary Education to regulate and control secondary education. Secondary education embraces all education other than primary or university. Education in madrasahs and middle schools is thus included as well as education in high school.<sup>38</sup>

The Bill proposed to constitute a Board with 50 members of whom 25 members were to be either ex-officio or nominated while the rest were to be elected by different electorates like Calcutta University, Dacca University, Legislative Assembly, Legislative Council, Headmasters, Headmistress, Head of Madrasahs and members of the Provincial Board of Anglo-Indian and European Education. Excluding the President who would be appointed by the Government, there were 49 members of whom 22 were to be Hindus, 20 Muslims and 7 Europeans. Of the total 50 members at least 22 members would be directly related to education while a number of others were likely to be indirectly related to education.

The executive power of the Board was however, vested in an Executive Council of 14 members to be constituted by the Board. Of the 14 members 6 were to be ex-officio members. They were the President of the Board, the two Vice-Chancellors, the Director of Public Instruction, the Assistant Director of Public Instruction for Muslim Education, the Deputy Directress of Public Instruction for Female Education. The remaining 8 members were to be elected by the members of the Board, of whom 2 would be Inspectors of schools, 3



Calcutta University members of the Board, 2 Dacca University members of the Board, 1 Scheduled Caste member of the Board. The President of the Board would be the Chairman of the Council.<sup>40</sup> It may be noted that in the council, excluding the President there would be 6 Hindus, 5 Muslims 1 European and the other one uncertain but likely to be a Hindu.

It is apparent that Muslims were not to be in the majority either in the Board or in the Council even if the President be a Muslim. There was, however, provision for communal representation. Considering the political situation of the time and the Muslim perception about educational management in general and Calcutta University in particular, such a measure perhaps was unavoidable. In fact, W.C. Wordsworth supported the motion on this ground though he did not like communal representation. He said "I would seriously, with all the seriousness I can command, ask the house to consider whether the opposition to communalism may not sometimes take a form as dangerous and unpleasant as communalism itself." The opposition, however, was not in a mental state to listen to his advice.<sup>41</sup>

Fazlul Huq maintained,

Is this injustice? It may be but it is not to the Hindu community. We might on a population distribution basis have demanded more seats for the Muslims, but we have tried to be fair and have given weightage to the Hindus because of their past achievements in educational spheres. As far as the provisions for Hindu, Muslim and European interests are concerned, therefore, there can, I think, be no justified criticism of or proposals. Criticisms can come only from those who are determined at all costs to retain the controlling influence in the hands of one community only.<sup>42</sup>

He announced three fundamental principles as the basis of this Bill and on which the government was not prepared to yield. They were; *i*) "The presence on the Board of adequate representation of the various communities must be guaranteed" *ii*) "The Board must be largely autonomous and have complete control of all secondary school activities" and *iii*) "Such ultimate control over the Board's activities as is necessary must be exercised by Government".<sup>42</sup> At the same time he assured:

assuming the acceptance of these principles, we are prepared to listen to criticism of the details and other aspects of the Bill and to ensure that before the Select Committee starts its deliberations, an opportunity will be given to the universities to make such recommendations about the Bill as they think fit.<sup>43</sup>

What appears from the debate that ensued is that the Government control over the secondary education and the communal representation as was proposed in the Bill, were the two main objections which prevented the leaders of different opposition groups to participate in the Select Committee and prompted them to fight it as bitterly inside as outside the Legislature. It is quite apparent that the other points they raised in course of their deliberations could easily be taken care of in the Select Committee itself. In fact, Fazlul Huq and the other leaders were meeting outside the Legislature to come to an agreement. An examination of the debates, however, will help us to understand better the different view points and perceptions of the problem.

## V

Harendra Nath Rai Chaudhury on behalf of Congress party moved by way of amendment, that the Bill be circulated for the purpose of eliciting public opinion. He argued that the secondary education system in Bengal was mainly a creation of private efforts and the Bill was designed to establish official control over a non-official system. He stated:

Our complaint is not so much that on the Board or on the Executive Council they are going to have so many Muslim members or so many Hindu members, as that these are going to be definitely political bodies, and the whole of the non-Government part of the secondary education in the province is going to be committed to the charge of a political body and not to the care of the educationists of the province. That is our main grievance.<sup>44</sup>

This was the typical stance taken by most other opposition leaders as if education was never a political issue nor it should be. However

may it be denied by the nationalists, Muslims in general believed Calcutta University to be a political body of the Hindus. And there was some truth in it. Nationalists also had some justification in taking such a stand.

Since the time of Curzon, British Government became suspicious of the private management of the secondary schools in Bengal. They considered the private schools to be the breeding ground of "terrorist" politics and tried to control the spread of such schools.<sup>45</sup> Congress in Bengal, as it was not in power like in other provinces of Hindu majority, refused to take note of the change that was effected by the installation of a representative Government, however limited might be its power. Besides, in the core of their mind, as the nationalists were predominantly Hindus in Bengal, they felt somewhat threatened by the communal award. But long tradition of ostricism did not allow them to see through the reality of the situation. It was no wonder that Chaudhury proudly claimed himself a Congressite and as such non-communal, yet he could not help giving out his Hindu bias to a provocation from the Coalition Bench. He retorted claiming boastfully, "It is the caste Hindus who have built up by their life blood all these schools and you dare enquire what about the Caste Hindus!"<sup>46</sup> At that Fazlur Rahman of Dacca remarked, "At the cost of poor peasants of Bengal!" Chaudhury replied, "Where do the poor peasants of Bengal come in? The schools are being run by the fees of the students and by voluntary contribution from private sources and not from any of the poor peasants of Bengal that do not receive their education in them".<sup>47</sup> Rahman commented, "Your income is derived from poor peasants".<sup>48</sup> It should be noted that poor peasants in Bengal were overwhelmingly Muslims and Scheduled Castes. And Harendra Nath Chaudhury was the famous Zamindar of Taki in the district of 24 Parganas.

Harendra Nath Chaudhury's views deserve special notice not only because his was probably the soberest speech made on the occasion, but also because he acted as the main spokesman of the Congress Party and became the Minister of Education of Bengal after partition when Bidhan Chandra Roy took over as the Chief Minister. His book "The New Menace to High School Education in Bengal" written in 1935 may be considered to be the nationalist's response to the Government's educational policy of the time. In this book he advocated private management of secondary education and cautioned against

Government polity of control on the plea of unplanned growth of secondary education in Bengal. His speech in the Assembly reflected the same trend of argument with the addition of implicit communal undertone. His opposition to Government control and his charge against the proposed Board of Secondary Education as a political body on grounds of the predominance of official and nominated members becomes suspect when compared with his own performance as the Minister of Education after the partition of Bengal. It was during his tenure as the Minister of Education that the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education was first constituted. And it was constituted with so many officials and nominated members that the students of West Bengal started a movement against the Board demanding a democratically elected body.<sup>49</sup>

If Harendra Nath Chaudhury's speech was implicitly communal, speeches by other opposition leaders including Atul Chandra Sen, Pramatha Nath Banerjee, Syamaprasad Mookherjee, Kiran Sankar Roy, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar and even Sarat Chandra Bose, were explicitly communal. The main purport of these speeches was to let it be known to the Government that Hindus would resist the Bill at any cost. It was clear from the speeches that official control was taken to be Muslim control over a system of education which was perceived to be a contribution of Hindus. Often they argued against bringing in communalism in the arena of education without even mincing words bearing definite communal import and thus betraying their own communal feelings. They were trapped in their own communal emotion, and their speeches only helped rousing the communal tension further.

Atul Chandra Sen's speech is a case in point. Characterising the Bill as communal he said,

under the proposed constitution we will have Government's own men, Pakistan-minded Muslims on the Board." He announced, "if and when this obnoxious Bill comes to be made into law, we shall know how to combat it as we did combat an executive fiat 35 years ago coming from a man much bigger than the Hon'ble Education Minister. If we could then unsettle 'a settled fact', we know that we can do it even today.

H.S. Suhrawardy retorted, "not to-day". Sen asserted "Yes, even today. Sir, I say that we can unsettle a settled fact even today." A member went to the extent of alleging that "the real object of the Bill is to make all the secondary schools the training ground in ideas and theories which the communally minded Ministry wants the youth of the country to hold".<sup>50</sup>

Kiran Sankar Roy alleged that the Bill would introduce communalism into education, and said, "Out of the 1400 schools 1200 were established by Hindus, out of more than 3 lakh students reading in those schools less than 80,000 are Muhammadans". He equivocated that he did not take pride in that but if pushed he would, though "as a Congressman he is not communal in outlook".<sup>51</sup> Nalini Ranjan Sarkir also did not mince his words and called the Bill "communal" and "not democratic" as it is communal.<sup>52</sup>

Syamaprasad Mookerjee was outspoken and showed no inhibition in holding brief for Calcutta University and the Hindu Community. He maintained that the present Government introduced several controversial legislative measures but that "there has not been any measure so vital as this to the largest interests of the people of this province".<sup>53</sup> He alleged that "the Bill has introduced the communal principle in a most pernicious manner touching elaborately even the constitution of bodies which will select publications and text-books and frame the syllabus and curriculum." He further alleged that "mutilation of the Bengali Language, distortion of historical facts and flagrant disregard of academic standpoints are the characteristic features of the work of the (Government reconstituted) Text-Book Committee".<sup>54</sup> He reminded the Government, "How can I forget that in this province today out of 1500 high schools, barring a few, all owe their existence to Hindu support and influence..."<sup>55</sup> He frankly declared that he opposed the Bill fundamentally and would not accept even if it was passed by the Assembly. As he was opposed to the Bill fundamentally he did not join the Select Committee. He offered three options, namely, *i*) to make Bill on purely educational considerations, *ii*) to allow Hindus to go their own way with their separate education system or, *iii*) to force this Bill and face the Hindu opposition.<sup>56</sup> He threatened,

They admit of no compromise and we are ready for fighting this new menace. Its acceptance specially means to us the end of the

Hindus and a cry must go forth to every Hindu child that is reading in educational institutions, to every Hindu guardian and to all others interested in the welfare of our people that if any self-respect is left in them, that if they are not to reduce themselves to a state of subservience in the field of culture as they have been reduced in the economic and political spheres, they must be prepared to face this organised campaign of opposition at any cost whatsoever. At this point his speech was loudly cheered from the Congress Bench, particularly when he declared, But let me say this, that minority though we are, it yet retains sufficient patriotism, courage and influence to stand boldly for the vindication of its just rights and it will consider no cause nobler and greater than the preservation of culture and education for which it would be prepared to face the most dire consequences....<sup>57</sup>

In rhetoric and oratory no other political leader of the time except Fazlul Huq probably could match Syamaprasad. And one can imagine the impact of his speech on the Hindu mind. In fact, he made such speeches, even harsher speeches in so many public meetings organised in different parts of the country. His speech in a meeting of teachers organised by Calcutta District Committees of All Bengal Teachers Association was even referred by Coalition Members as an example of inciting communal temper, during the Assembly debate on the Select Committee Report in 1941. Before discussing the response of the Hindu public, let us examine some of the speeches made by Muslim members of the Legislature.

Abu Hussain Sarkar from Krishak Praja Party, who was known to be a nationalist, gave qualified support to the motion for sending the Bill to a Select Committee. He countered the argument of nationalist Hindus regarding Government control saying that the University was not a free institution and the Government had full control over it. He maintained that out of 110 members of the University excluding the Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor, only 20 were elected while 10 were ex-officio and remaining 80 were appointed by the Chancellor. He also alleged that the University compelled students to salute the Union Flag and sing "God save the King". He asked, "Did they teach us anything save and except 'England's Work in India' to insist love for imperialism, false story of Black Hole, Tarasundari and other things, stories of Rajput Chivalry concocted by the British writers? Is this



nationalism?" He reminded that C.R. Das rightly called the University *Golamkhana*. He further alleged that the University did not do anything to improve the lot of the school teachers who received Rs.20 to Rs.30 a month.<sup>58</sup> There is some truth in the allegation no doubt. However, it is apparent that the Secondary Bill became an issue of confrontation between Calcutta University and Government of Bengal believed to be representing Hindu and Muslim causes respectively.

Syed Musta Gawsal Haque maintained that communalism had been used as a bogey by the opposition to subvert all the good legislative efforts of the Government. He referred to the Bengal Tenancy legislation, Bengal Agricultural Debtor Act, the Money-lenders Bill and Calcutta Municipal Amendment Act and said that all these had been opposed on grounds of communalism but gave radical results. He observed that secondary education had been suffering from "haphazard" and "inefficient" management because of dual control of Government and the University. He alleged that the University was allowed to make a good business out of the examination fees and sale of text-books but it did not spend a single pice for the improvement of secondary schools.<sup>59</sup>

Syed Badradduza appeared not to be swayed by emotions. He opined that some Government control was necessary and maintained that the constitution of the Board as proposed in the Bill, was not communal but only provided safeguards for educational interests of different communities. This was, of course, unlike in Calcutta University where voice was hushed by brute majority. According to him, "the Board is more representative than the Syndicate of the University of Calcutta as it does adequate representation of Muslims, Hindus, Scheduled Castes and Europeans and various other interests." He believed that "The Muslims will only have an effective voice in the control, regulation and administration of secondary education in Bengal" and that the Board was called communal "because a Government supported by a Muslim Majority contemplates its formation".<sup>60</sup>

He declared that he was as proud of the great sons of Bengal like Ashutosh Mukherjee, Keshab Sen and Rammohan Roy who played decisive roles in "shaping the educational destinies of the province and laying the structure on a solid foundation." He continued,

But... while our Hindu brethren have thrived and

prospered....Muslims have languished and pined away in misery. Neither the University nor the Government of the day encouraged and fostered the growth and revival of the glorious heritage of Islam that constitutes a distinct landmark in the history of World civilization and culture....

He alleged that "Muslim boys have been compelled to feed on ideals and ideas hostile to the spirit and genius of Islam and drift into the morass of complexes that never constitute the part and parcel of their cultural existence..." He maintained that control of secondary education therefore, was "absolutely necessary not for or by one community alone, but for all classes and conditions of people that inhabit this land." He concluded his speech refusing to accept the challenge thrown by Syamaprasad Mookerjee in a public meeting, as that would be most unfortunate for Bengal.<sup>61</sup>

However, unlike Badradduza, Abdul Latif Biswas would accept the challenge "for the good of the province".<sup>62</sup> Abdul Wahab Khan posed that they were accused of communalism but it would be evident from the speeches made by the opposition leaders who were really communal. He particularly referred to the speeches by Syamaprasad and Sarat Chandra Bose.<sup>63</sup> Sarat Bose, it is said, threatened to build one National Secondary Board parallel to the Government's Board. Syamaprasad also threatened to build a separate system for Hindus.

Abdur Raschid Mahmood observed, "It is very interesting to observe that my Hindu Brethren, though thinking all the time on communal lines, express in national terms, although they -- the Muslims -- by their vast majority form the nation of Bengal." He supported the Bill and wanted "more substantial education" to prepare "The masses of Bengal for the national responsibilities -- the responsibilities of a free nation".<sup>64</sup> Jalaluddin Ahmed considered "that nationalism is only another kind of communalism in the name of nation..." and "is worse than communalism".<sup>65</sup>

Abul Hasim as an example of Hindu bias and Hindu nationalism, quoted from Abanindranath Tagore's *Rajkahini*; an approved textbook taught in Hare School:

*"Sei abosare Sultaner jato amir omra iungi chere, dari fele bibi ar murgir khacha nye ratarati sahar chere Ajmirer dike champat dilo Sakal bela Prithwiraj Toda dakhil kare nilen"*<sup>66</sup>

[In the nick of time, all the "amirs" and "omrahs" shed their "lungies" shave their beards, and carrying their "bibis" and cages of hens turned tail during the night and fled the town for Ajmer, the next morning; for Prithviraj, occupation to Toda was just a walk over!]

The passage is written in a very lucid style and it may appear to a Hindu child funny. It may not, however, appear as funny to a Muslim child. Rather, he may seriously feel hurt as the passage could barely conceal an attitude of contempt for Muslim ethos. (One may note the use of Bengali verbs *champat dilo* used for amirs while *dakhal Kare nilen* in case of Prithviraj.) It was no wonder that most of the Muslim speakers expressed their resentment against the approved text-books and Hindu domination over text-book selection committee. This was perhaps the moot cause which led them to demand "an effective voice" in the educational management of the province.

Fazlur Rahaman, representative of Dacca University, though not equal to Syamaprasad in oratory, was as scathing in this remarks. He would not mince his words in attacking Calcutta University and Hindu domination over the system of education. He argued,

No nation can be great unless it learns to respect its own culture and traditions. The University of Calcutta is responsible for presenting the past history of India to the school boy in a manner that it carries an impression that anything that is Hindu is good and anything that is Muslim is bad. The result is that every Muslim boy who receives the training at an institution under the control of the Calcutta University grows with the idea that he belongs to an inferior stock and thus develops an inferiority complex. He loses self-confidence and becomes timid in his attitudes towards life.

As a result, "the Hindu boys cannot take kindly to the Muslim boys and begin to develop a feeling of hatred towards them. This explains much of the bitterness between the two great communities of the province".<sup>67</sup> He argued further, "an examination of the educational policy of the University will convince one that in formulating its educational policy, it has proceeded on the basis that the people of Bengal is homogeneous and Hindu in character. It has completely ignored the distinct cultural and educational needs of the Muslims."

He even alleged that the policy was so successful that even "distinguished public men of the Hindu community cannot appreciate the distinctive character and excellence of Muslim culture and Muslim sentiments" as they were the product of the education provided by the University.<sup>66</sup>

## VI

Let us now pause for a while and see where we stand after tracing the line of debate in the Assembly so far. It is clear that the House was vertically split into two contending communal groups cutting across political affiliations of the members on the issue of the Bengal Secondary Education Bill 1940.

- The Hindu members of the House opposed the Bill on two basic grounds. These were, *i*) Government Control and *ii*) communal representation. They claimed to have been championing the cause of secular and national education. According to them Government control and communal representation were detrimental to the cause of secular and national education and as such, no compromise on these two fundamental points was possible.
- On the other hand, Muslim members considered both Government control and communal representation necessary for safeguarding the educational interests of the Muslim community and refused to yield on these two counts.

It is interesting to note that the Hindu members condemned communalism in education from the postulate that the arena of education was sacrosanct and secular, and that national education was ideal. But they did not find it inconsistent to boast of Hindu contribution and even to build a separate system for non-Muslims. Muslim members, on the other hand, defended the communal representation on two basic assumptions: one, the cultural roots of the two communities were different; and two, the existing system of education was biased in favour of one community. Freeing the system from the clutches of one community they considered to be the pre-condition for building a general system which would take care of the educational

interests of different communities. The general thrust of their arguments was to prove the Hindu bias and dominance over different spheres of education like text-books, curriculum, syllabus and management. Their demand was for a "fair share" in all these spheres of education. It is apparent that Hindu members attacked communalism to defend Hindu interests which they felt was threatened by the Bill while Muslim members attacked Hindu vested interests in the present system of education to safeguard their own educational interests which they thought was neglected so long.

To come back to our story, the motion by Harendranath Choudhury for eliciting public opinion was then put to vote and was lost with 71 votes in favour and 131 against. An analysis of the voting on this motion shows that all the Hindu members, excepting the Hindu Ministers, voted for it while all the Muslim members excepting the three independent members, voted against it. Fazlul Huq motion to refer the Bill to a Select Committee thereafter was adopted by the House by 121 votes in favour and 60 against.

## VII

On 2nd September 1941, the Report of the Select Committee was placed before the House by Fazlul Huq. Harendranath Chaudhury proposed eight amendments and moved a motion to recommit the Bill to the same Select Committee to make the amendments. In a fervent speech he said that since the Bill had summarily been referred to the Select Committee

Bengal has known no peace. For about a year educated public opinion in Bengal continues to be exercised more by this measure than either by war abroad or even by riots within the province.... The communal fascism in the educational sphere that the Bill promises to introduce can only find a non-communal parallel in any of the totalitarian countries with which the Government of India may either be at war or allied.<sup>46</sup>

In fact, the Hindu members including the Congress and Hindu nationalists, found the Select Committee Report more communal and

as such more reactionary. The debate on the Report was more tense and hence revealing. Syamaprasad Mookerjee, the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, supported the recommittal motion of the Congress leader Harendra Chaudhury and upheld the cause of secular education. He said, "In Bengal political and official domination is closely linked up with communal squabbles which, if unchecked, will sound the death-knell of true education.... We want our secondary education to develop purely on secular lines."<sup>70</sup> While Syamaprasad advocated secular education, Sarat Chandra Bose, the leader of Congress opposition appealed to all to approach the Bill from a nationalist stand point. He said, "This Bill mortgages the future. It stretches the grasping hands of reaction and sectionalism towards posterity."<sup>71</sup>

It was Atul Chandra Sen, another Congress leader, who defined the secular and national education as perceived by the Hindus of Bengal. He said,

It is openly hinted that the Hindu mind is at present dominating education and educational ideas in the land. Yes, this is true and for historical reasons. When the English culture invaded this land the Hindu mind with its innate catholicity and receptiveness drank deep of this culture while our Muslim brethren stood sullenly away... being enriched by the new ideas the Hindus mind began to build up a new culture -- not a Hindu culture in the narrow sense, but an Indian culture, in which all communities and individuals, Hindus and Musalmans, Rabindranath and Iqbal alike must contribute if they love themselves, their community and the land they inhabit and want to earn for it an honoured place in the community of nations....

He further said, "We regard cultural differences as mere mental angularities which without losing the mental substance may be rounded off by closer and closer political and cultural contact -- by creating a composite culture of all communities inhabiting the land..."<sup>72</sup>

This discourse may remind one of the Hindu Mahasabha thesis of *Hindutva* as a non-religious cultural concept of Indian origin. Hindu Mahasabha thesis by implication excluded Muslims as non-Indian while this nationalist theory of composite culture or cultural synthesis admit the Muslims into a Hinduised Indian culture. In fact, Muslims,



in general, never liked this theory of cultural synthesis as they considered this to be a process of Hinduisation of Muslims in India. Abul Monsur Ahmed, a prominent political person of the time, observed in this regard thus:

the reason why there was no Hindu-Musalman unity was Hindus wanted Musalmans to merge into Hindu society as Aryans, non-Aryans, Saks and Huns did. Musalmans ought to become Hinduised Musalman. To be Indian Musalman would not do. Not only Congress and Hindu Sabha but even Rabindranath Tagore opined thus.<sup>73</sup>

Deliberations of Muslim members in the Assembly indicate that this was the general impression of Muslims about the theory of cultural synthesis. The responses of Rabindranath Tagore, Profulla Chandra Roy and other Hindu public men to the proposed Bill only strengthened their impression further.

We would better complete our story in the Assembly before going out to survey the public responses outside. On 4 September 1941 the opposition amendment for the recommittal of the Bill to the same Select Committee was rejected by the House by 124 to 56 votes. Opposition thereafter took up delaying tactics and moved a number of amendments on different clauses of the Bill. Division was sought on every motion of amendments. Some of the clauses were passed during the month of September. Meanwhile a ministerial crisis cropped up and on December 16, a new Ministry headed by A.K. Fazlul Huq including Syamaprasad Mookerjee as Finance Minister took over the charge. As a result the Bill along the clauses already passed was allowed to lapse.

In the 13th session of the Assembly in April 1942 a new Secondary Education Bill was introduced by the new Progressive Coalition Ministry as it was called. Abul Kasim, the Education Minister, proposed to refer the Bill to a Select Committee with instruction to submit its report by 31 July 1942. The Bill had the same fate. The Select Committee virtually could not function as various technical objections were raised by some members. Time for submitting the report had to be extended for as many as five times and on the last occasion till 31 March 1943. But in that very month Fazlul Huq was forced by the

Governor to resign. Syamaprasad had resigned from the Ministry in November 1942. The Bill was thus dropped automatically. On May 10, 1944, Temizuddin Khan, Education Minister of the Muslim League Ministry moved the Bengal Secondary Education Bill, 1944. But before the Bill could get through the Assembly, Bengal was partitioned into two countries. Hindu members kept their word and unsettled the settled fact of communal representation in educational management but at the cost of partition of Bengal.

Syamaprasad Mookerjee, the most vocal and forceful opponent of communal representation in the field of education, supported the Partition of Bengal while Fazlul Huq who advocated communal representation and introduced the Bill in the Assembly, made an all-out effort in favour of a united Bengal. But that is another story.

## VIII

Let us now turn towards the picture outside the Assembly. There is no doubt that the Secondary Education Bill stirred the Hindu public opinion in an unprecedented manner. This stiffened the Muslim attitude further. The Bill was gazetted on 1 August 1940. On the very next day Syamaprasad Mookerjee on behalf of the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha issued a statement saying, "Hindus of Bengal must observe in a befitting manner Sunday August 4 which has been declared as 'An All Bengal Protest Day'"<sup>74</sup> In a letter to the Branch secretaries of the Sabha he wrote, "The Hindu Mahasabha has no right to exist if it cannot boldly fight against the deliberate acts of injustice which have been committed or about to be committed by the Ministry."<sup>75</sup> On August 3, 1940 *Amrita Bazar Patrika* called the Bill "A Ruinous Education Policy", and wrote, "Thus, the Hindus on whose sacrifice the University has been built are given sack. The Board is to be officialised largely, Moslemised partly, with the Hindus as of no consequence whatever."<sup>76</sup> On August 4 a protest meeting was organised at Sraddhananda Park, Calcutta. According to *Amrita Bazar Patrika* a crowd of thirty thousand at the modest computation gathered. Saffron robed sannyasins with red tridents lent an unusual feature. Syamaprasad hinted at launching mass civil resistance if their demands were not fulfilled.<sup>77</sup>

As days passed the protest movement by Hindus got momentum and grew more and more powerful and voluminous. There surfaced an instinctive Hindu solidarity; old rivalries were forgotten; party polemics were dropped; Bose-League pact was condemned. Hindu Mahasabha grew as a very powerful organisation and its popularity almost touched the sky. Syamaprasad became the hero. Hindu Mahasabha, Congress and most other organisations dominated by Hindus got united on one platform over this issue.

On August 6, a public meeting of the representatives of the members of the managing committees and teachers of schools in Calcutta and its suburbs was held in the Albert Hall under the presidency of Harendra Coomer Mookerjee. The meeting considered the Bill "anti-national" and "reactionary" as it would make education subservient to political and communal considerations. The meeting protested against Government control and communal representation. It further pointed out that the Bill ignored "the legitimate claims of the teachers of secondary schools in respect of their representation on the Board and the Executive Council".<sup>78</sup> It is surprising that in the Assembly debate hardly any member raised this very important point. It may also be noted that members of managing committees and teachers unitedly joined the protest movement although the main objective of the teachers' movements till then was to fight the tyranny of the managing committees of the educational institutions. In fact, this Bill threatened the interest of managing committees of aided and unaided recognised schools. There was hardly anything in the Bill for the teacher as a community, to fear or to lose.

On 18 August the Annual Conference of the Calcutta Teachers' Association adopted a resolution condemning the Bill. Syamaprasad Mookerjee threatened while opening the Conference that if the Bill was passed he would advise the Hindus to constitute a separate Secondary Education Board for them.<sup>79</sup>

All Bengal Teachers' Association organised a special session on 28 December at the University Institute Hall. It resolved,

The Bengal Secondary Education Bill is a dangerously disruptive measure and will retard the progress of education in Bengal, and that as it is academically and nationally an unsound policy to introduce communalism in the sphere of education, the Bill

should be immediately withdrawn.<sup>80</sup>

By now different district Associations and more than 400 schools adopted such resolutions. A.B.T.A. however, recognised the fact that the "violent storm of protest" against the Bill was raised by the "educated non-Muslim communities" and appealed to the Muslim community in Bengal "to rise to the height of the occasion by proclaiming that they shall be no party in consenting to the introduction of communalism in education."<sup>81</sup> The Muslim response was that, not the Bill, but the protest movement was communal.<sup>82</sup> A.B.T.A. like all other Hindus, failed to take cognisance of the fact that the prevailing education system was considered by the Muslims as communal in substance and structure.

On 25 August another meeting was held at Sradhananda Park convened jointly by Syamaprasad Mookerjee, Sarat Chandra Bose and Hem Chandra Naskar to protest against the Bill. Both Mookerjee and Bose reiterated that if the Bill was passed in spite of their protest they would build their own council to organise and control their own system of education.<sup>83</sup>

Syamaprasad Mookerjee toured through different districts of Bengal and addressed public meetings organised by local Hindus. They gave him rousing receptions everywhere. By December 1940 the movement reached its peak when a massive protest conference was organised by the Hindu leaders of Bengal. A Reception Committee of 1200 persons was formed including Syamaprasad Mookerjee, Sarat Chandra Bose, Nirmal Chandra, Naliniranjan Sarkir, Bidhan Chandra Roy, Nilratan Sarkir, Kiran Sankar Roy, Tulsi Goswami, H.C. Mookherjee, and others. The Reception Committee in an appeal said,

if Government persists in carrying this Bill through the legislature in its present form the Hindus and the communities other than Muslim in this province may feel compelled to demand that there should be a separate authority established for their education.... We should be prepared to take steps for constituting our own Board of Education....<sup>84</sup>

The Conference continued for three days from 21 December to 23 December, at Hazra Park and was presided over by Acharya Prafulla

Chandra Roy, the most respected public man of the time next only to Rabindranath Tagore. Rabindranath Tagore sent a message to the Conference. According to *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 3,200 delegates representing the "educational institutions and interests in all parts of the province" participated in the Conference. Jadunath Sarkar, S. Radhakrishnan, Meghnad Saha, Hirendranath Dutta and almost all other leading educationists, politicians and intellectuals who were Hindus were present in the Conference. On the opening day 10,000 people attended it.<sup>55</sup> Nationalist press gave it unusual publicity.

Rabindranath Tagore in his message and Prafulla Chandra Roy in his presidential speech sounded a warning against the intrusion of communalism in the "sacred shrine of Learning". They however, equally failed to appreciate the Muslim point of view and sentiments. Tagore in his message wrote,

we are proud of our Bengali language which must be preserved from harm and nourished by the devotion of our people; no sacrifice would be too great in the task of strengthening its foundations in the minds of our new generation at the educational institutions and outside... the danger which menaces the cultural existence of my Province has touched me profoundly and I cannot help sending these few words even from my sick-bed.<sup>56</sup>

In fact, a bogey was raised by the nationalist press and Hindu intelligentsia that the present government was encouraging Muslimisation of Bengali Language and culture. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on 18 October, wrote an editorial with the title "Moslemisation of Bengali Language". It said,

We have on several occasions had to discharge the painful duty of exposing the vagaries of the Bengal Text Book Committee.... Of late, there has been unfortunately displayed an increasing tendency on the part of certain Muslim writers to introduce in Bengali literature outlandish Arabic and Persian words.... The Bengali language it should be remembered, has been, like so many other languages derived from Sanskrit. Necessarily, therefore, it is profoundly influenced by that mother of all languages not only as regard its vocabulary but its general character and style as well.

Our Mahomedan friends, who are for the most part Hindu converts to Islam, have no reason to take umbrage at this or to consider it as a slight to their religion and culture.<sup>87</sup>

It was for this attitude of Hindus that Abul Monsur Ahmed alleged that Hindus wanted us to be Hinduised Muslims.<sup>88</sup>

Prafulla Chandra Roy in his written speech said, "...Indeed, I am fully convinced that, of all the misdeeds and misadventures of the present Ministry, the Secondary Education Bill is the most mischievous from the nationalist stand point."<sup>89</sup> He further said, "with exception of about 50 government schools and less than 150 schools maintained by the Christians missions, secondary education in the province is provided in the institutions built up and maintained by the Hindus... is it any wonder that the Hindus refuse to accept a measure which seeks not only to restrict the scope for their intellectual progress but to strike at the very root of their own culture" by official control on communal basis.<sup>90</sup> He even resented such provisions of the Bill as would deprive Calcutta University of its rights to recognise schools, to admit candidates to the Matriculation examinations and framing the syllabuses and prescribing the text-books.<sup>91</sup> It is evident that Roy would not take note of the Muslim resentment against Calcutta University as an institution with Hindu bias.

The Conference condemned the Bill on many grounds and demanded its immediate withdrawal. It condemned the Bill as it "makes the interest of Education subservient to political and communal considerations, and completely ignores the academic and cultural point of view which is absolutely essential to the building up of a sound system of National Education."<sup>92</sup> It is evident that the conference ignored the Muslim point of view. Muslims, in fact contested the claim that the present system of education was a political, non-communal and secular. According to them it had definite Hindu cultural bias and as such it was communal. Besides, they refused to accept nationalism as developed in India, as a secular ideology. To their mind it was Hindu nationalism and as such not acceptable. In fact, here lies the crux of the problem.

It is also evident that not all the resolutions adopted in the conference were entirely free from communal bias. It was stated in one resolution that, "The Bill is specially designed to cripple the educa-



tional interests of Hindus of Bengal, who supply about 75 per cent of the pupils and even a larger percentage of the funds of the secondary schools in the province"<sup>95</sup> Another resolution reads,

"The Bill places the preparation and publication of text-books in the hands of Special Committees which are of predominantly communal character.... The Bill will seriously affect the integrity of the Bengali language and literature and will destroy the culture of the province, the manifestations of which are already clearly visible in the existing text-books approved by the Education Department now under communal influence."<sup>96</sup> Now Muslims for long have been alleging the same against Hindus who were dominating the system of education in all its sphere.

The Conference even gave a call for raising funds and to take measures towards constituting a separate authority for the secondary education of Hindus and other non-Muslim communities.<sup>95</sup> This was no doubt a separatist slogan and no less communal than communal representation. After the Conference Fazlul Huq in a statement alleged that, "I have not the slightest doubt that the agitation is based on intensely communal grounds, and in a narrow spirit of non-appreciation of the claims of all communities except a section of the caste Hindus."<sup>96</sup> He even said that he was prepared to amend or even withdraw the Bill if it was opposed on purely educational grounds. Prafulla Chandra Roy in a rejoinder denied the allegation that the Bill was opposed on communal grounds and maintained that a look through the resolutions of the Conference would show that the opposition was mainly on educational grounds.<sup>97</sup>

Muslims defended communal representation to restore a balance in the educational system which in its composition and content was heavily tilted towards the Hindu community. In this, however, the Hindu leaders saw the opening of the floodgate of communalism in the educational system, the only remedy for which, according to them, lay in the constitution of a separate Board.

A resolution of these diametrically opposite stands was not easy to come by. Bengali Muslims in their new quest for an identity found in the issue a rallying point just as the Hindu sentiment that was whipped up during the controversy cut across political parties and even secular associations like All Bengal Teachers' Association. As the battle lines began to be drawn more rigidly the weakness of the

ideology of Indian nationality came out more sharply with words like "Indian" and "Bengali" becoming more suspect and major bones of contention between the communities.

## NOTES

Note: The paper uses a variant of the spelling of "Muslim" as "Moslem" in quotations from documents of the British period -- Editor.

- 1 Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Manas O Bangla Sahitya* (Muktodhara, Calcutta, 1971), pp. 81, 96-97. Anisuzzaman observed, "It was most unfortunate that Nationalism and Hindu revivalism became synonymous." He further observed, "The theory of separate Hindu Muslim nation took root as Hinduism and Nationalism became synonymous."

Sarkar, Sumit, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal* (Peoples Publishing House, Delhi, 1973), p. 411. Sarkar also writes, "Patriotism tended to be identified with Hindu revivalism, 'Hindu' and 'nationalism' came to be used as almost synonymous terms -- a good example would be 'National' Nabagopal Mitra with his Hindu mela."

Chatterjee, Partha, *Nationalist Thought And The Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986), pp. 72, 77. He observed, "Bankim's nationalism leads him to the claim that purified and regenerated Hindu ideal is far superior as a rational philosophy of life than anything that Western religion or philosophy has to offer. He further observed, "It was this ideal, which produced in Bankim a barely concealed hostility towards Islam." See also De Amalendu, *Bangali Buddhijibi O Bichchinneatabad* (Ratna Prakashan, Calcutta, 1974).

- 2 Mannan Abdul Qazi, *The Emergence and Development of Dobhasi Literature in Bengal* (Bengal Academy, Dacca, 1974). As quoted in page 187.
- 3 Ahmed, Wakil, *Unish Shatakey Bangali Musalmaner Chinta Chetanar Dhara*, Part II, (Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1983), pp. 133-152. Mannan Abdul Qazi, n. 2. See Chapter XI Muslim Society and Its Language Problems.
- 4 This may appear to be a simplistic formulation of a very complex process. I am aware that Islamisation of Bengali Muslims, if I am allowed to use the term, can be traced in the Farazi and Wahabi movements; the economic roots of these movements and their anti-British character. There is no doubt also that a separatist tendency is inherent in any revivalist or fundamentalist movement. Yet it may be said that the revivalist movements of Muslims in Bengal during late 19th Century and early 20th Century took a distinct separatist character mainly as a reaction to Hindu nationalism. Shila Sen saw it as "self assertion of a conscious community in an attempt to define its social, political and economic mores". Sen Shila, *Muslim Politics in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1976), p. 22.
- 5 *Report of the Committee Appointed By the Bengal Government to Consider Questions Connected with Muhammadan Education* (Calcutta, 1915), p. iii.

- 6 Ibid., p. 16.
- 7 Ibid., Recommendations No. 53, 55.
- 8 Ibid., Recommendations No. 83, 58, 60.
- 9 Ibid., p. 19.
- 10 Ibid., p. 19.
- 11 Ibid., p. 25.
- 12 Ibid., p. 25.
- 13 *Report of Calcutta University Commission 1917-1919*, Vol. I, Part I, Calcutta, 1919, p. 175.
- 14 Naik, J.P. and Nurullah Syed, *A Students History of Education in India* (Delhi, 1974), As quoted in pages 324-325.
- 15 *Report of the Dacca University Committee*, p. 31.
- 16 Islam, Nurul, *Samayikpore Jiban O Janamat* (Bangla Academy, Dacca, 1977), pp. 24-25. *Report of the Kamal Yar Jung Education Committee*, Calcutta, pp. 204-205.
- 17 Ahmed, Abul Monsur, *Fifty Years of Politics As I Saw it* (Nowroz Kitabistan, Dacca, 1975), p. 155.
- 18 *Report of the Kamal Yar Jung Committee*, n. 16, Note by Azizul Huq, pp. 275-295.
- 19 Ibid., Chapter XI and pp. 287-294. Mitra N.N. (ed.), *The Indian Annual Register*, Calcutta, 1938, Vol. II, p. 438 and 1939, Vol. II, p. 425. In successive sessions of All India Muslim Educational Conferences in 1938 and 1939 Wardha scheme was severely criticised by different speakers including A.K. Fazlul Huq. Resolutions were adopted rejecting the scheme.
- x20 *Report of the Kamal Yar Jung Committee*, n. 16, pp. 290-291.
- 21 Ibid., p. 291.
- 22 Mitra, n. 19, 1941, Vol. I, p. 276.
- 23 Ibid., p. 280.
- 24 Ibid., 1939, Vol. II, p. 316.
- 25 Ibid., 1938, Vol. II, p. 339.
- 26 Ibid., 1939, Vol. II, p. 320.
- 27 Ibid., 1939, Vol. II, p. 320.
- 28 Bandopadhyaya, Brajendranath, *Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya* (Sahitya-Sadhak-Charitmal Bangya Sahitya Parisat, Calcutta, B.S. 1381), p. 35-40. Bhudev was appointed Inspector of Schools, Behar Circle on 15 November 1876. He wanted Hindi as the national language for India. It was during his time that Nagri script was introduced in the Government offices replacing "Persian script" (?) Bhudev, it is stated, took initiative to introduce Hindi as the medium of instructions in the primary schools in Behar. *Calcutta Review*, 1880, Vol. 71, pp. 151-168 and 1881, Vol. 72-73, pp. 363-377. In volume 71 of *Calcutta Review* Grierson wrote the article mentioned, in defence of Behari dialect as the medium of instruction and official language. He considered Behari a language different from Hindi. In Vol. 72-73 of *Calcutta Review*, he again wrote an article "Hindi and the Behari Dialects" to show the difference between the two languages in support of his plea for the peoples tongue. Obviously, he was also like Bhudev, not in favour of retaining *farsi* as the official language but unlike Bhudev he wanted to introduce one Behari dialect in its place.

- 29 Jahan, Sarwar, *Bankim Upannase Muslim Prasanga O Charitra* (A study of the Muslim topics and character in the Novels of Bankim Chandra) (Bangla Academi, Dacca, 1984). It is a good objective study of the subject.
- 30 Islam, n. 16, pp. 352-357.
- 31 Khan, Layek Ali, *Bangla Sahitya Musalman Anusanga, Barika*, January-March 1988, Calcutta. In this article the author has highlighted this point. He writes that Muslim world is surprisingly absent in the modern Bengali literature.
- 32 *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, 1940, Vol. 57, No. 4-7, 21 August 1940, pp. 37-38.
- 33 *Calcutta University Commission*, n. 13, Vol. IV, Part II, Recommendations of the Commission Chapter XXXI.
- 34 *Report of the Committee on the Draft Secondary Education Bill Appointed by the Syndicate*, December, 1937. See Appendix A, p. 1. A short account showing the different stages of the question of establishment of a Board for secondary education.
- 35 *Ibid.*, pp. 4-7.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- 37 *Ibid.*, Appendix B, letter No. Misc 5162, dated 4 January 1937, from the Registrar to the Secretary of the Government of Bengal.
- 38 *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, n. 32, p. 42.
- 39 The Bengal Secondary Education Bill, 1940 as published in *Calcutta Gazette* dated 1 August 1940. This is what I find to be the composition of the Board from the Gazetted Bill. But Pramatha Banerjee interpreted the composition differently in his speech in the Assembly.
- 40 *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, n. 32, 27 August 1940, pp. 217-223.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 21 August, 1940, p. 46.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- 45 Chaudhuri, Harendra Nath, *The New Menace to High School Education in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1933), pp. 126-127. Harendra Nath Chaudhuri wrote this book as a criticism of the Government policy in regard to High School education, a rejoinder and a study. In this book he wrote, "The terrorist movement has been responsible for many a misfortune of this provinces, but the injury that it has done to the reputation of her high schools is not the least of the disservice it has done to her. Its reprehensible attempt to extend the recruiting field into the sacred precincts of educational institutions meant for immature young people and boys of tender years is worthy of the severest condemnation indeed."
- 46 *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, n. 32, p. 67.
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 West Bengal Secondary Education Act providing for the creation of a Secondary Board was passed in 1950 and the West Bengal Secondary Education Board actually came into existence in 1951. In 1963 this Act was replaced by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education Act, 1963, which became effective from January 1964. This Act provided for a Board which would be constituted mainly

with ex-officio or nominated members. There was hardly any provision for elected member. Government control over the present West Bengal Secondary Education Board is also absolute.

- 50 *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, n. 32, 22 August, p. 83.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 27 August, p. 195.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 214.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 28 August, p. 251.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p. 266.
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 268.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 276.
- 57 *Ibid.*, pp. 278-279.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 22 August, pp. 84-85.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- 60 *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 109.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- 63 *Ibid.*, 27 August, p. 187.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 204.
- 65 *Ibid.*, p. 233.
- 66 *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 28 August, p. 243.
- 68 *Ibid.*, pp. 243-244.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 2 September 1941, p. 55.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 4 September 1941, p. 145.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p. 151.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 3 September 1941, pp. 88-89.
- 73 Ahmed Abul Monsur, n. 17, pp. 160-161.
- 74 *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 2 August 1940.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 4 August 1940.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 3 August 1940.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 5 August 1940.
- 78 *Teachers' Journal*, Vol. XIX, 1940, pp. 517-518.
- 79 *Ibid.*, p. 582.
- 80 *Ibid.*, Vol. XX, January 1941, p. 65.
- 81 *Ibid.*
- 82 Ahmed, Abul Monsur, n. 17, p. 214. Ahmed as the editor of the Bengali daily paper *Krishak* supported the Secondary Education Bill in the editorial column. The Managing Director objected and asked how could he support a communal Bill. Ahmed answered, "Not the Bill but the protest was communal." He however, resigned the post.
- 83 *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 26 August 1940.
- 84 *Ibid.*, 27 September 1940.
- 85 *Ibid.*, 22 December 1940.

204 *Democracy and Education in India*

- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Ibid., 18 October 1940.
- 88 Ahmed, Abul Monsur, n. 17, pp. 160-161.
- 89 *Teachers' Journal*, Vol. XX, 1941, p. 20.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Ibid., p. 24.
- 92 Sinha, Prabodh, *Problems of Education in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1941), Appendix A.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 Ibid.
- 95 *Teachers' Journal*, January 1941, p. 68.  
*Anvita Bazar Patrika*, 24 December 1940.
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## Degeneration of Democracy and Education: Reflections on the Indian Scenario

N. Jayaram

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### Introduction

Political philosophers and educationists have from time immemorial debated on the relation between education and democracy.<sup>1</sup> In his famous treatise *Democracy and Education* first published in 1916, the noted American educationist and philosopher, John Dewey suggested that the character of the educational system has a definite bearing on the polity of a democratic country.<sup>2</sup> Since then liberal political philosophy has come to view education as a *sine qua non* of democracy. Today, every politician mouths this idea as a cliché.

However, there is more to this political doctrine linking education to democracy than as a mere exercise in rhetoric. Analyzing the comparative data on the educational level of a nation's population and its chances for democracy, Lipset observed that "the educational enrolment per thousand total population at three different levels -- primary, post-primary, and higher educational -- is... consistently related to the degree of democracy." He also found that

the evidence on the contribution of education to democracy is

even more direct and strong on the level of individual behaviour within countries than it is in cross-national correlations.... The higher one's education, the more likely one is to believe in democratic values and support democratic practices. All relevant studies indicate that education is more significant than either income or occupation.

This is so because,

education presumably broadens man's outlook, enables him to understand the need for norms of tolerance, restrains him from adhering to extremist doctrines, and increases his capacity to make rational electoral choices.

Lipset, therefore, concluded that "if we cannot say that a 'high' level of education is a *sufficient* condition for democracy, the available evidence suggests that it comes close to being a *necessary* one."<sup>3</sup>

Sound as this thesis on education and democracy may apparently seem to be, it is not difficult to pick holes in it. It is not my purpose here to controvert Lipset's thesis by adducing fresh comparative data. Such an exercise, for reasons which would become clear later, would be futile in an effort to understand either the educational crisis or the political mess in an individual country, as for instance in India. Furthermore, to attempt such an understanding it would be necessary to state the unstated assumptions of the liberal education-democracy thesis.

This thesis conceives of people as atomized units behaving, by and large, in a rational manner. It assumes people to be homogeneous and living in an open, though stratified, society. It conceives of education as formal schooling (in the Western "secular" sense) which is equally open to all. It assumes, *a la* Tom Paine, that democracy is the best form of government and it alone is the legitimate form of government under all conditions. It also assumes that the leaders who are elected by the people are the enlightened ones who endeavour to work for the common weal not only without any self-interest but even at the cost of their own self. It further presumes that the election of the leaders is a fair and free mechanism, in which the people make a rational choice. Education attained by the people is supposed to influence their choice

of the leaders and to induce them to engage themselves in a discourse on their polity.

Though this thesis does not necessarily posit a *status quoist* concept of society, it nevertheless emphasizes change as a peaceful process of transition involving readjustments within or tinkering of the social system. It excludes change *of* the system. After all, if people are dissatisfied with those who are in charge of the government, they can be changed at the next hustings! While conflict is not ruled out -- in fact, in some forms and under certain conditions, it is even regarded as functional -- all violence is dubbed as uncivilized behaviour. Here again, education is expected to play a positive role in enabling the people to resolve a conflict situation through peaceful dialogue.

In the light of all this, it is easy to understand how the liberal political philosophy was led by its internal logic to declare "the end of ideology."<sup>4</sup> Both education and government are viewed as "value neutral" and if there is any value-commitment at all, it is to democracy as an *abstract absolute*. Education and democracy, in brief, are treated as given entities. No wonder then, text-books on liberal political philosophy, and even political science too, generally eschew any discussion on the socio-economic and cultural context of the operation of democracy, save for some illustrative purpose.

Does this facile thesis of liberal political philosophy, reiterated often by academicians and politicians alike, hold good with reference to the social dynamics of a polity like India? Is it substantiated by, let alone explain, the experience of India over the last four decades? What is the education-democracy linkage as witnessed in India? I have attempted a tentative examination of these questions in this paper, which is not conceived as an exegesis either of democracy or of education *per se*. Hence, on both these aspects my analysis would be inadequate in coverage and superficial in treatment. Rather, my objective here is to delineate the education-democracy linkage as it evolved in the pre-Independence era and as it is functioning today.

### **The Colonial Legacy**

In India, the institutions of "modern" education and parliamentary democracy are both British colonial legacies.<sup>5</sup> The earliest at-

tempt to impart English education in India can be traced to the missionary activities following the establishment of the East India Company and the measures adopted by Warren Hastings as early as 1773. The protracted controversy that had been generated by these initial efforts was finally resolved by William Bentinck, barely a month after Thomas Babington Macaulay had penned his (in)famous Minute (on February 2, 1835). This policy, was reaffirmed by Charles Wood's Despatch of 1854, and with minor modifications continued throughout the British rule.

Historians of education have now adequately laid bare the fact that the "spreading (of) English education was not an act of disinterested magnanimity".<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, it was the outcome of a complex combination of motives, not the least of which was the political motive of consolidating and maintaining the dominance of the British in the country. Charles Trevelyan, a distinguished civil servant of the British Raj, clearly perceived the political pay off of English education. The English-educated Indians, he hoped, would cease to consider their rulers as foreigners; on the contrary, he expected them to become "intelligent and zealous cooperators."<sup>7</sup>

This does not mean that the British embarked on a programme of mass English education in India. What they were interested in was only the creation of a small class of English-educated Indians, who may act, in Macaulay's words, as "interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern -- a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect."<sup>8</sup> This class was expected to filter down to the masses the knowledge and values it had acquired and internalized. This, it was hoped, would eventually stabilize the Raj.

The system of education that the British introduced in India was modelled after the system prevalent in their Mother country. From the time of its inception it was urban-based, top heavy, and elitist. The masses gradually got estranged from the polity because of the emphasis on English in the administrative, judicial and commercial institutions established by the British. Since they were vitally affected by these new institutions and were not able to understand the modalities of their operation, they were forced to depend upon those who were English-educated and who consequently came to be bestowed with unprecedented prestige and power.

Although in the shorter run English education did contribute to the political stability of the Raj, in the longer run it proved to be the undoing of the British stranglehold on the country. The educated class, which had been exposed to the values of "liberty, equality and fraternity" espoused in Europe and elsewhere in the West after the French Revolution, became more and more vocal in its criticism of the Raj. The Sedition Committee which investigated the revolutionary conspiracies in India reported in 1918 that most of the conspirators were educated young men. As it turned out almost all the leaders in the forefront of the nationalist movement belonged to the English-educated elite.<sup>9</sup>

Though the English-educated elite turned from being "zealous cooperators" to becoming "freedom fighters", they could not rise to the historic task of liberating the nation. The nationalist movement, led predominantly by the English-educated bourgeoisie, was not a radical revolution premised upon mass involvement and directed towards changing the fundamental institutions and cultural values of society.<sup>10</sup> Nowhere is this more perspicuous than in the gradual adoption of the Western -- mostly British -- institutions of administration, justice and commerce, and the hammering out of the republican constitution by the Constituent Assembly after Independence.<sup>11</sup> It is to this mere change of complexion of the elite from white to brown that we owe the rather smooth transfer of power from the colonial masters to the indigenous English-educated bourgeoisie, which was accomplished without any major breakdown or transformation of the English-implanted institutions, including education and parliamentary democracy.

In brief, the back-drop for a discussion on education-democracy linkage in India is provided by the implantation and development of an elitist system of education superimposed on existing inequalities, a gradual socialization into a parliamentary form of government and the adoption of a republican constitution by the English-educated bourgeoisie with strong underpinnings of liberal political philosophy. That India has been able to survive as a democracy -- irrespective of the modalities of its operation -- for over four decades, notwithstanding the innumerable fissiparous tendencies, belying all doubts,<sup>12</sup> is something remarkable by itself. However, the glaringly unequal distribution of the fruits of planned development reinforcing the already existing inequalities, and the persistence of poverty, illiteracy and

exploitation of large sections of the population reveal that the system is no panacea for all our socio-economic ills.

### **Illiteracy: Failure on Education Front**

What would perhaps appear to be the most glaring and at the same time quite significant point of irreconcilability of India's experience with Lipset's thesis is the survival and functioning of her democracy in spite of the rampant illiteracy and indigence of the masses. One may recall here that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in his Jodidi Lecture delivered at the Harvard University on October 18, 1987 (Government of India 1987) expressed the rather naive opinion that India's experience has proved that illiteracy after all is not a stumbling block for the functioning of democracy.<sup>13</sup> This paradox raises certain important questions about the nature of the democracy which prevails in the country as well as the nature of the educational development that has taken place after Independence.

The most unpardonable failure of our educational system is evidenced by the pathetic literacy rates. While the percentage of literates has increased at a snail's pace from 16.67 in 1951 to 36.23 in 1981, the number of illiterates has shot up from approximately 300 million to 437 million in the same period, and is expected to cross the 500 million mark by A.D. 2000. Of the 125 countries listed by the World Bank, only 26 had literacy rates worse than ours. And, the Bank estimates that India would have the largest concentration (54.8 per cent in 15-19 age group) of illiterate population in the world by that year.

As Paul Harrison says, "illiteracy is a personal tragedy, and a powerful force in preserving inequalities and oppressions."<sup>14</sup> Besides being a disqualification standing in the way of better-paid employment, it is a source of cultural deprivation. It weighs heaviest on those groups -- women, scheduled castes and tribes, the poor and those in rural areas -- which are already disadvantaged in other ways. What has Independence and democracy brought to these hapless sections of our countrymen, and what meaning has democracy for them?

It is in this context that universalization of elementary education, which has unfortunately not been the primary concern for the political



elite all these years, notwithstanding the specific directive in this regard in the Constitution, assumes greatest significance. In fact, the deadline set for the realization of the Constitutional directive regarding universalization of elementary education has already been extended thrice, and the so called "new" education policy does not even set a deadline for this as a priority! It is true that most children now have a primary school within one kilometre of their homes. But the facilities available in most of these schools and the quality of the instruction imparted there are, as confessed by the "new" education policy statement,<sup>15</sup> anything but satisfactory:

Forty per cent (of these schools) have no pucca buildings, 39.72 per cent have no black boards, and 59.50 per cent have no drinking water. Thirty-five per cent schools have a single teacher to teach three or four different classes.

What is more disconcerting, out of every 100 children enrolled in Class I only 23 reach Class VIII.

In marked contrast to this scenario, excessive emphasis has been laid on higher education. While the expansion at this level has been most rapid, the percentage of the relevant age group in institutions of higher education constitutes an insignificant 4.8. With the rapid expansion of higher education the associated problems have multiplied and the resulting crisis has been accentuated over the years. The legion problems include the irrelevance of the present system of higher education to the needs of the society, the decline in the quality of education, the mismatch between education and employment and the consequent unemployment or misemployment of the educated persons, the devaluation of degrees and escalation of qualifications for jobs, and the alienation of the educated persons.<sup>16</sup> But more important from our point of view here is that while the system of education has insignificantly contributed to the levelling of inequalities, it has significantly contributed to the stabilization and perpetuation of ascribed status or status retention.<sup>17</sup> Alas, the much talked about "new" education policy has only turned out to be a programme *par excellence* of elitist education.<sup>18</sup>

It must be pointed out here that the "formal" equality of opportunities which is emphasized following its enshrinement in the

Constitution is essentially a conservative notion; and "as a recipe for social engineering it merely makes for mobility within the *status quo*."<sup>19</sup> If formal equality is fallacious in conception, it is unjust in practice. In fact, the moral assumptions about equality are ingeniously reconciled with the functionalist economic, sociological and psychological arguments for inequality in the ideology of meritocracy.<sup>20</sup> Worse still, the resulting thinking individualizes failure and shifts the blame for people's predicaments from society to individuals.

### **The Electoral Game and Manipulation of Consent**

The survival of democracy, even if it be in a truncated form, amidst rampant illiteracy and chronic poverty, necessitates an analysis of the manipulation of the consent of the people and the engineering of its legitimation by the regime. The most effective instrument for such a manipulation in a democracy is the game of elections. Election is considered as the bedrock of democracy as it gives to the people the freedom to choose their own rulers, and thereby recognizes the sovereignty of the people. The political party which has mastered the rules of the game of elections and knows how to use them fully to its advantage can play it successfully. The advantageous position which a ruling party -- especially one which was in the forefront of the freedom struggle, namely, the Indian National Congress -- commands vis-a-vis other parties can hardly be exaggerated.

Without going into the details of the electoral dynamics it is enough to note that at the national level a party has been able to rule for decades without ever getting fifty per cent of the total votes. In other words, "the democratic swindle," as Karl Marx appropriately dubbed it,<sup>21</sup> amounts to the vast masses of the people being used through the periodical ritual of elections to legitimize the rule of a party which is controlled by the ruling class.<sup>22</sup>

The absence of any sincere and dedicated opposition party to match the strength, skills and resources of the Congress party and the government led by it has no doubt enabled it to remain in power at the national level, but for the brief Janata interregnum, and provide a stable government. But its position as far as the states are concerned has seen a sea change. It is significant to note that it is precisely in the

backward states of the Hindi heartland with rates of literacy below the national average that the Congress has been able to retain its stranglehold. The elected representatives from these states together constitute a majority in the Lok Sabha.

In those states outside the Hindi heartland where the rates of literacy are above the national average, parties other than the Congress have had a chance to come to power.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the state which has been politically most volatile in the country, namely, Kerala, has the highest literacy rate. In other states where in spite of the rate of literacy being lower than the national average non-Congress parties have been able to come to power -- e.g., Andhra Pradesh and Assam -- it has been mainly due to ability of the indigenous educated elites to successfully raise the banner of revolt against the affront to the state's self-esteem and the unimaginative handling of the state's affairs by the Congress at the Centre.

A curious paradox of the Indian political scenario has been that while the leaders have been by and large educated, the educated people themselves are observed to be politically apathetic. The Constitution of India does not prescribe any educational qualifications for the membership of either Parliament or the State Assemblies. Despite this, the educational levels of the members of the Lok Sabha have not only remained relatively high but also seem to be going up in every successive Lok Sabha. The majority of the Lok Sabha members have been graduates and holders of higher academic qualifications, and the Eighth Lok Sabha has in fact the distinction of having the highest percentage of members (71.1) belonging to the category of "graduates and above."<sup>24</sup> The situation in the various State Assemblies may not be very different.

On the other hand, studies on voting behaviour seem to reveal that the illiterate and below matriculate electorate are more enthusiastic in casting their votes than their college-educated counterparts. In a case study of the Fourth General Elections in Rajasthan, Varma, Narain *et al.* found "that literacy is not a precondition for political mobilization and participation."<sup>25</sup> Similar findings have been reported by other studies.<sup>26</sup>

As Varma, Narain *et al.* observe,

what appears to motivate the electorate more to become a voter

is its sense of political efficacy. People who have faith in the efficacy of the political system in general and the ballot box in particular and who as such have a stake in both of them feel motivated to vote.<sup>27</sup>

The average educated citizen, though more exposed to the socio-economic realities and who therefore can even be expected to be politically more conscious and be aware of the political processes, tends to be more alienated from the political system and the electoral process. The educated electorate constitute a comparatively large percentage of non-voters.

Nevertheless, it can hardly be denied that if the educated persons decide to vote at all it will be to protest against the ruling party and its perceived omissions and commissions. This was witnessed in a characteristic fashion in the 1977 General Elections when the Congress party was voted out of power not only in the Centre but in many states too. Available evidence confirms that the main support of the Congress comes from "the illiterate and the half-literate voters," whereas the non-Congress parties receive "support from the better educated strata of the society."<sup>28</sup> Kini's analysis of the voting behaviour in the General Elections of 1967 in Nagpur revealed that "a vote for Congress varies inversely with the educational level and for non-Congress directly with the educational level of the voter. Congress thrives on the vote of illiterates while the non-Congress vote is more enlightened."<sup>29</sup>

The inference is obvious then that both the apathy of the educated non-voter and the illiteracy of the enthusiastic voter constitute the strength of the bourgeoisie ruling party, be it Congress or Janata or some other. No wonder then the ruling party at the Centre and in most States as well as the parties in the opposition have manifested a studied apathy to the spread of literacy or, more appropriately, a vested interest in the perpetuation of rampant illiteracy and ignorance.

It is obvious that in a democratic political game where the electorate has to choose between parties which are basically bourgeois in character, a change in the party in power cannot bring about any significant change for the masses. Should the "revolutionary," "anti-bourgeois" parties then participate in the electoral game and parliamentary politics? Shakir has quite convincingly argued that it is only through participation in elections that such parties can "educate and

enlighten the masses." He regards the "left" governments as "transitional instruments" of the working class from which miracles cannot be expected. But what is important, he emphasizes, is that "the left can show an alternative to the people" who would otherwise "obey the existing system, with a sense of inevitability."<sup>30</sup>

### Populism, Protest and Suppression

But how is the meek consent of the illiterate majority manipulated by the ruling class for the perpetuation of its own power and interests? After Independence, and especially since the mid-sixties, we have been witnessing what is best called the politics of populism and sloganeering: "*garibi hatao*," old and new "20 point programme," loan melas, subsidized sale of rice, free supply of text-books and *mangalasutras*, mid-day meal scheme, and so on. In addition to squandering the valuable scarce resources on unimaginative ephemeral schemes, this weird brand of "leftist-centrist" politics has resulted in rousing the people's unrealistic expectations and aspirations, besides breeding a sense of dependence in them. Their ambitious dreams are further whipped up by the culture of consumerism to which they are exposed by the media and the demonstration effect of the way our leaders, the elite and the *nouveau riche* lead their lives.

Considering the inexorable constraints of resources, the nature and rate of feasible economic growth and the structural limitations, these aspirations are chimerical and utopian. Since people do not or, rather, cannot realize this and as the government is neither interested in nor capable of educating them in this regard, the latter can counter the resulting unrest and attempt to maintain itself in power only through the politics of expediency. It often even tries to divert the attention of the people from the real issues. But such an exercise in political hoodwinking is, of course, not always successful.

The periodic sporadic outbursts of protest and struggle, often taking an extremist turn, should be viewed as symptomatic of the subterranean contradictions of the above situation. The successive governments have facilely treated such protests and struggles as essentially a problem of law and order, and have stubbornly refused to grapple with the underlying contradictions. As a consequence we

notice a growing authoritarianism on the part of the government on the one hand and political alienation among the people on the other. This has the danger of destroying the democratic edifice itself in the long run.<sup>31</sup>

What is worse and not surprising is that instead of identifying themselves with the state and the government, sections of the people have come to view the latter as their exploiter and to orient themselves towards them in a belligerent manner. Such an attitude comes to be mutually rationalized considering that the police and the law enforcement machinery have been politicized, the frequency of police firing and the deployment of the army to tackle civilian disorder has increased, and the number of obnoxious laws curbing dissent and democratic rights increasing.<sup>32</sup>

The fact that state aggrandizement and alienation of the people have resulted in a people-government relationship worse than the one prevalent in the pre-Independence period is tied up with a unique form of political identification which has emerged. It is observed that the country is identified with the government, the government with the ruling party, and the ruling party with its leader. This trend is characteristically illustrated by a statement such as "Indira is India," expressed by a ruling party politician a few years ago. With reference to the Congress (I) at the Centre this is understandably explained by reference to the historic role of the Congress in the freedom movement and the hold of a particular family which was deeply involved in the movement over the party. But one does see such a phenomenon even in states run by political parties which have only a recent history.

Whatever may be the roots of this phenomenon, one consequence of it is certain. That is, any criticism, however genuine it may be, of the leader of the party or the party itself, comes to be viewed as an attack on the government and the country. As a result we have a situation where "if you are not with me, you must be against me," and patriotism, whatever it may mean, has become the monopoly of the ruling party and its leader(s).

The dynamics of the foregoing situation has thrown up a new genre of leadership, which being socialized in the new wave politics is by and large totally oblivious to any higher political values and commitments and is content to pursue narrow selfish or sectional interests. It is well known that among our "leaders" today we have tax evaders, smugglers, hijackers, *goondas* and even proclaimed abscon-



ders! Political intimidation, group skirmishes, and murders are part of a syndrome which is best described by the sobriquet "the criminalization" or "the lumpenization" of politics.

A direct deliterious consequence of the general drift and the politics of expediency is the gradual erosion of existing institutions. Rule of law has almost disappeared from our jurisprudence, people's faith in the judiciary is under strain, the universities have so much deteriorated that much of what goes on in the name of education there is only to be experienced to be believed, intra-party democracy has become almost extinct, corruption, nepotism and inefficiency have come to be institutionalized as something inevitable. The fact that we are now resigned to live with these aberrations is a tragedy too deep for words.

That the common man has reconciled himself however reluctantly to his present predicament about which he feels helpless is easy to understand. But what is not so easy to understand and still more difficult to excuse is the apathy of the intellectuals, and the gradual disappearance of what Shourie recently called "the national discourse."<sup>33</sup> There are no doubt a few journalists who have taken up cudgels against autocracy, corruption, nepotism, exploitation and violation of human rights. But, by and large, our social scientists have cut a very sorry figure in this regard. It is of course true that hardly five per cent of the population knows English and only a small section of even this has the time and the inclination to read about the present state of our society and polity, and therefore the overall impact of what is written in English is far less than what is expected. Can this be an apology for apathy by a section of the population which can understand and owes a duty to make others understand too?

### **Conclusion: Education for Liberation**

The need for a radical socio-economic transformation or a "total revolution" has been repeatedly voiced. To speak of such a transformation or revolution is not to embark on its course. An important prerequisite for it is the recognition that it can come about only through a process of education whose aim is what Freire calls "conscientization."<sup>34</sup> Conscientization refers "to learning to perceive so-

cial, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality." This implies that, using education as a catalyst of social regeneration, a people can be awakened to their suppressed and deprived conditions and armed with the means of changing these conditions. "A small section of the people getting higher education and becoming individually mobile does not help spread conscientization. Rather it would act as a wet blanket on conscientization, keeping social awareness in swaddling-bands."<sup>35</sup>

The spread of literacy and oracy through lower levels of education can play an important role in bringing about social transformation. But it is precisely at this level that the present system of schooling has failed. At the snail's pace at which the rate of literacy is growing it would take many many more decades to reach a significant level. How long it will take for the oppressed sections in rural areas to reach the general level of literacy is anybody's guess. Leave alone the physical limits, the present system of education premised upon mobility ideology and welfare state philosophy cannot be expected to undertake the historic task of social transformation. In fact, it seems to be an effective instrument for the reproduction of the social division of labour and the maintenance of the *status quo*.

In a highly insightful paper on the failure of American education, Coontz concluded, "when people know that what they think will actually make a difference, what they think about is likely to expand considerably."<sup>36</sup> There is an urgent need to rekindle a national discourse on what should the future society be like and how do we go about realizing it.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, parties and organizations which are genuinely interested in bringing about a radical socio-economic transformation should primarily devote themselves to the rapid spread of literacy and oracy among the masses and set in motion a process of conscientization instead of being excessively preoccupied with electoral politics which only legitimizes the existing system and its operators all the more. After all, "a journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step"! (Laotzu).

## NOTES

1 The concept of democracy is a hard nut, which I do not propose to crack here.

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- 3 Lipset, S.M., *Political Man* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1973), pp. 55-60.
- 4 Among the chief representatives of the "end-of-ideologism" are Daniel Bell, Seymour Martin Lipset and C. Kerr. The empirical generalizations in which this ideology is embedded are summarized by Giddens. See Giddens, A., *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 283.
- 5 In outlining the colonial legacy in education I have borrowed heavily from my paper "Education in India: From Colonial Legacy to Neocolonial Dependency" presented at the V World Congress of Comparative Education, Paris, 2-6 July 1984. A revised version of this paper was published in *Mainstream*, see Jayaram, N., "Education: Colonial Legacy, Neo-Colonial Dependency," *Mainstream*, 23.35, 1985, 19-23. For a succinct account of the colonial legacy of our democratic polity, see Morris-Jones, W.H., *The Government and Politics of India* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), pp. 16-48, and Hanson, A.H. and J. Douglas, *India's Democracy* (Delhi: Vikas, 1972), pp. 11-31.
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- 7 Trevelyan, C.E. 1838. *On the Education of the People of India* (London: Longman, Orme, Gree and Longman, 1838), pp. 189-90.
- 8 Sharp, H., *Selections from Educational Records* (Part I 1791-1839) (New Delhi: Published for the National Archives of India by the Manager of Publications, Government of India, 1965), p. 116.
- 9 See McCully, B.T., *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), and Seal, A., *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1982).
- 10 See Desai, A.R., *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, 4th edition (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966).
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- 12 Harrison, S.S., *India: The Most Dangerous Decades* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1960).
- 13 Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, *Foreign Affairs Records* (1987), pp. 340-46.
- 14 Harrison, P., *Inside the Third World: The Anatomy of Poverty*, 2nd edition (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 305.
- 15 See Government of India, Ministry of Education, *Challenge of Education: A Policy Perspective* (New Delhi, 1985), p. 35.
- 16 The "new" education policy document bemoaned that the preponderant majority (of the students) come out of the institutions of higher education, perhaps with a little more of book learning and of course a degree, but with very little capacity for self-study, poor language and communication skills, a highly limited world view and hardly any sense of social or national responsibility. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 Jayaram, N., *Higher Education and Status Retention: Students in a Metropolis* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1987), pp. 159-171.

- 19 Entwistle, H., *Class, Culture and Education* (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 9.
- 20 Jayaram, N., *Introductory Sociology*, Adaptation of the original by Tony Bilton *et al.*, (Madras: Macmillan India, 1987) pp. 101-5.
- 21 Draper, H., *Karl Marx's theory of Revolution*, Vol. I (New York: Atherton Press, 1978), pp. 306-7.
- 22 Analysing the class nature of the state in India is a complex and difficult task, and a strait jacket mechanical application of the Marxian concepts is futile. See Shakir, M., *State and Politics in Contemporary India* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1986), pp. 31-62. However, the concentration of economic power in the hands of the industrial bourgeoisie in the urban areas and the class of rich peasants and landlords in the rural areas, and its bearing on the state managers (cutting across party lines) can hardly be gainsaid. It is to refer to this political combine that the terse table "ruling class" is used here.
- 23 It must be noted that ideologically, organizationally and functionally these parties are not necessarily different from the Congress. The Janata Party in Karnataka is a case in point.
- 24 Lok Sabha Secretariat, *Members of Lok Sabha: A Study in Socio-Economic Background* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1986), pp. 5-8.
- 25 Varma, S.P., I. Narain, *et al.*, *Voting Behaviour in a Changing Society: A Case Study of the Fourth General Election in Rajasthan* (Delhi: National Publishing House, 1973), p. 24.
- 26 See Sirsikar, V.M. *Sovereigns Without Crowns: A Behavioural Analysis of the Indian Electoral Process* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1973), pp. 276-281, and Ganguly, B. and M. Ganguly, *Voting Behaviour in a Developing Society: West Bengal -- a Case Study* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1975), pp. 50-52.
- 27 Varma and Narain, n. 25, p. 366.
- 28 See Sirsikar, n. 26, pp. 276-77.
- 29 Kini, N.G.S., *The City Voter in India: A Study of 1967 General Elections in Nagpur* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1974), p. 256.
- 30 Shakir, n. 22, pp. 125-26.
- 31 Desai provides an excellent documentation on and analysis of the various aspects of the repressive state in India. Desai, A.R., *Violation of Democratic Rights in India*, Vol. I (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1986).
- 32 See *Ibid.*
- 33 Shourie, A., "Converting Clamour into Discourse" and "Restoring Discourse," *Indian Express* (Bangalore), 19 and 26 June 1988.
- 34 Freire, P., *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 15.
- 35 Jayaram, n. 16, p. 157.
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**Missing Voices in the Sociology of the School in India:  
An Attempt at Restoring Them**

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I

Sociologists of education in India have tended to look at educational processes largely in terms of their "internal" and "external" dynamics discussed somewhat loosely as the social background of teachers, student politics in higher education, problems of university administration, educational goals in relation to social development, and so on. All these problems, and others of their kind, indicate a concern with issues that are perhaps necessary to identify the social linkages with educational processes in general. While an understanding of these links is indeed important, it is quite obvious that there is a lack of interest in theoretical principles as informing the problematic of educational processes in India. These theoretical principles have been neglected to the extent that we have studies of secondary and higher education, for example, which provide us with adequate descriptions of fact and detail but do not really provide us with an account, for example, of what really life at school is all about. Of course to do so is not the task of every commentator on educational processes. But surely as sociologists our work must be informed by the theoretical concerns which we bring to bear on our findings which do not exist by themselves in a vacuum. Our interpretation and explanation would

necessarily be guided by our training as sociologists and social anthropologists. However a concern with theoretical principles alone can result in an extreme case of a lack of concern with the facts on the ground, as it were. The point is that we should aim for a middle course rather than adopt either extreme posture.

The second problem is that an exegesis on educational processes in India is rarely concerned with the human beings who participate in these processes. There are studies about teachers and their problems or about students but we do not hear their voices. Education, it would appear, is discussed without its own voice. We might ascribe other voices, such as those of the prevailing influences from outside or of the internal dynamics of school organisation, for example, but we do not let its own voice speak. Teachers and pupils remain largely silent participants in the educational process in writings in India on them. It is only when their voice is heard, as that of the major participants in the process, that "meaning" is introduced into any study of educational processes.

It is Max Weber who draws our attention to the necessity of "verstehen" or "interpretive understanding" in the attempt to understand the participants' point of view: "Action is social in so far as, by virtue of the subject meaning attached to it by the acting individual (or individuals), it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course."<sup>1</sup> It follows that for an adequate explanation of society "the object of cognition is the subjective meaning-complex of action."<sup>2</sup>

In my construction of a particular school in south India -- Rishi Valley School in Andhra Pradesh run by the Krishnamurti Foundation India -- I have attempted to understand the subjective meanings which the teachers and the pupils attach to or perceive in their actions in an effort to establish their meaningful behaviour patterns.<sup>3</sup> These subjective meanings are individual and collective orientations and may arise, for example, from "subjectively defined interests" that are served by their entering into these relationships.<sup>4</sup> These interests, based on varying motivations and intentions, may include, on the part of the teachers, a commitment to the school's ideology and its implementation in the school or, alternatively, a desire for professional advancement, personal gain, status or power, or a combination of these. The pupils, on their part, may be oriented towards success, acquiring knowledge, or simply towards having "fun" and enjoying life



at school. These orientations would necessarily affect the nature and content of interactional processes. Pupil and teacher orientations towards each other and their roles are therefore significant in my understanding and interpretation of school processes.

In allowing the "missing" voices, as it were, to speak for themselves in studies of schools, for example, we are in fact imbuing educational studies with meaning that somehow gets lost in our descriptions and explanations of facts alone. The major problematic at this level then emerges as "What does it mean to be a teacher or a pupil?" within a larger question on "What is life at school all about?" It is important to point out here that the interpretive understanding of subjective meaning fulfils only one level of adequacy in sociological understanding, viz., "adequacy on the level of meaning". Sociological explanation must also be "causally adequate."<sup>5</sup> In this sense, and following Weber, I am concerned with adequacy at both individual and structural levels. I have tried to identify the structural conditions of both the internal and external orders of Rishi Valley School which partly inhibit the execution of its particular educational programme but also provide the possibilities and opportunities for the effective functioning of its pedagogic process.

The manner in which I have tried to combine the Durkheimian emphasis on objective facticity with the Weberian concern for subjective meaning may be seen as, in fact, reinforcing the two perspectives in my analysis of the school. This seems possible if we take the view that "society does indeed possess objective facticity. And society is indeed built up by activity that expresses subjective meaning.... It is precisely the dual character of society in terms of objective facticity and subjective meaning that makes its 'reality sui generis'."<sup>6</sup> My primary concern therefore is with the "world of everyday life" which "presents itself as a reality interpreted by men [and women] and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, this world has social meaning and being in so far as it is not "my private world but is from the outset an intersubjective one, shared with my fellow men, experienced and interpreted by others."<sup>8</sup> Central to my study then are the processes of interaction in the school between different groups and categories of participants, for example, between teachers and the Foundation members who are in fact responsible for the school, between pupils and teachers, amongst teachers or pupils themselves, between senior and junior pupils, between one kind of teacher and another kind, and so on. I have

also examined the interface between ideas and the school, viz. Krishnamurti's ideology and school processes, between what I call the internal and external orders of the school such as its academic programme and institutions of higher learning outside the school.

In this paper, an attempt is made to focus on one aspect of interaction in school processes: teacher-pupil interaction in different settings and contexts and the meaning this brings to school processes and in a sense contributes to the creation of a particular ambience in the school. I would like to suggest that teacher-pupil interaction in Rishi Valley School tends to be generally grounded in informality and freedom bounded however by the rules and norms of different situations and contexts. This appears to be in conjunction with the school's ideology which in fact stresses a particular kind of relationship between the teacher and the pupil. It is not possible however that authority and control would be absent from what is essentially an asymmetrical relationship. This aspect is thus also present in the school although it often tends to be invisible, as it were. When it is revealed, as we shall see below, it appears in what a pupil would refer to as a most "deadly" form.

## II

It would appear that an essential feature of teacher-pupil interaction is that it has a definable form, that some of its constituent relations stay relatively stable over time. It is therefore possible to predict certain modes of behaviour among teachers and pupils in particular contexts. The school's academic programme for the senior classes adheres to the policies and recommendations of the Indian Council of Secondary Education, and influences not only the curriculum and related activities but also the goals of the participants. At the same time, the school is located in a particular institutional setting in so far as it is managed by the Foundation and is governed by a specific educational ideology which lends it a special character that differentiates it from other public schools.

Coming closer to everyday life, the formal settings for interaction are the classroom, and other similar locations, such as the staffroom and the auditorium. Less formal settings include the "house", the

sports field, the dining hall, and the "outdoor." Temporality is an important element as interaction in each setting takes place within a prescribed time limit: teachers and pupils meet in the classroom for a predetermined length of time; interaction in the house is usually limited to outside school hours; and they spend an hour together on the sports field every afternoon. The temporal sequence of events, embodied in the school routine, contributes to the predictable and orderly manner in which the interaction occurs. The precise content of interaction may vary in different settings but it is the relative persistence or invariability of its forms which lends a sense of structure to everyday life in the school. Moreover, as the form and content of relations in one setting invariably affect relations in another, the structure of teacher-pupil relations may be seen as being relatively established in terms of predictability.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, variability in teacher-pupil interaction is also present and arises, for example, from the nature of the situation in different settings. Each situation has a dominant characteristic which appears to be the result of a number of variables. Thus a situation may be affected by the physical environment, the personality of the teacher, the multiple roles she may be performing, her ideological commitment, her image of the pupils, the nature of the subject being taught in the classroom, a preceding event like a badly done test, a forthcoming event like an examination, and teacher-pupil relations in other settings. Other factors like parental pressure and social expectations also contribute significantly to individual definitions of the situation.

To the extent that pupils interact with a number of teachers in the course of the day, the nature of the interaction inevitably varies from teacher to teacher. It is also dependent on variations among the pupils in terms of their age and gender, and their attitudes towards school processes, its ideology, and the teachers. Teachers also vary in terms of being either those committed to the school's ideology or those who are more committed to their roles as professional teachers, senior or junior teachers, and members of the Management (such as the Principal or the Headmistress) or those unconnected with it.<sup>10</sup> The kind of image or reputation a particular teacher may have established in the pupil community also affects the nature of interaction.<sup>11</sup>

The intentions of the participants are to some extent dependent on the purpose of the situation itself: for example, the classroom situation exists for the pedagogic purpose. The participants' percep-

tion of this, and the meaning they give to it, define their intention in a situation. Each setting however has its own rules, procedures, and conventions which shape the form of the interaction. In some situations, the interaction gives rise to the formulation of certain procedures by the participants. In this aspect of interaction the teachers and pupils make use of strategical action in order to achieve certain goals which may or may not be common to both.<sup>12</sup>

It would appear that negotiation is the key strategy employed by teachers and pupils. It implies the "search for agreement" in as much as "certain rules of procedure have to be established and maintained"<sup>13</sup> to enable interaction to proceed in a manner acceptable to both sets of participants. In other words, they "lay the basis for a truce" so as to achieve their goals and maximise their interests.<sup>14</sup> Following Woods, three assumptions underlie the concept of negotiation: that of power in the sense that although it is assumed that teachers have more power than pupils, in fact, their use of power is restricted by pupil manoeuvres. Secondly, teacher-pupil relations are variable as they are "continuously creating relationships, changing them, shifting the bases of them, gaining a point here, conceding one there, devising new forms of them, new ways of getting around them, plugging holes in one's version, detecting weaknesses in others."<sup>15</sup> Finally, both teachers and pupils generally have varying interests. In so far as their goals do not coincide, the use of negotiative strategies is a common feature. My analysis however indicates that in the senior classroom at least teachers and pupils have common goals, though perhaps varying interests, and negotiation is very much in evidence.

The possibilities for negotiation tend to depend on an individual's awareness of his abilities; for example, most children realise that they have important "bargaining power" with their parents, teachers, and peers. If pupils are encouraged to express their opinions freely, as they are in Rishi Valley, they become aware of this bargaining power.

On the part of the teacher, the use of this strategy is linked to her need for control over the pupils in one form or another.<sup>16</sup> To the extent that appropriate pupil behaviour can be negotiated by the teachers and the pupils, an atmosphere of informality and freedom prevails in the classroom and the house. It is only when negotiation fails that teachers resort to the use of punitive measures to establish control. This may also be the teacher's preferred method of teaching. The strategical device of "domination" which employs verbal aggression as

a form of punishment is then used as a measure of control. This does not happen very often as teachers generally refrain from punitive measures in accordance with school regulations.

It has been suggested that the teacher strategically establishes her dominant position in the classroom by imposing her "definition of the situation" on the pupils by talking, teaching and questioning them.<sup>17</sup> It is evident that when their definitions are weak -- for example, when they are vague in their use of methodology or unable to define the content of the lesson immediately upon entering the classroom -- the pupils take advantage of the situation and indulge in disruptive behaviour.

Pupils' strategies in the classroom have been succinctly perceived by Delamont: "The pupil's first strategy is to find out what the teacher wants and give it to her -- assuming that they can see a pay-off for themselves, in terms of grades, eventual jobs or peace and quiet. When there is no discernible benefit to be had by giving the teacher what she wants, "disruptive behaviour" is likely to become the major strategy."<sup>18</sup> In my study of two classrooms in Rishi Valley, I found that senior pupils who are clear about their goals and the benefits accruing from adhering to the rules generally comply with the teacher's requests. In the junior classroom, the pupils are too young to perceive any benefits, and disorder prevails. The pupils' strategy in the senior classroom is that of conformity to teacher expectations to enable them to meet the proximate goal of passing an examination in an overall positive orientation towards learning. In other settings as well the use of pupil strategies is apparent as the means to get what they can out of a situation.

The teacher's attempts to introduce humour into the classroom situation is an attempt at "fraternisation" with the pupils.<sup>19</sup> This strategy works well with those teachers who already have fairly congenial relations with them outside the classroom. If a teacher is aloof and distant from the pupils in general, humour in the classroom does not cut any ice with them. Fraternisation is more common outside the classroom, on the sports field and on excursions where the expectations for pupil behaviour are somewhat relaxed and where the pupils themselves view their relations with teachers in a more informal manner. It is obvious that the use of different strategies such as negotiation, domination, fraternisation, and the use of different masks, as it were, allows for greater flexibility in teacher-pupil interaction as

it continuously changes and develops in different settings.

I will discuss teacher-pupil interaction in only one setting, viz. the senior classroom although the influence of other settings will be apparent even here.

### III

I observed 25 lessons in the 'B' section of Standard 10.<sup>20</sup> Pupils in standard 10 are divided into sections 'A' and 'B', not according to ability but to facilitate learning, with 27 and 21 pupils respectively whose average age is 15 years. The setting, i.e. the classroom, where the interaction occurs is important in so far as "those who would use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their performance when they leave it."<sup>21</sup> The Standard 10 'B' classroom faces a small quadrangle around which all the classrooms in the senior school are located. There are two large windows in the classroom overlooking the shrubbery outside. Inside, 12 boys and nine girls sit behind desks, all facing the teacher at the head of the classroom with the blackboard behind her. Girls and boys sit separately divided by a narrow aisle running through the length of the room. The seating arrangement is the pupils' choice who, rather self-consciously, refrain from mixing across the sexes in the classroom. At the back of the room, pupils keep their books and other equipment on shelves and at the entrance, there is a notice board on which they pin up the weekly timetable, notices regarding tests, poems and paintings, and general information.

Lessons begin in the senior school at 7.20 a.m. and go on until 1 p.m. with short breaks for assembly, breakfast and juice. After lunch, the pupils may have an activity, laboratory work, or a lesson. They remain in the classroom during the morning spell and the teacher moves from class to class taking lessons. A bell announces the beginning and end of each lesson which lasts for 40 minutes. In 10 'B', teachers and pupils wasted little time on preliminaries or side-talk as the impending examinations seemed to weigh heavily on everybody's mind.

While the pressures of school work emphasise a work-oriented



teacher-pupil relationship, interaction is also influenced by their relations outside the classroom. The boarding school ethos bestows a greater importance on the outside interaction, in less structured settings, than on interaction in the classroom. Moreover, the teachers appear to, by and large, understand and accept the ideology's insistence on a relationship free of fear in the learning situation. It appears to be a part of the school ethos for them to at least establish informal and friendly relations with the pupils.

The effort to achieve this informality finds expression from the moment of entry.<sup>22</sup> When the teacher walks into the classroom, the pupils do not rise to greet her and this is not considered a sign of disrespect. The pupils are also preoccupied with the earlier lesson (discussing the subject or rearranging their books) or talking to one another in the brief transition between two lessons. Nonetheless, an important aspect of interaction in the classroom is the teacher's concern with maintaining order so as to facilitate teaching. However, order is not brought about nor control enforced through "constant teacher directives and autocratic sanctions against deviance". Instead, the pupil is "socialized" into a set of rules for "appropriate" and "competent" classroom behaviour which he is expected to know and behave accordingly.<sup>23</sup> These rules may change continuously during the course of a lesson depending on whether the teacher is merely asking the pupils to settle-down or is engaged in the "lesson-proper", i.e., "instruction". As the rules are "context-dependent", they vary and the pupils have to adjust to the changing situations. There are rules for late entry into the classroom, for quietening down so that the lesson can commence, for participation in the lesson, and so on. Rather than a strict imposition of rules, the teachers attempt to induce order by drawing the pupils' attention to the established rules.

The teachers also use different strategies in coping with pupil behaviour when they enter the classroom. To quell the initial disorder (pupils banging their desks, scraping their chairs, talking to one another, moving around the room), some teachers merely reprimand the pupils but this is usually not very effective. For example, on entering the room, one teacher vaguely asked the pupils what they had discussed at their last lesson. In the absence of a concrete topic for discussion, the pupils continued to make noise which was clearly irritating the teacher who asked them to settle down. She then used the strategy of specific questioning on the lesson-topic which solved the

problem. Similarly, at another lesson, the pupils began to grumble when the teacher announced she was going to teach grammar. They protested for several minutes: "Everday grammar"; "Its boring, akka";<sup>24</sup> "Please, no grammar" etc. She listened to them in silence and then quietly asked to open their text-books on a particular page. The pupils complied amidst groans of protest. In the case of a very mild, elderly, newly recruited teacher, the pupils were initially noisy but he began to teach amidst the din until he held their total attention. Most teachers thus gain the pupils attention by asking them to open their text-books, or by writing a problem on the blackboard, or by beginning to teach almost as soon as they set foot in the classroom.

It is apparent that the teachers recognise the fact that they need to employ a strategy or a technique in order to deal with a situation that may not be conducive to achieving their goals if left unattended. The use of a strategy of this kind is not collectively formulated, nor is it a formal teaching technique, but is "implicit in the hidden curriculum."<sup>25</sup> The pupils are also tacit participants in the employment of a strategy. Their compliance is related to the goals of both sets of participants: the teacher, to teach the lesson and complete the course, and the pupil, to learn under pressure of the impending examinations which he must pass in his own interest. The costs of not conforming to the expected behaviour pattern (poor performance or failure) are thus too high to incur.

Once the lesson-proper begins, the teacher encounters another problem of maintaining order. As the pupils are enthusiastic about school work, they actively participate in the lesson: they interrupt the teacher to ask or answer questions, sometimes prompting her in her exposition of the lesson-topic or helping her solve a problem on the blackboard, correcting or questioning her conclusions, and so on. The task of controlling excessive pupil participation is therefore a continuous problem for most teachers. It is important to note that they do not seek to curb pupil participation completely -- in fact they elicit it themselves -- but only attempt to control its extent or the disorder it may give rise to.<sup>26</sup> Teachers deal with pupil participation in various ways. In Lesson One (a brief summary of which is given below), we have an example of the teacher who allows free pupil participation and his appeals for order are not met. He thus has to cope with the confusion and disorder that results.

### Lesson One

The teacher walked into the classroom and quickly read out a problem from the text-book. He then drew a diagram on the blackboard. The pupils began to help him in this by making suggestions, all talking together. He asked them to speak one at a time. A pupil walked up to the blackboard and started changing the diagram, explaining why he was doing so. They discussed the problem and at first, the teacher disagreed with the pupil's suggestions, "So what? Why are you giving all those instructions?" At the same time, he was trying to quieten the rest of the class. He called another pupil to the front who offered another solution. The teacher finally agreed with both pupils' solutions. Pupils: "It's easier [their way]". Teacher: "O.K. For you, it might be easier. But both methods can be used."

Other pupils continued to talk and interrupt the teacher. After explaining the method, he asked them to work on the problem. He then began to move around the pupils' desks, looking at their work, helping and guiding them individually. After about 10 minutes with the girls, he moved to the boys and asked them for the answer, adding, "Please don't make noise". Meanwhile, a girl made a correction in the teacher's method on the blackboard. He gamely accepted it.

A boy was moving around the classroom looking into others' notebooks and discussing the problem with them. The teacher reprimanded him but he did not respond. The teacher then asked the pupils to solve the problem at prep. as he wanted to get on to the next problem and finally told the wandering boy to "Sit down!" and as the pupils were talking together, "What's going on here?". The noise subsided.

The teacher wrote the next problem on the blackboard. The pupils were again prompting him. Suddenly, he turned around and addressed a pupil slouching in the front row: "Sit right. Then you will understand all this". The pupils asked questions and suggested alternative methods. The teacher accepted some of these, making the necessary changes on the blackboard, explaining why he was doing so.

The teacher was on to a third problem. The pupils began working

on it while the teacher erased the writing on the blackboard, looked at his watch and said, "Oh, we have to discuss so many problems." Some pupils called him. He asked them to wait and continued talking to another pupil. Soon, all pupils were discussing the problem amongst themselves. Teacher: "I won't help you at all. Why are you all talking like that?" They stopped talking but continued after a while.

At the close of the lesson, the teacher gave the class two problems for prep. Just as he was leaving the room, a pupil yelled out the answer to the problem they had been working on. It was wrong. Teacher: "How will you learn? Think, First of all, think."

Another teacher uses the method of "direct selection" to control "over participation", naming the pupils from whom he seeks a response, or only using gestures (pointing, nodding, looking), for selection.<sup>27</sup> The difference between the two teachers' methods to control pupil participation results in two somewhat different situations in the classroom.

### **Lesson Two**

The teacher was revising an earlier lesson, asking particular pupils by name to respond to his questions. Other pupils began to answer and the teacher, very politely, said: "One at a time. Excuse me, I asked him and you answered. I'm asking him". He then pointed to a girl in the first row and questioned her. A boy raised his hand, "Sir?". Teacher: "Let her answer." He continued in this manner until he was satisfied that the particular topic had been understood.

Having finished the revision, he began a new topic using the blackboard and drawing the pupils' attention to it, he kept repeating, "Please look here". When he finished writing, he asked the pupils to think about the problem and then asked them questions. They raised their hands and he selected particular pupils. As the boys seemed to be doing most of the talking, he turned to the girls, "From this side, please". As they took some time, he urged them, "Quick, quick". He emphasised throughout that he wanted them

to "visualise" the problem and not merely supply random answers.

The teacher took a long time over the topic asking individual pupils if it was clear to them. Every time a pupil answered in the negative, he would explain a particular point all over again. Meanwhile, other pupils were copying into their notebooks from the blackboard. Turning to the girls' side, the teacher asked, "Any doubts, this side?", and continued to explain different aspects of the same topic. Finally, he stopped and asked the pupils, "Is it clear to you? Shall we move on? O.K.?" While most of the pupils replied in the affirmative, the teacher suddenly walked up to a boy in the front row and asked him a question. Surprised, he began to stammer out a jumbled response and other pupils supplied the right answer.

The teacher then started on a new topic, writing it out on the blackboard. As the pupils questioned him or attempted to provide answers to anticipated questions, he controlled them by asking them not to answer, repeating, "Just a minute, please". When other pupils interrupted, he quietened them saying, "Sorry, I didn't ask you".

While the two methods of control over pupil talk, participation, and behaviour are obviously different, they are not attempts to publicly denigrate or mock the pupils. Informality in the classroom is characterised by a relative lack of authoritarian control: the pupils do not formally greet the teacher on her entrance, they are allowed to laugh both with and at her, they address some teachers by their first names, they can question the teacher's choice of lesson-topic, and so on. The other indication of the extent of pupil freedom with the teachers is the manner in which they draw attention to themselves by either raising their hands or calling the teacher: some merely raise their fingers or, in their excitement, snap their fingers at her.

The teachers, too, fraternise with the pupils, bringing elements of humor or fun into the learning situation, but they are careful to see that they do not lose control. One factor that makes their task easier is pupil enthusiasm for school work. For example, when a teacher asks them if she should wind up the lesson before time, they almost always ask for more work in the classroom. And once a problem is set, they work on it to the exclusion of everything else, perhaps a little noisily.

Informality in the form of light-hearted banter can however sometimes lead to impertinence and disorder primarily due to the inexperience of a particular teacher.

While the school's ideology and ethos advocate and facilitate a certain informality and freedom in teacher-pupil interaction, the constraints of the curriculum, embodying the formal school system, give rise to an element of formality that is also present in certain classroom situations. It then becomes apparent that the tension arising from pupil performance in tests, and the teacher's comments on it, are a significant aspect of teacher-pupil interaction. The pupils are obviously affected by their grades and are anxious to improve their performance. There is a difference in the way different teachers may discuss this in the classroom but the pupils' anxiety is always the same.

Some teachers who generally have cordial relations with the pupils in the classroom are stern and sarcastic in their judgement of pupil performance at tests:

### **Lesson Three**

The teacher began by asking the pupils how they had done in the test. One boy said, "O.K." which he clarified on the teacher's inquiry to stand for "Not good". The other pupils laughed but were quiet when the teacher repeated his question. Expressing puzzlement at this, he talked at some length about the necessity of studying in order to pass the examinations. He said that most pupils had not studied for the test which is why they had done badly in it. There was pindrop silence in the classroom and each pupil's attention was riveted on the teacher. He spoke of the "ambitions" pupils had of becoming "engineers" and told them that if they had any such ideas, they would have to work hard. Studying the textbook just a day before the test was no good. Moreover, if they wanted to opt for the Science stream in the next two years, they would have to work very hard. If they did not do so, he sarcastically said that he would be "very happy". He also indicated that the Management and senior teachers were planning to hold "selection examinations" to weed out possible failures. He then went



over the question paper in detail explaining where the pupils had gone wrong.

Next, the teacher divided the class into different groups for a series of experiments and started explaining them but was very curt with pupils for the remainder of the lesson. With his back to the pupils, continuing teaching using the blackboard, he asked questions, and when the replies were incorrect, he sarcastically commented, "Very good, very nice". Writing the correct answers on the blackboard, he asked them, "Is this what you have learnt up to now?". He told them there was obviously no point in their remembering what they had been taught in Stds. 8 and 9. He then explained the experiment on the blackboard, meticulously drawing diagrams and writing in detail.

This teacher was particularly popular on the sports field and otherwise. The significance of school work, and the external world, lies precisely in the fact that it was able to transform an otherwise cordial relationship into one of domination based on the strategy of sarcasm on the part of the teacher and compliance out of fear of impending examinations, on the part of the pupil. Other teachers are less harsh and more restrained in their criticism.

#### **Lesson Four**

In contrast to the earlier lesson, this teacher entered the classroom, distributed the answer-books and went out for a short while. On his return, he asked the pupils if they had gone through their papers and then discussed the question paper with them. He emphasised that it did not matter if their answers were wrong but that they should look at the question paper carefully. For each question that the teacher discussed, he stated the number of marks given and told the pupils how much they had obtained on an average in each answer.

He continued to talk about the pupils' expected performance at the forthcoming examinations and quietly repeated, "I'm very unhappy; very, very unhappy..." (about their performance in the

test). When he finished, the pupils called him to their desks for individual discussion. At the back of the room, some boys discussed their grades, comparing their performance with one another.

Such variations between teachers result in contributing towards either increasing or reducing the tension already evident in the pupils. Pupil anxiety about their performance in class tests is obviously related to anxiety about performance in the Board examinations. Their anxiety thus does not arise as a reaction to the teacher herself and is only exhibited when the pupils encounter a situation related to the examination. It is obvious then that the informal relationship between teachers and pupils in the classroom is always bounded by the dormant fear of examinations.

A third and final factor influencing teacher-pupil interaction, apart from the school's ideology or its ethos and the formal system, is the personality of the teacher and the use that is made of this by teachers to ensure pupil compliance to appropriate behaviour patterns. A lesson conducted by a senior teacher, who is considered an authoritarian figure outside the classroom as well, was thus loaded with sarcastic comments directed at the pupils, and she kept them alert by asking questions incessantly.

### Lesson Five

The teacher began by observing that some pupils were not present and asked the others where they were. The pupils did not respond. Teacher: "Are they sleeping?" (This was an afternoon lesson). Pupils: "Yes". Teacher: "I hope they continue to sleep until eternity". The absentees walked in Teacher: "Have you woken up?" You come late because *akka*. [the other Biology teacher] allows you to. If once you are sent back, you will come on time." She started teaching, stopping suddenly to tell a girl in the back row, "Sit up, my girl." Meanwhile, some pupils continued to walk in late, each one saying, "Excuse me, *akka*." Teacher: "What shall I excuse you from? From the class? Stand guard outside." Pupil: "My leg has a pull, really". Teacher, "Come in", and to the other

pupil, "What about you? Have you got the push?"

The teacher then asked the pupils, particularly "those who have been sleeping", questions on the previous lesson. When they gave wrong answers, she said "Oh!" very caustically. She addressed a question to a girl who merely smiled at first. Teacher: "I don't want sweet smiles. I want answers". The pupil said she did not know the answer as she had not read the book. The teacher reprimanded her for not having attended the previous lesson nor bothering to read the book.

The teacher goaded the pupils, questioning them, adding "Come on, come on". The pupils were very attentive throughout but hesitant in responding to her. Whenever a pupil provided a correct answer, she said "Good" which however was a rare comment. When all the pupils were unable to provide an answer, she refused to provide it and asked them to "find out". On the whole, she was difficult with pupils throughout the lesson. She made fun of pupils who answered questions wrongly and other pupils giggled softly. When they responded hesitantly, she commented, "I must say your memory is very slow and you are supposed to be revising [the lesson]". She was particularly impatient with pupils who were slow on the uptake, muttering, "My God!" when they gave an incorrect answer. In complete exasperation, at the end of the lesson, she told the class, "Oh, My God! You are such ignoramuses. Am I saying something new? I don't know."

Questioning a pupil incessantly is a strategy to pre-empt control over the lesson and, using the method of direct selection, over the pupil as well. This teacher is therefore in full control of the lesson employing the strategy of domination which serves to ensure pupil compliance. However, as a result of the fear evoked by her domineering personality, she was unable to elicit sufficient pupil participation in the lesson. Her very presence, associated with her style of teaching, laced as it was with sarcasm and censure, inhibited their performance. Although she did not use explicit punitive measures, her verbal aggression indicates an "unofficial" or "informal" punishment of a kind directed at "showing up" the pupils in the classroom.<sup>28</sup> Such a method appears to be contrary to the school's ideology which emphasises a relationship free of any form of authority or domination and

fear. It is obvious that some teachers in the school continue to use a teaching style best suited to her temperament or one that she has merely adopted over a long career.

This teaching technique is adopted by other junior teachers who seek to establish their position in the classroom which might be otherwise undermined by their informal relations with the pupils. Such a teacher, employing a strategic form of action, intentionally presents a "front", with "borrowed plumes", as it were, to the pupils so that they can perceive and define their relationship to the teacher accordingly.<sup>29</sup> This was the case with a newly recruited teacher who worked closely with a senior teacher and intentionally simulated her teaching style. The junior teacher felt that it is necessary for a new teacher to establish her position in the classroom lest the pupils take advantage by making noise and disrupting the lesson. It was therefore important for her to present the front of a "competent" teacher to pupils in order to establish control.

This teacher used a harsh, sarcastic tone in the classroom although she was unable to maintain a stern manner with the pupils outside. Her intentionally developed front would slip at times in the classroom, allowing pupils to have a glimpse of the more informal and relaxed aspect of her personality. She was however quick to move back into her chosen style fearing that the pupils might take advantage of the situation. The pupils on the whole did not show any fear or restraint in her lessons, perhaps because they recognised her front for what it was and related to her differently outside the classroom. Thus her attempt to emulate the senior teacher was not always successful.

Lacey has suggested that the young teacher copes with problems, such as controlling pupil behaviour, by developing a "teacher persona", which includes establishing "role distance" with the pupils, a "formal atmosphere" and "a presence" which the pupils associate with a set of appropriate behaviour patterns.<sup>30</sup> The use of the teacher persona, however, would be effective only if the teacher maintains a similar distance from the pupils outside the classroom. My discussion of the case of the junior teacher above indicates that her attempt to present the front of the "competent" teacher, with its accompanying characteristics of aloofness and distance, did not quite convince the pupils who had a different relationship with her in other settings. Similarly the teacher in Lesson Five was successful as she has a reputation for being a disciplinarian and the pupils generally avoid

talking to her inhibited further by her teaching style. It is clear that an asymmetrical relationship between teachers and pupils arises from the pressure of examinations (as we have seen in Lesson Three above) and from particular teaching styles (Lesson Five).

#### IV

In the junior most class in the school, the Prep. Section, the informality that is a part of teacher-pupil interaction in Std. 10 'B' is transformed into disorder or commotion as a result of several factors that emerge from the situation. I have identified these as the innovative curriculum itself, the lack of physical organisation in the classroom, the obvious lack of any real commitment to the new curriculum on the part of two out of the total of three teachers, and the lack of clearly articulated pupil goals at this stage.<sup>31</sup> The nature of disorder in the two classrooms is significantly different. In the senior classroom, it primarily takes the form of excessive pupil participation in the teaching activity itself, arising from the pupils attitude towards the lesson which is related to their learning goals. In the junior classroom, disorder is characterised by noise arising out of excessive pupil talk that may or may not be related to the lesson. Teacher-pupil interaction in the senior classroom is continually evident in the course of the lesson while inter-pupil interaction seems to occur to a greater extent in the junior classroom. This contrast is largely due to the difference in the pupils' ages and hence in their learning goals.

In the classroom, it is clear that teachers and pupils engage in the construction of a special world with the lesson as its axis. Their images of one another emerge through and shape the interaction. Similar images emerge likewise in the house and outdoors in terms of the shared experience of collective living. The house and other settings are therefore as important as the classroom in our construction of the school. Although the activities may be different, the same processes of defining the self and the other in terms of the patterns of interaction are in operation. Pupil and teacher views on their interaction tend to be ambivalent. Among the pupils, their views in the senior school vary on account of differences in their perception of their relations with different teachers. There are three broad areas within which pupils are

consciously aware of their relations with teachers: they view teacher behaviour in relation to themselves, the classroom and school work, and to the school's ideology. Their images of teachers in these specific areas however emerge from their overall view of teacher-pupil interaction. By and large, they experience a "friendly and close relationship" with most teachers but are wary of or distanced from others. Of course their relations with teachers would depend on individual teachers, their gender, and the interaction with them in one setting would inevitably affect interaction in another setting. If pupil views are ambivalent suggesting both cordiality and hostility in teacher-pupil interaction, teacher views express a similar attitude. This attitude arises largely from the conflicting nature of their expectations and their actual experience of interaction with pupils. Teacher perspectives are also influenced by the extent to which subjective criteria are present in their evaluation of pupil conduct or performance depending on the situation or setting. Of course it is also possible that teachers might just have been more cautious than pupils in expressing their views on interaction. Nonetheless, their ambivalent attitude emphasises the complexity in teacher-pupil relations. Thus although the teachers are aware of their responsibility and affection towards the pupils, and the informality between them, they are also exasperated by pupil behaviour particularly in the classroom and the house. Ambivalence is also present in individual relations between particular teachers and pupils so that a teacher is uncertain about her relationship with some pupils. Finally, ambivalence is present in teacher evaluation of pupil performance and conduct as a result of the lack of consensus arising from the situation itself.<sup>32</sup>

My analysis of teacher-pupil interaction at Rishi Valley School, presented in a somewhat abridged form, has indicated that the dominant characteristic of such interaction is informality always bounded, however, by the rules of different settings. I have suggested that this informality is present in the school ethos that encourages informal and fearless relations between teachers and pupils and is also strategically pursued by both sets of participants.

I have also acknowledged the asymmetrical nature of teacher-pupil interaction both in the pedagogic situation and in the more informal settings of the house and the outdoor. This asymmetry



derives from certain aspects of the teacher's role which contain authoritarian elements that are exercised in every situation depending upon the rules, procedures and conventions of the setting. This does not however suggest undue conflict in interaction. The pupils' tensions, fears, anxieties exist in relation to the pressure of tests and examinations and the personalities of particular teachers. No situation ever developed into one of open, uncontrollable conflict to the extent that pupils themselves sought to rectify their "quarrels" with teachers. I have also discussed the interaction in terms of the various strategies devised and used by teachers and pupils to relate without conflict and achieve their goals. If the discussion of strategies appears to be heavily loaded with teacher initiatives, that only serves to bring out the major characteristic of the situation which is essentially asymmetrical in nature. While teachers negotiate, fraternise, and dominate in their relations with pupils, the dominant pupil strategy is that of conformity as a result of their goal perception in the senior school and their relatively younger age in the junior school.

The lack of an essentially authoritarian teacher role vis-a-vis the pupils places this school apart from other public schools in the Indian setting. De Souza's study of Indian public schools points to the authoritarian structure evident in these schools: "the headmaster, the housemasters and the prefects occupy strategic positions [in the authority structure] for the surveillance of group behaviour and for the control and coordination of the multifarious activities of the organisation."<sup>33</sup> That such a structured situation, established for the precise purpose of controlling and directing pupil behaviour, does not exist in the school highlights the lack of a formal authority structure in teacher-pupil interaction. This enables freer and more informal interaction between teachers and pupils than might otherwise have been the case.

My analysis of teacher-pupil interaction in Rishi Valley School has also attempted to provide a contribution to the sociology of the school in India in terms of restoring the voices of teachers and pupils to educational studies. It is in fact their voices, as we have seen, which give meaning to and construct the social reality of the school which no doubt exists out there as a social fact.

## NOTES

- 1 Weber, M., *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Tr. A.M. Henderson and T. Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1947), p. 88.
- 2 Ibid., 101.
- 3 See Thapan, M., *Life at School: An Ethnographic Study* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- 4 King, R., *The Sociology of School Organisation* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 15.
- 5 Weber, n. 1, p. 99.
- 6 Berger, P. and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 30.
- 7 Ibid., p. 33.
- 8 Schutz, A., *On Phenomenology and Social Relations: Selected Writings* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 163.
- 9 Delamont writes about the "physical, temporal, organizational and educational contexts in which classrooms are embedded." Delamont, S., *Interaction in the Classroom* (London: 1976), p. 26. The setting comprises the temporal aspects of classroom interaction, the formal organization of the school, the social and educational context, and the physical surroundings in which they take place". ibid., p. 27. My use of the term "setting" and the different contexts, as suggested by Delamont, extends however to all teacher-pupil interaction in the school.
- 10 For a detailed discussion on the typology of teachers at Rishi Valley School, see Thapan, M., "Forms of Discourse, a Typology of Teachers, and Commitment", *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 1986, pp. 415-431. See also Thapan, n. 3, Chapter Five.
- 11 Delamont has suggested that pupils view teachers "more or less favourably on the basis of idiosyncratic features of their private lives." They (the pupils) do not usually have access to "guilty knowledge" (information not publicly available), but when they do acquire it, "it becomes specially potent because the access is illegitimate." Delamont, n. 9, pp. 81-82. In Rishi Valley School, the private knowledge the pupils acquired of a male teacher's relationship with a lady teacher adversely affected their relations with him as they did not view such a relationship favourably since it lay outside the accepted social code.
- 12 Strategic action implies the use of a "strategy" which Woods describes as essentially a way of achieving a goal. He suggests five prominent aspects of strategies related to their origin in interactionist theory: strategies are thus "individually motivated, culturally oriented and interpersonally adapted. They are also situationally adjusted". Finally, he relates strategies to structure and process. Woods, P. ed., *Teacher Strategies: Explorations in the Sociology of the School* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), pp. 18-38. I am using the term in a similar sense.
- 13 Woods, P., *Sociology and the School: An Interactionist Viewpoint* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 127.
- 14 Elsewhere, Woods has used the concept of "negotiation" as an example of the teachers' "survival strategy" in their interaction with pupils. Woods, P., *The Divided School* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 146.
- 15 Woods, n. 12, p. 14.

- 16 Woods defines "control" in this context as "successfully dealing with an incident which fractures a teacher's peace, or establishing one's power in a situation which pre-empts such an occurrence." Woods, n. 14, p. 146. This definition appears to refer primarily to situations of disorder. The use of control is also evident in orderly situations where the teacher attempts to seek pupil compliance to prevalent norms for pupil behaviour.
- 17 Delamont, n. 9, pp. 94-98.
- 18 Ibid., pp. 99-100.
- 19 According to Woods, "fraternization" is a "prominent survival strategy": "to work for good relations with pupils, thus mellowing the inherent conflict, increasing the pupils' sense of obligation, and reducing their desire to cause trouble." Woods, n. 14, p. 155.
- 20 For an account of my fieldwork in the school, see Thapan, M., "Lifting the Veils, Fieldwork in a Public School in South India," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 21, no. 49, 1986, pp. 2133-2139. See also Thapan, n. 3, Appendix B.
- 21 Goffman, E., *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1959), p. 33.
- 22 It has been suggested by Hargreaves *et. al.* that a lesson generally consists of five phases: an entry phase, a settling down phase, the lesson-proper phase, a cleaning up phase, and an exit phase (as referred to by Hammersley, M., *Teacher Perspectives*, E202 Schooling and Society, Units 9 and 10 (Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1977), p. 52. Although I am not dividing the lesson into phases for the purpose of analysis, the different aspects of the analysis are self-evident.
- 23 Ibid., p. 51.
- 24 *Akka*, literally older sister in Tamil, is the term by which pupils address lady teachers in Rishi Valley. It is also an example of the effort to induce informal and close relations between teachers and pupils.
- 25 Woods, n. 12,
- 26 Hammersley notes that for situations of this kind, "the generation of pupil attention and participation and the control of pupil participation has the character of a dilemma for teachers and pupils." Hammersley, n. 22, p. 56.
- 27 The term "direct selection" is used as it is by Hammersley "tagging a question with a name or 'one of you four', 'you', combined with pointing, etc." Hammersley, n. 22, p. 57.
- 28 Woods suggests that the essence of "showing up" pupils as a punishment lies in the force with which an individual's deviation from the norm can be emphasized in the eyes of his peers. Woods, P., "'Showing them up' in secondary school" in G. Chanan and S. Delamont, eds., *Frontiers of Classroom Research* (Windsor: NFER, 1975), p. 123. I am not sure to what extent this was the case with the teacher in Lesson Five. She, however, used this form of punishment which proved to be functional in as much as she held the pupils' attention, established order in the classroom failing nonetheless to elicit sufficient pupil participation.
- 29 The term "front" is used here as it is by Goffman, "[it] is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance." Goffman, n. 21, p. 32. The teacher puts on an act by carefully controlling her expressions, behaviour and speech so as to ensure control.

## 244 *Democracy and Education in India*

- 30 Lacey, C., *Hightown Grammar: The School as a Social System* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), p. 174.
- 31 For more details on the new curriculum in this class, see Thapan, n. 3, Chapter Eight.
- 32 Pupil and teacher views on their interaction have been discussed at greater length in Thapan, n. 3, Chapter Eight.
- 33 De Souza, A., *Indian Public Schools: A Sociological Study* (New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1974), p. 84.

## School Science in Search of a Democratic Order?

*Anita Rampal*

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"Science for liberation" reverberated through the history of Western education, in the last century, as a refrain of the liberal reformers. Recently it has echoed once again in our country, though somewhat ambivalently -- on the one hand, in the ambiguous verbosity of the official slogans professing "Prosperity through Cultivation of Scientific Temper" (a notion as elusive as "democracy"!), and on the other hand, in the impassioned instrumentality of "Science as Social Activism"<sup>1</sup> (a concept still being delineated through practice). The school seems to be the common epicentre of both strains of activity: the vacuous yet celebrated tremors of newer official policies invoking "scientific literacy" as well as the silent yet determined vibrations of voluntary activism working towards "scientific awareness". However, an appropriate model for science within school, rooted in our specific socio-cultural context is yet to be evolved. The model we have received originated early this century and was shaped by complex forces serving the dominant interests of a stratified society. This paper attempts to analyse some factors that have influenced the teaching of science in school, broadly within the perspective acquired by participating in the development of the Science Teaching Programme<sup>2,4</sup> in Madhya Pradesh, locally known as "Vishika" -- an acronym for Vigyan Shikshan Kar-yakram. It is of particular interest to note how the curriculum in

science, a discipline proclaimed for its democratising potential, has itself perpetrated various forms of pedagogic hegemony within the school while being subservient to dominant pressures from without.

### **The Emergence of the Pure Abstract Science Curriculum**

Despite appeals to its liberating potential deriving from its methods of objective observation and analytic abstraction, which could be directed to develop deep social insights, the science curriculum, as it emerged at the turn of this century, conformed completely with the criteria of "pure" theoretical knowledge laid down by the elite academia of an aristocratic culture. In John Dewey's words, by making scientific knowledge "aloof from the practical needs of the mass of men, advocates of scientific education put themselves at a strategic disadvantage".<sup>5</sup> Emphasising the distinction between the requirements of a profession and a curriculum for school he wrote, "whatever natural science may be for the specialist, for educational purposes it is knowledge of the conditions of human action".<sup>6</sup> "The functions which science has to perform in the curriculum is that which it has performed for the race: emancipation from local and temporary incidents of experience and the opening of intellectual vistas unobscured by the accidents of personal habit and predilection".<sup>7</sup>

The curriculum, however, did not respond to this vision. What emerged then and has continued to provide the basic framework for school education ever since, was a model of "pure" abstract science, in consonance with the demands of logical coherence as viewed by professional practitioners of the discipline. No alternative frameworks were sought; in fact, alternatives, if they did emerge, were authoritatively dismissed. Analysing the historical and socio-political forces that shaped the current model of school science, Hodson and Prophet<sup>8</sup> give an interesting account of the changes that occurred in the British educational system during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Taking off from Layton's<sup>9</sup> work they focus on the two major alternative conceptions available then: the "science of the common things" and "pure laboratory science". The former was initiated by an influential clergyman, Rev. Dawes, with the aim to instil self-confidence and integrity of thought amongst the children of the poor, in the



attempt to ultimately improve their moral and religious condition. The curriculum was consciously designed within the cultural context of the labouring classes and, in Layton's words, "was no crumb of upper class education charitably dispensed".<sup>10</sup> Prominence was given to the applied sciences such as mechanics and agricultural chemistry to provide familiar experiences for the exercise of reason, speculation and imagination. The success of the programme and its imminent expansion to all elementary schools was viewed as a major threat to the social hierarchy; it was feared that the classics-based education for the higher orders, which had insistently excluded instruction in science, would prove ineffective for the domination of a "scientifically" trained mass of poor. Voices from various influential quarters rose to express the perceived social danger in imparting a superior education to those inferior in position. The views of eminent scientists like Lyell and Faraday echoed in the Report of the Public School Commission set up in 1861, explicitly stating that "from a political point of view, it is not only an unhealthy but also a dangerous state of things in some respects, that the material world should be very much better known by the middle classes of society than by the upper classes".<sup>11</sup> A double-edged campaign backed by the *Times* newspaper advocated the introduction of "pure" science, fit for the "superior" mind, in the liberal curriculum for the higher orders and, simultaneously, a halt to the practical scientific education of the lower orders since it had become "too good" and expensive for them and was "too far above basic literacy (required) for Bible reading".<sup>12</sup>

Science was soon removed from the elementary school curriculum and the Revised Code of 1862 sought legitimacy on the grounds of inadequate funds and trained teachers. It was further asserted that a "knowledge of common things was not to be obtained by the direct study of science, but through country walks, star gazing and domestic experiences".<sup>13</sup> Two decades later when it did reappear in the school curriculum it was in a form very different from that envisioned by the radical "science for liberation" advocates. Yet, ironically, it was justified in terms of the prevailing liberal tradition with its devotion to the discipline of the mind and its accent on the exercise of reason and logic. The goal of "pure" science in schools, as expressed by its new supporters, was to inculcate habits of "value-free" and "disinterested" inquiry "for its own sake" in order to prepare future scientists for the universities. In the words of an eminent professor, teaching of science in

schools was to be "a means of sifting out of the great mass of the people those golden grains of genius which are now too often lost amongst the sands of mediocrity".<sup>14</sup>

Science in the school curriculum thus became defined as a highly selective sieve to sort out those few who conformed to the image of the "pure scientist". Indeed, the mass of the populace for whom it was a resource accessible only in theory, were effectively deprived of any meaningful education in science, owing to its intended abstraction and aloofness from matters of their everyday lives and belief systems. Eggleston<sup>15</sup> points out that this was in consonance with a general shift in the educational ideology at that time and a consequent redefinition of high status knowledge as that which was not immediately useful in a vocation or occupation. Layton<sup>16</sup> affirms that even now school subjects, in their drive towards greater academic respectability, tend to become exceedingly abstract and remote from pupils' real life concerns, thus promoting in them an attitude of resignation and disenchantment. Asserting that such resignation is an express intention of the "hidden" curriculum, Eggleston further exemplifies that "the purpose of the mathematics curriculum is not only to enable pupils to learn mathematics but also to allow some to understand that they cannot learn mathematics and to acquire a suitable respect for those who can"<sup>17</sup> thus legitimising the superior occupational status the abler pupils ultimately acquire.

In an interesting analysis of the origin of the modern science text, Strube and Lynch<sup>18</sup> trace the change from the "conversationalist" texts of the nineteenth century to the "formalist" ones currently in use. Most of the earlier texts meant to introduce into schools a "science of common things" were in the form of a discourse, drawing analogies from common life and using simple models or demonstrations. The style endowed science with a "very human face"; it seemed less concerned with imparting knowledge than sound "habits of thinking". The formalist texts which began to dominate around 1880 (the time "formal" science appeared in school) are strikingly similar to many modern texts for advanced science courses – highly structured, characteristically devoid of vivid or figurative forms of speech, demanding "a high level of abstraction and logical analysis plus the ability to follow reasoned argument from a difficult, remote context".<sup>19</sup> Thus in what evolved as the acceptable format for school science, the very spirit of science – of exploration and curiosity about everyday life –

was conspicuously absent. The desire to communicate was set aside by the intention to inform. Indeed, the immediate accessibility of the "common" model, congruent with the concerns of the majority, was almost obliterated in favour of the impregnability of the "pure", "disembedded"<sup>20</sup> version, described by the dictates of a minority.

### **Innovations in Science Teaching**

The last three decades have witnessed a spate of curriculum reform in the West. A plethora of planned innovations for the teaching of science have been attempted with emphases on "discovery", "enquiry" or "child-centred" methods, demanding a more democratic environment within the classroom. The curricula, though changed, have largely remained anchored to the old paradigm of good science for better scientists. In Young's<sup>21</sup> words, "science teaching... began and continues with its main purpose to maintain the supply of future scientists. This has two inter-related and in effect self justifying outcomes -- the mass scientific and technological ignorance of a people in an increasingly technologically dominated society, who see themselves as dependent on experts in more and more aspects of their life, and a community of scientists who see the knowledge which they are responsible for producing and validating as necessarily not available to the community at large". He argues that even in the Nuffield era the emphasis has remained on abstract "technically sweet" science, dissociated from its applications and broader societal implications.

The fundamental nature of the curriculum has not radically altered yet educational rhetoric in this century has, gradually but markedly, shifted its focus from the liberal metaphor of "science for liberation" to the more instrumental yet somewhat ambiguous slogan of "science for modernisation". Layton<sup>22</sup> delineates the two proclaimed aims of the new curricula as firstly, to increase substantially the national stock of scientists and technologists required to gain supremacy in industrial and military research and, secondly, to build a scientifically literate citizenry deemed essential in both the modernisation and development contexts. Indeed, as Esland<sup>23</sup> points out, the new curricula emphasising pupil participation were a part of a larger public relations campaign to reverse the declining popularity of sci-

ence and to reclaim a climate of public opinion in which more funds could freely be made available. The movement for curricular reform originated in the early sixties in countries of the North but were soon imported or suitably adapted by the newly independent developing nations. Science with its proclaimed transformationist potential served as an attractive mandate for national development. Third World countries attributed their poverty and backwardness to the deficit of a "scientific mentality", assumed to be significantly diffused in the developed world and often identified as the diacritical factor singularly responsible for its progress and advancement.

However, the twin goals towards which the global movement for innovation directed itself, namely, the delivery of an elite cadre of professionals as well as a scientifically "tempered" populace, were ostensibly mutually incompatible. Science education has thus been faced by a major dilemma arising out of this incongruity of purposes. Most countries in the West apparently resolved it by fragmenting the curriculum into "academic science" for the "able" pupils, with its explicit cognitive goals, and "non-academic science", regarded less respectable by virtue of its emphasis on "relevance"/"utility" for the less-able pupils. The academic science courses are awarded high status owing to their perceived "difficulty" characterised by decontextualised abstraction, emphasis on written presentation, use of individual rather than group work, high competitiveness and remoteness from real-life knowledge. The non-academic science courses, on the other hand, are relegated to the low-status category by virtue of their perceived triviality and, in Hodson's<sup>24</sup> words, are characterised by their concreteness of knowledge, emphasis on oral presentation, use of group activities and relevance to everyday concerns.

However, a more equitable way of resolving the dilemma, as suggested by Fensham,<sup>25</sup> is through the policy of containment, whereby specialised science education is confined only to the later years of schooling and not allowed to encroach upon the earlier curriculum. In fact, a similar system is followed by Thailand where the academic science curriculum is available only after pupils leave lower secondary school. Layton<sup>26</sup> argues that there is little evidence to suggest that such a policy of containment would either lengthen the period of time needed to subsequently specialise in science or in anyway diminish the pool from which the specialist students emerge.

India too has followed a policy of one science for all. Despite occasional pressures from educational quarters, the policy makers have resisted permitting a plurality of science courses to conform with pupils' differential academic status. The single science course has, however, been more inclined towards the "academic" (which, in this case, could be termed a euphemism for "utterly incomprehensible" and "blatantly irrelevant") and less to the "relevant".

In response to the New Education Policy, the Report of the Working Group on Science Education for the First Ten Years of Schooling (1987) has perceptibly pointed out that science and maths education in our country has remained almost irretrievably examination-centred. It goes on to state that "a self-perpetuating and self-propagating retrogressive system has generated and extended from the universities to the primary schools";<sup>27</sup> subsequently, on the pretext of keeping abreast of the current knowledge explosion, the child is mercilessly subjected to an avalanche of (often irrelevant) information. The report however flounders when it confesses that "the main purpose of learning science, that is, the development of 'scientific literacy', has never been attempted", for its delineation of the "dimensions of scientific literacy" are, to say the least, utterly confounding. The authors seem so enmeshed by the "academic-relevant" dilemma that their recommendations appear to vacillate most incoherently; this is particularly evident in the following excerpt on requisite manipulative skills:

Maintenance of bullock carts, cycle and scooter; Changing of fuse wire; Using thermometer and balance; To handle domestic animals; Use and care of microscope, metre stick, camera, calculator, tape-recorder; Use of following equipments: graduated cylinder, timing device, sphygmomanometer....<sup>28</sup>

At this point I stop, overwhelmed by my own illiteracy, unable to comprehend, even literally, this last word!

The dilemma is thus apparently difficult to resolve especially since, despite the best of policy intentions, the inequities of our society inevitably intrude almost giving a farcical twist to every new official recommendation.

### **The Vishika**

The Vigyan Shikshan Karyakram, embodying one attempt to forge compatibility between intellectual credibility and utility (and probably the only one to be incorporated into the government school system of our country), was initiated in 1972 by a fortuitous collaboration between voluntary activists, professional scientists and school teachers. It was a low-cost, activity-based endeavour to somehow embed academic science within the socio-environmental context of predominantly rural children. Taking cognisance of the high dropout rate of pupils after class VIII, the curriculum gave priority to such specific skills and fundamental concepts that would help develop a critical scientific attitude for life, deliberately excluding some which merely satisfied criteria of relevance laid down by the discipline. Indeed the express emphasis on the use of low-cost equipment and indigenously designed apparatus made from locally available materials provided an incentive to teachers to exercise their own creative skills. It also symbolised an assertion of self-reliance. Pedagogically it was important for students to feel comfortable and familiar with the apparatus so that it alleviated the overwhelming sense of alienation and mystification that is normally associated with science lessons, not just in the rural but also in our city schools. However, this feature of the programme was often conveniently co-opted into the familiar discourse of "low-status" curricula by critics, who classified it as "Pichhda Vigyan" or "backward science". Consequently, political as well as parental pressure had to be convincingly combatted; many an occasion was, however, judiciously exploited to conduct informal discussions about broader issues related to the science-technology-society interaction in a developmental context. But as more and more "hard" technology is pumped into the otherwise barren desert of our education system, it becomes increasingly difficult to emphasise the efficacy of low-tech "humanistic" pedagogical practices.

The basic model for Vishika, conforming to the "enquiry" method, was initially inspired by the innovative projects undertaken in the West. Children are encouraged to perform experiments in groups of four, collectively discuss their observations and draw inferences therefrom. The textbook has been replaced by a workbook providing a sequence of instructions and questions to guide enquiry. The radical shift in approach was meant to change the existing didactic and



authoritarian method (which, incidentally, is followed in the best private urban schools too) with its reliance on passive, unquestioning and rote learning in order to establish a more open and active environment within the class-room. Moreover, the rigorous re-orientation of teachers (who were often themselves inadequately trained in basic sciences) in the form of extensive discussions, debates and a regular informal dialogue between them and the so-called experts was expected to shake their complacency, make them more open to possible divergence in thought and instil in them a sense of self-confidence and purposefulness. Indeed, the spirit of free discussion and enquiry helped to provoke teachers to actually "de-expertise" the experts so that the programme could emerge as a truly shared construction. It was hoped that the unusually open interaction between teachers and resource persons would help define a new culture of learning which the teachers would, in turn, be inspired to share with their pupils.

Other forms of authority directly influencing the curriculum were also challenged. The traditional examination with its stress on the agility to spew out memorised "facts" was replaced by an open-book one, more in congruence with the demands of enquiry learning. This was a fortuitous achievement and became the sustaining strength of the programme. Other innovative attempts at curricular change have foundered basically because they were compelled to submit to the traditional Board examination, in which the administration rarely allows much intervention. In *Vishika* not only was the pattern of the class VIII Board examination changed but so were the related procedures for setting a question paper and evaluating the answer-sheets. The annual examination paper is collectively composed by a group of teachers during a special workshop, in ostensible violation of the usual official norms for confidentiality. Constructive discussion has been stressed as essential for framing a creative question or deciding norms for its fair evaluation. Requisite secrecy is, however, restored by authorising an official moderator to put together different questions and compose the final paper from the various alternative versions prepared during the meeting.

### **Bal Vigyanik: A Philosophical Fallacy?**

The *Vishika* workbook is named *Bal Vigyanik*, which literally

reads *Child Scientist*. The inspiration for the title can be traced back to the pupil-as-scientist trends of the sixties with a major emphasis on inculcating scientific enquiry by making the child vicariously experience processes of "real" science. However critical analyses of those curricula has led to the growing realisation that such reforms lacked a truly child-centred perspective. Extensive research has now shown that the stress on a logical rather than a psychological ordering of subject matter and the increased demand on "discovery" through detailed scientific procedures has not only rendered science more difficult for children<sup>29</sup> but has also failed to reveal any significant improvement in their ability to employ those processes, particularly in situations outside the classroom.<sup>30-31</sup>

The pupil-as-scientist curricula have proved inadequate on predominantly two grounds: the outdated nature of the philosophical stance implicit in them and their inability to address children's belief-systems. An examination of the underlying epistemological foundations of these curricula reveals that they espouse the classical inductive-empiricist approach towards knowledge, the main premise of which is that scientific enquiry relies on concepts inductively inferred from discrete sensory impressions. Such curricula were substantially influenced by Robert Gagne who presented a hierarchy of science processes which (stated in increasing order of complexity) included observation, classification, measurement, drawing of conclusions, making operational definitions, formulation of hypotheses, control of variables, interpretation of data and experimentation.<sup>32</sup> Gagne placed unbiased observation at the very foundation of science learning, emphasising that physical characteristics of objects need to be systematically observed and discriminated "using all externally oriented senses" and that "all the differential attributes of objects previously learned as discriminations need to be used for establishing (generalised) concepts".<sup>33</sup>

Such a view of the scientific method had long been proved to be fatally flawed on the grounds that observation can never be truly "objective" for, what one "sees" depends only in part on the immediate sensory impressions and more on accumulated past experience and expectation. Thus the observation we make essentially depends on the preconceived theories we have in mind and, therefore, cannot be an infallible basis for scientific knowledge. Notwithstanding our own intuitive and psychological make-up that often seems to compel us to

behave inductively in our everyday lives, justification for inductive generalisation as the basis of enquiry had almost been abandoned by the turn of this century. Yet the commitment to empiricism and induction authoritatively persisted in science education and even conveniently coalesced with the progressive child-centred philosophies, emphasising direct experience and individual enquiry, to produce the almost mesmeric notion of "discovery learning". Questioning the philosophical validity of the tenets of the discovery method, Hodson<sup>33</sup> argues that such methods not only underestimated the complex relationship between observation and theory, but also misinterpreted the nature of the activities of the scientific community in validating and disseminating scientific knowledge. In keeping with the current philosophies of science and psychology, he stresses that the acquisition of new knowledge depends only in part on the structure and organisation of that knowledge, being predominantly determined by the learner's existing conceptual framework. Observing carefully, recording observations accurately and making generalisations are useful skills for children to learn but are certainly not the means for discovering new concepts. The pupil-as-scientist curricula have almost mocked and reduced scientific method to a mechanical ritual, ignoring the role of informed speculation and constructive imagination in processes of discovery. In an almost prophetic vein the philosopher Nagel had written, as early as 1959, that "the student should be disabused of the common misconception that a collection of facts is either the beginning or the goal of scientific enquiry" and "... should be made to recognise that the concepts to which he is introduced have not been obtained by a process of simple abstraction from empirical data, but that they are intellectual creations, often suggested by the data, and are the products of a constructive imagination".<sup>34</sup>

The new philosophies of science have been inclined towards the "constructivist" position as opposed to the "realist" view-point, which perceives reality as a stable configuration of objective facts, open to the identical inspection of all. Constructivism, on the other hand, is the belief that reality is personally negotiated so that each enquirer perceives a world depending on her (or his) preconceptions, and where agreement, which constitutes factual knowledge, is a specific collective negotiation, with an often limited temporal validity.<sup>35</sup> Indeed the view that knowledge should be impersonal and detached is often rejected in favour of the development of reason informed by passion.

Thus knowledge that has been individually construed or "truth" that has been personally appropriated is what ultimately constitutes the "private" construct of the learner. A truly learner-based or child-centred education programme would necessarily have to be congruent with the constructivist stance and take into account pupils' personal constructions of experience in order to establish meaningful communication. For, successful communication between individuals depends not so much on the commonality of their construct systems, but upon the degree of empathy they have for each other's constructs.<sup>36</sup>

The last decade has witnessed a growing body of research in science education attempting to explore pupil's constructs and "alternative frameworks".<sup>37</sup> The new curricula based on conceptual schemes had emphasised on a coherent system of ideas as perceived by scientists, ignoring the fact that such ostensibly logical connections may be far from obvious to children. Moreover, little attention was paid to the ideas children themselves generate as part of their life experiences. It has now been found that children hold stable and tenacious views regarding the world around them and these preconceived notions are often at variance with established scientific concepts.<sup>38</sup> Unless consciously addressed or confronted these intuitive beliefs resist change and are continued to be held in parallel to the formal theories taught in the classroom. Moreover, since such "spontaneous" knowledge is normally derived from the common experiential base of the child, large areas of "informal" science are found to be strikingly universal; alternative frameworks in mechanics<sup>39</sup> or heat,<sup>40</sup> for example, reveal a fascinating similarity that transcends territorial, tutorial and even temporal distinctions. Osborne et al<sup>41</sup> point out that children tend to view the world from an anthropomorphic or human-centred position and construct particular explanations for specific events without being concerned about their mutual consistency. Indeed, common metaphors of everyday language, as well as those used unsuspectingly in the discourse of teaching, reinforce intuitive beliefs and are co-opted by the learner's imagery to endow physical entities like heat, electric current or force with distinct human characteristics. Thus "the heat pushes the cold out", "the electric current turns back when faced by an insulator or gets used up by a resistance" or "the force in the ball fights against gravity to keep it moving upwards until it gets exhausted and gives up" are some of the interesting untutored ideas voiced by

children today which are surprisingly similar to the intuitive scientific theories articulated a few centuries ago.

Transition from the learner's informal to the established formal framework would require a conscious restructuring of knowledge, a conceptual "accommodation" which might, at times, be similar to the paradigmatic shifts that scientific knowledge has itself gone through. Indeed, according to one opinion, pupils' life-world knowledge, into which they are socialised during the major part of their lives, and which, therefore, has greater social value and persistence, cannot be extinguished by the considerably weaker and temporary socialisation within school. For, school learning seeks to explain experiences in terms of marginal interpretative systems forming the so called "symbolic universes"<sup>42</sup> of knowledge which tend to be alien to the learner's natural attitude and are therefore more fragile. Joan Solomon<sup>43</sup> argues that it would thus be more fruitful to foster a fluidity of thought between the two domains of knowledge and the capability of distinguishing between them. Indeed she has shown that pupils who are capable of successfully crossing over and back from the life-world to the symbolic domain of thought indicate a deeper level of understanding of a concept as abstract as "energy". Moreover, even a few months of lapse of time after formal instruction causes a preferential shift to the life-world domain, provided there is no further reinforcement of symbolic knowledge.

Thus, unless science education takes cognisance of learners' (which includes teachers) private conceptual frameworks and ensures that the new "public" knowledge is embedded within the active construction of personal meanings, "schooling" in science would continue to contribute to a conformist and unquestioning majority, overawed by the authority and formidable formality of the discipline.

### **Culture and Cognition: Science within an Oral Universe**

The Vishika, with its legacy of a progressive yet somewhat "scientific"<sup>44</sup> model of pedagogy, has, over the last sixteen years, slowly attempted to adapt itself to its students and teachers. Active feedback from the field of operation (covering a predominantly large rural area) has led to a number of alterations in the design of the experiments, the



nature of the content, the language of the textual material and the training of teachers. However, the adaptations have often seemed to be attempts to account for some kind of "limitations", not just structural but also cognitive. On the one hand this could be because the core resource group, with its urban and professional science background, had no prior experience of working within the rural school system and was, therefore, constantly striving to redefine its expectations to plug the ostensible cognitive gaps between the design of teaching and the apparatus of learning. However, what seems more significant here is the fact that the culture through which science is taught is itself at variance with the culture in which it is being received. Science is a product of a tradition of writing, and its teaching has naturally demanded a literate cultural base. Therefore, even the best attempts to accost a culture like ours, based predominantly on traditions of residual orality with resources born essentially out of literacy would result in profound gaps in communication. Moreover, from the literate frame of reference cognitive processes of the oral mind have always appeared to be inexplicably "limited". Indeed, psychology and anthropology have a fairly long history of crosscultural research into the workings of the "non-literate" mind (long been classified as the "savage" mind!) which has usually been potently ethnocentric and often unsuspectingly polarised by the "cultural spectacles" of the observers. As Walter Ong in his masterly work illuminating the contrasts between orality and literacy points out, "we are so literate that it is very difficult for us to conceive of an oral universe of communication and thought except as a variant of a literate universe"<sup>45</sup>, and that too a woefully deficit one. The non-literate or neo-literate mind was normally characterised as one typically lacking in abstract and analytical thought and poorly equipped for inferential deduction. Moreover, such conclusions are in consonance with the conventionality of a strict hierarchy of knowledge conceived in terms of dichotomies such as abstract-concrete, symbolic-sensual, objective-subjective, complex-simple rational-emotional etc. The non-literate mind is, by such definition, poorly developed, quite incapable of learning science and, therefore, at best suited for a course in vocational training. This is strikingly reminiscent of the tacit assumptions behind the nineteenth century educational debate regarding the introduction of science in elementary school, whereby two distinct types of mentality (the "gnostic" and the "banausic"<sup>46</sup>) related to the "intellectual"



and the "banal", were attributed to people belonging to the upper and lower classes. Millar<sup>47</sup> has shown how these ideas are still held by the "contemporary polemicist", who though more guarded in his tone, is nevertheless as eager to invoke similar models of cognitive deficiency.

Science only for the "superior" literate mind is a verdict we in the Third World clearly refuse to accept. We, of course, could dismiss it as arising out of ethnocentric prejudice, or, in Ong's words, "blind spots of the unreflective chirographic or typographic mind".<sup>48</sup> But what then is our stand? On what premise do we base our efforts to evolve a science education programme embedded within our cultural resources? In what way can the "psychodynamics of orality" be constructively incorporated into the process of learning science? Or rather, how can the teaching of science meaningfully define itself within a predominantly oral universe of thought and expression?

In trying to comprehend the cognitive depths of an oral universe what is called for is an "hermeneutic" approach or, in the words of Geertz, an interpretative "attempt to somehow understand how it is we understand understandings not our own".<sup>49</sup> A number of such anthropological studies have shown that the so-called shifts from magic to science or from the "prelogical" to the more rational mind can be more economically and cogently understood as shifts from an oral state of consciousness to various stages of interiorised literacy.<sup>50</sup> This is not to imply that the oral mind lacked a sense of logical reasoning but that certain tools of intellectual operation associated with the Greek notion of formal logic, like contradiction, scepticism or inference, which call for critical attention to a text, were made possible by a tradition of writing. Thus, in the words of Kathleen Gough, "Literacy is for the most part an enabling rather than a causal factor, making possible the development of complex political structures, syllogistic reasoning, scientific enquiry, linear conceptions of reality ... and perhaps certain kinds of individualism and of alienation. Whether, and to what extent, these will in fact develop depends apparently on concomitant factors of ecology, inter-societal relations, and internal ideological and social structural responses to these".<sup>51</sup>

Knowledge that is once conceptualised by primary oral cultures can soon be lost unless adequate investments of energy are made, by saying it over and over again, to preserve it for posterity. Only when it is released of its mnemonic tasks by relegating them to the written text, can the mind turn itself to new speculation. Indeed, the residual orality

of a given chirographic culture can be gauged from the amount of memorisation its pedagogical practices demand. The rhythmic recitation that goes by the name of teaching in most of our schools bears eloquent testimony to our indomitable oral spirit!

Orality ensures an empathetic and communal identification with what is known, whereas writing distances the knower and thus "sets up conditions for objectivity, in the sense of personal disengagement".<sup>52</sup> All thought is basically analytic but processes requiring abstractly sequential, classificatory and linear structuring of knowledge distanced from lived "situational" experiences are difficult without writing and reading. Learning within oral cultures is based on close human interaction, on apprenticeship depending on a minimum of verbalised explanation and by participation in a kind of "corporate retrospection" -- not by study in the normal literate sense. Indeed, the notion of private reading does not belong to the oral universe of most of our children -- reading for them is very much an oral and even social activity. Moreover, silent study demands privacy and isolation -- a luxury only very few of us can afford.

Deep insights into the operations of an oral mind are found in Luria's<sup>53-54</sup> work with the non-literate and semi-literate peoples of Uzbekistan and Khirgizia. His research though not explicitly encoded in terms of orality-literacy contrasts, does indeed emphasise that abstract and conceptual thinking is a reflection of a society's cultural and intellectual history, conveyed through its linguistic system. Studies on categorisation, or the way people group things and make generalisations, revealed that non-literate subjects invariably resorted to "situational" thinking and classified objects according to their real-life relationships. This "functional-graphic perception" based on practical experience was so overriding that even the suggestion of other abstract principles to guide classification was persistently dismissed as "stupid" or irrelevant. A typical example is that in which non-literate subjects, on being shown drawings of a hammer, a saw, a log and a hatchet, insisted that they all belonged to one group and that none could be excluded. "They are all alike. The saw will saw the log and the hatchet will chop it into small pieces. If one of these has to go, I'd throw out the hatchet. It doesn't do as good a job as a saw".<sup>55</sup> On being told that another subject had placed the three things -- the hammer, saw and hatchet -- together keeping the log out, one peasant promptly replied, "Probably he's got a lot of firewood, but if we'll be

left without wood we won't be able to do anything".<sup>56</sup> They further insisted that wood too could be called a "tool" since handles of tools were made from wood, and so were poles and other things. They asserted indignantly -- "we call all the things we have need of tools" -- "we have a saying: take a look in the fields and you'll see tools" -- thereby defining the essential practicality of the modes of generalisation they used.

New science curricula, including *Vishuka*, have laid special stress on classification, regarded as one of the fundamentals of conceptual learning. In the last three decades, however, extensive studies have been conducted by cognitivists to understand human classificatory practices and much new insight has been gained predominantly by the work of Eleanor Rosch. She points out that presumptions that the human mind uses laws of formal logic to define a category by abstracting clear-cut independent and unambiguous criteria for its membership, are not supported by research. She is critical of the classical notions of categorisation attributed to the "mature western mind" and remarks that "if other thought processes, such as imagery, ostensive definition, reasoning by analogy to particular instances or the use of metaphors were considered at all, they were normally relegated to "lesser beings" such as women, children or primitive people".<sup>57</sup>

The "natural" view of classification points out that the natural world of categories (as opposed to the mathematical world of abstract classes), however, consists of highly correlated (non-independent) features which provide considerable redundancy in the appearance of members of a given category. Indeed, it is this redundancy which is exploited by our recognition mechanisms. For example, as cited by Gardner,<sup>58</sup> a perceiver who can distinguish wings, furs and feathers soon realises that in the empirical world wings occur with feathers more than they do with furs. Moreover, Rosch has found that we normally construct categories around a central member or "prototype" -- a representative example of that class which shares the most features with other members while sharing few, if any, with elements from outside the class. Since a sparrow is more a prototypical bird than a penguin or a chicken, it is bound to be more readily recognised and is less likely to be misclassified. Thus according to the natural view, categorisation involves erecting typical prototypes for further matching rather than abstracting a list of common criteria. That is, we normally look to see how well objects resemble a typical member of a

class as we conceptualise it, rather than objectively search for common attributes. Moreover, work done in Third World countries shows that it is not as if rural children cannot use superordinate concepts for classification, regarded as conceptually preferable in school systems, but that they choose not to do so because such concepts do not satisfy their modes of organising experience.<sup>59</sup> A sensitive example is that of a 12-year old peasant child from Mexico, who when asked to categorise various objects on the basis of their similarities, almost poetically refused to place them together by stating that the "banana is like a horn, the orange a ball and the bean a little heart; they are not alike".<sup>60</sup> This imagery, embedded as it is in the child's living experience of perception, is strikingly similar to the kind exhibited by children in oral riddle-games.

The capacity to logically connect two different statements and draw a conclusion from them, as in syllogistic reasoning, was for a long time considered basic to human consciousness. For example, if we are given the two propositions: "Precious metals do not rust" and "gold is a precious metal" we can almost unthinkingly conclude that gold does not rust. Piaget had raised questions about the "naturalness" of such logical operations in his studies related to the intellectual development of children. However, Luria, in his work with non-literates had attempted to determine whether or not such logical schemes are invariant at different stages of social history and social development. He found that subjects who could draw excellent judgements about facts of direct concern often failed to perceive logical relations between the premises of a syllogism, which was a form of abstract reasoning alien to them. As an illustration, let's consider the following syllogism: "In the Far North, where there is snow, all bears are white. Novaya Zembla is in the Far North and there is always snow there. What colour are the bears?" To this one person revealingly replied: "I don't know. I've seen a black bear; I've never seen any others.... Each locality has its own animals", and on being pressed further, he retorted, almost exasperatedly: "That's my last word. Those who saw can tell, those who didn't see can't say anything". However, the response of a semi-literate volunteer, ostensibly keen to absolve himself from the personal responsibility of assigning a colour to the unseen bears, was, typically: "To go by your words they should all be white".<sup>61</sup> Thus the responses, reflecting a mistrust of the initial premises which were removed from their immediate experience, categorically refused to

commit to any "objective" conclusion. Moreover, a bare brush with literacy (especially of the kind associated with schooling) could apparently make theoretical modes of generalisation more accessible, if not entirely acceptable. The rules of the game became more apparent, even if the game was not wholly satisfying.

Indeed, as Ong points out, a syllogism is like a text -- fixed, self-contained and isolate -- its conclusions are derived from its premises only, without recourse to personal interpretation. The riddle, on the other hand, symbolises a mode of reasoning which belongs to the oral mind, demanding resources of knowledge far beyond the words themselves. Many of us have seen how even young children love to indulge in complex riddle games -- relishing the act of stretching their imagination, searching their memory and maximally taxing their inferential abilities.

It is, therefore, significant to note that the noetic capacities of an oral mind are, perhaps, impossible to gauge by written tests, or even oral ones framed in a literate format. Indeed, in the West, written examinations came into wide use well after print had been assimilated by the culture, already conditioned by thousands of years of writing. It is thus pertinent to examine how appropriate written questions (especially those requiring use of decontextualised logical reasoning) are in the context of our schools, where a majority of the children are first or second generation literates. Further, what is significant is not just the lack of familiarity with print but also the inability to afford it, for, in a large number of homes the school textbook is the only "chink in the wall" that exposes them to the literate universe.

It needs to be stressed that the kind of literacy associated with formal schooling is distinct from that required for other reading/writing tasks as, for instance, in the pursuance of religious instruction. Consequently, the specific skills enhanced by each kind of literacy may also differ, as was shown by the Scribner and Cole<sup>62</sup> study in Liberia or by the work of Brian Street<sup>63</sup> in Iran. However, changes in generalized cognitive abilities (as distinct from "skills") are not unmediated or immediate implications of "instant" literacy and cannot necessarily be measured by standard psychological tests. Moreover, as emphasised by Goody, "In differentiated societies... cognitive skills are rarely to be found at the level of generalized cognitive abilities or generalized culture attainments that reside in the totality of the population; both



abilities and culture have to be understood in another way for these are differentially distributed among the population".<sup>64</sup>

The *Vishika* has almost instinctively and empirically become aware of some characteristics of the oral universe of its children. The title page of "*Bal Vigyanik*" is in the form of a personal letter, composed calligraphically, addressing the pupils and inviting them to share the fascination of science. This, according to Ong, was found in medieval western manuscripts, which introduced their text not by an impersonal title-page but by a conversational observation addressed to the reader, in an attempt to preserve the likeness of the manuscript to that of an utterance. Recent alterations in the workbook have tried to incorporate greater redundancy in language in keeping with children's natural forms of expression. Indeed, redundancy is a natural characteristic of oral discourse, unlike sparse linearity which economically structures expression for the purpose of writing. For, effective repetition of what has just been said maintains a kind of backlooping thereby ensuring proximity to the focus of attention, as is judiciously exploited by many an experienced orator.

Much cognitive research has now been done in areas of visual perception to show that pictorial or diagrammatic representation is also a culture-specific mode of expression. However, most textbooks, especially those in science, continue to exhibit gross insensitivity towards children's natural forms of visual expression, both from the psychological as well as cultural aspects of cognition. *Vishika* has attempted to experiment with less formal diagrammatic representations though much more systematic work has yet to be undertaken, in collaboration with artists sharing a deep commitment and sensitivity to both tribal and children's art. Indeed much effort needs to be expended to effect a successful shift in the entire discourse of science teaching -- from the transactional to the expressive, the dry and terse to the more vivid and elaborate and from the transmission modes of representation to the more interpretative ones discussed in greater detail in an earlier paper.<sup>65</sup>

The fundamental task remains essentially unattempted: to radically redefine the teaching of science within the cultural universe of our children and thus to meaningfully address and engage the cognitive structures they bring with them to the learning situation. It is clear that an effort in this direction would require versatile resources and intellectual inputs with many an hermeneutic insight from the fields of



sociology, linguistics, psychology and cultural anthropology.

### **Structural Dynamics of Curricular Change**

The Vishika from its very inception was committed to operate within the existing government school system, rather than set up its own "islands of excellence". Over the years it has continuously expanded its sphere of influence and encompassed more and more schools in different districts. The process is necessarily a slow one since curricular change requires a restructuring of attitudes and beliefs through close human interaction. The new spirit must somehow osmose through the almost ossified structures of the educational bureaucracy. Moreover, in a feudal state like Madhya Pradesh, the protagonist of pedagogical change, the school teacher, occupies the lowest and the most dismally unenviable position in both the educational and the social hierarchy. Hence, change within the classroom must necessarily be accompanied by change without. Indeed, for teachers to delegate some measure of autonomy to their students they must be enabled to wrest some of it for themselves too.

### **Enquiry within the Classroom**

The Vishika classrooms, especially those where some measure of activity did take place, became conspicuously noisier, in somewhat cathartic defiance of the still prevailing conservative norms of "pin-drop" discipline. The departure from the regimented straight-file architecture of inactivity to a more practical and informal groupwise configuration of participation scaffolded the spirit of freedom sought by the programme. Excursions taking pupils outside the dismal confines of school, in order to explore and learn from the natural (and social) environment, were institutionalised by incorporating them into specific chapters of the book, despite initial objections raised by conservative parents of girl students.

The classroom has thus changed perceptibly yet the ethos of enquiry has not been entirely assimilated. At one level, this could be a cultural phenomenon with its origins in a society's conservative

values demanding unquestioning deference towards those older in age. As a result queries are by definition unidirectional; a pupil's question to the teacher, especially if it is a probing one, would not only violate pedagogical but also social conventions. A recent study<sup>66</sup> regarding the influence of culture on Nigerian pupils' questioning habits in science lessons, points to similar social inhibitions determining the nature of classroom interaction. Kenneth King<sup>67</sup> points out that the tradition of a subservient disciple, prevalent in several countries of East and South East Asia, is directly counter to a truly pupil-centred curriculum. Thus science education in such cultures tends to become "doubly authoritarian", conforming to Kuhn's description of it as "a relatively dogmatic initiation into a pre-established problem solving tradition that the student is neither invited nor equipped to evaluate".<sup>68</sup>

The Bal Vigyanik has, in a conscious attempt at subversion, sought to introduce various activities requiring students to experiment with "guruji's" watch or cycle and if they could muster enough courage, to even count the bones on his ribcage! The children, given half a chance, would only be too happy to comply. Indeed, the constraints depend only to some extent on the social inhibitions of a particular community but, at the more general level, derive from the culture of teaching itself. A number of hermeneutic studies in more "progressive" schools of the West, attempting to understand teachers' intentionalities within the framework of their belief systems, have shown that teachers find it difficult to fit "enquiry" into their own definition of teaching. Enquiry teaching lays great emphasis on classroom discussion, an activity teachers feel most uncomfortable with, for, allowing pupils to talk freely in class seems to be an abdication of control, undermining their own influence. As Olson puts it, "teachers do not understand that 'not dominating the class' can count as a form of influence".<sup>69</sup> Moreover, they tend to consider it an ineffective method for accomplishing instructional goals – a wasteful "waffle"<sup>70</sup> that fails to economically deliver the established facts of science.

The Vishika teacher orientation courses (as well as the monthly meetings) are consciously conducted in the "discussion" mode of enquiry. Initially teachers, themselves deeply conditioned by the expository mode, tend to feel disoriented and frustrated and complain about the "vagueness" or "lack of direction" of the approach, always insisting that the "correct" canonical answers be given to them.

However, they soon acclimatise to the more open and democratic environment and begin to respond hearteningly. Yet, they seem reluctant or are, perhaps, incapable of carrying the same spirit to their own classrooms. Delineating the dilemmas of enquiry, Olson further argues that innovative practices often expect teachers to develop in students quite complex cognitive skills which are difficult to delimit. Thus teachers continue to adhere to the text, dictate answers and gear their teaching totally towards examinations because that system provides a firm anchor and effectively delimits their work, offering time-tested criteria of "accountability". In fact teachers' performance is often assessed by the examination results and, till recently, promotions were withheld on the basis of a poor pass percentage.

Indeed, changing a curriculum is, as Mary Waring points out, like trying to move a graveyard, for both are filled with sacred bones.<sup>71</sup> Dissonance often occurs between the initial objectives of an innovative curriculum and subsequent classroom practice because, over time, individual teachers accommodate themselves to their own situations of "equilibrium". The compromises they make to minimise tension and the strategies they adopt for such accommodation normally fall within the more familiar traditional approaches informed by a relatively stable body of ideas of what and how to teach. However, those who do depart from the secure expository mode are often dominated by the "activity"<sup>72</sup> frame of mind, restricting themselves only to the functional and manipulative details of doing experiments, rather than going into the logic of those activities. Their own limited understanding of the subject often bars them from adopting a "learning" frame by which to interpret the experiments. Indeed, "learning by doing" has often been over-stressed by the innovative curricula, almost to the point of dire distraction. Most such curricula expressed allegiance to the famous Chinese adage: "I heard I forgot; I saw I remembered; I did I understood", which also boldly prefaces Bal Vigyanik. The mere act of mechanically manipulating often tedious and time-consuming experiments does not necessarily facilitate comprehension but might, instead, as Rosalind Driver suspects, result in the anguish of: "I do and I am even more confused!"<sup>73</sup>

A significant section of the Vishika teachers, however indoctrinated by the tenets of "discovery learning" they may be, are often severely constrained and understandably demotivated by the lack of basic equipment. This constraint overrides the others with which they

have somehow learnt to cope: leaking roofs (if ever they exist), a crowd of sometimes upto a hundred children crammed into dark and dilapidated classrooms, acute shortage of water.... The supply of the low-cost science kit, a responsibility of the State Education Department, is a long-suffering victim of bureaucratic inertia and inefficiency, giving rise to the perennial complaint proverbially termed as "kit ki kit kit". However, the kit though crucial, is not the lone cause of discontent. Administrative lapses and procrastinations constitute the normal order. Indeed, a large measure of the youthfulness and enthusiasm of the now not-as-young voluntary activists, in their almost indefatigable attempts to somehow keep things moving, has been irreversibly sapped by the virtually immovable files of the local educational set-up.

In terms of the perceived practicality of a preferred curriculum the new approach probably raises some other questions as well. The emphasis on collaborative problem solving or constructing "shared meanings" is, perhaps, construed by teachers as highly paradoxical, for in the conventional culture of "no cheating!" or "keep your eyes strictly on your own note-book!" to encourage mutual consultation could amount to dereliction of the traditional ethical norms they have persevered to maintain (except, of course, when discretion decides otherwise). Indeed the reification of "knowledge" within our contemporary education system, and its consequent redefinition as an individually acquired "possession" to be fanatically guarded yet blatantly displayed, has led to the almost abject practice of "competition" and one-upmanship amongst students. Pupils are almost provoked by their peers, parents and even pedagogues to stealthily pinch others' notes while prudently preparing their own. Thus, when knowledge is a commodity almost surreptitiously transacted under cover, to propound collaborative learning must sound confoundingly crazy!

### **Enquiry outside the School**

The spirit of enquiry has demonstrated some measure of contagion outside the Vishika classroom. Teachers have gained confidence and have shown signs of protest against bureaucratic repression. Indeed the manner in which some middle school teachers recently withstood tremendous political pressure emanating directly from the

Vidhan Sabha is a case in point. In last year's annual (class VIII) examination, a question pertaining to the theory of probability required students to compute the chances of winning a game of "Satta", thus exemplifying that gambling is largely a losing proposition. A political opportunist objected on the grounds that Vishika, by virtue of its activity-based learning approach, was corrupting children by teaching them how to gamble and must therefore be packed up. An absurd accusation, but once articulated behind the high portals of power could portend serious trouble, especially for the poor school teachers who had framed the question. However, in an unusual act of conviction, they stuck to their stand, officially stating that this was a more effective way of combating the widespread problem of gambling rather than the moral sermonising they are normally expected to do in the classroom.

Whenever innovation challenges existing hierarchies within schools, let alone without, political problems inevitably arise. There is always this fear that if curricula tend to look at social realities too critically, teachers emerging from such a course would become, in the words of a school inspector, "active emissaries of misrule".<sup>74</sup> Elaborating on the notion of "curriculum as practice", Young comments that educational theory must lead to the transformation of ideas into action and ought necessarily be rooted in the world of practice outside the confines of school. He eloquently asserts that "if the educational experiences of both teachers and pupils is to become a realistic possibility of human liberation, then this is going to involve many others who have no direct involvement with the school, and much action by teachers and pupils that would not be seen as either confined to school or, in conventional terms, necessarily educational at all".<sup>75</sup>

A significant section of the Vishika cadre of teachers has moved out of the classroom; in collaboration with voluntary activists or "informal agents of change",<sup>76</sup> it has now engaged itself in activities related to broader societal issues, like environmental pollution or health and medicine, besides organising popular science exhibitions, quizzes and Bal Melas. Indeed these activities have gained further momentum by having been incorporated into the agenda of the People's Science Network, recently formed by voluntary groups from different states of the country. Interaction with peers from different geographical regions would thus provide a wider exposure and lead to a heightened sense of self-awareness, essential for any meaningful

restructuring of belief systems. Thus the new movement of "science activism", using science almost as Freire treated "literacy", has begun to mobilise the extensive network of teachers and children, who, if meaningfully motivated, can act as potential agents of social change. This envisioned marriage of innovation with activism can possibly liberate school science and direct it in search of a truly democratic order.

The Vishika resource group is meanwhile engrossed in a long-standing debate about the future of the programme. To expand or not to expand? — looms large ahead. Geographically (into more districts)? Vertically (into higher levels of school)? Officially (as part of the government's new statewide scheme)? Voluntarily (through a network of voluntary groups)? — the "dialectics" of expansion continues to engage. Moreover, despite various past attempts, the inevitable question of "programme evaluation" invariably emerges. How must Vishika be effectively evaluated? By ourselves? By professional educational consultants? By the government bureaucrats? By politicians? By the teachers themselves? By the children, or the community at large? Can such evaluation ever be truly "objective"?

Indeed, curriculum evaluation is necessarily a political enterprise and it is too naive to consider it a neutral activity. In House's words:

contrary to common belief, evaluation is not the ultimate arbiter, delivered from our objectivity and accepted as final judgement. Evaluation is always derived from biased origins. When someone wants to defend something or to attack something, he often evaluates it. Evaluation is a motivated behaviour. Likewise, the way in which the results of an evaluation are accepted depends on whether they help or hinder the person receiving them. Evaluation is an integral part of the political processes of our society.<sup>77</sup>

### Postscript

The above words proved to be almost prophetic. In the couple of years after this paper was first presented, Vishika has witnessed many evaluations driven by diverse motivations. Meanwhile, the resource group had settled for suitable mechanisms for the expansion of the



programme to cover the entire state, after the Departments of Education and Science & Technology of the Government of India had proposed to support the plan. However, the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), which was the ruling party in the state at that time, decided to overrule the Centre's evaluation and carried out its own "assessment", clearly trying to stall the Vishika expansion plan, while expanding and consolidating its own right-wing educational network.<sup>78</sup> However, Bal Vigyanik has now been translated into many different languages and the programme is being taken either formally or informally, into schools of different states of the country.

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## Index

- Africa, 129  
 Age of Remorselessness, 31  
 Ahmed, Abul Monsur, 173, 193  
 All Bengal Teachers Association, 186, 196, 199  
 All India Hindu Mahasabha, 175  
 America, 77  
 American Anthropologist, 25  
*Anvita Bazar Patrika*, 194, 197  
 Amsterdam, 32  
 Andhra Pradesh, 213, 222  
 Ariosto, Ludovico, 53  
 Assam, 213  
 Austrian Parliamentary Committee, 73  
 Ayer, A.J., 62  
  
 Bal Vijyanik, 266-7  
 Banerjee, Pramatha Nath, 177, 184  
 Bangladesh, 125, 170  
 Bateson, Gregory, 28  
 Bauman, Zygmunt, 46  
 Beelzebub, 53  
 Bengal, 140-1, 143, 149, 151, 154, 159, 168-70, 172, 176, 182-4, 189, 192, 198  
 Bengal Secondary Education Bill (1940), 168, 175, 179, 190, 193-5, 198-9  
 Bentinck, William, 208  
 Bernstein, 11  
 Beteille, Andre, 133  
 Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), 71  
 Bhoomi Sena, 97  
 Biswas, Abdul Latif, 188  
 Blackett, P.M.S., 53  
 Bock, 121-2, 124  
 Bofors, 72, 74  
  
 Borda, Orlando Fals, 125  
 Bose, Sarat Chandra, 184, 188, 196  
 Bourdieu, Pierre, 11, 136  
 Brahmo Samaj, 154, 157  
 Brazil, 118, 126  
 Brecht, Bertolt, 52  
 Britain, 3, 129, 138, 140-1  
     educational system of, 246  
 British War Office, 51  
 Bruno, Giordano, 32, 38  
 Buddha, 37  
  
 Caesar, 76  
 Calcutta Teachers Association, 195  
 Calcutta University, 171-3, 177-8, 180-1, 183, 187, 189, 198  
 Carneige, Andrew, 4  
 Cartesian, 39, 59, 62  
 Cartesian Doubt, 31-2, 58  
 Cartesian formula, 31  
 Cartesianism, 28-9  
 Catholic Church, 35, 41  
 Ceausescu, Nicolae, 40  
 Census of 1981, 122  
 Central Institute of English, Hyderabad, 145  
 Chandra, Nirmal, 196  
 Chardin, Teilhard de, 49-50  
 Chattopadhyay, Bankim, Chandra, 176  
 Chattopadhyay, Sarat Chandra, 176  
 Chaudhury, Harendra Nath, 177, 182-4, 191-92  
 China, 7  
 Chomsky, Noam, 24, 30, 34, 37-8, 75, 77, 79

## 276 *Democracy and Education in India*

- Christians, 46  
Church, 36  
Columbia, 125  
Commission for Planning of Higher Education, 143  
Commoner, Barry, 48  
Communist Party of India (Marxist), 71, 143  
Conally, Cyril, 42  
Congress Party, 182-3, 192-3, 212-4, 216  
Constituent Assembly, 209  
Cottingham, John, 34  
Cummings, E.E., 63  
Curzon, Lord, 183  
  
Dacca University, 172, 189  
Dahrendorf, Ralf, 128  
Das, C.R., 187  
Datta, Umesh Chandra, 154  
Death Immersion, 58  
Delamont, 227  
Delhi, 43  
Derozio, 153  
Descartes, Rene, 28-9, 31, 33, 35-9, 62, 64, 66-7, 75  
Dewey, John, 1-3, 6, 8, 205  
Dresden, 54  
Dube, Leela, 148  
Durants, 31  
Durkheim, Emile, 1, 138-9, 223  
Dutta, Hirendranath, 197  
Dutta, Ramesh Chandra, 176  
  
East India Company, 151, 157-8, 208  
Einstein, Albert, 27, 42, 48, 59, 63-5  
Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) (1977), 98  
Entropy Law, 39, 48  
Europe, 35, 50, 53, 78, 138  
  
Fermi, Enrico, 64, 77  
Florence, 31  
Fonden, Bergslags, 73  
Fowler, H.W., 26  
France, 3, 76  
Freire, Paulo, 57, 59, 61, 118-9, 126  
  
Freirean, 58  
  
Gagne, Robert, 254  
Gaia and Ge, 67  
Gaia Hypothesis, 67  
Galileo, 31  
Galtung, Johan, 54  
Gandhi, Indira, 216  
Gandhi, M.K., 7-8, 37  
Gandhi, Rajiv, 210  
Ganguly, Dwarkanath, 154  
Gasset, Jose Ortega y, 49  
Geertz, Clifford, 42-3  
Georgescu-Roegen, Nicholas, 39-41, 48  
Germany, 3, 54, 76  
Ghosh, Ramgopal, 156  
Gibbon, Edward, 55  
Goethe, 63-4  
Gokhale Education Society, 92  
Golden Age, 41  
Goswami, Tulsi, 196  
Gough, Kathleen, 259  
Gramsci, Antonio, 37, 85  
Greeks, 27, 50, 54, 67  
Grierson, George A., 176  
Groves, General Leslie, 75  
Guha, Ramachandra, 71  
Gujarat, 86  
  
Haque, Syed Mustafa Gawaal, 187  
Hardy, Thomas, 28  
Harrison, Paul, 210  
Hasim, Abul, 188  
Hastings, Warren, 208  
Heisenberg, Werner, 28  
Hindu Mahasabha, 175-6, 192-5  
Hiroshima, 46, 54  
Hiroshima bomb, 46  
Hiroshima Day, 46  
Hitler, 76  
Holland, 38  
*Homo sapiens*, 37, 51  
Hong Kong, 44  
Huq, Azilul, 173-4  
Huq, Fazlul, 174, 177, 180-1, 186, 191, 193-4, 198



- Huxely, Julian, 30  
 Huxley, Aldous, 53  
  
 India, 8, 79, 114, 125, 129, 134, 150-1, 251  
 Indian Council of Secondary Education, 224  
 International Education Commission, 117  
 Iran, 263  
  
 Japan, 3, 53  
 Jeevan Shikshan Sthala, 93  
 Jenken, N.A., 178  
 Jensen, 9  
 Jonas, Hans, 45  
  
 Kailashbashini, 132, 150, 152-61  
 Kaiser Leopold German Academy of Scientists, 63  
 Kakar, Sudhir, 148  
 Kanpur, 150  
 Kashtakari Sanghatana, 96, 100, 103, 106  
 Kasim, Abul, 193  
 Kepler, Johannes, 64  
 Kepler's Laws, 64  
 Kerala, 213  
 Khan, Abdul Wahab, 188  
 Khan, Genghis, 37  
 Khan, Osman, 176  
 Khan, Temizuddin, 194  
 Kidd and Kumar, 118-9  
 Kisan Sabha, 87, 97, 100  
 Kishwar, Madhu, 150  
 Kluckhohn, Clyde, 24  
 Koestler, Arthur, 46  
 Kothari, Rajni, 80  
 Krame, Aaron, 23  
 Krishak Praja Party, 186  
 Krishna Kumar, 120, 148  
 Krishnamurti Foundation India, 222  
 Kroeber, A.L., 24  
 Krupskaya, 7  
 Kurrien, 123  
  
 Lahiri, Ramtanu, 156  
 Lakshman, 145  
  
 Latin America, 64  
 Laws of Motion, 51  
 Layton, D., 246, 248-50  
 Lenin, 7, 76  
 Leontief, Wassily, 78  
 Lerner, Gerda, 130  
 Liberia, 263  
 Lifton, Robert, 43  
 Lippmann, Walter, 77  
 Lipset, 205-6, 210  
 Lok Sabha, 213  
  
 Macaulay, Thomas Babington, 208  
 Madhya Pradesh, 245  
 Mahila Samakhya, 122-3  
 Mahmood, Abdul, Raschid, 188  
 Manhattan District Project, 43, 75  
 Mannheim, 119  
 Mao Tse-tung, 7  
 Marx Karl, 7, 49, 212  
 Mathema, 126  
 Max Weber, 222  
 McDonald, 63  
 Merchant, Carolyn, 68  
 Mersenne, Friar Marin, 31  
 Merton, Robert, 133  
 Mexico, 125  
 Mill, John Stuart, 138  
 Mills, C. Wright, 76  
 Milton, John, 38  
 Mitra, Kissory Chand, 152-3, 155-9  
 Montaigne, Michel de, 32  
 Mookerjee, Harendra Coomer, 195-6  
 Mookherjee, Syamaprasad, 184-5, 188, 192-6  
 More, Henry, 66  
 Mother Church, 52  
 Mukherjee, Ashutosh, 187  
 Mumford, Lewis, 33  
 Muslim League, 194  
  
 Nagasaki, 54  
 Nagpur, 214  
 Naik, J.P., 134  
 Nandy, Ashis, 150  
 Napoleon, 76

## 278 *Democracy and Education in India*

- Naskar, Hem Chandra, 196  
National Adult Education Programme, 117  
Navodaya Vidyalaya, 105  
Nazi, 54  
NCERT, 145  
New Policy on Education (NPE), 117, 251  
New York, 44  
Newton, Isaac, 51  
Nicaragua, 125  
Niels Bohr's Principle of Complementarity, 64  
Nigeria, 129  
Nobel Prize, 69  
  
OECD, 78  
Omotoso, Kole, 129  
Ong, Walter, 258-9, 262  
Oppenheimer, Robert, 69  
Orlando Furioso, 53  
Orwell, 77  
Ossuary, 53  
  
Paine, Tom, 206  
Palme, Olof, 73  
Pantheon, 53  
Papagiannes, 124  
Parajuli, 126  
Paris, 44  
Passeron, J., 136  
Peary Chand, 152  
People's Science Movement, 93-4  
People's Science Network, 269  
Pestalozzi, 1  
Philippines, 125  
Popper, Karl, 26  
Prabhu, P., 91, 103  
Public School Commission, 18, 61, 247  
  
Rabi, Isidor, 77  
Radhakrishnan, S., 197  
Rahman Fazlur, 125, 183, 189  
Rajasthan, 149, 213  
Rassundari Debi, 152  
Redfield, Robert, 51  
Renaissance, 53  
  
Representation of the People's Act, 71  
Revised Code of 1862, 247  
Rickover, Admiral, 6  
Rishi Valley School, 222, 224, 226-41  
Robinson, Mrs. Joan, 25, 30  
Rome, 76  
Roop Kanwar, 149-50  
Roosevelt, Franklin, 76  
Rosch, Eleanor, 261  
Roszak, Theodore, 50  
Rousseau, 1  
Roy, Bidhan Chandra, 183, 196  
Roy, Kiran Shankar, 177, 184-5, 196  
Roy, Profulla Chandra, 193, 197-9  
Roy, Rammohun, 138, 187  
Russell, Bertrand, 26-27, 51, 60  
Russia, 76  
  
Saha, Maghnad, 197  
Samuelson, Paul, 47  
Santayana, 42  
Sarkar, Abu Hussain, 186  
Sarkar, Jadunath, 197  
Sarkar, Sumit, 142  
Sarkir, Nalini Ranjan, 184-5, 196  
Sarkir, Nilratan, 196  
Sastri, Sivanath, 154  
Sathe, 145  
Scheduled Castes, 133  
Seabrook, Jeremy, 78  
Second Law of Thermodynamics, 39  
Sen, Amartya, 130  
Sen, Atul Chandra, 177, 184, 192  
Sen, Keshub Chander, 151, 154, 187  
Sharadasundari, Debi, 151  
Shramajibi Sanghatana, 94, 97, 105  
Shramik Mukti Sanghatana, 93, 105  
Sikh, 43  
Singapore, 44  
Singh, Nalini, 71  
Singh, V.P., 71-2  
Southeast Asia, 266  
Soviet Super, 76  
Sperry, Roger, 69  
Sri Lanka, 125  
Suhrawardy, H.S., 185

- Suresh, V., 91, 103  
 Sweden, 72  
 Swift, Jonathan, 44  
 Syed, Badradduza, 187-8  
 Symington, 86-7
- Tagore, Rabindranath, 114, 176-7, 193, 197  
     Santiniketan Ashram, 177  
 Taylor, Maxwell, 79  
 Teller, Edward, 24, 37  
 Thailand, 250  
 Third World, 12, 118, 120, 259, 262  
 Trevelyan, Charles, 208  
 Truman, Harry, 75-6
- Unamuno, Miguel de, 31, 33  
 UNESCO, 117  
 United States, 1, 3, 6, 11, 47, 77, 131  
 University of Bombay  
     College of Social Work, 92  
 Unterweger, Peter, 73  
 USSR, 3, 7  
 Uttar Pradesh, 120
- Vana Niketan, 92, 105  
 Varma, Narain, 213  
 Vidhayak Sansad, 105  
 Vidyasagar, Ishwar Chandra, 141, 176
- Vigyan Shikshan Karyakram (Vishika), 245, 252-7, 261, 264-70  
 Voest-Alpin, 73  
 Voest-Alpin Company, 73
- Waddington, C.H., 14-5  
 Wardha scheme of education, 174  
 Warnock, Marv, 134  
 Westfall, R.S., 66  
 White, Lesli, 25, 37, 42, 60-1  
 Whitehead, A.N., 28  
 Williams, Bernard, 62  
 Williams, Raymond, 40, 48  
 Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 30  
 Woods, Charles, 208  
 Woods Educational Despatch (1854), 143, 208  
 Wordsworth, W.C., 181  
 Working Group on Science Education for the First Ten Years of Schooling (1987), 251  
 World Bank, 210  
 World War II, 6, 53
- York, Herbert, 75-77  
 Young Bengal, 153  
 Young, Tar Zianshi, 7
- Zachariah, 123  
 Zuckerman, Lord, 47, 54