13.

The Impact of Western Educational Styles on India's Struggle for Development and Justice: Some Reflections

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Throughout her long history, India has been open to other cultures and styles of education. This paper has to limit itself to the two major influences that have come to us from nineteenth century Europe, and possibly make a comment on the necessity to learn from other Asian educational styles.

Two Western Currents

Apart from the various colonial thrusts from the West (Portuguese, Dutch, French and British), two main currents have hit us in this century with great force—Western liberal humanism, and Western marxist socialism. The former has definitely shaped the pattern of our institutional education ; the latter has made its impact both on the educated elite, and on vast numbers of workers and peasants, especially in Bengal, Andhra and Kerala.

India has not, however, simply adapted these ideas wholesale. The impact has made most of our educated people neither liberal humanists nor marxist socialists. This is largely due to our peculiarly Indian attitude towards ideas as such.

Indians have an exceptional ability to assimilate foreign ideas, though not always at a sufficiently profound level or in an adequately *nuance* manner; they can also express these ideas with eloquence of language though not always with elegance of style. In the urban-technological societies of the West, ideas are at a premium, eagerly sought after, generously paid for, and promptly acted upon. In Indian society, on the contrary, ideas are mainly for the purpose of making speeches or writing articles, but not necessarily to be paid for or actually to be implemented. Ours is a talkative society, not a dynamic one.

The enormity of our problems and the awareness of our long history conspire to make us prefer an easy-going approach to the task before us. Unlike the Westerner we are adept at focussing on the reasons why something will not work, rather than on the need to find new ways of

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dealing with our difficulties. We feel tired, powerless and frustrated ; all we want to do is to make self-deceiving excuses for not making the effort, or for not sustaining the effort beyond the initial failure. Because the problems are so enormous, we seem to trust more in the cosmic forces than in our own effort to work things out. This seems to apply both to the Indian liberal humanist and to the Indian marxist socialist, though perhaps not to the same degree.

The Streams Merge ?

The highest compliment that can be paid to the Western liberal educational style is to recognize its direct role in initiating and advancing India's struggle for development and justice. Western education hit little more than the apex of the pyramid of Indian society in the 19th century. But it immediately led to the quest by an Indian elite for social reform. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswati and Debendranath Tagore were ardent social reformers. Not only were their consciences quickened ; their will to reform found expression in Western style societies and movements—Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Servants of India Society, Indian National Congress and so on. Tilak and Gokhale, Vivekanand and Gandhi, were all more than talkers ; they were organizers of social reform movements the like of which were not seen in India before the Western impact.

This early movement for social reform in India had two essential characteristics—it was *religiously motivated*, and though led by an elite, was essentially *universalist in horizon*. In this sense it was an attempt to integrate western ethics into an Indian religious framework and at the same time to universalize Indian religion. Ram Mohan Roy stood for an "upanishadic universalism" not only for Indians, but for all humanity—witness his impressive and effective participation in the anti-slavery movement in Britain. The early elitist social reform movement could not accept a Western "secular" basis. Only with Jawaharlal Nehru secular socialist ideas, unrelated to the Hindu religious framework, become pervasive in Indian elitist thought. For Nehru, the springs of motivation lay, not in the religious and cultural heritage of India, but in the European struggle for emancipation from ecclesiastical control of thought, and from feudalist-capitalist oppression of the masses. It is in Nehru that we see clearly the merging of the liberal-humanist and the marxist-socialist streams of thought in an unindian secular framework.

At the Lucknow Congress (1936) Nehru's presidential address spoke about the direct relation between "the intensification of the struggle for social freedom in Europe, and a new aggressive nationalism in the countries of Asia[1]. Both forces were anti-imperialist and anti-fascist ;

imperialism and fascism were reactionary forces allied to a decadent capitalism. The Congress had to opt to be on the side of the progressive forces of secular socialism.

Did Nehru succeed in converting the Congress to his point of view in 1936? No, at least not totally. Already in 1930 he had observed the conflict between upanishadic universalism and secular humanism threaten to split the Congress. And in the famous 1930 pledge for *Purna Swaraj* (complete independence) drafted by Nehru and accepted by the Congress, it had been recognized that the emancipation of India was more than a political and economic affair. The *Purna Swaraj* pledge was meant as a policy platform for the liberation of India from the colonial yoke, in four parallel movements. The first and the most important was economic emancipation to which Nehru devoted three paragraphs, and the second political liberation which merited a long paragraph. The pledge then went on to speak about the two other aspects of freedom—cultural and spiritual :

> "Culturally, the system of education has torn us from our moorings, and our training has made us hug the very chains that bind us. Spiritually, compulsory disarmament has made us unmanly, and the presence of an alien army of occupation, employed with deadly effect to crush in us the spirit of resistance, has made us think that we cannot look after ourselves or put up a defense against foreign aggression, or even defend our homes and families from the attacks of thieves, robbers and miscreants"[2].

Nehru obviously was making a concession to the older elements in the Congress who put more emphasis on a cultural and spiritual renaissance as the most essential aspect of decolonialisation, but he gave his own "secular" interpretation to these cultural and spiritual elements.

Two New Streams Emerge

In this way, the merging of the Western liberal humanist and marxist socialist ideologies inside the head of Jawaharlal, led to two different streams again in the quest for a reawakened India. For the sake of convenience we will label one "Nehru's vision" and the other "the Gandhian vision", of India's future. There was so much in common between the two visions, that they found it not much of a problem to co-exist in the bosom of the Indian National Congress.

There were radicals on both sides. The secular-marxist radicals later separated to form the Communist Party of India. Some more fanatic religious extremists separated to form conservative religious groups like the Rashtriya Svayam Sevak Samiti. But the vast majority remained with the

Indian National Congress. Within the Congress itself, however, the Gandhian vision and Nehru's vision uneasily co-existed, the latter predominating.

The Gandhian vision, inheriting the original upanishadic universalism, consisted in a Ramarajya of limited aspirations as far as consumer goods were concerned. It was anti-industrialist, anti-urbun, but not anti-capitalist. Capitalists like Birla and Tata were regarded as allies who would hold properly in trust for the people, providing funds for humanitarian purposes.

Simplicity of life, an agrarian-rural setting with a minimum of factories and cities, primacy of the spititual, uplift of the down-trodden, an omni-religious, theistic basis, work-based basic education—these were some of the planks of the Gandhian platform. Coming in the tradition of Ruskin and Tolstoy, Rousseau and Thoreau in the West, the Gandhian vision had much in common with the counter-culture syndrome now gaining ascendancy in America and other Western countries.

Nehru's vision of a socialistic pattern of society, in contrast, based on the secular humanism of the industrial West, was openly committed to the urban industrial culture based on Western science and technology. Ideologically anti-capitalist, though unable to extricate itself from dependence on capitalist wealth and power, the India of the five-year plans had as her objective the raising of the GNP, catching up with the West, ever expanding production and consumption, increasing educational and health services, and better distributive justice through graded taxation. It is this Nehru vision, with the primacy of the economic factor, that has dominated India. Her educational system has also been idea-based (the 'banking' concept of education, to borrow a Paulo Freie term) rather than work-based. While giving encouragement to art and music, dance and drama, literature and sports, the Nehru vision had but limited interest in either the spiritual heritage of India or in a coherent vision of man and the meaning of his life. In agriculture, as in industry, in education as in research, our inspiration as well as ideas came from the West ,whether socialist or capitalist.

Education and the Five-Year Plans

Planning, obviously, is the key to our vision, and the index of our orientation. This is something we took over bodily from the Soviet Union. But we have integrated our planning into our own "soft" system of liberal humanism. Centralized economic planning, government-controlled, does not work very well in our society, precisely because the other key element necessary for the success of a Soviet five-year plan seems to be totally lacking in our society—viz., party cadres locally organized, trained

and disciplined by ideological formation, to carry through the transformation of attitudes and patterns necessary at the primary level of production and distribution, whether industrial or agricultural.

It was the co-ordination of party cadres and Government machinery, the former disciplining and controlling the latter, that assumed responsibility for the implementation of the plans in the Soviet Union. In our soft Indian society, there was little ideological formation of the Government personnel, and the party cadres were both undisciplined and inactive in terms of primary production. The recent *Kumaramangalam Thesis* is supposed to have changed all that in India, but only on paper. The persistent fact remains that no five-year plan can be implemented by a bureaucracy, unless undergirded and supported by ideological education of the masses, carried out by a corps of non-governmental but strictly disciplined party cadres.

The fundamental defect of our educational system is directly linked with the defect of the national planning system. No radical reform of education can be carried out in a nation by the production of a good report and the allotment of a fat sum for its implementation. Class-room education cannot be reformed adequately without parallel effort affecting the masses throughout the nation. Mass social education is the necessary matrix for any substantially effective institutional change in education.

The secondary defect of our educational system is its alienation from the basic primary economic relations of the people i.e., of production and distribution. The 'banking concept' of education remains untransformed, despite all statements about a work-based education. The success of the Soviet Union, especially of its great educational pioneer with a large vision, A.S. Makarenko[3], depended on the concepts of work-based education and social responsibility ("proletarian duty", he called it), but the Soviet Union practically rejected Makarenko's philosophy during the Stalin days, and went in for competition with the West. The Communist system was expected to produce bigger and better steel factories and space rockets than the capitalist system was able to. Stalin's Russia forgot the basic orientation of Marxism— the remoulding of Man, and became preoccupied with outdoing the West, at any cost.

And Stalin's Russia therefore decided to abandon Makarenko's social-rehabilitation-oriented education in favour of Germany's industrial-production-oriented *Gymnasia*. But even in this adopted Western capitalist educational system utilized by a socialist society, care was taken to see that education in the schools was not divorced from education in the factories and communes. This is where the Indian system seems a total failure, and the Chinese system appears to have started off much more on the right foot than the Soviets.

The Tagore Approach to Education

Rabindranath Tagore tried to show a third way to which India paid but scant attention. He was willing to use Western insights, but he wanted a radical reorientation of our educational system ; in this he was opposed to the scientific-technological approach of Nehru.

One expression of his views can be seen in the series of addresses[4] he delivered in his younger days at Harvard University and at the Shantiniketan. His basic thesis is a distinction he makes between the scientific attitude to life, which he describes as an attitude of objectifying everything and bringing it under control, and the unitive approach, which seeks a vital, non-objectifying relation to reality :

> "India intuitively felt that the essential fact of this world has a vital meaning for us ; we have to be fully alive to it and establish a conscious relation with it, not merely impelled by scientific curiosity or greed of material advantage, but realising it in the spirit of sympathy, with a large feeling of joy and peace"[5]

Tagore argued that joy was more important than power. And joy comes from union, not from knowledge or control. Tagore accuses the Christian West of not really coming to terms with Christ's teaching on fundamental unity.

Ivan Illich if he had lived then and had his present ideas, would have loudly cheered the opening words of Tagore in his 1924 address to students in China !

> "When I was very young I gave up learning and ran away from my lessons. That saved me, and I owe all that I possess today to that courageous step"[6].

But did every child that left school for one reason or another at the age of 12 or 13 develop into a Tagore ? What the poet meant was perhaps simply that the Western style school stifles creativity and dessicates the spirit of man. The Western style school,according to both Illich and Tagore,alienates from reality and creates ghettoes of the mind, full of parochial prejudices, national chauvinism, and acquisitive greed.

I do not know what the Chinese response was to Tagore in 1924. I doubt whether his warning against the Western style of education was heeded at all at that time.

The Chinese Experiment

But today the Chinese seems to be succeeding in the creation of an educational system which is certainly not a pale copy of the Western style. Mao Tse Tung, one of the greatest educators of all time, saw in the

very early stages of the Liberation War that ideological education should be the core of the fighting power of the army. It was a simple system of conscientization, i.e.,

(a) allow every soldier to 'pour out his grievances' against the oppressor class, by citing actual experiences of the peasants and workers.

(b) carry out the three-fold check-up of each soldier for class origin, performance of duty, and will do fight[7].

The Chinese educational system, starting from that very modest and rudimentary ideology in 1940 has in the past quarter century dared more radically than any other national educational system that I know of, to introduce sweeping changes into the pattern of education based on a clear ideological vision. To put the present theory in short-hand, it goes something like this[8] :

(1) each economic plan can be carried out only by first effecting the ideological mobilisation of the people.

(2) Ideological incentives should replace material incentives, but should generate equal or greater material results.

(3) The technique is : "from the masses and back to the masses". i.e., party cadres should go to the masses, gather their ideas, analyse and correct them and refine them in discussion, and thus arouse the spontaneous creativity of the masses. After this the movement of education and production will be carried on by the masses themselves. There is no need of coercion. The masses will exert their own pressure upon themselves.

(4) All possible means should be used for the education of the masses, but always starting with their own ideas. Use processions with drums and flags, use all public media, use discussions, meetings, debates, demonstrations, public trials, and every means for maximum public involvement. The mass movement will generate its own heroes and leaders, and compose its own popular slogans and marching songs.

(5) This mass movement would sometimes mean a stinging criticism of the ruling party ; in such a case the party must stand ready to be rectified by the public criticism. No bureaucracy, no party, no government, no individual should be immune from public criticism.

(6) Educate the anti-social culprits in order to transform them ; do not punish by coercion and force. Let the masses do this too. Physical liquidations and purges

create chain reactions of hate which are ultimately destructive. Public criticism, ridicule and lampooning of those who offend against the public interests are much more effective than concentration camps and secret-service-engineered purges.

(7) Even the army should use ideas or education as its main tool, rather than brute force. The army should be the leader in the national reconstruction, by creating a nation-wide study movement which operates through a mass movement for improved production and distribution, both rural and urban, agricultural and industrial.

(8) Intellectuals are not to be trusted either with education or with political leadership. China has for millennia been a meritocracy, ruled by the Mandarin literary elite. A political revolution without a literary revolution is bound to fail. Classical literature emphasizes style and form at the expense of spirit and content ; it teaches certain individual moral values of a feudal or capitalist society, rather than the values of social justice and social wealth as they affect the common man. The principles of the literary revolution had been laid down as early as 1917 by Chen Tu Hsiu, and provided the primary intellectual thrust for the Chinese Revolution :

(a) overthrow the painted, powdered, and obsequious literature of the aristocratic few, and breathe the plain, simple and expressive literature of the people;

(b) overthrow the stereotyped and over-ornamental literature of classicism, and create the fresh and sincere literature of realism;

(c) overthrow the pedantic, unintelligible, and obscurantist literature of the hermit and recluse, and create the plain-speaking and popular literature of society in general."[9]

The attempt in 1949-52 to create a new, socially responsible, intellectual elite produced highly unsatisfactory results ; the many attempts to make the teachers and writers go back to the masses and learn from them did not transform their ideas overnight. In January 1956 Chou En Lai had to call a special session of the Communist Party to deal with the question of intellectuals. This was the "Year of the Hundred Flowers", when intellectuals were given a temporary respite of freedom, to see if the

method of open debate and public criticism, so successful among the masses, would succeed also among the intellectuals.

Radicalisation of the Elite

In the agonising self-appraisal that followed the Year of the Hundred Flowers, the Chinese discovered that the radicalisation of the elite was an uphill task. They decided on a programme to transform the educational system, both social and institutional. The line was more or less as follows :

(a) More youth of peasant and worker origin should enter the higher institutions, in order to break the clique of 'meritocracy' that controlled higher education.

(b) Chinese education must abandon all "foreign stereotypes", and was to be based on bold, independent thinking coming out of the experience of working class youth engaged in productive labour ; manual labour was accepted as a normal part of education, for teachers and students alike.

(c) China must assume the leadership of the world struggle of the oppressed which the U.S.S.R. was abandoning · this sense of world mission has a great deal to do with the educational dynamic in China today. She decided to "go it alone" and to march in front.

(d) The army should be used as the major instrument for the socialist education of the countryside, through literacy campaigns, through popular art, producer and consumer co-operatives, communized agriculture, and a village-based light industry.

(e) Activation or animation of local mass groups would be the main task of the army as educator of the nation.

(f) Education must combine socialist consciousness and attitudes (including the dignity of productive labour), with scientific reasoning and inventiveness, which includes emancipation from superstitious beliefs and obsolete traditions.

(g) The mass organizations should have their base in the under-thirty age group. Youth, both men and women, were to break out of the traditional value system of individual virtues, and to cultivate the virtues of social productivity, the spirit of collaboration and team-work, freedom from corruption, bribery, violence and from arbitrary exercise of authority, the equality of men and women, and national self-reliance.

Without this massive movement for the socialist education of the countryside as well as of the cities, China would never have reached its present status. But "education into a socialist society will cover a long historical period" as Chou En Lai said in December 1965.

The Lack of Will in India

In India we have not had either the will or the organizing capacity for this mass mobilization of the people. We have not set our educational thinking and planning in the context of this mass social education and dynamicization of the people. We have no local cadres in the ruling party or any other party which can undertake this work on a nation-wide basis. In India we are still thinking of social justice as something achievable through central planning. One can see how social justice can be advanced through large-scale public sector investment and a graded system of taxation, but so long as power remains in the hands of a capitalist-feudal bourgeoisie, it is hard to see how the investments and the taxation will not be manipulated in their own favour by those in power.

Social justice in India is achievable, it seems to me, only through a massive shift in the power-base, from the bourgeoisie who form perhaps five or six percent of the Indian population, to the rest of the masses, whether urban-industrial, agricultural, or government servants, labourers and peasants, including the millions of the unemployed. But this power-shift has to be preceded by a massive socialist education of the masses to clarify their own long-range objectives and to formulate the strategy for attaining those objectives. Such a socialist education of the masses must focus on a shift from individual and group egoism, greed and selfishness, to a new set of social values.

One would have thought of the primary school as a starting point, or even of the secondary school, the teacher training college, or perhaps the university. But such thinking comes from the institutional hang-up of many of us educational thinkers.[10] *Without mass social education, intitutional education cannot be radically corrected.* Unless the primary relations of production and distribution are reorganized on the basis of social justice, until all cultural and communication media are enlisted in the service of mass socialist education of the people, without a concerted and disciplined effort on the part of the civil and military forces of the multi-million member enterprise called the Government of India to educate themselves and the people along socialist lines, the mere tinkering with primary, secondary or tertiary educational institutions can in no wise actually achieve a society with justice. The battle for the minds of the young cannot be fought in the confines of the compound walls of institutions. Book learning by itself will not usher in social justice.

A Gigantic Educational Experiment—The Chinese Cultural Revolution

China began her experiments in 1958, with Marx's idea of a part-work, part-study education, not based in the schools, but in the factories themselves. But these proved to be largely a failure by 1962. In 1964 the scheme was reactivated with renewed vigour and circumspection, but this time in integral relation to what was happening in the society around, especially in communes. Teachers with the right attitudes and skills were difficult to find.

In 1966, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution exploded with earth-shaking force. The masses, led by the army and the young people, took over their own education. All students were now required, beginning with senior middle school, to spend a year or two among the workers, peasants and soldiers, in the factories and communes. There they were to be educated in the three primary principles of Chinese education : the class struggle, the struggle for production and the promotion of scientific research and inventiveness.

University entrance was no longer on the basis of academic merit. That criterion led to the anomalous, monstrous and shocking fact that even in the mid-sixties, the Shanghai Music Institute had some ninety percent of its students with a bourgeois origin[11].

1966 saw the abolition of the examination system both for entrance and for graduation. The Cultural Revolution forced the university students to return to the factories and communes for a year or two. Readmission to university reduced enrolment to about a third of what it was before the Cultural Revolution. Students were readmitted on the basis of their social attitudes, their capacity for productive work, and their scientific inventiveness and initiative as demonstrated in the years in the communes and factories.

Chinese education is no pale imitation of the West. It has its own vision, its own dynamic, its own cultural rootage and particularity. Many of its basic ideas and patterns as well as the theory seem at first sight strikingly Western. But the Chinese have made something of it which is now fully their own.

What about Us ?

Is the plea of this paper that we should stop imitating the West and start imitating the Chinese ? Far from it. The Chinese system is in any case in its early pioneering and experimental stage, and the whole Chinese revolution is a package deal which cannot be exported piece-meal.

What we need is our own pioneering. There are some things which we can well learn from the Chinese, not as models for copying, but as principles of fairly universal relevance.

First, we should learn that reforms will not come from Governmental planning, but only through nation-wide cadres, ideologically oriented, strictly disciplined and co-ordinated, democratically organized from a mass-base. Only such cadres can set in motion movements for genuine social and educational reform.

Second, reforms of educational institutions, without a radical process of socio-economic reform, are bound to prove frustratingly ineffective. Mass social education is the context in which a new educational system and new types of educational instisutions can take shape. Such sweeping mass movements cannot be led by mercenary personnel. It must generate its own unpaid, voluntary leadership.

Third, both the mass educational movement as well as the educational institutions should develop a pattern that is related to primary relations of economic production and distribution, teaches the dignity of labour, promotes creativity and inventiveness in science and technology, and generates new altruistic social attitudes among the masses and their leaders.

But if educational and social reform in India would merely stick to these three principles, it would still hardly be Indian. We have certain new factors to take into account in educational innovation in India :

(a) the recognized perils of consumerism and greed.

(b) the crisis of science and technology.

(c) the planetary crisis produced by population growth, resource depletion and environment pollution.

It is in this context of Western civilisation gone sour that we in India need to reflect again on our own cultural heritage, so that in the context of the disillusionment of the West with an urban-technological culture's capacity to save man, we can see a new vision coming out of the depths of our own rich past and still not totally hopeless future. In that vision social justice can be only one, though a large and most significant one, of the constitutive elements.

Ultimately, it seems to me, we have to take all these elements into consideration, in order to do our own pioneering. We should learn from the Chinese experiment all its valid lessons without being blinded by inherited prejudices. We should continue to make use of marxist social analysis in so far as it has been confirmed by experience. We should continue to learn from the patterns of implementation of national plans in the Soviet Union and in Tanzania. We can still use our Western-acquired secularist liberal humanism for an evaluation and criticism of our value-system.

Three things, however, stand out as high priorities in India :

(a) The relation between mass education and institutional education should be further studied, and a new national scheme for both has to be envisaged and implemented through a huge nation-wide network of disciplined and trained voluntary cadres.

(b) We should, as a nation, take a fresh look at our theoretical assumptions about what kind of a society we should plan for in India. Here we should look at our own three options—the Nehru, Gandhi and Tagore visions. We should also look at the Chinese, Cuban and North Korean experiments at social reconstruction. We should examine the experience of the bourgeois West, which is raising new questions about the validity of science and technology as a way of man's relating himself to nature in the context of problems like resource depletion, urban agglomeration and environmental pollution. Only on the basis of a more adequately clarified vision of what it means to be human today in India can we proceed to a genuine programme of educational reform. This is the sort of area where the Thinking Cell of the A. I. A. C. H. E. could do some pioneering.

(c) There can be little doubt that we have to show much more determination and discipilne in *making institutional education directly linked to the primary relations of production and distribution.* Here there is no controversy. The industrial-capitalist, the Gandhian, and the Marxist can agree on this—one of the few points on which they agree. Only the will for implementation is lacking. This is another point at which there is scope for independent planning on the part of colleges. The question is not that students should leave their institutions in an occasional sortie to a neighbouring village. What is demanded is that the village's or factory's primary relations of production and distribution become the milieu in which education takes place. The village or the factory itself becomes the school rather than an isolated school building. The students live in and participate fully in the agricultural and industrial activities of society and get their training there. This is the

point at which Ivan Illich's demand for "de-schooling" begins to make sense.

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