

Education in India

Education is being developed in India with firmness and foresight as one of the means of lifting a people within a generation to new levels of human dignity and responsibility.

EDUCATION in India today can be better understood when viewed in relation to a complex background of social, political and economic conditions. Just a few of these will be mentioned to provide an orientation for the later comments descriptive of the educational program.

Education in India has strong marks of its English ancestry. Introduced initially to provide clerks and other government servants who would facilitate the British operation in India, the educational program did not keep pace with subsequent educational development in England. As a transplanted, foreign system of education, it tended to exist in splendid isolation from the dynamics and problems of Indian life. It had neither received the stimulus of Indian life and culture, nor helped learners relate to the intense problems of living which surrounded them. The gap between school and life, which was abrupt and disorienting for the learner, extended to social ideals and orientation, to literature, to history and to the medium of instruction. The school might be viewed as an escape from the worldly noise and confusion of pressing problems.

The methods of instruction have tended to stifle individuality. Memoriter

learning buttressed by an examination system which removed all evaluation responsibility from teachers fostered a cramping narrowness rather than a release of individual creativity. Uniformity, rigidity and bookishness had rather completely stifled meaning and purpose, both of which are central to sound education. Interest, curiosity and joyous enthusiasm became rare indeed.

While India has supported a very large population for thousands of years and has been exploited by many invaders, it is essentially an underdeveloped country. Natural resources have not been tapped or organized for use. Industrialization has been stifled and annual per capita income has been less than \$60 per person. Variations in price levels make unwise a direct comparison with the United States, but \$60 per person means that the great mass of the Indians are forced to live at very inadequate levels.

As a matter of government policy, priority is now being given to the development of agriculture and the provision of adequate food supplies, the development of heavy and machine tool industry, the creation of power resources and the development of transportation. These are the basic essentials in an economic development which will make possible

the support of education for all at the elementary level as is promised by the constitution. However, India is faced with an exploding population. Thus, in spite of gains in all sectors of economic and educational development the total problem remains very large.

The people of India are quite aware of their relative world-wide position in respect to living conditions. There are evidences of great restlessness as well as of tremendous effort to change the way of life and to bring better standards of health and of material welfare to all of the people. Education is seen as an important aid in attaining a new way of life, but it must take its place as part of a planned effort to create improved conditions of learning on a broad and substantial base.

Education in the Current Scene

There is no aspect of education which has not felt the drive for reform since independence. At all levels education is being mobilized to serve the new India now being built. Reforms, started while the British were still in India, have taken on new dimensions and assumed new urgency. However, India is seeking to build on its rich traditions and ancient achievements as it produces a better life for all its people.

Education in India is under control of the 14 states. While the national government has a large leadership assignment in education, the states by constitution have a prime responsibility. This results in some differences in the program and

pattern of education from state to state.

In most of the Indian states there is one predominant language group different from that in other states. General policy provides that each child shall be taught in his mother tongue. The state language, when different from the mother tongue, is usually introduced early in the elementary school years. Hindi, which by constitution is to become the national language, may well be different from the mother tongue and the state language. It too must be given a place in the program. For those few who reach the secondary school, English is once again being viewed as important preparation for higher education. Thus, the language burden in Indian schools is exceedingly heavy.

Elementary Education

Before independence, and through Gandhi's leadership, India embarked upon a reorganization of its elementary schools. The new program is craft and community centered with much correlation of the academic areas with education for work and with problems of community living. These changes have tended to make education more active, to relate school to life and to introduce potentials for the creative development of individuals.

India's elementary schools are at various stages in respect to their acceptance of basic education. As in any society, schools vary enormously in their attainment of the generally accepted ideal. Yet, in school after school there is evidence of a new ferment and a vitality which ultimately should give greatly increased meaning and significance to the earliest years of schooling.

Slightly more than half of the children 6 to 11 years of age are now enrolled in school. However, the wastage or drop-

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out rate is high. Hence it is doubtful if one half of the children have the opportunities inherent in a full five year primary or junior basic school. Great effort is being made to reduce wastage and the third five year plan provides that over 60 percent of the children, age 6 to 11, shall be in school by 1961. Developments are, of course, uneven among the states and girls are less favored educationally than boys.

Secondary Education

Approximately 20 percent of the 11 to 14 year age group are enrolled in middle or senior basic schools and about 10 percent of the 14 to 17 year olds are in high school. At these levels, slight increases in the percentages enrolled are being attained from year to year.

At the secondary level, however, a major reform in program is under way. A six year higher secondary school is being developed to provide an eleven year span of elementary and secondary education to replace the present ten year system which is common throughout much of India. The eleventh year is to be taken away from the intermediate classes of the degree colleges and attached to the secondary schools. The way is thus opened for a three year collegiate program following the secondary school and leading to a degree.

This change in structure and organization is not nearly as significant as the accompanying curriculum modifications. The present academic secondary school, as provided in the proposal of the Mudaliar Commission, is to become a multipurpose school with a core of common learnings and special programs in home science, agriculture, technology, commerce and the arts. Thus it will have much in common with the comprehen-

sive secondary school in the United States. Technical and vocational schools at the secondary level are not extensively developed.

In the colleges, specialized academic programs are being broadened by the introduction of general education, and professional colleges, especially in medicine and engineering, are being expanded. Polytechnic and vocational institutions of post-secondary standard are gradually coming into being. A small number of rural institutes have been created. They have some features of American community colleges but are closely related to the problems of rural living. As at the secondary level, a national commission on higher education has very ably studied existing programs and charted future directions.

Teacher Education

Teacher education follows a pattern quite different from ours in that it tends to come after general education as well as after entrance upon teaching. For the secondary level teacher, professional preparation tends to be provided in a separate one year course following the Bachelor's degree and after three to five or more years of teaching. Teachers in elementary schools usually have considerably less academic preparation. Most teacher preparing institutions are small, enrolling 100 or more and frequently are separate from, even if affiliated with, a larger higher institution. As a result of the small size of units there are many hundred teacher training institutions.

Salaries of teachers tend to be very low thus creating a problem of securing a sufficient number of well qualified teachers in spite of high unemployment among educated youth. There are large numbers of untrained teachers in some

states and standards of preparation vary considerably.

Universities in India may be residential and teaching institutions much like ours. Often they are affiliating agencies which serve in a sense to accredit or give status to university work which may be done at widely dispersed locations. While there has been a considerable expansion in all types of higher education in India, major efforts and resources have been focused on expanding work in the sciences, and particularly in engineering, to prepare the workers required for the industrialization being planned.

Education for adults has been labeled social education and has focused not only on literacy but also on the improving of personal and community living. Probably well over 40,000 centers have been established to further social education.

The Task Ahead

It is thus clear that India faces a tremendous and an almost overwhelming problem of educating close to 400,000,000 people. Much of the task remains to be done. Obviously the numbers being educated must be increased. Also, the quality of education is receiving increasing attention. In many instances, kinds of education not formerly available must be created to deal with new problems.

There is a considerable measure of excitement about educational development in India. Promising innovations of many types are emerging. Relations between education and the vast community development program are being carefully fostered. The National Institute of Basic Education and the All India Council for Basic Education are conducting studies of basic education problems and pro-

grams including the preparation of teachers. Extensive in-service programs are being fostered by the All India Council for Secondary Education through the secondary teacher training colleges.

The system of external examinations which has served to smother and render sterile education at both collegiate and secondary levels is being dealt with creatively. By focusing on the development of examinations for new types of objectives, by preparing teachers to construct examinations for new types of objectives, and by granting teachers some slight authority to participate in the grading of students, a frontal attack is being made on objectives, and on the curriculum, as well as on the examination system.

New types of instruction are being developed for rural leadership, for agricultural education, and for the education of women in home science. Increased attention is being given to the handicapped, to education for social work and to medical education. The All India Council for Technical Education is vigorously approaching its task of expanding programs of vocational and engineering education and of securing the instructional staff required to carry these programs.

The absence of local government as we know it, has retarded the involvement of parents in school programs. However, there are many forces at work and many examples at hand of their involvement in one way or another.

Education is being nurtured and developed in India with firmness and foresight as one of the essential means of helping to lift a people within a generation to new levels of human dignity and responsibility. The directions of growth have been carefully established, and progress to date is most encouraging.

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