

EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

—N. V. KRISHNA WARRIOR

Myrdal in his "Asian Drama" has observed that education as it obtains at present in the developing countries is not a modernisation value. The systems of education which the ex-colonies have inherited from the Imperialist powers are bookish and anti-manual labour. They are also a-social if not definitely anti-social. Instead of emphasising on adult literacy and universal primary education of adequate duration and content, they waste scarce resources on elitist adventures of doubtful utility, thus preventing the transformation of our traditional society and thwarting modernisation of agriculture and industry.

Myrdal is not an exception. All educational thinkers worth their salt, who have thought about this problem, have drawn pointed attention to this fundamental weakness of the systems of education in the developing countries. The strongest critic of British education in India was Mahatma Gandhi. As an alternative, he formulated a system of Basic education, which, after initial enthusiasm, has been discarded by Independent India. The voluminous report of the Education Commission headed by Dr. Kothari indicts the current system of Indian Education in strong terms, but the recommendations of the Commission intended to import

into this system some vocational bias and to give to students some opportunity for work experience remain largely unheeded.

The present systems of education in the developing countries are an important component in systems of entrenched vested interests. It is not possible to radically alter the educational systems of these countries without first dislodging these vested interests. This is the lesson of the miserable failures of repeated attempts to reform Indian Education. Where the Father of the Nation got defeated, what is the chance of others succeeding?

This does not mean that all attempts at educational reforms are to be kept in cold storage till revolutions sweep away all the vested interests from the developing countries. That would mean inaction, which only helps reaction.

Efforts for implementing educational reforms in developing countries have to be linked with efforts for bringing about a social revolution.

Social revolution in the developing countries can only mean Socialist revolution. Now a socialist revolution postulates five basic conditions: (1) Social ownership of the means of production, (2) Social participation in productive labour and appli-

cation of modern science and technology for producing enough things to satisfy the needs of all, (3) Equitable distribution of things so produced, (4) An adequate social and political machinery to ensure such production and distribution and (5) A cultural or spiritual climate in which the above four factors become possible of realisation.

Education should be planned in such a way that the above conditions become a reality, if not immediately, at least in the next generation.

That is about long term planning. What about *immediat*e reforms ?

I feel that four reforms, recommended by the Education Commission and accepted by the Government of India, are of paramount importance in the Indian context and should be, and can be, implemented right now.

The first of these reforms stems from the recognition of the importance of the eradication of adult illiteracy. At present 70% of Indian population is illiterate, and in our traditional society it is these adult illiterates who take decisions on almost every question of importance. Without wiping out this adult illiteracy we cannot have democracy, and it is futile to speak about socialism.

Eradication of Indian illiteracy is not an impossible task. With the human material resources we command at present, it is possible to wipe out this curse within 10 years, provided an all-out campaign towards this end is planned and executed.

The second priority should go to making seven years of primary education not only free but also compulsory. I would suggest that a moratorium on increasing expenditure on higher education be declared and all the available resources be diverted for achieving universal compulsory primary education.

The educational reform which I consider next only to the above two in importance is the change of the medium of

education from English to the regional languages at all levels. Most of the State Governments and Universities in India have taken steps to implement this change. But these steps are mostly halting and inadequate and lack in sincerity. It is a shame for us that Kerala, which is supposed to be educationally the most advanced State in India, will perhaps be the last State to implement this inevitable reform. The vested interests may delay this by confusing people by false propaganda, but they cannot block it permanently.

The fourth reform, which perhaps should be afforded the first place because of its revolutionary significance, is the introduction of work experience for students. In the circumstances prevailing in India it may not be possible to set up workshops or kitchen gardens in every school and give actual spot training to students in the use of improved machine tools and scientific methods of cultivation. The system of sending batches of students to farms and factories also may not be universally feasible.

However, we can right now organise labour Brigades in every school and college. Starting with maintenance and minor repairs of school and college buildings and cleaning of premises, these Brigades can undertake repairs of village roads and such other labour-intensive work and get paid for it. They can also be increasingly employed for short periods in construction works of national importance. This productive employment will instil in the minds of our young men a sense of participation and commitment, and give them a taste of social labour.

I commend these four educational reforms for immediate adoption and wholehearted implementation. They are sure to pave the way towards the socialist transformation of our outmoded systems of education, which is a necessary condition in bringing about a socialist transformation of our traditional societies. •••