

Book Reviews

Ratna Ghosh and Mathew Zachariah (eds) *Education and the Process of Change*. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd. 1987. 301 pp. Price Rs 190.00 (Hardbound Edition).

Is formal education in India a sort of indoctrination by economic and political elites to perpetuate their dominance over the common people? Does the Indian system of education at all levels really promote economic growth? What social classes benefit from public education? What role does education play in cultural revitalization, social mobility, and social progress? Does education help in reducing the fertility rates to control population growth? What is the role of education in eliminating child labour and in liberating the oppressed female and rural populations from ignorance, misery, and poverty? These are some of the major questions which comprise the subject-matter of the fourteen articles of this important book. These papers were presented by eminent Indian scholars at a conference on "Education and Social Change in India: Reinterpretations and New Directions", held at McGill University, Montreal (Canada) in June 1985, and published later in Delhi.

The Montreal conference dealt with three broad areas in education: first, the social, political and cultural constraints in the general economic, scientific, and technological policies; second, the strategies and methods to overcome these constraints; and, lastly, social change for cultural revitalization and social mobility.

Pakistan shares all these problems with India and other Third World countries; some of our own problems are even more complex. Therefore, the book under review will be of more interest to our economists, sociologists, educationists, and planners. Pakistan can learn many lessons from the Indian experience.

The first paper by Ratna Ghosh introduces the theme of the conference, gives an outline of the problems of education and social change in India and summarizes the contents of all the papers. The last chapter by Mathew Zachariah gives excerpts from the comments of discussants, who were all non-Indians. This has made the book more critical, objective, and comprehensive.

The next article, by Krishna Kumar, ("Reproduction or Change? Education and Elites in India") discusses the right of equal opportunity in education guaranteed by the Indian Constitution and the efforts of the lower social classes to rise higher in the social stratification. The writer thinks that wide educational opportunities

in India for all classes have indeed increased social mobility. At the same time, he notes that there has been an increase in rural inequality after the Green Revolution. Other factors such as migration of the landless villagers to urban centres, unemployment, and the desire among the urban rich to acquire the living standards of the West have assisted in polarising Indian society. Consequently, with the resurgence of religious revivalism, the forces of democratic egalitarianism and secularism have been weakened. The middle classes in villages and cities, says the author, are now taking education as an instrument for this fundamentalism. He thinks that this revivalist orientation of education will impede the efforts for social change and progress.

The third paper, by Iqbal Narain, examines "Administration of Higher Education in India". It is a lucid exposition of the state of administration in Indian universities. He discusses the major types of universities and the objectives of higher education in India. There are, the author tells us, central, provincial (state), residential, 'full-fledged', professional, private, and women's universities. Research, teaching, and "extension" are the three main objectives of Indian universities. The concept of "extension" means relating a university to the society at large. According to the author, universities in the south are more peaceful than those in the north. The professional-cum-general universities are politically less troubled than the universities offering the humanities and the social sciences.

Narain thinks that politicization of universities has badly affected the quality of education. He suggests that for better results a proper coordination has to be maintained between the University Grants Commission, the universities, and the ministries of education and finance. And lasting reforms should come from within through the efforts of faculty members, students and the university administration, as external support does not last for long. He suggests a sort of autonomy for higher education to be free from political interference at all levels. This is even more relevant in the Pakistani situation where politicization has reached extreme levels, affecting the quality of output by the lowering of educational standards.

Poromesh Acharya, in "Education, Politics and Social Structure", discusses the problems of popular education in an agrarian society like West Bengal. In West Bengal (total population 54 million) 73.51 percent of the people live in thirty-eight thousand villages. This situation in West Bengal helps us understand the problems of education in Third World countries. From the evidence the author infers that all the benefits of education in West Bengal have gone to the rural upper strata, and consequently the expansion of education has sharpened the differentiation in rural society since *Jotedars*, rich peasants, and middle peasants (often becoming teachers) and their children have reaped the greatest rewards. However, Paulos Milkias, in his criticism of the paper, says that the Marxist government in West

Bengal has brought about radical changes in the social structure of rural Bengal and has, within the broad bourgeois democratic capitalist system, also brought about great educational reforms through the local *Panchayat* system, which cannot be overlooked.

Suma Chitnis ("Education and Social Stratification — An Illustration from a Metropolitan City") tells us that school education in metropolitan Bombay has not substantially benefited the lower classes like the scheduled castes. The poor labourers and other lower class people largely send their children to ill-equipped municipal schools while the rich educate their children in privately-owned model schools. The paper shows that this unequal system of education in the primary schools of Bombay increases social and economic inequalities.

A. M. Nalla Gounden cogently delineates the relationship of education to economic growth. He discusses the role of education in Indian economic development. The Indian Constitution states that all children from the age of 6 to 14 should have free and compulsory education. But the literacy rate in India is still only 37 percent. He observes that per unit cost of higher (university) education is much more than on primary education. He recommends that when about 115 million people in the age group of 15 to 35 are illiterate, primary education should be given priority and the resources should not be wasted on higher education.

In his well-written and amply documented article on "Science and Technology Policy in India", Dinesh Mohan harshly criticises the Indian government's science and technology policy which, he says, neglects the people at large and in turn scientists and engineers are isolated from society because of their narrow elitist professionalism. He thinks that as an ideal, the culture of science is based on "equality, curiosity, individuality, courage of conviction and absolute honesty", but these values are discouraged in India which is a caste- and class-ridden society of *status-quo*. (p. 137). He says that, despite its success in the early decades, India's industrial policy has floundered. Indians are contracting heavily with foreign companies and governments for import of designs and processes in power, steel, fertilizer, automobiles, aviation, consumer goods, etc. There is a tremendous pressure for opening doors to the foreign multinationals. Before the Indians took a recent loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) they had "increased the number of foreign collaboration allowed from 277 in 1976 to 526 in 1980". (p. 145). More than one hundred multinational subsidiaries are operating in India (*ibid.*). "It appears", says the author, "that we are not utilizing our domestic potential fully and have neglected products in favour of toys for the elite" (*ibid.*). He suggests that as a medium of instruction English must be discarded and primary education be given priority, and that the expenditure on higher education must be curtailed. Import of technology in areas of strength (agricultural technology, railways, etc.) must be discouraged. He stresses the point that the people of the Third World must develop science and

technology without becoming dependent on the developed countries.

The eighth paper, by Anrudh K. Jain and Moni Nag, examines the relationship between women's education and fertility in India. The authors suggest that female education must be oriented to producing a significant impact on fertility in order to control population. They say that female education at the primary level must be given top priority since educational policies tend to reduce fertility.

Usha S. Naidu ("Child Labour and Education in India – A Perspective") says that according to the 1981 Census there were about 13.6 million child workers in India, of whom 8.1 million were boys and 5.5 million were girls. Ninety percent of them work in the villages. The government and the private agencies have tried to ameliorate the working conditions of child workers. The Ministry of Labour has undertaken such programmes in Ahmadabad, Aurangabad, Bangalore, Calcutta and Delhi.

The author observes that poverty is the main cause of child labour. Therefore, the problem is directly related to the problem of economic development. The author proposes that the strategies for educating working children must be based on short-term and long-term policies. Because of poverty the child-labourers cannot abandon their jobs to get education; therefore any kind of education has to be combined with their jobs. The curriculum for such worker-students will also be different from that of the regular students.

In "Education, Development and Women's Liberation: Contemporary Debates in India", Vina Mazumdar underlines the role of education in women's liberation in India. She suggests that such policies and programmes must be undertaken as will ensure equal participation of women in all social, economic, and political processes in the country.

In an extremely interesting article on the concept of participatory research, Rajesh Tandon explores the idea of involving the masses in social and economic development because, according to him, the results of various models and theories of social change have been mixed: the conditions of more than half of the rural populations have not improved. Participatory research is an approach which aims at an integrated activity for investigation, educational work, and action, making the participating people themselves experts in the relevant areas. This method of participatory research mobilizes people for organised action. It is a collective educational process, which uses the power of knowledge for liberation and progress. He gives examples of bonded labourers in a district of Maharashtra and some landless poor people in Orissa who investigated their plight and poverty and used the administrative machinery and the courts to regain their lost land, freedom, and dignity. The paper strongly recommends the idea of participatory research as a tool for liberation of the poor.

Joseph Di Bona and R. P. Singh graphically portray the contradictions of

present-day India. There is a widening gulf separating the English-speaking elite which controls the government, economy, and the highest educational and research institutions, on the one hand, and, on the other, the huge masses with fewer amenities, limited vernacular knowledge, and no prospects of economic or social mobility. "The latter are locked into a frozen social structure in which the cement of oppression is school". (p. 277).

Arvind Sharma raises a very important question: should religious education be imparted or not in the Indian educational institutions? He traces the relationship of instruction and religion from the early times of the British rulers when they clearly separated religious education from the school system. The author is of the opinion that in the secular polity of India, comparative religion must be taught and the government must not be neutral; it should actively intervene to promote religious instruction to inculcate religious harmony, understanding, and mutual tolerance. But, as Katherine Young takes exception to Arvind Sharma's paper, any intervention by the state in religious instruction will exacerbate the communal differences, misunderstanding, and intolerance.

Arvind Sharma, recounting the events of 1947 to 1985, observes: "while Gandhi was a deeply religious man, he worked for a secular India, while Jinnah, secular in outlook, campaigned for a theocracy"; and that the partition of India was "a division between a *secular* India and a theocratic Pakistan". These statements are not true. The creation of Pakistan was the result of a constitutional and democratic process: it was a political demand for self-determination by the Muslims of India. This did not envisage a theocratic state but a modern social democracy based on fundamental rights of the people; nor did Jinnah champion the cause of theocracy in Pakistan. He was a constitutionalist and a democrat who staunchly believed in the values of parliamentary democracy. The theocratic trends which later emerged under military dictatorship were a post-Jinnah phenomenon. The wholesale revival of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan under the Zia regime (1977-88) was based on the medieval political concepts; it was a deviation from the democratic norms and without a mandate from the Pakistani people. Theocracy, whether Hindu, Christian, or Muslim, is an irrational political scheme which always thrives under the darkness of autocracy, superstition, and tyranny.

The book under review, thus constitutes a fresh and fascinating treatment of the problem of education in a developing country, in its relationship with all other areas of social life — religion, culture, economic development, social stratification, and social change.

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