

A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH TO OUR EDUCATIONAL-CULTURAL PROBLEMS

The article below is the text of a preface which Comrade Shibdas Ghosh wrote back in 1968 to a book entitled 'Present Educational System', on request from its author. This document serves as a theoretical guideline for the democratic forces on how to approach the question of educational reforms in a backward and decadent capitalist set-up such as ours where the rulers are trying to exploit the education system as an implement for sowing the seeds of obscurantism, ultra nationalism and a fascistic psyche.

It is a pleasure for me to write an introduction to this small but thoughtful book of Sri Biswanath Prasad Singh on the present education system in our country. As a student of social science I cannot but admit that in a class-divided society the concept of education and educational system is never free from class preconception. Students of social science know that every basis of a society has its corresponding superstructure, the basis of society being the economic system at the given stage of development of that society. The superstructure is the political, legal, philosophical, ethical, artistic views and institutions corresponding to them. Furthermore, the superstructure is not just a passive force, neutral or indifferent to the basis. It is, on the contrary, a very active force, always assisting the basis to take shape, consolidate and strengthen itself.

Education system being the superstructure of a given economic base, its role, therefore, is not neutral or supra-class in a class-divided society. As superstructure of the economic basis it cannot but serve the class in power which actually controls the material production and hence the spiritual production of the society.

Ours is a class-divided society. Whether anybody likes it or not, it is a stark reality which exists independent of our likings or dislikings. Nobody can have one single approach to the problems of education, serving at a time the interest of both the classes, standing historically antagonistic to each other. Under the circumstance, there can be only two outlooks, two objects, two purposes, in regard to the system and method of education — one serving the politics, ideology and the interest of the capitalist class, the ruling bourgeoisie, and the other serving the politics, ideology and the interest of revolutionary struggles of the toiling masses. Anybody who stands by the interest of the toiling masses and claims to think in terms of the people must adopt such outlook in regard to education as would be conducive to the interest, ideology and the politics of the proletarian masses.

Hence, in a capitalist society like ours, the dominant educational views, the education system, and the educational institutions that have already taken shape and have consolidated in our country are not at all neutral in the constant struggle that is going on in our society between different classes, nor are these supra-class instruments for the advancement of 'pure knowledge' among the people, as philistine intellectuals often propagate. These are definite class instruments

in the hands of the ruling bourgeoisie to carry on attacks on the mode of thinking and revolutionary ideology of the working class and other exploited masses of the people.

The system, pattern and object of education which the author has advocated in his book are consequently incapable of being achieved in the existing social order in our country. They can only materialize under socialism, when there will be no question of national oppression and exploitation of man by man.

But this does not in any way mean that we should sit idle and shall not make any serious effort to reform the present education system till we achieve socialism. On the contrary, the democratic forces of our country should resolutely fight for bringing in educational reforms not only to make education cheap, universal and secular in the true sense of the term but also to democratize the entire educational system to conform to the democratic principles of life. Therefore, the aim of any such reform in our education system shall be to strengthen the democratic struggle of the masses for completing the unaccomplished tasks of the bourgeois democratic or national democratic revolution, namely, the social and cultural revolution which is long overdue in our country.

We all know that because of the peculiar conditions under which Indian capitalism developed, the national bourgeoisie which led the national liberation movement here compromised with feudalism and imperialism all through in coming to power. As a result, it could not accomplish the task of social and cultural revolution, which is essential for the democratization of the society and for complete merger of different nationalities speaking different language and communities professing different religions into a nation and establish a truly secular state. Moreover, it is always to be remembered that under capitalism the people are subjected not only to economic exploitation but also to national oppression. This is why even today we see in all the capitalist countries where there is more than one nationality; the dominant nationality suppresses the other nationality or nationalities. It, too, is clearly evident from the nature and the character of our society. Though we have developed as a nation politically, yet socially and culturally we are nothing but a conglomeration of different groups and communities, separated from one another by religion, language, race, caste, etc.

To achieve the unity of our people our education system should be really secular and free from religious tutelage. Thanks to the nationalist leaders and the leaders of the then radical left movements, secularism in our country has virtually come to mean equal encouragement to all religions by the state. Truly speaking, this is not the proper meaning of secularism. In actuality, secularism means non-recognition of any supernatural entity. Thus, a secular state puts religion in its proper place by making religion a purely personal affair of faith having no connection with the state and no bearing on politics, social action and education system of the country. In a secular state both the believers as well as the non-believers enjoy equal rights and opportunities. It is one thing not to interfere in one's faith and injure one's religious feelings, while it is altogether a different thing to encourage and indulge in one's religious susceptibility. So, the attitude of a secular state shall be that it will neither encourage religious faith nor obstruct it. Secularism in no way means that a government will lend its support equally to all religious faiths. But to the credit of the Congress and the pseudo-communists and socialists a peculiar conception of secularism has developed in our country which implies equal encouragement to all

religious faiths. Under such circumstances, what else can we expect except the whipping up of religious fanaticism? Moreover, if secularism means equal encouragement to all religions then have the protagonists of this idea ever thought over that then the difference between India and Pakistan objectively boils down to this that the latter is an Islamic theocratic state while the former is a multi-theocratic state?

To reform education in accordance with the democratic principles of life, it was the bounden duty of all the forces clamouring for democracy first of all to free education completely from the influence of religion. But contrary to this expectation, of late, we find our education system is aiming at incorporating religion, inasmuch as religious education has been included in the curriculum, to best serve the interest of the reactionary forces of our country. By taking recourse to this type of capitulation to religious heritage, all declarations of democracy have been virtually reduced to verbosity. It is no wonder, therefore, that the products of our present education system are showing a distinct inclination towards parochialism, communalism and casteism.

Besides this, our education system is becoming more and more restrictive and undemocratic. The demand for universal free education of the pre-independence day is getting the worst jolt from the present rulers of the country. Under the pretext of improving the standard of education, even the existing scope of education, especially higher education, is being squeezed and education is being made more and more costly, resulting in curtailment of education. Courses of studies are being drawn up in such a way as to develop a sense of neglect for those subjects that actually can make our students acquainted with the latest, modern intricate scientific and revolutionary thinking of the world and foster human values. Judging on the class basis, it is not at all difficult to realize how the courses of studies, whether in the branches of humanities or in science, are providing absolutely mechanical knowledge, divorced from the very essence of the discipline itself. As an example, a student of history comes out of the university being enriched only with certain information regarding historical events without, however, developing any creative knowledge of how to analyse and correlate the events of history in the yardstick of the law of development of human society. The studies of science present no better picture. Chemistry, physics, biology, mathematics, etc., are taught in such a way as to provide only technical knowledge in utter disregard of the ethics and philosophy of science. As a result, we find in despair that most of our students of science, even after completing their studies in the universities, do not acquire adequate standard of having a scientific and systematic approach to various problems confronting our life.

Due to a lack of elementary understanding of ethics there is a growing indifference and callous attitude towards any social problem among our students, youth and intellectuals. Instead of instilling in students a temper for scientific and systematic reasoning, we find that there is a growing tendency to bring about a peculiar fusion of spiritualism with science. This trend in our educational life is indeed alarming as it is characteristic of the fascist culture. Fascism is a peculiar fusion of science with spiritualism. It adopts the technical aspects of science in its bid to develop and strengthen the economic and military might of the fascist state, while in the matter of ethics and morality, it instills in the minds of people all sorts of anti-science religious fads in the name of national culture and heritage in order to retrograde the mental process of people from the scientific path of causality to the mystic alley of blind faith, pre-conception and obscurantism, and ultimately develops contempt for social action. All these symptoms are

distinctly noticeable in our cultural life. The inevitable conclusion, therefore, is that fascism has made deep inroads in the cultural life of our society.

Then again, do we not see that in spite of the chorus of sermons by the national leaders to the younger generation to be good citizens and of observing the anniversaries of all great men with great éclat, petty selfishness, moral depravity and cold unconcern for social activities are eating into the very vitals of the young people? Why is it that the generation which a few years back was in ferment with national fervour and social action against injustice and oppression during the period of foreign rule in India is showing these ugly symptoms of moral degradation? Definitely our children are not born depraved and corrupt now. It is something in the general atmosphere of the country, in the system which is serving as the breeding ground of this fall in the moral standard. Therefore, no tangible purpose will be served by simply murmuring about petty selfishness, moral depravity and cold unconcern for social activities among our young people without probing into the root cause of the prevailing crises in our socio-political and cultural life.

A philosophy and ideology and a given category of sense of values which play a progressive revolutionary role at a particular stage of social formation, become a privilege and an instrument of reaction at a different stage of social formation. This has been the case with the ideology of bourgeois nationalism and sense of values of bourgeois humanism which we held aloft during the national liberation struggle. In the pre-independence period bourgeois nationalism and bourgeois sense of humanism were not a privilege. It had then, historically, a progressive revolutionary role as it did essentially merge with the collective interest of the society. With the attainment of national independence and with the establishment of bourgeois rule in our country the ideology of nationalism and the sense of values of bourgeois humanism have lost their progressive and revolutionary role and become a privilege in the hands of the ruling bourgeoisie, requiring no sacrifice for being a nationalist and ultimately standing in the way of further social progress. No more does it represent the collective interest of the society which historically has merged with the class interest of the proletariat. Today it is directed mainly against the progressive and the revolutionary movement of the society. So, we see that the ideology, the sense of values, the banner of which at one time we raised high, that governed the course of the entire progressive and revolutionary movement during the period of national liberation struggle, has today become completely exhausted inasmuch as it has been transformed into a privilege in the hands of the ruling bourgeoisie.

Moreover, the malady of our social and cultural life has further been accentuated by this education system which does not inculcate in the students and the youth any understanding of ethics and hence any sense of social obligation. The basic teaching of ethics should be that, before asserting any right, one will have to first fulfil one's obligation towards society.

Our society is passing through a period of intensive crisis today in the field of ideology and culture. It requires the emergence of a new philosophy, a new ideology which is capable of imbuing our younger generation with the spirit of social action. The ideology of scientific socialism is the only way out of the present impasse which alone can integrate our patriotism with proletarian internationalism. Because, it is patriotism guided by proletarian internationalism, at this stage of our social formation, which alone does represent the collective interest of the society. It provides an invincible ideological weapon of struggle in the hands of

the toiling masses against all privileges. Dialectical materialism is the only philosophy of struggle against all sorts of injustice and privileges, calling for sacrifice and self-dedication, as it alone is capable of stemming the rot and raising the moral standard of the people.

Therefore, those who think of reforming the education system in order to raise the moral standard of the people will have to consider the issue in the broader perspective of anti-capitalist socialist revolution. Otherwise, they will find no answer to the vexed question of why the cultural standard of the youth is showing a steady decline in spite of the floods of sermons by the leaders and the setting up of numbers of commissions. In fine, the task of reforming the education system of our country is inseparably linked up with the question of completing the unaccomplished task which the bourgeoisie in our country is incapable of performing in the present era. It is a great task for the revolutionaries, progressive thinkers and the educationists to coordinate the educational, moral and ethical approach with the basic ideology and politics of the proletariat fighting for emancipation from the yoke of capitalist exploitation in India. My request to the readers is to give a serious thought to the questions raised above.

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