

An Outline of National Education

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The way our education was conceptualized and has developed, it is today in complete disjunction with the environment and with the tradition, cultural and intellectual. Our country has often been rightly described as primarily agricultural/rural (*krishi-pradhan*) but the subject matter of our social sciences is urban-visions and has very little to do with the rural way of life: its discussions and assumptions are those of an individualised urban society. Again with its western theoretical frameworks and content with its imperative of 'modernization' this education is all in all an argument against the cultural and intellectual traditions of this country. It promotes a materialistic and an atheistic way of life in what was always recognized as a morally oriented (*dharma-pradhan*) society. To do that it excludes and marginalizes the Indian intellectual traditions of learning and thought so that it may produce generations of young Indians victims of cultural anomie or schizophrenia who have contempt for things Indian and reserve their admiration for the western civilization and its 'success' whatever that may be. Young people who value indulgence rather than restraint and rights rather than duties.

This education has de-intellectualised its victims in the sense that it has made the Indian academy intellectually subordinate to the western by establishing a recipient-donor, data-theory relationship. In the process it has engendered many contradictions such as between the languages of the people and the language of education. One would have thought that at least after 1947 the education commission would be able to see through this and relocate the education in the Indian context. But such

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has been the success of Macaulay that his 'children' have become more 'anglicized' than the English. Ironically it had been left to an enlightened Englishman, Sir Charles who chaired the first 1882 education commission to say that Indian education should be based in Indian systems of thought and culture. But so strong is the Raja Rammohan Roy syndrome that we continue to indulge in self-negation and self-denigration. As far as the national education policies of independent India is concerned the less said the better. For instance, the three authors within 3 kms in Delhi of the 1986 national New Education Policy were evidently themselves out of harmony with Indian traditions and the Indian way of life. Hence both culture and morality went out of the purview of educational goals. So elitist has been the policy that it expects a boy from village school and a boy from the English public school in a city to compete at the same level. Further it equated the 'ability to think independently' with freedom to do so or say whatever one wishes to with a complete lack of discipline and restraint.

Luckily, this large system of education (hundreds of universities but not one with the reputation or excellence of the famed Takshshila or a Jagdala) having served its original purpose producing 'clerks' and having produced too many of them by now has become totally meaningless in a climate that it itself has created. The sad commentary is that the best minds now go to commerce and the worst to philosophy; and in sciences, our best minds are trained to be cheap labour for the West. But to make the education meaningful and intellectually fruitful, and to make it serve its proper native purposes, we have to orient it towards the villages and the poor, make it village-visions (*janapadiya*), and re-locate it in the attested Indian cultural and intellectual traditions of learning and in thought that informs the way of life of the ordinary people. What are the Indian intellectual traditions and how does the current philosophy of education differ markedly from what it practice? All these questions need an expositional response and the need for a new thinking.

2.

We have today a very large education system:

	1950-51	1990-91	1996-97
Institutions			
Universities	30	177	214
Colleges	750	7346	9703
Enrolment (000's)	263	4925	6755
Teachers (000's)	24	272.2	321.0

They also include four universities exclusively meant for women while all others are open to both male and female students. There are 1000 colleges exclusive for women. There are 9703 colleges – a majority of these are arts, science and commerce colleges offering education in humanities, natural sciences, arts and commerce. There are 550 engineering and technical colleges, 655 medical colleges, nearly 600 management institutions, and 700-teacher education training colleges and 1100 polytechnic. There are 3,21,000 teachers and 6,75,000 students 12.9% of all students go to medicine and engineering and other professional courses; 19.6% go to general science; while 67.5% of all students are in arts, commerce and humanities.

The system has undergone deep decline in quality. The best students opt for commerce; the worse for philosophy. The best go for technology, the worst for pure sciences. Of-course, this has to do with the value system but then the value system is itself contingent on education we give.

Even quantitatively, it is not satisfactory - the infrastructure is large but student enrolment, large though it is at about 6 % of the relevant age group, is lower than even that of Malaysia (10.10 %), Thailand (19.10 %) and Philippines (27.8 %). This unsatisfactory increase in access and decline in quality are major issues confronting higher education in general. Also, its increasing irrelevance. Sri Jayaprakash Narayanji speaking in Bombay on December 14, 1977 had underlined the aimlessness of our education: "The contemporary higher education is like flowing water current in which study from matriculation to BA degree is done without any purpose – and the degree is taken only for a job." And when the jobs too became scarce, the whole process and system becomes meaningless.

We have therefore to re-define the objectives ourselves in our context anew: we should have done that immediately after 1947. We didn't do it. In this task, the insights of the western tradition from the pagan thinker Aristotle to the Christian John Dewey would no doubt benefit us – some more, other less – but principally we have to mine our own long attested thinking about matters educational from the *Upanishads* down to Mahatma Gandhi. The solution

has to be our own. As the great surgeon *Shushruta* said: "It is desirable better to cure the ailment of an animal by the cure which is available in the country he belongs to." However, we all know that this system set up by the East India Company was not designed for our conditions and needs.

Inception of 'Modern' (Macaulayan) Education Policy

We now have a brief look at the history of education to put a perspective on the modern, materialistic and atheistic education. Fourteen disciplines, sixty four arts and crafts, the immense body of Vedic literature, the six auxiliary sciences (*vedangas*) constituted the subject matter of study in ancient times in *gurukulas*, institutes of learning with strength of students up to 10,000 presided over by a great teacher. The purpose has been expressly stated as acquisition of knowledge and constitution of character. These were residential, free, disciplined and open to both rich and poor alike. Simultaneously there was the institution of taking trainees on job in crafts such as iron-smithy, carpentry, pottery, bangle-making etc.

By 6th C.B.C. India's great universities had begun to be established – Takshashila excelled in medicine and other useful sciences. Nalanda (4th centuryAD) focussed on philosophy and had a nine-storeyed building to house its library – its books when burnt provided fuel for six months to prepare food for an army of ten thousand. Similarly, there were later universities such as Vallabhi in Gujarat and Vikramshila in Bihar and the Jagdala University of Bengal which flourished under the patronage of Muslim rulers from 12th to 18th century and specialised in logic, astronomy, mathematics and Tantra.

Besides these major centres of learning, it is known that "the house of every learned man was a school, as was each temple and later each mosque as well in the middle ages." When the Muslim rulers set up major centres of learning in Delhi, Bidar, Lahore and Jaunpur in the middle ages then there was a new linguistic input and a new cultural input and two parallel systems developed. These, while differing in content, did not differ qualitatively in objectives or in philosophy, differences being restricted to disciplines and the content available, in the particular tradition and the language of instruction.

But with the East India Company, a radical shift occurred. We are all familiar with the Anglicist–Orientalist controversy, of who was on which side and why (Raja Ram Mohan Roy, for example a scholar of Sanskrit, advocating exclusively English education), and how the Anglicists prevailed and how the spirit and the thought of Macaulay formed the philosophy of new education. We are all familiar with his well-known Minute, but the

following four extracts of his views sum up the formations of his education policy:

1. Writing a letter in 1812 from Calcutta, he says: “*Our English schools are flourishing wonderfully. We find that no Hindu who receives this education has much respect left for his religion ... much better than proselytisation*”.
2. In the minute he says: “*My purpose in this education is to produce clerks in increasing numbers so that we can continue to rule this country for long*”.
3. The aim is to produce those “*who are Indians only in appearance but Englishmen non-Indian in spirit and thought*”.
4. “*One shelf of English literature is more valuable as knowledge than all the literature of the east [India]*”. (Essay on Literature)

Universities in India were set up since 1858 onwards and colleges in which education was imparted through English in various western disciplines subsumed under arts and humanities. The first engineering or medical colleges were set up (at Roorkee and Lahore) to take care of the needs of the army and, therefore, of the empire. General education in these colleges came much later, and the emphasis, remained on arts, humanities and social sciences, “to produce” in the words of Macaulay, “clerks”. Both the philosophy of education and its content were non-Indian.

Effects of This English Education

As Macaulay noted early, this education *changed the Indian mind and social reality* -

made atheists of a people who were traditionally theistic;

made people materialistic and taught them to pursue comfort and pleasure;

gave those who received it a sense of superiority and made them contemptuous of things ‘native’;

distanced the educated people from the masses, from the vast rural life customs and values of the people.

As a result, it generated several oppositions:

1. between the languages of the people and the language of power,
2. between those who didn’t know English and those who did,
3. between those who respected the tradition and those who didn’t
4. between Indian values of *dharma* (duty), *niyama* and *nivrtti* and the new values of rights, freedom and indulgence.

It has *de-Intellectualized* the Indian mind and made it subservient to the Western academy. De-intellectualisation results from an abandonment or marginalisation of native theoretical frameworks and de-culturation from prestigious values traditionally alien to the society.

To take one example of each:

1. A whole lot of research has been conducted on ‘constructing a nation’ with the meta-assumption that India is not a ‘nation’. Now ‘nation’ is a European political science category denoting a single language, one ethnic group or/and state. This Garner/Gilchrist category is lifted uncritically and applied to India. If ‘India’ does not fit into the category, it is of course India’s fault, (the category being sacrosanct). The alternative categories *desha* and *rashtra* are often ignored or abused but never verified or falsified.
2. Consider also, in the cultural sphere, the official and rampant upholding of ‘indulgence’ and ‘rights’ in opposition to our values of *niyama* and *dharma*.

In fact, the native knowledge systems have been completely excluded from the mainstream education even in disciplines in which there is a long attested tradition of texts and thinkers, disciplines such as linguistics, literary theory, philosophy of language, philosophy, sociology, polity and economics, prosody and metrics, mathematics and astronomy. This has had devastating intellectual consequences in making the Indian student and scholar an uncritical receiver, reducing Indian research to merely applicational and ethnographic and in reducing the Indian reality to the status of mere data (West being the ‘theory’). This has also restricted and delayed the fulfillment of Indian scholarship that has consisted necessarily, mainly of influence or comparative studies (theoretical or expositional research being completely unmotivated in this environment). And by separating and isolating the Indian traditions of thought, the possible advantages, such as what the 19th C. Europe enjoyed, have been lost.

For the first time, this education *created a break in the intellectual history of India* by excluding completely the Indian tradition of thought and learning from the system of education. It prestiged the urban over rural; it prestiged literacy over education of the mind. There were responses, like the DAV movement and the Gurukul movement, but the DAV did not make much impact as it had to work within the framework and the other (Gurukul) existed only as a minor system doomed to failure as its products could not compete for jobs with those who had received the English education. So the education we have today is essentially the same, cosmetic changes notwithstanding, and its de-culturing/de-intellectualizing potential

continues to be exploited by new vested interests in the changed political oppositions after 1947.

Some of the 'radical' theories designed to undermine the Indian self-respect and propounded for our benefit by the exponents of this education are: (i) The Aryan invasion theory; (ii) Sanskrit not having been the spoken language; (iii) Aryan-Dravidian divide; (iv) Indian civilization not being more than 3000 years old; (v) all the Sanskrit literature (about 10 million *granthas*, texts) having been composed in a few hundred years of the Gupta age; (vi) Indian civilization being essentially Brahmanical, and, (vii) all the Vedic literature (including the *Upanishads* and the primary texts of philosophy) being sectarian. This is not the place to argue out all these 'politically' motivated theories.

3.

Post-1947 Education Commissions and the Education Policy

One would have thought that the very first post-1947 commission would see all this as self-evident and move away from an essentially colonialist education. But that has not happened. The first education commission of 1882, the Sir Radhakrishnan Commission of 1946-48, Kothari Commission of 1960-62 none show any evidence of having studied the educational systems that had prevailed in India before the time of East India Company. The last two commissions do talk of moulding education according to the Indian practices, but do not describe the Indian system, nor do they say how this molding would take shape. They have not succeeded because they have not demolished the 'windmills' of the perceived opposition between 'tradition' and 'modernity', between Indian learning and technology, between religion and science.

The composers of the 1986 'New Education Policy' were too obviously completely ignorant of the Indian thought and tradition as a whole – as if they are not worth bothering about. The three policy makers, all from within 3 kilometers of Delhi (no one else was found worthy in this vast country), pay lip service to *Sanskriti*, culture, but do the final demolition job for Sanskrit, the medium of that culture – even the option of studying Sanskrit ceases to be available to young undergraduates. It is abysmal ignorance to suppose that one can teach/learn/imbibe India's culture without access to Sanskrit, the one donor language, the repository of what is still a donor intellectual tradition (while all modern Indian languages are recipient languages), a language with the largest and the most sophisticated body of literature in all forms and in all domains of knowledge.

It is a pity that the Lok Sabha the representative body of our peoples adopted this Sanskrit-devoid education policy without a single voice of dissent. Even the speaker of the then Lok Sabha, who had taken his oath in Sanskrit, did not have anything to say.

Sanskrit thus had been effectively removed from the mainstream education. To remove Sanskrit amounts to eliminating Indian thought.

No number of special Sanskrit universities can or could undo this damage.

But, one may as well ask, why is it necessary to study Indian thought? And, what lessons does Indian educational system hold for us?

It is necessary because Sanskrit thought has a remarkable modernity, a contemporaries, a certain timelessness, be it the grammarian Panini, the philosopher Jaimini of *Mimamsa*, Sabara the great exegete, the philosopher of language Bhartrhari, or that remarkable non-dualist and monotheist, the 9th C.B.C. etymologist Yaska. The contemporary European thought, in fact, has its roots in classical Indian thought via *de Saussure* who was a Professor of Sanskrit at Geneva before he came over to Sorbonne to deliver his famous lectures on general linguistics that are embedded in the structural principles of Sanskrit grammar. We are alluding to the 18th and 19th century European experience, to the galaxy of Sanskritists that shaped the modern European mind in the course of the 19th century: Wiehalm Van Humboldt, Rasmus Rask, Schiller and Schelling, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Grimm and Verner, Saussure, Trubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson.

It is necessary because the integrated Sanskrit thought system – let us call it that to prevent hackles being raised over the world 'Hindu' – including Prakrit-Jain and Pali-Buddhist thought, is not contradicted by modern science. That is, it is intrinsically rational unlike the major Semitic systems – whether it is the theory of creation or the number of species or the place of the earth in the solar system or the nature of the cosmos. With a methodology other than the empiricist, the great Indian scientists such as Arya Bhatta and Varahamihira made the correct postulates in the domain of astronomy more than a thousand years before Copernicus and the Galileo. That the western mind, devoted to method, would accord primacy to method rather than truth is something we have to learn to respect; but this does not mean we should cultivate disrespect for thinkers whose epistemological foundations were different.

4.

In this broad perspective, the education policies in independent India virtually wrote itself.

First, the content and practices of education must be re-located in (i) Indian theory of goals of education, and since knowledge is the goal of education, in (ii) Indian philosophy of knowledge. Second, flowing from above, specific practical steps should be initiated. Third, some general policy is framed to remove the existing constraints. The *overall objective* to be agreed to is to restore India to its traditional position as the thinking mind of the world.

Indian view of goals of education:

The word *shiksha* has a connotation different from that of 'education': the latter means to *train*, to take part in some specific work in life; *shiksha* means 'to teach' the process by which one engenders/acquires/develops knowledge'. *Chandogya Upanishad* is even more explicit – the Shvetaketu narrative says *shiksha* does not mean storing texts in the mind/memory but to extract knowledge from them. *Mahabharata* and *Kiratarjuniya* (15.37) define *shiksha* to mean "to learn, to study, to acquire knowledge, to become the master in art". According to *vedangas*, to acquire complete knowledge of a particular domain of knowledge is *shiksha*. Thus the goal of education is knowledge and acquisition of knowledge is not to be linked always with practical, commercial ends. 'Educated' (*shikshita*) means the holder of knowledge, specialist, adept.

Again, according to *Mundakopanishad*, he is 'educated' who is 'humane, humble, and aware of his areas of darkness' So education must morally evolve the learner. This teaching is of the whole man in *niyama* (preferred way of doing things), *maryada* (limits) and *shishtata* (propriety).

And this teaching addresses the four ends of life: *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, *Moksha* – education has an ethical dimension, individual and social. It teaches **duty and righteousness**. There is no divorce from actual day to day life – yet it teaches you how to handle it by transcending it?

There is also the principle of entitlement, *adhikari*, and this is intellectual merit or ability, not economic or social status. This applies to both students and teachers. It also lays down a strict disciplined life for the students and the teachers.

The Indian educational practices were founded on the following assumptions:

(1) central role of memory; (2) centrality of the teacher and of the primary text; (3) autonomy (in relation to state) and free enterprise; and (4) training of the mind as the instrument of knowledge.

Philosophy of knowledge:

Knowledge in Indian thought is not a process of information storage or transfer but of constitution of knowledge. And knowledge in this tradition is constituted in the Self and not as in the empiricist mode through the senses. The self is the knowing self and therefore education must focus on the subject as against the Western focus on the object. Great primacy is attached to training the inner self consisting of *mana*, *buddhi*, *citta*, *ahamkara*, what is called 'the knowing self'. Great store is laid by sharpening the mind as in the Yoga system. Also, knowledge is subordinate to ethics, to *dharma*, and therefore, education seeks to produce not only knowledgeable mind but also a virtuous mind.

A really new education policy has the great challenge of reconciling this Indian requirement on knowledge formation with the contemporary need for new technologies to cope with information explosion, of reconciling success with happiness.

We need in education an *ontological shift from object to subject* and *epistemological shift from the training of the senses to the training of the mind*.

The knower is to be the focus – *instead of combative individuals in a conflict mode we must produce individuals stabilized in the self and in the harmony mode*.

Specific steps:

1. To reconstitute syllabi/content by incorporating Indian content/texts.
2. To make the disciplinary structure flexible and integrate Indian knowledge system, arts and crafts.
3. To forbid English as the medium of instruction at every level (to break the pyramid).
4. Allow and recognise parallel systems of education – traditional, non-formal, rural.
5. Prioritise elementary and primary education *focussing on orality*.
6. Shift in general from *scriptal to oral educational practices*.

5.

We may finally ask why Indo-Centric education?

Because it is important for the whole world, for the welfare of mankind.

As Will Durant, the great historian, said: "India is the mother of our race, and Sanskrit the mother of all European languages. India is the mother of philosophy, and of Mathematics via the Arabs; via Buddhadeva of the excellent Christian principles and via village structure of self-government and democracy. In diverse ways India

is the mother of us all." It is also noteworthy, that Indian thought centered in *ahimsa*, non-violence, and *shanti*, peace (for all), and in the principle of the world as one family is a *harmony* model as against the *conflict* model that structures the modern western thought. Indian thought teaches co-existence instead of seeking dominion on others and on nature.

The Indian Intellectual Traditions, therefore, have to be built into our syllabi and subject-matter of study.

There are unbroken, continuous and cumulative and diverse traditions; there are chains of attested texts and thinkers in – sociology, philosophy, literary theory, semiotics, logic, history, geography, grammar, linguistics, prosody and metrics (apart from the sciences). These are *living* traditions, these are *oral* traditions, with specific mechanisms of *maintenance* and *transfer* (communication) marked by a search for one ultimate explanatory principle. These are yet pluralistic and multiple (allowing for both monism, semitic, and pluralism, pagan). The dominant explanatory model has been *advaita*, a non-dualist structural system of categories. The whole tradition has been marked by a movement from materialism to idealism which is the converse of the history of ideas in the west. The tradition has a unified view of knowledge, and believes that knowledge is not an end in itself – the purpose of knowledge is to ensure *dharma* and *nyaya*, justice and righteousness.

Enumeration of Vidyas and Kalas, the pathyakrama (syllabus)

1. singing (vocal), 2. instrumental music, 3. Dance, 4. Calligraphy, 5. making moulds, 6. Ritual, 7. Decoration, 8. Dyeing, 9. Flooring, 10. Furniture, 11. water sports, 12. Architecture, 13. bio-warfare, 14. garland making, 15. hair-dressing, 16. costume designing, 17. Ornamentology, 18. incense making, 19. Cookery, 20. Magic, 21. medicine making, 22. Handicrafts, 23. sweets and delicacies, 24. making sweet drinks, 25. stitching (tailoring), 26. Embroidery, 27. playing instruments, 28. versification

and quiz construction, 29. Enunciation, 30. specific enunciation, 31. Reading, 32. auditing (drama, etc.), 33. willow art, 34. carpentry – seats, 35. general carpentry, 36. Chemistry, 37. Gemology, 38. Metallurgy, 39. metals in medicine, 40. study of trees, 41. study of birds, 42. bird language, 43. Massaging, 44. gesture language, 45. codes and coding, 46. Dialectology, 47. flower agriculture, 48. sign science, 49. machinery designing, 50. cultivating memory, 51. Declamation, 52. completing poems (?), 53. Lexicology, 54. Metrics, 55. figural language, 56. concealment techniques, 57. Hiding, 58. Gambling, 59. chess, art of, 60. children sports, 61. social manners, 62. military science, 63. Gymnastics, 64. pottery

How to incorporate what is good in the tradition into mainstream education?

1. by re-designing disciplinary structure, viz. bead-making/garland stringing; 2. by re-designing content (include Indian texts); 3. by changing the medium of instruction to Indian languages at all levels; 4. by integrating humanities/social science with sciences; 5. by making education a state (not Union) subject; 6. by allowing private enterprise in education.

The questioning of assumptions

That,

1. 'modernization' is equal to 'westernization' and is necessarily desirable; 2. everything about us is bad; 3. oral to scriptal cultural movement means progress; 4. all good things come from the west.

While the Western civilization has great achievements to its credit, particularly, in the sphere of technology, we must also remember that the same civilization has been guilty of genocides and bloodshed in the name of race and religion.

Therefore, Indian thought must become an obligatory part of the syllabi of all disciplines.