

*Review of
Shankar*

White Star January 1958

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Do Not Trespass



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EDUCATION today has become a petty though heated, controversy about language and it is essential to go back to fundamentals in order to determine the scope for Government intervention in issues pertaining to education.

During the recent debate in Parliament Mr. Lobo Prabhu moved an amendment to the resolution on the Report of the Education Commission which is worth quoting.

Government intervention should be:

- consistent with the fundamental rights of parents, it is desirable to leave to the parents both the choice of schools and colleges and also the medium of instruction for the education of their children;
- consistent with the principles of academic autonomy and freedom, it is desirable that each

university should be the judge concerning the medium or media of instruction and that therefore no further action be taken by the Government of India in so far as the medium of instruction in universities is concerned."

The idea of the neighbourhood school is excellent and every one will concede that social mobility is desirable. Class or caste distinction are bad and as far as possible, we should encourage their removal. Whether these are class distinctions based on wealth, or whether these are class distinctions as in communist countries based on political privilege and the occupancy of public office; both are equally bad and both must be combated.

No one will dispute that equality of opportunity is desirable and that we should move towards its realisation. All children should be given an

equal chance consistent with their intellectual equipment to have as high an education as possible, in keeping with their talents, and that the accident of birth whereby a child is that of a industrialist or a commisar should not come in the way.

But these objectives can be and are best achieved by methods that have been tried in progressive countries of the world with great success. These are to give scholarships and freeships in liberal measure to children of parents who are too poor to see their children through schools, universities or special institutions. This really equalises opportunities in that it has no barriers, to advancement.

Today in the Grammar Schools and the Public Schools of England, at Oxford and Cambridge, children of so called, working class parents are now in a majority while those of the so called privileged classes are very much in minority. Thus excellence in education

of Bombay telephones 'outstripping' the striptease artists.

How often does one hear that Bombay Telephones are unresponsive to complaints. This is not true. The General Manager is, in fact, very much alive to the situation. As he says in his letter: "Being a public service we have to patiently bear with both types of arguments and make endeavour for a cool judgement to prevail over a flurry of wishful thinking." Wishes are unlikely to turn into horses, just because you think you must have a telephone. Cool judgement must indeed prevail. And do remember everything comes to those who wait. Even a telephone.

There seems to be a "credibility gap" between the General Manager and his beloved subscribers. Why else should he say: "The people are not exactly hostile but apathetic to the entreaties put forward by the Bombay Telephones." How sad that this should happen in India's most enlightened city. Can't's people read?

We are justifiably immune to promises of 'pie in the sky'. But the General Manager, Bombay Telephones, is not a professional politician. He is rightly circumspect in his promises of better things to come. His statements are qualified. For instance: "Without claiming any power of clairvoyance and as clear as night follows day and in such light as is granted to me, I can't bring myself to foresee that the Bombay Telephones would be happily circumstanced in the Fourth Five Year Plan....."

And sure enough the Fourth Plan has been scrapped. It will only start in April 1969. Yet there is robust optimism, when he says: "The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today." The tragedy of India is that it has the world's largest population of doubting Thomases. No one wants to keep the flag flying.

In spite of virtually unsurmountable difficulties and public apathy enough to discourage the best of men, Bombay Telephones has done wonderful job. And the General Manager is justly proud: "Our glory has not been in never falling but in rising again every time we fall". Apart from the hackneyed tale about King Bruce and the spider, one must admit that you can't keep a good man down.

We have read glowing accounts of the automatic Trunk Exchanges being installed in places such as Agra, Kanpur and Lucknow and may sometimes wonder why Bombay does not have this direct trunk dialling facility. True, it does not have the Taj Mahal and other tourist attractions, but we do have a lot of telephones. It is one thing to connect Lucknow with Kanpur or Agra with Delhi, but quite another to connect Bombay with other major cities. But there is good news now. The General Manager tells us: "An automatic Trunk Exchange imported from abroad under installation at Waudby Road is expected to be commissioned before the fag-end of the year." Notice the crystal clarity of the statement. The automatic

Trunk Exchange has been imported from abroad so that people used to food zones and the export and import of food grains between States, know that the telephone exchange has come from abroad and not from a surplus State. What is more it is under active installation, in case people accuse Bombay Telephones of being passive. And only the petty minded would ask what is meant by the "fag-end of the year." The General Manager goes further when he says "The commissioning of this telephone exchange would facilitate introducing the subscribers trunk dialling service between Bombay and Surat, Bombay and Poona and Bombay and Ahmedabad before December 1967." The fact that this has not happened should generate no complaints. What is a few months, or a few years, between friends. Similarly when the General Manager promises a direct dialling service between Bombay and Madras in the "first quarter of 1968"; between Bombay and Delhi "before the middle of 1968"; and Bombay and Kanpur "thereafter". One must not quibble if the whole lot comes "thereafter" as long as it does not come in the "hereafter". Remember that the glory of Bombay Telephones "has not been in never falling but in rising every time...." So everytime you see Bombay Telephones digging up the road remember: They dig only for you.

The General Manager ends his letter:

"Believe me
I am

Yours sincerely"

has not been achieved by reducing educational standards, but rather by making it possible for everyone with merit to have the best possible education irrespective of his parental wealth.

The concept of the neighbourhood schools as advanced in the Commission's report is however, repugnant to democracy. It is totalitarian because it is based on compulsion. It seeks to force parents to send their children to a school which may be altogether unfit from the point of view of the parents, just because it happens to be nearer than any other school. This is uniformity at a low level while what we want is equality at a high level.

Democracy entails the very opposite of the Education Commission's report. This is embodied in the Election Manifesto of the Swatantra Party:

The Swatantra Party stands for.

- a) The vindication of the citizen to educate his children according to his choice in an atmosphere untrammelled by official directives; and
- b) the autonomy of Universities and other educational institutions."

The Education Commission's totalitarian concept of the neighbourhood school violated these vital principles and is inconsistent with true democracy based on Freedom of Choice and Equality of Op-

portunity. In fact, it may well be unconstitutional. Our Courts of Law may strike it down as a violation of fundamental rights.

Article 30 of the Constitution lays down certain rights of the Minorities in regard to Educational Institutions:

- (1) All minorities, whether based on religion "or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- (2) The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language."

Thus a member of any minority community, as we understand it in this country, cannot be coerced to send his child to neighbourhood school. He has the constitutional right to send his child to a school of his own choice where the religion or the language of his particular minority is in vogue. All non-Hindus will, therefore, be immune from neighbourhood schools. Should only the majority community be coerced into sending their children to neighbourhood schools? Would this be either fair or democratic? The answer is obvious that it would be discriminatory and our Supreme Court may well strike down the Education Commission's idea of neighbourhood Schools. The whole

attempt is misconceived and the sooner it is abandoned the better. Our Judiciary has an enviable record of upholding the Rule of Law.

The other controversy is about the medium of instruction. Have the Government and Parliament any right to interfere with or to legislate regarding the medium of instruction at any educational institution including Universities? The answer is a clear 'No'. Academic autonomy is a vital part of a free society. The choice of a language in which to teach is entirely within the domain of educationists and teachers; So to the appointment of teachers and the way in which they admit students. The choice of the language is essentially a matter of domestic decision for each university to consider, in the community in which it is set. Indeed, this is the view of the entire University world in this country, to whom a great deal of violence is sought to be done by the present heated debate by politically motivated people.

A resolution of the Inter-University Board passed at its meeting in Delhi held on 15th to 17th December, 1967, when Vice-Chancellors and Heads of Universities were present makes this quite clear. Incidentally the resolution was passed unanimously but unfortunately, has been ignored both by Parliament and by the Education Ministry. Nevertheless, it is important: to quote it:

"Resolved that the Chairman of the Inter-University Board

of India, discuss with the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha and the Speaker of the Lok Sabha the question of evolving a parliamentary convention under which matters impinging on the autonomy of a University, like the medium of education, scope and quality of research and the appointment of teachers be not accepted or discussed in Parliament."

Parliament has no right to meddle with the affairs of the Universities which have the Acts of their State Legislatures and Parliament to guide them. This is a completely sound principle consistent with democratic values.

Our constitution lays down that Education is a State subject and except for Central Universities, neither the Union Government nor Parliament has the right to interfere.

On University education the opinion of the Vice-Chancellors and the Inter-University Board is correct—that they should be left to determine their media of instruction and other matters according to their ideals their experience, and the aspirations of the communities in which they function. But it is essential that each university reaches its own conclusions without political interference or pressure.

The medium of instruction is matter between the parent, the child, and the teacher and neither the Government nor Parliament has the right to interfere, much less to coerce. The present attempt of the Education Minister to introduce politics into an area where it

has no place is only one facet of a dangerous trend which can only jeopardise democracy in India. It is entirely undesirable that politics enter every walk of life whether good or for evil. The world of Sport, culture, literature, music or dancing provide examples where official patronage distorts the free flow of intellectual life in India. Then there is the whole of economic life where limits of decency in Government intervention have been crossed long ago.

To return to Education there are the undesirable attempts at nationalisation of text books. As if there is nothing better to nationalise. These essentially should be left to the author the publisher and the prescribing authority, in schools and Universities.

We have a Book Trust with a Former Minister, who failed to get elected, as a Chairman. Then there is the Book Development Council with a well-known Communist Mr. Ramesh Thapar as Chairman. What are these two politicians doing in the world of Education and Culture? Is it essential that the politicians rejected by the electorate be provided with a job? And why should a communist who has never been guilty of writing a book be chosen as the Chairman of the Book Development Council? All these are examples of the way in which politicians are inviting the doom of India. By having a finger in every pie they are attracting the ill-will and the disgust of the people. The flagrant exercise of patronage based on political considerations can

only breed disrespect for the democratic system. Ultimately, people will be completely disillusioned with the politicians who dominate every field of human endeavour not because they are qualified to make a contribution, but because they want to distribute the patronage and the perquisites of office. This is extremely objectionable and, while it may be worthy of a Fascist or a Communist dictatorship it has no place in a democratic society such as ours.

The politician will be respected if he sticks to politics, as much as a cobbler would be ridiculed if he dabbles in literature, books, sports, and education for all of which he is singularly disqualified. Let educationists run the world of education. Let writers and publishers produce books. Let us not bring the system of Parliamentary democracy into disrepute by providing a spectacle of politicians meddling in areas in which they lack competence.

The present Education Minister is apparently an innocent at large. Leaving his own world where he knew what he was doing, he has now been taken for a ride by his advisors and junior colleagues who are politicians with an axe to grind. It is true that his recent statements are an improvement over his earlier intemperance, and ill thought out bursts, but slowing down the pace of disaster is not enough. By saying that we will not perpetrate an evil in five years but in 15 does not mitigate the crime. It merely prolongs it.

I FEAR for India. Not for all the conventional reasons: rationing, superstition, communal disputes, linguism, corruption. Like many a nation before her, she could survive all that. What she may not be so easily able to survive is the creeping danger of erosion.

There is a primary school textbook used in Maharashtra which contains a story about the law of the jungle. In it a tree complains bitterly that, after men have enjoyed a meal and a rest in its shade, they lie back and say: "What a fine

state of normal health; which have not, in other words, been hacked, mutilated, burnt or chopped until they are on the point of death. Over the years my game has got easier and easier, for on every trip there are markedly fewer trees to count. On our last trip, two weeks back, I realised that I should have to invent a new game soon. There was not a single reasonably normal-looking tree on the road between Poona and Bombay."

This article, published in June 1967, may one day be

the same climate it had fifty years ago? Is there more dust in the air these days than a few decades ago?

Poona of course is only one isolated example. Joseph John wrote to the *Times of India* (27 Sept 67): "In the context of the steady depletion of greenery in Bombay, I had occasion time and again to plead that there should be legislation to prevent all cutting of Bombay trees except with permission, to compel builders who cut down trees to do adequate replanting and provide for deterrent



Tom McArthur

tree. Think how many strong boxes we could make out of it!" Or how much paper, planks, firewood, furniture.

In a recent issue of *OPINION*, Laeeq Futehally made a grim comment on the general attitude in India to trees: "For years it has been my private game, on long drives along familiar roads, to count the number of trees which seem to be in a

mentioned as the only record of the deforestation of the Bombay-Poona highway. People do not generally record the slow denudation of the countryside. They just wake up one day to realise that they inhabit a desiccated, sand-blasted wilderness and wonder how it all happened. Ask yourself this question in the same breath as Laeeq Futehally's remarks: Does Poona have

punishment to those who cut or injure trees. Such pleas were dismissed as impractical and the Minister of Local Self-Government and the Municipality always seemed to think that this was something fantastic."

Descriptions and comments from all over the country tell the same story: Assam, Delhi, Himachal, Bihar. There is not

a state of India in which the forest areas and the standing trees of other areas are left intact or adequately maintained.

A Pakistani immigrant I met in Birmingham, England, was nervous of the gasfire which his host had lit in his bedroom. It was wintertime and the room was cold. "Back home," said the Pakistani, "if I was cold I could go out and chop down a tree. But I don't trust burning gas!"

It is interesting to ask why the cradlelands of civilisation are now so degenerate and under-developed—North Africa, Mesopotamia (Iraq), Crete, and Greek mainland, Spain, Sicily and Turkey. The Harappa area speaks for itself too. Historical records demonstrate that all these once-fertile lands were heavily forested in days gone by. The Sahara, the Thar, the Gobi and other deserts have been very largely man-made. Richard St Barbe Baker, the world-renowned forester, made a special trip across the Sahara which proved conclusively that this vast area was not a natural desert. Many areas had possessed forests within living memory, but now the whole expanse is advancing southward into Kenya and Nigeria and the other new states, insidiously advancing at what he described at a visible pace! When one considers the destruction of forest cover and the erosion of topsoil throughout the world, it is not so hard to understand why climates are changing and droughts becoming more frequent.

Most people recognise that tree roots serve to bind soil together and that trees act as wind-breaks, but it is not generally known — unfortunately — that trees also have an intimate link with the rainfall of any given area. Every day, an average-sized tree pumps gallons of water into the air, bringing down the temperature around it. A medium-sized forest multiplies this output into lakhs of gallons. Combining with dust particles and windblown moisture, this rising vapour precipitates and returns as rain. Now, the tree in the first place draws the water up from the deeper layer called the water table. To allow this to happen is far less strenuous than to cut all the trees down, leave the soil unprotected and dig countless wells to get at the water table, which, without trees, will steadily sink deeper and deeper until it forms after long ages vast underground lakes. It is interesting that just such a lake has been reported recently under Bihar and the U.P. (Times of India, 26 Aug. 67.) It has been described as "probably the largest and potentially the most productive in the entire world." Similar underground seas exist below the Sahara and Australian deserts. We have helped by our negligence to form them and will now have the technical problem of bringing the water up ourselves.

But at least the water is there. The same cannot be said for topsoil once it blows away. I visited Mount Abu during the pre-Monsoon hot weather

in 1965. It normally is a clear-aired hill station 5,000 feet above sea level, but for two days it had swirling dust storms that Delhi would have been proud to claim as her own. I asked the local people if this was a normal phenomenon and they vigorously denied it. I thought it must be blowing down from the Thar, but on checking the wind-flow and directions I came to the reluctant conclusion that we were in the direct path of the topsoil blowing freely off the Plain of Gujarat.

Now, these could all be dismissed as isolated items and suppositions on my part based on foreign weather conditions. My nightmare of a bald range of mountains called the Western Ghats, with red erosion bubbling down to the sea, might be so much fantasy, a bleak and foolish pessimism. Readers may say: "Don't worry, even if what you say is true, something is being done about it. The India Forest Service is going to be formed — It was announced in the Press just this September. Mr. Shinde, Minister of State for Food and Agriculture, said in Bhopal that this was a big step forward in conserving forests and that a bumper grain crop is also expected this year. Actually, India is past the worst now."

I hope so. But I have doubts about brave words spoken by our reigning politicians. These doubts were shared by the third leader-writer of the Times of India in the issue of 10 July 67: "Reforestation is