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Mr. M. R. Masani's speech in the Lok Sabha on
November 20, 1967, in the course of the discussion
on the report of the Education Commission

This debate has become a kind of duel over the matter of languages, and in that way the scope of the debate is unfortunately sought to be narrowed and somewhat distorted. I would like to take it back to a more fundamental plane and to invite the House to consider what is the legitimate scope of the intervention of the Union Government and Parliament in certain issues pertaining to education.

I would like, in that context, to support the amendment that was moved by Shri Lobo Prabhu on behalf of our Party, and in order to focus attention on these issues, I would like to read it out again. We want that, at the end of the motion, the following words should be added, namely,

"and is of the opinion that —

- (a) 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;
- (b) 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. "

In so far as the neighbourhood school idea is concerned, I agree, we are all agreed, that social mobility is a good thing. Class or caste distinctions are bad and, as far as possible, we should encourage the removal of those distinctions. Whether they are class distinctions, as in democratic countries based on wealth, or whether they are class distinctions as in communist countries based on political privilege and occupancy of public office, both are equally bad and both must be combated.

We agree that equality of opportunity is a good thing and that we should move towards it as an objective — that all children, all boys and girls, should be given an equal chance, consistent with their intellectual equipment, to have as high an education as possible, suitable to their talents, and that the accident of whether one is the son of a commissar or of an industrialist should not come in the way.

But we believe that these objectives can be and are best achieved by methods that have been tried out in progressive countries of the world with great success. And these methods are to give scholarships and free ships in liberal measure to children of parents who are too poor to send them to high schools or universities or special institutions, and thus to equalise the opportunity that is open to all.

Today, in the grammar schools and public schools in England, in Oxford and Cambridge, children of working class parents are to be found in a majority, while the old classes who monopolised them are now in a minority. But this is not done by abolishing high level institutions, whether universities or schools. It is done by opening their doors increasingly to merit as opposed to birth and wealth. This is the way in which in all the leading Democracies of the world progress has been made towards democratisation of education and equality of opportunity.

The concept of the neighbourhood school, as advanced in the Commission's Report, however, is repugnant to democracy. It is a totalitarian approach because it is based on compulsion. It seeks /parents to send their children to a /to force school which may be altogether unfit from the point of view of the parent, just because it happens to be nearer than any other school. This is a kind of regimentation that would have uniformity at a low level, while what we want is equality at a high level. Therefore, we are opposed to this concept of the neighbourhood school, because it is based on an undemocratic concept of compulsion and coercion.

We, on the other hand, stand for the opposite principle. I quote from the

Election manifesto of my Party, on which we have got elected to this House, and I quote the relevant part:

"The Swatantra Party stands for

- (d) the vindication of the Fundamental Right of the citizen to educate his children according to his choice in an atmosphere untrammelled by official directives; and
- (e) the autonomy of Universities and other educational institutions."

The concept of the neighbourhood school violates both these concepts or principles to which we are pledged. Therefore, we are unreservedly opposed to any form of compulsion of this nature.

In fact, I am not sure that this attempt is not an unconstitutional one, whether the Courts of Law will not strike it down as objectionable from the point of view of Fundamental Rights. I will explain why this is likely to happen, and therefore appeal to Government to desist from this vain and futile attempt.

Article 30 of the Constitution lays down certain rights of minorities in regard to educational institutions. I will read out the article:

"30(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 it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language."

It is quite clear to me that a member of any minority community, as we understand it in this country, cannot be coerced to send his child to a neighbourhood school. He has a constitutional right to send his child to a school of his own choice where the religion or language of his minority would be in vogue. Therefore, all non-Hindus, if I may say so, will be immune from this attempt. Then, is it to be suggested that only the majority community should be so coerced? Would that be fair? If nobody of any other denomination can be so coerced, is it fair that the majority should be coerced in this manner? The answer is obvious. It is unfair, it would be inequitable, and also it will be discriminatory, and therefore the Supreme Court is likely to strike that down also as being discriminatory between a member of the majority community and of a minority community. The whole attempt, therefore, is misconceived, and I think the sooner it is abandoned the better. In any case, it is not going to prevail if the Rule of Law and our independent judiciary have any say in the matter.

Now I come to the other topic, the controversy which has occupied the House, the medium of instruction. Let me make it clear that I do not propose to join in the battle of languages. I deplored it when I started. As is well known, my Party has never made a party question of any language issue. We believe that the issue of language is one that belongs to the sphere of the individual, that it is between him and his conscience and his own ideas, and that party whips and coercion are entirely out of order in this context. We have refused to regiment our members on this issue one way or the other and, as is well known, our members take part in a dialogue of a democratic kind, expressing their views, whatever they may happen to be.

The real issue has been obscured so far in this debate. The real issue is this: Have this Government and Parliament any right to interfere with, or legislate in regard to, the medium of instruction in Universities and at other educational institutions? And our answer is a clear 'No'. We believe in academic autonomy. We believe that it is part of a free society that universities and such other bodies should be masters in their own homes, subject only to the statutes and the rule of law. And the choice of a language in which to teach is, in our view, essentially one of those topics, like those of teachers, the appointment of teachers, the way

in which you admit students. The choice of the language is essentially a matter, in our view, of domestic competence for each University to consider and decide in the light of the wishes of the parents and the students in the community in which they are 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 this kind of debate in which we have been indulging.

I would like to read to the House something that has not been brought to it. I am surprised nobody has mentioned it. This is the resolution of the Inter-University Board passed at a meeting in Delhi which was held from the 15th to 17th December, 1966, and at which the Vice-Chancellors and heads of the Universities were present. And this was a unanimous decision. I shall read the resolution. It should have been circulated to this Parliament by the Education Ministry itself. It says:

"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."

I do not know whether the Chairman of the Inter-University Board approached the Speaker of this House and the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha or not. I subscribe entirely to this principle. I say this Parliament has no right to meddle in the affairs of the Universities which have Acts of their State legislatures or of Parliament to guide them. I think this is a completely sound principle and we stand unreservedly for it.

(Mr S.M.Banerjee : What about the Central Universities?)

(Mr M.R.Masani : Those Universities which function under Acts of Parliament have their fundamental statutes or constitution, and whatever is the autonomy or discretion given to that university under that Act should be exercised. But we should not in this political manner try to interfere with the exercise of their autonomy.)

(Mr S.K.Bhattacharyya : What about the Central Universities?)

(Mr M.R.Masani : I am saying that the central universities have their own statutes and if those statutes lay down the language in which that university should teach, I have nothing to say.)

(Mr S.K.Bhattacharyya : That is passed by Parliament.)

(Mr M.R.Masani : Yes; but it was by Parliament at a time when the present trends, these very unhealthy trends of political interference in the affairs of the country which have no need for political interference, were not there. If, in due course, a new university is established and Parliament has to vote funds and Parliament prescribes certain things, I have nothing to say. I am for stopping this interference with existing institutions which have developed their own life, which have developed their own media of instruction and which have gained their experience, and now we come in as busybodies and interfere with them. There is a great deal of difference between legislating ab initio and imposing something like a political decision on those who are doing their job.)

(Now, as I said, I do not know whether the Speaker was approached, but I think he should have been approached and I think it is a great pity that the kind of intervention in which we are today engaged should have taken place at all. The Constitutional position is clear. Education is a State subject, and except for the kind of university to which my hon. friends just referred, where an Act of Parliament is a thing that determines, we have no business to interfere in regard to primary and other education, which are a State subject.)

Even in regard to university education, the opinion of the Vice-Chancellors and the Inter-University Board is the right one -- that they should be left to determine their media of instruction and other matters according to their ideas, their experience and the pressures of the community in which they function. If, by and large, the community wants a certain language to be utilised, then, in a

democratic way, the universities will respond to it, because they want students to come. If, on the other hand, the parents want another language, the university is likely to be influenced in that way. That, Sir, is the democratic way in which the parents of this country should determine the kind of education and the language in which it should be given. Let each University come to its own conclusion, unaffected by political interference or pressure. It is not enough to say that we will not pass a law ...

Mr Vasudevan Nair: Does the hon. member think that there should be some relationship between the medium of instruction and the medium of administration?

Mr M.R.Masani: I do not think so at all. We are competent to legislate for the official language of this country and, when the Bill comes before the House, we shall deal with it. But the medium of instruction is a voluntary matter between the parent, the child and the teacher in which Government or Parliament has no right to interfere. This is an unwarranted interference in a matter which pertains to the child, the teacher and the parent, whose autonomy and fundamental liberty should be respected.

Mr N. Mahida : You will continue English for all time.)

Mr M.R.Masani: My hon. friend will not provoke me to take sides in the battle of languages. If a University is today teaching in Hindi or Urdu, let it do so. If a University is teaching in English, let it make up its mind whether to adhere to it or change it. I do not want to take part in the futile debate in which we are engaged. The real debate in which we should be engaged is to turn the searchlight inwards and consider: have we any right to interfere in this matter?

Even the pressure of the University Grants Commission should not be brought by the Education Ministry to try to influence or pressurise universities into determining their medium of instruction. This, I suggest, is in keeping with the spirit of our democratic Constitution. Anything else is not.

Unfortunately, this particular debate in which we are engaged, this particular attempt on the part of the Education Minister, is only one facet of a trend that is very dangerous to our democracy. It is an undesirable trend for politics to enter into every walk of life, whether for good or for evil.

There are many other examples. There is the world of sports in which we find politicians meddling. There is the world of culture, of dance, of literature, of music, where official patronage distorts the free flow of intellectual life in this country. There is the whole of economic life where we believe the limits of economic interventionism have been crossed long ago.

To come back to education, there are these undesirable attempts at nationalisation of textbooks, as if there is nothing better to nationalise than textbooks, which are essentially something that should be left to the author, the publisher and the prescribing authority to create for the minds of our children.

There is a Book Trust, with a retired minister as Chairman. There is another thing called Book Development Council, with a particularly well-known Communist, Mr Ramesh Thapar, as Chairman. What are these politicians doing in the world of education and culture? Why should a Communist, who has never written a book in his life, be picked up to become the Chairman of the Book Development Council? Why should another retired politician, who is no longer in Parliament be given another job?

That is the way we politicians are inviting our doom in this country. We are attracting illwill and distrust because, by putting our finger in every pie, we are creating opportunities for patronage which we have no right to exercise. People are getting more and more disillusioned with us, saying that these politicians are trying to dominate because they want to distribute patronage and perquisites. This is extremely objectionable. This may be worthy of a Fascist or Communist dictatorship. These trends have no place in a democratic Constitution such as ours.

This extension of the role of Government and of politicians, far from increasing

(She)
our power, is going one day to bring about our destruction and the destruction of our Parliamentary Democracy if we do not stop from this attempt. The politician will only be respected if he sticks to politics. Just as a cobbler should stick to his last, the politician should stick to politics, and not dabble in literature, books, sports, education and everything else. Let the educationists run the world of education. Let writers and publishers produce books. Let us not bring the whole system of Parliamentary Democracy into disrepute by dabbling in things which we are not competent to deal with. This Parliament is not competent to discuss what should be the language in which children should be taught. What study have we given to it? I do not pretend any competence for myself; I am a lay man. So are all of us. We are not educationists. What business have we to dabble in matters of which we know nothing?

(The man (uneducated people))
Mr N.S.Mahida : The hon. Member is a great liberal. May I know what will happen to the uneducated people in the country? Unfortunately, in our country we have a great mass of uneducated people. What should we do for them?

Mr M.R.Masani : They should be educated by being given free and compulsory education which our Government has failed to do in the last twenty years. The job of the Government is to provide primary education. It has neglected that and, instead of doing that, they are dabbling with University education which is functioning all right. We are following the tradition which the British set for us of having an army of unemployed graduates, while the poor people remain uneducated. Let us attend to it. Let us not neglect our duty and dabble in other people's business.

The present Education Minister appears to be like 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 advisers and his junior colleagues who are politicians and who have an axe to grind. His more recent statements show some improvement on his earlier brash statements during the last Session of Parliament. But slowing down the pace of disaster or of a mistake is not enough. Saying that we will not do a wrong thing in five years but we may take fifteen years to do it is no solution to anyone. We question the very direction in which he is moving. We say that the attempt to interfere with the medium of instruction and choice of schools and colleges is reactionary and anti-democratic. Therefore, it is not enough if he says that he will go slower down to ruin. We want to stop him from going to ruin and turn him away from this attempt. He has been a good educationist. I appeal to him to save himself from the clutches of those into whose hands he has fallen and to extricate himself.

Dr. Triguna Sen: May I know what is my policy that he says will take me to ruin?

Mr. M. R.Masani: I say that the Education Minister should neither have gone into the question of language nor have advocated compulsion in regard to choice of schools. He should not have taken up for discussion in this House and the Cabinet the question of the medium of instruction. He should have abided by the decision of the Inter-University Board. He should have respected the view of the highest educationists in this country and kept his hands off.

Mr. Bal Raj Madhok: Can you think of any education in which we do not have any say in the matter of medium of instruction? You cannot separate the two things. I wish you had been teaching in a college or a school because then you would know better in this matter.

Mr. M.R.Masani : My hon. friend will be speaking for his own party. I am putting a point of view which is the Liberal point of view.

Dr. Triguna Sen: I have not understood the hon. Member. Am I right in thinking that he has given me credit for enunciating a certain policy?

Mr. M.R.Masani : For fomenting certain politics.

Dr. Triguna Sen : Certain policies of whom?

Mr. M.R.Masani : Of your Government and the Commission.

X (Dr. Triguna Sen : I will reply to that.) X

✓ (Mr M.R. Masani : I say the Education Minister has given a wrong lead to the Education Commission and is seeking to do it to this House. If I have charged him unfairly, I would ask him to advise the Cabinet to accept the Amendment that stands in our name. If he does that, then I agree that the charge has been made unfairly and I shall withdraw the imputation that he is an innocent at large playing into other people's hands. If he is to do something good after the discussion for the last three months, the decision of conferences of learned and eminent educationists who have seen him, written to him, met him in public and private, and have made some dent on him, I would ask him as a man of education even now to say that the whole thing was a mistake. Let us drop it, let the universities teach in such language as they, the parents and the children want. Let him say that we made a wrong start and let him correct it now. The way to do it is for the Minister to accept the Amendment which I read out at the very beginning. If he does that, then I have been unfair in my charge and I will withdraw every word that I said.

X (Dr. Triguna Sen : I am sorry.)

(date) November 20, 1967
