



REFLECTIONS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

The Indian leaders were aware of the need of revolution in the political status of India, but at the same time, they were deeply concerned with the basic problems of the form and character of their future free society and their new culture. Therefore, the question of social reconstruction was discussed in its depth and that of culture from the viewpoint of the consequences of the impact of the west on the traditional and the emergence of the modern. Indian independence was not regarded as a matter of bread and butter alone, but far more as a search for the new ideals of life. In short, the question was what the Indian to live and die for was.

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These men were not merely political leaders, they were equally makers of opinion and their importance has to be judged as much by the ideas – moral, social and political, which they propounded as by the activities, which they organized. Nationalism, at least then, meant moral nationalism. Morality was the base of education and nation making.

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The fact that somehow the Indian education administrators have not critiqued the foundations of modern education, to be precise the colonial foundations, has led to the almost incomplete decolonization and revolutionizing of education. Modern education in India has many parents. Two which are distinctive colonial are the East India Company and the British Crown itself.

The first form of British rule in India was the East India Company, but later the Company ceased to be a political power in 1858 and the Government of India came directly under the Crown; and the rule of British Parliament established in India through the Viceroy. The question is that as to what was the kind of philosophy of education, which the British had, when they became rulers. An answer to this question is not as clear as one may expect it to be, because the British were colonial rulers and they ruled Indian people. There was a kind of antagonism between two

groups of people, one of which dominates and rules, while the other is dominated and ruled. This was inevitable and unavoidable, especially when the dominating group is foreign. The policies, measures and manners of the rulers may exacerbate or extenuate the antagonism, but cannot be in the nature of things eliminate it. The attitude of individuals and even parties is unable to affect any considerable extent what is intrinsic to this inorganic relation whether of short or long duration. It must end either by the fusion of the two groups or the extrusion of one. In the case of India and Britain, the first was impossible and the only alternative was the removal of British rule.

At the commencement of the 20th century, the antagonism was subdued, but as the century advanced, the antagonism became open, sharp and keen. Indian pressure on Britain grew more exigent and oppressive. On the other hand, Britain's capacity to withstand the pressure correspondingly diminished. Above all, world developments helped India. During these five decades the United Kingdom was travelling down the arc of descent from the zenith of world empire to the status of little England. At the same time, the constituents of the British Empire were climbing up to sovereign equality, the colonies and territories to unrestrained independence. India, which was the largest, the most populous and the highest priced of the imperial domains, was becoming impatient and restless for freedom.

The social, economic, political and ideological changes, which had occurred in India in the 19th century, had some curious consequences. Social differences were toned-down, but inter-communal relations were worsened. The class structure, which varied from region to region tended to uniformity, if not examined too closely. The old aristocratic ruling class had been wiped out or rendered impotent. It remained in a decrepit state at the princely order, composed of rulers of large states like Hyderabad and Kashmir, and tiny principalities of Kathiawar, and was utterly dependent upon the sovereign authority. The millions inhabiting the hundreds of thousands of villages were politically impassive and mentally stagnant, immersed in poverty, illiteracy and disease, and oppressed by government officials, property owners and moneylenders.

The middle class, a product of the British Raj, was mainly comprised of three sections – agricultural, industrial and professional. Among these sections there was

growing a consciousness of nationality and a sentiment of patriotism, which was a result of both material and psychological needs. The mantle of the medieval ruling class fell upon the shoulders of the new middle class, which naturally spearheaded the struggle for independence. The characteristic development of Indian economy is interesting one. In 19th century, especially in its latter half, Britain became an imperialist power with a highly industrialized base. Its economic policies were formulated in the interests of Britain's imperialist needs. As a result, a colonial economy was established in India, which resulted in the evolution of a lop-sided differential economy. The results of this economy were increasing poverty of the masses engaged in agricultural pursuits, thereby accentuating the conflict between the landholders and tenants. In a province like Bengal, where the majority of the landholders were Hindus and that of the tenants Muslims, this conflict acquired a communal bias. Other factors, including the policy of the Government, competition for services, economic and educational inequalities, cultural and religious diversities, irrational and vague fears, jealousies and apprehensions and lack of understanding on the part of the leaders of the majority and the minority – pride and prejudice – exaggerated the discords. These differences were not abnormal, as similar differences existed in other countries of the world, but the presence of the third party wielding the instruments of overwhelming power acted like a catalytic agent separating and isolating the elements and preventing them from combination.

Politically, a radical transformation had occurred. The medieval political order and the concepts, on which it was founded, had completely disappeared. The traditions of limited sovereignty exercised by hereditary monarchs liable to dynastic revolutions were wholly forgotten. Tribe, clan and family, which were politically important and autonomous village republics, which had provided stability and continuity during the disturbed conditions of foreign invasions and conquests and internal upheavals, had lost their vitality and functional utility. As politicization expanded in depth and extent, the old diversities of socio-religious systems invaded the field of politics; they were exploited and magnified by imperialist designs.

In this sphere of thought and culture, the penetration of westernization was considerable. The consequences were diverse. The highly educated acquired the scientific and critical attitude and methods; but they used them for different

purposes. Most Indian thinkers tried to reconcile the basic principles of the ancient Indian thought – regarded as spiritual and intuitive, and therefore superior, with the objective and sense data based approach of the west, which was depreciatingly called materialist. They were obliged to make the accommodation because the wonderful success of the western methods demonstrated in the amazing development of science and technology, wealth and power, could not just be ignored.

In this sphere too, change was uneven. Among the educated, there were different degrees of sophistication. Some of the philosophers, scientists and literary men of India, took their stand with the high ranking representatives of the west, but a large number, even of university trained men, were only superficially equipped. Most had a dual personality – traditionalist at home and modernist in public. Unfortunately, the uneducated formed the large bulk of the Indian population. They had scarcely emerged medievalism. Custom, superstition and a gross form of credulity governed their behavior. Therefore, they could be easily excited, especially on issues connected with tradition and custom.

The rulers also suffered from their peculiar obsessions. Right from the beginning, it seems, they were inspired by the Benthamite principle. They looked upon themselves as the cream of the white race, the elect of the human kind. They considered the brown people of India as an inferior race, inferior in intellect, in character, in practical ability and the art of self-government. It was their conviction that Indians were so divided by race, religion, language and culture as to preclude the possibility of their ever forming a nation, from which they concluded that self-government for such peoples was unthinkable and it was necessary for Britain to govern India ‘as if forever’. They had persuaded themselves that the educated Indian was a contemptible creature. The Hindus, politically minded and affiliated to the Congress, were more than a nuisance; they were rebels – open or incipient. The Muslims, though inferior to the whites, were considered somewhat superior to the Hindus, and because they were afraid of the majority and sought the protection of the rulers, worthy of favorable treatment.

The Hindu leaders of the non-communal outlook believed in secular nationalism. They believed in one India and one Indian nation. Both Hindus and Muslims had common interests – political and economic. However, there were

differences of language, custom and religion. There were some, who were communal minded, insular and shortsighted Hindu leaders, they were afraid of the Muslims and the Muslims were of the Hindus. The action and reaction between the two setup a kind of vicious circle. For a long time disfavored and ill treated by the government, Muslims had developed the mentality of the persecuted. Everyone seemed to be against them. They felt isolated, misunderstood, undervalued, yet they dreamed of the glories of the past – of the piety and graciousness of the righteous Caliphs, of the swift expansion of Islamic empire, of the wonderful conquests in the domains of art, literature and science. They were once sovereign of greater part of India. They naturally yearned for an opportunity to play a prominent role in India, which was evolving. Obsessed with jealousy of the Hindus, who had made greater progress in education, affluence, services and professions, they were working up their fears and jealousy complexes, afraid that in any democratic set-up, the Hindu majority would overwhelm them. Reason and argument fly out of the door when passion and prejudice enter.

The third party, exploited these fears and obsessions. They gave recognition to the separate interests and to the historic importance of the Muslim community and thus encouraged their separatist tendencies; on the other hand, they blamed Indians for the communal and cultural discords, which negated their claim to be a nation. The policy of separate electorates, based on denial of nationalism, did not change even when British representative institutions conceded in 1919 and 1935. Almost all factions and parties converged to agreement, namely, the demand for complete independence. The struggle for independence was based on a full-fledged philosophy. It was not a narrowly limited movement for political emancipation. It was broadly an endeavor to reconstruct an old, static, collective society and to establish in its place a modern dynamic organization for the promotion of such values as liberty, justice, individualism, humanism and secularism. The object was to exchange the new bonds of association for the old ones – territorialism, secularism and nationalism for tribalism, regionalism and communalism. The task was colossal, especially in view of the extraordinary obstacles, which stood in the way of progress.

The history of freedom movement is, therefore, not a simple narrative of the incidents, which happened on the stage of politics, but an essay in understanding the

rationale of the total process of social evolution – both the emergence and propagation of new ideas, as also the clash of interests and forces ranged on the contending sides. The growth of different ideas, which constituted the ideological basis of the movement, provided inspiration to the fighters for freedom. The Indian leaders were aware of the need of revolution in the political status of India, but at the same time, they were deeply concerned with the basic problems of the form and character of their future free society and their new culture. Therefore, the question of social reconstruction was discussed in its depth and that of culture from the viewpoint of the consequences of the impact of the west on the traditional and the emergence of the modern. Indian independence was not regarded as a matter of bread and butter alone, but far more as a search for the new ideals of life. In short, the question was what the Indian to live and die for was.

The war against foreign domination had, thus, two aspects – that of force and that of ideas. The war had to be fought both on the material and on moral planes; it was as much a war with an external enemy as a battle within the mind. It is, therefore, necessary that the history of freedom movement should be both a narrative of the facts of the political struggle as well as an exposition of the thought processes and philosophies of the chief guides of the struggle.

The ideologies of these leaders have identities and diversities, for they are particular expressions of deep thinking and wide ranging minds seeking solutions of the great problems, which faced their country. So, on the one hand, they devised the tactics for the campaigns of the struggle, on the other, they deliberated upon the national and moral justification of ends and means.

The two-fold search for freedom within and without is not unusual. All great human uprisings have shown similar dual features. The French Revolution of 1789 was preceded by the philosophies of Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot and the Encyclopedists. The Bolshevik revolution of Russia in 1917 was prepared by the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Even the more limited movements of German and Italian unification had their literary precursors – Goethe, Hegel and others in German, and Mazzini in Italy. Their writings paved the way for the leaders of action. In recent times in Turkey and in the Arab Lands, philosophers and men of letters prepared ground for reconstruction and independence. Similarly, it is necessary for

the proper assessment of the significance and character of the Indian struggle for independence to analyze and explain its philosophical background.

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