

DISCUSSION

**PROFESSOR RAJENDRA PRASAD ON
PHILOSOPHY, EDUCATION AND THE
QUALITY OF LIFE : SOME OBSERVATIONS ***

This submission consists of two sections. In the first section I shall try to understand the position of the author and in the second section an attempt will be made to put forward certain observations on the problems raised in the paper. Before entering into the main content, I take the opportunity to convey my deep sense of gratitude to Professor Prasad for writing such a thought-provoking and excellent paper. This paper may plausibly attract a lot of comments and observations for its pragmatic nature. *IPQ* (XXI : 2) April 1994.

I

The author has very rightly identified certain problems relating to educational system and in turn the quality of life which is intimately related with the former. He also tries to provide a clue towards the solution of this problem. I agree with Professor Prasad about the degenerate state of education and the quality of life determined by such education. But I am not convinced about the feasibility of the solution proposed by him. This conviction is borne out of the prevalent social reality through experience.

Professor Prasad has very appropriately noted the task of the philosopher in social context where he says, "Philosophy being a predominantly cognitive inquiry, his concern with social affairs or problems has to be predominantly cognitive . . . etc. etc." (P. 101).

* The Editors of the *IPQ*, very deeply regret the untimely death of Prof. Abul Kasem which occurred recently. He was only 42. Prof. Kasem was Reader in Philosophy at North Bengal University, and was a frequent contributor to *IPQ*.

He unhesitatingly points out the failure of the philosophical community in India. It is also true, he maintains, that sometimes philosophers are unduly accused of for not taking active part in social affairs. However, the exhortationists are not at all clear as to what role a philosopher can play in social context. Does he play the role like a politician or a chairman of a flood-relief committee? Plato once said "Philosopher must be king". But now-a-days philosophy and philosophical community in India are becoming good for nothing in social context. In fact I cannot resist myself to note that one Vice-Chancellor (a leading expert in Bengali language and literature) has commented sometimes back that students of Bengali and philosophy will deal in potato fry. This reflects the attitude of the academics in India towards the state of philosophy. What to say about the common people? I am no less concerned about the Question of survivality of philosophy. One thing strikes to my mind that perhaps we have not yet succeeded to resolve the questions 'What philosophy is' and 'What philosophy is for' in our socio-political context. On the contrary, we are simply engrossed in assessing and reassessing some stale philosophical theories already propounded either in the East or in the West as purely intellectual exercise for name, fame and fortune. Here too lies the failure of the philosophical community of our country. In this context I mean to say that our philosophical activity does not reflect our life. Rather it is totally divorced from social reality and has become the monopoly of a group of so-called intellectuals. The author with his vast experience has properly diagnosed the degeneration of social values in every sphere of life. But this is nothing new. Many educationists in the past also lamented about social degradation. However, recently in academic field it has become very rampant. Dr. Prasad has cited a lot of examples in favour of his position. I can also supplement another set of causes from my experience e.g., Ph.D. degrees are sold in lieu of cash or kind, dictating notes in the class room without discussion, discriminatory marking, supplying answers in the examination hall, research scholars are sometimes used for personal comfort of the supervisor. As a result students are reluctant to read text book, they are interested for notes and even abhorrent to read those notes, rather prefer to adopt unfair means in the examination. Research scholars, on the otherhand, are expecting their dissertation to be written by

the incompetent, dishonest supervisors who in turn advising to copy from books and managing to find out examiners of the same category for the dissertations to be approved. This is however not the whole story. There are indeed a few who have been constantly endeavouring to resist this dishonesty but they are outnumbered and even sometimes the authority is siding with the corrupt majority on the pretext of democracy.

But the crux of this discussion is that the author has suggested some way out of this total chaos and degeneration. He has introduced the concept of *internal value* that can help surviving this dismayed educational situation. By *internal value* the author intends to mean generation of some kind of value through imparting/receiving process in the normal way. These values are basic, indigenous or internal to any worth-while, well-conducted formal system. They are built into the very concept of formal education. The author emphasized that these values should not be tampered with. They are *processional* i.e., inculcated in the normal process of education. It appears to me here that the author is mainly concerned with the educatees and he has not taken into account the role of the educators and helping staff in running a formal educational system that can generate internal values.

Most importantly, the author attempts to establish a relation between internal value of education and quality of life. Although in section IV he proclaims that at least a working conception of the worthy life is to be reinforced through a sensible education and in section V he tries to show that internal values of education can improve quality and standard of social life to greater extent. He was very much emphatic to hold that whatever other factors there are, without proper education and educational system the dream of value-based worthy life and society cannot be realized. This in fact a truism.

A most important and pertinent question that the author does not miss to highlight is educational system inculcating internal value must function unobstructedly in a normal situation. Besides, the educatee, educator and the helping staff must work hand in hand with commitment and accountability.

II

What has been said above is my understanding about the problem of education and quality of life pragmatically discussed by an eminent scholar and academician. I do not know whether I have been able to understand him properly. As mentioned before, I am inclined to make some observations which may appear unorganized in the face of such a well-articulated, well-organized paper of Professor Prasad. However, before that I shall try to make a very brief theoretical prefatory note of my observations.

Education is no doubt a social phenomenon. To understand this phenomenon properly some other social conditions are required to be understood. It is palpable that every social phenomenon is intimately connected with its economic condition. This is no exception in India also. Hence it is clear that in our social context we have to understand the methodology of cognition of the social process, by which we are guided in the analysis of philosophical and sociological ideas. Lenin wrote, "Just as man's knowledge reflects matter which exists independently of him, so man's *social knowledge* reflects the economic system of society". Political institutions are known as a superstructure of the economic foundation. We are quite aware of the economic situation of our society. Inequality is one of the burning problems of this economic system. More than 67% of people live below the poverty line and more than 50% of them are illiterate. With the concentration of national wealth education is also getting confined within a particular section of people as saleable commodity.

Now let me clarify my position noted above. The system of education generating internal values demands commitment of educatees, educators and non-teaching staff as maintained by Dr. Prasad. But in reality we discern that lack of commitment of all the three sections is one of the important factors for debacle of educational system culminating in degeneration of social life. Professor Prasad further maintains that educational system in order to generate internal value must function unobstructedly without any extraneous interference of whatever nature. But this condition is hardly fulfilled.

We are all aware that India had been under British rule for two hundred years. The main intention of the British rule was exploitation. Naturally they have constructed and executed everything in India keeping in mind their class interest. Economy and education are no exception. They were out to destroy the economic self-dependence of this country. As a result the educational system they executed suited them and helped to serve their economic interest. The present educational system does not have its root in the soil of our society. It is not framed considering the needs and aspirations of our social reality. Rather it is superimposed and inherited which has enormous oddity, infirmity and inconformity. These loopholes can hardly be corrected with temporary measure.

Some historians raised a very tricky question whether India has achieved freedom in the true sense of the term or it is mere transfer of power. If the latter is the case then only rulers have changed but the machine of exploitation and the socio-economic condition of the large majority of the ruled have remained unchanged. It again implies that power was captured by the then leaders in order to satisfy their personal ambition and aspiration. They had no ideology or philosophy for future India. The British rulers transferred power to the Indian affluent elites who were supposed to act as their representatives. Naturally, since then there has been no fundamental changes in the social systems-be it economy or education-in conformity with the social reality of our country. It may not be irrelevant to note that some great men like Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore have tried to formulate and execute certain indigenous economic and educational systems but those are not widely accepted. Therefore, we are still within an educational system advocated by the colonial rulers. However, at times certain minor changes and adjustments are made within the given system.

I have mentioned that educational system was never free from extraneous interference both in the pre-independence and post-independence period. To illustrate, it may be recalled that during post-independence India there has been a number of commissions on education headed by eminent educationists. But how many recommendations are accepted and implemented? Besides, after

independence education was included in the state list of the Constitution but later on it has been brought back under the concurrent list. And the reason is simply to keep political control over the educational affairs. Hence education has not till now operated unobstructedly and I believe will never within this system without radical shift in orientation and approach.

Further I would like to point out that lack of commitment among the participating parties in academic system cannot be achieved unless rules framed are uniformly executed. Now-a-days in most of the academic institutions it has become the practice to implement rules in a discriminatory way resulting in frustration and lack of commitment among a large section of staff. This discriminatory attitude of the authorities in most cases is due to their personal benefit-direct or indirect.

To conclude my submission I would suggest that value oriented educational system may be evolved depending upon the personal integrity and honesty of the individual which is inherent or genetical in nature and can flower in the congenial atmosphere. Besides, collective effort for uniform execution of formal rules must be ensured for smooth functioning of a system generating internal values. This in turn necessitates political will of the ruling class. In order to achieve our goal of value-oriented education and quality of life it is necessary to arrange indigenous educational system for all people. Necessary measures should be initiated for eradication of illiteracy and compulsory free primary education. These programmes no doubt require certain effective economic steps to be taken for their meaningful implementation. I believe there may be other considerations but these are no less important for a value-based educational system that can improve the quality of social life to a greater extent.

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