

Metropolitan Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios

Let me begin with a snippet from my autobiography. When I returned to India in 1967 after nearly 20 years of wanderings in four continents (Africa, America, Europe and Asia), I thought I would serve my people best by concentrating on theological education and Indian higher education. I thought that some of our better motivated and more intelligent younger people were in our colleges and universities. I was founder-chairman of the All India Association for Christian Higher Education, and worked also with D.S. Kothari and J.P. Naik of the Kothari Commission. I was full of hope, but misguided hope, as I soon found out.

From that two or three years of working in Higher Education I came to one conclusion. Adequate reform in the Indian Education System, I was convinced and still am, cannot take place except as an integral part of an allround movement for social transformation in India. It is futile to inculcate higher values in schools and colleges so long as students live in a society with much lower values and interests. Schools and colleges cannot change society's value system, until society was willing to change itself and was engaged in a nation-wide popular movement (like the national freedom movement in the 30's and 40's) to achieve better organisation of our political-economic structures. Formal education is not the place to start social reform or value-change.

I had hopes rekindled, though tinged with cynicism, when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi began pressing for a New Educational Policy. It must have been in the early years of the Rajiv regime that I had a long conversation with then Education Minister, K.C.Pant on some of the principles to keep in mind on any educational reforms. For example, education reform related to a mass movement for adult literacy and social reform; education in the context of productive economic activity, both industrial and agricultural; the whole of society including the armed forces, civil servants and political parties being actively involved in an Adult Literacy Campaign with special emphasis on women, and so on.

Mr. Pant assured me that all these points had been adequately taken care of in the draft of the New Educational Policy then under formulation. When the document actually came out, I saw none of my half a dozen points in it. My cynicism was reconfirmed.

Second, I agree with Sri Anand Swarup that culture was always bi-level, i.e. an elite culture and a folk culture. But the two are not separated by impermeable walls. Take Bharatanatyam or Kathakali. Was it elite or folk culture? The elite probably financed it, but large masses gathered together to enjoy it during temple festivals and other festive occasions. In actual fact both Bharatanatyam and Kathakali were folk forms of art, which have now been put on the stage where the ordinary people can seldom afford to go. What we have to promote is not culture on the stage, but folk forms of culture where the common people gather. The elite-folk bifurcation is of more recent origin, mainly because of the system of tickets for viewing cultural performances.

Third, I am worried about prevailing currents of 'mainstreamism'. Some people think that in India we have one mainstream culture, everything else being canals or tributaries. This marginalises the real main stream culture-namely the adivasi culture. It brands Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism as Indian, along with the 'mainstream' Hinduism, while Judaism, Christianity and Islam are alien. Nothing is in fact side-stream in India. Hinduism as we now have is itself a new thing, born out of many conflicts and many frustrations. The idea that the mainstream culture of India began with the Vedas, and then flows through the epics and Upanishads to contemporary Hinduism is preposterous. What we have in much of our elite ruling class is a strange mixture of that kind of mainstream and a few unexamined liberal ideas. The discovery of our true heritage in such a way that all of us can call it 'ours' and therefore feel fully Indian is an absolute priority. A false mainstreamism is a sickness. We need to be healed at that point.

For me our mainstream has as its foundation the pre-Aryan and pre-Dravidian 'primeval vision'. Every conquering horde, including Dravidians, Aryans, Central Asians of all kinds, including

Scythians, Sakas, Mongols, Chinese, Tibetans, Turks, and Moghuls brought something new, as did the West Asian who came here with Alexander in the 4th century BC, the Jews (around that time), the Christians, the Muslims, and before all these the Sumerians, the Akkadians, the Chaldeans, the Babylonians and the Iranians. We did not borrow from them. They brought something with them and we accepted what we thought was good.

Our educational system must help us Indians to find our true common identity as Indians. We have to go beyond Jawaharlal Nehru to effect our own new 'discovery of India'.

Not everything we have inherited is good. Much in our heritage we have already rejected, and that rightly, e.g. monarchy, feudalism, slavery, serfdom and so on. We need a discerning rediscovery of what is valuable in our heritage without selling it short.

It is a major mistake in our educational policy that we still look upon it primarily in terms of an investment in the economy. The formation of trained manpower [and woman power] to run our industrial academic and civic institutions is a necessary function of the educational system, but not its primary function. This is where the Kothari Commission went wrong. To fit education into a development ideology that thinks in terms of inputs, outputs, investments and profits is bound to go wrong. That ideology assumes that the more people produce the more happy everybody will be. This is a pernicious and dominant ideology developed within a neo-colonial framework in the past 45 years or so. If we try to fit education into that ideology, human dignity, identity and meaning are bound to be the casualties. At the moment, education everywhere seems enslaved by this ideology. The most valued courses in the university today are entrepreneurship, management, technology and engineering for productivity, science for profit. No proper assessment of the ideology of development, leading to delineation of real human value, seems to have been undertaken in the educational context, except for a lot of talk about 'value education'. Value inculcation both inside and outside the classroom can actually be undertaken only in the wider context of a people's movement.