Chapter IV: Education and National Education: The Political and Intellectual Debate

Sri Aurobindo finally came to Bengal in 1906 after a fourteen-year stay at Baroda – in between he had been a visitor to the province in order to survey the political situation and to initiate the first steps towards developing a movement of revolutionary nationalism. In December 1905 after he had attended the Benares Congress Sri Aurobindo returned to Baroda and in February 1906 he took two months of privilege leave to which he ‘attached the summer vacation and spent the whole time in Bengal.’ He utilised this time to further consolidate the nationalist links that he had established, and in sorting out various issues in the centres of revolutionary activity that had started under his inspiration and guidance and in general studying the political situation in the province. But even during this period when he was just on leave from the Baroda State Service he had to take part in Bengal politics from behind the scenes. It was only later in 1906 when it was decided to found the Bengal National College and his name was proposed as principal that it gave him the ‘opportunity to he needed [of coming permanently to Bengal] and enabled him to resign his position in the Baroda Service and join the College… [this made him free] ‘to give his whole time to the service of the country’.

The province of Bengal had just undergone the first pangs of partition and was in the throes of a massive protest movement that had captured the imagination of the whole country. Sri Aurobindo realized that this was a supremely opportune moment to begin a movement that would ‘establish and generalise the idea of independence in the mind of the Indian people and at the same time to push first a party and then the whole nation into an intense and organized political activity which would lead to the accomplishment of that ideal.’

And as pointed out, his political programme – which reflected a new direction given to the politics of the country - was to have an overt side to it a – ‘public propaganda intended to convert the whole nation to the ideal of independence’ a proposition then regarded by the vast majority as an almost ‘insane chimera’. This overt programme was to also include the creation of an organization that would carry on sustained and united opposition to the government through an ‘increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance’. The covert side of the programme was to be the initiating of ‘a secret revolutionary propaganda and organization of which the central object was the preparation of an armed insurrection.’

The secret part of the political programme does not concern us in this present discussion, the point that is our focus at this stage is the fact that National Education was to be part of the open programme and that it was accorded great importance and priority by Sri Aurobindo is evident from his own statement while discussing his political programme, where he says, as mentioned earlier, that he attached much importance to the programme of National education.

Assessing the national education movement in the statement Sri Aurobindo observed that, ‘the movement began well and many schools were established in Bengal and many able

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229 Ibid., p. 21.
men became teacher, but still the development was insufficient and the economical position of the schools precarious.²³⁰ It is known that insufficient funds and the ever-growing number of schools made the situation difficult. But was is striking in the statement and supports our contention that Sri Aurobindo was greatly concerned with national education and was in the process of trying to give it a more concrete shape and make it relevant to the needs of the nation even after his disassociation from the National College in 1908. By his own admission on the issue, he had ‘decided to take up the movement’ he says and ‘personally and see whether it could not be given a greater expansion and a stronger foundation,’ this idea was ‘cut short’ due to his ‘sudden departure from Bengal,’ in April 1910.²³¹ This shows that after his acquittal in the Alipore Conspiracy Case when even though he ‘found the whole political aspect of the country altered’ he decided to continue the struggle in a determined manner and began planning again on the possibilities of re-implementing the nationalist programme and in it of course he decided to personally give shape to a national education scheme which he felt was necessary in a drastically altered manner after observing the declining impact of the first attempt. It may be said that probably for no other programme during his political phase did Sri Aurobindo express his intention to ‘personally’ initiate action. Attributing the collapse of the movement also to the repression unleashed by the government and the general ‘depression’ that followed it Sri Aurobindo observed that the idea of national education ‘lived on’ and he expressed his hopes that ‘it will one day find an adequate form and body.’²³² A number of points thus are compressed in the above statement; they are first, that national education was an important agenda in the manifesto of the

²³⁰ Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, pp. 32-33.
²³¹ Ibid., pp. 32.
²³² Ibid., p. 32.
nationalist party founded by Lokmanya Tilak and Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo gave the credit of laying the foundation of national schools in the ‘Mofussil’ to the ‘enthusiasm of the Nationalist party, the propaganda of its leaders and the ardent self-devotion of little bands of workers who gave their self-sacrifice and enthusiasm…’\textsuperscript{233} and as to the ‘successful organization of the Bengal National College in Calcutta’ he gave complete credit to the work of ‘its able and enthusiastic Superintendent aided by a body of young and self-sacrificing workers.’\textsuperscript{234} The second point that emerges from Sri Aurobindo’s above statement is that the movement had an enthusiastic beginning and had a number of able men as teachers; this has also been authenticated by Prof. Haridas and Uma Mukherjee in their landmark work on the origins of the national education movement. The intellectual base was growing and was being gradually organized as a number of young scholars, researchers and teachers were emerging and casting their lot with the fledgling national education set up. The third point that is evident from the above statement is the fact that the economic base was rather weak and Sri Aurobindo was exploring the possibilities of giving it a sturdier and lasting base. The hope that national education ‘will one day find an adequate form and body’ gives credence to the third point which is that Sri Aurobindo retained a continuous interest in national education and believed in the necessity of creating a truly national system of education and not a modified copy of the existing colonial system and that he realized that it had not been done till then [i.e. when the statement was made in 1946] and that independent India ought to truly give it proper attention, thought and energy. Thus national education, its need, the movement and its future were all central to Sri Aurobindo’s public life and

\textsuperscript{234} Ibid. p.387
action. His contribution and participation in its quest therefore also becomes the central focus of this work.

**IV.1 Rise of the Demand: A Survey of the Educational Scene**

Between January 1902 when Sir Gooroo Dass penned his note of dissent and November 1905 when the first national school was declared open at Rangpur, East Bengal, the national education discourse began occupying an animated space among the various discussions that had been generated for greater public awakening by the thought-leaders of the day. The colonial administration devised the educational system in India with a clear set of intentions in mind. It had studied its effects on the Indian mind, it had accepted these effects of an education with alien content and images on the Indian psyche and at times its representatives also expressed these evaluations in public such as strangely enough did Lord Curzon on a number of occasions. Speaking around 1899 of the differences between ‘a residential and teaching University such as Oxford and Cambridge’ and ‘and examining and degree-giving University’ such Calcutta, he observed that the curriculum at the Calcutta University was defective and simply whetted in pupils the hunger for diploma’ and it ‘sacrificed the formation of character upon the altar of cram’ and turned the recipients into ‘a sort of phonographic automation.’ Curzon’s colonial disdain shone through the comparison but it had more than again of truth especially if we leave aside for the moment the fact that his own administrative predecessors played not a minor role in the entire state of affairs. ‘A residential and teaching University of Oxford or Cambridge’ said, Curzon:
‘...with its venerable buildings, its historic associations, the crowded and healthy competition of its life, its youthful friendships, its virile influence upon character, its esprit de corps, cannot, either in Great Britain or in any country, be fairly compared with an examining and degree University such as yours. They are like in bearing the same name, and in constituting parts of the machinery by which in civilized countries all peoples work for the same ideal, namely, the cultivation of the higher faculties of man. But they are profoundly unlike in the influence they exert upon the pupil, and in the degree to which they affect, not so much his profession, as his character, and his life.'

The products of a university which is a mere examining and degree university have in them a generally a heightened hunger for diplomas and emerge as something ‘better than a sort of phonographic automaton into which have been spoken the ideas and thoughts of other men.’ Curzon also saw such an exposure gave rise to type which was ‘half-denationalised’ and had ‘lost the virtues of his own system, while only assimilating the vices of another.’

In his convocation speech of February 17th 1900 Curzon stated the issue again when he said, ‘We teach you in your Indian Colleges, and we examine you in the Universities upon subjects not merely conveyed to you in a foreign language, but representing foreign ideas and modes of thought. They are like an aerolite discharged into space from a distant planet, or like exotic plants imported from some antipodean clime.’

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236 Ibid., p.99.
Thus if the object of University education was to mould the individual into ‘a finer specimen of a man’ then it failed to perform that task. Obviously Curzon advocated ‘cautious reform and not wholesale reconstruction’ of the existing system. However this can be construed as an indictment of the system by Curzon himself then Governor-General and a few years later to be the divider of Bengal, an act which suddenly galvanised into action the till then simmering forces of nationalism and gave a huge impetus to the national education movement itself.

IV.2 Technicalities of a Colonial Education System: an overview

A survey at this stage of the official educational scene would provide an insight into the issues that Indian thought-leaders then spearheading the gradually growing movement for educational reform were facing and grappling with. It is generally accepted that the colonial educational structure followed a certain line of development from 1854 onwards since the formulation of the Wood’s Education Despatch till 1902 when Lord Curzon set up the Indian Universities Commission. The development during this period was mainly focused on the spread of education rather than the quality. Curzon had ever since his initial vice-regal phase in India targeted the area of education; he appeared to want to bring about a certain qualitative change as opposed to the quantitative that was being clamoured for by the ‘native’ intelligentsia. He also wished to bring about about a greater degree of official control over the education framework and looked askance at most of the private attempts of educational activism.

In the field of primary education Curzon’s focus was quantitative as well as qualitative and in the area of higher education his focus was a qualitative improvement rather than a quantitative one. As early as 1901 he convened a conference of chief education officers at Simla which set in motion the process of appointing the Indian Universities Commission in 1902 in conformity with his temperament Curzon did not invite any Indian educationist to the conference giving a negative signal to the Indian intelligentsia who began to perceive a hidden motive behind the whole exercise. One may take a look at Curzon’s educational work in India during his tenure based on official documents; it will serve the purpose of having a view from the other side and will also indicate the official educational scenario and opinion in Bengal around the time Sri Aurobindo arrived in the province to start work first as an educationist and then gradually and predominantly as a politician who was deeply concerned with educational issues and programmes.

The two decades from the appointment of the Indian Universities Commission to 1921 when the subject of education finally passed to Indian control – though Indian ministers even then did not have much independent say or scope of action – saw a number of administrative and infrastructural changes in the Indian educational framework. It can be accepted that many of these were seriously considered or implemented because of the first national education movement between 1906 and 1909. The movement then, though it was short lived, had it seems succeeded in making national education a national issue and a part and parcel of the larger struggle for freedom. What one perceives is that most of the changes that were brought about were of an administrative nature and little was really done to bring about a change in the intellectual
content of the curriculum which is what the national education movement leaders including Sri Aurobindo demanded. By 1909 it became clear to Sri Aurobindo that mere infrastructural tinkering would not serve the long term purpose of national regeneration and development and that is why he opposed the officialized approach and the existing university model replicating mode that the national college and council began to adopt later. Sri Aurobindo felt that the council would finally morph into ‘a centre of scientific and technical education; [but would] no longer be a workshop in which national spirit and energy are to be forged and shaped.’

Around this time Satish Chandra Mukherjee had also delinked himself from the National College tendering his resignation in 1908 and continuing with the work of his Dawn Magazine till November 1913 after which it ceased to appear.

With Satish Chandra’s disassociation it may be said that not only the principle pillar but the inspiring and organizing soul of the movement in a sense went missing.

The two decades, as mentioned earlier, were from the official point of view rather beneficial ones for educational reorganization, compared to the Victorian Era, this period had much larger finances, saw a more active role on part of the government which had earlier adopted a laissez-faire attitude vis-à-vis education, there were ‘vigorous attempts at qualitative improvement’ in all ‘types of educational institutions’, an almost unprecedented expansion ‘in almost all branches of education’, also the growth of a militant as well as mass national movement demanding national emancipation became

\[240\] CWSA vol.8 p.265, the observation was made in an article that appeared in the Karmayogin issue of Saturday, 19th October, 1909 under the title ‘Apostasy of the National Council’ in it Sri Aurobindo criticized the Council’s directives that all schools must abjure ‘all connection with politics as part of the duty of a “National” school’. Sri Aurobindo called it a ‘National Risley Circular’ & pointed out that this completed the divorce of the national education experiment with the national movement.

\[241\] Origins of the National Education Movement, op .cit., Life-Sketch of Satis Chandra Mukherjee, p. 200.
one the major factors that made the rulers sit up and take serious note of education and educational reform.\textsuperscript{242} The Central government during this period sanctioned regular central grants to education and the surpluses were allotted to the provinces for expenditure in education. ‘The earliest of these grants was sanctioned by Lord Curzon and the policy was kept up by his successors.’ Between 1902 and 1918-19, the grants allotted were about Rs.500 lakhs non-recurring and about Rs.300 lakhs recurring. Such large central grants were previously unknown in the history of Indian education and were greatly responsible for the expansion and improvement of educational infrastructure that was then being undertaken.\textsuperscript{243} The other issue which Curzon set in motion was a more active role for the State in matters of education. ‘Prior to 1902 the State played a minor role in education, the doctrine of State-withdrawal from direct educational enterprise held the field, and the State did little more that pay grant-in-aid to private institutions and in

\textsuperscript{242} J.P.Naik & Syed Nurullah, \textit{A Student’s History of Education in India-(1800-1973)}, p.239, 6\textsuperscript{th} revised ed. Macmillan, New Delhi, 1974. A shorter version of a larger work based on primary sources, such as government educational records, minutes etc. J.P.Naik (1907-1981), well-known educationist who worked in the area of educational research, planning & policymaking for four decades was ‘the largest single influence in originating & promoting Indian educational research, in institutionalising educational innovations and reforms, and also in educational planning and policy-making.’ For a brief critical analysis of Naik’s life educational thought & role in the Indian educational field see e.g. A.R. Kamat’s article in \textit{PROSPECTS: the quarterly review of education}, vol. XXIV, no.1/2, 1994, page 203-16, UNESCO, International Bureau of Education, Paris. Syed Nurullah distinguished educationist rose to become the Pro-Vice Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University. The authors in their History of Modern Indian Education have shown, & it is relevant to our discussion on colonial education, based on a number of reports & statistics that a ‘fairly efficient & indigenous education system [was in operation] in many parts of [India] before and at the time of the British conquest. The authors have described its strong and weak points and have rightly emphasized that the modern Western educational system introduced by Macaulay and Wood, instead of utilizing the traditional system, simply ignored it much to the detriment of mass education. It could have been continued and strengthened by modernizing its content and organization. Some of the British rulers also belatedly realized the value of indigenous education at the time of the Education Commission of 1882. By that time, however, irreparable damage had been done and the old system was dying out’ [Kamat, PROSPECTS]. This is the issue that Mahatma Gandhi kept highlighting from the 1930s onwards when it came to discussing national education & Indian educational scenario under the British. The decay of the indigenous system & its replacement by a British model of education completely divorced education from life & surrounding & snapped the organic link that had hitherto existed. It is this aspect that Sri Aurobindo too emphasized in his early educational thoughts & writings – the omission of the impact of the environment & society in the education of the individual. He did not have, of course, access to documents that discussed the pre-British Indian indigenous system of education.

\textsuperscript{243} Naik & Nurullah, op.cit., pp. 239,240.
return, exercise some control over them\textsuperscript{244} the change to this picture began from 1902 onwards. Under Curzon the state-withdrawal policy was officially given up, the inspecting system was strengthened, attempts were initiated to set up model institutions and the inspection and surveys of till then largely unmonitored private institutions were also stepped up, as a result of the new policies the State began, along with playing a more active role in educational matters, to assert the right to ‘\textit{control private enterprise’ in education as tightly as possible.}\textsuperscript{245} Among the many issues that influenced this stance is one that would be of interest to our study, it’s the fact that official India began to realize with trepidation, that political consciousness among the people was spreading in general, and expectations that a western education would bound in perpetual loyalty to the Empire all its recipients were being belied. Official India began to scrutiny this aspect and felt therefore that a greater state control over education had to be asserted especially the monitoring and controlling of private institutions, especially those under Indian control, was needed as they were felt to be ‘breeding sedition.’ This desire for greater control of education, it has been pointed out, was therefore, ‘\textit{only partly educational but mainly political}’ and it was for this reason that the nationalist opinion vigorously opposed such a move.\textsuperscript{246} This then becomes, for our purpose, the principal reason among the leaders of the national education movement for opposing Curzon’s initiatives in reforming the education sector in India. Moreover between 1902 and 1905 Curzon made a number of disparaging remarks against the Indian intellectual prowess and capacity during his convocation addresses at the Calcutta University, which further inflamed nationalist passions. The essential conflict between a section of the intelligentsia and Curzon was

\textsuperscript{244} Naik & Nurullah, op.cit., pp. 240-41.
\textsuperscript{245} Ibid., p.241.
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid.
political and it went on simultaneously on a number of fronts – education being an important one. The broad nationalist demands in education were the ‘early indianisation of the Education Department; adoption of Indian languages as media of instruction; the teaching of history from the Indian view point as against that of the imperialist power; the development of a feeling of patriotism among the students of schools and colleges’\textsuperscript{247} etc. The enumeration of these points do not of course seem to perceive the essential spirit of the demand which wanted a deeper change of the whole system and a deeper transformation of the whole intellectual content, but they suffice in at least pointing out the major political demands in education. Most of the principle thought-leaders of the national educational movement such as Satish Chandra, his scholar-followers, Sri Aurobindo, Sister Nivedita, later Mahatma Gandhi, who formulated his early thoughts on education in his ‘Hind-Swaraj’ in 1909 and of course Rabindranath Tagore who was always radical in his approach to institutionalized education having distanced himself from the national education experiment when he saw it getting institutionalized, wanted a deeper change in the education system. Perhaps not only a change but a complete transmutation instead of the whole framework that they felt ought to be based on stronger and lasting intellectual and spiritual foundations. A mere surface cosmetic change- as it appears from their various stands and expositions- they felt would not take the movement much forward nor allow it to have a lasting impact on the people’s mind and the nation.

The growth of national education has been seen by some as a ‘revolt against the intellectual domination of the West’\textsuperscript{248} What then were the issues in education that

\textsuperscript{247} Naik & Nurullah, op.cit., p. 247.
\textsuperscript{248} Ibid., p. 247.
Curzon felt needed attention and which were followed up by his successors and which he set up broadly as the mandate for the Universities Commission, some of them were: a) the feeling that the recommendations of the Indian Education Commission of 1882 were becoming less relevant in the present environment i.e. in 1902, that it was mainly concerned with quantitative improvement whereas what was needed now, according to Curzon, was qualitative improvement; b) the replacement of the policy of laissez-faire and expansion with that of control and improvement, it was this laissez-faire policy of the government that Curzon felt was responsible for the poor standards of most of the private institutions which had become more of ‘coaching institutions for examinations than educational centres in the proper sense of the word’ 249 c) the continuance of British dominance in all superior posts of education 250 d) the exclusion of politics from schools – especially at the secondary schools and colleges which were believed to have been most affected and e) the raising of the standard of English. 251 On most of these issues the Indian opinion was opposed to that of the Viceroy’s. The Indian opinion questioned the wisdom of placing the qualitative over quantitative activism showing that such an approach might suit England where expansion of education had already been carried out but was irrelevant to India where expansion had never been undertaken in the right

249 It is interesting to note that the effects of the colonial education system as put into operation in an organized manner from 1854 onwards and which remained focused on the passing of examinations may have played a leading role in converting educational institutions to mainly coaching centres for passing examinations.

250 This was obviously reversed when Sir Asutosh Mookerjee (1864-1924) was appointed the Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University and remained in the post till 1914. He reformed the institution from a mere examining body to a centre of teaching; within the limited framework that he functioned in, Sir Asutosh succeeded to a great extent in reforming the system and in accommodating to an extent the nationalist demands in the field of education. Since he was Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University from the period of Sri Aurobindo’s arrival in Bengal and remained so during the period when Sri Aurobindo was writing on education in the Karmayogin, we may assume that he read some of the articles of the journal. It would be interesting for some future scholar to undertake a comparative study of the changes that Sir Asutosh brought about in the Calcutta University system with Sri Aurobindo’s educational thoughts and call for reform during that period.

251 Naik & Nurullah, op.cit. p. 248.
manner. It also pointed out that the official attempt to ‘control and improve secondary and collegiate education’ was politically motivated and was to be done with the aim of trying to subvert the growth of national feelings in the mind of young Indians. The expansion proposals at the primary level was felt to be to meager and the speedy Indianisation of the Education Department was called for, it demanded that modern Indian languages be adopted as the media of instruction and the exaggerated importance to English be reduced and finally that education must develop love and patriotism for the motherland and not loyalty to the British.\textsuperscript{252}

Curzon gave priority to educational reform and on 27\textsuperscript{th} January 1902 appointed the Indian Universities Commission to’ inquire into the condition and prospects of the universities established in British India and to consider and report upon proposals or improving their constitution and working.’\textsuperscript{253} The Commission submitted its report in the same year. But there were some inherent limitations to the mandate of the Commission which curtailed its capacity to cover all areas of educational reform and suggest a systemic revamping, the secondary education area was excluded from the purview of the Commission and thus it could not deal with the educational problem in its entirety and it did not address the fundamental problems of what type of university organization was to be ultimately developed in India and did not propose the kind of transitional arrangement that would be required during this phase which would lead the country to this ‘predetermined goal in the shortest possible time’.\textsuperscript{254}

What were some of the recommendations of the Commission: the Commission adopted the model of the London University as modified by the Act of 1898 in that every

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{252} Naik \& Nurullah, op.cit., p. 249.
\item \textsuperscript{253} Ibid., p. 250.
\item \textsuperscript{254} Ibid., p. 251.
\end{itemize}
university ought to be a teaching university, that a college should be well staffed and equipped for it to be granted full privilege, that teachers must be closely associated with the government of the University, the supreme governing body of the university called in India as in London the Senate ought not to be too large.\textsuperscript{255} This showed that Commission studied Indian conditions under the backdrop of educational issues then being discussed and debated in London; it did not contain any discussion of the fundamental problems of university organization.\textsuperscript{256}

On the other hand Curzon’s ‘unstable head’ was accused of working towards rooting out Indian education altogether. He was accused of trying to ‘destroy the indigenous colleges that have grown up all over India.’\textsuperscript{257} The ‘native’ intelligentsia took up the issue severely indicting the recommendations of the Commission thereby also pointing at the Viceroy himself. The majority report of the Commission was seen merely ‘as a lengthy exposition of Lord Curzon’s expressed ideas and utterly subversive of the existing system of higher education in India.’\textsuperscript{258} When the report of the Commission appeared in June, 1902 along with Sir Goroo Dass’s note of dissent it created a stir among the Indian intelligentsia and was criticized by almost all leading Indian newspapers and journals of the day. Even those ‘native’ men of distinction who were chosen sometimes as Members of the Legislative Councils expressed their bewilderment and agony over the recommendations. Mahendra Lal Sircar (1833-1904) ‘the foremost native scientist in India and the most senior member of the Senate of the Calcutta University’ for example lamented:

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  \item \textsuperscript{255} Naik & Nurullah, op.cit., p. 250.
  \item \textsuperscript{256} Ibid., p. 251.
  \item \textsuperscript{257} J.C.O’Donnell, \textit{The Failure of Lord Curzon: a study in “Imperialism”}, 1903, p.66.
  \item \textsuperscript{258} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
‘…we are enjoying under the rule of this nation more liberty, more freedom of thought and action, than we ever enjoyed under own. But alas! that I should live to see this liberty ominously being threatened in a matter, which has been the greatest blessing under British rule. …I cannot but observe, and it breaks my heart to do so, that the recommendations of the Commission seem to me to strike at root of general education and to discourage the study of science.’

Raja Pyari Mohan Mukherjee for instance called upon ‘every well-wisher of the country to avail himself of all constitutional means to get those recommendations set aside.’ Norendra Nath Sen, Editor of the influential *Indian Mirror* commented that the ‘recommendations of the Universities Commission may spell life to a few, but to they mean death to countless aspirants after not only fame and fortune, but for very subsistence.’

Another ‘most capable educationist himself the Principal of a very successful indigenous college’ Surendra Nath Banerjea, condemned the crudity of the new policy in a ‘very moderate language.’ ‘With all possible respect for these gentlemen’, wrote Surendra Nath in pages of his *Bengalee*:

‘…we are bound to say that they proceeded as if they had a *tabula rasa* upon which they might inscribe anything they pleased. The great middle class of England are wealthy, and can afford the heavy educational expenses of the Public School and of the University. The middle class in India are poor, and for reasons, which it is needless to enquire into, are poorer now than they were fifty years ago. To transplant the English system into their midst, without reference to existing conditions and the

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260 Ibid., pp.67, 68.
totally different circumstances of the two countries, would be a piece of political unwisdom, which we trust the present rulers of India will permit us not to associate with their names.\textsuperscript{261}

Satish Chandra also began a systematic attack of the Commission’s recommendations in the column of the leading nationalist daily \textit{Amrita Bazar Patrika} and launched a detailed criticism of the ‘Present System of University Education in India’ and provided ‘a Scheme of Reform’ of the system in the pages of his by now established magazine \textit{Dawn}. He did not just stop at mere theoretical criticism but took the initiative of establishing in July 1902 a special educational society and named it the Dawn Society, with the intent of remedying the ‘defects and deficiencies of the existing system of University education. The Dawn Society would be among other things ‘an institution for the cultivation of patriotic and nationalistic impulses.’\textsuperscript{262} Writing in the magazine in 1904 Satish Chandra dwelt on the need for inculcating a spirit of unity which shall grow from the awareness of the richness and diversity of the nation and an empathy towards fellow Indians, this he felt was what ought to be imparted by education, not the present existing system, but a future one which is what the newly founded Dawn Society would ultimately aim at creating. ‘At the present-day, we Indians, have hardly any real or extensive knowledge about India, its people…We know almost nothing of the actual condition of the teeming masses in the different provinces, of their social manners and customs, their languages, means of livelihood, religion, education, or general character,’ observed Satish Chandra and he saw this to be a serious lacunae of the present system of education, ‘And where

\textsuperscript{261} J.C.O'Donnell, \textit{The Failure of Lord Curzon}, op.cit., p.68.

\textsuperscript{262} \textit{Origins of the National Education Movement}, op.cit., pp. 14, 15.
there prevails this widespread ignorance about each other’s concerns in a community,’ he continued, ‘it is idle to expect that there should be an effective bond of sympathy or unity, among its members. All our present unity is because of our living under a common administration, which, however, in our case is not a growth from within but a structure imposed from without. Hence this sort of force such as is likely to grow among us from a more intimate acquaintance with each other’s actual wants and conditions in life.’ Satish Chandra was also enunciating in a sense a ‘spiritual foundation’ to the growing Indian nationalism and was already discussing the essence of true unity as opposed to a forced unity; he was giving a key for maintaining intact the future Indian polity. It was also evident to him that sufficient thought was not being given to the growth of this perspective, he therefore emphasized that the Dawn Society in its varied activities should also focus on the cultural progress of the Indian mind. Since its inception the Society began by holding two weekly classes – the General Training Class and the Moral and religious Training Class. Satish Chandra himself conducted the former every Sunday and he lectured wide ranging subjects and ‘discussions were conducted on a comparative basis, Eastern ideals and institutions being thrown in relief side by side with western ideals and institutions’ and whatever the subject of discussion Satish Chandra always drew attention to ‘man’s moral values, self-sacrifice and patriotism.’ The Moral and Religious training class was conducted by one Pandit Nilkantha Goswami who explained the Gita to the youth in a simple manner giving them the essence of the deep spiritual thought contained in its verses.\textsuperscript{263} Between July 1902 and July 1905 the Dawn Society had attracted around five hundred students; in this sense the Society prepared practically 

the initial ground for the movement of national education to pick-up around October-November 1905, the inputs and organization of the Society were instrumental in giving the support required for the movement to gather momentum, one may say that the data and experiences of the organization in the field of organizing national education proved useful when it was being considered to start the movement on a larger scale.

The next logical outcome was the Indian Universities Act of 1904 passed on the basis of the Report of the Universities Commission of 1902. Among the changes suggested by the Act was the ‘enlargement of the functions of the university’, making the size of the of Senate ‘manageable’, provisions for ‘stricter conditions for the affiliation of colleges to a university’, the point ‘that all affiliated colleges should be periodically inspected by the Syndicate in order to see that a proper standard of efficiency is being maintained’ and the requiring of Government approval for ‘affiliation and disaffiliation of colleges’ the introduction of the provision of election of Fellows etc. Indian opinion received the Universities Act ‘with a violent outburst of indignation’, some interpret this reaction due to a wrong reading of the provisions of the Act inspired by the atmosphere of distrust that Curzon had encouraged by his behaviour towards Indian public opinion.

266 Ibid., p.253. According to Naik & Nurullah, the Act had its positive aspects and was largely an administrative measure with the aim of making ‘the administration of universities more efficient than it had hitherto been’ and they point out that the Act did succeed in this mandate, the Senates became more manageable and efficient, the ‘stricter conditions of affiliation and the arrangement for periodical inspection made it difficult for new colleges to spring into existence’ and led to the removal of the weaker non-performing ones, they also point out, interestingly, that the growth of Indian private enterprise in education was not adversely affected by the Act instead the growth of colleges conducted by Indians ‘was far more rapid after 1904 than before it. The other positive aspect as pointed out by them was that the Act ‘made the Government of India sanction the first grants to Indian universities’ and that fears of the Indian opinion that the Act would ‘sabotage Indian private enterprise’ in education proved unfounded. The Act ‘did not throw the monopoly of Indian education into European hands any more than what they already had’ was what has been discerned by Naik & Nurullah. [pp.255-56] It may however be pointed out that the
Anyhow, among the main areas of Indian opposition to the Act were the following issues: it was believed that the provision for the University to become a teaching centre would not be implemented in right-earnest, regarding the election of Fellows it was felt that the seats marked for election were too few and that the professors who the real stakeholders of the University were kept away from participation in the election, the small number of Fellows fixed by the Act was seen to be a ploy to ‘create a majority for Europeans in the constitution of Indian Universities’, stricter provisions for college affiliations were also seen negatively because it was seen in the light of the argument that the government was trying to control education. All provisions of the Act that gave ‘more powers to the Government in the administration of the Universities’ was opposed as they were seen to be the outer manifestations of an innate tendency for imperialist domination of the national mind. Curzon’s reform in the collegiate education level saw the allocation of ‘larger financial assistance’ to private colleges ‘in order to enable them to come to the higher standard expected under the new university regulations’ and to achieve better standards of libraries, laboratories and hostels.

What needs to be examined is Curzon’s attempt to ensure Governmental control of private enterprises in education, especially in the secondary section where the Government tried to ensure that improvement took place simultaneously with the increase of greater control. The Government tried to control the private enterprises through a number of measures. Between 1882 and 1902, the two decades in focus, the screening of private Indian initiatives in education did become tighter and that it is well known that national schools spawned by the national education movement and at times founded by uncompromising opponents of the administration were selectively targeted.

268 Ibid., p. 257.
Government as per the earlier recommendations of the Indian Education Commission followed the policy of regulating only those institutions which asked for grants-in-aid and allowed those that did not ask for financial assistance to develop freely according to their ideas. These two decades therefore saw the structured guidelines for aided institutions and no serious effort was made to regulate the unaided ones. This policy was altered and it was stated that all private institutions aided or unaided must be brought under the purview of Government control. The Government Resolution of 1904 clearly explained this policy thus:

‘Whether these schools are managed by public authority or by private persons, and whether they received aid from public funds or not, the Government is bound in the interests of the community to see that the education provided in them is sound. It must, for example, satisfy itself in each case that a secondary school is actually wanted; that its financial stability is assured; that its managing body, where there is one, is properly constituted; that it teaches the proper subjects up to a proper standard; that due provision has been made for the instruction, health, recreation, and discipline of pupils; that the teachers are suitable as regards character, number, and qualifications; and that the fees to be paid will not involve such competition with any existing schools as will be unfair and injurious to the interests of education. Such are the conditions upon which alone schools should be eligible to receive grants-in-aid or to send up pupils to compete or, or receive pupils in enjoyment of, Government scholarship; and schools complying with them will be ranked as ‘recognised’ schools.\(^{269}\)

\(^{269}\) Naik & Nurullah., op.cit., p. 258-59.
The provisions for control as is evident from the resolution were rather elaborate and took into consideration almost all administrative aspects and the rider for recognition at the end in a sense ensured that most private educational enterprises veered round to acceding to control and to seeking official recognition, this ensured their pupils a reasonably safe academic process and a secured future in terms of job prospects which they saw that the national education institutions were unable to ensure. It was perhaps this aspect of the Act that, it could be said, slowed down the growth of the national education movement, limited its sweep, prevented its influence from percolating to all sections of society and finally made it compromise and turn into another stereotyped educational institution with no urge to bring about an epochal change or innovation in the educational system of the nation. The Indian Universities Act of 1904 made all universities frame regulation for recognition of schools which desired to present pupils for matriculation examinations under universities. These regulations ‘laid down the conditions which must be fulfilled by a recognised secondary school’ and prevented the appearing in such examinations of candidates from the unrecognised category of institutions. The benefits of recognition were enlarged so as to make the seeking of recognition appealing to private institutions; it was laid down that Departmental recognition will entitle an institution to ‘receive a grant-in-aid from Government, send pupils for Government examinations’ including Government technical schools’ the grant-in-aid to recognised private schools was increased. Those private institutions wanting recognition would value them because of the advantages it gave in terms of grants-in-aid and for the purpose of being allowed to avail of the matriculation examination scheme. But because there remained a large number of private institutions which were not overtly bothered about recognition or
grants-in-aid and therefore did not the pursue the path of seeking recognition a devise had to be planned in order to subjugate these schools into the control orbit, this was done ‘by prohibiting automatic transfers of pupils from unrecognised to recognised schools’. The Director of Public Instruction (D.P.I.) Madras, for example, noted around 1902-07 the benefits of such a move, ‘The rule was quite effective for the purpose,’ he observed, ‘it closed to the pupils of the unrecognised schools admission to a recognised school and consequently to the Matriculation and Upper Secondary Examination, and under present conditions no secondary school which does not lead to one or other of these examinations can hope to succeed’270 This aspect of the control drawn up with its larger effect in mind was again perhaps one of the important intervention which stunted the growth of national education institutions that were part of the larger Swadeshi movement in Bengal. Under these stringent regulations – which if carefully examined lend credence to the contention that they were done with a political motive in mind – the nascent national schools of the national education movement could not respectfully survive because the terms and benefits of affiliation that the Council gave could never have matched those of the State, hence they proved less attractive to the majority of the populace who were mainly concerned with a secured future rather an uncertain one under a nationalist educational dispensation.

In the area of primary education Curzon emphasized ‘expansion side by side with improvement.’ This was done because he felt that expansion in the area of primary education has been slow and its requirement at present was therefore urgent and he also identified the inadequacy of grants as the principle reason for this slow expansion and sanctioned ‘large non-recurring grants to primary education’ as well as recurring grants.

This policy led to a large increase in primary schools and pupils. Between 1901-2 and 1911-12, the number of recognised primary schools went up from 93,604 to 1,18,262 as against 82,916 in 1881-82 and the number of pupils in the above schools increased from 30,76,671 in 1901-02 to 48,06,736 as against 20,61,541 in 1881-82, the full effects of Curzon’s policies were noticeable by 1911-12.\(^{271}\) This again shows that the Government recognised school remained throughout the preferred institution for the large majority, especially during the period when the national education movement was being initiated.\(^{272}\) Among the agendas of Curzon’s reform for education especially at the primary level was the introduction of a more structured training for primary teacher’s, a revision of curricula which he wished to be enriched, of course according to the State’s understanding of the needs, the desire to include agriculture as a subject at the primary level in the rural areas, the desire to see the kindergarten method become more common and the universalisation of physical education etc. He could not achieve much in terms of reform in this area but in terms of expansion his initiatives were successful to a large extent. The concept of agricultural education was given a shape by Curzon’s initiatives, the principle that ‘every important province in India must have its own Agricultural College’ with proper staff and equipment was his contribution. It would also be interesting to see what his ideas were on moral education and training. The issue of religious education was discussed at the Simla Conference; the tradition that State schools must remain secular was well established. The Education Commission of 1882-83 had prescribed a ‘moral primer or text-book’ at the college level, this Curzon brushed

\(^{271}\) Naik & Nurullah., op.cit., pp. 262-63.

\(^{272}\) It must, however, also be pointed out that this re-schooling of the Indian society was taking place after the effective decimation of the indigenous Indian system of education had been effectuated by the colonial power. That system did have a wide ambit which included pupils from all strata & class of society.
aside as inadequate, ‘If pupils can cram Euclid,’ he said, ‘there is nothing to prevent them from cramming ethics.’ The Conference therefore examined the question of how an education system that was secular could realize moral and spiritual values. Curzon’s Resolution on Educational Policy (1904) looked at the issue in the following manner:

‘…In Government institutions the instruction is, and must continue to be, exclusively secular. In such cases the remedy for the evil tendencies…is to be sought, not so much in any formal methods of teaching conduct by means of moral text-books or primers of personal ethics, as in the influence of carefully selected and trained teachers, the maintenance of a high standard of discipline, the institution of well-managed hostels, the proper selection of text-books, such as biographies, which teach by example, and above all in the association of teachers and pupils in the common interests of their daily life.’

It must be mentioned here that indigenous model of value-moral education remained overlooked. In their efforts to supplant the indigenous education system which they considered to be undemocratic and obsolete the colonial planners did not as much as pay causal heed to models in it on which other frameworks could be grafted.

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273 Naik & Nurullah, op.cit., pp. 264, 265, 266.
274 Joseph Bara of the Educational Records Research Unit (ERRU), Jawaharlal Nehru University, in his ‘Colonialism and Educational Fragmentation in India’ puts up a resolute argument regarding the indigenous system of Indian education which he says was far more socially mobile and democratic than was projected or assumed to be by the colonizers. Among a number of points he makes in the essay is the one on the pre-colonial Indian education-system not being devoid of value-based morals. He quotes F.Keay’s A History of Education in India and Pakistan to support his argument that value-based morals were ‘nurtured and practiced by the general literate population mainly in the family, and passed on from generation to generation.’ He also points out that M.Elphinstone (1779-1859, Scottish statesman and historian, later Governor of Bombay, associated actively with administration in India especially the educational aspect) favoured the rehabilitation of those morals and values which he found prevalent in the then Indian society, he felt that nothing extraneous could or ought to be done to improve the morals of the people ‘except by improving their education…there exist in the Hindu languages many tales and fables that would be generally read and that would circulate sound morals. There must be religious books tending more directly to the same end. If many of these were printed and distributed cheaply or gratuitously, the
The nationalist Indian criticism of the Act of 1904 was stringent and continued to gather momentum in a section; this would finally culminate in the formation of the National Council of Education and the founding of the National College. The regular critics were the journals and newspapers representing nationalist opinions. Annie Besant in an article published in the Dawn in January 1906, asked the Indians to take the “question of education into their hands.” She felt that this had become necessary ‘in consequence of the late University Act’ which was likely to render higher education very very costly’ and would thus exclude from its purview “the very class that demands it most urgently” and would “shut the doors of the University to many brilliant students in India who would do their country very good services.”

It was perhaps Motilal Ghose (1847-1922), founder-editor of the Amrita Bazar Patrika and later a nationalist associate of Sri Aurobindo, who voiced the overall nationalist Indian opinion towards this Act. In an analysis in the Amrita Bazar Patrika, Ghose observed that first of all the whole Act was based on the realization that growth of education led to the growth of political consciousness and therefore the educational system itself had to be revamped. The Act according to Ghose ‘was designed to check unofficial control of education. [But] It led, on the contrary, to the officialisation of the whole educational machinery’ and the drastic reduction of the native influences. The other point that Ghose made was that the educational policy enumerated by the Act ‘was not intended to give to the young students any useful or solid knowledge, whether scientific, technical or literary. Even before

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275 Origins of the National Education Movement, op.cit. pp. 15, 16.
1904,’ complained Ghose, ‘the textbooks taught in the schools had been too numerous for the young students, but their numbers had been [now] practically increased…by doing away with a specified course for the Entrance Examination so far as English was concerned. The pass mark in English under the new Act was raised from 33 per cent to 37 per cent.’ This heightening of standards, Ghose felt, was meant to act as ‘a brake upon high percentage of passes and to arrest the rapid expansion of higher education.’ According to him when the pass mark was 33 percent 50 percent of the appearing candidates faced elimination now that it was raised to 37 he was certain that about 80 or 90 percent shall face the same fate. He feared that in the higher examinations the rates of failures also would be correspondingly higher. The portals of higher education thus was to be effectively closed to Indian aspirations, the number of those failing in the entrance examinations would annually increase and ‘our country will be filled with tens of thousands of half-educated men belonging to respectable classes, who will either be useless or dangerous members of the society.’

This is how the educational scenario established itself during the Curzonian period in India, this was to be followed by the momentous partition of Bengal a year later, which would further galvanize the nationalist sentiments and give lead to a movement which would have education as one of its cornerstones and would inspire the founding of the first national school in 1905, the National College in 1906 and would finally bring Sri Aurobindo to the province to give shape to a number of nationalist policies and programmes that were to be implemented in course of the country’s struggle for freedom.

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As discussed earlier, Sri Aurobindo came to Bengal in 1906 having made the decision of relinquishing his post at the Baroda State Service. He came to observe the development of political movements and programmes that had been initiated post the partition of Bengal in 1905. The major events in the area of national education that had taken place prior to Sri Aurobindo’s arrival in Bengal are worth noting because each of them pushed the movement further towards greater strength. The Swadeshi movement was gaining momentum and the ‘students proved to be the chief props and pillars of the Swadeshi and Boycott movement from the beginning.’ Many of them prompted by the leaders took part and gave lead to many of the movements of the Swadeshi period. The young scholars who had gathered around Satish Chandra Mukherjee also resolved to boycott the M.A. examinations of the Government controlled Calcutta University and they gave a lead to the agitation for boycotting the ‘officialised University.’ The Government took serious note of these developments and realized that the leaders’ principle intention was to get the students actively on their side in this movement against partition; large number of students both in the city of Calcutta and in the moffussil took the oath of Swadeshi and Boycott. The students’ active participation in the movement helped to broad-base the twin concepts of Swadeshi and Boycott with the Government deciding to weaken this support pillar through the now well known Carlyle Circular – a circular issued over the signature of the Officiating Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal R.W.Carlyle.

Circular which first appeared on 22 October, 1905 in the Statesman warned that students involving themselves in political agitation and activity in institutions ‘assisted or countenanced by the Government’ shall face disciplinary action and the schools and colleges ‘concerned will forfeit their grants-in-aid and the privilege of competing for scholarship holders, and the University will be asked to disaffiliate’ these institutions and if the authorities were unable to sanitize their respective institutions they were to immediately submit a report to the District Magistrate attaching a list of the disruptive boys. The district superintendents of police were directed to instruct their local police stations to report of any misconduct of boys in the nature political agitation or participation.\textsuperscript{279} The nationalist opinion burst forth on this issue, it saw it as a first step at strangulating the movement, curbing the basic freedom of students and in trying to take control by force and through intimidation of young minds which had begun questioning publicly the status quo of colonial rule in India.

This gave a fillip to the political movement and the demand for establishing an independent system of education began to be voiced in numerous public meetings that began to be regularly convened to condemn the circular. On 24\textsuperscript{th} October 1905, a large public meeting was held in Calcutta where a number of Sri Aurobindo’s future political associates such as Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932) and Shyam Sundar Chakravarty (1869-1932) among others addressed the gathering and demanded the repealing of the offensive circular and the initiation of a movement that would start a national education system. Hemendra Prasad Ghose (1876-1962) another political associate of Sri Aurobindo and one who assisted him on the \textit{Bande Mataram} editorial board also pleaded in a letter addressed to an English daily, that the teaching of boys must be undertaken without

government help and that serious consideration ought to be given to the founding of a national University. This was followed by the now famous ‘general meeting’ to protest the issuance of the circular on October 27th with Tagore in the Chair and attended by a galaxy of nationalist leaders were present, among them Satish Chandra Mukherjee, Krishna Kumar Mitra (1852-1936) Sri Aurobindo’s maternal uncle as well as political associate, Bipin Chandra Pal and Monoranjan Guhathakurta (1858-1919) a close political co-worker of Sri Aurobindo, proprietor of the Bengali nationalist newspaper Navasakti, which Sri Aurobindo planned to revive just before his arrest in 1908 and the one who funded the revolutionary party and whose son was to bear the brunt of police brutality during the break -up of the Barisal Provincial Conference in April 1906. It is to be observed here that a number of Sri Aurobindo’s political associate some of whom were already in touch with him were part of the national education demand since its inception. It can therefore be assumed that Sri Aurobindo was au courant with the educational issues then being worked out in the province though he did not play an active role in their propagation as yet. This in turn was followed by the first open act of educational defiance when in protest against a circular which prohibited the students of the Rangpur Zilla School [East Bengal] to participate in ‘boycotting, picketing’ and under whose provision the defiant students were fined and expelled, the students of the Zilla school and their sympathizers decided to act independently and boycotted school. In Calcutta meanwhile opinion was being mobilized to extend moral support to the struggling students of Rangpur. A students’ meeting attended by Satish Chandra, Manoranjan Guhathakurta, Hemendra Prasad Ghose and others resolved to form the Anti-Circular Society, Sachindra Prasad Basu a 4th year student of the City College moved the
resolution for the establishment of the society which would have Krishna Kumar Mitra as
treasurer and his son Sukumar Mitra (1885-1973), who acted as Sri Aurobindo’s
messenger during the nationalist phase and among those who would later organise his
ship journey to Pondicherry, was to be its assistant secretary. Sachindra Prasad along
with other student co-workers of his rushed to Rangpur and on 7th November 1905 the
people of Rangpur led by eminent citizens convened a public conference where it was
decided to organize the education of the Rangpur students and to start a national
institution on national lines to impart education. As a result, the Rangpur National School
was started on November 8 1905, the first national school to begin functioning openly.\(^{280}\)
The first landmark in the political demand for educational reform had been achieved, we
shall not attempt to scrutiny the viability or stability of such an institution or how much it
was fanned by political sentiments and passion but instead point out that a review of
these major historical events that lent weight to the demand for a national education
system is relevant if one is to understand the link between national education and Sri
Aurobindo’s championing of the issue as a political programme in his overall scheme of
nationalist action. But it is apparent from Sri Aurobindo’s writings on education that he
did not merely see it as a political programme that would add weight to political demands
but as an important area that schemes of national reconstruction would have to take into
account and work out.

Our position that Sri Aurobindo was observing and formulating his stands and
thoughts on the political issues in Bengal is corroborated by the fact that a number of
articles by him, most of them incomplete and unpublished, on the political issues of the
day have come to light. A scan of these writing of his during this period of 1904-1906,
\(^{280}\) *Origins of the National Education Movement*, pp. 24-29.
though they do not contain any direct reference to the educational demand, show that Sri Aurobindo was indeed keenly studying events in Bengal during the time of the partition. And it was during this period that the national education movement also gained momentum.

It would however be relevant and necessary to point out here that Sri Aurobindo did not play a direct role in initiating the demand for national education; his service under the Baroda State made him initially an observer and an occasional participant in Bengal politics and prevented him from active and open action. As mentioned earlier, initiating Jatindranath Banerji and directing his brother and fellow revolutionary Barindra Kumar Ghose (1880-1959) to set up a revolutionary group in Bengal and visiting the province periodically to assess the progress of his programmes was all that Sri Aurobindo could do for a while. His observation and study period at Baroda enabled him to plan and prepare possible courses of action to be made applicable in future to the political movement in other provinces. His espousing later a philosophy of national education and his talks and

281 The series started off with an ‘open letter to those who despair of their country’ entitled ‘Unity’, another was written ‘during the early stage of the agitation against the partition of Bengal’ around 1904 and dwelt on ‘The Proposed Reconstruction of Bengal – Partition or Annihilation?’ in it mentioning Curzon, Sri Aurobindo wrote that [Curzon was] ‘a vain man loving praise and sensitive to dislike and censure…[and that] he [was] a statesman of unusual genius who is following a subtle and daring policy in which immense issues hang…’ Around 1905 the unsigned pamphlet ‘Bhawani Mandir’ written by Sri Aurobindo ‘to train people [not for] assassination but for revolutionary preparation of the country’ appeared and created a sensation. September 24th of that year saw ‘Principal Aravind Ghose’ preside over a Swadeshi meeting in Baroda, and propose a second resolution in support of the Swadeshi movement with the following words ‘…The present wave of support for the movement is very strong, and we should make comprehensive efforts to prevent the wave from receding . We must ensure that the movement is sustained.’ The report of this resolution was published in the Kesari of Poona on 3rd October 1905 displaying again Sri Aurobindo’s early and continuous link with Lokmanya Tilak. Sri Aurobindo also began drafting a proposal during the period 1905-06 to set up ‘A Sample-Room for Swadeshi Articles’ at Baroda, where Swadeshi products could be displayed, ‘1. I propose that a permanent sample-room should be maintained by the Baroda Industrial Association in its own offices fulfilling the following purposes (1) an ocular demonstration to the public and the merchants of the number and kinds of goods they can have from their own country; (2) a standing advertisement of Swadeshi articles procurable in the local market; (3) a register of information available to all interested in the industrial development of the country…’ As mentioned, most of these were not published, maybe constrained by the terms of his services Sri Aurobindo kept these to himself but they certainly reflect his active interest in the developments in Bengal. [ vide CWSA vol.6, section: Writings and A Resolution -1893-1906, 2002]
writings on the issue point to the fact that he intended to give an entirely different turn to the educational discourse in the country and had realised that unless a movement for a thorough change of the educational system was initiated no meaningful effect of education would be ultimately felt. However, his preoccupation with politics, his incarceration, his almost single-handed effort at reviving nationalist politics post his release and his eventual departure for Pondicherry left him little time to focus on creating such a movement and it was left to others – mainly Gandhi and Tagore – to at least keep the educational problem and the demand for a new system highlighted throughout the struggle for freedom. But by showcasing the need for a national system of education which would first learn to look at the learner as an individual – a soul with a distinct destiny and mission to be fulfilled – who needed an altogether different level of approach and handling and not be seen merely as a cog meant to run the huge colonial machinery, and by continuously highlighting this perspective as a vital component of the nationalist education demands, Sri Aurobindo did his part for the issue to gradually gain a different and original dimension.

**IV.4 Debate of Ideas – Analysing Indian Education: Bipin Chandra Pal and Satish Chandra Mukherjee**

Satish Chandra Mukherjee and Bipin Chandra Pal, both largely neglected figures today in nationalist educational discourse and historiography, were contemporaries of Sri Aurobindo in Bengal. Sri Aurobindo worked with both briefly but closely, the inclusion therefore of some key aspects of their educational thoughts may perhaps enrich the
content of the present discussion and also enable one to develop an idea of the prevailing approaches to education in Bengal just before Sri Aurobindo’s stay there.

The demand for a review of the existing system of colonial education, suggestions for reforms in it had already begun to be voiced before Sri Aurobindo came to Bengal to actively participate in the politics of the province. And as observed, one of the most effective, systematic, erudite and discerning voice in support of this demand was that of Satish Chandra Mukherjee’s. It would be useful therefore to attempt to focus in some measure Satish Chandra’s educational thought of this period, for no discussion on the nationalist educational demand can be complete without taking into account, at least to a certain extent, the role Satish Chandra played to underscore and accentuate that demand. It may appear that I have given a disproportionate representation to Satish Chandra and to his views on Indian education – but it cannot be otherwise, if one is to really understand the educational issues of the age when Sri Aurobindo was politically active and also because Satish Chandra himself had prolifically written on the theme of education, perhaps more than any of his contemporaries.

A reading of some of his writings on the issue reveals that he had begun early to study the system and diagnosing the ills affecting it. From the beginning of his activism Satish Chandra ensured that his journal became a forum for discussing freely new thoughts on education, attacking cogently the existing system and suggesting reforms in it. His Catuspathi days in the 1890s were characterized by the attempt at reviving the dynamic and defining aspects of what he termed Hindu education. His belief that there existed perennial principles in the classical Hindu educational discourse which could be successfully implemented in the educational system of his time so as to make it truly
suited to the Indian character and temperament and requirements and make it intelligible to the vast majority, drove him to activism on that front. In fact, this belief had influenced him to start a parallel alternative educational institution - patterned on a certain indigenous institution of education then gradually starving to extinction – perhaps the first of its kind which experimented with an alternative model. Tagore was to start his educational experiments a few years later. The early issues of the Dawn contained mostly articles on Indian philosophy and scriptures, it reflected Satish Chandra’s quest of trying to reinterpret a number of ancient concepts in modern light. What is marked however, by its absence in Satish Chandra’s approach, is the attempt at retrogressive thinking, the constant endeavour instead was to integrate classical educational concepts and if possible aspects of indigenous educational structures to present day situations and suit them to present day demands. The belief that the sustaining concepts of a classical Indian education thought were to be reintegrated under present conditions was firmly held by him. As early as 1898 we see him comparing the ‘Principles of University Education in the East and the West’. The Hindu and the Western ideal of education he observes seemed ‘to differ as poles asunder’, the Hindu ideal insisted on the development of the intellect ‘as a means to an end, the end being the development of the higher, spiritual nature of man’ while in the West even though education is a means to an end, the end there is ‘greater worldly comfort, greater worldly prospects, acquisition of wealth and power’.\(^{282}\) He establishes this as the fundamental difference between the two. The ancient sages of India made ‘all-conduct part of an all-comprehensive scheme of education’ and this he equates with the ‘spiritual discipline known as Karma-yoga (work-discipline)’.

thus perhaps pointing out that the Indian concept of education encompassed the whole life and its activities. In the same piece he quotes a passage from Dr. Bhandarkar’s\textsuperscript{283} convocation address as Vice-Chancellor of Bombay University, which succinctly defines the complete goal of education in the ancient Indian context. Referring to a saying of the ancient Indian sage Patanjali, that ‘a man who does not store up wealth [who retains only so much as can be contained in a jar], who is not greedy, and who disinterestedly and without any further object acquires proficiency in some branch of learning’ Bhandarkar formulates the key concept of education in the classical Indian tradition thus, ‘\textit{The idea, therefore, is that he that devotes himself to the pursuit of knowledge or truth for its own sake and disdains mere worldly prosperity is a man of education and culture.}’\textsuperscript{284} Satish Chandra agrees with this formulation and his insistence on reviving the core ideals of ancient Indian education is evident throughout the article. The article is, to my mind, an important one because it not only tries to discuss the positive aspects of an indigenous Indian system of education but also makes a brief survey of existing University systems in Europe and of their key objectives and then reproduces a long passage from Michael Foster’s\textsuperscript{285} address at the John Hopkins University where Foster discusses some ideas and

\textsuperscript{283} Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar (R.G.Bhandarkar) (1837-1925) Orientalist, scholar, social reformer. Was Professor of Sanskrit at the Deccan College, Poona and appointed Vice-Chancellor of Bombay University in 1893. He made pioneering contributions to the study of Sanskrit and Indian antiquities, his elementary books of Sanskrit were in wide use, his lectures on philology and books on the history of the Deccan were widely read and remained authoritative sources for a long time. Recipient of a number of awards Bhandarkar sent a paper to the International Congress of Orientalist in London in 1876 and attended the Vienna session in 1886, where he made valuable contributions. [Source: S.P. Sen ed., \textit{Dictionary of National Biography, Vol.1}, 1972.]

\textsuperscript{284} \textit{The Dawn}, September, 1898, op. cit., p. 214, italics in the original.

\textsuperscript{285} Sir Michael Foster (1836-1907) British physiologist, graduated in medicine at the University of London, 1867 teacher of practical physiology at University College London, between 1881 and 1903 played a vital role in the organization and development of the Cambridge biological school. During this period as one of the secretaries of the Royal Society he ‘exercised a wide influence on the study of biology in Britain’ and was also elected to represent the University of London in Parliament. [Source: \textit{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Foster\_\(\text{physiologist}\)}]
methods followed at the Cambridge University. By highlighting this lecture Satish Chandra probably wanted to indicate the deficiencies the Indian universities contained in their workings. Talking of the training of the mind, Satish Chandra observes that ‘all mental discipline subordinates itself to requirements of the age’ which for this age was a race ‘for greater worldly enjoyment, greater worldly power.’ He argues that though the development of the aesthetic side of life, the development of the ability to appreciate expressions of beauty in art is a legitimate objective in ‘all higher education’ it seemed to be hardly an important objective with ‘most men in the West.’ And in the context where this appreciation is present there is also present an element of ‘a suspicion’ a questioning as to whether the development of this appreciation leads one to true enjoyment as compared to the enjoyment felt by ‘those whose thoughts are so earth-bound, so prosaic…’  

Indian universities, Satish Chandra castigates, are ‘copies of copies’ because English universities were in themselves bad copies and therefore Universities in India suffered a ‘double taint’ – first because they were ‘bad imitations’ and second because the originals themselves required reorientation, further perfection before they would be capable of absorbing the ‘true functions of education’ which was the aim of developing ‘not a lordly animal with a thousand wants (which must always be distinguished from activities) and tossed at every turn by the angry gusts of passion, - but the evolution of a higher nature in man which lifts him up to the level of a god.’

Since the Indian universities did not have even remotely such an objective inspired by India’s own tradition and heritage, Satish Chandra felt the absence of a sound intellectual and

\[\text{\textsuperscript{286} The Dawn, September, 1898, op. cit., pp. 214-15.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{287} Ibid., p. 215.}\]

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philosophical base to the system of education in the country and believed that its adverse impact on the Indian mind had begun to accelerate.

Comparing next, Universities of Germany and England, Satish Chandra points out that the German universities were far ‘ahead of their other continental rivals’ the reasons being that these produced ‘greater original work’ had ‘greater freedom of teaching, greater freedom of learning, a wider keener fresher intellectual atmosphere’ compared to English universities. He traces similarities of the German system with the indigenous Indian education system of the *tols* or *catuspathies*. Original work rather than results in a competitive examination was what received appreciation and paved the way to ‘a higher social position’ under this system. And according to him original work in such a system was possible because the learner was placed under the influence of teachers who ‘devoted their lives to the cause of education’ who passed ascetic lives in order to be able to surrender whole-heartedly to the ‘cause of higher individual and collective life.’ Here Satish Chandra points to another fundamental difference, in his opinion, between the ideal of ancient Hindu education and the Western education. The teacher - *Acarya* in the Indian context represented a spirit of self-sacrifice, he did not charge the students for the knowledge he imparted instead he bore the expense of their education ‘out of his own pocket’ and it was this ideal of disinterestedness, of self-sacrifice and dedication to a cause that attracted learners to the *Acarya* - and they in turn lived under the tutelage of

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288 English universities in India and the colleges under their affiliations during this period and even later to a great extent were examining bodies and coaching centres and the principle complaint against these bodies by Indian education reformers was that they did not encourage sufficient initiative, new research and originality. Satish Chandra himself was to write later [starting from April, 1902 in The Dawn] a detailed exposition on what ailed the university system in India and would suggest possible reforms. We have not tried and attempted to get other views on systems of universities in the West -supporting or contrary- because our intention here is to simply read Satish Chandra’s analysis of the educational problem, nevertheless it is to be observed that in The Dawn as well as in other journals of the period regular articles did appear comparing the western universities and their poor replicas in India.
the master, willingly submitted to the system that he drew up for them and served him one-pointedly.\textsuperscript{289} The whole of life itself, with all its activities included were part of the learning process. The householder - \textit{grhasta}- aware of the sacrifice and dedication of the \textit{Acarya} supported him in his mission by ensuring that ‘his home was always full of the necessaries of life which were always left at the throng of pupils by whom he was surrounded even as a father by his dutiful children.’ Satish Chandra makes a historically valid observation here, that of the existence of an organic link between the community and the system of schooling. The system of education did not function in isolation from the community but was sustained by it.\textsuperscript{290} It was this organic link that made the education

\textsuperscript{289} \textit{The Dawn}, September, 1898 op. cit., p. 215.
\textsuperscript{290} Educational records of the colonial administration prove that the community sustained the pre-British indigenous system of education in India. [See. Political Agenda of Education, op. cit.] One also perceives that the teacher under this system, which was still free of the examination –passing demand, had the liberty to formulate his own teaching material and the space to implement it according to local needs and conditions. The system of instruction in basic skills was widely prevalent in India before the ‘colonial control of the economy was established’ Teachers were revered. William Adam’s schools survey of Bengal in 1835 revealed that the ‘teacher exercised autonomy in choosing what was worth teaching and in deciding how to teach it.’ The curriculum usually comprised of an ‘acquaintance with culturally significance texts, and the learning of skills’ that were perceived to be useful to the village society. [Krishna Kumar, Origins of the Textbook Culture in \textit{What is Worth Teaching}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed., 2004, p. 27.] The organic link and teacher’s autonomy were two crucial aspects that made education then relevant and meaningful. Therefore it may be perhaps safely concluded that Satish Chandra was not off the mark when he describes the indigenous Indian education system as being supported by the community and encouraging original work because of teachers who had the freedom to function and who had dedicated their life to the cause of education. Noted Gandhian scholar (late) Dharampal who based his study of pre-British indigenous education in India on primary archival sources observes in his pioneering work (cited above) \textit{The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century}, that education in the traditional institutions of the \textit{pathshalas, madrassahs, gurukulas} ‘ were kept alive by revenue contributions by the community including illiterate peasants’ and was termed as \textit{shiksha} and included the ideas of \textit{prajna, shil} and \textit{samadhi} – [i.e. the system it could be said, focused on character building and refining and not mere information gathering]. He calls these institutions as the ‘watering holes of the culture of traditional communities’ and therefore argues that the term ‘school’ for these institutions do not really convey the role that they actually played in Indian society. [Dharampal, op. cit., pp. 17, 18.] Discussing the fiscal arrangement that could make such a widespread network of schools possible in the pre-British period Dharampal points to the existence of a ‘sophisticated operative fiscal arrangements of the pre-British Indian polity’. This fiscal arrangement, he argues, had for long assigned a substantial portion of the revenue for a variety of public works. According to him the arrangement ‘seems to have stayed more or less intact through all the previous political turmoils’ and thus made sustenance and functioning of such a educational network possible. It was the colonial system’s introduction of a centralization of revenue and politics that led to the eventual collapse of such an arrangement and the subsequent decay in the socio-economic life and in the education system of the country. [Dharampal, op. cit., p. 21] This perception based on primary records again supports Satish Chandra’s position that Indian education was supported by the community. It is interesting to note here that
imparted meaningful to the learners. We have supported this position with historical evidences in earlier sections.

Pointing briefly at the education system in France, Satish Chandra observes that the ‘higher University education’ in that country suffers because of its being clubbed with ‘professional or civil service training or equipment.’ He divides the French educational institutions in two sectors, one, the Academies, which he observes ‘fulfils the functions of a true university’, that is, encourages original research, innovative teaching and the other the ‘so-called Universities’ that are in reality Government institutions ‘that prepare and test candidates’ in order to fill various administrative departments and posts.\(^{291}\)

Commenting on the Indian Universities he then observes that they had been successfully fulfilling the ‘functions of Government Institutions’ by preparing candidates for Government service and ‘facilitating the work of the administration of the country’\(^{292}\) thus starkly indicating the principle objective of the education system in colonial India. But this stage, Satish Chandra felt, was reaching its end and it was thus imperative that Universities themselves should realise the need for a reorientation and prepare themselves to play their true roles. Having established a ‘line of demarcation between the Western and Eastern methods of education’ Satish Chandra highlights the peculiarities of University education at Cambridge by quoting Michael Foster’s passage which discusses Cambridge University life of the past and the present. In showcasing this passage Satish Chandra probably tried to elucidate features that really make a university the centre of learning and life – features he felt the Indian version of the British system sorely lacked.

\(^{291}\) *The Dawn*, September, 1898 op. cit., p. 216.
\(^{292}\) Ibid.
The recognition of the training in the University as ‘a preparation for practical life’ was one of the features that struck Foster most, both among students and teachers. The dominant occupations of the early social period in England influenced the founding of three faculties – faculties of theology, law and medicine. And the conviction that ‘teaching should be an earnest preparation for practical life’ was firmly held by the teachers.’ Thus the perception that education was meant to prepare man for practical life is seen to be prevalent early. The lack of such a perception in the colonial set-up in India was what Satish Chandra probably tried to put forth by quoting this part.293 The other striking features of the University, as Foster observed them – was the realisation that ‘the work of the University consisted not in the mere acquisition of knowledge, but in the training of the mind.’ The objective was to train the pupil’s mind in thinking and ‘in arriving at conclusions.’ Even the concept of examination then had a different connotation, the concept of a written examination and use of paper was absent. The present system assigns two examiners for hundred students the earlier system assigned nine to each student. The examiners had, what could be termed as discussions rounds with the students, they ‘went in with him and out with him until they satisfied themselves that he knew something, and had gathered something from what had been told to him.’ The final test consisted of putting the student on the ‘stool’ that is to make him debate in public and to draw out his ‘stock of knowledge’ especially to assess his ability to use to it and to demonstrate ‘that his mind had been trained’ simultaneously with his exercise of

293 *The Dawn*, September, 1898 op. cit., p. 217. The Historical Register of the University of Oxford 1220-1888, Oxford, 1888 also indicates that Civil Law, Medicine, Divinity were among the first professorships to be created in 1546 [Source: Dharampal, op. cit., p. 11, a chronological list of professorships created from 1546 onwards at Oxford University]
gathering ‘a certain number of facts.’ The reason for focusing on this passage by Satish Chandra perhaps becomes most evident after this. The present universities in India, he always felt, were exhausting themselves in solely preparing students for examinations, examinations which mostly consisted in testing pieces of information that had been loaded onto the learners mind – just for the sake of success – through the instrument of memory and not genuine understanding. And this became later an important argument of the Indian educationist as well against the pre-university and university system in India. Another feature that was present in the old system according to Foster and as Satish Chandra cites it, was the ‘spirit of inquiry’, ‘a spirit of free inquiry’ prevailed even though the knowledge available was limited. The ‘long – drawn-out discussions’ that the scholars indulged in were an ‘expression of their love of inquiry.’ The nationalist educators complained that it was this spirit of inquiry that was not encouraged by the official Indian education mechanism, Satish Chandra in his later analysis of the education system would repeatedly emphasise this issue. The final ‘striking’ feature that Foster enumerates was that of the university being ‘an open home for all those who wished for learning’, anyone who displayed a ‘promise of benefiting for the instruction given’ there was welcomed and nurtured. Merely an interest in learning was sufficient for enrolment. Thus the features that were at the foundation of the university system in England – the recognition that education must be an earnest preparation for practical life, that the work of the universities was not mere information gathering but the training of the pupil’s mind which could analyse and arrive at conclusions, the concept of examination being based on debates and discussion was a process of essentially trying to

294 The Dawn, September 1898, op. cit., p. 218.
295 Ibid.,
demonstrate that the pupil’s mind had been trained, the encouraging and nurturing of a spirit of free inquiry and the acceptance of all those who evinced a wish for learning – were seen to be conspicuously absent or intentionally discouraged in the colonial version of that education. Perhaps George Birdwood’s encouraging letter of this period – the one cited earlier – convinced Satish Chandra of the relevance and immediacy of the position he had taken, ‘…you will never assimilate and receive real nourishment from any alien culture imposed on you under the compulsion of the drill-sergeant’s cane’, Birdwood had written to Satish Chandra in his letter of 9th September, 1898 (cited above). He encouraged reverting to the classical Sanskrit, Greek and Latin ‘as essential items in every college curriculum’ and interestingly suggested the leaving of English literature ‘for private reading’.  

Satish Chandra provided space to the contents of Birdwood’s letter and kept alive the issues of the exchange through January and February 1900. In an article entitled ‘Sir George Birdwood on the Need for Higher Sanskrit and Vernacular Education in India’ he summarises the contents of Birdwood’s letter citing passages where the latter urges India not to surrender her extant ‘literary and artistic and philosophical and religious’ – in a word her ‘spiritual culture’, and instead to strengthen it and ‘extend its influence’ and then quotes extracts from his answering letter. Birdwood as mentioned earlier and Satish Chandra again points to this argument of his, expresses in the letter his view that India would necessarily be exposed to modifying influences of the West which may prove to be of ‘real’ and ‘lasting good to’ her but that these influences could not be imposed upon her unilaterally as was being done through the ‘Government schools and the not less official

Indian Universities.’ The one point that probably touches Satish Chandra is Birdwoods exhortation of maintaining India’s personality because ‘it was representative of a unique ‘highly developed type of civilisation that can still command the admiration of the world’ that maintaining of the ‘historical personality of the Hindus’ was an important criteria. This Birdwood felt could be done through the revival of ‘classical Sanskrit and literature of the literary Prakṛts, such as Mahratti and Tamil as essential items in every college curriculum in India.’²⁹⁸ But he also believed that Sanskrit being a dead language alive only through dialects that owe their origin to the language could not effectively work towards this preservation. The ‘still living arts’ of India instead could become a ‘far more efficacious rallying centre for the revival of the indigenous and traditional culture of the Hindus’ and thus work towards preserving the Indian personality.

The aim therefore of the whole effort must be, as Satish Chandra summarises, for modern India to ‘fix its eyes more especially on all that is living of its ancient past, all that having proceeded from the pure spring of ancient culture, still preserves its indigenous character and stamps on the present Hindu race a distinctive personality of a strictly beneficent type.’²⁹⁹ This remark perhaps also summarises the whole effort and aim of Satish Chandra’s early educational endeavour. The later approaches saw him drop defining nomenclatures but nevertheless the belief that aspects of Indian past had something to offer to the present restructuring of Indian education remained. Satish Chandra’s letter in answer to Birdwood’s, indicate his thinking on the ‘educational problem in India’ then, it would perhaps be necessary to cite passages from the reply. Satish Chandra agrees with Birdwood’s expressions of delight at ‘every symptom of the

²⁹⁸ The Dawn, January, 1900, p. 168.
²⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 169.
spontaneous revival of the indigenous and traditionary, literary and artistic and philosophical and religious life of India – India of the Hindus’ and feels an equality of sentiments on this count. But he notes that ‘our schools and colleges, such as they are and have been, are getting to be a growing hindrance’ \textsuperscript{300} to this act of spontaneous revival. And here he provides an interesting insight – it seems to him that these existing institutions have ‘outlived their initial stage of usefulness; and that if they were to be of help in the ‘future evolution’ of the country ‘they would have to be remodeled on, or informed by a principle the keynote of which would be a greater help by the people themselves along lines suited to a natural, peaceful, indigenous growth,’ and also aided largely by ‘responsible men in authority.’ \textsuperscript{301} These seem to be themselves keynote views of Satish Chandra on his future course of educational action – the present structures of education were growing outmoded, they needed to be remodeled but with the inclusion and involvement of the people and not decided and imposed by an alien officialdom and it was to encourage natural and indigenous growth and was to have an organic link to the people and the environment; such an effort the authorities could only facilitate. The contentious issue according to Satish Chandra, and one that really created an imbalance, was the fact that Indian schools and colleges were under control of government officials who with the ‘best of motives’ desired to stamp the influence of a culture with which they were familiar ‘at a high speed’ upon the Indian mind and way of life. The process, Satish Chandra argued, was not evolutionary; it was ‘not a growth from within ourselves’ but rather a unilateral imposition from without. He suggests therefore a line of reform

\textsuperscript{300} The Dawn, January, 1900, pp. 169, 70.  
\textsuperscript{301} The Dawn, January, 1900, p. 170.
that must be initiated for a permanent improvement of this structure and for a good that would be ‘stable’ ‘enduring’ and ‘lasting.’

The other impediment towards developing an indigenous system of education was the fact that the Indian universities were being ‘more and more governed’ by a section of countrymen who were themselves products of this enforced culturisation and therefore when something different was to be envisaged, when a ‘more progressive road’ was to be taken, and a ‘larger foresight’ was required, such countrymen were perceived by Satish Chandra to be incapable of taking this initiative. In the present system Satish Chandra saw ‘little of life either in the teachers, or the students, or the University Fellow’ due largely to this enforcement of culture. Everything moved because of a certain momentum, there was life but it was a life which could not really ‘work out its salvation’ because the ‘culture has been imposed’ and thus the activity it engendered was an ‘artificial, delusive’ one which must eventually disappear. Thus the enforcement of culture created an artificial life and representative activity and produced men who where incapable of eventually undertaking any original experiment for the progress of the race. Satish Chandra is careful to point out that he does not ‘deprecate high English Education’ but what he advocates instead is its infusion with a ‘higher informing spirit’, that could only come about by pursuing the comparative method and by the development of ‘a critical spirit’. The method he says is take ‘nothing of English life or civilisation’ on trust, the spirit of approach to these must be one of ‘truthfulness and fairness’ and it must be understood and ‘appreciated in constant reference to the civilization and culture of India’s past’ which he saw to be still providing the ‘motive power for further evolution. It was

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302 The Dawn, January, 1900, op.cit.
303 The Dawn, January, 1900, pp. 170-71.
such a meaning that Satish Chandra held in mind when he spoke of ‘awakening a purer and higher thought’ amongst his Indian countrymen.\textsuperscript{304} The critical and comparative approach was missing in Indian education and Satish Chandra realised that unless this was rectified further degradation could not be inhibited and future regeneration was a near impossibility.

Satish Chandra kept up the debate on educational matters alive through the pages of The Dawn, even though metaphysical and philosophical matters also occupy greater space in its columns. He also encouraged various personalities to air their views on different aspects of education, Indian and Western, reflecting mostly his quest for an alternative system, which could also reflect the best of other systems. The Dawn issue of September 1900 carries an article on the ‘The System of Teaching in Indian Colleges’ and adopts a comparative approach of the system followed in Oxford and Cambridge with the one followed in India, this was one of the adopted approaches in the discourse then, a comparison would perhaps reveal the extent of distortion and dilution that took place in the Indian application of the British system of education. Some of the features that are highlighted and compared are similar to those discussed earlier by Satish Chandra himself.

The writer, Atul Chandra Chatterjee, talks of his first-hand experience of the system in England and complains that ‘even brilliant and promising graduates of foreign universities’ ‘sink in the slough of routine and examinations and are heard no more’ when they migrate to India. The other point of comparison which is still largely relevant in the present Indian educational reform discourse is the large and heterogeneous nature of the class where no attempt is made ‘at individual teaching’ and where the ‘lecture merely

\textsuperscript{304} The Dawn, January, 1900, p. 171.
consists of the paraphrasing of one of the text-books, line by line… Some major afflictions of the Indian system – reliance on and domination of the text-book, unwieldy classes where there was a uniform treatment of a heterogeneous group and the absence of research and serious study – are discussed in great detail in this article. And with the progress of years and the educational debate Satish Chandra himself began to write detailed papers on various aspects of educational reform and re-organisation, a look at these articles reveal that The Dawn did indeed place the entire educational debate on a serious level of measured debate and dialogue. It showed that the indigenous education demand had a sound intellectual base and was not a mere reflexive revivalist action. The series on ‘The System of Classification of Boys in Indian Schools: A Scheme of Reform’ in the January 1901 issue of the Dawn reflected the ingenuity of Satish Chandra and his futuristic perceptions. It also showed that he was not a radical, in fact there was perhaps no need of the radical tenor in the discourse then, and advocated instead the reform of the existing system. It was evident from this series that Satish Chandra was not merely concerned with the reform of higher education in India but also advocated the restructuring of school education. He began the series by recognizing an acute problem, it was the reality that ‘under the present system…of school instruction…boys of widely unequal merit and attainment in very branch of study [were] herded together and treated of as an homogeneous whole and placed under the tuition of one teacher at a time during the different hours of the day’ and that this led to the teachers to ‘gradually cease to take a living interest in their work from a sense of the helplessness of their position’ and the students themselves ‘silently deteriorate or are prevented from rising to the full height of their powers…’ Satish Chandra suggested reforms to such a system; the business of his

\[305\] The Dawn, September 1900, vol.4, pp. 31-37.
paper was to examine one branch of school-instruction, to see whether it was feasible to ‘classify boys into forms or groups for the purposes of most efficient teaching.’ He found the classification of boys into classes, radically vicious and pointed out that the remedies he would suggest ‘will be in the nature of adjustments, leading to greater economy [of energy], instead of waste,’ as it is presently of the energy that is spent on school-work by the tutor and the learner, his suggestions ‘would not necessitate any addition to the tutorial staff, and that they would generally lead to a better organisation of …educational institutions.’

Such a debate had perhaps scarcely been taken up before.

In March 1901 he started his widely discussed series on ‘Education and Examination’ with a review of Max-Muller’s views on education which he felt would be useful to revisit ‘on the eve of some great constitutional changes’ that were going to initiated in the Calcutta University. Quoting the English historian E.A.Freeman (1823-1892) on examination being an evil that made ‘men read not for the attainment of knowledge, but for the object of passing the examination…’ Satish Chandra states the central theme of his discussion in the series. It was the view that:

‘true educational reform in India must principally consist in manning our Indian colleges with original workers and investigators as professors and lecturers, giving them free scope or full liberty to teach according to the best of their lights, or in other words, giving them as much of independent discretion as possible in the work of teaching. And having got together the right sort of men, the genuine scholars, the true thinkers, the true workers and investigators, the function of testing or examining candidates, of rightly appraising their work must be left completely in their hands…’

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Attention must also be eventually paid, and this was to be the first step in initiating
changes of a thoroughgoing nature, to the ‘recruiting of a body of men on adequate pay
who will be able to set a very high standard of teaching in India and will not degenerate
into mere crammers or amateurs.’\textsuperscript{307} This was to be in a sense Satish Chandra’s life
mission in education, the national education institution that he organized was to have
such a body of scholars dedicated to setting a high standard of teaching and research in
the country beyond the routine of examinations. Such scholars were also encouraged to
produce original research work taking into account the living influences of the Indian
past. Satish Chandra’s early writings reflect an attempt at remedying the existing system,
his later actions indicate that he realised that an alternative system was needed which
could work-out the remedies he had in mind. The gradual growth of the nationalist
education demand culminating in the formation of the Bengal National College in 1906
gave him that opportunity. Therefore to him one must look as an initiator of the early
nationalist education discourse in India, one who not only identified and analysed the
symptoms but suggested, to use his own word, remedies; it was, one may safely say,
largely due to his efforts that the early debate on Indian education assumed greater
intellectual and technical structure and substance. He was of one of those dynamic ones
who set the intellectual foundation for the quest of a philosophy of national education.

\textsuperscript{307} \textit{The Dawn}, March, 1901, p. 235.
During 1901 and 1902 Bipin Chandra Pal was as yet a political moderate. On his return to India from England he launched the English weekly ‘New India’, its first issue appearing on August 12, 1901. Launched initially as a vehicle for transmitting and encouraging cultural thoughts and debates New India quickly assumed a wide a readership and ‘transformed into a mighty mouthpiece of resurgent Indian Nationalism’ when it began discussing the major socio-political issues of the day. During the first two years of its existence between 1901 and 1902 the paper focused on and vigorously debated economic and educational issues. The inaugural issue which stated the weekly’s policies, perceptions and areas of focus pointed towards these, it spoke of the economic problem as the ‘most pressing and important’ of all the ‘perplexing problems that confront New India’ and of the educational problem as next in importance to the economic. Setting the tone for the analysis of educational issues Pal succinctly observed in the first issue that, ‘the present system of education is bad, but the cure for bad education is not no education, but good education.’ He then went on to enumerate the fundamental defects of the existing system of education and pointed towards two of them, namely that 1) It is not a national, and 2) that it is not a rational system…’ A flawed economic policy, he argued, was ‘undermining the material basis’ of the country and an ‘irrational educational policy has been emasculating the intellectual and moral life of the nation.’ New India, therefore Pal stated, while taking into account the importance of political, social, religious issues confronting the nation, would make

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308 Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, Bipin Chandra Pal and India’s Struggle for Swaraj, op.cit., pp. 17-18. Also see e.g. R.C.Majumdar, History of the Freedom Movement of India, vol.2, op.cit., pp. 139, 140 for an analysis of Pal’s conversion from moderatism to extremism.
persistent agitation on present day economic and educational problems its ‘speciality’. Satish Chandra’s *Dawn* had already begun highlighting the educational problems and thus together the two organs began building a formidable case for reforming and restructuring the Indian educational system. 1901-1902 where the years when the Indian Universities’ Commission was at work and this coincided with the first two years of *New India*’s existence. It was during these years that Bipin Chandra wrote a number of articles on economic and educational problems and he not only advanced well-structured criticisms in them but also placed ‘positive lines, of reform and reconstruction.’

A survey of some articles in *New India* reveals that Bipin Chandra did not overtly concern himself with direct political issues at that period of time and that wherever he thought necessary he appreciated and praised the government’s efforts – especially at education reform. His criticisms were of course direct and bold. This was to be the case till the disclosure of the Bengal partition plan – the revelation of this plan transformed Bipin Chandra into a political extremist and one of the chief thinkers of the group. An examination of portions of the *New India* articles on education reveal the grip on educational matters that Bipin Chandra possessed and like the editor of *The Dawn* he too encouraged others to write in his paper on educational issues. Thus we see his in ‘Weekly Record & Review of Modern Thought and Life’, which is what he put as the mission of *New India*, Prof. S.C.Mahalanobis writing a sketch of the Edinburgh University. Talking of the integrality of physical education in the scheme of English education, the

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309 *New India*, August 12, 1901, Ibid., p. 18.
310 Ibid., p. 20.
311 *New India*, August 12, 1901, pp. 21-28.
312 Prof. S.C.Mahalanobis had returned to India from England in 1900 and had joined the Presidency College as Head of the Department of Biology. In 1898 Prof. Mahalanobis was with the Physiology Department of Cardiff University.
author observes that ‘British University life without athletics would indeed be ‘Hamlet’ without the Prince.’ The social and collective aspect of the British scheme of education is illustrated through showcasing the role of the Students’ Union in the University. The institution of the students’ union was a lively arena for debate, intellectual exchange and expansion. The students were in-charge of its activities and administration. The Union building was a ‘great varsity’ institution. The building was usually a ‘magnificent one provided with a splendid dining room, a commodious debating hall, smoking room, news room, library, baths, gymnasium, billiard room.’ ‘The management of the Union is vested in the hands of a committee of students.’ It might be recalled that Sri Aurobindo was active in the Baroda College Union activities and did much to enliven the intellectual atmosphere of the body. The pet theme of Indian Universities being mostly examining bodies was what was highlighted in the article. Comparing the Calcutta University as patterned nearly on the London model, Prof. Mahalanobis comments that the ‘Scottish universities’ instead ‘are not merely examining bodies but teaching institutions’ which have ‘along with the German Universities, fully retained the medieval synthetic type.’

The Scottish universities, observed Prof. Mahalanobis basing himself on his first-hand experiences in one of them, ‘are not satisfied with merely stamping a number of students with the ‘hall-mark’ of examination, but there the student owes his intellectual life to the cherishing, nourishing and fostering care of his alma mater. [Whereas] The present London University found its model in the French Academy. The Napoleonic system is characterized by its dogmatic nature. Worst of all, such dogmatic education admits of and even indirectly encourages “cramming”.’ Therefore the similarly patterned Calcutta

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313 Prof. S.C.Mahalanobis, Sketches of Edinburgh University, New India, August 26, 1901. New India Files, Microfilm Copies, National Library of India, Kolkata.
University ‘requires of a student to be taught according to the standard of the test. [Thus]
consequently, it matters very little whether a student is well trained or not so long as he is well informed.’ [Therefore] ‘the result’ of the examination ‘continued to remain ‘the pole-star, in view of which [the entire] educational argosy is steered.’ ‘Unfortunately’, laments Prof. Mahalanobis, ‘our present system of education demands of the student, the maximum amount of work in a minimum time’ and it was this quick fix demand that was giving rise to the cry for ‘something of the ‘put-a-penny-in-the-slot’ nature that will save time and bother. This is provided by the elaborate machinery of cram. And behold the result!’ Prof. Mahalanobis concludes the piece with a light-hearted remark which nevertheless points to a deeper truth which was then and perhaps continues to remain to a great extent relevant even today, ‘A friend once remarked’ he recalled, ‘that some students were “like safety matches”: The latter ignited ‘only on the box’, whereas the former shone only on examination papers. I am afraid the safety-match students are steadily growing in number.’

Excerpts from such articles are useful to set in perspective the discussion of dominant educational matters that preoccupied some of the leading academic minds of the period under review. It appears from such an analysis that Bipin Chandra, like Satish Chandra during that period, did encourage and invite a wide-ranging debate on educational matters.

In the September 9, 1901, issue of *New India* Bipin Chandra discussed the Viceroy’s [Curzon] speech delivered at the Simla conference on education reform and pointed towards certain deficiencies in it. The stupendously lengthy speech with its variety of topics covered and issues analysed failed to clarify the real intention of the Government *vis-à-vis* educational reform. Bipin Chandra touches upon some of the issues

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315 *New India, August 26, 1901*, op. cit.
that had generated debate after the speech. The perception that the Government sought to centralize the whole system of education and thus preclude the growth and consolidation of the indigenous educational initiative was the foremost charge against the official reform and one that generated the most vocal opposition. ‘The general feeling has been’ wrote Bipin Chandra giving voice to that perception, ‘that the Viceroy proposes to centralize the educational agencies more completely than they had hitherto been, and to leave little or no room for the free and unrestricted development of national ideals of education, in the school system of the country whether aided, or unaided, by Government grants.’ Curzon’s speech, Bipin Chandra commented, did nothing to remove such misgivings. In fact it was this attempt at centralizing that created much apprehension and protest. The proposal of appointing a Director-General of Education was seen ‘as the main move’ in this direction. The other moves that would make the official element supreme in educational matters were ‘the reorganization of the Provincial Text-Book Committees’ and ‘the power of absolute control over the selection of text-books vested in the Director of Public Instruction’. These Bipin Chandra opposes, he identifies the problem as that of the Director of Public Instruction being ‘generally innocent of all knowledge of the language, traditions, and the thought life of the people’ and it is this which has raised serious misgivings as to the genuineness of the reforms. These have been looked upon by the public as attempts at ‘thought-breeding’ and it was this that was seen as the core aim of the colonial administration that was to be worked through the agency of education. Bipin Chandra then goes on to make a strikingly bold observation regarding the necessity of broad-basing governance, ‘No Government, in our times, however autocratic, can feel itself secure unless it is broad based upon the will of the
governed. This basis may be found in two ways, - by suitting official actions to the feelings and opinions of the people, or by training these feelings and opinions to be in consonance with official ideas and ideals’ the general feeling in the country, he concluded, was that the educational reforms aimed at carrying out the second experiment – the training of people’s feelings and opinions to be in tune with official ideas and ideals and therefore the legitimacy of the reforms were questioned from the start itself.  

Bipin Chandra next undertakes to analyse the various aspects of the revised scheme of education in an article entitled ‘The Revised Scheme of Primary Education in Bengal’. He supports the revised scheme, provides an insightful summary of the ‘salient points’, points out its positive features, as he found them to be, and makes suggestions towards filling what he perceives to be omissions in it. He identifies the object of the new scheme of ‘Primary and Middle Vernacular Education’ to be that of training and improving ‘the intelligence of the young whatever may be their future course of technical instruction or occupation life’, the primary was not to ‘impart technical instruction or to prepare boys for learning any particular trade or profession.’ With such an aim the new scheme has been based on a twin principle ‘(1) “the recognition and stimulation of the child’ spontaneous activity,” and (2) “the complete and harmonious development of the child’s faculties.”’ The child’s education must therefore start with developing the ‘senses and powers of observation’ and with the training ‘of the hand and the eye’, continue to the ‘strengthening of the memory and the reasoning powers’ besides the training of mental faculties provisions must exist for a ‘healthy physical training

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316 New India, September 9, 1901.
317 New India, November 4, 1901.
which is necessary to the growth of the young.\footnote{318} Keeping these objectives in mind certain changes have been proposed to be incorporated into the new scheme, they are (1) the introduction of the Kindergarten scheme suited to Indian conditions and Bipin Chandra recognizes this as an useful addition for ‘training through senses in the infant stage, ‘(2) a well organized scheme of object lessons embracing sensible properties e.g. colours, form, weight, size and, phenomena of the sky and the atmosphere, action of metals, growth of plants etc’ up to the Upper primary stage, ‘(3) the science of everyday life or simpler and more fundamental facts of Botany and Natural History’ for both boys and girls, hygiene is to be introduced at this stage for boys [the omission of girls from this subject is glaring and probably points towards the reigning conservativeness of Indian society] and for girls the subject of Domestic Economy would find a place. The additional subject for urban boys at this stage was to be physics and chemistry and agriculture with ‘gardens-attached to the classes’ for rural boys, ‘(4) drawing for training the hand eye; (5) action songs in the infant stages drills and gymnastics for boys in the higher stages replaced by drills and calisthenics for girls, for furthering physical growth [it is interesting to note that provisions have been made for girls to continue with some form of physical education as well]. Sixth was the provision for manual training of pupils, needle work for girls and manual training for boys which was to include such work as ‘paper and clay modeling and simple wicker-work for teaching the use of tools and appliances.’ The manual training however was to be optional. Reading and writing – including the reading and writing of vernacular documents useful for court and zamindari work – was to remain and arithmetic and mental arithmetic ‘(European as well as Indian) retain the same place in the new as in the old curriculum. History, Geography, literature

\footnote{318 New India, November 4, 1901.}
and Grammar have been ‘slightly’ and ‘considerably’ reduced so as to ‘make room for the object lessons and the Science primers.’ Keeping in mind the necessity of serving the needs of ‘emotional culture’ in the young ‘Moral lessons and Poetry’ is to be included in Literature [it is again to be noted that Moral lessons was not treated as a separate subject but was instead clubbed together with poetry and included in literature. Such an attitude may have appeared to be incomprehensible to the Indian mind which gave great importance to the Moral element in education. Bipin Chandra however, does not comment, at least in the article, on such a provision.] The scheme emphasizes the importance of ‘objective lessons’ and intends that ‘every subject should be taught as much as possible by means of object lessons.’ Keeping to this lessons have to be taught in a certain manner such as ‘geography lessons should be taught by visible illustrations and by modeling in sand and clay, of rivers, mountains, plains, &c. and tales from history are to be graphically told and illustrated by striking pictures or when possible by magic lantern slides.’ These would help to ‘powerfully foster the child’s imagination and representative faculty. Bipin Chandra concludes the summary with his support for the ideas in the reforms, ‘it must be admitted’ he concludes that these reforms are a ‘decided improvement upon the existing system, and is along the lines of the most advanced systems of Primary instruction in the Western countries [and] if intelligently and faithfully carried out, it sure to lead to both the deepening and broadening of elementary instruction in this country.’

In the following issue of New India, November 11, 1901, Bipin Chandra offers his views on the revised scheme of education that he had summarised earlier. Commenting on the reform committee’s method of training through the senses in the lower stages,
Bipin Chandra observes that what is needed instead is ‘not training through (sic) but first and foremost the training of the senses [for] this alone can ensure habits of accuracy, delicacy, discrimination, and acquisition of skill in the use of each sense, without which the training through sense would inevitably degenerate into mere exercise of the memory.’ His suggestions for implementing this method are that ‘greater attention be paid to the training of the eye, the ear, the touch, the smell and the taste.’ The eye should be trained through object lessons and should develop the practice of ‘forming accurate judgments of distance in regard to objects on the horizons, of measure and size, of degrees of light or luster, marking shades of colour and varieties of form.’ The ear should be trained to be capable of catching ‘the time and the pitch of a sound’ the skin and muscles should be trained so as to be able to give ‘approximate measurements of temperature, as well as degrees of pressure, force and weight.’ Bipin Chandra also accepts that for this kind of training, teachers with greater capacity and ability would be required.

The importance of manual training in his educational considerations is evident when discussing it he emphasizes the necessity of making it compulsory, ‘enlightened public opinion in no part of Bengal would oppose this measure’ [of making manual training compulsory] He calls the argument that mandatory manual training would be opposed by the people as mythical and points to the fact that a number of technical schools and institutions in Bengal had already introduced obligatory manual training. Referring to the ‘Sibpore Engineering College’ he observes that a severe manual training is given in such institutions and that ‘youths of all castes and of the most respectable families are found’ in these. Therefore in his opinion ‘to make manual training optional

320 New India, November 11, 1901.
would be really to give up half the benefits of the new scheme. The senses are intended to lead to active movement, and the training of the senses must always be incomplete without manual practice in wielding the simpler and common tools and implements.’ He recognises that ‘the advanced European system of manual training’ would be too expensive to be implemented under Indian conditions but nevertheless ‘it would surely be easy to devise methods of manual training based on the highest modern principles and adapted to Indian conditions.’

Pal continues the series containing his observations and suggestions on the reforms in the next weekly issue of the *New India*; he takes up the remaining areas starting with the teaching of history. Narration and illustration according to Pal must have primacy in the teaching of history and if history is to truly enliven the pupil, ‘historical lessons’ should be ‘taught with the help of profuse illustrations, and consequently the History Reader [pupil’s manual for history] must be carefully illustrated’ and that ‘special care should be taken to encourage the boys and girls to narrate what they read graphically, not from memory, in the words of the book, but simply as they narrate stories that they have heard, or describe scenes and incidents which they have seen.’ This approach, Pal argues, automatically discounts the role of memory and instead fosters understanding and originality of self-expression. The illustrations in the History Reader therefore required to be significantly altered in order to make an impact, and must not only ‘include portraits of the principal actors, but what is far more important, they

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321 *New India, November 11, 1901.*
322 *New India, November 18, 1901.*
323 This is reminiscent of the experiment to teach subjects in an alternative undertaken by the legendary Indian educator and Gandhian Gijubhai Badheka (1885-1939), see e.g. his *Divasvapna* (*Trans*), rpt. 2006, pp. 44-47, for an alternative method of teaching history mainly through narration of stories. The experiment that Gijubhai undertook succeeded and pupils did eventually study history with renewed interest.
must contain representations of the life and manners of the age to which the stories refer, - reproduction of the coins they used, the dress they put on, the arms and weapons they fought with, as also of the cities they lived in, and the houses they built up. Besides these, along with the portraits of the kings and warriors and statesman, striking scenes and situations in their lives should, so far as possible, be placed before the juvenile reader through suitable illustrations.'

Pal wishes to make the study of history something organic and living through which the young mind can establish a living contact with the nation’s past and civilisational achievements and in the process perhaps gain a certain amount of self-confidence and certitude vis-à-vis the nation, its people and future.

The teaching of geography had to similarly seek to create a lively interest in the pupil, the scheme proposed to use visible illustrations and modeling in sand and clay, of hill and valley etc and along with these as Pal suggests include illustrations of the ‘neighbourhoods of the schools, with which the students must be made to acquaint themselves by long and repeated walks, taken with their teacher’ and through which they might also develop the habit of observation. The Geography Reader, Pal suggests, must also ‘contain some account of the economic product of the district’, ‘some statement of the internal trade of the province as well as…external and foreign trade.’ The pupil needed to know first his surrounding and province, develop a thorough knowledge of the region along with gaining knowledge of the far flung areas. The similarity of this suggestion with Sri Aurobindo’s third educational principle which calls for working

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324 New India, November 18, 1901, op. cit.
325 New India, November 18, 1901.
‘from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be …’ cannot be missed.

Commenting of the agriculture for rural area aspect of the scheme Pal suggests that it should not be merely confined to a garden attached to the class but must include in the more advanced stages ‘actual field-work and excursions [and that] the teaching should have direct reference to the actual conditions of cultivation in the different districts’ and also to the ‘more obvious and feasible opportunities of improvement in these conditions.’ In the subject of Science of Everyday life which he considers to have been rightly included by the reform committee in the scheme of education, Pal suggests a few additions which are he believes usually ‘acquired by people in early life or not acquired at all’, these he enumerates as being:

(a) Naming and identifying the commoner plants, flowers and fruits, - with some reference to their properties; (b) Naming and identifying the more important orders, general and species of Natural History, with the help of zoological charts, and with special reference to fauna of the immediate neighbourhood of the schools, (c) Naming and identifying the principal planets and stars with periods of rising and setting, with special observations of the sun and the moon; (d) Naming and identifying the principal metals and alloys; (e) Naming and identifying the principal rocks, with geological charts showing the stratification of rocks; and (f) Observation as to the more obvious signs of the weather, as also the changes of the seasons, and where there are opportunities of doing so.

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326 CWSA vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 384, 385
An acquisition of these elementary and useful knowledge would better equip the pupil in his every day living and give him an empirical and practical orientation. This also indicates the minuteness with which Pal had actually studied the reforms and thought over the possibilities of further improving them and making them responsive and relevant to the circumstances, environment and need of the country and people. An important omission that Pal identifies in the scheme is the exclusion of the training and cultivation of the vocal organs, ‘the Committee have either ignored it altogether, or have, considering the present condition of the country, thought any plan for the culture of the vocal powers as unpractical.’ It is difficult for Pal to find reason for this exclusion and he appeals to at least introduce this subject as an optional one and supports the offering of ‘special prizes to the pupil and bonuses to the teachers’ for the encouragement of the subject ‘so that the new scheme might bring us at least one step nearer to the regular introduction of singing into primary schools for boys as well as girls as they have in European countries.’ Such a ‘sad waste’ of human faculty should not be permitted according to Pal in any civilised community. 328

As mentioned earlier Pal was alive to the fact that the implementation of the revised scheme of education would require a new training method for teachers. He raises this point in the following issues of paper and identifies the present ‘teaching staff’ to be the first great difficulty to be overcome in the process of this new implementation, the

327 New India, November 18, 1901, op. cit.
328 New India, November 18, 1901, op. cit.
present staff ‘in charge of [the] Primary and Middle School are admittedly unfitted for the work’ he observes and in order to have ‘even a tolerably qualified staff of teachers’ additional money would have to be expended which for the present seems to Pal to be ‘almost prohibitive.’ Therefore the alternate step he suggests which could be initiated to address this issue is ‘to try and train the existing staff in the secret of the new methods by the help of Manuals specially prepared for the purpose.’

Pal suggests a restructuring or rewriting of the existing teachers training manual. Such a move it seemed to him would be within financial bounds while greatly serving the attempt of making the teacher’s have a new orientation. Great care however have to be taken to prepare these manuals, the Government has to realise that there are none in and practically few outside the services who could be entrusted with this delicate task. Pal identifies the qualification necessary for such a work, they are of a ‘twofold character, namely a thorough grasp of the fundamental principles underlying the new scheme on the one hand, joined to a thorough mastery of the details of the different systems wherein these principles are being sought to be embodied in the advanced educational methods of European countries, and a clear and deep insight into the peculiarities of life and thought in Bengal in relation to the realities of which the new plan will have to be worked out on the other.’

The formation of an expert committee for drawing up these manuals appears to Pal to be a possible way to be adopted. He suggests the method of forming the committee and its possible composition. The Director of Public Instruction, he observes, may be allowed to nominate ‘two of the most competent men…from among the officers of his Department’ then interestingly he suggests two names which he felt would be of invaluable assistance.

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329 *New India, November 25, 1901.*
330 *New India, November 25, 1901.*
in the Committee’s functions, ‘we can, however confidently name two gentlemen who could render invaluable assistance…in this matter. They are Principal Brajendranath Seal of the Victoria College, Cooch-Behar and Babu Rabindranath Tagore, the leading Bengali author who adds to his unrivalled qualifications as a master of the language in which the Manual will have to be compiled, considerable practical experience of the system of sense-training which he tried to work out in the education of some of the members of his own family.’ These two Indian educational and literary stalwarts were considered to be the persons best suited by Pal because of their deep understanding and study of indigenous conditions, their direct involvement with education in the country. The Committee thus could comprise two officers of the State Education Department, these two external experts and the Director as the President and ‘a Committee thus constituted will…be able to get up the best Manual for teachers under the new scheme.’ Trying to work out any other plan and entrusting the whole work to a ‘singly individual’ would, according to Pal, ‘court total failure.’

Pal identifies the procedure of selecting text-books under the new scheme as one that was bound to face serious difficulty. He realised that the responsibility of text-book selection has devolved on incompetent hands whose only qualification he perceives as that of being on the right side of officialdom. In a trenchant critique of such a trend he observes that:

‘the duty of providing text-books for our vernacular schools have drifted into the hands of a class of people, who as a body, must be declared to be half-educated at

331 New India, November 25, 1901.
the best, and whose success has hitherto to a large measure depended upon, not
the intrinsic merit of their productions, but upon the strength of their heels to
dance attendance upon the gods who preside so long over the work of making
selections, or on the degree of their consanguinity or the measure of their
personal and private friendship with the Members of the Text Book Committee.’

And the Committee itself was not competent to ‘select the sort of books that are wanted
for a satisfactory working out of the new scheme’ therefore it would be in the healthy
interest of the scheme itself if the selection of the text-books could be left to some
independent body – the suggested Committee for Teacher’s Manual preparation could
also be entrusted with the task of text-book selection. ³³² Pal was keen on the indigenous
voices being heard in the formulation of the education syllabus, it was the one way which
could perhaps ensure the successful implementation of the new scheme which appeared
to him to have merits and to be in tune with the latest educational method followed
worldwide.

The December 2, 1901 issue of the New India sees him indicting the High School
system in India as one that was in a bad state and merited the ‘severest condemnation that
could be passed on any educational scheme.’ ³³³ Pal sees it as a system of not mere cram
and rote but one that is ‘positively injurious to the brain and seriously arrests the growth
of the mind as well as of the body. It injures the eyesight, produces weakness of the brain
and the nerves, reduces length of life, atrophies the mental faculties with the exception of
the memory, and makes the latter a receptacle of second-hand colourless images and
meaningless abstractions.’ The newly devised method for the primary and middle

³³² New India, November 25, 190.
³³³ New India, December 2, 1901.
schools, he feels ‘will be a distinct boon to the very large number of boys, especially the upper and middle classes of society who, as a rule, do not go to any Primary or Middle school, but go directly to a High School.’\textsuperscript{334}

In the following weekly issue Pal formulates his observations in support of the need for technical training and points to the infrastructural deficiencies in promoting such training. He points to the problem of the large number of ‘young people whose circumstances do not permit them to go in for a full University course’ and of those ‘who cannot even go into the University at all’ and who thus have no other opportunities or avenues that would make themselves self-reliant. He complains that ‘there is practically no provision for learning any suitable trade or business; and in the absence of these provisions, the smattering of general education which they receive in the Primary, Middle, or High Schools simply involves a waste of energy, and lets loose on society an army of half-educated people without any training or purpose or profession for their future life, and [as a result] they drift into every kind of places for which they have no fitness.’\textsuperscript{335} Such a state of things Pal terms as the ‘greatest evil of the present educational system’ in the country and it could only be remedied ‘by a scheme of technical of professional training sufficiently comprehensive to permit the filiations of every grade and stage of education with it…’\textsuperscript{336}

The next year, 1902, saw Bipin Chandra Pal continue his examination of educational themes, for example in the May 19, 1902 issue of \textit{New India} he takes up the cause of ‘\textbf{The Higher Education for Women}’ and enunciates his conception of the

\textsuperscript{334} \textit{New India, December 2, 1901}.

\textsuperscript{335} \textit{New India, December 9, 1901}.

\textsuperscript{336} Ibid.
modern ideal of women’s education. In the article Pal takes on those, Mrs. Annie Besant included among them, who, he says, view ‘education almost exclusively from the social standpoint’. The individual in their view exists only ‘for the society…and consequently the object of all education’ for them was to fit the individual ‘for the due discharge of their functions as parts of the social machine.’ Pal places his ideal of modern education in contrast with what he calls the ancient Hindu ideal of education which was to mainly educate women to ‘make them immeasurably more useful as the wives and mothers they will be’, that is making them ready to dutifully just serve or live out their social functions and duties.337 Such an ideal Pal believes is not in consonance with modern requirements, ‘it is not in consonance with modern conception of nature, man, and society. The object of all education in the modern view, is self-realisation, this self being considered as a person, that is having very definite personal ends. Every individual, in this view is an end unto himself or herself, and not a mere tool for the realisation of others’ ends, whether civic or social. The education of women, as much as that of men, must therefore aim at something higher than mere fitting them up as efficient organs of the social whole.’ But Pal is careful to point out that the personal aim of education is not in conflict with the ‘highest interest of society’, the individual is intimately related to society and in pursuance of his social aims the individual develops an ‘organic and living relations with the universal system of ends Pal points out that this harmony was essential, there was to be a harmony and synthesis between the personal ends of the individual and the ends of his ‘particular class, community’, nation and the whole universe. Pal differentiates between private and personal ends in education, the former he indicates reeks of selfishness and will therefore be untenable and suicidal in the long run. He then

337 New India, May 19, 1902.
systematically defines the contours and aims of a personal education, and one perceives in it a comprehensive scheme for the individual’s personal growth – social, ethical, spiritual. Personal education, as defined by Pal, involves:

‘(1) the education of the senses, that is the powers of observation; (2) education of the imaginative faculty, the object is to free the mind from the immediate and the present interest, by relating it to the past and the future, and to correct merely subjective notions by objective verifications or realisation; (3) education of the emotions, with a view to raise the mere feelings into sentiments, and to train the mind to the contemplation and enjoyment of the ideals of life, intellectual, aesthetic and ethical; (4) education of the social instincts of sympathy or altruism with a view to create enthusiasm for one’s own nation or for humanity; (5) education of the will, to train the individual in habits of self-control, of subordinating the appetites and desires to ideals and principles, and thus to develop a life of deliberative self-control; (6) education of the faculties of reason, the development of the sense of the categories and relations, and the training of the mind to habits of systematic thinking; and (7) education of the spiritual faculty, the education of the sense of the unseen, and the training of the mind to a perpetual consciousness of the presence of the Eternal within and without.’

Such were the contours of ‘personal education’ and Pal expresses hope that proponents of the predominantly social aspect of education would recognize the absolute necessity of such an education to be imparted to women. The ingenuity of Pal’s educational thought finds expression through these writings, the approach is not a didactic but rather a deeply

338 New India, May 19, 1902.
suggestive one, his expression of a spiritual education does have a universal appeal. It is also evident that such a perspective on personal education was absent from the colonial system of instruction, the apprehension that its existence would further crystallize the individual personality perhaps proved too strong for such inclusions to be made into the system.

Pal’s progress towards greater radicalization perhaps began accelerating from 1902 onwards, in an article in August that year on ‘The Cause of High Education in India’ Pal boldly describes the un-national character of the present educational system as the ‘central evil’. He enters into a near metaphysical analysis of the whole aspect and the originality of his reading of this problem emerges. Pal accepts the universality of the mind, the drive towards unity inherent in man’s movement forward but also points to the diversity of expression that he feels is a necessity and requires preservation and nurturing. One finds in this passage clear indications on the major problems of education in India, ‘Though the mind is one’ Pal begins, ‘the vehicle through which this mind works and expresses itself are many and diverse, owing to diversities of structure and environments of different peoples, resulting in variations in experience and associations. And all true education is imparted through real experience.’ This real experience education was what was missing from the present day education. Education through real experience simply ‘seeks to place the individual minds in living contact with the experience of the race. National and historical associations are the vehicles of these experiences. All education must work, therefore, through these national associations, which alone can have any reality to youthful and inexperienced minds.’ The prevailing education system lacked such an approach, ‘The system of education so long prevalent in this country has,

339 New India, August 7, 1902.
however, always failed to do this. It is English associations, British sceneries, European experiences, that have been used so long as the main instruments of education in India. It has therefore never been a national system.'

This was one of the central points on which the whole nationalist educational discourse and demand concentrated and revolved. The approach of providing alien examples and settings ‘created a divorce’ between the mental and practical life, it ‘caused a wide breach between what one was taught to think and what one saw, heard, felt and lived.’ This divorce Pal calls the ‘root-evil’ in the present education and it ‘is in the power of no foreign government, however beneficent, to bridge this breach. This can only be done by indigenous educational agencies, absolutely unfettered by official guidance or official control.’

The ‘right method of reform would, therefore, be for [the] alien Government…to gradually withdraw from the position of supreme controlling authority in the matter of the education of the people. Where the Government pay for the maintenance of schools, they must, no doubt, exercise absolute control over the expenditure, and see that the money is used for legitimate purposes; but except this financial control, all else should be left to the people themselves.’

Pal does not call for a total cessation of control, monitoring of the financial aspect must remain in case of aided institutions but even there the rest – syllabus formulation and structuring, text-book selection and preparation etc. must be left to the people.

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340 *New India, May 19, 1902.*

341 *New India, August 7, 1902.*

342 Ibid.
These – divorce of education from the reality of everyday life and surrounding and the strict centralisation and official control of education discouraging major indigenous initiative – were the principal issues that were to dominate the educational discourse in the capital of the Indian empire at the beginning of last century. The first demand of the nationalist educational discourse was to render the education system national by giving it over to indigenous control; this was perceived as the first step towards creating a national system of education that would be responsive to national needs and would also largely create future responses and necessities.

The two nationalist personalities – giants in their respective fields of action – who have thus been analysed in some detail have had a major influence in shaping the early nationalist discourse on education and nationalism and both, as mentioned earlier were closely linked with Sri Aurobindo during the latter’s stay in Bengal. Referring to the personality of Satish Chandra Mukherjee and to his defining role in laying the foundation of the National College and the national education movement in Bengal, Sri Aurobindo said that the former was one ‘who had given his life’ to the work of organising the movement and was the one ‘who had really organised the National College in Calcutta.’ And talking of the nobility and depth of Satish Chandra’s personality he observed that although ‘he lives in the world [he] lives like a sannyasin…’³⁴³ Sri Aurobindo had assessed the spiritual undercurrent and sustaining force of Satish Chandra’s life and it was this aspect of his which was perhaps the principal dynamo of his mission. Such men were needed in each department of the movement that would to eventually lead India to freedom and light. It was to Satish Chandra that the burden of shouldering the additional

³⁴³ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, op. cit., p.23. The speech entitled ‘Present Situation’ was delivered at a public meeting at Mahajan Wadi, Bombay on 19 January 1908. The text was published later in the weekly edition of the *Bande Mataram* on 23 February.
responsibilities of the National College fell when Sri Aurobindo was forced to take repeated leave for political and health reasons and this task he carried out with outmost dexterity and devotion. Interestingly Satish Chandra’s association with Sri Aurobindo, though brief, was not limited only to the educational field, at the risk of digression here into the arena of political philosophy – which perhaps cannot be helped when one discusses Sri Aurobindo’s early nationalist activities – we need to take a look at this nearly forgotten aspect. When Sri Aurobindo started writing in his daily *Bande Mataram* the ‘Passive Resistance’ series enunciating the ‘New Thought’ in Indian politics between April and May 1907, Satish Chandra’s was the first article to appear in the paper in defence of the ‘New Thought’. Much criticism had begun to be leveled by then at the radical nationalist group that Sri Aurobindo motivated and organised. Some contemporary papers – *Hindu Patriot* among them – had begun calling the Extremists as people who talked nonsense, who had no policy and who behaving like maniacs were reducing ‘the chance of self-government to the people to a shadow.’ Leaders such as Pandit Motilal Nehru (1861-1931) observed while presiding over the U.P. Provincial Conference held at Allahabad that the new school of thought that had arisen in India had ‘evolved out of the depths of despair.’ This Satish Chandra emphatically refuted with a resounding ‘No’. He saw this new thought and spirit not as the product of ‘any passing wave of feeling’ but as ‘something very vital and life-giving.’ He negatively summed the key aspects of the New Thought, defining what it was not, ‘it [was] not the offspring of a spirit of revenge, it [was] not the advocating of mere measures of coercion and

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retaliation, [and] it [was] not a mere suggestion of despair.' In an eloquent defence of the new movement he observed that the:

‘New Thought proclaims from the housetop that India has a right to live in history as a separate nation with a destiny and a mission all her own…The New Thought holds and declares as a fundamental axiom of political philosophy that the countenance of foreign predominance or overlordship in any shape or form, political, industrial, intellectual, social or religious, is fatal to the continuance and growth of self-conscious life among a people subject to such overlordship.’

And therefore the vital question that the New Thought puts to the Indian people was whether India shall be permitted to have ‘an independent destiny which she shall be at liberty to work out in her own way’ or whether she shall forever be yoked to ‘the chariot-wheels of superior Power’ and receive alien dictates as to how she should live and grow. This crucial question the New Thought sought to address and for this it had formulated a mass action programme for the country that had as its core components ‘the Swadeshi Movement, the Boycott Movement (both in its industrial and political aspects) and the new Education Movement.’ And all of these were, according to this new pattern of thinking, the ‘natural and legitimate outcome of the desire of the Indian peoples to assert and vindicate their inalienable right to achieve their own salvation – to work out their own ideals, in their own way’ and therefore these were upheld and promoted by the new nationalist group. Satish Chandra demonstrated a perceptive understanding of the

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345 *Sri Aurobindo and The New Thought in Indian Politics*, pp. 13, 14.
346 Ibid.
347 Ibid., pp. 14, 15.
political philosophy that Sri Aurobindo articulated at that point of time, in fact it may be said he was one the best exponents of that political philosophy during that period and did much through this one article to spread its tenets in wider intellectual circles of the province and the country – the ‘sannyasin’ thus displayed a remarkable capacity to both organise national education as well as explicate political themes and philosophies. The following assessment of Satish Chandra by his biographers perhaps aptly describes his whole outlook and contribution:

‘…Although never an extremist political leader like Bipinchandra or Aurobindo, yet Satischandra was an exponent of radical ideologies in the educational sphere and in the cultural realm. As a thinker his natural affiliations were more with Rabindranath than either with Bipin Chandra or with Aurobindo for each of whom he had, however, an abiding respect. But the essence of nationalism which Satischandra had been preaching through the *Dawn* during all these years from 1904 was comparable in deeper spiritual quality with the spirit of nationalism as preached by Aurobindo in the *Bande Mataram*.\(^{348}\)

A discussing of Sri Aurobindo’s contribution to the Indian nationalist movement can perhaps never achieve integrality if one chooses to omit Satish Chandra and his role in the origin and growth of the national education movement in Bengal.

Sri Aurobindo looked upon Bipin Chandra Pal as ‘perhaps the best and the most original political thinker in the country, an excellent writer and a magnificent orator’.\(^{349}\) It was with Pal that Sri Aurobindo went on a tour of East Bengal after the breaking up of

\(^{348}\) *The Origins of the National Education Movement*, op.cit., p. 72.

\(^{349}\) *On Himself*, op. cit., p.27.
the Barisal Conference in 1906, and surveyed first-hand the political and social condition of the province. This was also the beginning of Sri Aurobindo’s close association with the ‘forward group in the Congress’ of which Pal was already an established ideologue. It was from Pal, who had by then already been ‘expounding a policy of self-help and non-cooperation’ that Sri Aurobindo received the invitation to join the Bande Mataram that the former launched. Thus it may be said that it was Pal who provided to a certain extent the platform Sri Aurobindo needed to ‘for starting the public propaganda necessary for his revolutionary purpose’ without this timely offer the issue of mass mobilization through propaganda would have perhaps been delayed. Pal on his part was among the first of the influential Bengal leaders to recognize Sri Aurobindo’s genius and necessity in the movement. Pal begins a masterly analysis of Sri Aurobindo’s personality and contribution to the advanced nationalist movement with an eulogising tone by saying that though ‘youngest in age among those who stand in the forefront of the Nationalist propaganda in India’ Sri Aurobindo was perhaps ‘superior to them all’ in ‘endowment, education, and character’ and ‘seems distinctly marked out by Providence to play in the future of [the] movement a part not given to any of his colleagues and contemporaries.’

Assessing his role in making the Bande Mataram a fiery organ of revolutionary nationalism Pal writes that:

‘…the hand of the master was in it from the very beginning. Its bold attitude, its vigorous thinking, its clear ideas, its chaste and powerful diction, its scorching sarcasm and refined witticism, were unsurpassed by any journal in the country, either Indian or Anglo-Indian. It at once raised the tone of every Bengali paper, and compelled the

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350 On Himself, op. cit., p. 28
351 Ibid.
admiration of even hostile Anglo-Indian editors. Morning after morning, not only Calcutta but the educated community in almost every part of the country, eagerly awaited its vigorous pronouncements on the stirring questions of the day...Long extracts from it commenced to be reproduced week after week even in the exclusive columns of the “Times” in London. It was a force in the country which none dared to ignore, however much they might fear or hate it, and Aravinda was the leading spirit, the central figure, in the new journal.\footnote{Bipin Chandra Pal, ‘Indian Nationalism: Its Principles and Personalities’, op.cit., p.200.}

Discussing the growth of the national education movement and formation of the National College and the politics of control that fledgling institution faced and which also saw the curtailment of Sri Aurobindo’s powers in it Pal is emphatic that had ‘Aravinda’ ‘been given a free hand in the new National College [in Calcutta] that institution would have opened an altogether new chapter not only in the history of modern education in India, but perhaps in the whole world.’ But the spirit that generally guided the functioning of the National Council, according to Pal, was ‘[a] timid, temporizing spirit’, this was ‘galling to the reformer and the man with new visions and large ideas’ and thus made it ‘almost impossible for Aravinda to throw himself heart and soul into his educational work in Calcutta. His place in the National College though he was its nominal Principal, was not really that of an organizer and initiator, but simply a teacher of language and history, even as it had been in the Maharaja’s College at Baroda.\footnote{Bipin Chandra Pal, ‘Indian Nationalism: Its Principles and Personalities’, op.cit., pp.198, 199.} Pal perhaps is himself the only leader to state unequivocally Sri Aurobindo’s uneasy situation in the National Council and College, Sri Aurobindo too, in his later political writings often indicated why the National Council could not make the impact it was originally meant to
and of how because of its compromising approach to education re-organisation it dislocated itself from the larger nationalist movement. By this compromise it diluted and eventually was shorn of its earlier ‘patriotic appeal’. Sri Aurobindo’s argument when he points to the dislocation from the larger nationalist movement is in consonance with the view that had the leaders of the policy makers of the Council firmly aligned themselves with the ‘radical political currents of the age’ the movement could have retained a greater degree of appeal. Sri Aurobindo’s was a trenchant attitude when he discussed the eventual compromise of the National Council before the official machinery.

Anyway the opportunity that were denied to Sri Aurobindo in the National College, Pal pointed out, were given to him by the Bande Mataram and eventually ‘from a tutor of a few youths he…became the teacher of a whole nation.’ Sri Aurobindo on his part hailed Pal as the ‘Prophet of Nationalism’ who as the speaker of a ‘God-given message’ stood ‘before India as the exponent of the spiritual force’ of the nationalist movement, ‘its pure ‘Indianity’, its high devotion to principle…’and as the ‘voice of the Gospel of Nationalism.’

We shall not at this point enter into an analysis of the National Council’s failures and shortcomings; it does not directly form part of this quest, and can be treated in as much as it helps us comprehend Sri Aurobindo’s dissatisfaction with its efforts and aims. But one thing that does attract attention in this piece, which is usually quoted rather selectively, is a succinct observation that Pal makes on national education, in it we perceive the radical nationalist boldly enumerating the ills of the colonial education system. Discussing the old education policy that existed prior to the Curzonian

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356 Sri Aurobindo, March 10, 1908, Bande Mataram, 1997, pp.742, 743.
educational reforms Pal points out that the old one ‘had given birth to wide-spread disaffection’ and the new education policy aimed to cure this evil by attempting to ‘manufacture loyal citizens – men who would be eternally content to remain loyal to the autocratic government in their country, without any desire for free citizenship.’ Pal sees the movement of national education as ‘the people’s reply to this official policy.’ Attacking the ‘officially-controlled’ education, he calls it ‘shallow’ ‘rootless’, ‘it imparted the shadow, but not the substance, of modern culture to the youths of the nation.’ He perceives it as ‘artificial’ because it was ‘foreign in both spirit and form [and] led to a fearful waste of youthful time and energy by imposing the necessity of learning a foreign language, to receive instructions through its medium in all higher branches of study.’ The system was controlled by an unresponsive alien bureaucracy who exercised control over it ‘in the interest, mainly, of their own political position, and only secondarily in those of real intellectual life of the pupil. It was excessively literary, and detrimental to the industrial and economical life of the country. The movement of National Education was started to counteract these evils of the officially controlled system of public instruction.’ There is truth to the perception highlighted by Pal’s biographers that ‘between [them] Aurobindo, Bipinchandra and Brahmabandhab [Upadhyay]…created a new Nationalist Movement and philosophy in the country to which Rabindranath supplied the genius of his poetic Muse. Before this there was certainly politics, but there was no ideal of composite nationalism…’ which was the special contribution of the new school of politics in Bengal.

Thus Pal, one of the most original political thinkers of his times, gave vent early to his ideas of a new system of education and became a forefront leader not only of the nationalist movement but also of the national education movement when it began. Between them, Satish Chandra Mukherjee and Bipin Chandra Pal, created the public habit of discussing the educational question not merely out of an emotional reaction to a colonial question but as an attempt at a deeper national self-searching. Their contribution to the quest for a philosophy of national education did much to evolve cohesive and advanced thinking on the issue, and provided an intellectual mooring and a philosophical foundation to the whole quest. Their initiation of a debate of the educational question did prepare the stage for the movement to take-off later on a wider scale and attracted to it some of the best young minds of the period. The nationalist educational discourse was thus set rolling before Sri Aurobindo’s advent to Bengal; he was to make it an integral part of the political demand and would give it a deeper philosophical turn.

Our tour d’horizon of the beginnings of the national educational demand, of the evolution of Sri Aurobindo’s early educational thinking, of the position of the colonial government on educational issues of the day, of the early nationalist or indigenous responses to these positions must necessarily come to an end here. Through it all we perceive that the educational question in India continued to occupy Sri Aurobindo ever since his early years in the country and though not prolific in writing on the topic he did dwell on it considerably and eventually systematically formulated his educational thought. This formulation may be termed as a philosophy of national education that called for a complete overhaul of the system of education then followed in the country. It also revealed Sri Aurobindo’s ‘constant preoccupation with the problems of right
education in the context of national resurgence’ and on the other hand contained the ‘germs of the Aurobindonian conception of integral education.’ In the next part shall read and discuss some of Sri Aurobindo’s educational formulations, expositions and ideas in greater detail and attempt to ferret out certain salient features that provide certain milestones in the quest for a philosophy of national education.

IV.6 National Education: Its Continuity in Sri Aurobindo’s Thought and in the National Movement

A point, however repetitive, must be made here in support of the stand that national education was an important segment of Sri Aurobindo’s thought not only as a political concept and programme but more fundamentally as an imperative for national reconstruction. It is also meant to show that even though Sri Aurobindo spent a brief period in direct service of the national education movement and wrote very less on the subject in comparison to his writings on other matters, the subject nevertheless remained in his scheme of thought and he continued considering its organization to be of great importance in the scheme of national development.

Most of these early experiments however did not have a sustained continuity, they ceased either because their founders further evolved their ideas and restructured their experiment as in the case of Tagore and Satish Chandra or they did not have the requisite time period to keep up the continuity as in the case of Upadhyay. But each, it must be accepted, whatever their conceptual shortcoming contributed to the evolution of the

concept of national education as a potent force in the nationalist struggle and to the awakening of the mass consciousness. Therefore their importance need not be minimized instead they ought to be seen as part of and contributing to the great effort. A word regarding the decline of national schools may be made here also. They collapsed as mentioned earlier, due to administrative repression especially after revolutionary nationalism came to the fore as an instrument of protest in the Indian context and the government of the day began considering national schools as hotbed of seditious activities and platforms for spreading disaffection among the younger generation. A detailed surveillance of national schools and the activities of their teachers and students was undertaken by the colonial intelligence department and it is interesting to note the minute details of the activities that were recorded and how on a number of occasions connections of teachers and students with Sri Aurobindo and his brand of politics was sought to be established and thus blacklist them as seditious and potential threats to the order of the day.\textsuperscript{360} The other reason for the eventual collapse of the movement was that a large number of people, especially the well to do urban elite stayed away from these schools and continued to be part of the official university system since the national schools, they felt, did not hold out bright future prospects in the professional field and students passing out of them risked being discriminated against by the administration. Paucity of funds and unequal distribution of it, the fast pace of setting up schools at times without adequate administrative infrastructure also contributed to the eventual decline of the established institutions. But nevertheless the contribution of the education movement to the overall character of the freedom struggle is immense, it was one of the factors that generated a rapid awareness of the need for freedom, self-confidence and self-reliance, it

\textsuperscript{360} Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., pp.176-77.
also contributed along with other factors and movements to the broad basing of the freedom struggle and of bringing in its main steam a large number of youth not all of whom lost out on their education and careers – rather a number of them went on to become established authorities in their respective fields of study and research as is evident from the cases of Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerjee (1880-1963) and Prof. Binoy Kumar Sarkar (1887-1949), Dr. Radhakamal Mukherjee (1889-1968) to name a few and in one province. It is known that the national education experiment gradually began spreading to other provinces as well especially in areas where the new party – i.e. the nationalist party -began gaining ground, provinces such as Maharashtra, Punjab and the Madras presidency. During 1906 to 1909 the national education movement made rapid progresses outside Bengal particularly in the district of Berar and in the Presidencies of Bombay and Madras. This itself shows, first, that the urgency of the need for education controlled by Indians and responsive to the Indian mind and conditions was felt by a cross section and was not limited to the sphere of theoretical elitist deliberations and two, that the nationalist movement as initiated by Sri Aurobindo which had the educational regeneration of the country of as one of its principle objective with a long term goal in mind was gradually assuming pan-Indian proportions and was not confined merely within the precincts of Bengal. At least the awareness began growing and the youthful minds

362 In fact it can also be stated here that the national education movement and its principal representative organisation did also think of and cater to the depressed sections of society. At least it tried to reach out them and attempted to bring about a qualitative change in their circumstances, especially education. A record of this effort is made by none other than Radhakamal Mukherjee one of the early active young scholars at the college and later to be one of the most prolific economist and social scientist of his age and one of those who had initiated in those days the ‘Adult Education Movement.’ In his memoirs ‘India: the Dawn of a New Era’ Mukherjee recalls, how he had written a ‘Primer for Adult Education – The *Siksha Prachar*’ which had an introduction ‘from the pen of Prafulla Chandra Roy and was distributed in thousands to all adult schools of Bengal.’ Radhakamal also recalled that he was the pioneer ‘in setting up Night Schools in the slums of Calcutta. [And that] these were established especially in the depressed caste

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began internalizing the truth that national education was an indispensable programme along with Swadeshi, Boycott and Swaraj for expediting national emancipation. It cannot be said that the education movement really collapsed, its outward edifice might have disappeared with only traces left behind but the debate it generated continued long after its light had dimmed. It firmly planted in the national psyche the realization that apart from indigenous industries an elaborate system of education that can be truly called national and would be suited to India’s temperamental requirement was necessary to be evolved if India was to be truly emancipated from foreign domination and if her mind – the national mind - was to be truly de-colonized and put firmly on the path towards future self-reliance and originality. It is because the spirit of national education remained alive that we see stalwarts of the freedom movement and the then cultural discourse continuously deliberating on the need for creating edifices, starting new experiments to continue the journey of discovering systems that could embody the need and demand for national education. We see this in Tagore throughout his life; we see this in Lala Lajpat Rai who wrote extensively on the demands and forms of a national education. While spending the first World War years in the United States Rai studied in great detail the American education system , he wrote on the ‘Problems of National Education in India’ apart from contributing a series of articles on the issue in the celebrated journal Modern Review of Calcutta , as has been observed earlier it is interesting to see how amidst the eddy of nationalist politics these front ranking leaders found time to contemplate on the quarters. To liquidate illiteracy, remove untouchability and ameliorate the condition of the poverty-stricken mass.’ Interestingly Radhakamal noted that a quarter of a century later when he visited the ‘Working Man’s Training Institution established by the Calcutta Corporation in Mechuabazar’ he was ‘dumb-founded to find that the Head Master of the institution was the same Chamar boy Fagua, whom I taught the three R’s on my lap in the Night School in 1906 and whom Ramesh Chandra Roy had treated for beriberi during an epidemic.’ (Radhakamal Mukherjee, India: the Dawn of a New Era,, 1997, pp.68-69.) Surely a re-evaluation of the position that the national education movement suffered from an upper-class bias is called for in the light of observations such as the above.
topic of national education and draw up alternatives in education for the people and their movement to work out. We witness this in Lokmanya Tilak who resolutely propagated the idea, we witness it in Sister Nivedita who wrote a number of papers on the theme and who gave it an almost revered place in her scheme of national regeneration, we observe it in that pioneering interpreter of Indian culture who too had his period of Swadeshi activism, Ananda Coomaraswamy. Coomaraswamy was among those first few along with Sri Aurobindo to highlight, sans rhetoric, the necessity of a cultural education as an indispensable necessity for freeing the Indian mind and making it conscious of its innate qualities. We notice later in 1916 Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya establish the University at Benares with cooperation from leading personalities of the day including Ms. Annie Besant and Satish Chandra Mukherjee, who had by then withdrawn to Benares. In Malaviya was at his pet project of establishing a Hindu University at Benares from 1905 onwards. He was clear that the University to be established would be different from the existing universities which were mainly examining universities. The university he envisaged was to be a teaching, examining and a residential university and would try and realise ‘the ideal of the University life as it was known in the past in India, and it is known in the advanced countries of the West…’ The principal educational objectives of Malaviya’s proposed university was to be: ‘To promote the study of the Hindu Shastras and of Sanskrit literature generally, as a means of preserving and

363 Tagore, Sister Nivedita and Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy were invited to deliver lectures at the newly formed National College. Dr. Coomaraswamy delivered two extension lectures between 18th and 20th August 1909 at the National College the first one having Tagore in the Chair. In it while describing national education and its urgency he criticized the university education system because it ignored the ‘traditional culture of the land and [because it was] modeled on the lines of the ancient English University system’ which had had come about when modern advances in Europe had not taken place etc. vide. The Origins of the National Education Movement, op.cit., pp. 145-48. It may be also mentioned that in his Essays in National Idealism – Coomaraswamy devoted chapters to the educational question in India.

364 Madan Mohan Malaviya, Speeches and Writings, 1919, p.237.
popularizing…the best thought and culture of the Hindus, and all that was good and great
in the ancient civilisation in India.' Two, ‘to promote learning and research generally in
arts and science in all branches; three, ‘to advance and diffuse such scientific, technical
and professional knowledge, combined with the necessary practical training, as is best
calculated to help in promoting indigenous industries and in developing the material
resources of the country’ and four, ‘to promote the building up of character in youth by
making religion and ethics an integral part of education.’365 The inspiration of the
national education philosophy of the first phase of the national education movement is
clearly visible in Malaviya’s objective clause. Undoubtedly inspired by the past
experiments and quest of the national education movement Mahatma Gandhi evolved his
Basic Education programme for the nation in the 1930s. A continuity of thought and
action was therefore maintained albeit in different forms and under different
circumstances.366 And we see it consistently in Sri Aurobindo too, who after arriving in

365 Ibid., p.238.
366 One of the major items in Mahatma Gandhi’s boycott programme during the Non-Cooperation
movement in 1920-21 was the call for boycotting government schools and colleges, no other item of boycott
had as much success as this one. This may be termed as the second phase of the national education
movement A large number of ‘national schools’ were established numbering to 1,200 as many as 80,000
students ‘got enrolled in them. This period 1920-21 also saw the founding of national education institutions
under Gandhiji’s leadership such as the Gujarat Vidyapith, Kashi Vidyapith under the tutelage of the
scholar and educationist Dr. Bhagawan Das (1869-1958) and the Jamia Millia Islamia under the
stewardship of eminent nationalist educationist Dr. Zakir Hussain (1897-1969) who introduced a number of
educational reforms in India and Dr. K.G.Sayiddin (who as Member of the Kothari Commission on
Education for National Development-1964-66 received a message by the Mother defining the term ‘Integral
Education’ – vide. Footnote-6 in Indrani Sanyal, ‘What is it to be Educated in the Light of Sri Aurobindo’s
Philosophy’, op. cit.) It was these institutions that managed to survive at times under extreme adversities
and remained as symbols of the educational demand of the national movement. When asked why the
agitation against the Bengal partition failed [rather it would be correct to say that why the national
education movement during the partition movement failed to sustain itself with dynamic vigour] Gandhiji
put forward the reasons as 1) the students had not been withdrawn from classes and 2) the leaders
continued to send their children to colleges. He termed the attending of government schools and colleges
sinful. [Amrik Singh, ‘Education and the National Movement’ in The Contested Terrain – Perspectives on
Education in India, op.cit.]. Though the educational movement reigned by Mahatma Gandhi petered out
after a short period of life – especially when he abandoned the non-cooperation movement which seemed to
be the organic lifeline of the education movement – it showed that the educational demand remained as an
undercurrent throughout the national movement. Mahatma Gandhi did not cease to take interest in

Bengal was the first one to present a cohesive programme for the nationalist struggle at different levels, in which the mass was to be an important component and the evolution of a national system of education was to be a programme of supreme importance. Sri Aurobindo realized that unless the Indian mind was freed from the shackles of the colonial process of thought political emancipation would have really no meaning. By 1906 the demand for national education had grown in Bengal, especially after the irrational handling of the students protest by the government that tried to tame the students’ wave through paper circulars and repressions and it gathered further momentum after the 1902 University Commission. It was to this demand for national education that Sri Aurobindo gave a shape; it was these urge that he channelized and gradually transformed into a dynamo that became one of the sustaining powers of the nationalist mass movement that he initiated while in Bengal. Satish Chandra and the National College became beacons of the national education movement and at a time when the movement was in its infancy and was growing they represented the light of hope for all those wanting to start national educational institutions. It may be said that it was Sri Aurobindo who put national education on to the political arena as an instrument of political action. He brought the national education discourse to the masses and revealed the way of emancipation through education on a mass scale. This aspect of Sri Aurobindo’s political programme is often overlooked, he is mentioned as being the first principle of the National College and as having resigned from it due to his greater education and continued to highlight the educational plight of the country in a sustained manner. The reasons for the inability of the second educational agitation to take off on wider scale are similar to those of the first national education movement, both failed to attract a majority of their countrymen, both faced a sustained pressure form the official machinery. But what is to be accepted is that they managed to leave behind at least some institutions which kept the flag of national education aloft – the second movement especially. In that sense, the first even in spirit gave momentum to the second and both it could be said played their parts in voicing the educational issue of the Indian struggle for freedom.
involvement in the political movement, while this is true and his contribution to the National College is gratefully acknowledged and mentioned in laudatory terms, it is also often understood by this that after relinquishing his charge at the College he ceased to further champion the cause of national education and was henceforth sucked only into the current of ‘revolutionary terrorism’. It is true that after a while Sri Aurobindo did not have the time to spare for the College’s administrative and teaching work and he could not devote sufficient attention to nurture the institution for enabling it to spearhead the creation of an altogether new national system of education which he believed should have been the ultimate aim of the movement, because of his hands being full with the editorial work of the Bande Mataram journal of which he became the leading spirit and which was fast becoming the vehicle of radical thought in Indian politics. He was also emerging to be the chief director of the young nationalist wing that was emerging within the Congress movement and was beginning to challenge the then prevailing moderate policies. He was also behind cover, the principle planner of the secret revolutionary movement which had as its objective the weaving of a network of revolutionary societies in all provinces and of providing military training to young men who would eventually work towards an armed insurrection in the country. Sri Aurobindo also realized that the mass cannot be excluded from any struggle for freedom that wished to call itself national but he saw that the then Congress leaders were unwilling to initiate this step and held the idea that the masses were incapable of articulating their needs and therefore an enlightened elite had to arrogate to themselves the role of articulators on behalf of the masses. Immediately on his return to India Sri Aurobindo carefully studied the political scene and challenged this position in a series of articles that he wrote at the instance of his Cambridge friend
K.G. Deshpande, editor of the Bombay paper *Indu Prakash* between 1893 and 1894. In these series he was the first one to articulate the need for the Congress to be turned into a national mass organisation and of the need for making the ‘proletariate’ part of the national movement; he was the first politician in India to use this word in the Indian political context.\(^{367}\) Anyway our intention in indicating this is to make the point that Sri Aurobindo realized very early the indispensability of involving the masses in the Indian national movement and having realized this he began formulating a suitable programme for mass action and application. This to be based on the ‘doctrine of passive resistance’ and would have Swaraj, Boycott, Swadeshi and National Education – the ‘four planks (*chatus-sutri*) in the new programme’.\(^{368}\) Therefore, for Sri Aurobindo National Education was first to be an instrument that would awaken the masses and educate them on the needs of freedom, but he did not use it merely as an instrument of political rhetoric to arouse the masses, instead he believed that a national education structure on a wide scale ought to be built first, in fact all provinces and districts of nationalist influence, as mentioned earlier, had started national schools. Eventually, Sri Aurobindo envisaged that a radically new system of national education had also to be evolved and not merely a replica of the existing colonial university system under Indian control pursuing the same pattern of subjects, text-books, evaluation and examination. He believed that a complete overhaul was necessary if national education was to succeed as a movement and positively affect the Indian character. At the same time as the movement advanced he


\(^{368}\) K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, op. cit., p. 228.
realized its problems and the deficiencies that were preventing it from assuming a wider sway and in his way highlighted them and critiqued the attitudes which he felt projected the old mindset – especially that of imitating the colonial structure and appending the term ‘national’ to institutions which continued to be essentially colonial in outlook and function. Thus a careful reading of his political writings and speeches during the period 1906-1910 will reveal that ever since his arrival in Bengal he began projecting among other issues the need for national education, he began working towards making it an inalienable part of the political discourse of the day, and even after his resignation from the National College he continued working for widening the ambit of the national education movement and encouraged and assisted the establishing of several national schools. While returning from the deliberations of the Surat Congress 1907 Sri Aurobindo toured the Bombay Presidency, which had already been converted due to the efforts of Tilak and other leaders into the stronghold of the nationalists, and delivered speeches on the situation in the country and the programme of the new nationalist party. In almost every speech he discusses the issue of national education. At the Pabna [East Bengal] Educational Conference in February 1908, just two months before his arrest in connection with the Alipore Conspiracy Case, attended by about ten thousand men Sri Aurobindo moved the resolution on national education and Rabindranath Tagore delivered a ‘stirring speech’ on the subject. At the district conference that followed also Sri Aurobindo ‘explained the aims and ideals of national education.’

As late as 1909-1910 just before his departure for Pondicherry he started writing a series discussing ‘some preliminary ideas’ on a national system of education in his newly launched English weekly *Karmayogin* and ‘almost’ outlined ‘a philosophy of National education for

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369 R.C.Majumdar, op.cit., pp. 78, 79.
Thus the thread never snaps, the contemplation on education continues and even in Pondicherry he began writing a Preface on National Education in the last two issues of his path-breaking journal of philosophy, culture and socio-political thought Arya between 1920 and 1921. In it one sees him further evolving the idea nearly two decades after he began working on it. Since the journal was discontinued the series could never be completed, but it just goes to prove that Sri Aurobindo definitely had concrete ideas on the issue of national education and the fact that he had given the subject due attention over the years goes also to prove how serious an aspect of national development he considered it to be. From 1920 onwards while being absorbed in his Yoga of Integral Transformation he also kept occupying himself with the thought of how India was to organize her freedom it may have been this preoccupation that perhaps made him start again a series on national education because he must have considered that to be an area critical to national development. As noted above as late as 1946 while dictating a general note on his political life Sri Aurobindo mentions that national education was another programme in the political plan that he chalked out to which he attached much importance. Even in 1949 he wrote a series on the importance of physical education in the national, individual and yogic life and the importance of cultivating the body in the Indian as well Western classical traditions for the inaugural issues of the Bulletin of the Department of Physical Education of the Ashram. In the beginning of 1951 when the Mother began contemplating the setting up of an university in the name of Sri Aurobindo she revealed that, ‘one of the most recent forms under which Sri Aurobindo conceived of the development of his work was to establish at Pondicherry an International University

Centre open to students from all over the world.’ ⁳⁷¹ Thus we see the thread continue even here – nearly five decades after he started work on it – from a system of education for the nation his thoughts had evolved towards creating a system of education open to all seekers of knowledge from across the world. Though he wrote very little on education compared to contributions of epic proportions he made directly to the field of philosophy, metaphysics, socio-political thought and literature, he appeared to be in touch with the subject and the Centre of Education thus became after the Ashram itself the second most important outward manifestation of his integral philosophy and continues to be an important contributing factor to the ongoing discourse on national education and its need and shape in the Indian context. National education and its quest looked at from this aspect assumes a centrality in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy as well as in his life.