CHAPTER - VI

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL IN REMODELLING AND REORGANISING THE SECONDARY EDUCATION OF THE PROVINCE AFTER 1977
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The combination of political parties (the left Front) which assumed offices in West Bengal in 1977 had before it a clear-cut set of objectives in the sphere of education. These objectives were spelled out in the manifesto on the basis of which it fought and won the election. The relevant portion of the manifesto proceeds as follows:

Concrete and effective programme including legislative and administrative measures backed by popular effort for eradication of illiteracy; scientific reform of educational policy and introduction of free and compulsory education for all up to middle school stage; steps to fight decadence and imperialist penetration in the cultural field and to foster progressive cultural activities; supply of books, paper, stationary and other contingencies to students up to class VIII; free mid-day meal to students up to primary stage; steps towards realisation of the right to education through mother tongue up to the highest level; education through all regional languages including Urdu, Nepali, Santali etc. to be encouraged up to the highest stages; security of service of teachers and employees in all educational institutions; direct payment by the government to teachers of all categories of their monthly salaries; repeal of the West Bengal Universities' Control of Expenditure Act, 1976; democratisation of administrative bodies with adequate representation for teachers; establishment of a Secondary Education Grants Commission; a comprehensive public library legislation.

The objectives as set out reflected the Front's intention to bring about a radical change in the educational system. The change must be based on the policy which ensures dissemination and development of education and through it help the development of human power and qualities. It will also help emotional integration and national solidarity. The basic characteristics of this policy are nationalistic, democratic and scientific in nature.¹

It would be useful to refer here to the situation prevailing before the Left Front assuming power in 1977. The decade 1966-77 was marked by political upheavals in the state which severely affected the education-scene. The general environment was not at all congenial to serious academic pursuit; students in schools, colleges and universities faced an uncertain prospect; the schedule of examination was thrown totally out of gear; mass copying in examinations was a common feature. Most of the teachers and other staff were without security of tenure, the payment of salaries was often irregular and the retirement benefits were inadequate and uncertain.

Beside these there were wide differences in service condition with respect to pay, allowances, retirement benefits etc. of different types of schools. There were four main types of schools in West Bengal such as –

1) Government schools
2) Government sponsored schools
3) Non Government affiliated schools
4) Special constitution schools.

The teachers and non teaching staff of Government schools got pay, allowances and other benefits at per with the employees of the state

government. But the staff of the non-government recognised schools which comprised 99% of the total schools of the state did not get the meagre pay scale declared by the government. In many schools the teachers and the non-teaching staff had to remain satisfied with only the Dearness Allowance. But this allowance granted to them was not at per with the employees of the state government. This discrimination of financial benefits created tremendous frustration amongst the teachers.

Thus the whole situation was detrimental towards the interest of the teachers and the non-teaching staff. But the students were the worst effected. Teachers being deprived of the minimum and being exploited, teaching learning could not run properly. Moreover such policy could not help the improvement of standard of education and it could not help in materializing the wider aims and the specific objectives of education.

To bring to an end to this dismal condition, the Left Front Government took various important steps.

**Increase in the number of Secondary Educational institutions**

The most outstanding step the government took was to increase the number of secondary schools. A considerable number of new schools were established. The following Table provides quantitative data on the expansion that has taken place between 1976-77 and 1991-92.

Number of Secondary Educational Institutions in West Bengal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>1976-77</th>
<th>1991-92</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Schools</td>
<td>40,941</td>
<td>51,021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Schools</td>
<td>7,847</td>
<td>8,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.S. Schools</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>1,574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Universities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, many junior High Schools were elevated to High and Higher Secondary Schools. In this connection the most remarkable development after 1977 is the establishment of new schools on the basis of a healthy and sound policy. The policy in brief was to cater to the needs of new areas having no school.¹

But only increase in the number of schools did not serve the purpose of expansion because every child can not avail educational opportunities only on the availability of school. Many Socio-economic limitations come on the way. Many parents can not send their children to schools or are compelled to discontinue the education of their children. Poverty, uncertainty of employment, lack of educational awareness, mass illiteracy of mothers (75% of the Indian women are still illiterate) and lack of future ambition are some of the reasons of mass educational backwardness of the weaker section. Moreover the purchasing power and standard of living of the teeming millions of rural and urban population are very low. Unless it is increased, multiplying unemployment is arrested and unless the rural economy is developed this expected state of development can not be achieved.² Yet the Left Front Government in such an unfavourable condition is trying its best to achieve quantitative and qualitative expansion of education. For this it has started emphasizing some supportive measures along with expansion of educational institutions as a part of its democratic principles of universalising primary and secondary education such as:

a) **Introduction of free education upto class XII**

   The first important step in the desired direction taken by the Left Front Govt. was to make education free upto Class-XII. In 1967, the

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first United Front Government had made primary education free. The second United Front Government decided that girls belonging to rural areas were to be exempted from tuition fees. The Government installed in 1977 proceeded much further. From January, 1978 tuition fees for all students up to class-VI throughout West Bengal were abolished. Thereafter education up to class-X and then up to class-XII was made free with effect from January, 1980 and January, 1981 respectively. But this step has been highly criticised. It is said that fees other than the tuition fees, collected from the students is not sufficient to meet the establishment and development expenses of the schools. So repairs and new developmental work in the schools have almost stopped. As a result most of the schools are in dilapidated condition.¹

b) **Distribution of free text books**

The supply of free text-books in primary and secondary schools is another important step. Free distribution includes the supply of all text books for all classes up to class-V and the text book on Mathematics for class-VI. The text books distributed are not in Bengali alone; a sizeable number of them are in Nepali, Hindi, Urdu, Santhali and English. In addition a further number of text books are prepared and published under the auspices of the State Board of Secondary Education and sold to students at a fixed price. The list includes English text book for Class-VI and text books on Mathematics and English for Classes-VII to X and History text books for Classes-VI and VII. It is no doubt a positive step for universalisation of education. The State Government spends about 5 crores of rupees per annum for this purpose. No other

state of India has taken similar measures. The standard of text books have been improved and the books have been made attractive for the readers. The subject matter has been made life centric as well as realistic and attempts have been made to present the subject matter in rationalistic way\(^1\). But irregularity in distribution of books is a common feature. This must be remedied to make the teaching-learning process steady and regular. Another irregularity is noticeable. Text books written according to the prescribed syllabus are sent to the Board for approval but many publishers unnecessarily increase the volume of such books after approval by adding new materials and sell such books to the students at higher prices. As a result the students become loser in two ways – they have to pay more for the book and labour hard for practising the additional subject matters. Moreover in the market made-easies and note books are rampant. Many of the publishers are flooding the market with solved problems of the prescribed books on Mathematics and they create situations in which the students are tempted to purchase such books. Such short cut method destroys the initiative of the students to read more and learn. This is totally against the educational policy. Such mal-practices should be stopped immediately. The Secondary Board may scrutinise the books before giving approval to these text books.

In order to do away with this corrupt and lawless condition in the field of text books a state level Book Trust should be formed immediately and such trust may be empowered to develop standard text books for all levels of primary and secondary education. Such practices have already been introduced in some states.

\(^1\) Bhabesh Moitra - Shiksha Prasange (Bengali), P. 26.
Change in the curriculum - minimizing the language load

The Government of West Bengal introduced several changes in the curriculum of the secondary schools. In this respect the main consideration of the government is to democratise the secondary education and it followed the policy of minimizing the load. Among the changes of the curriculum based on this policy most important and most debatable is its language policy. Withdrawal of Sanskrit is a part of the language policy of the Left Front Govt.

The syllabus of the secondary level of West Bengal was burdened with languages. Before 1977 there were three languages in the curriculum of the Madhyamik Examination.

1st language - Total Marks - 200
2nd language - Total Marks - 100
3rd language - Total Marks - 100

Total - 400

Whereas science group was comprised of Mathematics, Physical Science and Life Science

Mathematics - Total marks - 100
Physical Science - Total marks - 100
Life Science - Total marks - 100

Total - 300

The distribution shows that the load of languages was undoubtedly heavier. It has been discussed again and again that in this age of Science and Technology more emphasis should be given to the
teaching of science. But, in fact, this was not done before the Left Front Government rule.

Most of the students took Bengali as the first language, English as the 2nd language and as regards third language there were a number of classical languages such as Sanskrit, Pali, Persian, Arabic etc. Majority of the students selected Sanskrit as their choice. In 1979 the Left Front Govt. withdrew this third language as a compulsory subject from the curriculum of the Madhyamik Examination. It was however retained as an additional subject in classes IX and X and it was treated as a compulsory subject in classes VII to VIII.

The policy behind this change is to reduce the language load. Reduction of language load is one of the preconditions for the expansion of education i.e. the democratisation of education which is the basis of the educational policy of the Left Front Government. The axe of reduction fell on classical language with the argument that the classical language is not a language of the common men. Secondly, knowledge necessary for day to day living and the knowledge for scientific education can be acquired without the help of the classical language. But this decision of the withdrawal of the third language as a compulsory subject was heavily criticised from different corners. But it is significant that the opposition against this decision came from the middle class Hindu intelligentia who fought for the cause of Sanskrit only. The patrons of other languages, which were included in the syllabus, were almost indifferent to the issue.

Those who fought for the cause of Sanskrit argued that Sanskrit is a mother language and other Indian languages owe origin to this language. Moreover, Sanskrit is the repository of Indian culture. It is an aid to the study of modern languages and it makes the study of the
provincial language easier. It is again argued that no one can be proficient in Bengali unless he has an adequate knowledge of Sanskrit. Sanskrit has its perfect grammars, a highly developed science of Alankar which is adopted in Bengali. So it should be regarded as a necessary subject of study at least in the secondary stage. Moreover the aim of education is the manifestation of a complete man in the learner. For this total development there is need for creating a bridge between modern knowledge and traditional thoughts as recorded through classical languages. Translated literature of the past do not serve the purpose because translation can only provide an indirect form of the original. It also misses the music of the original. The study of Sanskrit literature, its Kavya and drama, is itself a joy and makes a man, 'rasik manus'. So the learning of Sanskrit should not be considered as useless rather it should be made a part and parcel of our educational programme.

Too much emphasis on science and technology is deviating our children from the traditional value system of the nation. But development of values is a must at the growing stages of the children. It is particularly true for the adolescents. Lack of values create great problems at the mental level of the growing children. In order to provide healthy values to these learners there is need for presenting the cultural heritage in its original form to them. For this, learning of classical language is a must.

But the Front Government was not in favour of making the study of classical language compulsory for all. They are of opinion that the third language has been retained as an additional subject and a student having love and aptitude is free to opt for such language. It is

1 Dhyanesh Narayan Chakraborti Shastri - Janashiksha O Sanskrita (Bengali), pp. 11-12.
not true that classical language has been totally abolished from the secondary syllabus of West Bengal rather it has been given its due place.

The Mitra Commission 1992-93, however, recommended that the two papers currently reserved for the mother tongue in the secondary examination may be telescoped to one and half papers and the residual half paper be assigned to Sanskrit. But the Left Front Government did not agree to the proposal and classical language has become only an additional subject in classes IX and X.

Abolition of English from the Primary Level

Another major step in the field of study of language was discontinuing the teaching of English in the primary level. Though the step taken was associated with primary education it had a great impact on the secondary education. The decision was based on the recommendations of a committee headed by Prof. Himangshu Bimal Majumdar in 1979 and was pushed through by late Promode Dasgupta, the State CPI(M) Secretary. The decision was implemented in 1981 and the pupils of government schools began to be taught English only from Class-VI. The teaching of English, it was decided, would commence at the secondary level, and students would learn the language from class-VI onwards. The effective duration of English instruction would be five years at the secondary stage, followed by a further two years of the Higher Secondary Level. The main aim of the Left Front Government in the field of education was the democratization of education, the first step of which was mass expansion. For mass expansion of the primary
education the greatest stumbling block was the inclusion of a foreign language like English in the curriculum. English was not a language with which the children of the common man was familiar with. So they could not pick up English from their environment. They had to learn it with utmost effort. There was a great difference between picking up a language and learning a language. Picking up a language was easier for a young child but learning needed some maturity. Keeping this point in consideration the Left Front Government abolished the teaching of English Language from the syllabus of the primary stage and introduced it in a more matured stage of class-VI.

The abolition of English from the syllabus of primary education was also a part of the Government's Policy of load shedding. The children from the weaker section were unable to take the burden of two languages at the very beginning. So only one language should be taught in this stage and that should be their mother tongue. In most of the schools Bengali as mother tongue was taught. But most village children spoke a dialect that was quite distinct from Bengali taught in schools. These children therefore had to cross a "dialect barrier" to learn, to read, to write and to speak the standard language. It was a barrier too for tribal students, who found themselves in minority situation in many schools. English for many of them was almost a third language and if introduced too early would prove to be a heavy burden.

A great problem in the field of education was the problem of "Drop outs". Every year forty-five to fifty lac students were admitted in Class-I but the wave of enrolment became thinner and thinner. During the Madhyamik Examination it would become 4 to 5 lacs. One of the cause of the gloomy picture was the burden of English.

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1 Ashoke Mitra - Anandabazar Patrika dt. 3.2.1999
Moreover liberated from the encumbrance of a foreign language, the average student would learn his or her mother tongue with greater proficiency at the primary level; such proficiency would in turn enable him or her to grapple with English better at the secondary level.¹ Throughout the country a general complaint was that the standard of English learning was very low. The basic cause lay in the introduction of English at the primary stage. For teaching of a second language i.e. a language other than mother tongue, before sound language grounding in vernacular, hindered learning. So for better learning of English it was imperative that English should be introduced at the secondary stage of education.

But this decision of discontinuing English from primary level has been highly criticised from different corners such as the parents, the intellectuals, the political leaders, the opposition parties etc. Even it is said that ever since its assumption of power in 1977, the CPI(M) had been resolute in destroying the fabric of education in the state. The first step in that direction is the abolition of English at the primary level and the gradual reduction of its importance at the secondary and tertiary stages.² Various arguments are put forward against the decision. It has been maintained that knowledge of English is essential for higher education, for success in national competitive examination as well as inter-state and international communication. So it is perilous to under emphasise its teaching in the state. Secondly, there are so many English medium schools in the state. The students learnt English in those schools right from the beginning. If the students of the Bengali medium schools do not learn English from the primary level, they will not be able to compete in the competitive examinations and in other spheres at the

¹ The Statesman, December 22, 1998 - English to be taught from class III.
² Asoke Sen - Same Old language Games. The Telegraph, 7 May, 1998.
national level with the students of the English medium schools. Thirdly, another result of this decision of discontinuing English from the primary level is the mushrooming of English medium schools in different parts of the state, where fees like tuition fees, development fees, session fees are demanded according to the need and whim of the authority. They are almost business centres where education is being sold like commodity.

The issue is complicated by the migration of a number of students from better off households to privately maintained English medium schools. It is clearly beyond the means of poor families, whether in town or village to emulate that example. Government policy, is therefore, helping to develop two cultures, those with money are able to educate their children in English from the primary stage itself, while the poor has to be content with instruction in mother tongue alone. Thus the state government is encouraging a duality in the educational system. Fourthly, a great importance of English lay in the fact that most of the standard text books as well as reference books, are written in English though Bengali has been widely accepted as the medium in higher education. Most of the text books and reference books of Degree, Honours and Post Gradute levels have not been written in Bengali language. Naturally students are bound to depend on books written in English language. In the field of research dependence on English is still more because English provides the door for entry into the world of higher knowledge. So the English language base of a student should be developed from his or her infant stage so that proficiency in English language is acquired properly.¹

An opinion has been developed that English should be abandoned gradually as it is a colonial language. As the first step of the process it is abandoned in primary school. Counter arguments are not without substance. English should not be resisted only because it has been introduced by the colonial rulers. In fact English is not the sole language of the Britishers. Rather it is the most well accepted international language. Without proficiency in English language it is not possible to enter into the vast arena of international art, literature, science and technology. For such proficiency teaching of English language should be started from the very beginning.

Moreover in the wave of globalisation the geographical boundaries are on the way to extinction. The doors of all the countries are opening rapidly. Through open market policy the whole world has entered every individual house of all countries. People are talking in English, they are exchanging their views through the medium of English. It is also the language of Information Technology. So the teaching of the language can not be avoided.

It is relevant here to mention the opinion of Dr. Chamsky, the eminent child Psychologist that childhood is the best time of language learning. Maoze Dong felt that childhood is the best time for learning foreign language. So it is better to start the teaching of this language from the primary level.

English should be given an extra importance on the ground that it can be the only "Link Language" in a country like India which is a multi-lingual one. There are about 250 languages in India of which
15 are recognised in our constitution. There are different languages in different states. In this situation there must be a link language. After independence there was an attempt to develop Hindi as the link language. But different states started movement not to accept Hindi, West Bengal was one of them. So English should be given due importance so that the Bengalees are able to face different all India competitions and take all India facilities.

But the decision to discontinue English from the primary level is not a new discovery of the Left Front Government. In taking this particular step, the Government of West Bengal merely followed the recommendations of three commissions on education appointed at the central level in the post independence period such as the Radha Krishnan Commission, the Mudaliar Commission and the Kothari Commission. The Kothari Commission recommended that the study of English as a foreign language should not begin before class-V.¹ Pursuant to the Commission's report most of the provinces discontinued teaching of English before Class-V. But West Bengal took a long period to banish English from the primary schools.

In India almost all the states excluded English from the syllabus of the primary level. Only four states like Manipur, Sikkim, Nagaland and Tripura teach English in the classes below Class-IV (Among them Tripura is a tribal state and in other three states books in their local languages are not available). Tamilnadu is the exception where English is taught from Class-III.

The chart will show the fact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Teaching of English starts from</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andhra</td>
<td>Class-V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>Class-V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>Class-V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujrat</td>
<td>Class-VIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hariana</td>
<td>Class-VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Himachal Pradesh</td>
<td>Class-IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jammu and Kashmir</td>
<td>Class-V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>Class-V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>Class-V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhyapradesh</td>
<td>Class-V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>Class-V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>Class-III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghalay</td>
<td>Class-IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagaland</td>
<td>Preprimary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>Class-VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>Class-VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>Class-VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikkim</td>
<td>Class-I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamilnadu</td>
<td>Class-III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripura</td>
<td>Class-III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>Class-VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>Class-V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vide Ajkal - April 14, 1989, P-1.

In almost all the civilised countries of the World mother tongue is taught in the primary level. Only in the former colonies a second language is taught at the primary level. So the teaching of English at the primary level is a colonial hang-over.
But the general public of West Bengal did not pay heed to any argument and there had been long protest against the decision and a major section of the guardians, students, teachers and academicians raised their voices in favour of re-introduction of English at the primary level. The state government answered to it by implementing a further commission named Asoke Mitra Commission appointed in 1992. It recommended that the teaching of English in government and government aided institutions might commence from Class-V. Children of this class might be introduced with the English alphabets only\(^1\). They may learn the meaning of some simple words and expression in this class.

But the movement which demanded English to be taught from primary level did not die down and it turned into a state wide stir. At the initial stage of the movement S.U.C.I. (Socialist Unity Centre of India), formed a Save Education Committee with the backing of middle class intelligentia. Its leadership came from eminent people like Sukumar Sen, the eminent linguist, Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy, Pratul Gupta, Pramathanath Bishi, Premendra Mitra, Sushil Kumar Mukherjee, Vice-Chancellor, Calcutta University, Dr. Arbinda Nath Basu, Vice-Chancellor, Jadavpur University etc. This all Bengal Save Education Committee spearheaded the movement for reintroduction of English at Primary level. In the early part of 1980s a lot of other resistances grew up against the language policy of the state government. A committee against the delimitation of educational facilities and establishing the educational rights of the common men started movement aganist the existing educational policy specially the language policy. Beside these the public opinion was voiced in various media like news papers, Radio, Television etc. Meetings and rallies were organised to protest agianst

\(^1\) The Mitra Commission (1992-93), Para 6.25.
the abolition of English language from the primary level. Even the village people for whose benefit mainly the policy was adopted had a share in the movement. The intensity of the public opinion was felt when the General Strike (Bangla Bandh) called on the issue by a politically insignificant party like Socialist Unity Centre (S.U.C.) on 3rd Feb., 1998 was spontaneously successful. Moreover the comparatively unfavourable result of the Lok Sabha Election in 1998 compelled the Left Front Government to rethink over the issue. The Pabitra Sarkar Committee was formed on 13th April, 1998 to examine whether English teaching should be resumed at the primary level. Although Prof. Pabitra Sarkar was personally against the view of introducing English at the primary stage, he, in fact, admitted that people of different strata of the Society were in favour of teaching English at the primary stage. They wanted that their children should learn English from the very beginning. Not only the parents of the middle class society but even the pupil belonging to the lower strata such as the rikshaw pullers and the day labourers aspired that their children should learn English from Class I.

Prof. Pabitra Sarkar could not deny the reality. In his report he mentioned that with the introduction of market economy multinational companies were coming to India. So English was getting greater importance. The committee collected the views of about three thousand people from the categories like guardians, teachers administrators and experts. About 75% were in favour of teaching English at the primary stage. Amongst them 37% were of opinion that English teaching should be started from Class I.¹

The report of the Pabitra Sarkar Committee was tabled by the school Education minister Mr Kanti Biswas on 22nd December, 1998. The

¹ The Statesman - English to be taught from Class III, Calcutta, 22.12.1998.
committee recommended that English was to be taught from Class III from the academic session 1999-2000. In the informal arrangement the state Government however decided that students of class-II would be taught the English alphabets and simple mono-syllabic words. But the children should not be asked to write English in that stage. From class-III English Text Books written as per the syllabus should be introduced. Writing skill would also start at this stage. But no test in English need be taken, only the continuous evaluation should be implemented with greater rigour.

The Committee recommended the formation of an expert committee to thrash out details of the syllabi for classes-III and IV. Thus the Left Front Government had to change their language policy and English was re-introduced in the primary level. But only the re-introduction will not serve the purpose. The government should seriously consider appointing new teachers to schools which need them badly. In the primary level generally a teacher teaches all subjects. He or she has a general education. But the English teachers need to be trained. English Institute in Calcutta may be asked to devise a programme of such training. It may also be called to create a manual in Bengali or English which is easy to follow. It will help the teachers of the primary level to plan their lessons.

Introduction of Functional Comunicative Approach of teaching English

With the state policy of withdrawing the study of English at primary level and to begin it from class-VI the Government of West Bengal introduced a new method of teaching English known as the Functional Communicative Approach. Since 1984 a set of new text books i.e. the Learning English series are being used. These books are biased to the Functional Communicative Approach to language teaching and
learning. The British High commission and the Institute of English, Calcutta helped the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education to prepare the Learning English series of text books and subsequently to train teachers to teach the series. These teachers were advised by a number of experts from the United Kingdom. Some members of the Institute's academic staff were sent to the U.K. for undergoing training there. It is only after the approach and the method had been discussed at great length in seminars and workshops that the learning English series was introduced at the secondary level.¹ This Functional Communicative Approach to learning English has removed the impediments to learning the language. Language is the greatest media of communication in human society. The new method urges students to learn English through communication in the classroom. Language has its functions. The pupil should learn English for performing those functions through direct and indirect communication. So the learning objectives of the Learning English series are expressed in terms of communicative functions such as giving instructions, greetings, requesting, narrating, suggesting, making enquiries etc. These language functions have been selected on the basis of frequency, teachability and classroom feasibility. So the learner is to be taken through learning processes which will help him to use language for the purposes mentioned through the functions.²

The whole process presupposes active participation of the learners. This method of self learning with the help and under the guidance of the teachers inspires students to acquire skill in the language. What is aimed at is developing of four linguistic skills, viz speaking, listening, reading and writing. Of the four linguistic skills

¹ Editorial- The Teachers' Journal, All Bengal Teachers' Association Vol LXVIII, October, 1989.
speaking is undoubtedly more important than any other skill because it enables pupil to a considerable extent to master other skills. So the Learning English series emphasise starting English orally. The age-long method (Translation method), of English teaching attaches much importance to reading and writing. The cultivation of speech habit was neglected miserably for a pretty long time. As a result speaking habit did not develop in the children. But after the replacement of Translation Method by the Direct Method, stress is being paid to the development of speech habit in the pupils.

But the series have been criticised in many ways. The course is scientific no doubt but it is unworkable under our conditions.\(^1\) It is an admitted fact that cultivation of speaking skill plays a vital role in learning English but it is neglected in most of the schools. Most of the teachers, entrusted with the task of teaching English, are the product of traditional method. Naturally they are not accustomed to the habit of speaking English and as a result their pronunciation of language is not satisfactory.\(^2\)

With the introduction of Learning English, teachers' manual was published to help teachers in following the proper methodology of teaching. But unfortunately most of the teachers can not even properly follow the teachers' manual written in English.\(^3\) The outcome conceivably would have been less disappointing if those instructions were translated into Bengali.

The first eleven lessons included in the manual are in the form of instructions to the teachers, while the primer itself starts only from

lesson twelve. Teachers, especially those from the rural areas, have not obviously found it easy to negotiate the preliminary eleven lessons. For a large number amongst them, the methodology has turned out to be both abstract and abstruse. Moreover the manual has not even reached many schools. So they are not generally consulted. Many teachers in the remotest corner have not heard of it.\textsuperscript{1} Even on receipt of the manuals they were not followed properly. A survey by the State Council of Educational Research and Training among the students has proved the ineffectiveness of the direction of the manual.

The specific directive in the manual was to help the students to develop silent and extensive reading habit without the intrusion of the mother tongue. According to the finding of the survey, a majority of the students continue to read about the lessons, which are translated into mother tongue in the class. A majority of the students also indicate that they have separate grammar classes. (Before the execution of the recommendations of the Mitra commission there was instruction not to teach grammar). The emphasis in the syllabus is to encourage students to correct their mistake and errors through mutual discussions rather than take recourse to cramming rules of grammar. Grammar is a distinct discipline. It talks about the language and does not help students to use the language. Often the students are able to identify parts of speech, phrases and clauses etc. but they are not able to use these in sentences for purposes of communication. Students were supposed to be encouraged to guess the meaning of word occurring in a group of words so that they may learn by themselves without intrusion of mother tongue. But this is obviously not what is happening. According to 60% of the respondents the teachers dictate answers occasionally, 14% said that this is done often, 16% said that they always do it. The

\textsuperscript{1} The Education Commission, Government of West Bengal, 1992-93, P. 3.
traditional use of the black board also persists. Thus for whatever reasons, most of the directives are not being followed in the class. So it is altogether doubtful whether the students are acquiring any effective communicative skills in English.\(^1\) Morerover the manual is not well written and there is no provision for continuous revision to reinforce its strong points and for weeding out aspects that are found unsatisfactory.

Other factors must have also hampered the success of the Functional Communicative Approach. The new method can be successful with relatively small groups of pupils. It can succeed only when the number of students is less than 20.\(^2\) Every student can be given \(1\frac{1}{2}\) minute time. But in our schools there are seventy students in average. Again this method will be successful only when the students will get the environment of English language interaction. But many of the students of our state are from house holds where the ambience of English language is totally alien. Most of them in villages are first generation learners and they do not even hear an English word beyond their English period in the school.

The framers of the syllabus of learning English series have overlooked a very important point. They have not considered the link between the syllabus of this series with the syllabus of the next higher stage. No syllabus can be self sufficient. Every syllabus provides a step for the syllabus of the next higher stage. But the Madhyamik syllabus has no link with the syllabus of the Higher Secondary stage. At the Higher Secondary stage there is no place for functional approach. This syllabus is mainly based on English literature and it is taught

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\(^1\) Report of the Mitra Commission, 1992, pp. 112 -13
\(^2\) Sanghamitra Sanyal, Rabindra Bharati University, Anandabazar Patrika, April 16, '98.
through lecture method. There is no scope of oral work and its success depends on writing skill. As a result the students are oppressed by the two different types of syllabi and the standard of English teaching learning is deteriorating day by day.¹

Above all the success of teaching of Learning English depends on the efficiency of the teachers. To attain such efficiency a teacher must have proper training. But the formal training of teachers who specialise in teaching English has shown little progress in the state in recent years. There is little evidence of influence of the B. ED and D. E. L. T. (of the Institute of English) courses on English teaching in the state.

Against this background West Bengal Board of Secondary Education has organised training courses of various lengths (3 days, 7 days and 10 days etc.) all over the state. These courses have covered so far nearly 18,000 teachers of English in Secondary schools. But it is difficult to vouch for the quality of the training. The time set aside is much too short for any intensive instruction. Moreover a considerable number of teachers are reluctant to cross over to a new methodology of teaching.

Beside this the success of the methodology depends on the practice of the methodology by practitioner himself and observation on his part of the performance of other practitioners. This is simply not possible in our schools, for the method prescribed exclusively for the teaching of English is quite out of fit with the rest of the curriculum.

Again the school set up is not favourable for introducing the methodology suggested in the manual. The teacher can not organise, as per suggestion in the manual, group work or pair work in this existing

¹ Soumitra Shankar Dasgupta, Reader, Serampore College, Anandabazer Patrika, May 1, '99.
school set up. The children running, hopping and playing right inside the class room, as they practise appropriate pieces of the language, can not be imagined. Through this method the learners develop some proficiency in understanding English but so far as the writing skill is concerned they lag behind. They become highly deficient in stock of English words. They do not develop the art of writing grammatically correct English.\textsuperscript{1} They can not arrange subject, object and verbs in proper places of the English sentences.

Moreover in the Learning English there is practically no scope of studying English literature. Naturally it has become highly prosaic and drab. It has become lifeless. Of late there is a popular demand for the introduction of English literature at the secondary level. Literature provides freedom of thought and develop values in the learners. Learning English series is written in drab English. There are a few poems in the last part of the series and they very much lack the literary beauty of the language. This syllabus makes English teaching learning dry as well as extremely uninteresting. The learners attend 14 to 18 periods in this subject but due to its uninteresting nature it does not create any love for the subject rather it creates aversion in the mind of the learner\textsuperscript{2}.

The evaluation system is also highly questionable. From class-VI to VIII forty out of one hundred marks are earmarked for oral examination. But no scientific method is followed for this part of evaluation. Naturally the main purpose fails. Another flaw of the evaluation process is the introduction of group system from class IX. Vernacular consisting of two hundred marks and English of one hundred marks forms the language group. A student scoring 102 out of these

\textsuperscript{1} Soumitra Shankar Dasgupta, Reader, Srerampur College, Anandabazar Patrika, May 1, 1999.
\textsuperscript{2} Jaya Mitra - "Engreji ki Parano uchit" (Bengali) - Anandazar Patrika, 26th March, 1998.
300 marks qualifies for passing language group. Out of these 102 marks a candidate is required to score at least 20 marks in English. So only 20% marks in English make a student qualified. This group system ultimately makes the learner weak in English. Moreover for evaluation of English separate question papers are not provided to the examinees. They are to answer in the space provided in the question paper. The students do not get the question papers for their drilling at home.

Inspite of all these criticisms the necessity of introducing Functional Communicative Approach cannot be denied. This approach helps in the development of the skill of verbal communication in English. India being a vast multilingual country there is need for communication - verbal as well as written. In day to day life verbal communication in English has great importance in the field of jobs, higher education, medical treatment and many other life situations. But the importance of element of literature cannot be denied. So the course content of English teaching should be recast giving due weightage to literary English as well as Functional Communicative English. This aspect was thoroughly considered by the Mitra Commission, 1992-93. The commission recommends that a committee consisting of specialists in language teaching and other experts should be appointed to recast the series of Learning English so that the course content becomes easier to communicate to those for whom the series are intended. This committee may also decide whether some elements of English Grammar could be directly introduced or not.

The manual of instruction for teacher should be suitably revised and translated into Bengali, Hindi, Urdu and Nepali in order that teachers, whose acquaintance with English at the ordinary level, can comprehend its contents more easily.
The commission lays importance on the training of the teachers. There are about twenty thousand teachers teaching English in the secondary schools of West Bengal. Over the next two years, training courses each of at least one month’s duration may be organised, so that teachers, in batches of one hundred, could go through an intensive training in the theory and practice of teaching English. The committee referred to earlier should function as a standing review committee, monitor the teaching of English in the different districts, supervise the training programme and suggest from time to time, whatever improvements in the course contents or method of teaching are felt necessary.

In due course the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education accepts the fact that though the new approach are proved effective and has liberated vast majority of the students from the compulsion of slavish cramming and has opened up path for learning English as a second language, there are points of departure from the basic approach in the text books. Better text materials could have handled the functions effectively. Sets of reading materials are at times very remote from the life experience of the students, impending the process of self learning. So keeping the basic approach unchanged the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education has changed the reading materials and included new pieces in the Learning English series.

Abolition of Work Education, Physical Education, and Social Service including School Performance

On 30th April, 1995 the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education decided to discontinue work education, physical Education
and Social service including school performance as a compulsory subject for the Madhyamik Examination. However, it was decided that the subject would continue as an additional subject in classes IX and X. Upto class VIII it would, however, continue to stay as a compulsory subject. The decision was implemented from the session of 1995-96. This was a vital change in the curriculum. There were several causes of such an important decision of the Board.

Firstly, teaching-learning of the subject was very weak mainly because of lack of proper training of teachers and absence of proper infra-structure necessary for teaching of the subject. The teachers were not sufficiently experienced and were not motivated to teach the subject. In most of the schools the period allotted for the subject had become the period of leisure.

Secondly, to the guardians and the students the main grievance against the subject was its weak and subjective nature of evaluation. There was no process of scrutiny or re-examination. The policy of evaluation was again not clear. Marking became a problem. The evaluators had no compulsion to follow any clear-cut directive in the matter. Naturally securing marks depended on the sweet will of the teachers and the external examiners. But the marks secured in this subject decided in many ways the fate of the students. Admission in Higher Secondary schools or securing a position in the merit list depended on the marks scored in the subject. The whims of the examiners in many cases sealed the fate of the students.

Thirdly, teaching learning of the paper was not a regular activity of most of the schools. During examination of Work Education the students used to submit finished products purchased from the market and claimed them as their own products. In regard to physical
Education regular classes were not held. Few days prior to final examination the students were trained in some physical education skills to demonstrate before the external examiner. Regular games, sports and physical exercise were not practised in the schools. So there was no question of either physical development or development of skills for production. The school authorities remained indifferent in the matter.

Fourthly, the load of Madhyamik curriculum in West Bengal was higher and it needed reduction. In comparison to other states the total marks of Madhyamik Examination was much higher. So the Board decided to make this paper additional instead of a compulsory one.

This decision of abolishing work education, physical education and social service of West Bengal Board of Secondary Education was severely criticised. Only intellectual education can not be a complete education. Education must have the scope of all-round development of the child. This is only possible if education is related to productivity through work education in one hand and physical and emotional development on the other through participation in games, sports and co-curricular activities. All the Education commissions corroborated with this view. Activities related to the paper reduced the monotony of teaching-learning activities in the school. So there was need of retaining the subject as a compulsory one. Regarding Physical education leading researchers of international repute are of opinion that school physical education programme has a vital role in attending the physical-fitness-needs of youth and aiding in the prevention of hypokinetic diseases. They recommend increased opportunities for students to develop fitness components, learn important concepts in exercise science and experience fitness tests which provide a profile of each youth's fitness, relationships to their peerage and sex group and
changes in their fitness achievement. So physical education should be a core curricular subject in school settings.

The subject had been made compulsory upto class VIII. In classes IX & X it had been made additional. From that action of the Board it appeared that there was need of productive activity and physical exercises upto Class VIII only and it was useless after that stage. A strong movement was launched by West Bengal Physical Education students' and professionals' Forum against the decision of the Board of Secondary Education of making physical education and social service an optional subject in Classes IX and X. The forum emphasised the importance of physical education as a core curricular subject in all sphere of education (Primary, Secondary, Higher Secondary, college and University level). They argued that the importance of physical education as a curricular subject was felt in different ages and different countries. In Germany, Denmark, Sweden and other parts of Europe drill and gymnastic were introduced by eminent reformists as an essential part of school educational curriculum.

The concept of Physical education for national health and fitness gained momentum in England, France, and the U.S.A. during early 19th century and was made a compulsory subject in school system.

The socialist countries like Russia, China, Cuba, Rumania and other Eastern European countries physical education and sports have been considered as one of the nation building tools and as a mark of progress of man. In all these countries physical education and sports are compulsory programmes in school curriculum. In India also the concept of introduction of physical education /culture / exercise in school system was initiated by the British ruler during the second half of the 19th Century. From the circulars of the D.P.I. Bengal as far back

1 A letter to the President, West Bengal Board of secondary education by West Bengal Physical Education students' and Professionals' Forum dated 9.2.96.
as 1899 and 1900 it appeared that physical education was considered as an essential part of the school programme and "Drill" was made compulsory. National movement for independence gained momentum with "Akhara Movement" and forced government to pass a motion in the Legislative Assembly in 1926 for compulsory physical education programme and it was introduced as such from 1928. It was declared that schools should realise the necessity of shouldering responsibility in the matter of physical training of boys within the limits set by the environment and circumstances of each school. The duty of teachers must not be confined to the preparation of boys for examinations. In the interest of health and physical development of the students of Bengal, school authorities should introduce a suitable programme of hygiene and physical education for all boys reading in their institutions. As a result a revised syllabus was introduced from 1933.

Provisions for formalised teachers' training was also made for the training of the physical education teachers so that they were able to impart effective programme of physical education. From 1910 onwards Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.), Calcutta was entrusted to conduct short teachers training courses. The All Bengal Teachers' Association, in order to meet the demands of the school, organized short vacation courses of physical training for High School teachers. Teachers' Training college for women was established in 1940 to meet the demand of trained teachers in girls' schools. School sports Associations were established around 1930. They organized inter school competition in a number of games and sports which further gave impetus for consideration of physical education and sports as a curricular subject in schools. After independence the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49), the Mudaliar Commission (1952-53), the Kothari Commission (1964-66), the conferences of Education Ministers of states (1956,
1959, 1964), National policy on Education (1968), National sports policy (1984), National policy on Education (1986, 1992), Report of the central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), Committee on sports and physical Education (1993) all emphasised the necessity of compulsory curricular programme for physical education and sports in all spheres of education from Primary to University level. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), considering all aspects, developed the national curriculum for elementary and secondary education in 1988 and categorically indicated that core-curriculum in the school syllabi must contain physical education as an integral part of academic programme. Physical education and sports should also be included in the evaluation of performance. 10% of the time in the school time table for health and physical education at primary and upper primary stage and 9% at Secondary stage should be earmarked.

Thus considering historical, cultural, political and scientific perspectives, it may be inferred that physical education and sports should be introduced in educational settings for positive attitude towards active lifestyle and the healthy development of a child for his or her full potential growth. Perhaps with these understandings physical education was made a compulsory examination subject at the secondary stage of education in West Bengal in 1974. It was a challenging model to the rest of India and many states accepted the model for preparation of their children. So it can be said that West Bengal Board of Secondary Education took a wrong decision by making physical education an optional subject in classes IX and X. Physical Education must be a core curricular subject in school settings and this is not at all a debatable topic. Discussions may be made regarding its weightage in examination, evaluation process etc. Mitra Commission also emphasised the importance of physical education. The subject could be retained as a compulsory one having internal assessment only.
In order to ensure the objectivity of the evaluation process of the subject certain steps can be taken such as -

(a) Visiting teams comprising of competent persons of one area can supervise the evaluation procedure of other areas.

(b) Before appointment of the member of such visiting teams workshops of training of such persons can be organised.

(c) There must be arrangement for the training of the grassroot level evaluators. The two steps (b and c) are very necessary for making the evaluation system scientific. State council of Educational Research and Training can be entrusted with the responsibility of arranging such training programmes.

Examination reforms

Curriculum, teaching learning and evaluation are mutually dependent and vitally related. Modern and enriched curriculum and good teaching learning are not all. Whether the students can assimilate and whether they can use their acquired knowledge and skill in the practical field are to be monitored at different stages. The Left Front Government has taken steps to improve the secondary education system. In order to monitor the outcome of these measures they are trying to improve the evaluation system also. Some important successes of the Left Front Government in the field of education are holding of examinations according to schedule, restraining of unfair means which vitiated the whole environment and made examination system meaningless. But there are some maladies which cannot be overlooked such as leakage of question paper. The unpleasant incident of leakage
of question paper has occurred more than once. As a result common people cannot rely on the system. Moreover the setting of question papers is also claimed to be defective. Questions out of syllabus have bewildered examinees several times. During setting of question paper the capacity of all types of students - below average, average and advanced should be kept in mind so that it remains within the capacity of all types of students. But in fact the principle has not been always followed. As a result there are the incident of protest and even cancellation of certain papers. As for example in 1994 Mathematics paper in the Madhyamik Examination was so severely criticized by all section of people that fresh examination of that paper had to be taken. So setting of questions is very important for the success of examination system. The questions set for secondary examination should be designed primarily to test students'power of comprehension and ability to express thought and ideas clearly and logically. Not only this, regarding publication of results some more defects are found causing great hardship to the examinees concerned and their guardians. A considerable number of incomplete results and results with errors create great dissatisfaction in the society. Another defect is the remarkable number of failures which is revealed in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of candidates appeared in Madhyamik Examination</th>
<th>Passed in the Examination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>1,43,283</td>
<td>66,209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>2,47,171</td>
<td>1,30,742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>3,02,293</td>
<td>1,79,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>4,02,053</td>
<td>1,95,851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>4,63,081</td>
<td>2,81,94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5,48,270</td>
<td>2,91,234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vide Records of the Results, West Bengal Board of Secondary Education.
During the early part of the left front rule the above mentioned defects were remarkably present but it cannot be denied that with experience the government has rectified the defects and a considerably healthy atmosphere in education has been established. The defects of setting of question papers has been rectified to a great extent by organising repeated workshops. Massive orientation programme held in 1988 contributed a lot in this respect. The West Bengal Board of Secondary Education undertook a massive programme for orientation of teachers throughout the state of West Bengal. The Board in conjunction with State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) and with an initial guidance from National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) decided along the line of its own thinking to organise centres for orientation in different headquarters. Each centre covered more than one district. The programme is then taken to thana level and then to institutional level.

In order to rectify the leakage of questions arrangements have been made to take prompt action. Mass copying was a phenomenon in early 70's. In combating this malpractice the Left Front Government has achieved success to a great extent. Publication of results of the Madhyamik Examination within ninety days is a great achievement of the Left Front led Board. During the recent years a new trend in the results of the Madhyamik Examination is visible. The students of the rural areas and the children of the downtrodden are coming up with comparatively better results. Moreover considering the age and mental level of the candidates the Board has started taking final theoretical examination in one paper per day. And the time of commencement has been shifted from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. This action of the Board has helped the candidates and their guardians are also happy.
Previously university and college teachers were entrusted with the duty of paper setting. Most of the head examiners were selected from university and college teachers. Many of the examiners came from them. But they were not fully acquainted with the achievement level and mental level of the adolescent candidates. Even they were not very familiar with the syllabus. The Left Front run Board has changed the situation and appointed Examiners and Head Examiners among the secondary school teachers.

But the colonial system of examination is still unchanged. At the secondary level the examination system in 2000 is basically the same as it was under the University of Calcutta. Still now the Students are expected mainly to memorise and the so called proficiency of the student is measured in a final examination. The chief characteristic of this type of written examination is that the students are well aware of the type, pattern and the trend of questions to be set. As a result, the students concentrate their attention on some selected and limited areas of study. The main purpose of education is thus frustrated. The main defect of this examination system is that it compels the students to join the rat race from their infancy. A fair proportion of children strive hard to achieve success in examination without any reference to the actual learning they achieve. The entire system of school education gets bent towards witless marks gathering. When an unexpected question that seeks to test the examinee's real level of learning comes up results becomes disastrous. Students fail in large number.

Moreover it can not be believed that the proficiency acquired by a student during the entire period of study can be measured through an examination of three to four hours duration. Chances like ill health, temporary instability of mental condition or any such other condition during the short duration of the examination can very adversely affect
the outcome ignoring all sincerity and diligence during the entire period of study.

On the other hand most of the examiners do their assigned duty reluctantly. All the labour of a student is evaluated within few minutes of the whims of half hearted examiners. Because of these defects of the examination system a peculiar situation has grown up. In stead of school centred teaching learning private coaching in exchange of money is becoming rampant. Education is becoming an article of give and take. The Mitra Commission organised a sample survey which shows that majority of the students have to undergo private coaching. Close to 60% of student respondents who have recourse to private coaching indicated that they do so to ensure better results in examination while, according to little over 20% private coaching is necessary as the syllabus is heavy. In this system real education is impossible. This system only helps in preparing a list of probable questions, writing dictated notes and memorising the answers. This spoon feeding has frustrated the real aim of evaluation as well as the real purpose of education.

Many problems in the field of examination arise out of increasingly large number of examinees. The number of those who sit for secondary examination is going up each year and has reached such a level that a centralised system of examination is totally nonviable.

The West Bengal Board of secondary education has taken certain steps towards decentralisation by setting up zonal offices. In spite of this measure the problems are still there. In 1951 West Bengal started with 1290 secondary Schools, 5 lacs of students and only 50 thousand examinees. In 1989 figures rose to 15 thousand schools, 75 lacs
of students and 4 lacs and 50 thousand examinees. The task of conducting examination, publication of results and award of certificates to such a huge number is really a herculean job. It is almost impossible for one Board to manage the whole thing. So the question of setting up five separate Boards has cropped up. The proposed Boards are as follows -

1. Calcutta Board (For Calcutta, Howrah and South 24 Parganas.)
2. Kalyani Board (For North 24 Parganas, Nadia, Murshidabad and Hooghly).
3. Midnapur Board (For Midnapur & Purulia).
4. Burdwan Board (Burdwan, Bankura and Birbhum).
5. Jalpaiguri Board (For North Bengal).

The adjacent state of Bangladesh has set up 5 independent Boards with only 8 thousand schools (1989 figure).

Abolition of traditional examination system in primary stage and introduction of Continuous Evaluation Process

In the field of evaluation another most significant decision in the post 1977 is the abandonment, at the primary stage, of the system of promoting students from one class to the next higher one on the basis of results of the Annual Examination.

The main aim of abandoning pass fail system from class I to IV was to make education joyful to the children in one hand and avoiding drop out on the other. In this regard Ashoke Mitra commission clearly mentions that the immediate results of abandoning pass-fail system at the primary level is diminishing accountability of the irresponsible
primary teachers. Teaching learning become ineffective. Economically backward parents soon realise the uselessness of the impact of primary education on their children. So they take away their children from the schools and engage them in menial duties.

Thus the step can neither make education joyful nor it can avoid dropouts. The impact of two important steps of abolishing English and abolishing pass-fail system at the primary level become evident at the secondary stage in no time. Students coming out of the primary classes become very weak in Bengali and Mathematics also. 74% of them can not achieve the minimum standard in Bengali and in Mathematics 64% are under achievers.\(^1\) In a joint survey conducted by the Indian statistical Insitute and the State council of Educational Research and Training it has been revealed that the students of class IV of the government and non-government schools are under achievers. 16% of them can not read at all, 56% of the students can read their text books with utter difficulty. On application of the achievement test prepared by the survey committee only 20% could get pass marks. In Bankura District only 8% could pass. The same was the condition in Purulia and Siliguri.\(^2\) So the students who join the secondary classes actually became beginners and during the five years from classes VI to X they remain busy in making up the deficiency of their achievement at the primary level. The net result is fall of standard of the secondary students. The system of promoting students from one class to the next higher one on the basis of results of Annual Examination is replaced by a mode of continuous evaluation so that short comings, if any, found in students' learning can be corrected immediately. But continuous evaluation is not carried out in the majority of the schools, partly due

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\(^1\) Debidas Acharya, Anandabazar Patrika, dt. 17.9.98
to shortage of teachers, but also on account of the inability of teachers to understand the method correctly. Most children go through the phase of primary education without acquiring the knowledge and skills they were expected to acquire. This in its turn accentuates the tendency towards dropping out.\(^1\)

**Change of academic session from January - Dec. to May-April**

In 1989 West Bengal Board of Secondary Education decided to shift the academic session from January-December to May-April. In the circular No. 716 dated 22nd September, 1988 the Board notified that:

1) From 1989 the academic session will be from May to April every year.

2) The Annual Examination up to class IX should be held at the end of March.

3) The result of the Annual Examination should be published in the third week of April.

The reasons behind this change of academic year are:

1) to increase the effective teaching learning days of the school. In this connection it may be mentioned that the Kothari Commission recommended at least two hundred days of teaching learning per academic year.

2) to create an all India pattern of school year. An all India pattern consolidates the process of national intergration and avoids loss of

school year for those students who was to change a state for various reasons.

3) The climatic condition of this part of the year is congenial for teaching learning. From November to February is the most suitable months for academic work of the year. Absence of any examination after the summer and the puja recess will keep the children free from mental pressure and they can enjoy the holidays.

But this change did not prove helpful in the development of the quality of education. The academic days have not, in fact, been increased by the introduction of the new academic session. The fact is clearly revealed if the academic session is analysed in three separate terms of a year. From the following chart the matter can be understood easily.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Working days (approximate)</th>
<th>Teaching days (approximate)</th>
<th>Days of Exam. (approximate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May - August</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep - Dec</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan - April</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>57*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Test Examinations - 10 days
Annual Examination - 15 days
Madhyamik Exam. - 10 days
H. S. Exam. - 15 days
Annual Planning - 07 days

Total 57 days
The above chart shows that the teaching days are only 148 though the Board visualized 170 days schooling time would be available in the new academic session.

In this connection a comparison may be made with the schooling days of the different countries of the world.

**Annual working days of the secondary schools of different countries of the world.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Average no of days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itlay</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The comparison shows that the Scenario in West Bengal is different with inadequate number of reading days.\textsuperscript{1}

Another great defect of this session is the heavy reduction of teaching days of the students of Class X. Only a few days after the new session the summer vacation commences. Ten to eight academic days are available within the intervening period. After the vacation the school reopens at the end of June and the academic work continues up to the first or second week of September, then Pretest Examination starts. After the puja recess the Test Examination appears and the students of Class X have no time of schooling. In fact the students of class X get their schooling time from June to middle of September only. That means the students of the final year get only three to three and half months' academic time. Within such a short academic time it is almost impossible to complete the prescribed syllabus. The Board declared that the students should come to the school after the Test Examination. But in fact the students prefer to utilise the time for their self study as a part of their preparation for the final examination. The guardians also do not like to send their wards to the school during this period.

From the point of view of evaluating the answer scripts May-April session is not effective. It is rather unfavourable and against the interest of the students. The Annual Examination, the Madhyamik Examination and Higher Secondary Examination create a chain like situation. Evaluating the answer scripts of the Annual Examination is obligatory on the part of the teachers. Immediately after the evaluation of these scripts come the scripts of the Madhyamik Examination and the scripts of the Higher Secondary Examination follow suit. Evaluation of so many answer scripts becomes very difficult for the teachers. So

\textsuperscript{1} Bulletin of the West Bengal Headmasters' Association, Vol XXXVIII, February, 1998.
many teachers avoid to become examiners. Those who accept it can not satisfy many of the concerned people. Justice to the students, in this situation, can not be guaranteed. As a remedy there should be some necessary gap between these examinations. The January-December academic session can put the Annual Examination at a safe distance from the Madhyamik and the Higher Secondary Examinations.

Moreover those students who can not pass the Test Examination unnecessarily wait for the next academic session. As a result they loose about six months' time. It is a great misuse of time on their part.

The summer vacation which is sufficiently long hinders the academic atmosphere of the school at the very begining of the new session. The students go to the vacation without proper academic orientation for the new session which starts from second May.

The new session again can not solve the problem of admission of students at the national level because in most of the states the academic session starts in April and not in May.

Again the problem of inter-state admission of students was acute in 1980s but those problem have been solved to a great extent by the establishment of all India courses like C.B.S.E. and the I.C.S.E.

The expectation of improvement of academic conditions due to congenial climatic conditions can not yield satisfactory results. In the old system the school remained busy with the publication of the results of Annual Examination, the start of the new session, cocurricular activities like Saraswati Puja, Annual Sports and it hampered the academic activities of the school. It was expected that continuous
academic time will be readily available in the new session but in fact it is not so. The time schedule of the Madhyamik and Higher Secondary Examination remain unchanged. The Test Examinations of both Madhyamik and Higher Secondary fall in November-December. As a result the regular classes of VI to IX are bound to remain suspended. Again, though the Annual Examination has been shifted to March many of the schools hold the Half Yearly Examination after the Puja recess. The Saraswati Puja and the Annual Sports are held as usual during the winter. So instead of increase of academic days it rather worsens the situation.

Moreover many of the schools become centres for the Madhyamik Examination. Some are again the centres of Madhyamik as well as Higher Secondary Examination. Under the situation the Board notifies that such schools can hold their Annual Examinations in February. So the situation boils down to a peculiar condition. November is engaged in Half Yearly Examination, December for Test Examination, January is for co-curricular activities, February is for Annual Examination and where is the time for class room activities? So the plan of the Board ends in a total failure.

So far the problems of the learners have been discussed. From the stand point of teachers the matter should be analysed. The academic session involves the activity of the teachers. Recently the society raises its voice criticising the inaction of the teachers and demands greater responsibility and accountability of the teachers. All sections of the society equally criticise the teachers. But the main cause of the academic problems lies in the short-sightedness of the academic planners and the adversity of the academic atmosphere. Education is always examination
centred. But now-a-days the schools have become only the examination-
centres and nothing else. It starts in September and ends with the Higher
Secondary Examination in April - May. The Half-yearly Examination,
the Annual Examination, the Admission Test are all the intervening
examinations. In addition there are the class tests. The teachers'
obligatory duties are to conduct these examinations. In this way the
teachers are the victims of suffocating situation created by the ceaseless
row of examinations. They need time to read, they have to plan their
class room teaching, they have to appreciate the lesson with others. There
is no time for all these. Unless a suitable remedy is found out teaching
learning in the schools of West Bengal will remain in its name's sake
only. The Tutorial Homes and the coaching classes will rule in full
devour.

In this way the present academic sesion is not suitable for the
interest of the teachers as well as students. It is known that the human
mind has intimate relationship with the nature. The dry sultry summer
of West Bengal can never become a time for starting a new academic
session. So the change of academic session appears to be a step against
the academic interest. During the chief-Ministership of Dr. Bidhan
Chandra Roy the academic session was changed from January-December
to April-March but it continued for a very short period. Assam and
Tripura also have reverted to January- December session. Under the
circumstances re-establishment of the January-December session will not
be a backward step rather a step to save our school education. Therefore
it can be concluded that re-instatement of January- December academic
session is essentially necessary for West Bengal. The fact that it will
increase the working days is revealed from the following chart-
It may now be suggested that in order to make the educational environment more suitable for teaching-learning activities only change of academic session will not serve the purpose. Some other concrete steps in the matter should be taken such as introduction of Annual-academic calendar. This calendar will include a detailed programme of curricular as well as co-curricular activities of the school. Some schools have already their own calendars but those are not satisfactory because the schools declare their holidays, dates of terminal, Half yearly and Annual Examination according to their own convenience. They are increasing or decreasing their days of examination according to their sweet will. The result is wide disparity of academic activities among different schools. So there is the need for introduction of uniformity, and the Board of Secondary Education should come forward with their own academic calendar. Such calendar should declare three types of holidays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Working days (Approximate)</th>
<th>Teaching days (Approximate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January-February</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March-April (Assuming that the school will be centre for Madhyamik and Higher Secondary Examinations)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June-September</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October-December</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of holidays</th>
<th>Number of days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Common holidays for all schools.</td>
<td>20 days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Long vacation (Summer, Rainy, Winter &amp; Puja recess)</td>
<td>50 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Modifiable holidays</td>
<td>10 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It has been suggested by many that in order to increase the working days the school holidays should be curtailed. In fact in 1988 the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education curtailed the number of holidays in Secondary schools. This was done for increasing academic days for the benefit of the students. The school holiday list now shows a decrease of seven days from 87 to 80 days. Those who are in favour of curtailing the holidays now suggest the abolition of the summer and the Puja holidays. But it should be remembered that holidays are not meant for the teachers alone, it is meant mainly for the students. The vacations are the time for their preparation and recreation. So the idea of abolishing the Summer and Puja holidays is not desirable in the interest of the students.

**Upliftment of the status and salary of the teachers**

The most remarkable contribution of the Left Front Government is probably the upliftment of the status of the teachers of West Bengal. Prior to 1977, the security of service of most of the teachers were very limited. Their tenure of service and their pay scales were not satisfactory. The payment of salaries was often irregular, retirement benefits were inadequate and uncertain. But the changes that have taken place in the twenty two years since 1977 are striking. Teachers of all levels have come to enjoy total security of tenure. The payment of salaries and retirement benefits have been regularised. The
Government itself has accepted the responsibility of paying their salaries, Dearness Allowances and retirement benefits. It has also introduced Medical Allowance and House Rent Allowance from 1981.

The three successive pay commissions (1981, 1990 and 1998) have paved the way for generous increase in the levels of emoluments and benefits for both teachers and non-teaching staff. The comparative pay scale chart attached (Page No. 209) will show the improvement of salary and allowances of teachers during the Left Front Government rule in West Bengal. It should be mentioned here that only the case of non-government recognised schools have been dealt with. 99% of the total secondary schools of West Bengal are of this category. The state government can boast that the pay scale of teachers and non-teaching staff of all educational institutions from primary to university have been improved commensurately with the employees working in other institutions having equal qualifications and responsibility excepting a very few exceptions. So the discrimination of financial benefits available to different types of schools was mitigated.

As regards Dearness Allowance there is a remarkable increase. It is specially important that the Dearness Allowances have been granted to them almost at per with the Central Government Employees.

Besides the pay and allowances the retirement benefits have been improved to a great extent. It is noteworthy that the services of these academic community have been more or less equated to those of government servants in respect of retirement benefits.

Before the rule of the Left Front Government the teachers of the secondary schools were entitled to a nominal pension which was
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designation /Qualification</th>
<th>1st Scale 1.4.54</th>
<th>2nd Scale 1.3.57</th>
<th>3rd Scale 1.4.61</th>
<th>4th Scale 1.4.66</th>
<th>5th Scale 1.4.70</th>
<th>6th Scale 1.4.75</th>
<th>7th Scale 1.4.81</th>
<th>8th Scale 1.1.86</th>
<th>9th Scale 7.3.90</th>
<th>10th Scale 7.3.90</th>
<th>11th Scale 1.1.96</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headmaster/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.Com/B.T. or Hons. B.T.</td>
<td>175-15/2-325 (B)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.A. Hons with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.T.B.Ed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree with B.T.E.Ed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.G.D.Ed./ P.G.B.T.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dip. in Phy. Edn. Work Ed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
not enough for their future security (The details have been discussed in the 4th Chapter). The Left Front Government introduced the new pension rules – Death-cum-Retirement Benefit Scheme in 1981. The pay commission, set up by the Government of West Bengal in terms of Finance Department Resolution No. 9716 - 6 F dated 16.11.77 made recommendations for allowing retirement benefits to the teaching and non-teaching employees of different educational institutions. As a result all whole time approved teaching and non-teaching employees of the non-government sponsored/aided institutions who are in active service on or after 1.4.81 would come under the Death-cum-Retirement Benefit Scheme, 1981 subject to the following conditions:-

a) Persons who retired from service prior to 1.4.1981 will not get these benefits.

b) Persons recruited on or after 1.4.1981 will automatically be governed by this scheme.

c) Persons who were in service on 1.4.1981 will have an option either (i) to continue to be governed by the existing rules governing retirement benefits or (ii) to come under the Death cum-Retirement Benefit scheme, 1981.

The scheme came into force with effect from 1st April, 1981, The following retirement benefits were admissible under this scheme: Either Pension (including family pension) - cum - Gratuity or Contributory Provident Fund at the rate of 8.33% (from 1.4.81) - cum - Gratuity according to option-I.
The amount of pension was determined in accordance with the following slabs:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slab</th>
<th>Amount Recoverable</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Upto Rs. 1000/-</td>
<td>50% of the average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>amount recoverable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for pension.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Next Rs. 500/-</td>
<td>45% of the amount</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>amount reckonable for</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pension.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Balance of the</td>
<td>40% of the amount</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average amount</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reckonable for pension.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to pension as above, an employee is entitled to relief as admissible to the state government pensioners from time to time. One other great achievement of the government was the creation of the provision of Family Pension. Family Pension is admissible to the members of the family of an employee who dies while in service after rendering at least one year's service. The benefit shall also be admissible in case of death of an employee after retirement.

Family pension should be admissible to the members of the family of an employee at the following rates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pay of the employee per month</th>
<th>Amount of monthly pension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i) Rs. 1,200/- and above</td>
<td>i) 12% of pay subject to a minimum Rs. 160/- and maximum of Rs. 250/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Rs. 400/- and above but below Rs. 1200/-</td>
<td>ii) 15% of pay subject to a minimum of Rs.100/- and a maximum of Rs.160/-.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Below Rs. 400/-</td>
<td>iii) 30% of pay subject to a minimum of Rs.60/- and a maximum of Rs.100/-.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This new scheme of retirement benefit along with family pension has been welcomed merrily by the teaching community of the schools. It gives them a sense of security about their own future and the future of their dependent family members. Thus they can securely devote their time and energy in their teaching activity.

But there is a lot of dissatisfaction among the teachers because of unusual delay and harassment in sanctioning the retirement benefits. It is often ventilated in the mass-media that the teachers waited long time for the sanction of their retirement benefits but died in expectation. The main cause behind the fiasco is negligence on the part of the school authorities. Most of the schools are extremely negligent about preparation of the Service Books and the necessary papers of the retiring teachers. The government however has taken a positive step of sanctioning provisional pension order to retiring teachers within a reasonable period.
The improvement of salary, allowances and the retirement benefits have an important impact on the secondary education of the state. It attracted the academically sound people to the teaching profession. Thus the government is able to create an atmosphere of providing good quality teachers to the students of all parts of the state.

Moreover the relatively respectable scales of pay and other benefits along with security of services for the teaching community and other staff have benefited the educational system in general and the students in particular and the changes have caused a major stir in the total system.

Another debatable decision of the Left Front Government is regarding the retirement age of the teachers of the secondary schools. According to the recommendations of the pay commission (1990) the age of retirement of teachers and non-teaching staff has been fixed at sixty. After retirement they would get retirement benefits at par with the government employees. Teachers opting for retirement benefits of the second pay commission would of course get the chance of working upto 65 years. This decision was opposed and various types of movements grew up. But these oppositions and movements can hardly be supported on the following grounds:-

1. In states other than West Bengal teachers retire at the age of 60.

2. Kothari Commission, 1964-66 and Chattopadhay Commission 1983-85 recommended that the retiring age of teachers should be sixty years.

3. The right to work upto 65 years of age was never established. On the basis of medical certificates declaring physical fitness and mental alertness school Managing Committee could renew the tenure of
service of the teachers annually after 60 years and renewal could never exceed 65 years.

Considering the precarious pecuniary condition of the teachers such an arrangement was made. But the new pension scheme ensures healthy living. So there is no need of praying for extension after 60.¹

4. Educated unemployment is a burning problem. About 15 crore of our youths are unemployed - amongst them many are educated youth. If the teachers retire at the age of sixty these young men and women can be provided. So the teachers should not drag on beyond the age limit barring way to the prospective new entrants.

**Appointment of Teachers through the School Service Commission**

With the upliftment of the social and economic status of the teachers the Left Front Government emphasises the appointment of efficient teachers in the secondary schools. A very important step in this regard is the appointment of the West Bengal Central School Service Commission. On 17th October, 1997 the Hon'ble Education Minister Kanti Biswas declared that the School Service Commission would start from functioning with effect from the first day of November, 1997. Henceforth the old system of appointment of teachers by the Managing Committees of about 10,000 Junior High, High and Higher Secondary schools and Madrashas came to an end on the 31st October, 1997 and the appointment of teachers through West Bengal Central School Service Commission was introduced.

The procedure of recruitment of teachers prevailing earlier in government aided secondary schools had been criticized in many ways. The procedure of recruitment was laid down by the Department concerned of the State Government. The minimum requisite qualifications for recruitment were also indicated by the government. Candidates had to be selected from those sponsored by the local Employment Exchange. The Selection Committee formed by the Managing Committee selected the teachers from those candidates. Selected candidates were given appointment with the approval of the District Inspectorate. But this system was defective and gave rise to malpractices and lack of uniformity in the process of selection. The District Inspectorate, partly because it was burdened with other work and partly for other reasons, played only a marginal role in the recruitment of teachers. The decision of the Managing Committee was in effect final. This decision is often vitiated by extra-academic considerations. There was even monetary allegations against the School Managing Committee both individually and collectively. With the substantial improvement in the emoluments of school teachers at all levels after different Pay Commissions, the attraction of such employment increased considerably. So candidates even did not hesitate to buy a post in return of a lac of rupees. Another draw back of the then existing system of recruitment was that the employment exchange always go by seniority in registration and failed to sponsor thereby the right type of candidates. Allegations of malpractices were there. So the existing arrangement have come under severe criticism from different quarters. It failed to select best teachers in terms of the criteria of merit and ability. Alongside academic merit the competence to teach and the presence of motivation have to be taken into account during the process.

of recruitment which was not possible in the existing system. The Mitra Commission (1992-93) recommended the setting up of a School Service Commission along the lines of the State College Service Commission. This was the only solution of the problems of malpractices in the field of appointment of teachers. Thus the West Bengal Central School Service Commission came into being. The appointment of the teachers in recognised non-government aided schools of whole West Bengal would be conducted by the School Service Commission. The state has been divided into four regions - East, West, South and North. Each Region is comprised of some districts. The distribution of districts will be as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>East</th>
<th>West</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>North</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birbhum</td>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>Coochbehar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burdwan</td>
<td>Midnapur</td>
<td>North 24 parganas</td>
<td>Dakshin Dinajpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hooghly</td>
<td>Purulia</td>
<td>South 24 parganas</td>
<td>Darjeeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jalpaiguri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howrah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Malda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The State Govt. has formed a Central School Service Commission of five members with a Chairman. Four Regional Commissions have been formed with the same members as the Central Commission. Head Quarters of the Regional Commissions have been located as follows:

- East zone - Burdwan
- West zone - Bankura
- North zone - Malda
- South zone - Calcutta
Thus Regional Level Selection Test for appointment of Secondary Teachers comes into vogue. The eligible candidates of each region have to appear at a written test comprising of two papers. Paper-I carries 40 marks and it is on a subject selected by the candidate from the identified ones for the Test. Paper-II is of general nature intended to assess the general awareness, information on science teaching, aptitude of the candidate, and is primarily designed to test reasoning ability, comprehension and understanding of diverse/allied disciplines. The examination for paper-II carries 20 marks. Among the rest 40 marks 10 marks is earmarked for Vivavoce and 30 marks for academic qualification. Those who are qualified are empaneled. The empaneled candidates have been appointed according to the merit list giving due preference to the schedule caste, schedule tribe and Other Backward Class (OBC) candidates. Candidates of each region are eligible for appointment to schools belonging to their respective regions and not outside the region.

But one centralised School Service Commission can not solve the problems. The School Service Commission is appointed in the line of College Service Commission but the later has to recruit teachers for hardly 300 colleges. Even so there have been complaints of delays and other difficulties. Recruiting teachers for over about 10,000 secondary and Higher secondary schools all over the state is a stupendous task for a single School Service Commission. So the Mitra Commission recommended the decentralisation of the commission and the establishment of a School Service Board for each district. It is demanded that the Education Department should lay down the principles and procedures of recruitment in a detailed manner for the guidance of the District School Service Boards with particular stress being laid on the need to test the aptitude of candidates for teaching. This also implies
rationalisation and strengthening of the District Inspectorate. The Inspectorate should be in a position to report on the quality of teaching on the part of the newly recruited teachers and also other concrete suggestions to the school service Board.

Moreover allocation of zones is faulty. As for example in the east zone Birbhum has been included along with Burdwan, Nadia, Hooghly and Howrah. But Birbhum is comparatively less developed and the opportunity of education there is not at all sufficient. So Birbhum can not compete with other districts falling within the zone.

Teaching posts have been divided into two categories -

a) The Honours and Post graduate.

b) The Pass graduate.

The teachers of the first category are meant for the Higher Secondary schools and the teachers of the second category are meant for Secondary schools, Junior High Schools, Junior Madrashas, Senior Madrashas. Work education and Physical education teachers fall within this second category. But the Higher Secondary schools are very limited. So the scope before the Honours and Post graduate teachers are also limited. Previously Honours and Post Graduate teachers could apply for post in Higher Secondary as well as Secondary Schools. A limited number of teaching posts was earmarked for the Pass graduate teachers in the Secondary schools. The new policy of establishing priority of the Pass graduates neglecting the opportunity of the Honours and Post graduate candidates is deplorable. This policy will definitely bring down the standard of education at the secondary level in one hand and the loss of interest for higher education on the other.
Another defect is that the applicants are to choose any one zone. They have no option to choose any one district, sub-division or police station area.

Moreover, excepting papers on language and literature questions are set in English though vernacular is the main medium of instruction at the secondary level. This decision of setting questions in English is not beyond criticism. The questions in paper-II are set on general knowledge and science aptitude. Without the knowledge of certain terms it is almost impossible to answer these questions. It has been declared that the standard of questions in paper-I will be of graduate level. But the syllabi of different University of West Bengal are not the same. So there was the need for presenting a syllabus by the School Service Commission.

The working teachers have been given the right to apply with a view to giving them the opportunity of transfer to the zones of their choice. As a result there is a chance that the fresh candidates can not be able to compete with the experienced teachers.

The Left Front Government considered the criticisms seriously and tried to make the system free from defects. The Government has already introduced the vernacular version of the questions. The commission has also published the syllabi of different subjects.

**Programmes of Teachers' Training**

The Left Front Government realised that all teachers working at all levels of education should be formally trained to do their job with professional competence. For every group of teachers there should be
a main training course of an appropriate length which should be followed up with supplementary programme and refresher course at regular intervals. In West Bengal the main training course for training of secondary school teachers were carried out by the B.T., B.Ed., PGBT Colleges and the University Departments of Education. But the arrangement for supplementary programmes and refresher courses were not carried out in organised way. Some institutions and departments were engaged in such programmes according to their convenience. A well organised institution was necessary to do the work. The National Council of Educational Research and Training visualised the establishment of its counterpart in every state to do the work. In West Bengal the State Institute of Education, Banipur was a weak beginning of the work. The Left Front Government took a very timely step in setting up the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). It was set up with the status of a post graduate Institution. It came into being through the merger of seven institutions, which used to work separately for curriculum and material development, training and orientation, evaluation and research. But before their merger the seven institutions lacked proper co-ordination and cohesion in their individual programme of work though their basic objectives were to bring about qualitative improvement of school education. So the merger of those institutions was a great need. The seven institutions merged together and formed State Council of Educational Research and Training Institute (SCERT) in 1980.1

The Seven institutions were:

2. The Bureau of Educational and Psychological Research, Calcutta (1951)


5. The UNICEF-assisted science programme section of the Education Directorate (1972).

6. The Extension Services Departments of the David Hare Training College, Calcutta, Government Training College, Hooghly and the Institute of Education for Women, Alipore, Calcutta (1956).

7. The Educational Technology cell of the Education Department (1978).\footnote{Annual Report - 1990, SCERT, Calcutta, P. 7.}

The SCERT is a state level counterpart of the National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi and has been working for the last few years mainly in the area of school education for its overall academic improvement. Unlike the School Education Directorate which looks after the administrative aspect of school education, the SCERT, West Bengal stands for better education. With this end in view the SCERT since its inception has been silently but quite effectively implementing a large number of educational programmes, projects and activities covering the entire spectrum of school education ranging from planning, research and action programmes to evaluation. But its activities are always in tune with the central and state policies.

Among the functions of the SCERT the following are important for the development of secondary education in West Bengal:-

i) To act as an agent of change in School education.
ii) To organise programmes including correspondence cum-contact courses for the overall professional development of teachers.

iii) To produce curricula, instructional materials, text book etc. for the use of educational institutions and teachers of pre-school, elementary, Secondary and Higher Secondary Stages in the state.

iv) To produce instructional materials for the use of teacher educators at the Secondary and Higher Secondary levels.

v) To conduct studies and investigations in the various problems of education in general and teachers' training in particular.

vi) To co-ordinate programmes of different subject teachers' associations in the state.

vii) To undertake specific projects at all levels of education. The West Bengal Board of Secondary education carried out different activities for the betterment of secondary education with the help of the SCERT during the rule of the Left Front Government in the 80's of the 20th Century.

Some activities the SCERT has already done are :-

i) Publication of teachers' guide books "SIKSHAN DIPIKA" on life science and physical science at the secondary level through a series of work shops in close collaboration with West Bengal Board of Secondary Education and the British Council Division, Calcutta in 1988. The basic objective of preparing those Guide Books was to help the relevent teachers in imparting the lessons more effectively through activity based method. Those activities were so designed as could be performed with the help of inexpensive materials readily available in local environment.

1 Annual Report, 1988, SCERT, Calcutta, P. 10.
ii) Development of strategies and teaching materials for improvement of Mathematics teaching in the classroom at the secondary level and publication of the same in the form of guide books.

iii) Finding out major learning points and preparation of Unit Tests in Geography and History for classes VI to VIII for qualitative improvement in teaching learning.

iv) Seminars on Integrated Syllabus of Physical Science and Life Science for Class - VII and other Higher Classes. A two days' seminar was held at SCERT, West Bengal on 28.8.89 and 29.8.89 to study the feasibility of introducing integrated syllabus of Physical Science and Life Science for class VII and other higher classes. "Unanimous Recommendations" of the two days' seminar were obtained. The recommendations were -

a) "Integrated Science" course would be introduced for classes VI, VII and VIII and Physical Science and Life Science course for Class IX and X would remain as it is for the present but for some sequential changes.

b) Total marks should be 200 for classes VII and VIII and 100 for Class VI.

c) Emphasis should be given on the "Practical" work which are of daily use in our day to day life and the activities by the students themselves.

d) Appropriate and necessary infrastructure should be developed for proper implementation of the recommendations.

e) These recommendations should be placed before a joint meeting of the syllabus sub-committee for Physical Science and Life Science for finalisation.
v) An orientation programme for examiners of English in the Madhyamik Examination was conducted in collaboration with the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education simultaneously at four centres at Siliguri, Burdwan, Midnapore and Calcutta on and from the 25th March, 1989 to 27th March, 1989.1

vi) Eight workshops were held during the period January to December, 1988. The SCERT organised the workshops in close collaboration with the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education and the British Council Division, Calcutta. The main objective behind organising these workshops was to develop a suitable teaching-learning method in science subjects at the secondary level, keeping in view the limited resources available in the schools. The last three workshops (held from 1st to 5th Dec, 1988 at SCERT campus, 7th to 11th December, 1988 at B.T. College, Kalyani and 14th to 18th December, 1988 at A.C. Training College, Jalpaiguri) were conducted by prof. A.I. Pirie, an eminent science educationist and expert in environmental science education from the United Kingdom. The participants were drawn from amongst the science teachers of secondary schools from all the districts of the state.2

vii) The project of reviewing the school text books on Languages and History from the standpoint of national integration was undertaken by the SCERT, West Bengal under the direct supervision and collaboration with the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education in 1985. The work of review was completed during the year 1989. Large number of books for different classes on the aforesaid subjects were carefully evaluated by the experts appointed for the purpose.

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Reports submitted by different reviewers on different books on the above mentioned subjects were carefully analysed. On the basis of the report of the project there were some modifications in the curriculum of the above subjects.¹

Thus the Left Front Government ventured to improve suplementary teachers training programme through the State Council of Educational Research and Training. The main training programme however remained unchanged to a great extent. Ashoke Mitra Commission of course identified the problems of the programme and made some important recommendations for its improvement such as:

i) intensive "Practice Teaching" should be given maximum importance.

ii) in order to make Practice Teaching more effective, it is desirable to attach a few neighbouring schools to each Training College. The duration of this teaching should be lengthend.

iii) research should be encouraged in the University Departments of Education. The University Departments and the State Council of Educational Research and Training should co-relate their research activities with the problem of teaching and teachers' training in the state.

iv) each training programme should have two equivalent but separate courses for pre-service and in-service teachers. The first should be of general nature and the second should lay emphasis on the method of teaching and the content of individual subject.

Those recommendations could not be materialised appreciably because of lack of infrastructure. The main problem was

acute paucity of teaching staff. Many of the colleges were run mostly by part-time teachers. Different colleges did not follow a uniform staff pattern. Some of them have 20 teachers or more, while the rest are to run the show with a skeleton staff of four or five whole time teachers assisted by a few part time teachers.\footnote{Report of the Mitra Commission, 1992-93, Government of West Bengal, P. 207.} The Left Front Government failed to improve the situation rather it deteriorated. There are Training Colleges where only one or two teachers are running the show with the help of some part time hands. The National Council of Teacher Education, time and again, warned against this poor show and in fact did not agree to accord affiliation to most of the Training Colleges of West Bengal.

The syllabus of the training course is defective. It follows the syllabus of the British period and it has lost its relevance in the teaching learning situation in our school at present.

Moreover uniformity of syllabus of different colleges affiliated to different universities have not been ensured. But teachers trained by those colleges are required to teach according to the same syllabus in different schools.

Teacher training is vitally linked with the improvement of teaching-learning in secondary schools. So the government should give due weightage to this aspect of education.

Thus the Left Front Government, after coming to power, has never fell back from their promise about education in its election manifesto. Within the limited financial and administrative capacity it has been striving to push forward their earlier promise of educational reconstruction and development in the State. Accordingly they have
taken several decisions, some of which are vital and some are marginal in nature. The government has been severely criticised by the common men as well as the opposition parties for some of the decisions taken by them. In such a situation the government has tried to change or modify their actions keeping in tune with the public opinion. Some decisions have been considered as welcome measure. The government has been trying for further improvement of such actions. But the government has never deviated from its basic policy of democratisation and development of education in West Bengal.