CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Broadly, the educational contributions of Indian national movements can be viewed from two standpoints—negative and positive. Negatively, they examined the official system of education and pointed out its defects and shortcomings. From the point of view of the needs and interests of the Indian people; and positively, they, on the one hand, put forward their own educational ideology, and tried to translate it into action, on the other, by starting such educational institutions which were in consonance with that ideology. This shows that their approach in the educational sphere was not only critical but also constructive—both theoretically and practically.

Keeping the above broad fact in view, we may, on the basis of what has been said in the preceding chapters, draw certain general conclusions about the educational ideology, work and effect of Indian national movements as follows:

(i) In the educational field, as in other fields, they were characteristically representative of the Indian viewpoint and interests, as opposed to the viewpoint and interests of the alien bureaucracy which ruled over the country.

(ii) Their educational ideology had a marked anti-British temper. This was a natural corollary of the first point. Since the official educational policy was concerned primarily with
political and economic interests of the British, these movements, which represented the interests of the Indian people, could not but have an anti-British temper.

(iii) They drew their inspiration from the ancient culture and civilisation of the country, which they believed to be superior to the Western culture — especially on the spiritual side.

(iv) Inspired by a firm faith in the intrinsic superiority of the pristine Indian culture, they exhibited a distinct revivalistic leaning and, as such, sought to revive and rehabilitate the ancient educational ideals and institutions of the country in modern times.

(v) Their approach in the educational field had a marked democratic and humanistic touch about it. This is borne out by the great concern shown by them for the education of the masses and women, suffering from acute ignorance and general backwardness.

(vi) By laying emphasis on the development of the total personality of students and stressing on the need of imparting vocational education, they strived to give a realistic touch to education, viewed as a preparation for future life.

(vii) Their efforts to popularise modern Indian languages, both as independent subjects of study and as media of instruction, were a happy departure from the then prevalent system of education which laid sole emphasis on the study of English language. This was a step in the right direction, both from the pedagogical and national points of view.

(viii) Notwithstanding their earlier revivalistic fervour, they showed a dynamic sense of social realism by following the
policy of assimilation towards the study of Western literature, philosophy and science.

(ix) The attention which they paid to education, as a part and parcel of their total programme of reform and reconstruction, went a long way in making the people conscious of the importance of education as a tool of national regeneration.

(x) Their efforts in the educational field ultimately led to the emergence of a sufficiently clear and coherent concept of National Education in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

(xi) Though they could not bring about a change in the official educational policy, yet the actual work which they did in the educational field on their own initiative by starting a number of schools and colleges in different parts of the country proved that the Indian people have the vitality and courage to go ahead with their plans even without Government help or patronage.

(xii) Through the educational institutions founded by them, they tried to keep the ancient cultural and educational traditions of the country alive in the modern times.

On the whole, the charge of all these movements against the educational policy of the British was that it had failed to evolve a national policy system of education suited to the national genius and needs of the people. Though the leaders of these movements were not oblivious of the vivifying influence which English education had exercised on Indian culture and society by bringing them into contact with the scientific and industrial developments of the West, but so far as national education was concerned, they strongly felt that it could never deliver the goods. The British
could not create a national system of education, as they could not create a national system of economy or administration, for the obvious reason that they had their own commercial and imperialistic ends, which they sought to achieve through all possible means, including education.

What these movements sought to accomplish in the domain of education was to fill in this gap between the national aspirations of the people and the contemporary official system of education, by putting forward and practising - to the limited extent they could - a national ideology of education in its variegated aspects. And this in fact, constitutes the quintessence of their contribution to Indian education.

SUGGESTIONS

India, since Independence, has been bubbling with activity everywhere and in all spheres of her national life. A multitude of schemes for the creation of a welfare state are being formulated and put into practice. From the Himalayas to the Cape Comorin, there is a new spirit animating the Indian people trying to forge ahead with an indomitable spirit. This is undoubtedly some thing unprecedented in the history of our country; a happy augury for the future.

In this renaissance of India's freedom, characterised by strenuous efforts for an all-round reconstruction of our national life, the task of educational reconstruction has also been taken up in right earnest. This is surely as it ought to be; for the future of a country depends upon her education. Not that industry, commerce and technology are unimportant, but because only educated men and
women can man them best. Unless, therefore, attempts to devise a sound system of education are made, all our plans, legislation and projects in the various fields may not be able to produce the maximum good expected of them and our progress may be distressingly slow.

The heart of the problem of educational reconstruction in India today is how to devise a system of education which would be national in the true sense of the word - based on the cultural genius of the people and capable of achieving their national destiny by securing for them internal prosperity as well as a place of pride in the comity of nations.

There is, of course, no single touch-stone of a national system of education. Whether the system of education of a country is truly national or not, depends upon a variety of factors - control, extent and quality of education. So far as control and extent of education are concerned, it may be said with certain amount of confidence that our present-day educational system is a national one, for it is controlled by our own National Government, on the one hand, and is based on the principle of 'equal educational opportunities,' on the other.

But as regards the quality of our education - which is no doubt equally important - it is difficult to say anything with certainty. A certain amount of controversy has been going on in regard to this aspect of our education, and a complete unanimity of thought has not been achieved so far. In fact, the general consensus of opinion on this issue seems to be gradually veering round to the viewpoint that, so far as the quality of our education
is concerned, much still remains to be done in order to make it perfectly national. This is, indeed, one of those vital educational problems confronting us today which merit the utmost attention of our educational administrators and planners. And it is here that we have to consider as to how much can we take from the educational ideology and contributions of our national movements.

True, these movements, like any other movement, had a special relevance to their own times; and, no doubt, in the context of the present-day changed socio-political conditions, they have lost much of their original significance – some of them have even become almost extinct –, but all this does not mean that these movements did not have anything of abiding value. In fact, pioneers, to whatever field they may belong, always blaze a trail, though it is seldom that, after the lapse of a few decades, they get an equal opportunity of doing or repeating what they did in their first attempt under certain conditions which were particularly suited for their original performance.

The Indian national movements have, of course, not been an exception to this universal truth; the fact, however, remains that their educational ideology contained certain elements of abiding value which must be considered and incorporated in our present-day educational system in order to make it really national, from the quality point of view.

When we look at the problem of educational reconstruction from this point of view, the very first question which arises is – should the ancient Indian tradition of education, which these movements held in such a high esteem, be revived in the present time?
To this question, those, who belong to the ultra-modern school of thought, would, of course, be inclined to give a clear-cut negative reply; for, to their mind, the educational system and institutions of ancient India are now mere 'Platonic ideals in the reverse direction', and, as such, if we try to revive them, they would perhaps brand us as 'unrealistic reactionaries'. Rather, they would, if they could, persuade us to forget our good old days and let ourselves go unresistingly along the current of Western culture - represented by its rational and liberal philosophy, on the one hand, and achievements in the field of science, technology and industry, on the other.

A moment's thought would, however, reveal to us the weakness of such an extremist view. No doubt, in a good many respects, the past of India, howsoever glorious, will never be revived in its pristine form. Any such attempt would obviously be in vain, and would lead us no further. It is neither practicable to do so in the changed social, political and economic conditions of the modern age, nor is that desirable, for it will retard our progress on the material front. In fact, we should not try - in a spasmodic flush of revivalistic fervour - to replace the modern educational ideals and institutions by the ancient ones root and branch - such a swing to the other extreme would ultimately prove to be a retrograde step, for it would place us in a disadvantageous position, so far as our race with other progressive nations of the world is concerned.

The impracticability and inadvisability of such an extremist revivalistic policy being admitted, it should not, however, be construed to mean that the ancient ideals and principles of education
should be abandoned lock, stock and barrel. For, a truly national system of education cannot be divorced from the past; we should not forget that a people has a particular genius and aptitude, developed in the course of their history, and these must invariably be used as the foundations on which the edifice of a national system of education should be built.

This is true of our educational system also. If we, in India, wish to evolve a perfect system of education, from the national point of view, we cannot ignore the cultural heritage of our country, which should form not only the starting-point of our education but also the staple of it. There can be no denying the fact that a student receiving education in a British institution is fed on British traditions, and he unconsciously learns and imbibes a love for the British way of life. This is equally true in case of other Western nations, and it should be so in case of India also.

In fact, our approach to the issue of modern versus ancient systems and ideals of education must be a judicious and balanced one. Extremist approach, in favour of either, will not do. Keeping the utilitarian end in view, we should not discard the modern system of education completely. And, from the national point of view, which seeks to preserve our dignity and individuality as a nation —, the ancient system should not be ignored or abandoned totally.

This leads us to the conclusion that a happy and harmonious blending of the two educational systems is what we need in India today. Our approach in the educational field should be assimilative, and not restrictive. It can be said on the basis of historical
evidence that our national culture has the vitality enough to stand
the temporary rufflings of such a process of assimilation and inter-
mingling. The story of Indian culture has ever been a long tale of
unity, of synthesis, of reconciliation, of assimilation and inter-
mingling of the old and the new values and ideals, without losing
its soul.

The earlier revivalistic obsession of the Indian national
movements apart, it is this judicious policy of assimilation which,
on the whole, they have tried to follow in the educational field.
Of all our national movements, the best representative of such an
assimilative and synthetic educational policy is the Ramkrishna/move-
ment. It has sincerely pinned its faith in the soundness of such a
policy, and has adhered to it faithfully in its work in the educational
field. This is testified by the following extracts taken from the
memorandum submitted to the University Education Commission in 1949,
by Swami Madhavananda, the General Secretary of the Mission :-

"Hence the entire educational programme of this country
should be so planned as may enable its people to remain
loyal to their spiritual ideals and, at the same time, to
master all that is necessary for making them as intensively
practical in secular affairs as any other nation. The
objective, particularly of University education, should be
to equip Indian youths for the dual task of ensuring the
material progress of this country, as also of demonstrating
effectively before the world the supreme worth of their
spiritual heritage in securing world-wide peace and harmony."
"Education should be 'essentially man-making and character building', as Swami Vivekananda put it. The best elements of Eastern and Western cultures should be combined to build up our national character. They dynamism and scientific attitude of the West have to be combined with the self-poise and spiritual idealism of the East, in order to develop a new type of manhood. University education in this country, we humbly suggest, should aim at fostering our national character on this line."

The fact is that what the leaders of Indian national movements protested against was not the assimilation of Western learning, but the promotion of it at the cost of the ancient educational ideals of the country. The Western system could supplement the ancient Indian ideals of education, and not supplant them, they firmly believed. In other words, what they wanted was that, though our system of education may incorporate the Western literature and science, but its spirit should remain essentially Indian; that is, we should not start 'de novo' - other nations may furnish us with light but our own history must determine the line of advance for us.

This is exactly the policy which should be adopted in India today, if we want to build up a system of education which would be national not only in control and extent, but in quality as well. This is an important lesson which we should take from the ideology and approach of the leaders of our national movements, in the sphere of education.

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Keeping, however, the educational policy followed by us thus far, it seems the lesson has not gone home to us. All of us, no doubt, take pride in waxing eloquent in praise of our ancient cultural and educational ideals, but very little seems to have been done to incorporate them in our educational system of today. The Western learning and Western ideals still seem to loom large on our educational horizon; there is very little in our schools and colleges which has a real touch of Indian culture about it; and the bulk of the Indian teachers as well as students are still reluctant to be led to the sources of Indian culture. All this shows that there is something wrong in the quality of education being imparted by our schools and colleges; and it is this aspect of our education which stands in need of improvement most.

What is to be done then to set things right, that is, to create a system of education which, while giving due place to the study of Western sciences, philosophy and history, will remain essentially Indian in spirit? Here again we would be doing the right thing in turning to our national movements and in doing what they have done in the educational field. What these movements have done is, of course, neither a miracle nor a mystery. They have simply tried to build their educational edifice on Indian foundations, that is, on the basic and cherished ideals of Indian education, nay, of Indian culture - broadly speaking. We have also to build on them, if we wish to evolve a system of education which would be essentially Indian by spirit.

This naturally raises another question, that is, what are those basic and cherished ideals of Indian culture and education by building on which we can have a truly national system of education?
By general consensus of opinion, they are as follows: -

(i) God-consciousness: Spiritual traditions of India invariably constitute the most precious part of her ancient culture; and religion - as an indispensable aid to it - has always been accorded a high place in her traditional system of education. This represents the supernatural element of our culture, of which the Gurukula experiment of the Arya Samaj is the most outstanding embodiment. Religion and spirituality, which should serve as model and inspiration to other nations, should animate our entire educational system. Religious instruction - imparted in a truly liberal spirit - should constitute an integral part of our education. For this purpose, students should be taught their own religion, as they are taught their mother-tongues, besides common principles of all religions. The aim of such instruction should, of course, be not to teach religion in a sectarian way, but to create a God-consciousness among the students, to foster in them those ethical qualities which form the basis of a sound moral character, and to inculcate in them the fraternal feeling that they are all the children of Mother India.

(ii) Self-consciousness: The principle which runs like a golden thread through the historic culture of India is that the ultimate aim of all human institutions and of all human endeavours should be not only to know and master his external environment but to understand and realise one's own self. 'Individuality' of man has always been kept at a high pedestal in the annals of Indian culture, laying great stress on inner attitudes, introspection and free expression, rather than on submission to formal beliefs and observance of external rites, which so often impede, rather than help, the spontaneous
development of man. This is another great element which we should take from our past, making 'Individuality' trait as one of the most outstanding features of our education. This means that every child should be treated not only as an automaton, but as a living organism, having his own individual traits, aptitude and talents.

(iii) Human-consciousness: Love of man is the very cornerstone of India's traditional culture. In fact, it constitutes the most lovable part of her spiritualistic philosophy. Its basic principle - the presence of 'Brahma' (the Divine Being) in all living creatures - is a great harmonising force, not only among human beings, but also between man and the sub-human beings. It leads man towards the ideals of 'altruism' and 'self-abnegation', in place of selfish pursuits. This humanistic trait of Indian culture has been represented best in modern times by the Vishwa Bharati of Rabindra Nath Tagore. It is a symbol of the passionate faith he had in the brotherhood of man and nations. This humanistic trait of our educational system should find expression mainly in two ways: (1) service to the nation, and (2) service to the humanity. Inspired by the first, our schools and colleges should have significance not only for the growing child, but should also become the centres of social welfare activities. Extension-service departments of the educational institutions run by the Ramkrishna Mission, and also of the Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi, are exemplary efforts in this direction. Inspired by the second, our schools and colleges should foster in the students a broad international outlook, based on the ideal of universal brotherhood. Such a broad humanistic outlook, besides being consistent with a lofty moral character, will prove to be a more positive approach to the problem of world-peace and good-will.
There are some other ideals of the ancient Indian educational system - the 'Guru-Shishya' relationship and 'Brahmacharya', for instance, - which also deserve being incorporated into our present-day educational system, as far as possible; but the above three ideals, which constitute the soul of India's ancient culture, should be a 'must' for our education today; and it is on them that the foundations of our present-day educational structure should be laid, so that its spirit may be intrinsically national.

Incorporating the above cultural and educational ideals into our modern educational system is, of course, not a tinker's job. For, mixture of the old and new is always difficult and doubtful, and unless a right sense of the two exists, the mixture is likely to become incongruous. It does not, however, imply that this is an impossible task. What is material is the 'will' to bring about the desired change in the quality of our education. If it is there, the creative and imaginative genius of our educational planners will, no doubt, rise equal to the task. As experts in the field, they will be able to build up a modern super-structure of Indian education on the foundations of the above ancient educational and cultural ideals of the country. India is today on the threshold of a new era. Enormous problems loom large on the horizon; and innumerable difficulties beset her path. To steer the country safely and well through these, such an attempt in the educational field would, indeed, be a step in the right direction.

This is about the educational ideology and policy of the Indian national movements and their applicability to our education
today. And then what about the institutions founded by them? Should they have a place in the educational system of free India? Some would perhaps express the opinion that it is simply a waste of money to maintain such 'educational museums', for they are inconsistent with the general set-up of education existing in the country today.

A little thinking would, however, make us feel that such a sweeping opinion in regard to the educational institutions founded—and many of them being still run—by our national movements is unwarranted. For, if we look at these institutions from the cultural point of view, and not merely from the point of view of immediate utilitarian ends, their existence would perhaps not be objected to. In fact, it should be a deliberate part of our educational policy to maintain at least a few such institutions in the country, for through them we would be exemplifying the traditional genius and spirit of India. The example of England is before us. The two medieval universities of Oxford and Cambridge and the famous traditional schools of Harrow and Eton are still there, and the Englishmen take pride in cherishing their old educational ideals embodied in them. In fact, it is through such institutions that the individuality of a nation is preserved and the traditions of a people's culture and character are promoted and transmitted to the posterity.

To preserve our own cultural heritage in a vivid and living way, we must have some educational institutions—at all levels—to which people may turn, when they want to know the genius and spirit of India, as people turn to public schools and Oxford and Cambridge when they want to know the genius and spirit of England.
And it is from this point of view that the Gurukulas of the Arya Samaj and the educational institutions of the Ramkrishna Mission - like the Ramkrishna Institute of Culture, Calcutta, and the Ramkrishna Tapovanam at Tirupparaitturai (Trichurapalli) - deserve our best appreciation, encouragement and emulation. Maintenance of such institutions is not mere cultural idealism, but a test of our national vitality; for the greatness of a nation depends not only upon its dynamic capacity to keep abreast of ever-changing conditions - that is perhaps a necessity for survival - but also in its vital power to draw its sustenance from the past. "Democracy", it has rightly been said, "without a past are also without a future. Mushrooms grow up rootless in a night and perish in the morning. Oak trees strike deep their roots and outlast the centuries."¹

¹ - Besant, A. - Essentials of An Indian Education (the Besant Spirit, Vol.7); p.95.