There was discontent in India acute and widespread when Lord Curzon laid down the reins of office. The partition of Bengal gave rise to militant nationalism fighting against the English in various spheres. The Swadeshi Movement that started in its wake deeply stirred the minds of the people. It did not remain confined to economic and political spheres. It plunged the schools and colleges of Bengal into the struggle. Restrictions on students' activities in connection with the political agitation in Bengal and the punishments and expulsions in the case of those who took active part in political activities led to the boycott of the Government owned schools and colleges.

In 1905, a large number of brilliant young students declared themselves for a boycott of the Calcutta University. They did not take the impending examinations. Soon the entire student community was in revolt against the Government. Repressive measures taken by the authorities against the students brought together the leaders of Bengal like Goorodas Bannerjee, Satish Chandra Mukherjee, Hirendra Nath Datt, Ashutosh Chaudhry, Rash Behari Ghose, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Taraknath Palit, Bepin Chandra Pal, Abdul Rasul and many others to think seriously about the ways and means to provide education to the thousands of students who had boycotted Government schools.

and colleges. The first conference held on November 16, 1905 adopted several resolutions, the most important being the one that recommended the establishment of a National Council of Education to organize a system of education, literary, scientific and technical on national lines and under national control.  

The National Council of Education was formed in 1906 with the following objects:

The object of the Council is to impart education literary as well as scientific and technical on national lines and exclusively under national control, not in opposition to, but standing apart from the existing systems of primary, secondary and university education, attaching special importance to a knowledge of the country, its literature, history and philosophy and designed to incorporate with the best oriental ideals of life and thought, the best assimilable ideals of the West.

The Council set up under it in Calcutta a National College and School in August, 1906 with Aurovindo Ghose as its first Principal and Satish Chandra as its first executive head. Soon after sprang up schools at many places in Bengal, most of them were affiliated to the Council. Liberal donations and regular subscriptions were received by the Council and it came to have a permanent fund and endowed property. The All-India National Congress gave it its support by passing a resolution in December, 1906 that the time had arrived for people all over the country earnestly to take up the question of national education for both boys and girls and organize a

---


3. Ibid., p.44.
system of education-literary, scientific and technical - suited to the requirements of the country, on national lines and under national control. The constitution of the National Council of Education was thoroughly democratic.

The moderate group of Bengal leaders, who did not favour total boycott of the Calcutta University and wanted simply to supplement the literary education of the existing system by a regular arrangement for technical education under national management, parted with the extreme group and undertook to organize an independent system of pure technical education. Thus a second organization named as Society for Promotion of Technical Education was formed. Many Bengalis were members of both the organizations.

The Curriculum Suggested

While the programme of the Society for Promotion of Technical Education was limited, the school curriculum prescribed by the National Council of Education was broad-based and diversified. In primary stage (a three-year course commencing at 6+) children were to be given literary and scientific education combined with rudimentary technical education, imparted through object-lessons and the kindergarten system. In the secondary stage (a seven-year course) also the literary and scientific education was to go hand in hand with such branches of technical education as might be necessary to prepare the student for his intended career in life. Workshop practice was to be introduced in this stage. By the end of the eighth year of school, which was considered to be equal to the Entrance or Matriculation Examination (taken at the end of ten
years' schooling), a student was expected to learn all important branches of science like physics, chemistry and biology with the aid of experiments. At the end of the 8th year the students could take up literary, scientific or technical course. The 9th and 10th years were equal to the Intermediate standard of a university.

The curricular programme for the last four years of the school was as under:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Literary</th>
<th>Scientific and Technical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7th Class.</td>
<td>1. Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian.</td>
<td>1. Mathematics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Vernacular Prose and poetry.</td>
<td>2. Science,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. English.</td>
<td>3. Workshop Practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. History and Geography.</td>
<td>4. Drawing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Class.</td>
<td>1. Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian.</td>
<td>1. Mathematics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Vernacular Prose and poetry.</td>
<td>2. Physics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. English.</td>
<td>3. Chemistry and Biology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Workshop Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Drawing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:-
1. The medium of instruction was vernacular.
2. All the science subjects were to be learnt with the aid of experiments and without text books. No written examination was to be held in them.
3. The study of the French, German, Japanese and Pali languages as optional subjects was also recommended.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9th and 10th classes</th>
<th>Literary</th>
<th>Scientific</th>
<th>Technical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. English.</td>
<td>2. English.</td>
<td>2. Chemistry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Ibid., pp. 53-54.
(b) For study and examination.

1. An Oriental Classic and
2. Any one of the following groups:-
   i) History and Economics,
   ii) Psychology and Ethics,
   iii) Pali, Hindi and either Marathi or Gujrati or Tamil or Telegu,
   iv) French or German.

3. Writing of an essay in English and also an essay in Vernacular at the time of the final examination.

(c) For study only: (c) Nil

Optional:
One or more of the commercial subjects:
Shorthand, Typewriting, Book-Keeping, Banking, Insurance, Commercial Geography, Correspondence and Arithmetic.

---

The ideal of the scheme of studies adopted by the National Council of Education was the "quickening of the national life of the people" as Satish Chandra Mukherjee observed or "the realisation of the national destiny" as Bipin Chandra Pal put it. On its liberal side, Gooroo Dass...

5. Ibid., p.63.
Bannerjee said, the scheme as a whole sought to train students intellectually and morally so as to mould their character according to the highest national ideals, and on its technical side to train them so as to qualify them for developing the national resources of the country and increasing its material wealth. It laid just importance to the awakening of the powers of observation and thought by means of object lessons and sought to make education real by insisting on the learner's acquiring a knowledge of things and thoughts and not merely words and sentences which are only their verbal expression.

By making the vernacular as the medium of instruction and by eliminating from the course unimportant and unnecessary matter, the scheme sought to help the students to learn in 5 years what they usually learnt in 7 years under the Calcutta University scheme. The study of science and technical subjects went side by side with liberal arts and culture. Provision was also made for moral and religious education but it was not to include religious rites and practices. The sphere of public examination was largely reduced. Questions set in the examinations were searching and thought provoking.

Students of the National College and School and other national schools had the privilege of getting education from eminent teachers. That Gooroo Dass Bannerjee, Satish Chandra Mukherjee, Hirendra Nath Datta, Ashutosh Chaudhry, Rash Behari Ghose, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Aurvindo Ghose and other eminent educationists should have set the question papers for admission to the 8th and 10th classes in 1906, reveals what an appeal the

6. Ibid., pp.63-64.
National Education Movement had and what a support it enjoyed. Despite the repressive measures of the Government, the National institutions thrived in Bengal and a number of similar institutions were started in Bombay and Madras Presidencies and in the United Provinces.

The National Council of Education had a progressive outlook. The three-dimensional education that it planned was rooted in the soil, respectful of the best heritage of the past, alive to modern requirements, and directed to balanced national growth. Lala Lajpat Rai who was himself a pioneer of national education in the Punjab considered the effort of the Council truly national. He wrote in 1918 that the scheme of National Council was free from the sectarian tinge of the Upper India movements; it took no notice of denominational nationalism; it took ample cognizance of the economic needs of the country as a whole, and it frankly recognized the necessity of ignoring the official university curriculum on the one hand and State aid on the other. It aimed at national consolidation and national independence. It was a direct challenge to the Government, and the Government accepted it whole-heartedly.

Unfortunately, the movement did not materialise into a stable system. As the heat of the political agitation abated, the enthusiasm waned and the national institutions attracted less and less numbers. Within a period of six or seven years of their birth, they went about seeking Government recognition and eventually fell in line with the old system so firmly entrenched. Financial stringency, Governmental repression,

uncertainty about the future of those who had got education in national institutions, the limited avenues of employment and those too under the Government and at later stages party politics in the affairs of the Council ended the first national attempt at improving education made in the beginning of the century.

An old member of the National Council of Education, writing about the failure of the attempt several years later, observed that the partition of Bengal was the occasion but not the sufficient cause of movement; but then it was an occasion worthy of the event which followed and sufficient as an occasion at least. In this way boycott in the years 1906-07-08 was only an opportunity; it should have been so used that with its powerful help, national education could have for all time built its destiny. As a part of the temporary tide in the political affairs of Bengal, the movement faded as the tide receded. Had the sponsors made full use of the general discontent with the educational system, and chalked out a long term programme based upon national lines, the subsequent history of education in India might have been altogether different. Nevertheless, the movement had a significance for us. It stimulated thinking on matters educational. It provided an example of an experiment in education on national lines and under national control. In the years that followed the leaders would refer to the example of the National Education Movement and the many associated with the movement advocated a national system of education on firmer bases in the light of their experience.

S. Pramathanath Mukhopadhyaya, National Education in India. Calcutta, 1921. p. 33.
Sober Thinking

The period intervening the decline in the National Education Movement of Bengal and the Non-cooperation Movement (1920-22) saw sober thinking on education. The experiences of the past with regard to efforts for national education made even before the advent of the twentieth century were reviewed. Ideals and aims of the National Education, its kind, quality, organisation and methodology, therefore, became the subject of serious thought.

The role Lajpat Rai played in calling upon the national educationists to think in the context of times was notable. He warned them not to be carried away by prejudices and mere sentimentality. Asking for a deep, careful and critical consideration of the whole question, he said, "Education is the vital question for us. It is the most important of all our problems. In a way it is the fundamental problem. We cannot afford to have loose and confused ideas about education, the aims and ends of education, and the methods of education. Our whole future hinges on it. It behoves us, therefore, to devote all the mental energy which we possess to the right understanding and the right solution thereof." 9

Lajpat Rai suggested that the aim of a national system of education should be to destroy the prevalent belief of the people in the negation of life, because he thought life to be real, precious, earnest, invaluable, to be prized, preserved, prolonged and enjoyed. "The attempt to live in the past," he wrote, "is not only futile but even foolish; what we need to

take care of is the future."10 For a full, healthy and vigorous life, he thought it was necessary for India to come into closer touch with the rest of the world and come up to the level of the most modern countries not only in politics and economics, but even in thought and life. And education was to play its part in building up a new India, fit men and women for the battle of life and not to convert them into anchorites and ascetics. Any widespread revival of the ancient or medieval systems of education, therefore, was unthinkable.

Besides the study of usual subjects like mother tongue, Hindustani, history, geography, civics, science, hygiene, drawing, modelling and music which the students in primary and middle classes should take up, the great leader recommended infusing the spirit of patriotism among the children so that they could identify themselves with the nation. Vocational education was recommended to increase their productive capacity, and physical education to develop their bodies. While the medium of instruction was to be the principal provincial language or mother tongue, English was to be studied compulsorily from the middle classes. Lajpat Rai would relieve the school children of the burden of studying classical languages. At the conclusion of the middle stage, a bifurcation of courses was suggested, one leading to the higher course in agriculture, commerce and technology and the other to the general course of higher liberal education. As for the art of teaching he said it should make children thinking and acting persons. Parents and teachers must learn to respect the child and have a feeling

10. Ibid., p. 41.
of tenderness for it. Lala Lajpat Rai would thus not go all
the way with Mrs. Annie Besant who stood against the
'denationalizing and despiritualizing' effect of the British
system of education and asked for an education controlled,
shaped and carried on by Indians, and which should "hold up
Indian ideals of devotion, wisdom and morality, and must be
permeated by the religious spirit".\footnote{11}

Earlier, after the collapse of the National Education
Movement in Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore set up a school at
Bolpur in Bengal which combined "in its course of training and
methods of discipline Indian tradition with ideas from the
West."\footnote{12} The boys from Bolpur entered for the Calcutta
University Matriculation examination as private students. The
school was thus free to work out its own courses and methods
of teaching. For the Matriculation, the students studied
mother tongue, English, Sanskrit, mathematics and history.
Earlier they studied natural science and geography. And there
were tasks to be done out of class hours. Music, drawing,
manual work, social service, etc., were a part of the programme.
The Bolpur school provided the nation a successful experiment
in national education. In the words of Prof. Humayun Kabir
"practically every new development in Indian education since
the beginning of the century owes something to the work which
was initiated at Santiniketan."\footnote{13} It should not be an
exaggeration to say that during the second decade of the century
the conception of national education grew both in thought and
practice.

\footnote{11. \textit{Ibid.}, p.28.}
\footnote{13. Humayun Kabir, \textit{Education in New India}. London: George
Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1959. p. 52.}
Opposition at National Level: Punjab in the Throes:

Neither the National Education Movement of early years nor the later thinking on national education nor even the criticism of the English system of education by eminent leaders like Annie Besant, Gokhale, Tagore, Aurovindo Ghose, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Hardyal, Lajpat Rai, Gandhi and others persuaded the Government to re-orient education to the needs of aspirations of the people of India. Discontent with education increased as the number of the educated unemployed began to swell for want of adequate number of openings in industry and commerce. The educational situation remained explosive to be exploited for political ends or made a front in the over-all struggle for independence.

The political unrest in India after the World War, which the Government tried to suppress with physical force and by doling out a slender measure of reforms, led to Non-Cooperation Movement under Mahatma Gandhi. The Resolution of the Congress passed in September, 1920 at Calcutta under the Chairmanship of Lajpat Rai and later confirmed by the Congress at its session at Nagpur in December, 1920, among other things, called for the "gradual withdrawal of children from schools and colleges owned, aided or controlled by Government and in place of such schools and colleges, the establishment of national schools and colleges in the various provinces." Mahatma Gandhi who moved the resolution pointed out the outstanding defects of the educational system organised by the Government. In his opinion, the system of education was

defective, apart from its association with an utterly unjust Government, in three most important matters. First, it was based upon foreign culture to the almost entire exclusion of indigenous culture. Secondly, it ignored the culture of the heart and the hand, and confined itself to the head. Thirdly, real education was impossible through a foreign medium. 15

The Resolution asked for the gradual withdrawal of children from schools and colleges and the establishment of national institutions. One wonders how it could have been imagined that the youth would come out of the schools and colleges gradually when a struggle against the Government was to be launched on a mass scale and how it could have been possible to set up a large number of efficient parallel institutions when the minds were seized with the more pressing problems. Despite a good deal of plea for national education no efforts had been made by the Congress or by other nationalist groups to open national institutions. In any case Gandhiji wanted a complete deadlock to force the Government to accept the demand of 'Swaraj' (complete freedom). With educational institutions functioning and imparting defective education to the youth of the people them in revolt against the Government, guilty of the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs, the deadlock could not be complete and comprehensive to paralyse the Government. Circumstances were such that called upon the students to come out of schools and colleges and make sacrifices for the cause of the freedom of the country so dear to all.

15. Mahatma Gandhi, Young India, September 1, 1921.
The response of the students to the call for the boycott of educational institutions was astonishing. By the thousand they came out to take part in the political agitation and programmes of social service. The fiery youth of the Punjab with bitter memories of the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy very fresh in their mind, were in the vanguard of the movement. The Director of Public Instruction admitted that, for a time, towards the end of 1920 and in the early months of 1921, the situation seemed serious. A few institutions cut all connection with the Government and University systems. Others bowed before the storm and were closed for a time. Some of the abler and better students left college. To them, undoubtedly, the call to sacrifice made an irresistible appeal. The number of teachers who threw up their posts was negligible. The Punjab, according to official figures, had 69 national institutions with 80, 46 scholars on rolls during the movement.

The Non-Co-operation Movement was called off early in 1922 as some people indulged in violence which was against the creed of Mahatma Gandhi. The boycott of educational institutions also ceased. The students started returning to their institutions, and the schools which had parted from the existing system gradually began to ask for recognition. According to the Government while very few schools were absolutely unaffected at the time, very few were ultimately wrecked. The storm passed away; and by the close of the year the surface was nearly calm. The situation was almost similar to the one experienced after the withdrawal of the Swadeshi Movement in the early years of the century.

Although the two upheavals in education were a part of the political struggle and had certain similarities, they differed in scope and effect. The movement of 1920 "differed materially from the first in several respects. It was more intensive, and more widespread; the number of students and teachers involved in it were far larger; it contributed more largely to constructive educational thought; and the movement continued to exist and do useful pioneer work even after non-co-operation came to an end."19

The Government realised perhaps for the first time that there was widespread dissatisfaction with the educational system. The Director of Public Instruction in the Punjab wrote that it was probable that the large bulk of the students suddenly realised, to their intense pain and disappointment, that much of their education was ill-suited to their practical needs. Students, both at school and at college, began to wonder whether they were being trained for life and for service or for mere success in the examinations, for it was the ideals of service that were uppermost in their minds.20 The Government of India also expressed similar feeling. It was recorded:

This episode in the history of Indian education is closed. It has not been without its valuable lessons to the educationist. It has brought to light evidence of a genuine dissatisfaction with the process of education in India.... the educational organization of India emerged triumphantly from the ordeal, but the crisis has left behind the conviction that our educational aims need restatement. If the function of education is the adaptation of the future citizen to his environment, then the content of education must change in harmony with changes in that environment. The political and economic conditions of India have been undergoing change and the

---

national school movement can at least claim that it lent strength to the advocates of educational reform. 21

The history of the succeeding years, however, showed that the Government made no special efforts to reform the 'ill-suited' education which was challenged by the national educationists and bring the content of education in harmony with changes in the socio-economic environment. The movement for national education had no immediate impact on the educational programme of the existing schools, but this in no way should mean that the movement proved a futile struggle for the improvement of the quality of education. It brought into limelight the objectives of national education as well as a suitable curriculum for their achievement. In the wake of the movement came a well considered plan of national education - Basic Education - sponsored by Gandhiji who had asked for the boycott of the state-run schools and colleges during the Non-Co-operation Movement.

21. Progress of Education in India, (Quinquennial Review), 1912-17. p.9