EDUCATION IN INDIA: A LETTER TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE MOST HONOURABLE, THE MARQUIS OF RIPON

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649568888

Education in India: A Letter to His Excellency the Most Honourable, the Marquis of Ripon by John Murdoch

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

www.triestepublishing.com

JOHN MURDOCH

EDUCATION IN INDIA: A LETTER TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE MOST HONOURABLE, THE MARQUIS OF RIPON

Trieste

EDUCATION IN INDIA.

A LETTER

TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE MOST HONOURABLE,

THE MARQUIS OF RIPON, K.G., G.M.S.I,

VICEROY AND GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF INDIA, &c. &c.

BY

JOHN MURDOCH, LL.D.,

(Indian Agent of the Christian Vernacular Education Society for India.)

MADRAS:

C. K. S. PRESS, VEPERY.

1881.

CONTENTS.

To

HIS EXCELLENCY THE MOST HONOURABLE

THE MARQUIS OF RIPON, K. G., G. M. S. I.,

Viceroy and Governor-General of India,
Chancellor of the University of Calcutta,
&c. &c.

MY LORD,

THE Government of one-sixth of the earth's population, differing in race and creed, with many inflammable elements, is a task demanding the greatest care and wisdom. The difficulty is increased by the administration being largely in the hands of foreigners, its head, generally a stranger to the country, holding office for only five short years.

The state of the people forbids Government standing still. On the other hand, it is possible, with the very best intentions, to make changes the evils resulting from which would far counterbalance the good. In some cases, the Viceroy has not to take the initiative, but to watch over measures introduced by his predecessors. It is a misfortune that the originator of a scheme in India is generally unable to guide its working, upon which so much depends. Like Solomon, he must "leave it unto the man that shall be after him."

Powerful vested interests and party claims have also to be taken into account.

Under such circumstances it is prudent to have important questions viewed from different stand-points before coming to a decision.

The subject on which I venture to address your Lordship is one of the most weighty that can come before you—the education of the country. As Lord Northbrook justly remarked, in a University address, "It would be bold indeed in me to venture to give any authoritative opinion upon the effects of the spread of education in India. I doubt whether any of those here present, however earnest they may be in the cause, could venture to prophesy what the effects of the spread of education in India may eventually be."

Lord Lytton spoke of the change now going on in India as "the greatest and most momentous revolution—at once social, moral, religious and political—which perhaps, the world has ever witnessed."

Education is rapidly spreading. According to the trite saying, "Knowledge is power." Whether it will prove a blessing or a curse depends upon the way in which it is employed. The stream resembles its source. The effects of education turn

largely upon its character. "If we go seriously wrong," says Dr. Murray Mitchell, "in the educational system we set up, the error may soon be irretrievable, and the consequences fatal."

When a witness gives evidence before a commission, the first inquiry is generally about his means of acquaintance with the subject. The writer may, therefore, be permitted to state that he has been connected with education in the East for nearly forty years. For about twenty years in succession he has made the circuit of the three Presidencies of India; he has visited every country in Europe noted for the excellence of its schools, as well as twice crossed the Atlantic. He may also venture to add that some previous remarks on the same subject, submitted to Lord Northbrook, were favourably received, and, it is believed, had some influence.

An endeavour will be made to take all the circumstances into consideration. Schemes will not be brought forward which, however good in themselves, are impracticable on account of the expense. Nor, again, will changes be proposed inconsistent with the avowed principles of Government education.

Every important step will be supported by past practice or by the approval of some of the most distinguished educationists or officers of Government. The writer will sometimes appear to have needlessly dwelt on what are platitudes, to have wasted labour in "slaying the slain." But there is still a considerable amount of ignorance in India about what are considered educational truisms in Europe. Some influential men still represent what may be termed the "middle ages" of Oxford. If there is any recognised principle among enlightened educationists at home it is, that teachers ought to be trained. Yet Dr. George Smith, himself an experienced educationist, said, "In a backward country like India the Normal School is the root of all successful education....It is sad to be under the necessity of writing such platitudes year after year; but it is necessary."*

The writer's course in India is nearly run. The shadows of life begin to darken. Before he leaves the country where his best years have been spent, he would seek to make another effort both for its poor toiling millions and for their natural leaders. He takes encouragement to himself from the remark of a former Vice-chancellor of the Calcutta University: "Men abstain from doing good or attacking evil when the opportunity is plain before them, for lack of faith in their individual power; but it is no new lesson which science teaches when it says that no energy, however feeble, is ever lost, and that no exertion is without some avail."

* *Friend of India.*

PROGRESS OF GOVERNMENT EDUCATION IN INDIA.

Before entering into details, it may be well to give a very brief sketch of what has been hitherto done. It will show the great evils resulting from ill-advised schemes, the necessity of watchful supervision, and the practicability of improvement.

Early Efforts.—The Calcutta Madrissa, or Muhammadan College, established in 1781 by Warren Hastings, seems to have been the first educational institution founded by the British Government in India. It was followed in 1792 by the Sanskrit College of Benares. The discipline of the College was to be "conformable in all respects to the Dharma Shastra in the chapter on education." The scholars were to be examined four times a year in the presence of the Resident, "in all such parts of knowledge as are not held too sacred to be discussed in the presence of any but Brahmins."*

The Poona College was founded in 1821. The Peshwa had annually distributed a large sum of money among the Brahmins noted for their learning. Mr. Chaplin, Commissioner of the Dekkan, proposed, as a less objectionable method of spending the funds while the original object was in some measure kept in view, that part of the grant should be devoted to the support of a College.

On the renewal of the East India Company's Charter in 1813, the following clause was inserted:

"A sum of not less than a lakh of Rupees (£10,000) in each year shall be set apart and applied to the revival and improvement of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India."

No steps, however, were taken by the Indian Government for ten years to carry out this measure, and the money was left to accumulate.

In July 1823, the Governor-General in Council resolved, that,

"There should be constituted a General Committee of Public Instruction, for the purpose of ascertaining the state of public education, and of the public institutions designed for its promotion, and of considering, and from time to time submitting to Government, the suggestion of such measures as it may appear expedient to adopt with a view to the better instruction of the people, to the introduction among them of useful knowledge, and to the improvement of their moral character."

* Kerr's Review of Public Instruction in the Bengal Presidency, p. 135.

In 1826, Sir Thomas Munro established a similar Board of Public Instruction for the Madras Presidency. The Bombay Board of Education was constituted in 1840.

Until 1835, the Bengal Committee of Public Instruction was mainly in the hands of orientalists, the study of Sanskrit and Arabic receiving special attention. "The medium of instruction," says Macaulay, "was oriental, the whole scope of the instruction was oriental, designed to conciliate old prejudices, and to propagate old ideas."

Introduction of English.—Intelligent Hindus felt the need of an education better adapted to the wants of the nineteenth century. In 1816 the Hindu College was established in Calcutta, largely through the efforts of David Hare, a watchmaker. The studies included the works of Locke, Adam Smith, Shakespere, Milton, and other writers.

Dr. Duff's Institution in Calcutta, commenced in 1830, gave a great impulse to the study of English. His views were held by the late Lord Macaulay and Sir Charles Trevelyan. Macaulay, in a scathing minute, exposed the absurdity of teaching at the public expense, "Medical doctrines that would disgrace an English farrier,—Astronomy, which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school,—History, abounding with kings thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand years long,—and Geography, made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter." Soon afterwards, Lord William Bentinck issued the following order:

"His Lordship in Council is of opinion that the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science amongst the Natives of India, and that all the funds appropriated for the purposes of education would be best employed on English education alone."

Macaulay subsequently explained that the General Committee, in "advocating English as the best medium of instruction, had in view those classes only of the community who had means and leisure for obtaining a thorough education." "When the object is merely an elementary education, it may be most easily imparted to the natives in their own language."

The Muhammadan College—The frightful abuses connected with this for about a century will be detailed at some length for an important purpose which will be explained.

Its original design was to supply Muhammadan law officers. It was consigned to the uncontrolled management of Muhammadan Professors, who "professed to teach Theology and Law according to the Koran, the Commentators, and the Traditionists, and Science according to the Graeco-Arabic system of Bagdad and Bokhara."