

History of Education

SURESH C. GHOSH

During the period covered by this trend report (1993-2000), we have only four doctoral theses completed in the universities and institutes, offering courses on history of education. Of these two relate to North East India, one to Kerala and the fourth to the British India. The Fifth Survey reported seven successful doctoral theses in history of education. The Third Survey contained 45 abstracts including 36 doctoral theses. (Ghosh, S.C., 1997) Does this indicate a decline in interest for research in history of education? Obviously, it does. However, the picture may be different if we could also look into research in this area in departments, other than education. Research in history of education does not necessary confine to the education discipline alone and some of the best researches in history of education in the past have come from departments other than education.

It is a pity we have not been able to develop an information system through which we could have been able to lay our hands on such works for assessing them for the period under review. Be that as it may, we have to be content with four doctoral theses in history of education and of these three definitely endorse a trend spoken of earlier in our past trend reports, that is, inclination among researchers to work on educational problems at the regional or the state level. As clarified earlier in the last trend report, this inclination or tendency is inevitable given the situation in which a researcher finds himself or herself at the time of his/her registration for a doctoral degree. For example, a Bengali scholar without an adequate

knowledge of Malayalam as well as without adequate acquaintance with the life and conditions in Kerala will hesitate to venture on a research at the Calcutta University under a Bengali supervisor on an educational problem in Kerala. (Ghosh, S.C., 1997). The fourth thesis on university education in British India is rather an exception to the general trend of investigation in regional educational problems with historical overtones. Such wide geographical area can possibly be undertaken at a national university like Jawaharlal Nehru University or Delhi University which not only admit students from different parts of India and abroad but also wear a positive national and cosmopolitan outlook.

At this stage, it is necessary to have a look at the four doctoral theses in respect of the problems investigated, methodologies followed and major findings arrived at by them before we can further comment on the trend of research in history of education during the period under review.

The thesis of Singh, (1997) entitled *A Critical Study of the Development of Primary Education in the North-Eastern Region of India with Special Reference to Manipur* focused the problems of primary education before and after independence till 1993, growth and development of educational institutions, enrolment, scholars, teachers and teacher education at the primary school stage, universalisation of elementary education and education for all children up to the age of fourteen years in the North-Eastern Region (NER) of India. It also reflected the contribution

of Christian missionaries in education in this region. Facts and figures related to the development of primary education in the NER and specially in Manipur were drawn from *Fifth All India Educational Survey*, Educational Statistics of Seven States of the NER of India, the Records of Director of Education (Schools), Manipur. A questionnaire was developed to collect relevant data. The collected data were treated with qualitative methods. In the plains of the NER of India, there was an indigenous system of education, like in other parts of the country, before the arrival of the Christian missionaries. The Christian missionaries pioneered western education and did excellent work with a network of primary schools. The first newspaper, the first book, the first dictionary and the first grammar were published by the Christian missionaries in this region. The main problem of the universalisation of elementary education and education for all in the NER is found to be due to the lack of proper infrastructure of educational institutions, high dropout rates, dearth of women and trained teachers, small and scattered habitation particularly in the rural and hilly areas.

Study by Bharali, (1997), *History of Higher Secondary Education in Modern Assam (1968-1990) – A Perspective* traces the historical development of higher secondary education in modern Assam covering 1968-1990. It focussed on identifying vital problems in higher secondary education such as its structure, administration and organisation, examination and evaluation, medium of instruction, professional requirements, diversification, etc., and the problems related to infrastructural facilities, planning and institutionalisation. The study reveals that the logical setting of higher secondary education was yet to be decided and implemented. The curriculum for higher secondary education was rigid and not suitable for the different situations which prevailed in different environments. The vocational bias implemented and stressed has remained more on theory than on practice. The existing system of examination was not sound and needed to be changed to effect better quality and

standard of education. Many items of educational policy both at national as well as state level were not implemented in all seriousness causing non-achievement of objectives. The educational plans so far made and implemented failed to incorporate the factors which could influence development of educational system so as to achieve objectives such as social demand, economic and political needs, etc. The higher secondary schools of Assam were being run with poor infrastructure and human resources like facilities of building, equipment and trained personnel. The administrative system was not so effective and needed to be reconstructed. Appropriate efforts were not made by the state government to train teachers in improved methods of teaching, evaluation and administration.

The third study by Sarojini Amma, (1998) *A Study of the History and Development of Nair Service Society as a Voluntary Educational Agency in Kerala*, attempts to study the history and development of Nair Service Society as a voluntary educational agency in Kerala. It focused on the major social forces and the historical antecedents which led to the creation of the Nair Service Society (NSS) a strong community organisation of the Nairs. Further, it discusses the entry of NSS in the field of education as a voluntary agency, and its contribution to the development that occurred in the educational establishment during 1916-1990. The NSS had played a significant role in the development of the educational institutions in the State and provided leadership on the critical issues in education. The NSS although created for the upliftment of the Nair community, grew into a social service organisation serving all communities and religions. The NSS had played an acknowledged crucial role in getting the state as the most literate State in India. The NSS established a large number of educational institutions. During the post independent period, there was an attempt by the Nair community to restore its past glory and position in the society. In the long run this helped the educational progress of all communities and the overall development of Kerala.

The fourth thesis under survey by Sedwal. (1998), *A Study of the Growth and Development of University Education in India* centres around the development of university education in India from 1920 to 1947. It analyses the chronological development of university education in relation to the changing socio-political situations. Data were mainly collected from printed official reports and surveys. The methodology adopted for analysis was historical. The problem is looked at from the point of view of relevant social science disciplines, in the light of new trends in history of education that have emerged in the West. The study highlights the fact that the university system was strongly influenced by the British model. However following the establishment of Inter-University Board in 1925, Indian higher education began to change from a system which served almost exclusively as an adjunct of the British administration network, to an educational apparatus at least partly devoted to Indian national development.

It is obvious that all the four theses depend heavily on printed official record reports, surveys and circulars. One of them used a questionnaire and another used interviews as one of the sources. Private Papers and Newspapers were used by only one researcher as sources for her research—perhaps the nature of the problems investigated did not need them or perhaps the investigation could have been done without their help or perhaps simply because they were not available in the archives and libraries consulted.

General Observations

It is heartening to find that three of them concentrate on local or regional problems in education. Regional investigations have their own value and uses – they often may throw up new material, new data, which may enliven the reconstruction of educational history at the macro level. However, such regional investigations also need a new technique, a new skill to handle the fresh local level materials. Investigation in local history is a new phenomenon in historical research and is one of the few important changes that have recently

taken place in our understanding of history involving, besides the local history comparative, political, social, intellectual and cultural history.

In comparative history a new approach has emerged, called quantitative approach. It pivots on the discovery of what was common between and what was distinctive to different societies as a sequel to the variety of experiences embedded in local, regional and national levels. In political history, attention is now moving from particular pieces of legislation (though these are still studied within a different frame) to cumulative administrative process, to the making of critical decisions, to the changing scale and role of organisation. It involves less concentration on the “landmarks” and more on the interplay of people and problems.

Similarly, in social history, the attempt is now made to make use of concepts derived from sociology, anthropology and psychology to study “history from below”. The new social history directs attention to people whose names never figured in the older history books, the people who were deprived or neglected in their own time and whose participation in government was minimal or non-existent, whose attitudes towards “authority” could be differential or resentful, passive or hostile. Finally, we have the new intellectual and cultural history. The history of ideas is now beginning to come into its own, not merely the history of ideas of the “great thinkers” but the history of chains of ideas and their mode of communication through different “media”, the shifting relationship between “minority”, and “mass” communication, the significance of “language” and the forms of control. The new history of ideas has been associated with a re-examination of such crucial changes as the invention and development of printing and the subsequent history of literacy and the more recent “communication revolution” (Briggs, A.1971).

These new approaches to history reveal current pre-occupations and are made possible by the availability of new materials and development of new techniques. The techniques, such as oral interview, are

instrumental and depend for their success on the quality of the questions asked. Another main important trend is the new balance between specialisation and generalisation, the old barriers between the different sub-branches of history are breaking down and new efforts at synthesis are being made, making possible the emergence of "Total History" as advocated by Lucien Febvre of the *Ecole des Annales*.

In studying history of education each of these new approaches is to be studied carefully. For, history of education is no longer regarded only as a matter of "Acts and Facts". The conception of education has broadened considerably in recent years. There is more emphasis on the idea that education is not just matter of formal schooling but of all the many influences which go to shape a person's character and intellect. History of education is, therefore, concerned not merely with institutions but with the social forces which have affected the quality of life, and with the ideas which have been put forward by theorists and practitioners of education in the past. Education is thus an adjunct to the process of history besides being one of the chief factors conditioning, outlook and aspirations of human beings. History of education is, therefore, a part of the wider study of the history of society—social history broadly interpreted in the context of the interplay of politics, economics and culture.

In Europe and the USA, as well as in Australia and Japan, the research in history of education has been built up around these approaches, which have characterised the emergence of the "new history" in the last three decades. Generally, the attempts of the scholars there are to find out how education discovers and provides the conditions which encourage the fuller development of abilities and skills in every sphere of human activity – intellectual, emotional and spiritual. Seen in this light, education may be strikingly described as the instrument of development of human beings in society. If schools, colleges, universities and teaching and learning institutions of all kinds are to flourish and they are to realise their

purpose of empowerment, one should understand what conditions hinder or encourage such a situation. This involves an in-depth analysis—an attempt to penetrate into the relations between education and society. Societies all over the world consist of different social classes and groups, who develop and articulate policies, and a general outlook, reflecting their own needs and aspirations and are often driven by contradictions and divisions between opposing forces. Such divisions, and the conflicts to which they give rise, are necessarily reflected in the world of education sometimes directly. The result is that education becomes and is best seen as, the site of a struggle between what are often opposing, or at least, antagonistic social forces. Such conflicts can become acute, as the historical record shows very clearly, and characterise the very beginning of the history of education in Modern India in Anglo-Oriental Controversy in the early nineteenth century, (Ghosh, S.C., 1997).

Regrettable as it is, none of the theses discussed earlier either reveal an awareness of these new approaches to the study of a historical problem or the need to interpret educational change while undertaking a sector wise or discipline-wise study of education – primary, secondary and higher – in the light of the articulation of opinions of the groups of people that inhabit the society. These limitations could be traced partly to the method of teaching history in schools and colleges and partly to its neglect in the curricula at various levels of education in the country. Traditions die hard and attitude hardly change. Despite the best efforts made since independence educational programme continue more or less on the same line as developed under the British rule, irrespective of tremendous socio-economic and political changes that have recently taken place in the country. As a result vast areas in history of education continue to remain unexplored and our knowledge about the historical development in education in India till 1947 still remains confined only to British India and since 1947, to very limited fields.

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