

Introduction

The space in education discourse and action in which one can raise questions and enquire is an endangered one. Both activists and teacher educators propagate the idea that there is nothing to be learnt by reading and reflection - what we need is action. The theoretical, set in opposition to the practical, has been turned into unnecessary baggage to be gotten rid off. Activists eschew any attempt to examine, or reflect. Many even arrogantly claim that they never read educational writing! Both the problems and the solutions seem so 'obvious'. Efficient management and implementation, along with some attitude building and love seem to be the need of the hour. Teamed up with international donors, the focus and the funding for any educational activity is heavily oriented towards 'implementing solutions through pyramidal models of diffusion'. Incorporating enquiry or renewed articulation of direction in education into these programmes is treated impatiently as an unnecessary waste of time.

Teacher trainers and most of education research have contributed to the same syndrome by presenting theoretical enquiry in its most shallow and least informative form. Generations of new teachers leave the B. Ed, with the conviction that philosophical and sociological enquiry is a ritual gilding. Only the mechanistic psychology they learn seems to have some relevance to the 'real stuff - classroom teaching. But, ultimately, they all learn only by jumping in at the deep end and flaying about to keep afloat.

Caught between shallowness, impatience and arrogance, the public space for reflection is shrinking. Articulation of a foundational character whether of concerns, or aims or direction, is being

delegitimized. Yet many of us know that to engage with the real business of educational activity - of teaching children to learn - it is impossible to go very far without beginning to ask questions, reflecting, and charting a course. Questions of what we are doing, why, what we need to do, who benefits from it and how, why this and not that, why things that are 'obvious' to us are not to others... Call them existential questions that problematize all aspects of life, or call them by the narrow classical heads under which the discipline of education addressed them; 'aims of education', 'ethics and education', 'sociology', 'issues in Indian education', etc. These very 'theoretical' concerns come back to haunt and to demand attention, enquiry and insight. Programmatic efforts which ignore this need get caught in contradictions and dead-ends, but the managerial framework in which they are conceptualised does not even permit the recognition that the solution is not the simple one of 'better planning and implementation', or 'attitude-building'. We don't get very far in the 'practical' without addressing the 'theoretical' and at the same time it is in relation to the practice that the theory is generated.

In this scenario, the Marjorie Sykes Lecture (and other writings) of Jane Sahi are an important effort to bring forth private cogitation, and re-establish the necessary public focus we need on continuing to engage in reflecting on the foundational aspects of education, through enquiry and reflection, that is not circumscribed in either scope or method. Marjorie Sykes herself was such a bold thinker and practitioner. It is fitting that the renewed focus and exploration of the practical philosophy of education should be in her memory. The mode chosen for this engagement - the lecture - also deserves mention. Although currently unfashionable, criticized, and replaced by more 'interactive' forms, there is still much merit in the old-fashioned lecture. It is simultaneously a process of enquiry and a dialogue. It demands a continuous engagement with an idea or a group of ideas, to systematically explore, build upon and give shape - a discipline that many of us would benefit

from. The act of listening to a good lecture also is far from passive - the listener is drawn into dialogue, both during and after.

Jane Sahi is an educationist who is unafraid of intellectual enquiry as a part of evolving her philosophy of education. Although a pioneer in her own right, she has the rare virtue of reading, engaging and learning from what others have said and done, as a part of her own enquiry and practice. Perhaps it is only natural, given her own philosophy of education where the concepts of connectedness and rootedness are as important as growth and individuality. The active context for her is undoubtedly the school she runs in a village near Bangalore. Active, not only because of the responsiveness to the life-force that bursts out of children, but also active because the pace of changes that the village community and the school need to respond to. *Roots and Branches* presents her search for a mode of practice for educating children to be rooted and to grow. For her, 'growing the soil' and 'nurturing the plant' are not only metaphors; ecological sustainability is both a philosophy of human existence and a spiritual beacon, giving 'interconnectedness' a scope wider than human society and culture. Her insights, anecdotes and stories infuse these metaphors with a new vigour. In an approach to understanding Gandhi's philosophy of education which breaks away from the stereotyped and narrow productive approach that goes under 'basic education'. In this essay Jane Sahi is critical and yet responsive to Gandhi, not merely as a follower but as an enquiring and creative educationist

Jane Sahi has amply established both the continuing relevance of philosophizing on fundamental aspects of education, and the potential of the lecture. Hopefully, in the years to come we will hear more voices and ideas take shape in and give to this space created by the Marjorie Sykes Lecture series.

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