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J.P. NAIK¹

(1907–1981)

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J.P. Naik, who was well known to educationists all over the world, died in August 1981. India lost the doyen of educational thinkers and organizers. Indian social scientists lost their greatest friend and benefactor since the establishment of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, and world education was deprived of the ablest exponent of the Indian educational situation and educational problems in the developing countries in general.

Naik was in the field of Indian education for more than four decades and a central figure for the last twenty years. His was the largest single influence in originating and promoting Indian educational research, in institutionalizing educational innovations and reforms, and also in educational planning and policy-making.

Early activities

A brief account of Naik's early life should help us to better understand the man, his thought and work. He came from a poor rural family and would have been unable to get out of the rural agricultural trap had his intelligence and love of learning not come to the notice of one of his benevolent relatives, who saw that he received a secondary and college education. He had a brilliant academic career and his versatile mind was equally interested in literature, history and mathematics. Perhaps his mathematical skill explains his quantitative approach and mastery over figures in his educational writings, his liberal use of educational statistics and also his simple, precise and direct approach to the complex problems of education.

By the time Naik had taken his first degree, the national movement for liberation in India had entered the phase of civil disobedience under Gandhi's leadership. He threw himself into the movement, served a prison sentence, and thereafter, like a good Gandhian, started constructive work in the rural areas, including rural education. Naik is one of the few, perhaps the only one, among the Indian educationists to have worked in diverse roles, from a village primary teacher to the educational adviser to the Central Ministry of Education in New Delhi.

Naik's varied interests ranged from a major concern for education to rural development, health and medical care, to promotion of social science research. His educational activities started during the early 1930s with the establishment and running of primary schools in the rural areas in the south of the then Bombay Presidency; and mass education, including literacy, adult education and basic education, in the Bombay Province before and after the popular ministries assumed office in 1937. He wrote on the history of Indian education since the beginning of the British imperial rule and prepared edited volumes of educational archives. He was involved in the establishment of the Indian Institute of Education for postgraduate training and research in Bombay between 1948 and 1959. He was also concerned with founding and running a rural educational-community-development institute near Kolhapur. He was drafted as Educational Adviser in the Central

Ministry of Education, where he worked without a salary and helped in that capacity to establish several new educational institutions, such as the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), Jawaharlal Nehru University and the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA). He was member-secretary of the Education Commission, the first such commission in independent India (1964–66). He made valiant efforts to get some of the commission's more important recommendations accepted and enforced by the government. He worked closely with UNESCO and other international agencies in education. His last institutional endeavour was the revival of the Indian Institute of Education (IIE) in Pune from 1977 onwards, a project that he cherished.

Naik was also drawn as an active participant into many committees and commissions on education at state and central levels. And of course he wrote extensively on several themes in education. He was the ablest and the most knowledgeable person in the field of Indian education. As one of his friends and admirers remarked a long time ago, Naik knew almost everything about Indian education and what he did not know was not worth knowing!

Before we attempt an account and critical analysis of Naik's educational contribution it is necessary to mention two more factors: the initial influences on his thought, and (b) his connection in later years with the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). They both contributed greatly to the evolution of his educational ideas.

The initial influences on Naik's educational (and other) thought were those of the ongoing national movement under Gandhi's leadership on the one hand, and of his own socio-economic and educational work among the rural poor on the other. Naturally enough, national education, basic education (expounded by Gandhi and Gandhian educationists) and Gandhian thought in general made a deep impression on his work. But he was also well-versed in Western liberal educational thought.

After Naik had begun to work systematically and vigorously as Secretary to the ICSSR fostering social science research in India, he supervised social science research, young social scientists and a number of research institutions. He gave social science research in India its present wide range, bringing in such fields as the status of women in India and social change among the weaker sections of society. At the same time, this ICSSR connection changed his own perspective on the Indian educational situation, and, as will be indicated later, changed his understanding of the relationship between educational change and social change.

Naik's educational thought

To describe and analyze the educational ideas of Naik is not an easy task, for he had a prolific output. Even if his non-educational writings are excluded, his books alone run into more than thirty-five titles. In addition, there are numerous reports of the commissions and committees in which he participated. It is no exaggeration to say that whenever Naik was a member of a committee or commission he was invariably also the author of its report, which incorporated a number of his own ideas on that theme. Inevitably these books, booklets and reports taken together cover almost every aspect of Indian education.

It is impossible to deal with all these writings in a piecemeal manner. They are therefore divided for convenience into: (a) historical writings, including his histories of Indian education, and the editing of educational archives and yearbooks of education; (b) basic education, the educational model of Gandhi and its modifications by his followers, education and work experience, and its latest variant of socially useful productive work; (c) mass education including universalization of elementary, primary education, adult education, non-formal education, continuing education, etc.; (d) educational planning and administration, that is, state-level, district-level and local-level planning and improvement of educational management and administration; (e) exercises outlining grand national designs for educational transformation, which started with the monumental Report of the

Education Commission, entitled *Education and national development* (1966a),² and was continued during later years under the general title of *Alternatives in development*, including his last work, *Education commission and after*; and (f) the relationship between education and society, between educational transformation and social transformation.

History of Indian education

Naik's historical writings and editing of parts of archives may be considered as pioneering efforts in the field. His two books on the history of modern Indian education (1945 and 1974b), the larger volume and its shorter version (written in collaboration with S. Nurulla), were the first systematic attempts to cover the subject in a comprehensive manner with relevant extracts and statistical data. They pointed out that there was a fairly efficient and indigenous education system operating in many parts of the country before and at the time of the British conquest. The authors have described its strong and weak points and have rightly emphasized that the modern Western educational system introduced by Macaulay and Wood, instead of utilizing the traditional system, simply ignored it, much to the detriment of mass education. It could have been continued and strengthened by modernizing its content and organization. Some of the British rulers also belatedly realized the value of indigenous education at the time of the Education Commission of 1882. By that time, however, irreparable damage had been done and the old system was dying out.

The two books on history, first written some fifty years ago, do have a general nationalist viewpoint but are not much more than conventional chronological histories of education. Their main weakness is that they make no attempt at a socio-political and socio-economic analysis of educational development. Subsequently, Naik himself became keenly aware of this serious lacuna. Hence the author created questionable historical categories, calling the British period after 1921 a period of Indianization. In reality, although Indian ministers held the education portfolio, they could hardly claim to have pursued an independent educational policy under British rule.

Basic education in schools

We shall next consider basic education in schools, propagated initially by Gandhi and later modified by Gandhian educationists, its vicissitudes after independence up to its latest reincarnations in the form of work-experience and socially useful productive work (SUPW). While Naik had written on basic education, and as a good Gandhian sponsored the ideas as early as 1937, it also recurs in his writings after the Education Commission (1964–66). It must be noted, however, that basic education innovation failed. It was accepted neither by the urban nor the rural populations for their own (separate) reasons. Its attempt to introduce craftwork also failed, and for the same reasons. The same has been the fate of work-experience and SUPW, which are now largely neglected. Work-experience or SUPW can succeed only in a society that is either rapidly industrializing itself or where industrialization is largely achieved. Even in such a context, the contents must be reviewed periodically to adapt to changes taking place in production processes. The real reason for the failure of all these ideas in India is that the Indian reality was never the (rural) society, which Gandhi had advocated, nor the socialist society that launches industrialization in a determined manner as socialized production. Neither Naik nor the other advocates of basic education or its later variants appear to have realized this basic incongruity. Harking back to pre-capitalist or an incipient capitalist era, as did Gandhi and Gandhians, or borrowing uncritically from foreign models do not help in the reality of India today.

Mass education

Let me now take up Naik's intellectual contribution to mass education, that is, universalization of elementary education (at least primary education for the 6 to 11 age group), adult education, non-formal education, etc. Naik's earlier writings and activities go back to the 1930s and 1940s, and the later revival follows the recommendations of the Education Commission's Report (ECR) (1966a) and writings during the last ten to fifteen years. He then described the neglect of mass education by the British rulers, and the efforts of G.K. Gokhale to R.V. Parulekar (1957) are cogently described, with the apparently 'non-formal' solutions of Rajagopalachari and Vinoba Bhave, in addition to the normal formal schooling system, which insists on single-entry, sequential and full-time education. He then points out that for school education to be universal it will have to be supplemented by a multiple-entry, part-time, non-formal education which does not insist on sequentiality. His sponsorship of the 'neighbourhood' or common school is also essentially sound.

But Naik sees to his chagrin that all these 'reasonable' ideas are only accepted in theory, without a serious effort of implementation in practice, that the National Adult Education Programme inaugurated with such fanfare in 1978 only limps along. He blames it all on the Indian educational system, which is 'class' education and not 'mass' education, and calls out for a 'mass movement' for the universalization of elementary education, including adult education. Naik does not see that in all societies based on class, education is always 'class' education, so that labelling it as such does not take one much further. His call for a mass movement for this purpose, as though such a movement can just be ordered, betrays an inherent weakness in his thinking. In an extremely poor, deprived and unequal society like that of India, education has no high priority in the minds of the large majority of people. A 'mass movement' is bound to arise in due course to confront the present social predicament but it will be for far more basic needs like food, shelter and jobs and other bare necessities for life. Education will at best be an additional demand. Thus the efforts to spread non-formal education and efficient implementation of the formal system cannot be realized in the present socio-economic and political framework and power-structure, except in a limited fashion. Their ultimate realization will occur in the coming struggle for radical socio-economic transformation for society. It should, however, be stated Naik's credit that, after the revival of the IIE he started an experimental project in non-formal education in rural areas, a project whose progress will be eagerly followed by concerned educationists.

After joining the Central Ministry of Education in New Delhi in the early 1960s, Naik immediately felt the necessity of emphasizing educational planning at all levels, for both the extension and qualitative improvement of education at all stages. For the latter purpose, it was also necessary to improve educational management and administration at all levels. He pursued both these ideas, and the establishment of NIEPA gave a tangible base for their successful dissemination. But if we survey the educational scene over recent decades, we can only conclude that the education system, except in the élitist segments, has deteriorated further at all levels due to both unplanned expansion and widespread mismanagement.

On education and society

Finally, we shall consider Naik's grand schemes for the reconstruction of Indian education and his ideas about the relationship between education and society, between educational change and social change. The last fifteen years of his life were devoted to thought in these areas. He wrote several books, continually reformulating his thought. It should, however, be stated that although he changed his stance on the relationship between education and society considerably, he never gave up putting forward newer models for educational reconstruction, returning to the ECR for their origins. This work went on in continued succession until his very last publication, *Education commission and after* (1982a), and its abbreviated version, *An assessment of educational reform in India and lessons for the future* (1980), published by UNESCO in 1980 in its series of 'Reflections on the Future Development of Education'.

It is necessary first to state the important facets of Naik's educational ideas as reflected in the ECR. First, the ECR explicitly stated that the present educational system is a dual system, in other words it is just a continuation of the system operating under the former British imperial administration. It ought therefore to be replaced by a proper national educational system geared to the social transformation of Indian society. The proposed educational system has therefore to be related to: (a) enhanced productivity; (b) social and national integration; (c) consolidation of democracy and promoting the process of modernization; (d) cultivation of science and scientific temper; and the fostering of appropriate social, moral and spiritual values. With these objectives the ECR drew up a grand design of the proposed national system, making detailed and exhaustive recommendations on all aspects of education. Second, ECR thinking was firmly rooted in the belief that education was the one and only instrument of social 'change on a grand scale' in India, that is, for radical social transformation.

Before commenting on these ideas, it is perhaps in order to say a few words about the actual implementation of the ECR. As Naik himself stated clearly in his last publication, *Education Commission and after* (1982a), what the government did was to adopt a very mild policy resolution, the National Educational Policy Resolution of 1968. The resolution ignored almost all the important ideas and recommendations of the ECR, incorporating only some minor recommendations. Moreover, even the latter were never seriously implemented.

It is clear that Naik's thinking in the ECR on education and society largely follows the tradition/modernity paradigm for social change in developing countries, a paradigm so insistently propagated by Western social scientists in the post-Second World War years. To that extent it abandons the historical approach and ignores the primacy of the socio-economic and socio-political structural changes. It also displays the all-inclusive 'hold-all' character of most thinking in India, of stringing together every 'good' thing from every advanced country irrespective of its historical or present relevance. Self-identity must link the present 'modernity' with the 'spiritual and moral values' and the age-old 'wisdom' of the Indian heritage. Inevitably the whole package of ideas becomes extremely diffuse, as has happened to the ideas of 'secularism' and the 'combining science with spiritual values' in the ECR exposition.

But Naik's ECR stand did not last long. Already by the mid-1970s he was writing about the necessity of a *simultaneous* advance in both educational and social reordering, of 'political and economic' efforts to change the structure, of adopting Freire's conscientization approach in adult education, etc. A few years later a further change in his understanding of the relationship between education and society, between educational and social transformation can be detected. He now speaks of the necessity of having a 'vision of the new society' and putting 'political content' into Indian education. He concedes that the educational design, however grand and meticulously prepared, has no chance of being implemented in the absence of favourable political and socio-structural conditions. This idea can be traced to his general disillusionment with India's stagnating situation in the educational, and more fundamentally, in the socio-economic and socio-political sphere. By that time, international educational and development thinking had also, even if partially, witnessed the bankruptcy of the tradition/modernity paradigm and was finding itself at a loose end. The so-called 'golden-age of education' had totally vanished, leading to acute disillusionment. But whatever the reasons, Naik's ideas underwent a definite change; his ideological stance was becoming sharper and more precise. Even so, he did not give up preparing simultaneous transformation on to the educational and socio-political fronts. He stuck to what he called Gandhian thought, to the necessity of combining science with spiritual values, to his insistence on harking back to the wisdom of the past—without clarifying what he meant. At the same time he was now convinced that the initiative towards the creation of the new egalitarian social order would have to be undertaken by the poor and oppressed themselves. He now recognized the crucial role of political and social workers outside the educational system in the task of organizing the poor and the underprivileged for this purpose.

In his last work, *Education Commission and after*, undertaken during the very last phase of his life, Naik goes even further in his own critique of his theoretical basis in the ECR. Here he frankly admits that the framework adopted in the ECR about education and development had basic weaknesses, since it did not even refer to the extreme poverty and deprivation in Indian society, and the highly unequal distribution of earnings, wealth and political power—the fundamental problems of Indian society which need to be faced squarely. His close association with social science research in the ICSSR had changed his outlook and he would have preferred to be Secretary of the ICSSR before becoming Secretary of the Education Commission! He also confesses the incorrectness of according primacy to education in social transformation and that such a view may divert the attention of concerned people from attending to first things first, from having recourse to direct action. Thus, this paradigm may do disservice to the cause of social transformation itself.

Naik also realizes that his exposition of the idea of combining science with the spiritual legacy of India was also weak and tries to make amends for it, dealing with it at length, though in our opinion even the new exposition suffers from vagueness and remains unconvincing. Moreover, he does not now bring in Gandhian thought to any appreciable extent.

Thus, during the decade and a half from the drafting of the ECR to his final formulations in the ECA, Naik has almost completely given up his idealist position on the relationship between education and society. He no longer insists that education has primary importance in social transformation. But he still clings to his old formulation of combining science and the spiritual values or age-old wisdom of India. And like a wise pragmatist anxious to remain in the main current of the Indian educational world, he continues to subscribe to his simultaneous approach and to repeat and reform his grand designs for educational reconstruction in India.

Naik as reformer

I am aware that in a short profile one cannot do adequate justice to J.P. Naik's extensive contribution to educational thought and activities in India. Considering the wide range of his rich educational career, spanning almost two generations, it can be said without hesitation that his is easily the largest single contribution to the cause of Indian education. He researched, wrote, lectured and founded institutions in diverse fields of education. Equally important was his role in encouraging and motivating a number of other scholars in educational research, innovation and experimentation. Before Naik's entry on the all-India educational scene in the early 1960s, educational research in India was a paltry, miserable, imitative affair, confined mostly to construction and modification of achievement tests in schools. During the last three decades it has considerably ramified and diversified, has grown richer and more relevant, and is now one hopes, on the road to maturity. The major share of the credit in this respect undoubtedly goes to Naik's own tireless efforts and his knack of lobbying and persuading others to undertake similar endeavours.

Naik was in constant touch with developing educational thought all over the world and he exposed Indian educationists to these ideas. Conversely, by his participation in international educational activities he became the authentic spokesman in those forums in the educationally backward Third World countries in general and for India and Indian education in particular. It is his wide-ranging national activities that have been in a large measure responsible for putting India on the world educational map.

In India itself, ever since he went to the Central Ministry and particularly after the establishment of the Education Commission in 1964, his constant refrain was the fundamental reconstruction of Indian education. The massive ECR and his efforts thereafter to popularize its formulations, modifying them where necessary, were all directed towards this single objective. Except for some minor issues, he failed in this grand objective, but it was nonetheless a magnificent failure. The present analysis has pointed out the inherent weaknesses in his conceptual edifice but,

irrespective of them, the failure was embedded in the very socio-structural forces of the Indian situation. Had he adopted in the very beginning the approach to which he arrived towards the end of his life, his thinking would no doubt have become more precise, more consistent. That would have hardly been acceptable, however, to the Education Commission and the powers that be, or for that matter to the wide audience he usually attracted!

Naik's efforts have achieved one purpose. Like the post-independence slogans about 'socialism' and 'socialistic pattern', his writings have induced in many Indian educationists, politicians and educational planners and administrators the use of radical phraseology in education.

Whatever his achievements and failures, Naik's departure from the Indian educational scene has left a big void which cannot easily be filled. In a sense it was the end of an epoch. It is for the ongoing generations of Indian educationists to work for his idea of radical reconstruction of Indian education with a clearer perspective.

Notes

1. This article was first published in *Prospects*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1983, p. 259–64.
2. Dates for references are those given in the select bibliography below.

A select bibliography of works by J. P. Naik

By Jandhyala B. G. Tilak

The entries are arranged in chronological order; under each year first books and then articles are presented, each in alphabetical order.

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