

Horizons of Education through the Presidential Loom of Utilitarian Rhetoric

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Abstract

Indian Presidential prose writing has been a treasure chest of ideas and pathways. Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma, the ninth Indian President, a scholar by nature and calling, casts his mind on the heritage of horizons of education. Contrast of Indian and a colonial model is entwined with key features of the civilization, humility of sharing of knowledge, strands of secularism and weft of democracy. Against the backdrop of regional languages and the intrinsic sigma of Sanskrit language, the reorientation of Indian youth is imperative to counteract the onslaught of global consumerism. Core values of management and technical education jostle for space of ideation to preserve the lost identities in the postcolonial cone. In the paper the refined rhetoric of the President for practical usage for the national reconstruction of an idea of true education has been sought to be culled from his texts.

Key Words: Presidential prose writing - Scholar President– Horizons of Education — reorientation to the youth – discourse and the utilitarian rhetoric in course correction – national reconstruction

Preamble to the President and the prose writing

The ninth President of India, Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma (25.7.1992 to 25.7.1997), was a multi-faceted personality - an erudite Sanskrit scholar, authority on jurisprudence, constitutional expert, impassioned intellectual, distinguished educationist, dedicated freedom fighter, national leader of integrity, perceptive journalist and an excellent orator. In thought, word and action, Dr. Sharma was a symbol of all that was good and essential in the age-old Indian tradition. He was a deeply religious minded man and yet a secularist to the core. He took his Ph.D. from Cambridge University.

Indian prose writing started much earlier than the writing of poetry around 1800 and much before Macaulay's Minute of 1835. Cavelly Venkata Boariah's translation of the 'Account of the Jains' published in *Asiatic Researches or Transactions of the Society instituted in Bengal for inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Art, Sciences and Literature of Asia* (1809) is said to be the first published work of English by an Indian where as Raja Rammohun Roy's essay on '*A Defence of Hindu Theism*' (1817) is regarded as the first original publication of importance in the annals of Indian English Literature. Since then the field of Indian English prose writing flourished in several forms (essays, texts of speeches, biographies, autobiographies, letters, treatises, travelogues, discourses and cultural and historical studies). It was used as a tool in freedom struggle, social reform, politics, administration, law, culture, philosophy, religion, science and technology, industry, education, journalism and many other fields. National leaders, social reformers, philosophers, religious reformers, lawyers and journalists contributed to pre-Independence prose writing in English. The writing and the writer were entwined with the ongoing independence struggle giving expression to aspirations and ideas of the people. Raja Rammohun Roy (*The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*), Krishna Mohan Banerji (*Dialogues on Hindu Philosophy*), Bal Shastri Jambhekar (contributions to *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*), Vennelakanti Soobrow (Report on 'State of Education in 1820) and Cavelly Venkata Ramaswamy (*Biographical Sketches of the Dekkan Poets*) became the pioneers in the world of prose during the early period from 1800 to 1857. During the period there was more of historical-political and religious-cultural writing by great figures like Dadabhai Naoroji (*Poverty of India and Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*), Viswanath Narayan Mandlik (*Writings and Speeches*), R.G. Bhandarkar (*Report on the Search for Sanskrit Manuscripts and Early History of the Deccan*), Mahadev Govind Ranade (*Rise of the Maratha Power*), Badruddin Tyabji (extracts of his speeches in *Life*), Pherozechah Merwanjee Mehta (*Speeches and Writings*), J.N. Tata (*Shells from the Sands of Bombay: being my recollections and reminiscences*), Bal Gangadhar Tilak (*Writings and Speeches* and *The Arctic Home of the Vedas*), Gopal Krishna Gokhale (*Speeches and Writings*), Keshub Chander Sen (*Lectures in India, The New Dispensation or The Religious Harmony and Discourses and Writings*), Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (*Letters on Hinduism*), A C Mazumdar (*Indian National Evolution – A Brief Survey of the Origin and Progress of the Indian National Congress*) Romesh Chunder Dutt (*The Peasantry of Bengal and A History of Civilization in Ancient India, Three Years in Europe, Rambles in India and The Literature of Bengal*), Surendranath Banerjee (*The Trumpet Voice of India: Speeches of Babu Surendranath Banerjee, Delivered in England in 1909 and A Nation in Making: Being the reminiscences of fifty years of public*

life) and Bipin Chandra Pal (*Nationality and Empire, Indian Nationalism: Its Principles and Personalities, Memoirs of My Life and Times and Introduction to the Study of Hinduism*).

Indian Presidents were roughly contemporaries with reference to their years of birth falling between 1884 and 1931. Their direct and indirect participation in freedom struggle of India, the roles played by them, the education and the upbringing and the lessons and the experiences, their struggles and sincere rise and invaluable contributions to their chosen fields, their words and actions and the books they have written are all inspirational and epoch making. The course of the nation's progress, its problems, its successes and its achieved aspirations appear to entwine with the life and work of each President. The prose writings of Indian Presidents though neglected by critical scope of the critic and the analyst alike has much to offer by way of discourses devoid of colour and pomp but replete with course correction strategies to the policy maker as well as persons at the ground level.

Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma's scholarship is manifest in his speeches and writings. His speeches were published under titles such as *Congress Approach to International Affairs* (1970), *Studies in Indo-Soviet Cooperation* (1981), *Nehru's Impact on India as PM* (1989), *Rule of Law and Role of Police, Secularism in the Indian Ethos* (1989), *Eminent Indians* (1990), *Horizons of Indian Education* (1992), *The Democratic Process* (1993) *For a better Future* (1993), *Ideas, Thoughts and Images* (1994), *Aspects of Indian Thought* (1993), *Towards a New India* (1994), *New Directions of Development and Our Heritage of Humanism*. He edited journals like *Lucknow Law Journal*, *Light and Learning*, *Ilm-o-Noor*, *Jyoti*, and *Socialist India*. In one of the editorials of *Light and Learning*, he states: "It is the duty of writers to express the creative needs of the race. They are not only to hope for the establishment of a reasonable society but actively to assist the achievement of such a society. Literature cannot have a noble function than that of awakening man to a consciousness of the high and noble destiny of a social being." (Jai – 224)

Horizons of Indian Education

The book, *Horizons of Indian Education* (1992) contains the texts of sixteen addresses by Dr. Sharma. These discourses present "the insights and visions of a thinker of great distinction, closely connected in diverse capacities, for over five decades, with the sector of higher education in India as an element in safeguarding the gains of freedom and accomplishing the gigantic task of national reconstruction." (Sharma – IV)

Indian Tradition of Education

Dr. Sharma defines the healthy education system as a blend of old and new streams of thought. Indian tradition did not exhibit prejudice against thinking from across foreign lands

nor did it display an ostrich-like attitude to absorb light from different parts of the world. He applies the Vedic precept of *Vasudhavia Kutumbakam* (the whole world is a family) to acceptance of knowledge and quotes Kalidasa to show the direction, “Decide it not be good, just because it is ours and ancient; reject it not as bad, because it is foreign and modern.” (Sharma – 2)

In the traditional educational system of India, the ‘four-month retreat’ (*Chaturmasya Sankalpa*) is practiced by the students with the inception of long southward march of the Sun (*Dakshinayana Punya Kala*) coinciding with the onset of south-west monsoon. Sharma states that this is observed in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism and points out the identical features of the Catholic retreat (secluded religious studies). He sees the need for the reintroduction of ‘four-month retreat’ into the current curriculum. A unique feature of the Indian tradition of education is the respect and devotion shown towards the teacher (*Guru*). He explains, “*Guru* literally means, ‘one who deserves and commands *Gaurava* or Honor.’ Yet another interpretation is – ‘GU’ stands for ‘darkness’ and ‘RU’ stands for ‘removal of darkness’. ‘Guru’ is one who dispels the darkness of ignorance. A teacher is one who has qualities of cleanliness of the body and mind, speaking truth, knowing no evil, self-controlling his senses, kind, compassionate and noble.” (Sharma – 3)

Humility to the extent of anonymity is a feature of the ancient Indian educational system where classical texts, works of literature, fine arts and *Smritis* and *Srutis* (ancient texts of Vedic wisdom) have no known authors. Sharma notes that effacing the ego is the higher objective and mentions, “The humility of the Indian educator is such that they have never labeled anything as the ultimate or final answer to any question on any subject. ‘*Nethi*’ is always the last line or the last word on any subject which means, ‘This is not the last word’.” (Sharma – 6) *Adhyaatma Vichara* (otherworldly thought) is another feature of Indian education. Whatever be the occupation or subject, whether science or mechanics or war science or the art of music or dance, the performer and the performance are endlessly devoted to the Divine: “A totally materialistic world is like the paper flower. It may last longer but exists without natural fragrance and an inner potentiality to multiply its message.” (Sharma – 7) The modern education system facilitates the proliferation of paper degrees.

In the traditional education, individual is trained in certain skills keeping the individual as well as the society in mind. The ancient wisdom demanded that the individual’s contribution should be more than proportionate to the individual’s own receipts from the world and as such the student is trained in the simple habits of food and living. Emphasis is laid on the economical use of natural resources for food, clothing, water and shelter. Sharma refutes the modern interpretation of ancient Indian education as worship of poverty and notes that it advises the students not to be unlimited in their wants but to be limitless only in the

thirst for knowledge. The environmental awareness inbuilt in the Indian education system is not a feature that the present educationists or policy makers could ignore. The 1991 order of Supreme Court of India for the inclusion of Environmental Studies in the curriculum of schools, colleges and universities is a step in the revival of this principle.

Sharma avers that the Indian system is built on the cultivation of mind. It is true that a certain measure of degeneration did take place during the periods of continuous foreign attacks and the withdrawal of Indian teacher into isolation during medieval period that resulted in loss of precious sources of knowledge. The world recognized the Indian contribution to modern sciences such as Astronomy, Mathematics, Cosmology, Geography, Physiology, Medicine, Logic, Philology, Sculpture, Architecture, Music, Dance, Grammar, Prosody, Linguistics and War Science. Sharma is amused at the growing tendency to boast about past and the present lethargy of Indians.

Sharma observes that the present technical training and job-oriented education models are the bye-products of the Industrial Revolution. The 'colonial clerical culture' has enlarged the white-collar employment to the extent that white collar and blue-collar employees are now evenly balanced in their strength. The objective of the education is not only the satisfaction of the physical needs of hunger and shelter but also promotion of the total personality. Modern Indian educationists are affected by the powerful political, economic and linguistic impact of colonialism.

Discussing the decline of Indian tradition of education and the modern challenges to it, Sharma blames the present generation especially the teachers for this pathetic state. He says, "The intense individual involvement and commitment between the teacher and the taught is so much missing in the class rooms and schools of today...An Acharya is one who practices what he preaches – one who makes people move in the right direction. He becomes an example to be emulated both in precept and in practice both in "Achaara" and "Acharana"." (Sharma – 8) The present youth, born after independence has no sense of history and the older generation should bridge the gap or the next generation would be isolated from the Indian ethos.

Sharma sees the omission of extracurricular activities as the reasons for students turning to habits such as smoking, drinking and drug addiction on campus. He lists the ills which are "...dominated by models and value systems of the colonial regime; emphasis on narrow individualism, verbal fluency especially in English and unhealthy competition to the neglect of social good and mere acquisition of information, neglecting ...cooperation, manual work, skill development and character building." (Sharma – 12)

The present day youth seek foreign shores for their prosperity because they find a better atmosphere for better education there. Sharma says, "I am not merely referring to

brain-drain in search of better living; I am referring to hundreds of unknown Srinivasa Ramanujans living amongst us today, whose genius is neither found nor recognized by us. It takes some other foreign university to find them and recognize them. It has led to such a situation that scientists of Indian origin winning international awards are claimed as foreign nationals.” (Sharma – 13)

Spirit of Secularism and principles of democracy

In India in view of the diversity of topography, climate, ethnicity, language, religion, traditions, food and dress and deeply stratified income distribution bases, citizens shall be educated about the concepts of socialism, democracy and the rule of law. The society has to nurture an educational system that can instill morals, values, spirit of sacrifice and dignity of labor into its muscle.

Institute and Industry Interface

An interface of industry and education is necessary for holistic development of the nation. Strategic planning of work force requirements of industry and commerce is advocated and their integration with admission policies of academic institutions is desired and the funding of the laboratories by the industrial houses to augment meager resources of university is warranted and this interface has to be governed by empiricism and intellectualism.

On Sanskrit

Sanskrit, the ancient language of India, has been found to be suitable for computer applications. Sharma refutes the mistaken idea that the literature of Sanskrit is full of obscurantism and observes that it is a rich repository of knowledge in the fields of philosophy, metaphysics, religious thought, poetry, prosody, drama, cosmology, astronomy, geology, plant sciences, physiology, surgery, medicine, genetics, mathematics, psychology and political science and many other fields of knowledge. He says, “The culture of Sanskrit and Sanskrit literature is actually the culture of synthesis and assimilation. The message of Sanskrit literature is one of humanism, of the unity of humankind, of the value of peace and mutual understanding and of harmonious development of the individual in society.” (Sharma – 39-40)

The use of Sanskrit may touch rock bottom in India but there is consolation that it will not become extinct owing to the intensive and extensive research carried in Europe, United States, Russia and Japan. Over a period, there has been a marked increase of interest in Sanskrit studies with financial, human and mechanical resources pouring into it. Sharma says,

“...The drive to learn the language, and to explore, examine, understand and use the content of Sanskrit literature is spurred by a clear utilitarian outlook typical of these advanced nations and arises from a conviction of the immense practical value of the knowledge that is reposed in Sanskrit literature.” (Sharma – 41) Sharma says that it is high time that India motivates itself for the protection and preservation of the heritage of Sanskrit and Sanskrit literature for future. He says, “Only a particle remains in any case of the great corpus of Sanskrit literature. Much has been destroyed and lost already. Let the surviving particle at least be collected carefully and kept in safe custody. Let us not have to be forced one day to borrow it from outside.” (Sharma – 42)

On Regional Languages

Sharma emphasizes the role of translations in national integration. Speaking on the role of Hindi as a link language, he desires for translations to be done from one regional language to another and simultaneously into Hindi. Such translations would not only widen consciousness of the great literatures of India, would also promote study of respective languages. Contrary to general perception, Indian languages are fully equipped and receptive to the requirements of science and technology. He also emphasizes on the deep impact and the benefits of technical instruction in regional languages on rural economy. In his *Constructive Programme*, Gandhi says, “Our love of the English language in preference to our own mother tongue has caused a deep chasm between the educated and politically-minded classes and the masses. The languages of India have suffered impoverishment. We flounder when we make the vain attempt to express abstruse thought in the mother tongue. There are no equivalents for scientific terms. The result has been disastrous. The masses remain cut off from the modern mind.” (Gandhi -19)

Values and Management Education

Students of Management education should be conscious of their social obligation and the value system. The process of imbibing values, forming values and establishing them in one's life is of great importance in one's formative years. Values are compulsory for the world where technology is mastered to produce goods and where goods are marketed to make profit against stiff competition and challenges. To substantiate his point Sharma quotes Mahatma Gandhi: “True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard, just as all true ethics to be worth its name must at the same be also good economics.” (Sharma – 61) Valuable leadership can only spring from a system of values and management is nothing but the culturing of leadership. As the world is going through a major transformative process, Sharma cautions that the players of the process should be fully aware of core values and core

systems. He mentions about the Nehruvian idea of a tree that must have its roots deeply rooted in the soil and must throw out its branches into an abundance of fresh air.

Indian Youth and the reorientation

In pre Independence era, youth were fired by patriotism. Youth in independent India have all the opportunities to grow into ideal citizens but they lack a clear goal in their lives. Sharma says, “the goal has to be service of our mother land...It is up to this generation to consolidate, amplify and strengthen our freedom and develop independent India into a mighty nation...” (Sharma – 75) A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, former President, echoes the same sentiments and feels the urgent need to energize youth on dreams, goals, vision and mission. (Kalam -22) These two Presidents highlight the essence of the education and implore the public to focus on it than the mere paper certificates. In the modern age of information explosion, proliferation of material knowledge and feverish use of electronic devices, education should provide the right direction which can be found in the words of these great personalities.

The Value of a Utilitarian Rhetoric

Sharma delves deep into history, compares several classical texts with contemporary thought and drives his point home effectively. He tries to dispel certain notions of youth who are drawn to certain ways of the western world through his analysis of the concepts of education, culture and moral values. His addresses display the classical trait of rhetoric intending to turn the public attention towards the utility of ancient Indian literatures and knowledge.

Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma’s prose style is formal and dignified. His long expressive structures are strung on the oratorical foundations of grandiloquence. He deftly uses the quotations from several classical texts and great personalities and weaves a mental picture of the concepts before the audience or readers. His filtering of the essence of classical texts, Vedas and mythology is legendary because he can correlate one issue from one quarter and tie it up with the other from another quarter – thus morphing a lucid vision in the text. His thoughts are grand and the scholar in him broadcasts them carefully. For example, “Some efforts should also be devoted, in my view, to the strengthening, amongst students, of what I would call our national values: the outlook of universal humanism, peace, brotherhood, service, creativity and an integrated development of personality. Without such development, education holds little meaning for me.” (Sharma -90) A biographer says: “Dr. Sharma knew the art of separating the husk from the rice; he also knew the chemistry of turning the husk into edible, cholesterol free oil.”(Jai - 235).

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