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Education and Development: Era of Hope and Disillusionment

It seems almost superfluous to have to highlight formal education as a social and moral institution (historically that has been its main role) but for the fact that after the Second World War greater consciousness on the part of rich industrialized countries spawns fresh concepts and notions that education is an economic enterprise. The human capital concept popularized by the Chicago School of economics as reflected in the works of Schultz and the seminal work of Denison catapulted education into the forefront as an engine of economic development for the so-called Third World countries. Heavy physical capital investment, with the exception of Japan and Germany, which is thought to be a sufficient stimulus for economic development in classical economic theory fails to deliver the goods. The frantic search for an efficacious solution to Third World Poverty unearths the forgotten dimension of educated and trained manpower as the missing variable in the economic development equation. Education becomes the new faith for Third Worlds in their attempts to banish poverty and join the rich industrial clubs. Needless to say, the new faith which holds sway for more than a decade ends in disillusionment (reflected in the Belagio Conference of 1974) for trained manpower is a necessary but not sufficient condition for national development. The complementarity and substitutability of physical and human capital have been overlooked. But whilst the human capital formation theory holds sway, formal education becomes predominantly an economic enterprise and correspondingly its function as a social and moral enterprise is reduced in importance.

For the many Third World countries, after having sunk millions of dollars into education, the promise of pay-offs have yet to materialise. Economic development as part of national development is yet a dream. Political and social development which is assumed to follow educational development takes the form of political and social unrest. With more people educated to higher levels but with occupational and social expectations and aspirations unmet, instability sets in. Internal instability has a spill-over effect on neighbouring

countries leading to turbulence threatening not only neighbouring countries but involving global powers as well. Hence the movement in the 50s and 60s for education for international citizenship or understanding was premature and in a sense irrelevant due to the wide disparity in the developmental level of nations.

The concern verging on the obsessional is for economic growth with cursory attention paid to social and moral development. Such a concern for GNP growth is not entirely unfounded or misplaced for countries struggling for sheer physical survival; and there is need to build up a viable economic base on which other less tangible but nevertheless important goals to ensure that the economic and political base built up painstakingly is not dissipated. It is not that new nations do not realise the importance of the intangibles (the soft ware, so to speak) such as national identity, patriotism, a heightened sense of personal and social responsibility, the concept of justice and all that it implies and a whole host of primary social and moral values. Every new nation proclaims repeatedly that it is placing great priority on these intangibles, the very stuff and soul of a nation, but faced with the harsh reality of physical survival and the desire to share in the world's growing abundance, the gift of science and technology, the intangibles somehow receive less attention than the pressing need to increase GNP. But many new nations in spite of almost super-human effort and sizeable foreign aid never make it to the rich club of nations. Others never even achieve take-off. For many nations, the diversion of scarce educational resources for the purpose of economic growth leaves GNP unchanged or changed very little but the social cost of an unbalanced education is high.

National development is more than economic growth. For some of the more fortunate new nations, among which are Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan and South Korea, the economic take-off climbs steeply to achieve a level of prosperity beyond expectation. But such a rapid growth of GNP is not without its social cost and is not without

its attendant problems. For Singapore and the other newly industrialized countries, the period of economic want and material deprivation are over. The economic hump has been crossed but there is no assurance that the now robust economy and political stability, a *sine qua non* for economic growth, will be a continuing feature if the intangibles mentioned previously are not given their due recognition as the very stuff on which economic growth and political stability are anchored. Relatively speaking, once economic growth and political stability are assured, at least in the short run, attention must be directed towards ensuring past and present gains are sustained. Also with growing affluence increasing attention is directed towards the quality of life that currently exists and its evaluation vis-a-vis the quality of life that should be built up. Such concerns stem from a number of observable facts or phenomena that seem to characterise life in Singapore today and the probable path life-style is heading towards—a direction that may spell trouble for future generations if not deflected or arrested as the case may be.

The above is not to be taken to imply that no attention at all is taken of the intangibles: the social and moral development in the parameters of national development. Few governments are as conscious as that of Singapore in viewing national development in a holistic perspective. Speeches of political and civic leaders, pronouncements in Parliament, educational and social policies—all these reflect the great importance placed on the social and moral dimensions. But given the scarce resources (including the available time of political and civic leaders) and the pressing need to find employment for the large pool of unemployed in the 60s, the problem of social and moral development received less focussed attention. An examination of educational policies will however, reflect the awareness of its importance.

In 1959, Singapore won its right to self-government and in 1963 became a state within Malaysia. In 1965, it became an independent state. We know that a state may be created with the stroke of a pen (a political act) but nationhood comes more slowly and painfully. One has to work at it to attain nationhood because nationhood is a psychological phenomenon. Until the majority of the people are aware of their citizenship duties and responsibilities in an active sense and a strong national identity develops with a strong cultural base and a distinctive morality, nationhood is in doubt.

Whilst economic growth is made the cornerstone of national development on the calculated assumption of the beneficial reciprocal effect of

economic growth and political stability, an assumption that has been borne out in the Singapore case, the other dimensions of education though not entirely neglected, receive less attention. The measure of Singapore's economic success has been well documented even as far back as 1973 (Geiger and Geiger).

National Development: Education, Conflict, Resolution and Unity

For a young state, the problems which require resolution are many and complex in the modernization process to attain goals which the political leaders have charted. Under such circumstances, priorities have to be set. Whilst other institutions, economic, political and social, are in the process of being modernized and mobilised for the task of national development, the major social institution, the school system, which was in a truncated and stunted form on the attainment of self-government, has also to be built up to complement the national effort to build a new nation out of the heterogeneity of racial, linguistic and religious groups.

On the achievement of self-government in 1959, the government found itself confronted with four separate systems of education, each drawing its inspiration from a source outside of Singapore, a hardly tenable state of affairs for a newly independent state struggling to transform itself into a nation. The situation is akin to Furnivall's definition of a "plural society" which he defined as a "unit of disparate parts which owes its existence to external factors, and lacks a common social will". His elaboration of the concept of a plural society typifies the situation in 1959:

"...In each section the sectional common will is feeble, and in the society as a whole there is no common will. There may be apathy, even on such a vital point as defence against aggression. Few recognise that, in fact, all the members of all sections have material interests in common, but most see that on many points their material interests are opposed."

The then Minister of Education in 1959 summed up the problems facing Singapore thus:

"If the over-whelming majority of our school children were only in one type of school then much of the complexity and difficulty of formulating a unified education policy could be easily ironed out. If only the four education streams were convergent instead of being divergent then much of the anxiety, stresses and strains that confront us in the task of nation

building could be dispelled the Chinese, Malay and Tamil schools are wholly communal ... only in English schools children find ... a common acceptance of certain values of life" (Yong, 1959).

The task of nation-building and modernization then is to inculcate common loyalty and values which cut across communal loyalties and which, hopefully through a common school system, build up a national ethos and spirit that will transform a political State into a Nation. Among others, the institution of the school has played its part well so that the society that was seen as consisting of "essentially selfish and self-centred people" and as an "aggregate that amounted to no more than a rootless, migrant parvenu society" is today seen as a more cohesive society "no longer, as a people, indifferent to our collective problems" (Goh, 1972).

The Transformation of Singapore into a Modern State

Obviously the task of the school in building new values which undergird loyalty to the nation, a strong competitive spirit, universalism in the conduct of public affairs, acceptance of change as a condition of life, punctuality and all the other complexes of values necessary for the successful modernization of a society is supported by simultaneous changes in Singapore's economic, political and social institutions. The rapid rate of economic development and urbanization have played their part as well in transforming a fragmented and traditional society into a modern state. Whatever criteria that are used to rate modernity, Singapore must count as one of the modern states of the world today: whether the criteria used pertain to rate of economic growth, urbanization, literacy, energy consumption, increasing welfare of the populace, labour participation or psycho-social characteristics. That rapid modernization is possible, apart from the political stability that is derived from an able political leadership that has the capacity to grasp the emergent aspirations of the people and articulate and translate that aspiration into policies and action, is due in some measure to certain characteristics of the migrant stock that facilitate the transition from a traditional to a modern society. *These characteristics have been identified as receptiveness to change, achievement orientation, materialism, individualism, aspiration for social mobility, economic rationality and acquisitiveness* (Hassan, 1976).

Whether this characterization of the Singapore man is an accurate representation is a moot point. What is significant, however, is the observation that as a people the average Singaporean is highly resilient and adaptable holding no strong principles and adhering to no strong traditional values which can serve as strong obstacles to

change. Change is quickly accepted and incorporated into his way of life. Conservative values which informed and guided life in all its aspects up to and including the first decade after the Second World War melted away when confronted with new values that followed the intense effort at modernization after independence. Thousands of people were transplanted from slums and traditional kampongs (Malay villages) to flats and they have adapted without apparent psychic trauma. Traditional occupations were wiped out and new occupational roles emerged transforming the whole economic and social fabric of society within a decade; the people have taken these dramatic changes in their stride. They have adapted. These are the positive qualities which make for survival: rapid response to changes perceived as necessary for the achievement of the good things of life for a long time seen as available only in Western industrialized nations. Those very strengths may well be weaknesses when they also incorporate and absorb indiscriminately Western values that are dysfunctional in the context of Singapore.

The Unfinished Business: Eliminating the Negative Effects of Rapid Industrialization

For a nation to be a nation, economic strength is a necessary but insufficient condition for a resilient and strong nation. Bread and butter sustains physical life but is hardly what life is all about. Economic herewithal once achieved must be seen as providing the purchase for a social and moral fabric, the very soul of a nation, that a people works towards, holds on to in the face of adversity and is ready to make sacrifices to uphold. It has been said that a nation no matter how prosperous but consisting of selfish, self-centred, time-serving individuals who lack all the graces of civilised life is hardly a nation worth sacrificing for.

Political stability and economic affluence are not the end product of the modernization process. It is a continuing process: a process of renewal and change, of correcting excesses and errors of judgement of what is traditional and modern, of eliminating fads mistaken for modernity and ensuring what is considered to be the quality of the good life is not sacrificed for what is ephemeral. Rapid economic development and affluence, a constituent part of modernization, cannot be the be-all and end-all. Without a strong cultural base and a national philosophy such as is found in Japan, the social cost of modernization, if it is based on the unmitigated Western model, can be very high.

Singapore is a case in point. The rapid pace of industrialization, modernization and the un-

intended accompanying injection of westernization within the last decade and a half, has spawned the technological society as we see it today. In a technological society, values which once influenced human relationships are eroded and devalued. Even core values such as honesty, loyalty, integrity, trust, compassion and respectability suffer a devaluation in such a society as a result of re-interpretation of these values in response to the demands of that society. Technology creates its own values which may be subsumed under the term "materialism". Put in another way, large sectors of institutional life and humans now derive their meaning and values from industrialism. The worth of a person is judged by his material success and the number and kind of material status symbols he possesses. For the common people, high consumption is the norm, conspicuous consumption the obnoxious by-product of a status-hungry people. Human relationship is based more and more on the market exchange theory. Compassion and care for others are increasingly scarce commodities. The world of work becomes a separate entity and is contra-distinct from the world of leisure. This leads to the development of attitudes and values harmful to the world of work. An observed phenomenon of developed western societies is the attitude that work is a necessary evil to earn the means to really "live" in the world of leisure. Dissatisfaction with such a mode of life is reflected in incipient movements in the West to correct the excesses of economic affluence (Steenbergen and Feller, 1979).

The question is whether industrialization must be accompanied by the kind of westernization in the sense that the western values and way of life must inevitably follow. It becomes inevitable only if the new nation does not foresee its dynamics and how it can lead to a way of life that appears to propel people along paths that appear to be concomitants of technological progress. If the negative values that accompany industrialization are indeed inevitable by-products of industrialism, then all industrialized societies would exhibit the same cultural features. We know that this is not so. Even a cursory study of the industrial societies of Japan, the Soviet Union and the United States or Britain will show that there are significant differences in the cultural patterns dominant in each of these. The existence of different models side by side gives hope that Singapore could, if it has the will and the foresight, industrialize and modernize in a manner that avoids some of the grosser negative effects of economic development and affluence found in the West. The model Singapore evolves must be based on its own cultural strengths, the blending of the strengths from the separate cultural base as represented by the four main

racial groups: the Chinese, the Indians, the Malays and the Europeans, just as the Japanese have industrialized without eliminating the distinctively Japanese culture which by and large grows out of the blending of the beliefs of Shintoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. Western industrial culture is incorporated in but is never allowed to supplant the Japanese way of life. The uncritical acceptance of the Western model in the early days of development, pre-occupation with more pressing problems of the development decade, the very adaptability and receptiveness of the people develop into an emergent way of life that is now considered inimical or potentially inimical to the development of those characteristics that can sustain national growth in all its aspects. The Western model of development in its entirety is seen as undesirable and inappropriate for a society that has its cultural roots in the East. The direction of development has to be deflected. The current thinking is that Western science and technology with their undergirding values of objectivity, universalism and unceasing pursuit of knowledge and its application to production are desirable but certain Western values which are reflected in behavioural patterns of unmitigated and mindless individualism, of extreme sectional interest reflected in the adversary model of government and the governed, of employer and employee, of excessive hedonism, of rootlessness and cultural poverty in the midst of material abundance, of escapism as reflected in hippism and drug abuse are unacceptable. What Singapore wants is a blending of the best features of both Eastern and Western civilizations, distilling what is acceptable from the West and resuscitating and strengthening those Eastern values that could give meaning and purpose to life. It must do so assiduously, deliberately and forcibly if it is to succeed. Success in this endeavour is problematic but not impossible.

Education and the Unfinished Business of National Development

Once again, the education system will be called upon to perform a major function in its historical role as society's main agent in transmitting social and moral values designed to counteract values considered harmful to society in the long run. The problems schools will face in this task are many and complex. For one thing, models for the development of this new dimension are few and far between and, even if available, may not be entirely appropriate.

Part of the problem may be attributed to the world-view people carry in their heads that schools are passive agents transmitting mindlessly values that are effete and entirely incapable of playing a reconstructionist role. Such a world view has

been promoted by the writing of sociologists of education who see education as a prime agency of conservation. Both empirical and speculative social theorists have shown little interest in the processes and mechanisms of social change, at least up to the middle of this century. The two notable exceptions are Dewey and Counts who pioneered the instrumentality of education in the process of change in their social reconstructionist theory of education. They were followed by a host of other social scientists who constantly stressed the potentiality of society's education system as an instrument not only of social control but also of social development. Schools can be used and used successfully to provide a countervailing force to arrest trends considered undesirable and build up an ethos of social and moral living designed to transform the whole of society.

Another problem the school faces in its social and moral development programme may be attributed to the contemporary tendency to look upon every situation as fluid, the reluctance to formulate and articulate standards of social and moral behaviour, the popular cult of looking upon all values as relative, the suspicion that absolute standards bear too much the stamp of totalitarianism or emergent totalitarianism. These tendencies are responsible for the current malaise in the school's role as the social and moral socializer of the young. Schools are left without guidance and without clearly articulated and formulated standards to follow. Charting the path of national development in the social and moral spheres without clear-out guide is to allow the stronger social, economic and political forces full play. Instead of controlling the nation's social and moral destiny, the people become the creatures of forces which happen to be fashionable and current at any one point in time.

A further problem is the tendency to castigate Western values as degenerate. In the practical affairs of men, it is difficult to make fine distinctions between Eastern and Western values. The masses exposed to ways of life other than their own imitate what they consider to be status symbols. Their world view, their conception of what in the modern life, is derived from long years of social conditioning by the mass media. Analytically, however, it is possible and desirable for the thinking elites to distinguish values that are distinctively Eastern or Western, their historical roles, their genesis, their action or behavioural counterparts and their impact on the quality of life. It will not do to classify all values we dislike as Western and all that we consider good as Eastern. It is a historical fact that Western values have played a dramatic role in harnessing the forces of nature for the material well-being of

mankind by the application of science and technology to the process of production and distribution. Western values pertaining to the inherent worth of man and his right to a dignified life in this world rather than the next have also revolutionised thinking in structuring the relationship between man and man on the one hand and the state and its citizens on the other. Many humanitarian values have their origins in the West. Western values whether seen as abstractions or in behavioural terms are spawned by the complex of interacting relationships between deep philosophical beliefs and their institutional set-ups. In that sense their values in their societal context are "functional". Transplanted these values could be disruptive of life and dysfunctional in a society that is held together by different beliefs and institutional set-ups. What is necessary is an in-depth analysis of Eastern and Western values and their implications in behavioural terms, the kinds of social structure likely to develop and support desirable values, the kinds of sanctions (which include rewards) that could be used to achieve the desirable social and moral state we want and perhaps the inherent risk of too rigid a value system in an era of change.

The school itself is part of the problem in the task of social and moral development. Traditionally, the social and moral values that are transmitted are by and large informal and very often unintended (the hidden curriculum). Attempts at formal instruction such as in religious instruction, civics lessons, citizenship training and moral education are often poorly executed or carried out perfunctorily. Schools often feel uncomfortable when called upon to instruct formally social and moral values. In part this is due to the ambiguity of such values in a society that is undergoing rapid change when signals from significant others are often contradictory and confusing. In part it is due to a lack of tradition in such tasks. Teachers' sense of insecurity and low status may partly account for this discomfort. The contradiction in values preached or taught in school and the values that are current at the societal level on the one hand and the incongruity of taught values and the school's social structure on the other add to the discomfort. These are serious problematic areas that cannot be brushed aside as trivial and must be resolved if schools are to play a significant role in the social and moral development of the young.

That the school system is a significant social and moral institution is a social fact and must be recognised as such. That it is not playing as significant a role as it has in the past is a contemporary phenomenon. That it should be playing its historical role with energy and faith in the current social and moral malaise is recog-

nised. That it needs support, both moral and material, to perform its social and moral role has to be given serious consideration. School and society must move in harmony if it is to have any chance of success at all. A re-invigorated educational system, one differently conceived and re-constituted with a vastly different curricula

and with concerted effort by one and sundry may be necessary if schools are to play an active and vigorous role in the social and moral growth of the future generation. Schools, in conjunction with other social institutions, will have to attend to the social and moral development of the nation: the unfinished business of national development.

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