

## A UNIVERSITY FOR NEPAL

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In the previous article I intended to draw the attention of Nepalese educationists to the dangers of parochialism in university education. In the modern interdependent world parochialism is questionable even in politics. Did not we have enough of this cramping narrowness of outlook during the days of isolation under the Ranas? Unfortunately, parochialism has stood in the way of all real progress of the reorganization of Nepal's public administration. Of course I am aware that this basic distrust of new progressive ideas which is a legacy of the Rana regime is being increasingly given the sugar-coating of Nepali Nationalism. It is easy to confuse the people at such time as the present when what appeared to be a really progressive movement is unhappily frittering out and a kind of revivalism of the ideas prevalent in the Rana regime is steadily taking shape by telling them that Nepali culture is in danger and Nepali tradition is in danger. Thus parochialism is harmful in every field in the modern context. But in the educational world it is certainly suicidal. A university is a seat of knowledge and knowledge is universal. The knowledge gathered in other universities, whether in practical university administration or the general understanding of the world, through painful struggles of centuries, is as much our precious possession as the knowledge that we might gather in our future university will be the world's possession. Indian universities which have now become the glorious centres of the specialised knowledge of Indian affairs, represented, when they were first established nearly a hundred years ago, an implanting of a totally alien system with its almost

exclusive emphasis on western history, philosophy and culture and seemed to cut at the very root of the Indian culture and with its predominant emphasis on the administration of universities by Englishmen. This step taken in India so long ago was, I am firmly convinced, more revolutionary than anything we might do or need to do today in Nepal in connection with the establishment of a university. If the leaders of the Indian university movement had been as timid to accept new ideas as we are to-day, Indian university education would have taken a different course.

One of main advantages of starting a university late in Nepal is that we can draw on the experiences of so many other universities which have had an earlier start. We can learn from them things to emulate as well as things to avoid. Would it be wrong, for example, if from the rather sad experience of many of American universities we develop athletics, if we develop them at all in the university, in a manner designed to make them absolutely subservient to the general academic climate of the university rather than a kind of "big business"? Again, would it be wrong, I wonder, if an honest effort were made to find out whether some of the unhealthy party politics, some factionalism and in some cases even some casteism involved in the election of many of the Governing Boards of the Indian universities could be eliminated? Would it be wrong again if, learning from the experiences of the British system, we tried to make higher education accessible not only to the limited elite but to a much wider circle? These are some of the defects and in each system these defects can be multiplied. But what is more relevant to the point I am trying to make is not the weakness but the strength of each system. Behind the efficiency, prosperity and progress of a nation lies its educational system and this system includes university education. In a broad sense, the prosperity, progress and moral and intellectual health of nation are a measure of the success of its educational policy.

Indeed we can learn much from the theory and practice of university education in other countries. In the first place, it is the main distinction of universities anywhere in the world that the atmosphere in the university is on the whole more liberal than outside. Although I do not have any intimate knowledge of Russian universities except through books, it seems to me that this applies to Russian universities as well. Indications of an intellectual stir among Russian students do come from time to time even through the mutually imposed Iron curtain. Though the racial relations in some of the American universities are far from ideal, leadership towards the removal of racial prejudice has come from such universities as, for example, the University of Chicago and others. It is the universities which have maintained a kind of cultural contact between Russia and the U. S. A. even during this cold-war through a large scale interchange of many cultural, scientific and professional journals. This liberal character of universities needs to be emphasised in Nepal today because I feel that if what is happening in many of our colleges is any indication, we seem to be holding many intolerant and partisen ideas unworthy of any academic life. Secondly, there seems to be a general trend today for the universities and the state to come closer than ever to serve certain basic social purposes. This is not new in the communist countries because it is the professed philosophy of the communists that education should subserve the purposes of the state. This trend is noticeable even in those countries which are less favourably disposed towards socialistic ideas. In Japanese and French universities the relation between the state and university administration is much closer than in British universities. Even in India large-scale revisions of university acts are taking place with the same object of bringing the universities and the state closer together. Even in Oxford and Cambridge a new relationship is developing as a result of the substantial financial assistance from the national exchequer. In the U. S. A.

in land grants colleges and state universities it seems to me that the relation between the state and the university is very close and even in such private universities as Harvard and Yale there is always a shadow of the state brooding over it. I do not mean to suggest that this trend is necessarily a healthy one but I mean to stress that this is the general trend, perhaps inevitable at a time when there is an obvious general shift from the ideal of *laissez faire* to that of welfare state. We can preserve the necessary degree of academic freedom in our educational system only when we, coming out of our ivory tower, grasp the realities fully and wrestle boldly with them. Finally, there is a general tendency for higher education in many countries to take a more practical and professional character and the older conception of higher education based on Humanities is undergoing, if it has not already undergone, a radical modification.

We must bear these trends in mind when we think of a university in Nepal in practical terms. Moreover, we are limited in our resources and we must avoid unnecessary duplication. It is becoming clear every day that unless the new university is conceived in a really national sense to serve the nation as a whole, transcending the local and communal self-interest there may be attempts to establish more than one university at once. Perhaps it might be argued that no objection should be raised to the number of universities if they could maintain a reasonable standard of efficiency. But past experience shows that we tend to establish institutions without adequate financial and other resources, and do very little to ensure a reasonable standard of efficiency.

I sometime believe that it will be a real contribution to the idea of a national university if those of us in Katmandu who think about the university could persuade ourselves to suggest that the main campus of the university be placed somewhere outside the capital. There is a wide-spread growing feeling outside the capital that all

idea of progress is Katmandu centred and suggestion of the main campus of the university outside the capital may go a long way to convince the people in the districts that the new men in Katmandu have started thinking in terms of the nation as a whole. Ideally, this is indeed a very attractive suggestion, specially when we know that some of the best universities of the world are situated outside the national capitals. But when we come down from the ideal to the practical questions, difficulties arise. Any man who thinks seriously about the university will realize that it is unpractical and uneconomical, at the present state of Nepal's development, to have university outside Katmandu. In the same way, it is uneconomical to suggest at the present state of progress and economy, that the new university campus in Katmandu should be located far from the heart of the city when an equally suitable site could be found much nearer and in a much readier form. I wish to emphasise, in any case, that the new university in Katmandu should be so conceived and such special provisions in it made so that the people in the districts do not come to feel that it is a university only for the people of Katmandu.

Then a few words about the administration of the university. I am inclined to believe that the best form of university administration is the administration by the faculty. This is the kind of administration that obtains in Oxford and Cambridge. This kind of administration is in the best tradition of academic democracy and is likely to ensure the maximum amount of academic freedom. Members of the faculty will have, under this system, a dignity and status which it will be difficult to have under any other system. University administrators will be people intimately acquainted with the educational problems of the university in as much as they continue to participate fully in the academic life of the university. When, in the interest of industrial democracy, it is becoming increasingly fashionable to suggest that the management of a factory should be left to the

workers themselves and it is contended that this arrangement is sure to give better results in terms of the quality and quantity of productions, it should be quite reasonable to argue with much greater force and plausibility that, in the interest of academic democracy, the entire administration of the university should be left to the members of the faculty who are sure to have a higher degree of education than factory workers. To the intelligentsia of Nepal who will be associated with the university, this responsibility and power will be a refreshing challenge.

The next best thing to do, in my opinion, is to divide the academic and administrative functions of the university. All academic matters should be decided by the faculty without any interference from the administrators, while administration should be entrusted to experienced administrators. This system of university administration has found its fullest expression in America. Comprehensive American universities often present complex problems of administration which can be better handled by men of administrative experience. There are indications in India too that this kind of approach to the problem of university administration may engage the minds of people interested in university administration as shown by the appointment of such men as Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer and Sir R. Mudaliar as Vice-chancellors in recent years. On account of her limited resources, and in view of the need for a regulated, diversified training of her young men in order to avoid the pitfalls of most Asian countries, with the possible exception of Japan and very recently of China, Nepal must, I am firmly convinced, make a choice at the very beginning in favour of a comprehensive university. Apart from the fact that such a university will serve the needs of our country better, it will also contribute to a richness in the pattern of Asian university administration.