

For a long time I have been working on several topics under the title 'Historical Conditions in India', which I wanted to put into two or three volumes, preserving their unity, because they are inseparable. This is the first of the series I am now bringing out, and I could have combined it with other topics of the same title like 'The English Language', 'The Modern Education', but, each having swelled to the size of a book, I thought it better to leave it as a single volume. It is not, by any means, intended for the specialist in English Literature only, but also, anyone who wants to know what is, happening now regarding its teaching. It is indeed part of the whole work, the theme of which is that something tragic happened to our mind, of which we are not conscious, and that if we do not know it we have the least chance of survival as a distinct civilization. The English language played a very crucial role in our recent history. What is characteristic of us now is the acceptance of its indispensability without ever considering the consequences arising if we use it as we have been doing. What these consequences are I will show in my discussion of English in India. But presently I deal with the teaching of English Literature, so as to expose what is being done in the name of teaching. The exposure will bring to light the vast difference between how we come to think it to be such and such and, on the other hand, the real conditions and quality of teaching. The difference in itself would, however, not be interesting, if it does not make us see how poor we are in the institution of education with regard to teaching. Why should we be so impoverished? and why could not we know it? If we know it, you may ask, what is it to us? If we know it, we shall perceive that what has happened to us is tragic. The value of this perception can only be ignored at a great peril to our life, to our past, and to our mind. We must, then, address ourselves to "how to acquire the ability for this perception and in the sequel, how to have a strength of mind enabling us to be different?"

I wrote two articles on this head before, but they do not satisfy the present theme. Besides, they were too short for all that wealth of matter organized here. To avoid the impression that I have overwritten myself some explanation may be due, as what seems to be a matter of a few ideas takes so much space here.

The movement of our mental energy is, as it seems inevitable, along ideas, impressions, and opinions, related to the Western model, but hostile to the Indian past, or, which is the same, to the major achievements of the Indian civilization with the belief that these do not matter beside the efforts of learning science and transforming India into a Western model. It is the fittest formula I can think of for the contemporary history of India, though in its expansion we have to include much that is related to the variety of sentiments and ideas that seem to go counter to it. This is not the place for its expansion, however. But we must note carefully three points: one, the emotion that we are not so good as the Europeans seizes many Indians who hold themselves superior to other Indians; two, the image -- I call it the mint image--of the West being superior to India creates and fosters in every Indian an animosity to the Indian past; three, this comparison of India with the mint image of the West impoverishes the Indian mind because it is provided with controlling ideas, impressions and emotions, while it is denied the benefit of the Indian or the

European achievements on human nature, and therefore, it has lost the capacity for thought and feeling that can preserve the Indian civilization. Let me know if there is a piece of writing from any Indian whose wind does not fall under my formula!

Our faculty of perception is so impaired that what we ought to know as true we do not know as true and where we ought to set value we do not set it; on the other hand, we have contracted the habits of misidentifying, misconceiving and misjudging under the Western impact during the recent history. What happened to us seemed to be inevitable, considering that it happened when an 'advanced' nation ruled over a 'backward' country. Hence, it is a historical condition. We can recover from it, but we may not. The trend of continuing in our blindfold to the perception of what is true seems, however, too overwhelming for recovery. But I make my point for what it is worth.

The consequence of the British rule and the Indian struggle for Independence lies in two sinister things: one, we believe in nothing else except bourgeois success; two, our character, to begin with, acquired some force of an impressive sentiment or an ideal, during the second half of the 19th century; but as we are now, it is essentially ill-made. In the interests of bourgeois success, we are cunning, self-blind, ruthless; If we had a better mind, things would have been different.

We hold that science is the most important subject in education, that making money and getting a position are the only aims worth having as far as our practical affairs are concerned. We justify ourselves by slogans or programs for what is called progress on the Western model. This historical movement in which we are involved had blinded us so that we have become the most unhistorical nation with scant respect for the past; for language, and therefore, for the mind itself. We never contemplate what our mind should form and nourish on. Rather we treat it as an instrument for the philistine ambitions and physiological functions only. To be grown up with the present education in India is to be a philistine with no other important side of life than to have a degree in a science subject with the ambition of emigrating to America. There seems to be nothing wrong if we are all trying to get a degree in science, and hoping to emigrate to America. There seems to be nothing wrong if no force of the past, of the achievements in our languages, of the religious culture, of our music, and Sanskrit has any effect on us, so long as we get a degree with a shabby knowledge of English, and can secure a job! I wonder if we are still men of our civilization or some monsters of a new modernism!

Doesn't what happened to us appear tragic? Let us think over one question, are there any parents in India now who want their son to do M. A. Degree in their own language? Why is it that we did not ask this question and see its implication? Such a question even looks strange to us because it is a shock to our philistine habits. Consider the question deeply. Isn't it then tragic that there are no parents desiring their son to study for M.A. Degree in their own language?

Let us look at an event which to nearly all Indians is a milestone in our progress in education, but which to me is an example of sheer madness. It is a madness for which

want of perception is as much responsible as our attraction for a program to get quantitative results in the interest of progress. I am referring to over three thousand men and women who are studying for M.A. Degree English through the Correspondence Course of Madurai-Kamaraj University. As I said earlier, such an event of so many being given a chance to procure M. A. Degree appears undoubtedly a great achievement, and one thinks the authorities deserve every praise from us. If it is a true achievement of benefit to us, I cannot but be mad myself in refusing to join the public sentiment of its appraisal. At the first blush, the public appraisal is right, and an objection to it might appear cynical. Let us go to the bottom of it and see if one who imagines this event as a great measure of progress is not open to question.

What I am striving to prove in the body of this book is that the conditions of our class - room, the conditions in which the teacher meets the student for the purpose of teaching the latter English Literature, defeat that purpose, but then we do not know this to be the case. If the case of teaching and learning English is as I see it, then, nothing will prompt me to give my assent to the public appraisal of the event under discussion. Let us put to ourselves the right questions.

1. Is it necessary to have so many M.A. Degree holders?

Not really. But then some will have the pleasure of having a higher degree, and not without hope of promotion in time to come. The retort to me is "How is it wrong to throw this degree: open to whoever wants it? And besides what an amount of money the university receives by way of fee-income!"

2. Is it possible for the teacher to teach the subject well and for the candidate to learn it well?

No, for this reason; if the classroom conditions are so bad, the conditions of teaching and learning by postal mail can only be worse. The retort is: "How do you know? We have seminars, and moreover the candidates are so mature that it is a pleasure to teach them". I am not afraid of such retorts, but I will reply, maybe provoking another one. "Yes, they are mature, and it is a pleasure to teach them, but is it right for you to think you can teach "well"? Again, the retort is: "You mind your own business, You think you alone can 'teach! What, am I not teaching when I take a class? You want to become popular by casting aspersions on us".

3. How is the subject taught? and by whom?

A dozen or so teachers of English with a Professor together prepare shoddy notes by stealing from potboilers, and mail it to the candidates and meet them once or twice or more, no matter how many times, for lecturing or seminarizing or both. But the majority of the students, on the other hand, prefer the hogwash of the Indian editions. This time there is no retort. There is the silence of being guilty. But behind my back many accusations are hurled at me.

4. Then, why do the authorities introduce such a measure? and how come the public applaud it so enthusiastically?

Because, both are blind. The authorities in the present conditions scarcely have the intelligence to think otherwise than adopt measures on the American model for spectacular results. The authorities could have thought like this, but couldn't; "Is it right to provide a chance for any citizen to get a degree when there is none to teach him and when he cannot make anything of the subject? How fantastic it is to have over three thousand students for M. A. Degree Literature, because literature could only be taught in certain conditions which Correspondence Course can never fulfill !" No, in this manner the authorities cannot be expected to use their wits. But how about the public? The public in India wants education and jobs. But to it education means degree, and job, salary: therefore, the more opportunities for them it finds itself with, the better for it.

It seems, then, difficult to persuade ourselves that the program of Correspondence Course for M.A. Degree is not the outcome of intelligent thinking but of the desire of the superficial mind clamoring for changes. Can we know what is true without being able to set up standards? Emotionally we, on the other hand, let the program go even if we know that everything is not right with it, just because it is better than to have no program at all. The first point with us is that we have no sense of the subject nor of the conditions essential for teaching and, therefore, we cannot have a firm policy. To carry conviction on a serious issue like this is impossible, and so, many plausible arguments pro and can appear from time to time, which are meaningless by the test of standards.

What the program, its origin, and its justification in dubious arguments points to is what concerns us here. It is a question of our perception, our action, and our belief, and judged by the standard of intelligence, we come out as failures. To go further, let us ask: what is the model behind the program? Immediately, the idea of the open-university in England which the Vice-Chancellor had an opportunity to watch. But at bottom, it is the idea of providing higher education by throwing it open to everyone on the model of the democratic spirit drawn from America. The idea comes from the West, and it is implemented with enthusiasm, if not with self-importance. It settles the form. But within this form, what happens does not issue out of thought, and it is left to the conditions as they are. Everything technical is provided for, with the staff to look after the execution. The next thing that one bothers about is the results, that is to say, if there are a vast number of students, and most of them take degrees, the scheme is regarded as successful, worthy of imitation, and the V. C. hailed as a commendable reformer in education. The Success is cried up in one or two wireless talks, and written up in one or two newspaper articles. It becomes the cause of fixing our belief emotionally that we are galloping towards the progress that the West has made.

What we must be able to see is the shabby reaching and poor learning within the form. The form with poor content becomes a pseudo-form. The consequence is that all functions are performed for form's sake with little benefit to our mind. It makes no difference to the form if one lecturer has the reputation of being very successful or if a few students are "brilliant". Our conclusion is that the form adopted from the West for

progress in India inevitably becomes a pseudo-form in which we lose out, and our mind is perverted.

It is not so very easy for us to realize that we are acting shamefully in a pseudo-form, while we hold fast to it as the right form in which we believe we are on the march towards the Western progress. My struggle is towards this realization. I cannot present my matter in easy ideals and conclusions for the sake of impressive appeal. Our habit of yielding to the appeal from sentiment or emotion and idea is as powerful as our belief in modern education, science, money-making and position-seeking. Usually, what is impressive to us is very characteristic of our mind. To-day without any exception, we are all impressed by the rhetoric of the wind - bag, by award - winners, position - holders, and by first - class degrees and reputations. Crude images are too easily formed in us, and they together with superficial ideas rule over our mind. The power of checking them meets with frustration from the impact on us of modern education, science, careerism and reformistic zeal. We are too ill-trained, too ill-formed to know anything well and in addition, we have too little patience for the real process of coming to know it. Nothing at present can deflect us from our involvement in the historical movement of attaining to bourgeois success with our cunning, self-blind, ruthless mind. The truth about this historical movement, will never dawn upon one who is involved in it. Till there is a force that can wrench us out of it, we will remain cunning, self-blind and ruthless. Our mind is so formed with its beliefs, with the forces at work on it, is in every respect conceptually poor. It cannot, on account of this, rise to the thought of anything, but remains with an impression or an idea of it, involving itself in action accordingly – that is, self-approvingly and blindly.

It is true that, unless we make efforts to know the details of the major issue -- of the true relation between India and the West we cannot imagine how so much that seems to fall outside the teaching of English Literature is really connected with it. It is an issue of such magnitude deserving a book for itself. Even if I make some generalizations here on its nature as I see it, I would only be falsifying it. All that may be said here is that to recognize the quality of our mind in teaching must take us nearer to the major issue of the true relation of India to the West because it is the question for India's survival as a distinct civilization.

If an English teacher condemns another English teacher, it is commonly assumed that the first has an ill-will for the second, he is jealous of the other, he thinks he alone can teach, and that he wants popularity, and therefore, he takes to mudslinging, while not knowing that he himself is the victim of the charges he lays against the other. I don't think that the force of the Impulses that the first teacher is supposed to allow to influence him will ever enable him to write a book. I want to show how in every detail we are poor teachers, only to see ourselves being so unfortunately conditioned. It is not a question of *I versus you*, but it is a question of knowing what the case is. If anyone is offended I have no displeasure. But let him make a point, I am answerable to it, yes.

I do not wish to offend anyone, nor am I self-important. The central question for me is the survival of our civilization. It is my conviction that what happened to us during the

last two hundred years is destructive of it. True, we wanted changes, and we have been subject to them. But are they not destructive of our civilization? We don't care for our heritage. We don't care for our mother tongue. Naturally, we are least aware of what has been happening to our mind, because we want changes, bourgeois changes, making over India into a Western model. We want to keep English for ever, We want industrialization, we want Westernization, no, Americanization! Well, we don't want to be Indian under any circumstances. I see this slogan writ large on every Indian face. "Let us industrialize and Americanize our country as fast as we can. Or still better, let us go over to America to enjoy its fruits, leaving this hell of India behind".

An Indian father says to himself "Let me send my children to a convent school or a public school so that they may speak English fluently. I want only to make doctors or engineers of them. Then let them go to America to make money. But I wish them to come back:'

But a doctor son of his dreams, "Let me take the first opportunity to emigrate to America. What chances have I here as a doctor? There is no scope for me in India. Everything is bad here. I hate this place: Nothing induces me to stay in this black hole. Off to the promised land. Good-bye!"

I am not mistaken in so representing the father and his son. Both of them represent the modern spirit of India - the spirit of being cut off from the Indian past, but westernized, exclusive of that which is Worthwhile in the West. Let me note here, with lament, that this species of mind comes of bastardization. If everybody doesn't belong to this species, there is no doubt that everyone wants to send their children to those institutions of education which transforms and stamps them with it. I don't think that anything serious can be taught to those of this modern species. The teaching of English Literature has suffered from want of real interest on our part from the beginning. The English language has been more important than its literature. It is learnt only to be a successful philistine; careerism for the teacher becomes more important than acquiring competence to teach English Literature. There has been a lot of imbecile enthusiasm for English Literature but we have neither efficient teachers nor sincere students. Well, it couldn't have been otherwise with the philistine mind learning it for the sake of employment from the philistine of the ruling class, who came over to India for a good position. At that time English replaced the mother tongue of any student, but being ill-taught and ill learnt, one was fit for an employment in the colonial India, that was all. On the other hand, one turned out to be an idiot or a fool, not having maturity and mastery either in English or in one's mother tongue. This fate for us has been inescapable. The Indian mind is too rotten for teaching and learning English Literature, and it is irredeemable now. The historical conditions make it so. We take up English Literature as a second preference for the sake of a degree, and without the habit of reading a serious book. A serious study of literature demands sacrifices, which we are not willing to make, because it is unrewarding. The academic study of it in the Indian conditions does not improve one's mind, to say the least. As a teacher of it one is formal or inane or pretentious; as a student of it one is muddleheaded and egotistic and false.

As we are now in the grip of a bourgeois scramble following the British rule, science and accounting alone are important to our mind, with the fatal consequence that we cannot understand a well-written sentence, much less write one, since we don't care for language, and ignore the value of its achievements for mental development. It is incredible but true that our mind behaves as if it cannot have nourishment from any other source than this historical bourgeois movement.

Language and its achievements (literature) are nothing to the mind worked up by the modern trend of moneymaking and position-seeking. Such a condition makes our mind so poor in understanding, inferring, and stating, that we are beings now without the force of real thought and feeling directing us. Usually our present state is that we are in an emotional mess. Emotions and sentiments of a cheap sort are our prop. Noisy verbal expression of musty ideals and appealing exhortations is the limit of our mental power. If we imagine that we are right, and that those whom we admire are 'really' great, we are well contented. If you look carefully at our writing, you will not fail to see that we scarcely realize that we have a mind whose function is to think. It has not been possible for us, since the inception of modern education to master a text and comment intelligently on it. This condition leads us to dependence upon Western resource, of intelligent application of mind. It means subordination, as long as we do not acquire any ability to keep ourselves independent. Suppose we attempt now to do some writing independently without this ability, we produce hogwash only. It has this effect, namely, that we see clearly the superiority of the Western mind, but there is no stimulus to improve our mind just because mental improvement does not strike us as worthwhile beside planning and acting for bourgeois success. Let us be quite clear that there cannot be mental improvement without concentration on language and its classics.

You would have noticed plebeianism in our writing and speech. It is due to our habit of generalities and head masterly interest in expression. The mannerisms of the Indian mind are easily spotted; I mean its preference for getting by rote purple passages and reeling them off and its habit of using set expressions or ink-horn words. The urgent task of our mind is to clear itself of false emotions and sentiments, and superficial ideas which make our expression barbarous, because they condition our mind now. We will have to learn that, by an academic interest alone, we can never master a subject, and never emerge with the independence of mind accustomed to perceiving and thinking deeply.

It is certainly time that we learnt the language of thought but I see we are so ill- prepared for it. We can only learn it when we master the thought of a great mind. But our misfortune is that there has been no institutional tradition of doing it in modern education. We have now only a third-rate mind going on disgracefully in our universities. Indeed, universities in India are national calamities for they adopt a pseudo-form, turning out young men and women as their products with a mind corrupt and incapable of what the universities must train them to be - good at understanding, inferring and stating well. No one has asked, but it is not surprising, in view of our civilization, what must our mind know and do, allowing for any change we have to effect according to the historical conditions? It is, on the other hand, all the more tragic that both inside and outside education what is happening has a force of its own which can easily crush the resistance

of intelligence, but, of course, it has not met with any such resistance at all either. There is not one who, through thought, protested against the blindness of our way of doing things so ruinous to the Indian civilization. One couldn't have done it, because one couldn't have been educated on the principle of correlation between ability for expression and ability for thought. The most appalling thing is that no principle can be assumed in our education but that it de-Indianises us with a degree and a sordid mind.

All of us now conduct ourselves with a corrupt mind which is due to our blind involvement in the bourgeois scramble for money-making and positions. Not only our education does not cultivate any impulse against this blind involvement, but on the other hand, it intensifies our desire for bourgeois success, and it makes us mad, in a word. To-day all of us can understand accounts only, but never sentences. On account of this education we are blind to thought, we are blind to the specific characteristic of thought and its relevance to living. Our habits of reading and understanding are so poor that the language of thought is ever embarrassing to us. Usually when we encounter thought, we mistake it for an idea - an idea which is lodged in our mind. It is common that we read a book without acquiring the ability to interpret it by the force of a mind that masters it. Our commentary on any book we read is, in general, wanting in argument, and betrays a very miserable organization. You never sense that a thinking mind is behind it. To hold the particular conceptually is impossible for a mind ill-formed by modern education. The influence of reformistic ideas, of popular scientific ideas, and of the ideas that please us, pointing out the backwardness of India in contrast with the progress of the West, on all of us went so far as to make us change the very form of our life. It is an influence which is the ideological expression of the bourgeois historical movement, but because of it we have lost the sense of thought. We therefore, accept and clamor for anything attractive. Anything Western appears attractive to us, and to illustrate from our choices, our present craze for smuggled articles bear it out; or we try approximations to the Western form, in which we fail owing to one of the three, enthusiasm, corrupt practice or self - blindness. We cannot have the inwardness and strength of mind equal to the Western form, and we are foredoomed.

I could imagine the reader saying to himself, "He could have made this work less offensive, and more suited to my taste, by choosing such language as gives no offence." The reply is: I could have done it if I could think otherwise and I had the aim of pleasing the reader by palaver. Every thought comes to me with agitation, and I regard it as 'evil' to throw its force away in polite expression. No one can keep the same thought in a different language, because thought is not idea, at least, not superficial idea. Historically, until journalism corrupted the human mind, thought had been idea, being its form in expression. But since the corrupt human mind accustomed itself to hit upon ideas, which are not of thought, and to describe them, keeping an eye on the effect of description, in a language entirely different from the language peculiar to thought, nothing is more unfortunate than failing to cultivate one's mind to the distinction between thought and idea. But the distinction will not convey any force to one who is used to journalism of third-rate books and of the newspaper articles. Our habits of expression are now journalistic, so that the sentence with thought is not the medium for our mind. When I say that the mind thinks, knowing its function which I said is to think, I imply that the result



of thinking is a value which is impossible by any other means than the process of thought. If one's mind cannot think, one doesn't know what one is doing. Our mind is very much like this, deriving what strength it has from the bourgeois scramble. If one is used to the language of society-parties, or of the Indian windbag and the academic hogwash, or of the 'heroes' in cement statues all over India, one is, by one's own habits, estranged from thought. The purpose of thought is to show this or that to be the case, in argument, with the content of its determinations, which exhibit the nature of thought. Usually we are either too vain about our abilities to be successful in thinking or too lazy for it, or both. Had we thought in order to prove what kind of perception is the right perception about the condition of our mind as well as what should be the standard to judge our intelligence and our skill, undoubtedly, we would have achieved some measure of success in thinking. When we make an effort to think we come out with ideas and ideals, and we spout. That wouldn't be thinking. At best one can call it Indian thinking. Nor would it be in the nature of thinking to accept things as they are, while producing plans and programs for improvement. It wouldn't be like thinking either to argue against or for by the generalizing habits that one contracts from one's education and from the associations in which one is placed by virtue of one's interest. It is really painful to see into what degenerate state of mind we have fallen, if we think of our ability for thought. As if inevitable, our mind takes to that to which thought is out and out opposed: superficial idea, false emotion, attractive sentiment, opinion, avant garde affectations, the genial commonplaces of the philistine. Thinking will have an aim, for it cannot be done without it: it moves on in its determinations by the stimulus of a passionate urge which is impossible for the journalistic mind. Its nature is as I implied earlier, to be particular and conceptual. Its success or failure depends upon what it produces and in fact it is by what comes of it that we know it is thought or not. By this test no teacher in India has so far produced anything that is characteristic of a thinking mind. As far as the university teacher is concerned, I say that, judged by the standard of ability to understand a passage and render its substance in his own words well, he is the most conspicuous failure in India today. Since no one is interested in asking the right questions and in investigating into his ability and skill as a teacher, he is secure in the present pseudo-form of university education. I have undertaken to exhibit the teacher's failure with a view to showing what it points to. The point is this, that it is the failure of all teachers I wish here to demonstrate. Isn't it a historical condition, whether we like it or not?