

# **THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT\***

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## **INTRODUCTION**

I present these thoughts as a private citizen of Fiji, as one who has some concern for this issue; so in sharing these thoughts with you I admit that I am not an educationist, and really do not have any professional justification for speaking on this subject. All I can claim for myself, however, is an interest in the subject of education in the broadest sense of the word.

My father used to tell me that "education does not only mean that we go to school; a man is continually educated until the day he dies". I think we all have some appreciation of the deep meaning of that statement, for education means a change in man's conduct of life. It means the upgrading of a man's ability to choose the best alternative available in any circumstance he faces. It means the development of the person to prepare him to adopt the best approach to a problem at any given time. Education may be broadly defined as 'adjustment ability to a changing situation and environment'. We all know that experience is the greatest educationist of all.

## **APPROACH TO THE SUBJECT**

In approaching this subject, may we first examine some basic elements of society and try to determine the place of education as one of the fundamental elements of any community. Then we will examine the way education relates and interacts with other elements within that society. Then we might look, with that picture in mind, at Fiji's multi-racial context and bring out some of the basic differences which contribute to some of the problems facing education and adjustment in Fiji today. Then we shall quickly and broadly analyse one or two basic problems and needs in order to formulate some objectives and the possible role of education in national development. The analysis is by no means comprehensive but readers can add to it. I choose to speak more on the operational, 'people level' and I hope that in doing so it will synchronise with the 'national level'.

\* Adapted from a paper delivered at a Fijian Teachers Association seminar on 6 December 1979.

## **THE FIVE PILLARS OF SOCIETY**

I think that anthropologists agree that there are five basic institutions upon which all human societies are built — the family, and religious, economic, administrative and educational institutions. Each is important in its own right as well as in its relationship with the others and each plays an important role in the total life of society.

### **The Family Base**

In the Bible it says that all was good about creation except the loneliness of Adam; so God created a helpmeet for him, that is, a woman to stand alongside him, to share his life with him and to share their lives together. Thus the family is the first active, positive creation of God in society and it is the basic unit of any society and of any nation. People are born, bred and die within the family. That is where they receive their first education. So the parents are the first teachers of the children.

### **The Religious Base**

When the patriarchs disobeyed God's law he banished them; but man could not do without fellowship with the supreme being. He desired to return to God so religion was born out of man's consciousness and need for fellowship with God in whatever form worship may take.

### **The Economic Base**

"Under the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return into the ground." Man has to work for his livelihood.

### **The Administrative Base**

The institutions of administration arose out of the need to maintain law and order at all the various levels of society.

### **The Educational Base**

This is the seat of knowledge that enables man to adjust constantly to the changing environment. He has certainly progressed a long way within this world. Education is more than an economic investment: it is an essential input upon which life, development and the survival of man depend.

Each of the five institutions mentioned functions in balance and interacts with others with positive and negative effects, depending on the weighting and emphasis that they are given in the social process. So the upbringing of children within the family must have a profound effect on the economic, administrative and educational life of the society; and so on. One could go on

and examine the relationship and the interaction of the five institutions. Suffice it to say that the healthy development of society as a whole depends upon a balance among them.

## **ETHNIC DIFFERENCES**

Before foreign influences came to Fiji, the Fijians lived in and through their own culture in their own little societies and institutions. Early discoverers like Tasman, Cook, etc., put Fiji 'on the map', thus creating world-wide interest in these islands. Rapid change occurred when Charles Savage and other missionaries came to Fiji. This contact profoundly affected the nature of the various, established institutions giving rise to faster changes in each one of them. For instance, the administrative change in Fiji in October 1874 affected the economic, educational and religious development of the Fijian way of life. New life-styles in the family, for example, were introduced by non-Fijians, and these diffused, interacted and mingled with Fijian ones. The effect of non-Fijian social and economical policies created serious consequences and continues to this day. There was cross-cultural interaction with all its give and take. The Colonial Administration played a key role in the speed and direction of the process of change from that time on.

The three main ethnic groups in Fiji differ culturally but each is based on the same human institutions. However, the Fijian culture operates almost in the opposite direction to non-Fijian cultures. For instance, the Fijian family system has a highly extended kinship pattern; the non-Fijian family is more nuclear or individual in nature. Fijians worshipped ancestral gods and then later became Christians; non-Fijians were either already Christians or of non-Christian religions. Economically the Fijian traditional system of share and care is quite different from the more individualistic, acquisitive, personal benefit approach of non-Fijians. Fijians are more strongly communal than is the more individualistic, commercial and legal society of non-Fijian people. Fijian leadership is based on traditional hierarchical order, other leadership patterns on more functional means and merit. The Fijian system of 'kerekere' is quite different from the system of 'loan with interest'.

Those are just some of the basic problems that education in Fiji has to deal with — within the context of a National Development Programme.

## **POLITICAL AND EDUCATIONAL AIMS**

Fiji became politically independent in 1970. It has been said that the political

objectives of Fiji can be summarized as follows:

economic progress;  
even distribution of income;  
racial harmony; and  
maintenance of law and order.

When one looks at Fiji's Educational Plan one may personally be impressed and endorse its worthy objectives; but it may appear very abstract since it is designed and based on long-term objectives. If, however, it is accepted that the four main political objectives in Fiji are broadly those which I have just related, then it would be proper to look for those educational policies and programmes which clearly bring out the role of education in national development. So education policies must be related to the political objectives and development in Fiji, or any other country.

We all know that it is the responsibility of everyone in a country to educate; whether we are parents, adults, children, or teachers, in the public or private sector, education is the responsibility of everyone. So we should all be concerned in assessing problems and identifying needs for the evolution of national educational policies.

## **SITUATION ANALYSIS OF PROBLEMS AND NEEDS**

First of all, there is the need to define clearly what *education* is. Is it purely academic attainment or does it stand for changes in the conduct of and approach to life? What is the need for education? Education for what? What are we educating our children for? What are the real needs of adult education? Is it for upgrading manual/technical skills alone, or should it be guiding us to be good parents? Education on whose terms? Western civilization? Fijian culture? A Fiji pattern?

When we see unemployment and the general problems of youth in this country we all agree that these are areas which need to be deeply examined and analysed especially in relation to our education system. One can continue to list the problems and needs of national education. But however we see the needs and problems, most of us would agree that the role of education is *to help provide the opportunity for all people to develop as fully as possible.*