

CHAPTER - VII :

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

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7.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the final chapter of the present research report. An effort will be made here to recapitulate briefly the major tasks attempted in the previous chapters and to identify the major conclusions. Suggestions will also be offered to streamline and strengthen the planning and financial relations between the Centre and the States in education which is the basic theme of the study.

7.2 THE RETROSPECT

In the preceding chapters, some selected areas of Centre-State relations in education were brought under focus. In the course of these chapters, the Centre-State relations in education were broadly delineated as they have developed during the past quarter of a century or so, and as they stand now. The spheres were also generally indicated in which problems have arisen and solutions are necessary. In doing this, the researcher has refrained from going into details, for, to do so would have been not in conformance with the task he had set for himself. To this extent, this study is far from being exhaustive. The object of the study has been to survey the field in the selected areas and

emphasise the perspectives. This has been an endeavour which can be linkened to the serial survey of a site on which is to be founded a great city of the future. The exercise helps in identifying the general setting and broad landmarks, but it is obviously inadequate for starting the massive work of construction.

The major tasks attempted in the previous chapters may now be recapitulated. The first two chapters were devoted to preliminaries. In the first, a profile of the study was attempted. The second chapter constituted a kind of 'story so far'. The substantive part of the study starts only with the third chapter.

In this chapter, a brief survey was made of the emergence of the federal ideal in India, the national compulsions that worked inexorably towards this ideal and the proximate socio-political forces that conditioned the final shape that the federal idea took. With this as the background, a quick look was taken at the three legislative lists of the Constitution, their comparative size and content, and then, the constitutional provisions regarding education were examined in some detail. The prevailing judicial view of these provisions was also examined. A brief survey of educational arrangements in some other federal constitutions was also attempted in order to provide a comparative perspective.

In the fourth chapter which dealt with Centre-State financial relations in education, the discussion started with a brief reference to some of the problems that a federal polity faces in ordering its internal financial relations. Some of the older federations had tried to solve these problems by leaving taxation largely a concurrent subject. India had the experience of these nations to go by while formulating her own constitutional arrangements in Centre-State financial relations. She decided to keep the taxing powers of the Centre and the states separate and mutually exclusive.

The Fifth chapter was devoted to Centre-State relations in educational planning. The discussion inevitably started with a reference to the Constitutional provision regarding planning and its wide implications, in the context of the division of legislative powers in the constitution. The main problem of Centre-State relations in educational planning was stated as that of evolving a modus vivendi in inter-governmental operations in the development of education. We then proceeded to give a descriptive account of the process of quinquennial and annual planning, and of the process of planning in education, for, the essence of central-state relations in educational planning had to be, as it were, strained out of this process.

The Sixth Chapter of the substantive portion of the study was brief and was concerned with the Centre-State consultative machinery in education. Such a machinery, it was argued, was important because Consultation was a vital component of what has been designated as 'federal behaviour', and the very success of the federal principle in an area like education was contingent on the effectiveness of this machinery. As one measure of this importance we made a reference to the search for consultative devices in education in federal polities like the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States of America.

A sample of three consultative bodies was chosen for examination, namely, the National Development Council (NDC), the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) and the Conference of State Education Ministers. Each of them was portrayed in terms of its composition and functioning and a broad assessment of their effectiveness as Centre-State consultative devices was attempted.

The last chapter - the present one - is the concluding one.

7.3 FINDINGS AND THE CONCLUSION

The centre of interest in a study like this is naturally its findings and the conclusions that these findings lead to. In the case of the present study particularly this interest is likely to be more than usual, in view of the national debate now in progress on the Indian constitution and its provisions, including the provisions relating to education. The findings and the conclusion on the focal points of the study - Central-State relations in the financing and the planning of education - are, therefore, briefly presented below.

The third chapter, it might be recalled, was devoted to an examination of the provisions regarding education in the Indian Constitution. The conclusion reached in this chapter is that the 'butts' in the major Constitutional provisions regarding education are such that they almost seem to take away with one hand what was given with the other. They lend themselves to interpretations that give the Centre large powers in education. Even in their barest meaning, they invest the Central Government with more authority in education than the Constitutions of the United States, Canada or Australia.

In the fourth chapter the Centre-State relations in the financing of education was examined. The constitution, it was

seen, had sought to keep the taxing powers of the centre and the states separate. A close look at the division of revenues between the Union and the States, however, showed that this separation was more apparent than real. The division indeed eliminated the possibility of simultaneous taxation which was its purpose. But, for the purposes of the public finance of the States, the two revenues really 'coa-lesced'. Thus, the assumption behind the division of revenues in the Constitution really was that India was a single inter-dependent economic unit. The financial autonomy of the States has, therefore, made subject to the over-riding considerations of national economic needs. The assignment of the more elastic sources of revenue to the Centre was perhaps a corollary of this.

Under the financial regime built up on this assumption, the gap between the fiscal needs of the States and their financial resources have tended to increase. For, growth generates a disproportionate demand for social services which largely are the responsibility of the States. Governmental expenditure at the State level, therefore, has tended to grow at an increasing rate. This has necessitated large scale transfer of resources from the Centre to the States.

This transfer of resources has not proceeded on the lines envisaged in the constitution. It had been assumed in the constitution that such transfers would be statutory in nature, mostly made through the instrument of the Finance Commission, more as a matter of right than of grace. But, the advent of planning and the Planning Commission has belied this assumptions.

Discretionary transfer of resources made through the Planning Commission now over-shadow transfers made through the Finance Commission. Planning has, thus, changed the economic, fiscal and also political context of the country. The financial needs of the States in a way have become the political opportunity of the Centre.

In education itself, the financial needs of the States are particularly pressing, mainly because of the yearly accretion to the committed expenditure in education. The returns from education are not such that they can be directly ploughed back to meet at least a part of this expenditure. The result is that the States have increasingly come to depend upon the Centre financially for almost all development in education.

Two kinds of schemes formed the basis of the Central subvention of educational developments in the states, namely, the centrally-sponsored schemes and the centrally assisted schemes. The centrally sponsored schemes formed a part of the central plan and were sanctioned by the centre with details of their administration laid down. The centrally assisted schemes belonged to the educational plan of the State concerned, but were entitled to central assistance. The way these two schemes were operated had reduced education, during the early stages of planning, to almost a Central subject.

Protests from the States and difficulties in plan implementation have led to modifications in the operation of the centrally sponsored and centrally assisted schemes. The centrally sponsored schemes have since been greatly reduced in number. They should now conform to certain criteria laid down for the purpose. The centrally assisted schemes also have undergone considerable change. They do not now carry patterned assistance or matching conditions. Assistance is given through block grants and loans, for the state plan as a whole. Adherence to national priorities is sought to be ensured through the earmarking of assistance to certain crucial programmes.

These adjustments, as was evident ^{from} the study, have considerably changed the situation. However, the vitiation by the Centre of the judgement of the States in education has not been completely eliminated, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, the total central assistance to a state is still calculated on the basis of aid-carrying schemes. Since the States find it difficult to curb the compulsions for netting as much aid as possible, there is a generous overlay of such schemes in State plans in education, often to the exclusion of schemes that deserved priority in the plan from the point of view of the needs of the State. The second reason pertains

to the centrally sponsored schemes. These schemes bring the States resources above and over their approved plan outlays. The States are also under constant and, often irresistible populist pressure for over increasing developmental activity particularly in areas like education. The nature of such activity is of secondary importance as long as it can be shown that it is something new. The States are, therefore, not too keen to look at the gift horses of centrally sponsored schemes in the mouth. The result often is some dysfunctional addition to the educational activities of the State concerned and ultimately to its committed expenditure on education.

In the fifth Chapter, the Centre-State relations in educational planning were dealt with. Looking back at the process from the point of view of the relations forged by the Centre and the States in planning, it was found that broad decisions regarding the basic assumptions and the orientation of the plan made at the initial stages of the planning process were taken almost arbitrarily by the Central Government without any consultation with the States and these decisions, by their very nature, had a determinative weight on the shape that the plans, including their educational components, finally took. The linkages between the centre and the states in decision-making

during the subsequent stages of plan formulation was then examined in some detail. It was found that the National Development Council, the federal body at the apex for decision-making in planning and matters of development, was consulted frequently during the formulation of the plans, but its impact on planning was far from being decisive. The factors responsible for this included not only those related to the way the machinery of the NDC was used in decision-making, but also those connected with the way the NDC itself made use of the opportunities it was given for intervention in the decisional process. The device of the working groups, another Centre-State linkage, was found to fare no better. The Central working groups in education did not adequately reflect the fact that the latter was a State subject. Indeed, in some areas, the assumption behind the composition of the working groups would seem to be the opposite. The State working groups in education, except in rare cases, behaved as if they were bound hand and foot and exercised little independence in their work. To top it all, both the Central and the State working groups worked in a financial vacuum so that their exercise lacked the elementary realism born of an awareness of the constraints of resources. Attention was finally turned to plan discussions, the last of the formal linkages between the Centre and the States in plan formulation. Here also the finding conformed to the pattern that was seen so far. The dice in these discussions

were heavily loaded against the States. The policy output of the discussions showed that the final decisions were, more often than not, closer to the position of the Centre than the States. Thus, the conclusion that in educational planning the Centre and the States are, as things now stand, yoked in a very unequal partnership seemed to be unavoidable. The former to-day almost rules the roost in this vital area.

The sixth chapter, as was mentioned earlier, was devoted to a study of the three Centre-State consultative devices of the NDC, the CABB and the Conference of State Education Ministers. In the case of the NDC, there already had been some discussion in another chapter. The inquiry in the present chapter only confirmed the earlier findings. It was seen that the general climate of its sessions and its style of functioning did not greatly contribute to its effectiveness. The short-run 'malaggregation' in the interest of the States, and the strategy sometimes adopted by the Centre for managing the sporadic and still inchoate dissent in the Council only added strength to these inhibiting factors. Similar conclusions were reached with regard to the CABB also. In the case of the latter body, there was the added factor of the serious dilution in its federal character brought on by the post-independence acquisitions to its membership. As for the Conference of State Ministers of Education, it has still to gain an organizational character. The Minister of Education at the

Centre is de facto both secretary and chairman to the conference. It is therefore, so buckled on to his person that one can call it a federal organisation only with some exaggeration. In any case, the conference has yet to resolve its identity conflict with the CABE. It would, therefore, seem from our discussion on the consultative machinery in education that the Indian federal polity has not yet given any serious thought to the problem of evolving a 'meta-policy', a policy about policy making, in the vital field of education.

What then is the nature of the Centre-State relations in education to-day? To attempt to compress a number of diverse findings on several aspects of a large problem into a single statement is a risky exercise. But, if one were to take that risk, it will not be much beside the mark to say that there has been a considerable concentration of educational authority at the Centre, and that this concentration would seem to be of a degree that makes education almost a concurrent subject, with initiative and influence in policy making mostly lying with the central government.

Though no concerted attention was not paid to the political power structure between the Centre and the States in this study, it would also seem that changes in inter-governmental

power structure has been largely tangential to the shift in educational authority. These changes (like the changes that followed the 1967 general elections) have had very little impact on the convergence of educational power at the centre or, the impact has been purely of a derivative nature. There may be two reasons for this. Firstly, education has still not become an 'issue area' in Indian politics. This may have something to do with the present stage of our educational development. The immediate developmental need of Indian education is the building up of a viable infra-structure. With this task all national parties seem to agree, at least at the level of profession. It is because of this that non-Congress State Governments, which are usually under strong political compulsions to adopt an anti-Centre posture, have never projected a dissentient educational plank. Even sub-national aspirations, which most regional parties represent, do not seem to bear evidence of an educational dimension except in the matter of language, which of course is a problem that transcends education. Secondly, the concentration of educational authority at the Centre has come about mainly through the humdrum process of satisfying the adaptive prerequisite of resource allocation and planning. Political factors like one-party rule or the charismatic political leadership at the

centre may have helped or even accelerated the centralising tendency, but they do not seem to have been the 'conduits' of centralisation in education. The result is that if shifts in the political power structure between the centre and states have to be effectively reflected in centre-state relations in education, the resource allocation and planning processes have to be 'carriers' of these shifts. But, these processes, adjustments and modifications in procedures notwithstanding, have essentially remained the same. The marginality of the Centre-State political power structure to federal relations in education, however, does not come out of this study as anything more than a plausible hypothesis. Confirmation will have to wait future studies in this direction.

How would this denou^ement of the twenty five years of operation of the Indian constitution be viewed? This question is important, for, upon an answer to the question would depend on the assessment of the problem of Centre-State relations in education and any suggestions that may be made to give for the future regarding the relations.

7.4 SOME WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE PROBLEM

One way of looking at the centralisation of power in education is to consider it as a 'defilement' of the Constitu-

tion by the bureaucrat and the politician. If the former were less arrogant and the latter less ignorant, it avers, the operation of the Constitutional provisions regarding education, which are the best possible under the circumstances, would have had a different outcome. This approach harbours two unacceptable assumptions. Firstly, that the Constitutional provisions are something frozen or eternally stabilized and are sacrosanct. Secondly, that these provisions are capable of regulating in every detail the political behaviour and factual operations of groups of people and levels of government. The first assumption lacks historicity and betrays political naivete. The second, as it was seen elsewhere is a fallacy, the 'formalistic fallacy', in legal and constitutional thinking.

There is also another and perhaps a more acceptable way of looking at the phenomenon of centralisation in education. Here, education is conceived of as an integral system, and the Centre-State relations as its 'control' subsystem. The Central sub-system, like all systems, functions and develops within a certain range, limited by two critical points: a point below which the system collapses and one at which it achieves its maximum. In the present case, complete autonomy to the States would represent the first point and

abject subordination of the States to the Centre, the second. At the first point, the Indian federation would be nothing more than a conglomeration of autonomous States: satrapies with a completely dismembered educational system; and, at the second, it would be a federation in name, but a unitary government in fact, despotically ruled from the Centre. Extending the model further, the 'phase' of the control sub-system between the two critical points determines the nature of centre-state relations at any given point of time. This 'phase' in its turn is determined by the 'environment' within which the educational system and its control sub-system operate. The totality of the other sub-systems of society (economic, political and social) constitutes the environment.

There is indeed a deterministic ring in the latter part of the foregoing analysis. This needs clarification, for, if it is implied that centre-state relations are mechanically determined by blind social forces, then, there is nothing that we can do about these except stoically accepting them. This however is not the position. Social systems, are not passive in their interaction with the environment. They adapt themselves to the environment, approaching it selectively and maintaining its integrity under varying environmental conditions. In fact, such adaptation and selective handling of environmental

stimuli aimed at system-maintenance are major functions of control sub-systems. Thus, external environments are significant, but their significance should not be treated as an absolute. They do not 'determine' the systems upon which they act in the mechanistic Laplacian sense of the term.

It is not proposed to attempt a historical validation of the model here. But, it may be pointed out that the present is an epoch, as Hales has put it, in which educational sovereignty is generally on the move. The factors responsible for this in older federations have been industrialisation, and the vast changes that followed at its heel like the growth of modern methods of transportation and communication, the concentration of economic activities into corporate units, the rise of pressure groups national in character and the emergence of a national 'work force'. These changes in the environment of education got transmitted into education, making education and the management of education a national concern. In other words, a redistribution of control in education occurred when interdependence and integration became sufficiently pronounced to create and expose educational problems transcending the bounds of the local or regional community.

Thus, the Indian experience of centralisation in education cannot be said to be anything unique. It is almost a

universal phenomenon. If it has any novelty, it might be in the sequence of events. In the older federations industrialisation and the attendant changes were antecedent to centralisation. In India, however, concentration of educational authority at the centre has preceded or is concurrent with the changes that would have in any case brought about a redistribution of control in education. But this is of a piece with the other well-known instances of the reversal of temporal sequences in history by the new nations of the world. The explanation lies in the fact that in their effort to telescope development in order to catch up with the advanced nations, these nations are obliged to resort to induced change and planning which have far-reaching implications for the distribution of power in a political community.

This digression into history and social dynamics need not detain us any more. One can now proceed to deal with the last two questions with which we are concerned in this concluding chapter, namely, our assessment of the problem of centre-state relations in education and the policy implications that emerge out of this assessment.

That there is a problem to-day in the field of centre-state relations in education seems to be generally accepted not only by educationists but by others also. It is easy to

proclaim that this problem lies in the overstepping by the centre of its constitutional brief. This assessment of the problem has the merit of simplicity, but it is unsatisfactory on two counts. Firstly, it fails to raise the more pertinent question of why this constitutional aggrandisement on the part of the centre has taken place at all. Secondly, if Central infraction of the relevant Constitutional provisions is the problem, then the obvious solution would be to restore these provisions, in all their pristine purity, to proper heights of command in inter-governmental transactions in education. But, this we have seen is not possible. Centralisation in education, in essence, though not in manner and form, is an irreversible process in so far as centralisation itself is an inevitable product of socio-economic forces that can no more be arrested. Thus, this simplistic statement of the problem of centre-state relations in education is purely of a 'metaphysical' character.

If a solution is to be found to the problem of centre-state relations in education, a more realistic and fruitful assessment of the problem has to be sought. A basic requirement of this exploration, it would seem, is to disabuse ourselves of the legalistic notion that the existing constitutional provisions regarding education should, under all

circumstances, constitute the immutable frame of reference of such an assessment. Primacy of consideration should be given to the socio-economic compulsions of the situation. It is these compulsions that lie at the root of the centralising tendency that we have noticed in Indian education. Seen in this perspective, the problem in centre-state relations in education seems to be that of a malalignment between the myth of constitutional provisions and the needs of a society that has accepted induced change and planning as its preferred instruments of developments

This disjunction between the legal provisions and the needs of policy-making for development has been deleterious in two ways. Firstly, though the Centre has, operationally speaking, enjoyed considerable initiative and influence in educational matters so far, its locus standi with regard to policy-making is not too secure and is persistently being questioned. As political plurality at the state level increases and the present non-antagonistic centre-state conflicts are transformed into antagonistic clashes, the possibility of which cannot be entirely ruled out, the tendency to challenge central authority in policy making is likely to be on the ascent. This will prove to be malintegrative to education and, ultimately, may be to the federal polity itself. Secondly,

the malalignment between the legal myth and the facts of praxis has created plenty of scope for 'passing the buck' in education. This, it may be pointed out, is often welcome both to the governments in the states and the government at the centre as a counter in facing a censorious public. But, this dubious political advantage is hardly commensurate with the price the country has to pay for it in terms of the growth and betterment of education.

What then is the solution? It would seem to be to make the factual in education, the constitutional also - that is, to put education on the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule of the constitution. ✓

One hesitates to make a suggestion like this so soon after such an august body as the Education Commission (1964-66) came to the conclusion that the constitutional provisions regarding education need not be disturbed. One would like to think that this splendid body, like most others of its ilk, was not trying to be more royalist than the king himself. But, the commission certainly had other compelling reasons to be cautious. It was reporting at a time so close to the climacteric 1967. It did not want to prejudice the reception of its excellent recommendations by the states by seeming to side with the centre. The Centre itself would not have been

overly happy about a controversy on this matter at such a time.

There is no need here to labour the inadequacy of the solution we have suggested to the problem of the Centre-State relations in education. The experience of the Damodar Valley Corporation is a good example of that inadequacy. The DVC Act gave the Central Government complete control over planning, implementation and operations in the corporation. Yet, the Bihar and West Bengal governments were able to frustrate the Central Government completely in the DVC. Putting education on the concurrent list of legislation, therefore, can only be the necessary condition for a more authentic pattern of the Centre-State relations in education. It will be beyond our scope here to go into the circumstances in combination with which it can also prove to be the sufficient condition.

One of the unstated premises of the suggestion that is made above has been that education has now acquired the characteristics of a national concern. This should naturally be reflected in the Constitutional provisions regarding education. But, the Constitutional change in this direction also harbours a serious danger. If one may paraphrase what Eric Eaglesham said in the context of the 1944 Act, a despotic Centre would find in these changes all the powers it needed

to twist the whole administration, both central and state, to suit its purpose. The only way to guard against this is to forge between the centre and the states a genuine partnership in policy making. This will mean considerable changes in our financial and planning procedures. It will also mean far-reaching changes in the composition, structure and style of functioning of the main Centre-State policy making and consultative devices. This is not the place to spell out these changes in detail. We have however, indicated the nature of the needed changes in the course of our discussions.

7.5 CONCLUSION

Thus, the task in Centre-State relations in Indian education to-day is to find a political modus vivendi that protects the interests of the Central Government in education as a national concern without stifling the initiative and creativity of the States in that field. This is no easy task. It poses a challenge to the ingenuity and the honesty of statesmen, politicians, educational administrators and educationists all alike. The suggestions made here only indicate a further line of research in the area so that a happy, yet efficacious solution can be found to the vital problem of Centre-State relations in education. Such research may eventually warrant even a reconsideration of the suggestion. But, the present enquiry will be more than amply rewarded, if it proves capable of inspiring further studies in the area, whatever may be then outcome.

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH :

Centre-State relations in education in India is an almost completely unexplored area of research. The following are some suggested topics for research. As the problems that any area of study yields for research depend upon the 'perceptual structure' of the researcher, the problems listed here may not be perceived as problems by other researchers, given another frame of reference. They are, therefore, purely suggestive in nature.

The topics are not listed in any order, either of importance or of generality.

TOPICS :

1. Centre-Provincial and Centre-State Relations in India since 1833: A Historical Study.
2. Judicial Review and Centre-State Relations in Education: A Study in Trends.
3. Dissident State Politics and Union-State Relations in Education.
4. State Backwardness and Centre-State Relations in Education.
5. The Centre and the States in Resource Allocation for Education: A Role Study.
6. The Process and the Machinery of Planning for Education at the Centre and in the States and their inter-relationships.

7. Administering Education in India - Centre-State Linkages.
8. Centre-State consultation and Policy-making in Education: Case Studies of consultative and Decision-making Devices (As an illustration one case-study may be: The CABE and the Promotion of Education in Federal India).
9. The Centre and the States in the Universalisation of Education at the First Levels: A Role Study.
10. The Centre and the States in the Promotion of Higher Education: A Role Study.
11. The Union, and Research and Development (R & D) in Education: A Case Study of the N.C.E.R.T.
12. Radical States and Centre-State Relations in Education: A Study in Political Ideology and Education in India.