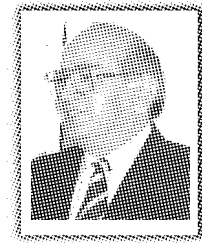


Educating India: A matter of great Urgency



As we get hurled into the current century with the power of convergence between the world of the atoms and the world of bits, the statement that knowledge will be the most competitive weapon or advantage is no longer rhetoric, but stark reality. In some sense this was always true, but it is now manifest in many very compelling ways.

It therefore follows that for the convinced, it should now be a matter for action. While there is a lot of lip service paid to education and educational initiatives, the actions which usually speak louder than words show that education is a long way from becoming center-stage in the nation's business.

Let us begin with the recent action of the Directorate of Education, de-recognising one of the best Delhi schools, often rated as such by independent agencies for having been open one day after the Directorate of Education felt it would be much too hot for children to learn. This was fortunately reviewed by the Lt Governor, but look at the amount of energy wasted. If there was some logic or reasoning the Directorate had, at least it should have been openly expressed and appreciated. There are numerous such examples and not justifiable regulations laid down by the regulating bodies. So the first step is to get the Government get out of the business of trying to regulate the operational parts of education. The policy, the strategy, quality parameters and the broad directions yes, but syllabus, time-table, calendar of activities- no, no.

This is the actual cause of worry. It is hard to find any documents outlining the strategic approach of the country towards education as a competing tool especially in the emerging context of globalisation as reflected in the WTO. Everyone, the Planning Commission, the Directorates, the Ministries is working at the details from transfer and postings to mid-day meals and the grand and absolutely right thought of launching a satellite purely for educational purposes but there is no assessment of what is the state of and direction that we should take in steering the educational ship of India. Often the large sums of money required for education and the inability of being able to raise them stifles further thought. But the question

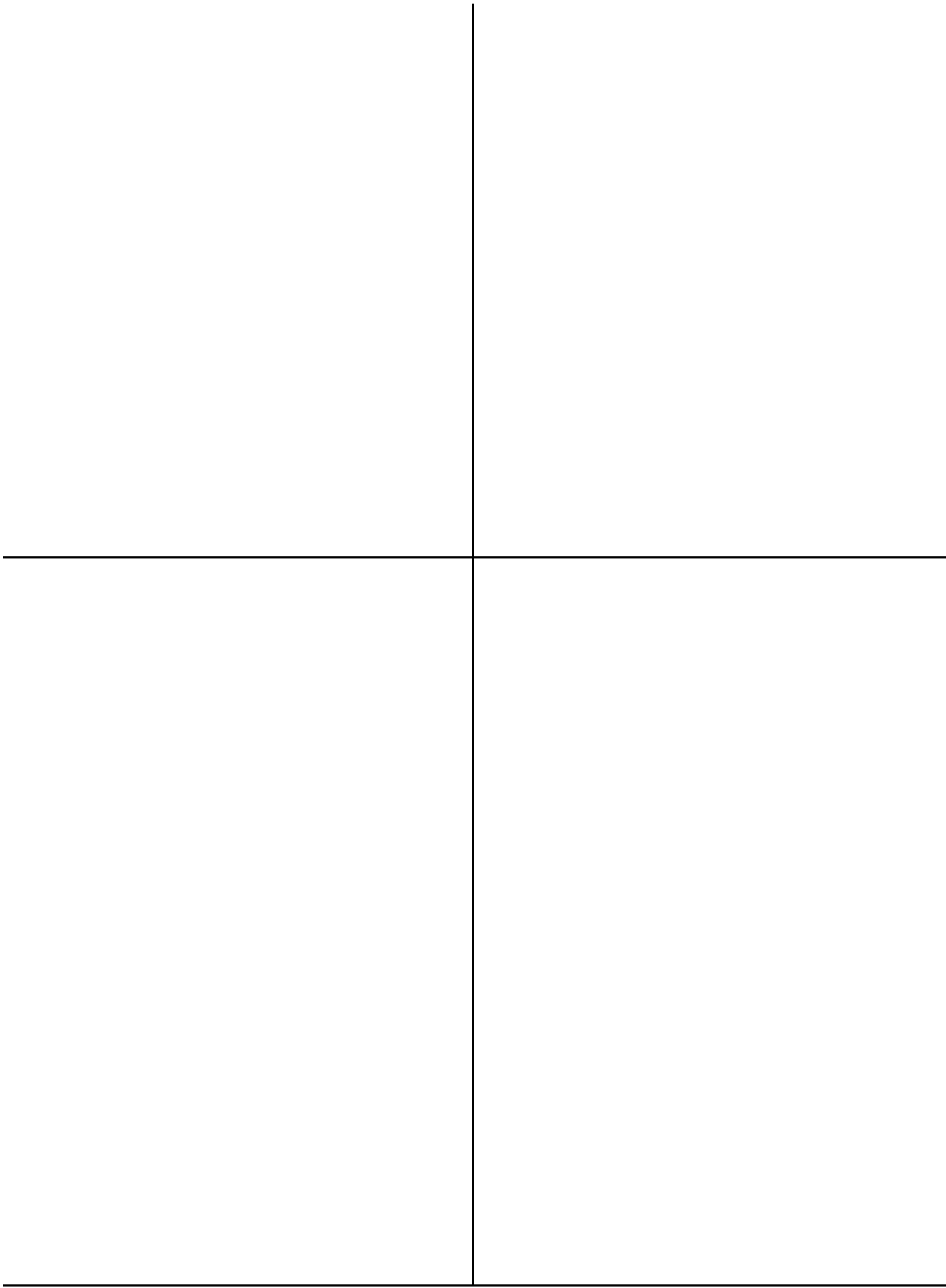
is not whether we can afford the money for education or not, but whether we can afford not to give education our highest priority. And yes, let us debate whether education is not more important than defence, and also throw open the question as to what else is more important.

The speed at which we move is awfully slow. Our mindset is reflected in the order derecognising the school referred to above for having taught one extra day. Should we not create a system where the entire educational infrastructure is used over longer periods of time if not round the clock. For a nation with huge illiteracy and just a tiny percentage having access to higher education, let us at least acknowledge that we need to think of methods of solving the problem. For 50 years we have unwittingly denied access to millions of potential learners just because of not seeing it as a challenge.

We must remember that when the physical power available to the world was manual labour of humans supplemented with some animal power, we were leaders. With advent of steam engine and later electrical and other forms of power, we slipped and other nations marched ahead of us. The coming years of convergence of bits and atoms are again possibly providing us a level playing field. If we can seize the opportunity, we could be world leaders once again but if we slip, we would find ourselves at the bottom of the heap.

Where would we get the money from? From the people themselves. If we can convey the message that an investment in education is the best investment, whether it is in your own education, your children's education or your neighbour's education and that it gives even in pure money terms better returns than similar investment in land, gold or Ketan Parikh companies or for that matter the Government of India's Unit Trust, and provide mechanisms where such investments can get fair returns there can be significant improvement in the educational infrastructure and its utilisation.

If we put our act together in time in a meaningful co-operative manner and see public and private as a partnership, rather than as a divide, we may see in the coming years the phenomenon of Indianisation of the Globe concurrently with the Globalisation of India... maybe that is the new Amrit Manthan. □



The Sky Is Blue

Chandan Ghosh

Srishti Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2001,

Price: Rs. 40

The Sky Is Blue lays bare the trials and tribulations of a fighter pilot. Narrated in a highly readable form, the author introduces the Indian Air Force to the readers. But more importantly, he takes us into the realms of a hitherto unknown world of the elite brand of the fearless and adventurous young men, who form the core of the Air forces, the world over. In his own inimitable style the author underlines that military flying is not only a profession, it is equally a philosophy and in some measure, a deep form of meditation.

The book traces a young man's uncertain steps from the streets of Calcutta to the chance visit to a selection centre. How he joins the Indian Air Force, what he confronts on his way to fulfilling a dream, how he copes with the stresses and strains of reaching for the blue sky, and the sheer ecstasy of finally being able to earn the coveted 'Wings' - the book is fast paced and makes very interesting reading even for the uninitiated. For those who are already in the profession, it is captivating. The women in the narrative are not thrown in for cosmetic reasons. The pilots are, above all, down-to-earth human beings and women not only play their part in a pilot's life, but also have a distinct role of their own.

The Sky Is Blue will no doubt inspire the young. It will also gratify the older lots who have their siblings in the service of the Air Force. And the wives--'who died every time their husbands went up in the air, but lived happily'.

In some ways, the book is an autobiography, but through Chanchal, the author has put together his life's experiences without glorifying himself. That I think was a great sacrifice and a great literary achievement.

Chandan Ghosh is himself a fighter pilot in the Indian Air Force, having retired as an Air Commodore - the equivalent of a Brigadier in the Army. His service experience includes the Indo-Pak war of 1971. Chandan Ghosh has done a creditable job with The Sky Is Blue. He has since gone on to write books on a variety of subjects, which includes fiction, sports, travel, horoscope and computers. He is a graduate of the Defence Services Staff College, a Ph.D. in Military

Science, and MA in Music (Sitar) and is equally versatile in languages, palmistry, homoeopathy, horoscopes and computers.

Srishti Publishers have brought out the book in a fairly compact and easy-to-read form. However, it could do with a slightly better editing. At Rs. 40, the book is highly affordable. It is a must-read book for all the young people of the country.

Book Reviewed by:

Shalini Sen

Shodh

Author: Taslima Nasrin

Translated by Rani Ray

Srishti Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 2003

Pages 227

Rs. 195/-

The firebrand literary giant from Bangladesh, Taslima, has finally found her emancipation through Jhumur. A relentless crusader for the cause of women, she has given Jhumur an expression of life, which she forgot once she married Haroon after a short love affair. She thought that she would give herself in the hands of her lover and live happily after marriage came as a rude shock. She got inducted in a conservative family flying wheel, which churns, groans but carries on endlessly. They did not expect anything from her other than total loyalty to the family. She was the one to make breakfast; she was the one who should take care for her ma-in-law. Yet, she was not allowed to go to the verandah to look at the free birds. That was most unlikely behaviour of a daughter-in-law. Even Haroon, once a great lover, forgot about her intellectual presence, he only remembered her only for his physical gratification. Haroon was Jhumur's dream. Around him, she built a castle of many dreams. But Haroon refused to believe that the child was his gift to Jhumur, the result of love of many nights. Jhumur wanted to be a mother. But Haroon didn't. He forced her for an abortion much to the chagrin of the girl once he loved. Helplessness also could be splendid if you could give the correct expression. It is only Taslima who could create such colourful despondency. Our heart goes out to Jhumur. You feel like crying out to her. Jhumur runs beyond the continent of darkness. Don't ever return.

Jhumur died intellectually. She couldn't see any light at the end of an endless tunnel. Her academic excellence was scoffed upon by Haroon's family. She wondered where she had gone wrong. She was chained in a golden cage. We feel pity for this young beautiful wife of Haroon but couldn't keep the book away for long. Kudos to Rani Ray who with her deft application of English has maintained the original flavour of the book written in Bengali.

We travel vicariously with Jhumur we wish her to break the shackle. But divorce--- no, that couldn't be the answer. That is why when Jhumur discovered herself in the eyes of an artist Afzal. She sensed that long

lost love. Our sympathy for Jhumur never allowed us to hate her to be unfaithful towards her husband.

Haroon failed to notice her emancipated wife. A complete transformation. He wanted the child. He did not even bother this time to find out about the legitimacy. Was he the father? He was too sure about himself. Male chauvinism forced him to destroy his own the progeny but accepted some one else's. No, he didn't doubt the chastity of his wife.

Jhumur found her identity through motherhood. She was transformed. She stormed into a new life. Hats off to you Taslima.

Book Reviewed by:

D..Bakshi.