

To,
Prof. Amartya Sen,
Hon'ble Noble Laureate.

Date : 28.12.2009.

Respected Sir,

At the very outset I convey my best regards to you.

I am a student of 1st year of M.A. in Economics at Jadavpur University. I have done my B. Sc. in Economics from Bidhan Nagar College under Calcutta University.

During my B. Sc. classes, I wrote four papers on Economics titled : (1) Future of Retail Trade in West Bengal, (2) Political Economy of Oil and its Implications for India, (3) Economic Hazards caused due to an Imperfect Market Structure and Asymmetric Information in the Indian Pharmaceutical Market and (4) The Pharmaceutical Market in India : A Market beyond Perfect Competition. The first two have won Gold Medals in competitions on Paper Presentation in Economics held at St. Xavier's College in 2007 & 2008, the 3rd one fetched me a Bronze Medal in a similar competition hosted by Presidency College in 2007 and the last one helped me to secure the 2nd position at a Students' Meet organised by Jadavpur University.

I aspire to take up academics as my career and am very keen to do a lot of research, because I find research work an extremely interesting and fulfilling experience. And, after three years of study of Economics, I have become very keenly interested in Development Economics, especially on the issues, Education, Health and related Economics of Corruption.

Recently I was fortunate enough to attend the seminar on the occasion of release of Protichi Education Report II at Sisir Mancha. I have also gone through the said Report. In relation to these, I beseech to put forward some of my observations hereunder, which may appear quite childish to you, Sir.

1. In the Seminar, all the speakers stressed on various important points. I have nothing to say or object on them. But, in relation to the deliberation of the Principal Secretary of the Dept. of Primary Education of Govt. of West Bengal, I wish to submit the following :

- A) The speaker said that a major hindrance in improving standard of primary education is political polarisation. In support of his contention, he cited the instance of obstruction in filling up of the vacancies of primary school teachers' posts.

I wish to submit it humbly that the problem of political polarisation is a matter of a few years – may be three-four years. Can the State Government claim that a better situation prevailed prior to that? It has to be remembered that West Bengal had been under Left Front governance over more than 60% of time in the post-independence era. We must not forget those dreaded years of Left Front rule prior to these continuous 33 years. Can we really blame opposition politics or politics of polarisation for the precarious condition of our primary education? The truth is, perhaps, otherwise.

The speaker himself admitted that the last time primary school teachers were recruited was in 2004. Is it a mere coincidence that the years of recruitment coincide with ensuing general elections? If it is so, does it point towards a genuine political goodwill of the Left Front government?

The fact is, perhaps, the opposite. Deliberately our children have been kept illiterate or poorly literate, as, I feel, it is the basic idea of every communist approach to disallow any question against the leadership. This has been, always, done with the obvious aim of total control of the leadership on the commune. The best way to achieve the target is by not letting the light of knowledge shine over the populace. Knowledgeable society is, I apprehend, the biggest enemy of communist leadership – not of the ‘ism’ itself. In fact, I think, communism is an ideology which was dreamt by honest dreamers and was implemented by devils. My contention was largely supported by Shri Pati of Teachers’ Association, who exemplified how our kids are being kept un-informed., if not being misinformed.

B) The Principal Secretary made a suggestion of participation of parents in governance, making the teaching system accountable to the society. I believe, this is a poor suggestion in a State like ours. Like all other situations, where the bureaucrats of our country make policies or take decisions, considering our country to be the United States of America, here also the speaker did not take into account the socio-political and the educational backdrop of the people of rural, or, even, semi-urban, Bengal. Furthermore, has the State Government ever shown its goodwill to pay heed to the common people at the grass-root levels? Has the government ever attempted, seriously, to implement e-governance, where people’s voices can directly reach the Writers’ Building, and will not be throttled down at the level of Local Committees of the major ruling party? I believe, the respected speaker would agree that the question of involvement of people at grass-root levels in governance of primary school teaching is a far-

fetched dream only considering the present socio-political scenario created by the ruling party itself.

2. As far as the Pratiche Education Report II is concerned, I have to submit humbly the following :

- A) As far as the Primary School Education of Muslims is concerned, I am of the opinion that the status of Muslims cannot be uplifted unless a holistic approach is adopted. According to my belief, attempts to only improve their figures in relation to primary education per se, such as, enrolment rate, drop-out rate, etc., will not really help them. The basic problems, like uncontrolled family size – leading to financial shortage as well as inadequacy of attention to children, degraded social status of women under the pretext of religious prohibitions, reluctance to educate the girl child - also under the pretext of religious principles, continuous input of distorted ideas about other religions, etc. are all major factors for repulsion from traditional primary school learning. Although, the female literacy figures have improved of late, my belief is that the figures alone may not successfully convey the entire story. Thus, I believe, unless these problems are redressed, primary education cannot succeed in Muslim communities.**
- B) Regarding the status of primary school education of Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes, I believe, that a similar holistic approach for them is necessary, deviating from the usual approach of uniform policy for all categories of students and over-protecting them in the sanctuaries of 'quota systems', which leads to the thickening of the 'creamy layer'. Otherwise, I think, only once in a while one Justice Balasubramanian, or one Dr. Periair, or one Smt. Meira Kumar, will come up to the limelight and their children and grandchildren will continue to enjoy all benefits offered by the government for the SCs & STs, keeping the huge multitude of SC & ST children in the remote corners of our country in a precarious condition - non-conducive for, even, decent living, leaving aside the question of primary schooling.**
- C) In this connection, I would also like to mention that maybe a better system would be to provide special attention to all the economically and socially marginalised people, irrespective of their caste or religion. This way the 'creamy layer' will fizz out and the people who really need this special privilege will get it. Also, it will prevent the further accentuation of caste and religious differences, which is undeniably a great menace in our society today.**
- D) In connection to the provision of cooked mid-day school meal, I am of the belief, that although it successfully attracts more children to school, it also opens up an avenue for corruption at the local level. In fact, instances of children falling ill due to poor**

quality of meal at school are not too uncommon. This indicates a dangerous corruptive practice of tampering of the ingredients of the meal as well as the cooking and distribution systems, which compromises the health of young children. And, this is, obviously, a far cry from the original aim of providing a balanced diet to the under-nourished children, apart from attracting children to schools for, at least, primary education. And, this poor quality of mid day school meal may also be looked upon as an important reason for children dropping out of school. Therefore, to avoid such unwarranted situations and to prevent uncalled for multi-focal corruptions, rather than providing cooked meals, I believe, that it would be better to arrange for dry foods in the lines of the Hyderabad Mix, formulated by the National Institute of Nutrition. As this preparation is essentially meant for the rural population of our country, it comes pretty cheap, and so, it should not be too difficult to arrange for. This preparation contains all important nutrients and provides a balanced vegetarian diet. Also, as it comes in packets, and can be had dry, like puffed rice, or can be made into a kind of porridge, it eliminates the risk of tampering of the ingredients. And, it is perhaps better to provide a wholesome vegetarian diet than to provide a flimsy non-vegetarian diet. The National Institute of Nutrition may also be consulted for similar handy nutritious and delicious dry food for mid-day school meals. Such food can be manufactured in a few centralised places and can be packed and sent to the destination in form of individual-child-pack, which can be preserved for a few weeks there. This system, I believe, will reduce level of corruption drastically and will benefit both the children in relation to nutrition and the primary schooling system in relation to proper and assured incentive for attracting more children to school. A supplementary solution may be, giving the children the amount required to buy non-vegetarian food items, in cash. It may be taken for granted that the intended food will not reach the children, but, that money will be of some use to the family. Thus, this system will generate a kind of double incentive – the child will be able to get a wholesome vegetarian meal at school and the cash money received will help the family in some way. And, maybe this will help in attracting more children to school.

3. In connection to your in-depth interview to a Bengali news channel, I humbly, submit the following :

- A) It is true that some sections of the people, including political parties, in the state have indeed acted irresponsibly in relation to industrialisation of the State. But, people can only be expected to act responsibly when the government behaves democratically. When the ruling class turns tyrants and oppresses and suppresses people, then after a certain time a mass uprising is bound to happen. And, history is witness to the fact that when such a situation is created, then the masses lose all sense of right

and wrong and indulge in mindless violence. And, this is exactly what has happened in the state today. Now, recently, some comments or actions of sections of the ruling party may be correct, but, after decades of tyrannical rule, the ruling party has lost all credibility. Today, the oppressed people cannot bring themselves to believe the people who had oppressed them for so long. It may be true that the people carrying out these mindless acts of violence are essentially opportunists. But, they are just taking the opportunity of the anti-establishment sentiments of the oppressed people. And, for this too, the ruling party alone is to blame, as had they not fanned all corruptive activities and deprived the common people of so much that they rightfully deserved, this sentiment would not have been created in the first place. Constructive discussion is possible only when true democracy prevails. Long standing tyranny will almost always lead up to a violent eruption of sentiments of the wrongfully deprived, many a times in a grossly incorrect manner. And, in such circumstances, no logic or reason is good enough to be paid heed to.

I am daring to write all these to you, Sir, as you, yourself, asked the audience to send you our comments on the proceedings. I sincerely hope, Sir, this will not irritate you.

With kindest regards, Sir,

(Debdatta Chakrabarti).

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