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Remembering Daulat Singh Kothari*

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When Dr Krishna of noble mien and resplendent culture puffed the last of his cigars and died suddenly in the Education Minister's room in the North Block where we were meeting for a discussion about the UGC Budget, the post of the Chairman fell vacant soon after CD Deshmukh had retired. I had run to fetch a doctor from the Health Ministry across the verandah, but the medical assistance was of no avail. In a few minutes the President, Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan arrived and sadly we bade farewell to the remains of a great gentleman. The search for a new Chairman started soon, and while the one very hopeful candidate was on his way to the Prime Minister's House, Dr Radhakrishnan advised the Minister to announce the appointment of Daulat Singh Kothari who was not in the running among several aspirants. The third Chairman of the recently constituted University Grants Commission on the lines of the British model, took office in 1961. Little was known of Kothari beyond the scientific circles of Defence Science and the University of Delhi, but the world of education welcomed the appointment of a scholar and teacher known and respected for his learning and dedication to teaching and research. I had met him earlier in the late fifties at a UNESCO General Conference which he attended as a delegate of India. He was happy to meet many well-known scientists and educationists from several countries, but did not take kindly to the procedures and time-consuming debates of a United Nations Organization seeking consensus of diverse cultures and personalities.

After his appointment as the Chairman we met in the North Block when he called on the Minister. Soon we developed a friendship which for me was a most rewarding experience. Our relationship quickly

transcended the official horizons of cooperation between a funding Ministry answerable to the Parliament for the financing of higher education and an independent commission entrusted with the choice of programmes and priorities. Being a university teacher for many years in Lahore, I had learnt to value the role and functioning of a University to which Kothari had already made notable contributions. Together we could serve the cause of education in a way more meaningful than the usual relations between the Chief of a Statutory Commission and a Secretary to the Government that appoints the Commission.

Simplicity and humility were combined with a lofty idealism and a rare sense of duty and service in the person of Kothari who was always greater than his calling because he valued and respected the human spirit, nurtured and reared by the University of which Jawaharlal Nehru had written with feeling and eloquence. He regarded the University as truly a Temple of Learning to serve the spirit of man by knowledge, wisdom and the best of human relations and values. The calling of a Professor was the noblest a scholar could aspire to and he regarded no honour higher than being a Professor. The ideal teacher gathers and imparts knowledge, attains and reflects wisdom, maintains openness and receptiveness in humility, approaches all life with compassion, exercises patience in hope and perseverance, builds faith of positive outlook and belief, strives for upsurge of creativity and shows the way of Love to himself and his disciples. In this way he can achieve and impart creativity in the pursuit of excellence and togetherness. Kothari possessed these characteristics of the ideal teacher in abundance and imparted to his disciples and friends the

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magic of a truly great personality that fulfilled itself and inspired others.

The following lines that I wrote about Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan fitted equally into Kothari's role and personality:

On this Teacher's Day
Which was launched in the Sixties
I hail a great teacher
Who was always a learner,
And imparted his teaching
With love and compassion,
Patience and Forbearance,
Endless striving
For Knowledge and Wisdom.
With faith in Humanity
And Man's innate dignity !

Kothari believed fervently that Education should contribute to man's innate dignity which often suffered in the Indian Society of traditional hierarchy and persisting poverty. One day at lunch time he looked out of the window of my room in the North Block, viewing a large gathering of peons and clerks relaxed in their frugal mid-day meals and cheerful togetherness. He said, "I long for the day when Ministers and Secretaries will join such groups and celebrate their togetherness in joyful equality and real humanity".

To such an ideal of human development the best of his lifework as Chairman of the Indian Education Commission was directed in true dedication and service.

The Indian Education Commission of 1964-66 was a great enterprise of educational thought, organizational structures and new linkages of institutions and stages of educational development suited to the needs and resources of a new resurgent India and the emerging horizons of a World Society of human welfare and solidarity. It set up 12 Task Forces and seven Working Groups for different sectors and problems of education, interviewed 900 persons, including many well-known authorities from home and abroad; travelled extensively to the States of the Union and drew upon the cultural experiences of many countries and regions, especially in cooperation with UNESCO and through India's growing links with countries such as the USA, the USSR, the United Kingdom and the British Commonwealth, Japan and the Asian countries. The story of the Commission's work is told by JP Naik and Jim McDougal in a voluminous Report, with bulky

addenda and annexures upon which a student of education could draw for a long time to come. Kothari delivered his Commission's Report to the Education Minister MC Chagla on 29th June, 1966 with a brief letter in which he expressed in the following words his own view of Education which permeated the work of the Commission:

"In a Science-based world, education and research are crucial to the entire development process of a country, its welfare, progress and security. It is characteristic of a world permeated by Science that in some essential ways the future shape of things is unpredictable. This emphasizes the need for an educational policy which contains a built-in flexibility so that it can adjust to changing circumstances. It underscores the importance of experimentation and innovation".

Among the many recommendations of the Commission, Kothari put special emphasis upon the following for bringing about an educational revolution in the country:

- (a) Introduction of work-experience and social service as integral parts of general education at all levels of education;
- (b) Stress on moral education and inculcation of a sense of social responsibility;
- (c) Vocationalization of secondary education;
- (d) Strengthening of centres of advanced study and setting up of a small number of major universities which should aim at achieving the highest international standards;
- (e) Special emphasis on the training and quality of teachers for schools;
- (f) Education for agriculture, and research in agriculture and allied sciences; and
- (g) Development of quality or pace-setting institutions at all stages and in all sectors.

The report of the Education Commission was hailed as a landmark of educational development in India and other developing countries. At home its recommendations got bogged down in the vagaries of a system which was not congenial to performance and implementation. For UNESCO, however, it served as a model for the launching in 1971 of the International Commission on the Development of Education under the Chairmanship of Edgar Faure. Its Report entitled

Learning to be—the world of education today and tomorrow, influenced educational thinking and planning for two decades.

Kothari's leadership of the Indian Education Commission was a remarkable achievement, made possible not only by his vast experience and commitment to education, but also by the moral and intellectual qualities of a rare human being, deeply imbued in the spirit of service and compassion, derived from the nature of science and the essence of the cultural experience and traditions of India. Notable among many who served the Commission was my friend and colleague, JP Naik. Naik possessed immense energy and knowledge of Education with a rare sense of loyalty and deep dedication to persons and causes. As Member-Secretary of the Commission his contribution to the enormous task of steering its activities was unrivalled. As a specialist he had the natural tendency of projecting his own views at the centre of recorded discussions among the members; it was necessary to correct this element in the making of the Report, which Kothari, as Chairman, performed with great tact, courtesy and wisdom.

For the speedy completion of the Commission's task and its harmonious functioning for mobilising so much talent in its deliberations, all credit is due to the leadership of Kothari and the labours of its indefatigable Member-Secretary, JP Naik. Respect for colleagues, encouragement of workers at all levels and good human relations marked the style of Kothari's leadership which yielded rich dividends in the creative functioning of the Education Commission and the relevance and wisdom of its wide-ranging recommendations. To all who worked with him, he was a remarkable person imbued with human values that brought out the best in those associated with him in both Science and Education which he served with rare distinction.

Among many pleasant memories and significant experiences of the Commission's work, I recall the drafting of the last few paragraphs of the first Chapter entitled 'Education and national objectives'. Under 'Social moral and spiritual values' and 'A challenge and a faith', much of the drafting was done by Kothari

himself who subsequently developed his thought about atom and *ahimsa* expressed briefly under para 1.86: "Atom and *Ahimsa*, or to put it differently, man's knowledge and mastery of the outer space and the space within his skull, are out of balance. It is this imbalance which mankind must seek to redress. Man now faces himself. He faces the choice of rolling down a nuclear abyss to ruin and annihilation or of raising himself to new heights of glory and fulfilment yet unimagined..."

Kothari drew upon the *Kena Upanishad*, the writings of the Cambridge Scientist, E. Schrodinger, and Jawaharlal Nehru's Azad Memorial Lecture on 'India and the world' in expressing his thoughts on a challenge and a faith. The writing on 'Social, moral and spiritual values' is even more pertinent today than in 1966. I recall one fine morning in the spring of that year when Kothari came excitedly to my room in North Block for a drive into the Central Vista where we discussed the content of his draft and felt happy with what emerged after a discussion. I discovered that he escaped often to such drives for fresh thoughts in solitude which he valued much.

I conclude this tribute to Kothari's memory by recalling briefly the experience of our travel together in the US and the USSR at the invitation of their Governments. We travelled extensively, conferred with academicians and officials about cooperative programmes in the fields of Education and Culture, and shared the thoughts and vistas of the World of Knowledge in the two dominant civilizations of that time. Those travels were great adventures of learning and of the discovery that the Humanity of the Mind and the Spirit transcended the modes, styles and beliefs of rival systems of Economics and Power-politics. Like a dazed child Kothari viewed the treasures of the Library of Congress at Washington and the Hermitage Museum at Leningrad. Among precious assets of travel were some beautiful books and pictures given to us as tokens of friendship which we valued and cherished. Some abiding spirit of the child remained with him through a long span of life, which endeared him to all who had the good fortune of experiencing the fellowship of a very lovable person.