

Letter to Editor

Higher Education in India

IN his article "Higher Education in India in the Light of Bobbins Report' (*The Economic Weekly*, November 16, 1963), Professor A K Dasgupta raises the important issue of higher education. Though he discusses the problem of higher education in general, I wish to restrict myself to the teaching of economics. Professor Dasgupta has a [mint when he says that the limited resources are liable to be spread over very large numbers. This is, however, inevitable and is as operative in India as in England or in America. The democratisation of education does change the 'character' to borrow the phrase from the *Times*—of education: and, in principle, it is desirable to change the 'character' of education which is meant only for the elite. I can visualise an Oxbridge man making the same pica in 1900 when the Redbricks came into being. What is important is the growth in the 'state of arts' and riot the character of education. The establishment of Redbrick and a large number of universities in America has definitely led to the growth of knowledge: and the process of democratisation of education in India, is bound to lead to such growth.

Coming to the Indian scene Prof Dasgupta misses the core of the problem. His solution of starting an All-India University Service, like most other solutions, merely tinkers with the problem. The fundamental problem is why even in 1963, our economists are being produced in the British and American Universities and not in the Indian Universities? Professor Dasgupta's answer is that we do not have big departments of economics in our universities. It is perhaps a matter of opinion how big a department one has to have to be able to produce an economist. Though they are perhaps not known to our Indian economists, in the last ten years the Redbrick Universities have produced economists of as high a calibre as Oxbridge. So a department as big as that of a Redbrick University like Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, etc, is big enough to produce an economist. On that basis the Delhi

School of Economics, the Gokhale School of Economics and Politics, the Departments of Economics of the universities of Bombay and Calcutta are at least as big as the Redbrick departments. Thus the size of the departments is not a sufficient argument to explain the inadequacy of Indian universities. One would then perhaps come to the staff and its quality. Even in this case one would not be exaggerating when one says that, the staff of the above mentioned departments and even of the departments in the universities of Baroda and Punjab (Chandigarh) is, man to man, competent to teach in any university of the world. Professor Dasgupta therefore is barking up the wrong tree.

To understand the problem and suggest improvements one has to go deeper. Education involves two things. One, respect for ideas for the sake of ideas. Two, analysis and appreciation of ideas. The hist is more important and basic. The essential thing is self-confidence which comes basically from one's education. If education cannot generate this confidence, it fails in its basic function. Unfortunately our departments of economics lack this fundamental quality. The members of these departments do not show-enough respect for their own education, so that the students do not get the confidence so necessary for further growth of knowledge. This is proved by the simple fact that a student who has been taught for the last two years, a time sufficient lor the teachers to understand and evaluate the student, and been awarded a first class by them and even offered a testimonial full of a good many adjectives is considered unfit by these very people when 'compared with an ordinary student from a British or American university whom these people have had little chance to know. If one did not underrate such education, class and testimonials and hence the teachers one would simply be naive and silly. This does not stop here. This starts a whole series of reactions. The teachers are not respected and therefore whatever they say is not con-

sidered good enough. One has to have further proof of their knowledge. The student loses the little confidence he has when he joins the department and to acquire this commodity he has to make a journey to the West. So the fundamental problem with Indian department-of education is not that they are small or that they are not well staffed, but that they are staffed with persons who lack confidence in themselves to value their own judgments — till it has been approved by an outsider. Any increase in the size of the department would not improve it. What we need is faith first in ourselves and then in fellow Indians. It is because of this lack of trust in ourselves that our educational institutions still remain feeders to the British and American universities. Our departments cannot grow till these can produce their own members.

The impression that education abroad is a useful thing, particularly because of the greater facilities for the performance of the second of the two functions mentioned above, needs to be cut down to size. These universities are rich to afford costly apparatus to help the analysis and appreciation of ideas. But one must not forget that this function is purely ancillary and not fundamental. If one takes a look at China and Japan which because of the language problem cannot avail of these facilities in the west, one can appreciate the importance of the first function of creating self-confidence in the student. This comes basically from teachers who have confidence in themselves. Sooner or later we have to face the fact that we must ourselves respect our own graduates. If we did respect our universities then perhaps Professor Dasgupta would not find such a paucity of educated people in India.

D K DIWAN

Birmingham University
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February, 25.