

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN SOUTH INDIA*

By Mr. H. C. PAPWORTH, M. A., O. B. E.
(Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Travancore.)

[A Symposium of the aims and direction of higher education in the Madras Province has been arranged by the Madras Station of the All-India Radio. Leading Educationalists in South India have been invited to broadcast their views on the subject. Mr. H. C. Papworth, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Travancore University, initiated the series with the following talk.]

The Madras University

WHEN I first came to India, thirty years ago, the University of Madras was the only University in South India. Madras University was founded, along with the other two Presidency Universities of Calcutta and Bombay in 1857, and for 59 years—that is, until the foundation of Mysore University in 1916—it reigned alone and satisfied the needs of all who desired university education in the Presidency and in the South Indian States. It was exclusively an affiliating and examining university; it maintained no colleges or institutions of its own, and, though prescribing the various courses of study and conducting examinations, it undertook no responsibility for any kind of teaching work, which was done exclusively by the various colleges affiliated to it. In spite of the laudable objective stated in the Preamble of the revising Act of 1923, which says that “it is expedient to reorganize the University of Madras with a view to establishing a teaching and residential university at Madras”, I do not think that the earlier main characteristics of Madras University as an affiliating and examining university have been altered to any appreciable extent.

Thirty years ago, when I first had the privilege of working in the University of

*With acknowledgments to the All-India Radio.

Madras, its courses of study were much fewer in number than they are to-day, but those courses were good courses, the standard of the examinations was high, and the general achievement of Madras graduates as a whole was, in my opinion, higher than is the case to-day. Various causes contributed to this, among which I should pick out as especially important the fact that classes and colleges were not hopelessly overcrowded as they are to-day, the standards of teaching had not yet become vitiated by the necessity for mass education, and very few influences, other than academic ones, intruded themselves into the management of the University and into the framing of its educational policy.

Ever increasing Demand

This monopoly of position and duty enjoyed by the University of Madras—which monopoly I venture to assert was exercised wisely, conscientiously and with the fullest sense of duty and responsibility—was first broken, as I have said, by the foundation of Mysore University in 1916, which was the first university to be founded in an Indian State. It is not possible in this short address to analyse the causes which led to the establishment in somewhat quick succession of a number of new universities in South India. The chief cause, I take it, was the fact that a single university could no longer adequately cater to the ever increasing demand

for university education on the part of all sorts and conditions of young men and women. This demand in itself was a laudable one; but I sometimes regret the speed at which new universities came into being one after the other, because it did not allow sufficient time for serious reflection as to the reformed lines on which it had already become necessary for new universities to mould themselves. Instead of modelling themselves in the main on the parent university, with its recognition of a School Leaving Examination as a sufficient qualification for admission, to be followed by the old-fashioned Intermediate courses and a two years' degree course, I wish it had been possible for some of the new universities to have started straightway with a reformed scheme of university education.

This, however, is not to suggest that none of the new universities possesses distinguishing features of its own. Mention must be made in this connexion of Osmania University in Hyderabad, which has shown that teaching of a university standard can successfully be imparted in Urdu. Again, Annamalai University, though following in the main the old structure of courses, is an example of a unitary, teaching and residential university. I served on the executive of that University for twelve years, and I know from experience the great advantages which have accrued to it by reason of these innovations.

Travancore University

The University of Travancore, which I now have the privilege of serving, was established and incorporated by an Act of His Highness the Maharaja in 1937 in order to fulfil specific functions, and to achieve definite aims and

objects in close connexion with the educational and industrial needs of the State, which were: impossible of achievement whilst the colleges in Travancore remained affiliated to the University of Madras. It was the definite intention of its founders that the University of Travancore should possess new features, and should not develop into a replica of other universities. An outstanding feature of the policy of the State is rapid industrialisation, and this places upon the University the necessity and obligation of continuous research. A prominent feature of Travancore University, therefore, is its concentration upon research, which is being undertaken in a separate department of the University, known as the Central Research Institute, wherein continuous research is being undertaken in Industrial Chemistry, Agriculture, Economic Botany, Entomology, Fisheries, Statistics and Public Health.

A New Orientation

An Education Reorganization Committee has recently sat in Travancore, and the recommendations contained in its report have been accepted both by the University and the Government. Many of these recommendations envisage drastic changes in all grades of education, including the University, and in implementing these reforms Travancore University will be a pioneer, and will, I hope, set an example of a new orientation in university education in India, which, judging from the criticisms which for many years have been levelled against the prevalent system of university education throughout the country, is urgently needed.

Unique functions and great responsibilities

I know that it is the fashion to criticise severely and to decry the work of Indian Universities, and I myself with

inside knowledge can do quite a lot of weeping when necessary. At the same time, it has to be admitted that, on the whole, Indian Universities have in the past faithfully discharged their unique functions and their great responsibilities. It is the universities of India which have produced the great men of the land in all walks of life—administrators, public servants, scholars, professional men, scientists, men of commerce and industry—all of whom have held their own with any rival in any part of the world. Indian universities have thus fully justified themselves. But in making this confident claim, I have perhaps hit upon a vital strength and a vital weakness. *At the top*, both in our courses of study and in our products, we are sound beyond any doubt; but it is when we come lower down—to the mass education of thousands of men and women, whose fitness for university education has by no means been satisfactorily gauged—that we feel very doubtful of the worth of our work. And unfortunately most Indian universities have become immersed in the factory like production system which mass education inevitably leads to.

A Hesitancy to be Pioneers in Reform

We are all conscious of this grave defect. Many commissions and many committees have sat in India during the past 25 years and have deliberated upon the manifold problems of educational reform. Many of the recommendations of these commissions and committees naturally repeat themselves, and many of them have become axiomatic. They are accepted as necessary, at least in principle, in all quarters, and yet in spite of the frequent repetition of fundamental reforms in these reports, we find that only very few of them have been implemented. We find a hesitancy on the part of Governments and universities to take the lead in bringing

about these admittedly essential changes. We find a hesitancy or fear on the part of universities to be pioneers in educational reform. Everyone seems to be looking to what their neighbours are going to do, and everybody seems to be waiting for somebody else to take the initiative, with the result that nothing, or at any rate very little, has been done. Take just one example. All educationalists, and perhaps other people too, are agreed that it is wrong to admit young children of 14 or 15 years of age into a university. That young age of admission has been condemned wholesale. Everyone is also aware that the so-called Intermediate courses in Indian universities are not really university courses at all, and that they are quite unworthy of university rank. These two things are inter-related. As long as we admit immature children of 14 or 15 years of age into our universities, and as long as we deceive them that by passing a school leaving examination, which was or should have been designed for an entirely different purpose, that are automatically fit to pursue a university course of study, we shall be compelled to start our university studies with courses of a sub university standard.

Yes—*at the top*—our research work, honours courses and professional degrees—we are doing good work and producing fine products; but it is lower down, at the stages of the Intermediate and ordinary degrees where the masses come in, that we cannot but be sensitive as to the worthiness of our work and its products, on which so much time and money are spent. It is here that I would like to see the universities of India setting themselves bravely and courageously to the task of reform, for there is nothing so detrimental to efficiency, to good education and sound learning, as a placid contentment with low standards.