

Educationist Ashutosh

Dr. Sujit Mandal

Assistant Professor in History
Department of History, Kalna Collge, Burdwan, W.B.

Received Dec. 29, 2017

Accepted Feb. 01, 2018

The way Sir Asutosh took part in the education movement was differed from how Vivekananda did. Sir Asutosh did not what religion to enter into the premises of education, nor did he thought in the line of individualism to be concerted with socialism. But both of them conformed in their thoughts otherwise. Both of them abandoned politics while taking part in education movement and expansion of education. Such view of Sir Asutosh was expressed during the convocation speech of Calcutta University in 1910. "I earnestly call upon teachers who hold it to be their duty to figure as active politicians out of school or college hours, to reflect on the special responsibility incident to their station in life, in the present circumstances of the country. Men of this type are not safe guides of the young... Let not the noble band of instructors of our youth forget that they are priests in the Temple of learning."¹

Sir Asutosh and Rabindranath represent a sparking likeliness; so far as their concepts of education are concerned.² Both of them wanted education for the good of the nation and education in mother-tongue. So to say they were contemporary. In 1892 expressed Rabindranath impressed his view in an essay *Sikshar Herfare* same views were expressed by Sir Asutosh while raising his proposal to the Senate which was supported by bankim Chandra.

What role was played by Sir Asutosh in education movement would be clear if we have sufficient data. For this, the contributions of some other persons are to be mentioned. Sir Asutosh also expressed such view in his convocation speeches as Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University. Sir Asutosh established residential schools. But Sir Asutosh was an opponent to religious teaching which was supported by brojolal.³ We find peculiar similarities, except in few a cases, about the ways and means of their involvement in the national education movement. In Iswarchandra vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra, Rabindranath Tagore and Sir Asutosh, we find similarities in most cases, as far as their thoughts and activities were concerned. Being inspired by Sir Gurudas Bandopadhyay, Sir Asutosh in his Senate proposal,

1891, presented his outline of education. Iswarchandra vidyasagar and Bankim Chandra supported him.⁴ Sir Asutosh and Iswarchandra vidyasagar had great similarities in regarding expansion of education, social perspectives, national vigour, love for tradition, sticking to principles and respect for duty.

The issue of mother-tongue as a medium of learning introduced a new chapter into the pace of education movement. Truly, the contribution of Calcutta University had an immense role in this respect, which was not only great but also unique. Through the years much many proposals for education through mother-tongue were made, but they did not receive nod from the English members of the governing body. Sir Asutosh did his best to arrange learning by vernacular, but he did not succeed in his life-time. After few years of his death vernacular medium was recognized by Calcutta University for higher education.

Sir Asutosh wanted to make Bengali the medium of higher instruction. But with the combined effort of Bentink and Macaulay English was made the medium of instruction. Sir Asutosh was inspired by Sir Gurudas bandopadhyay. After six months of the death of Vidyasagar Sir Asutosh wrote a letter to the registrar of the Calcutta University with an appeal to include mother-tongue into the curriculum of F.A, B.A, Hons. and M.A, courses. But in spite of the Indian members comprising the majority, the proposal was rejected. Sir Asutosh had to bear with this agony in his heart. But he did not leave his effort and waited for the right time to come. For the first time his effort failed. After five years of this effort Bangiya Sahitya Parishad was established and for its ardent effort in every session it continued to discuss on the claim of Bengali to be included into the University curriculum. Many scholars were there but all the efforts went in smoke. In the year 1901 Sir Asutosh took part in the Raleigh Commission as a local member. In the recommendation of Raleigh commission Sir Asutosh's view was reflected. 'The commission headed by Sir Thomas Raleigh which presented his report in 1901 accepted Sir Asutosh's twelve-

year old proposal that Indian languages be a part of University courses in arts for all examination.⁵

When all of Bengal as well as Indian to protest against the partition of Bengal, Sir Asutosh became the Vice Chancellor of the Calcutta University. At this time Rabindranath, Chittaranjan Das, Bipin Chandra Pal, Arobinda Ghosh, Sir Gurudas Bandopadhyay, Hirendranath Dutta and the leaders of this movement called for introduction of national education and as a result the National Education Council was formed (11.03.1906). On the part of Calcutta University Sir Asutosh came forward to advance the cause of the National Education Movement. In his convocation speech he reminded the newly passed graduates about the development of mother-tongue and said, 'Above all sedulously cultivate your vernacular, for it is through the medium of the vernacular alone that you can hope to teach the masses of your countrymen.'⁶

Although Sir Asutosh was the V.C. of the University his opponents in the senate and faculty were strong to oppose him regarding any effort to include mother tongue as a medium of instruction. So he took his steps to go slow. Not only did he call his students to teach in Bengali but he took necessary steps to make scopes at the grassroots level. In 1904. Sir Asutosh tried to move forward taking a cue from the law and teaching of law in vernacular medium. The Article 19 of this law said that from matriculation up to the B.A, level Bengali would be taught and its students would sit for examination. In the department of literature he appointed Dinesh Chandra Sen who authored '*Banga Bhasha O Sahitya*' for giving uninterrupted lectures speech to its students. In 1901, Dinesh Chandra rote in English to make the case for Bengali in '*History of Bengali Language and Literature*'. Sir Asutosh commented that this book would be helpful specially to those who wanted to sit for the M.A. examination. In 1912 by the guidance of Sir Asutosh arrangements were for Ramtanu Lahiri research fellowship to inspire those who wanted to do research and publish works in Bengali. Dinesh Chandra Sen owns the first fellowship. In 1913 it was said the duties of a fellow are a) 'To devote himself to the investigation of the history of Bengali language and literature from the earliest time b) To deliver annually a course of twelve public lectures embodying the results of his investigation; the lecture to be published by the University c) To submit to the syndicate every six months a report of the progress of work done by him during the preceding six months.'⁷

From the above prescription it is to be said that the fellow of the language should be careful and attentive enough for the exercise of mother tongue. It is also to be said that by this exercise qualitative writings would be possible to come out. Thus, Sir Asutosh took continuous steps for the exercise of language and research in Bengali. In the convocation speech of 1913, Sir Asutosh could not hold his emotion because in that year the University awarded D.Litt tittle to Rabindranath and immediately after that Rabindranath received the Nobel. Sir Asutosh said that his continuous struggle to eradicate the shame of his mother tongue failed time and again yet the literature could get a glorious crown in the assemble of scholar from throughout the world and for that he was overwhelmed with joy. He spoke how he had walked through a long way for this day to come. He told, '... our national poet who, to our pride and satisfactions at the present moment is not only the most important figure in the field of Bengali literature, but also occupies a place in the foremost rank amongst the living poets of the world.'⁸

Sir Asutosh was of the opinion that not only to acknowledge the mother tongue for the university curriculum, but also to inspire those who write in mother tongue outside its premises of the literature and history of it, would be among those of our duties received half of his success by the writings of Dinesh Chandra Sen and winning of the Nobel Prize by Rabindranath. Dinesh Chandra Sen in his memoir wrote how Sir Asutosh inspired him to write and edit *Banga Sahitya Parichaya, History of Bengali literature, History of Vaisnabya Sahitya , Gramya katha O Sahityer Itihas* , Ramtanu Lahiri speeches. He also was the inspiration to Dasguptababu and Vijaybabu for their immortal works. At the same time Sir Asutosh succeeded to Frame the MA curriculum for the University examination. Sir Asutosh had to work through many obstacles to achieve this. Actually what were to be taught in the MA classes was Sir Asutosh's main concern.

Meanwhile Sir Asutosh made arrangements for the examination to be conducted in four Indian languages. Sir Asutosh as a member of the Saddler Committee was able to arrange for the teaching of and examinations in mother language before the report of the commission had come to light. When the report was published it was seen that the report conformed to Sir Asutosh's prescription. The other part of the report was, 'The elaborate scheme recently adopted by the University for the critical, historical and comparative study of the

Indian vernacular for the MA examination is but the copingstone of an edifice of which the base has yet to be placed on a sound foundation, and it is only when such a structure has been completed that Bengali will have a literature worthy of the greatness and civilisation of its people.’⁹

Sir Asutosh used speech his many both inside and outside the University premises. In the conference of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad in Howrah. North Bengal and Bankipur, Sir Asutosh tried to convince everyone presents that the mother language should be the source and applied to every sphere of life. He demanded for the development and improvement of the mother language. After a long time his dream was realised. He made provision for other Indian languages also and he established four departments in those subjects. a) The department of Indian languages; b) The department of ancient Indian languages and their history; c) The department of Islamic history and culture; d) The department of Pali. Commenting on the efforts of Asutosh for teaching these languages Rabindranath bestowed on him many praises. On 3rd Baisakh, 1326 in the series of lecture for Visvabharati Sir Asutosh laid stressed on teaching Bengali, Asamese, Maithili, Oriya, Urdu, Hindi, Gujrati, Tamil, Dravida, kanadiand sinhali. He said in this respect that a large number of people if united in the field of literatures, a nation would be born with national sentiment.¹⁰

Sir Asutosh never took any part in politics. In spite of that Sir Asutosh could think in terms of National Unity, cultural integrity and national education policy. He had steered in a definite direction to reach their goals. As Bipin chandra Pal remarked, ‘Indian Unity can only mean the unity of Indian masses and not the unity of mere handful of English educated Indians. If we are to work up a real cultural unity in India, we must help the masses to understand, appreciate, enjoy and assimilate this great Indian culture. And the first step in this direction has been taken by the Calcutta University in the institution of this new MA degree which raises Sir Asutosh’s claim from that of a clever and successful administrator to that of a constructive statesman, with a clear a vision of the future as he has a strong grasp of the present.’¹¹

Sir Asutosh fought unto his last for the expansion of learning in mother-tongue. In so many speeches in the convocations he told of mother tongue to be applied as medium of instruction. He had special emotion for the mother-tongue. But he admitted that so long his mother-tongue could not be upgraded and was

not ripe enough to become the medium of instruction. English would remain as the medium of instruction for higher education. His effort was developed in the ambience of the university. Thus the national education movement was accelerated. At that time there were no arrangements for the mother-tongue to be taught in the lower classes and its application could not be ascertained. In the report of the Saddlar Committee it was said that it was essential to teach the students all subjects in mother-tongue except English and mathematics till matriculation. Sir Asutosh gave emphasis on this part of the report and supported the cause of mother-tongue as medium of instruction till matriculation.¹² He realised that mass education was possible only by mother-tongue. Also a large number of teachers with MA degree were required for teaching mother-tongue. Sir Asutosh by his earnest efforts made mother-tongue the medium of instruction in higher education.

Outside the University campus there were political leaders to lead the National Education Movement and support the cause of mother-tongue. They wanted to refuse application of English as a medium of instruction and claimed that National Education should be totally devoid of English. The aim of national movement of education was to inspire the students in national thinking and dedicate them for the service of countrymen. If we analyse the nature of movement as led by the national leaders, we would find the enthusiasm to build national schools and colleges whenever the movement reached its peak. But whenever the movement became slow, claims for building schools and colleges also slowed down, as for instance during the partition of Bengal. The demands of the national leaders outside the university for mother-tongue were satisfied when Sir Asutosh’s efforts became successful. Later on many schools were founded by Nation Education Council but they were insufficient in number so far as requirement of the people was concerned. It is to be remembered here that in the lower levels of the university mother-tongue was not applied as medium of instruction though many other institution were able to do that. At the later stage demand for mother-tongue as the medium of instruction in primary schools became popular and as a result of that Mahatma Gandhi accepted the idea of primary Basic schools. He also laid stress on education for the revival of tradition and culture and eradicate the bondage of lower Castes and Untouchables. To Gandhi mass education was one of the fundamental necessities for the nation.

In the national education movement of Bengal Sir Asutosh was one of the most familiar names. Although he did not take part in any political movement yet he did a remarkable job as the Vice Chancellor of the Calcutta University. He was determined to emancipate education from the hold of Government and make it open for all. When Sir Asutosh became the Vice Chancellor of the Calcutta University for the second time all of them were staggering then by the waves of Non cooperation movement led by Gandhi. Being impressed by his call thousands of students left their schools and colleges and joined the movement. For teaching them many institutions were established, examples Calcutta national University, Bihar Vidyapith, Kasi Vidyapith, Gujrat Vidyapith, Maharastra Vidyapith etc. National education movement, thus depending on Non cooperation movement, was expanded throughout the country. All the national education institutions started teaching by mother-tongue and it was accepted as the medium of answering questions in the highest level of examinations. In the flow tide of this movement, it was not possible to use mother tongue as a medium of instruction and examinations of the Calcutta University. But it was accepted for the higher education level. Sir Asutosh was fond and patron of Bengali literature. In the exercise of mass literature and culture he had a great zeal.

They raised questions on Sir Asutosh and his efforts. Sir Asutosh found no other way but to accept mother-tongue as the medium of instruction of the higher levels for mass education. For this, he supported Filtration theory, although many of the political leaders criticised it. Sir Asutosh had a strong conviction in the theory. Beside he believed that highly educated students would return to the villages and be appointed teachers in the schools and *tols* established by the zaminders and thus they would play a vital role in expanding mass education. Many of the national

leaders ridiculed Sir Asutosh that he had only patronised education in high levels of the university and therefore opposed mass education. Sir Asutosh's reply to the question was that primary and secondary education would suffer for the dearth of teachers in their institutions if there were no highly educated men. On the other hand the young people would be deprived of the knowledge and wisdom of a high standard. To him those who favoured this argument are opposed to the idea of mass education. So Sir Asutosh wanted higher education for masses. He believed that if people aspired for education and if such aspiration were roused, the nation itself would make arrangements for mass education. And thus they would proceed towards National Education.

References:

1. Calcutta University convocation Address, 12th. March, 1910
2. Roy Sushil- siksha tatta O siksha darshan: Rabindranath Tagore, Calcutta, 1983 p- 654
3. An Interview – Madhusudan Chakra barty son of Brajalal Chakraborty
4. Singh Dineshchandra – Educational thoughts of Ashutosh, Calcutta, 1992. P-6
5. Calcutta University convocation Address, 2nd. March, 1907
6. Dasgupta R.K. – Sir Asutosh Mukherjee Annual Lecture, Calcutta, 1980, Calcutta University calendar.
7. Calcutta University convocation Address, 26th. Dec., 1913
8. Hundred years of the University Vol. 1, p-338
9. Pal Bipin Chandrea – character sketches
10. Lecture for the Bangiyo Sahitto congress in the district of Howrah, 1326 son
11. Proceedings of the Faculty of Arts and Science, 8th. April 1922