

Life-long Learning

We know that "enlightened government" depends on having a population that is, in every sense of the word enlightened. Often we have heard people speak about the "Enlightened Citizen" without stopping to consider what we really mean by this term. Is it, as it implies, the prerogative of only the intellectual? Or should all citizens be enlightened? It is this latter precept which interests us most for, in today's world, it is becoming increasingly important that each and every citizen be "enlightened." But how are we to achieve this lofty goal? Obviously not with the set formula our educational system has provided.

Now that the window to the world has been opened and with it the Age of Information has finally intruded on our rustic existence, vindicating perhaps the one or two prophets who "saw it coming" in today's world the "Information industry" has come into its own and those who fail to keep up are destined to be left behind. All this has made us intensely aware of how far we are lagging behind and most of this is due to our traditional mind-set. Because of this we have not kept pace with world trends in education and we might even say we have been content to let the grass grow under our feet. Most particularly we are lagging behind in the teaching of modern information technologies, not from the technical point of view for we have our experts, but in conveying to the common man the basics. In a world where global trends and globalisation have become pre-eminent, making it difficult for people to cope, we are morally bound to bring them out from their isolation.

We can, perhaps, take heart from the four-page document drawn up by UNESCO which defines the role education should take for the future so as to "secure the informed and effective participation of both men and women in every sphere of life." That should be our guideline. It is for us a matter of survival in an increasingly technical environment and if we are to survive, it is extremely important, for us to meet the challenges now. This must of course be reflected in our approach to education, not only in the formal sector but in all branches of public education ranging from adult to post-formal or continued education, for education is an on-going process.

The country that seeks to inform its people, is the one that will be able to stay ahead. Unless we can utilise the various mediums at our disposal, it is unlikely we will meet our goals. Apart from anything else, policy makers have a moral commitment to the people. Without education, an education that prepares people to adopt the role of "enlightened citizen," the full participation of people in society simply cannot be achieved. It is, therefore, imperative for us to formulate our plans and programmes for the future. The next millennium is already knocking on our door and as the pace of technology increases, we better wake up if we do not wish to be left behind. The state, needless to say, will remain the essential vehicle for ensuring the right to universal education, particularly for the most vulnerable groups of society. There is no longer room for antiquated ideas. If we do subscribe to democratic values, as we profess, we must also subscribe to the right of the individual to a life of life-long learning. Without this essential, we cannot even expect to profit from any community participation, nor can we expect to encourage and nurture the leadership we will need to steer us into the future.