HUGH B. WOOD [1]

Development of Education in Nepal

Improved schooling in Nepal is a result of cooperative planning at many levels.

THE MOUNTAIN kingdom of Nepal lies astride the backbone of the Himalayas. Stretching 500 miles northwest-southeast, from Kashmir nearly to Burma, it separates Tibet and India by approximately 100 miles of rugged, snow-capped mountains, precipitous gorges and valleys that make up the foothills, and low-lying flat lands that are part of the Gangetic plains on the south. The natural features of the country have served to promote, first, an internal isolation of the various groups of people among themselves, and, second, an isolation from the outside world.

It was not until the 18th century that unification efforts brought any semblance of national cohesion; even today, without modern transportation and communication facilities, this isolation of many sections of Nepal is one of the major handicaps to rapid development. Many of the hinterlands are 20 to 30 days removed from the capital.

It was largely because of the design of the ruling dynasty of prime ministers from 1846 to 1951 that Nepal remained aloof from the rest of the world during this period of development in the west. Isolation provided stability and security; contacts with other countries would have upset the medieval system of controls. Nevertheless, the pressures resulting from India's freedom, the Communist invasion of Tibet, and the return of thousands of world-wise Gurkha soldiers to their villages following World War II, contributed to a successful overthrow of the Rana regime in 1951. Since that time, the King and his supporters have been attempting to develop a democratic form of government. The first country-wide elections are being held as this goes to press.

Prior to 1951, education in Nepal was practically nonexistent. There were six high schools, four of which were in the central Kathmandu valley. There was one small college in the capital. It is estimated that there may have been about 100 primary schools, but many of these were little more than tutoring classes. Education was discouraged, even prohibited except for sons of the government officials.

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But as one pundit has put it, "There was a great thirst for knowledge." By 1954, there were 1200 primary schools, 83 high schools, and 14 new colleges! These sprang up largely through local initiative, totally without professional supervision, and with only meager financial support.

A New Plan

Early in 1954, the Minister of Education appointed a 46-man National Education Planning Commission,[2] which, sitting for a full year, surveyed existing educational trends and mapped out a master plan for education in Nepal. The Commission's report, *Education in Nepal*,[3] is the basis for educational developments since 1954 and for the program here outlined.[4]

The Commission's plan establishes four major goals: (a) five years of universal primary education within 25 years; (b) multipurpose secondary education for about 20 percent of the nation's youth, and at least one high school in every one of the 32 political districts within ten years; (c) a national residential university within five years, and some form of higher education for about 5 percent of the youth within ten years; (d) adult education (including literacy) for all who desire it within 15 years.

Primary schools are to be coeducational and open to all, regardless of creed or caste. An attempt will be made to develop functional literacy, national and civic consciousness, and general vocational readiness within the five-year period. For some time, primary education will be terminal for most children.

The curriculum for this group has been planned by the staff of the Demonstration School and the College of Education. It is based on a survey of needs of children of Nepalese villages, but also provides for the pupils who will go on to high school. The core centers around three basic areas: Clothing Ourselves, Feeding Ourselves, and Housing Ourselves. The skills—mother tongue, mathematics, and general vocational skills—are integrated around the core. Broad units have been developed which take the pupils from their own environment—Life on the Plains, Life in the Valley, or Life in the Mountains, as the case may be—to that of other parts of the country, the continent, and then the world. The curriculum also includes many experiences in nature study, local science, health and sanitation, and culture—music, folkdancing, folklore, literature, drama, and art.

The need for multipurpose or comprehensive secondary education has been recognized. Agriculture and home science are the basic vocational needs, but other skills will be provided for as needed. For example, the capital and several industrial centers will be able to support commercial and industrial education departments. It is hoped that many high schools will offer courses in primary school teaching (as the need exceeds the capacities of the present normal schools), nursing, health (for local level public health specialists), and college preparation, as well as pro-

[2] On which the author served as Educational Advisor.

[3] Copies of *Education in Nepal* are available from The American-Nepal Education Foundation, Box 5111, Eugene, Oregon, at $6.00.

[4] The development of education in Nepal has benefited from the absence of firmly established patterns, which might compete with new and practical patterns which are based on analyses of indigenous needs. The program presented here ignores existing patterns, which, because educational efforts in the past have been so limited, will have very little influence on educational development during the years ahead.

PHOTO COURTESY THE AUTHOR

A primary class in Nepal.

fessional work in agriculture and home science to develop local level workers.

The high school curriculum (a five-year program) provides a common core of subjects for general education—social education, science, skills, culture—but of necessity is departmentalized to meet the various vocational needs. High school will be terminal for the majority who attend, and will have as its major purpose the preparation of youth for life in the local community. English, commonly used and required in the colleges, will be an optional subject in the high school curriculum.

High school teachers hope to give up the terminal examination to provide more freedom in methods and to make the curriculum more practical and functional. The first step is to shift it to the colleges as an entrance examination and the substitution of more realistic measures of achievement at the secondary school level.

Climate plays no small role in education in Nepal. Because it is generally mild, many primary schools meet under a spreading pipul tree, on the steps of a temple, or in a bamboo-thatched hut. High schools may be found in thatched buildings. Glass is seldom used, or local community pride and use, will be housed in substantial brick or stone buildings. Glass is seldom used, or needed, in the windows.

In the hills, schools usually are in session from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., during the warm part of the day. On the plains, schools operate from daylight until 10:00 a.m. to escape the intense heat of the day. There are many holidays, but schools meet 5½ or 6 days a week in order

PHOTO COURTESY THE AUTHOR

An old school building—Pokhara High School, Nepal.

to satisfy the 200 days-per-year requirement of the government. A two months vacation comes in January and February in the hills, in May and June on the plains.

Status of Teachers

The Nepalese teacher has a mixed status. In some rural communities, he may hold a position of prominence—first-aid expert, member of the village council, scribe, magistrate, and general confessor and advisor to all. In other villages, and particularly in larger communities, the teacher has no special status. In no case does he have a very favorable economic status. The pay of a primary school teacher often is as low or lower than a common laborer; if he has been professionally trained in the newly established normal schools, he may receive twice as much. A high school teacher receives the same as a government clerk of similar qualifications, or less. In most instances the teacher has to augment his salary by private tutoring, often doubling or tripling his income.

The typical primary school teacher will have had four to six or eight years of schooling, or may be a retired Gurkha soldier. The typical high school teacher will be a high school graduate and may have gone to college for a year or two.

Although professional organizations are being formed, little attention has yet been given to fringe benefits and retirement plans. A few teachers, who teach in schools entirely supported by the central government, will share in a modest pension plan for all government workers.

Education in Nepal is to be administered, supervised, and financed on a national-regional-local basis. The Min-

istry of Education is responsible for all education. The country has been divided into seven supervisory zones, each with an inspector and several sub-inspectors. Local "managing committees" or school boards are being encouraged, and each school has a head teacher or headmaster. In practice, initiative and finance flow both ways. Many schools are started by local initiative and finance and later receive help from the regional and central authorities; at the same time, the central government encourages the opening and development of schools through financial grants. Eventually, it is hoped that primary education will be financed entirely by local efforts, secondary education will be jointly financed, and higher education will be provided by the central government.

In conclusion, certain characteristics of education in Nepal stand out:

1. There had been practically no organized education prior to 1951.
2. The present plans have evolved through group study and action, with the assistance of professional resource persons.
3. This planning has not been handicapped by traditions, customs, and established patterns.
4. The resulting program is based on the indigenous needs of the people served; it preserves, expands, and adapts the cultural values of an old civilization to the modern world.
5. The program is flexible, so that it can pace other developments in the country.
6. There is a firm belief that education is essential to the democratic way of life, to which the country is dedicated, and that education is the *first step* in the development of the country.

A new primary school, Nepal.

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