

# "NATIVE EDUCATION" AND THE AFRICAN TEACHERS

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In order to understand and evaluate the function and the status of the African teacher in the complex of South African society, it is essential to understand and evaluate the function of education among the Africans. The African teacher is the unfortunate product of, and the even more unfortunate instrument of what is commonly called "Native Education." The history of South Africa, and its social, political and economic structures, reveals the existence of this qualified education. So-called Native Education is a reality—it is a term applied to a process, which is intended for the African and not for the European. It differs from European education in purpose, administration and development. It is in the field of education that discrimination and segregation are most completely implemented.

The history and aims of African education expose the falsehood of the claim that Europeans came to South Africa with benevolent motives of civilising the African and of bestowing upon him the benefits of Western Civilisation. What is clear is that the desirability of 'educating' the African, and the form of education have been functions of the economic value of the African to the European. "Native education" is the product of the economic structure and development of South Africa.

The first schools were started by the early missionaries, and the earliest was in the Cape at Genadendal in 1799. The different missionary societies established different mission schools. The missionaries regarded education as an ancillary to the evangelization of the African. The process was simple, the African had to be taught to read and write, so that he should be able to read the Bible and be converted, after which he qualified as a teacher and evangelist. He was then sent out to teach and convert his people. Originally the farmers opposed the evangelization and education of the African, as they regarded Christianity and Education as the prerogatives of the White man. Later, however, when they realized that the 'educated and christianized Hottentot' was more industrious, efficient and loyal, they sanctioned the process. It may be noted that 'industrious' means readiness to work for Europeans, and loyalty means unquestioning submission to European authority. The missionaries continued their work of educating the African without any assistance from the European community until 1854. The results of their work were pious Evangelist-Teachers and industrious and loyal labourers.

In 1854, Sir George Grey, then Governor of the Cape, realised that the 'education' of the African was a means of solving the Frontier farmers' land and labour problems. He realized that the education and evangelization of the African had the effect of 'pacifying' him, which really means that the resistance of the Africans to European demands of land and labour has been lowered. In Sir Grey's own words, "the education of the African was an attempt to bring them to civilisation and Christianity, and thus to change by degrees our present unconquered and apparently irreclaimable foes into friends, who may have common interests with us."

Education then was a strategy of invasion. Not only was education used to pacify the African, but also through it his needs for European commodities were to be increased, so that when bartering was inadequate to satisfy his needs, he should readily exchange his labour for money to acquire these commodities and so make him dependent on the European. In order to expedite the process of stimulating new wants, African labourers were paid partly in money and partly in kind, and commodities such as Coffee, Sugar and Tobacco were used. With this purpose in view, the Governments of the Cape and later

of the other Republics subsidized the Mission Schools. In return for these subsidies, the governments acquired the right of regulating the Curricula. The Curriculum consisted in a little English to enable Africans to read the Bible and be able to interpret; manual and industrial training.

Towards the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th, minerals were discovered and towns and industries developed and the demand for labour increased. Originally Indians and Chinese were imported, but this system was inadequate and the various Republics devised means of disturbing the self-sufficiency and independence of the African in order to induce him to sell his labour to the European as cheaply as possible. Apart from the imposition of Taxation one of the methods which was carefully studied was education. This is clearly indicated in the Reports of various Commissions and Directors of the period.

### Report of the Directors of the Transvaal 1903.

"The view mentioned above of **teach the Native to work**" contains the true principle by which the education of the Native is to be regulated and controlled, and no proposal for a plan of Native education would be likely to **commend itself to the sense of the great majority of the people of this country** that did not contemplate the ultimate social place of the Native as an efficient worker. . . . The tentative scheme prescribed ~~the results of which have yet to be tried and determined make provision therefore,~~ in the first place for the combination of manual training with elementary instruction and in the second place for the shaping of that elementary instruction so as to equip the Native for a more intelligent comprehension of **any industrial work before him.**"

This report is an admirable thesis on the prevailing views of the aims and function of "Native Education." "The great majority of the **people** of the country" are the European employers who had determined the ultimate social place of the African as an efficient worker. The Africans were not, and are not regarded as **people**. There is an admission in this report that by some different process of education the Africans could become something other than mere efficient workers, but this would not commend itself to the Europeans, because it would not facilitate the exploitation of the African. The governments implemented their plans of producing efficient cheap labourers and the products of this system of education were pious Evangelists, loyal teachers and industrious workers. A few of the Africans escaped this triangle after completing their industrial and teachers' training courses, and they managed to get overseas, where they pursued the type of education which would not commend itself to itself to the sense of South African Europeans. Some qualified as doctors, others as Lawyers and Graduates. It is some of these **accidents** of "Native Education" who later organised the Africans to struggle for their liberation, notable amongst these is Dr. Ka I. Seme, the first President of the African National Congress (1912). The fundamental principle, then, of "Native Education" is that it is undertaken because it is economically convenient for the European. It does not contemplate any benefit for the African, since his ultimate social place is as an efficient worker and any other plan does not commend itself to the European. It is now a little less than 50 years since the above report was written. Many things have changed since then; many things are now accepted as normal which were then regarded as abnormal. And all these radical changes "the sense of the great majority of the people of this country" has not changed.

African teachers are still mainly trained in missionary training institutions, which are subsidised by the Government. There are 33 Mission (State-aided) training institutions in South Africa. In almost all these schools, the trainees have to clean their classrooms, school premises daily and, where they are in residence, they have to do their own washing and ironing. In many such institutions the girls who are in training have to cook for themselves in turn. Whilst it is generally argued that this has to be the case with African students because the fees are not adequate to pay the wages of a large number of employees in these institutions, whose duties it would be to clean the premises, clothing and cook for the students as in European schools, it is submitted that the inadequacy of the fees is due to the principle of under-paying the African and these

menial duties which the students must do, are in actual fact, a preparation of their minds and bodies for their ultimate social place as workers.

For many years it was only necessary for an African to pass Std. VI in order that he could be trained as a teacher, as compared with Matric as a pre-requisite for European teachers. This low qualification has been justified by saying that it was a concession to the African, who has fewer obstacles in his way, than a European to obstruct him from qualifying as a teacher. This, then, it is argued, is an advantage for the African. This argument is completely deceptive and fallacious. The real reason for the low qualification is to implement the doctrine of "manual training and elementary instruction" and to keep the quality of "Native Education" as low, and the European education as high, as can be commendable to the sense of the Europeans. There are about 10,000 qualified teachers who have passed Std. VI only (N.P.L.), 3,000 who have passed J.C. (N.P.H.)-900 Matriculants, and about 315 graduate teachers in South Africa.

On completing his training, the teacher usually finds employment in the school controlled by the denomination to which he belongs. In that case he is employed by the manager of the school who is usually a priest, subject to the approval of his appointment by the Provincial Education Department which controls "Native Education."

The African child does not receive education as a right and as has already been shown, his education is merely economically convenient. In contrast with the European child, the African child does not enjoy free compulsory Education. This has two effects, and they are that the State does not contemplate or desire that all Africans should be educated, since this would not be convenient as South African Economy relies on the existence of a large reservoir of cheap unskilled labour. The number is therefore regulated, by shortage of schools, poor equipment of the schools, and the general poverty and exploitation of the Africans which makes it impossible for them to keep their children in school for long, because the schooling of an African child is an additional burden on an income so low that it requires the very child should supplement it. The second reason for the above is that the State does not want to accept African education as its duty. It is convenient to regard it as a benevolent and charitable gesture towards the Africans. These, then, are the 'controls', which ensure that "Native Education" will continue to be a process, which commends itself to the sense of the large majority of the Europeans. It might be argued that this analysis is not correct since it neglects the existence of high school education and even University education. High school education usually prepares the European child for technical or university apart from the fact that only a small percentage of the African children ever receive high school education. (Only 25 per cent. of the children of school-going age are in school, and of those who are in secondary schools are about 2 per cent. of the total enrolment. This is to be contrasted with the corresponding figures for Europeans which are 100 per cent. and 16 per cent.) The Africans are denied technical education, and those who do get through their courses at high schools usually become teachers, nurses and clerks.

The principle of cheap labour is applied to the teachers. Their salary is about three-fifths that of European women teachers, which is three-fifths of that of European male teachers, with the same qualifications. The African teachers with the exception of those in Natal, receive no pension benefit. When they are too old to serve the government faithfully, they have to find some other employment.

The general conditions of employment of African teacher are uncertain and vague. In the Cape, African teachers are discouraged from being active members of political organisations but the Department has no powers to dismiss teachers who are active members. In the O.F.S. African teachers can be members of political organisations, but they are not allowed to hold any office. In Natal, and the Transvaal, teachers are not allowed to be members of political organisations. These restrictions are in accordance with the fundamental principles of "Native Education." The teacher is expected to accept the "ultimate social place" of the African, which commends itself to the sense of the European, and he has no right either to question it or attempt to change it. The consequences of violating these restrictions is dismissal with the possibility of being struck off the roll. Although the African community really bears the cost of "Native Education" it has no effective control over the education of its children.

The Government deceives the Europeans by telling them that they in fact carry the burden of Native Education. This is of course completely untrue, since a large percentage of the national wealth of the country depends on the contribution of the African through direct and indirect taxation, and the compulsory contribution through cheap labour.

The teacher is caught up in a conflict of interests between the government and his people, and as his people have no power to secure him, he unconsciously resolves the conflict in favour of the government and he pursues his task as a loyal servant. The position and status of the teacher is no accident. It is the direct result of a political, social and economic system which does not regard the Africans as people and whose object is the perpetuation of white supremacy and domination and black inferiority.

The educational system is a process which is intended to carve the African child so that he may fit into a fixed mould. There is therefore no pretension to develop the creative abilities of the African child. The teacher, in the process, is merely a precision machine and nothing else. And should he regard himself as anything else, and his task as different than he is "a dangerous element." The insecurity of the teacher in his job is the insecurity of every worker in an artificial system which depends for its existence on the complete submission of people. The lack of control by the Africans in the education of their children is the denial of control of the Africans in all their affairs in the country.

In order to have a different system of education, we require a different society, a society which will not fear to develop the creative abilities of the African child to the fullest; a society which will not predetermine the role or share of any of its members. In short, democratic education is only possible in a completely democratic society.