

Book Review

Sikkim State Higher Education (SSHE) in India— Visionary Monologues of Koottathuppatty Natarajan Sundaram Mudaliar

SANJAYA KUMAR

Professor
Dean-Academic and Nodal Officer
NIMS University, Rajasthan
India

Abstract:

The present article is documented with five sections being originated from review process the book titled “Current Scenario of Higher Education in Sikkim” authored by Dr. KNS Mudaliar and published by the SRM University, Sikkim. Sikkim State Higher Education-- a promising sector for harvesting more with low expenditure on Employment Based Education is a visionary monologue by the author, set to open up new vistas to livelihood through education. The book is an educational panorama that provides a gestalt view on current state of higher education in Sikkim. Pictures that are depicted on the cover page provide a gross outlook of how challenging for the state to educate its citizenry. The blurb is being meaningfully articulated a paragraph where the author has submitted that the book describes origin and development of institutions imparting higher education in the state and gives emphasis on their present status. The author has claimed that an analysis has been made on the prospects of the SSHE during 21st century. The back side of cover page contains the profile of the author has been lucidly articulated. An Emeritus Scientist; recipient of Padmashree, Bharat Bhusan, Padma Vibhusan, Professor M.S. Swaminathan’s foreword on the book highlights significance of higher education, in general, in terms of cultivating humanism, tolerance, reasoning, adventure of ideas, and search of truth. Published by Sri

Ramasamy Memorial University(Sikkim), contents of the book introduce strength and potentialities of the state followed with historical development of state education, advent of modern school education, history and development of higher education in the state. Being documented with more than seventy six pages, the book devotes chapters on Colleges, Technical Training Institutions, and Universities as Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Before drawing conclusion to the entire endeavour, author has critically analyzed prospects of higher education for Sikkim especially with reference to 21st century. The book is not less than an epic being entombed with meaningful monologues and insights of a scholar who has dedicated his service for the cause of national development through education.

Key words: Sikkim State Higher Education, School Education, College Education, Technical Education, University Education.

1.1 Why the Book is a Masterpiece?

On receiving the information about the book, a month ago, the author of the present article got excited to have a review on it mainly because of two reasons—memories of 1993's visit to the state; and prospects and challenges before education in a high land state being carved out on the lap of Himalayan ranges. Two decades ago, the reviewer of the book had been to the state and visited for more than two weeks. Then, a few buses were plying from New Jalpaiguri (West Bengal) to Gangtok—the capital city of Sikkim. For a journey by a bus to the state through a number of mountains for several hours, one should have courage, confidence and patience, this fact is drawn from my own experience. The moment you step out from the bus rightly at the heart of the city of Gangtok, one could be amazed to feel natural peace and divine beauty with honest and hardworking people. You find a male coolie to transfer your luggage from bus stop to any nearby pension(hotel), the reviewer find Sikkim manual workers using a rope that are tied on their fore head and on the side it is tied upon the waist, and

they put entire load on their back. Though many of our states witness practices of manual labour putting the luggage/goods load on back, use of rope considered to be a little in-human (personal view of reviewer). Culture of the state has more resemblance with China, Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan; and though not completely but strikingly away from mainstream culture of India.

While education sector has been frequently questioned for many reasons and facing numerous challenges in terms of ensuring Minimum Level of Standards, the SSHE is an epic being entombed with visionary monologues of Natarajan Sundaram will serve as a basis for investors in school education through higher education in the state. Sikkim— a state carved out on the lap of Himalayan Range Mountains and nurtured by divine grace and bliss, has geographical resemblance with Himachal Pradesh, Kashmir, Uttarakhand and a number of north-eastern states, has progressed much faster than it ought to be, provided sisterly-linkages between institutions are improved. Dr. N. Sundaram is a renowned educational administrator, barring his golden depiction on SSHE; his scholarship in Aquaculture in Marine fisheries is well recorded. The title page of the book is a collage of pictures that provide a holistic view on the state of education and has portrayed girls' education as meaningful pathways for its progress. A total of 78 pages legibly printed book opens up education development related memorabilia.

The most striking feature of the book is related to its foreword being outlined by Mankombu Sambasivan Swaminathan, world renowned geneticist, and the Father of Green Revolution in India. His generosity is witnessed with the plight of poverty alleviation from the soil of India; Professor Swaminathan's insights have been major inputs for phenomenal growth of Indian Council of Agricultural Research, International Rice Research Institute, and International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

Acknowledged as “Living Legend” by UN’s Secretary General, Prof. Swaminathan is recorded in the annals of history as Emeritus scientist of rarest distinction and being honoured as most influential Asian People of the 20th Century in the Time Magazine’s “Time 20” list. Bengal Tragedy of 1943 due to acute shortage of rice prompted him to take up career in Agricultural Sciences that widened vistas to achieve laurels in the field of his expertise, as well as recipient of Padmashree, Bharat Bhusan, and Padma Vibhusan. Being the first Chancellor of the Central University of Sikkim, the Emeritus Chairman Professor Swaminathan has delighted to express his deep debt of gratitude to Dr. N. Sundaram for his sacrifice for higher education in the neglected parts of our country by establishing the SRM University at Gangtok.

The preface articulated by the author provides valid information about literacy rate, indigenous system of formal education, and historical development of college and tertiary level education. In the backdrop of the above, the present book attempts to summarize the current state of higher education in the state. The author acknowledged top management of SRM Trust (Chennai), Dr. T.R. Pachamuthu (Chancellor, SRM University), Dr. P. Sathyanarayanan, (President, SRM University), Dr. S. Manivannan (Managing Director, SRM University), Prof. M. S. Swaminathan (Emeritus Chairman, MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai), and Ms. Dipa Basnet (Director, Higher Education) for their timely support and bliss that brought success to the author in the form of an epic on higher education in the state. Author found it customary to introduce SRM University; though a single page is devoted for such introduction, it reveals a symbolic contribution of SRM Trust in the field of modern tertiary level education in Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Sikkim. One and half a pages depict biographic information on leading brains behind SRM Management, commencing with Dr. T. R. Pachamuthu, Mr. Ravi Pachamoothoo, and Dr. P. Sathyanarayanan.

1.2 Sikkim—Brief Introduction

The state is the home land of Orchids and Oranges, cites Professor Swaminathan. Being the 22nd state of Indian Union since 1975, Sikkim –the small state in the Eastern Himalayan range is well acknowledged for its high literacy rate of 82.20 per cent (as Census 2011) much above the national average of 74.04 percent. It occupies 13th position at national level and 3rd position among north eastern states in literacy. A tiny high land state has not only progressed remarkably in terms literacy, but has well addressed to gender parity (with female literacy rate of 76.43%). Such phenomenal achievements attributed to informal and incidental education, as Dr. N. Sundaram mentioned in the preface of the book. Looking at its progressive graph on gross development, the state government has implemented “Shakshar Bharat Mission” to optimize literacy to Cent percent literacy by 2015.

The author cited that Sikkim is derived from “ Su-Khim or Soo-Him” and known as “Be-Yul-Demoshang” in Tibetan, meaning “hidden valley of rice” is claimed to be “Most Sacred and Sanctified” land. It is the second smallest state of the country and is “believed that Kiratas as primitive people lived in Sikkim”. Having a total area of 2818 sq miles stretching 70 miles from south to north and 40 miles from east to west, it is spread below the Kanchenjunga mountain whose enchanting view mesmerizes thousands of tourist flown from various parts of the country and the world. The state is connected to Tibet and Bhutan through two gateways known as Nathu-La and Jelep-La respectively. The author tried to have a special mention about biological diversity(Flora and Fauna)—dense forests, varieties of orchids and shrubbery, thousands of flowering plants, forests are its real worth being sheltered by a wide variety of wild animals including Himalayan black and brown bear, snow leopard, Sambhar, Barking dear , Panda.

Religion has been the potent social medium through which nations across globe witness national and human resource development through educational development, in other words, religious institutions fundamentally laid foundation of learning and education. Buddhist monastic education system, initially laid the foundation of state's development followed by Hindu perspective of Pathsala education. Since 1880 onwards western thought based modern education was introduced by Christian missionaries followed by the Durbar administration and Private Native Enterprises in Sikkim (Dewan, 2012). As Night College, the first degree college was established in 1977. Educational development in the state was addressed by the Department of Education by 1945 and a directorate system was introduced in early sixties. In 2004, Human resource Development Department came into existence while Directorate of Higher Education was formed in 2007. Sikkim— Ornithologists's paradise has owned Red Panda (*Ailurus fulgens*) as state animal. The state is healthy and serene, but not that much wealthy as it ought to be. More than ten cash crops, two main crops (paddy and maize through terraced farming which is popular in Sikkim), a few pharmaceutical industries and distilleries are the major source of income. Unexploited mineral wealth holds the key of economic development and employment opportunities where SRM University aims to connect educated youth to industry and scale up employability. The River Tista(Teesta) is the lifeline of Sikkim, as Ganges for northern states. Lakes and rivers are originated through glaciers, and Rathong Glacier is most famous. All rivers are perennial being fed by snow melting of mountains and torrential rains throughout the year. Social and ethnic composition of Sikkim state population reveals that two principal groups ("Sikkimese of Lepcha-Bhutia origin" and "Sikkimese of Nepali origin") those are further divided into three ethnic groups (the Lepchas, the Bhutias, and the Nepalese). Lepchas are main native inhabitants, while Bhutias

of Tibet and Nepalese had migrated to Sikkim. More than eight regional vernacular language/colloquial languages, Nepali and English are chief means for social, cultural and constitutional communications. Nepali being widely spoken was accorded status of state language in 1977, but English continues to be the official language of the state till date. Three language formula is implemented in the state that includes English, Hindi, and regional vernacular language. The past was not as glorious as the current state of affairs in Sikkim, and it has witnessed quite large number of social, economic and political (positive and negative) turmoil.

1.3 Education System of Sikkim—Historical Backdrop

The historic development of education system in Sikkim cited by Dr. N. Sundaram is originated from Dick B. Dewan's (2012) book titled "education in Sikkim—A Historical Retrospect—pre merger and Post merger period", the book which widely referred by scholars.

Education being knitted with scientific theories and practices; and verbal, non-verbal, symbolic communications are central to all forms of education; hence languages become absolute for human survival. Alphabets and scripts make languages popular since they tune human interactions with ease and convenient manner. Evolution of the first formal and organized language is traced back to historical discourse of 7th Century A.D. when a Buddhist king developed an alphabet "Rong Chhyo", and he translated many Buddhist scriptures into Lepcha or Rong language. The next historical evidence on scripts include "Sambhota" which is known and used as "Lhokey" script for Bhutia, "Sambhota" script for Sherpa and "Tamayek" script for Tamang. The author of the book has employed his systematic search on genesis of various scripts, and though a large number of scripts are witnessed on the soil of Sikkim, English continues as official language.

The first landmark in Sikkim Education System (SES) is the monastic education, the vital form of indigenous system of formal education, is laid down by Buddhists in Sikkim. Author has presented a meaningful sentence (page 13) of the book that “Every monastery was maintaining a library for strong and preserving scriptures and images through which they contributed significantly to the cause of education.” Spiritual and life-centered education was the prime learning constructs for each and every family to function as socio-religious institutions. “Sanskrit pathsala” is another form of educational institution, which has significant impressions on the present form of education. By 1996, the state had 12 Prathma and Madhyama level pathsalas. Madrassa Education for Muslim population of Sikkim is another type of indigenous education.

1.4 School Education: Prerequisite for SSHE

The chapter third of the book is devoted to discuss advent of modern school education where author has confidently mentioned that “it is bitter fact that no school existed in Sikkim till 1880.” The Scottish Christian Missionaries are pre-eminent and attributed to the efforts of Rev. William Macfarlane—the legend for disseminating elementary education not only in Darjeeling hills but also in the Himalayan Kingdom of Sikkim. Quite interesting and mysterious is the history of modern education system in Sikkim, the direct taxation system of 1889 introduced by the British enabled Chogyal dynasty to finance modernized form of education in Sikkim.

Bhutia Boarding School (BBS) of 1906 in Biram (near Burtuk) as first, while Nepali Boarding School (NBS) in Lal Bazar is the second and in 1909 “Enchey school for Lamas” as third government school had been monumental in Sikkim School Education(SSE). In 1924, Tashi Namgyal Academy (earlier known as Sir Tashi Namgyal High school) accommodated BBS and NBS to its Campus and started

functioning with affiliation to Calcutta University. Barring these, Hermitage at Sahurbotey(in 1927), Rongli school (in 1929), Namchi School and Padamchey School(in 1935), Geyzing School(in 1935-36), Assam Lingjey School(in 1937-38), Dikling School(1942), Ghattay Dara School(1946), Chujachen School(in 1947), R.C. Mission School(1952)—were those schools who have accentuated the need for further education and education development in the state. To quote, “By 1960 Sikkim had 6 high schools, 13 Junior High Schools, 53 Upper Primary Schools, and 38 Lower Primary Schools totaling 110(as per records of education department). By the year 1980, the Education Directorate was upgraded to Education Secretariat.” Initially school education was under the control of West Bengal Board of Secondary Education and later brought under the ambit of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). Influenced by the National Education Policy (1968), Navodaya vidyalayas were set up in Sikkim in 1996. The concept of “education by mail” initiated by NCERT way back in 1974 laid the foundation of distance education and three National Open Schools were established. By the end of 20th century, the number of Secondary Schools increased to 72 and Senior Secondary school to 27. Though current statistics on school education in Sikkim is not depicted in this chapter, yet the author has painted a rosy picture of school education that seems to be hidden treasure for higher education.

1.5 Sikkim State Higher Education (SSHE): Past to Present

The year 1857 is popular for many reasons in India, one of them could be relating to the establishment of three universities—Calcutta, Bombay and Madras by British on the model of London University. Indian Universities Act in 1904 paved the way for establishing universities in India, and by 1947 there were more than 20 universities including BHU (1915), AMU

(1916), and Delhi University (1922). Dr. N. Sundaram has submitted in the fourth chapter that Dr. Yodida Bhutia's book (2012) titled "Sikkim—Status and Problems" is a major source of reference for him while sketching historic development of higher education in Sikkim.

State variation in quantity and quality higher education has been a prominent topic for debate and discussion. It is true that by 1975, not even one college of permanent nature was operational in Sikkim. Annals of history shed lights on three institutions (college level/tertiary level) namely Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (1957), Sikkim Institute of Higher Nyingma Studies(1963), and Sir Thudob Namgyal College (established in 1972) which have proven their worth. By 1995, the state could establish only 10 colleges that were mainly due to the contribution of private investors. The 21st century witnessed a few pioneering efforts in the form of colleges namely Harka Maya College of Education (in 2003), Pakim Palatine College(in 2004), Gyalzing and Sikkim Government College(in 2005), College of Agricultural Engineering and Post Harvest Technology(in 2006), Sikkim Government B. Ed. College(in 2009), Government Degree College Kyongsa(2011). The first and foremost university known as Sikkim Manipal University (SMU) was established in Sikkim followed by the ICFAI University(2004), the EIILM University(2006), the Vinayak Mission(2008), NIT(2009), and the SRM University(2013). Despite the fact that colleges, technical training institutions, and universities are showing an upward trend, yet these could hardly accommodate all those who have desire for tertiary level education. The author has showcased education developments at tertiary level in three chapters, fifth through seventh.

The fifth chapter has embodied facts on development of college education in Sikkim and by the year 2013, there are 18 colleges (as stated by the author) which have made their presence prominent in the region. Dr. N. Sundaram has

sketched meaningfully the profile of (18 out of 19) colleges starting with Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (1957) and ending the list of colleges with Government Degree College Kyongsa(2011). Most of these colleges are responsible for offering general courses and programmes and some of these have come up to the level of center of excellence in certain areas of human interest. The sixth chapter has included profile of two technical training institutions namely Advanced Technical Training Centre and Centre for Computers and Communication Technology. These technical institutions provide wide ranges of on-campus facilities. Chapter seven of the book discusses about seven pioneering universities that are currently contributing towards development of higher education in Sikkim. The first ever public-private-partnership model based university known as SMU(Sikkim Manipal University) was established in 1995, and by the year 2009 with the establishment of NIT, Sikkim as state on mountains has not seized its developmental activities in higher education sector since SRM University has been in the pipeline for its pioneering campus. Barring these the state has established State Open University and a Central university.

Before concluding remarks, the author has devoted a chapter on prospects of higher education in the 21st century. Credit goes to Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), a political party under the leadership of Dr. Pawan Chamling in 1994 that has brought noticeable transformation in the field of higher education. Dr. N. Sundaram reiterated that “the presence of Universities of Higher Learning in the State of Sikkim was very late and its development also is surprisingly low.” It is clearly evident courses other than professional and technical ones attract most of students in Sikkim, while students from affluent families opt for medical, engineering and other professional courses. Since the state has no Deemed to be University, the author has raised an alarm with dissatisfaction on current state of higher education. The conclusion chapter of the book

highlights gross developments in higher education. Since the entire state is carved out on mountains and has faced many challenges in recent past, growth of higher education in Sikkim will never be questioned. A journey undertaken by the reviewer in nineties for appearing written examination for college lecturers had a number of queries that are amicably answered by Dr. N. Sundaram for which the reviewer owes special thanks to him as well to management of the SRM university.