Interview with Fr. Sunny Jacob S.J.

Theme: Education – kindling of a Flame.

1: In what way will you define the present education system of ours?

The present system of Education in South Asia is more of mark oriented and based purely on memorization. Successive education policies of the Governments made it more ineffective and inefficient. In India, the proposed New Education Policy of the present Central Government is more in the name of Indianisation based on their ideology. All indications suggest a backward looking policy in the making. We have suggested more progressive policy proposals to the government.

Jesuit education in General and in South Asia in particular is attempting to make students and teachers persons of humanness. Ultimately all need to understand the purpose of education; integral and person oriented. We need to be out of the obsolete memory based
system to a creative and dynamic system.

2: Having visited the assistancy education Institutes what is the need of the hour for us?

The need of the hour is to come out of the deadly trap of our ‘satisfactory underperformance’. Our men must not be administrators of our schools; rather they must be more of animators to all our stakeholders. The need of the hour is to educate our men and our collaborators of the vision and mission of the Society and strength of our Legacy. It is also important to be united and face the challenges as a body. Towards these full time education coordinators for the provinces, especially those one have more schools, and also Zonal coordinators with more powers is a must. Provinces, Zones, and JEA must work as a team for the consolidation and expansion of the Mission.

3: Education being the major Apostolate of the Jesuits, what are the ways we need to adapt to live up to the standards of our society, A.M.D.G.?

Yes, Education is the major apostolate, no doubt. However, many of us live in the past glory. We need to be really Jesuitical; hard working, impartial, discerning, creative, intellectual, spiritual and people oriented. We need to be part of the Global endeavors, but acting locally, based on the Jesuit legacy.

4: What are the major challenges we are facing as minority institutes in the South Asian Assistancy?

There are lots of challenges we face today. First of all we need to feel the need for a more corporate sense among all the Jesuit Institutions in the South Asian Asistancy by strengthening JEA. Externally, there are challenges from the Right Wing ideology that are against Minority status for our schools. So, influenced by this ideology, the Governments and officials act against us, parents are instigated against us and we face many legal hurdles. These all affect our smooth functioning a lot.

5: What sort of an Education system would you suggest for the children of today?

I suggest a system that caters to the needs of all the aspects of human life. Call it integral education. The problem is, today’s system is very often memory based, mark oriented, and bookish in nature. The result is we make ‘intellectual monsters’ who do not know how to be human. Therefore I suggest more of a collaborative, cooperative learning system, a caring and mentoring teaching, and a skill developing learning system based on the understanding of Multiple Intelligence.

6: In what way do you see the education system as a means to kindle a flame for the world?

I believe only true education can change the world. An education that changes the mind set of people to a more humane and harmonious world is the need of the hour. Jesuit Education is a step forward in that direction. If education makes one gripped by the love of God and love for people, the rest will follow. The whole world will be in light. We all
need to work more towards that.

7: Looking at our Educational Institutes, what is the feeling you get as a JEA Secretary?

I get a feeling of satisfaction, encouragement and hope. I am sure we Jesuits will never succumb to complacency. We will work as a team, consolidating our existing schools and will reach out effectively to more and newer areas. We will assume the role of animators than merely school administrators. We need to train ourselves and our collaborators in Jesuit legacy and tradition. JEA is organizing National level and Zonal level sustained training programme for this purpose. Expert team is already in place. External evaluation is also on. We will set things right and move forward with much vigour and vision.

8: Can you share your experience of teaching and the role as JEA Secretary?

I love teaching, teaching is my passion. In the schools I worked, I used to teach as a full timer. Even as the principal I found time to teach, to visit families of children, meeting with parents and practice the Jesuit Magis. As JEA Secretary, it is a different role altogether. It is more of coordinating of all our institutions and act as a link between the International Jesuit education and JEA. The effectiveness of the JEA is greatly depends on the network among the Zonal and province level educational endeavours. I feel, we are at the right direction now, only the pace has to increase. Communication is a boon to our effectiveness today.

9: What is your message to the readers esp. those involved in the teaching ministry?

The enemies of success are: 1. Laziness. 2. Fear. 3. Complacency. 4. Lack of awareness of our roots. I think if we can overcome all the four enemies, and put on the armour of Jesuitness in our approach, we will achieve what St. Ignatius envisaged and many of our great predecessors relentlessly carried on. So be creative, be innovative, think differently, there is always a better way for us as teachers and educators.

10: Ten Years from now, how do you wish the Educational Institutes to be?

I wish our educational Institutions be centers of leadership in the locality wherever they are placed. In ten years from now I see our Jesuits play greater role as animators and great leaders. I wish to see our Educational institutions concentrate on research, innovations, policy interventions, and be centers of excellence in all spheres. My dream is to see Jesuits play greater role in shaping the future of the nation, as we did earlier. Let our life tell the people what we are and what we stand for. Time has come for us to be more proactive leaders of people. In ten years, I also visualize there will be innovative flagship programme for South Asian Assistancy, like Fe Ye Alegria of Latin America or Cristo Rey Model in the West, that will give us a new identity and a brand of Jesuit Institution. Let that way our Education be kindling of a Flame to the Assistancy and the world.

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