

An Approach to the Educational Policy of India

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- **Introduction**

The higher education sector in India is passing through various phases of its journey towards globalization and liberalization in recent years. Various issues related to higher education are being discussed in the seminars and conferences held at national and international level. One of such issues is 'assessment and accreditation of institutes of higher education'. Though the quality of higher education is being discussed for quite some time now, it received a real impetus with the establishment of two agencies at national level. The first one is National Assessment and Accreditation Council under University Grants Commission, and the second one is National Board of Accreditation under the All India Council for Technical Education in 1994.

It is with the arrival of these agencies only that the serious discussions and deliberations on the concept of 'quality' in higher education gained momentum. But unfortunately the supporters of this new policy misunderstood or (even it can be said that) misinterpreted the concept of 'quality' and badly failed to achieve its prime objective. It is being forgotten that the concept of 'quality' itself is relative and therefore elusive. As Prof. K.B. Powar rightly says, "**quality** is an attribute of values, which **cannot be** always **measured** and **quantified**" (emphasis added). This concept has become all the more complex when it is used with reference to higher education as there are various issues and factors that are interrelated with it.

- **Education in India: It's Background**

It is generally noticed that the intellectuals at all level keep themselves engaged in oft-used concept called quality of education. But if we really want to know the precise reason/s as to why the discussion on quality in higher education has started, it is necessary to understand the background of education itself in India. It can be better understood if studied in terms of three chronological stages it has passed through.

(I)Ancient India: - The educational scenario in ancient India was not at all satisfying. It was quite undemocratic as the education was the privilege of very few. If we peep through Indian history to Manu, we find that Brahmins were the only ones to be allowed to get the light of education. The Non-Brahmins including women were deprived of education. Indian history is full of such illustrations where the right of education was denied to even the talented and aspiring candidates simply because of the fact they did not belong to the Brahmin community. For instance, Eklavya and Shambuka were severely punished for taking their education which was deemed to be a crime.

(II) British India: - In British India, too, almost similar situation continued to exist up to the 19th century. But still in such odd circumstances, ceaseless efforts were made by social reformers and educationists to make provision for the education of the Indian masses. During the British Rule, the representatives of Indian people had started to express their views and opinions on variety of issues related to India and Indians.

Variorum Multi-Disciplinary e-Research Journal
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Education was one of those issues. R. B. Telang represented Indians as a member of Hunter Commission in 1882. Along with others, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule expressed his views about giving free and compulsory education to the Indians. Chh. Shahu of Kolhapur and Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda had already introduced such kind of education in their respective states. As the member of the Law Board, Gopal Krishna Gokhale had tabled a Bill of free and compulsory education for Indians in 1910. In an Educational Conference held at Wardha, the leaders of Indian Freedom Struggle discussed various issues related with education in India.

(III) Post-Independence India: - After independence, Indian Government with the policy of welfare state-economy worked out its educational policy. This policy of welfare state-economy has been reflected in various educational commissions appointed to look into the educational situation in India. The following commissions were appointed by the Government of India:-

- 1) University Education Commission of 1948 under the chairmanship of Dr. Radhakrishnan.
- 2) Secondary Education Commission of 1952 under the chairmanship of Dr. Mudaliyar.
- 3) Education Commission of 1964 under the chairmanship of Dr. Kothari.

The main objectives of these commissions were co-related with government's policy of the welfare state-economy. In 1967, the government announced its comprehensive educational Policy. Even the 4th and 5th Five Year Plans reflected these educational objectives. All these commissions considered **education as a tool of social change**. These commissions were in favour of the doctrine of '**Equal Education to All**'. The investment for education was regarded as a commercial investment but as a social investment and so it was stated that this investment should be done by the government as it represents the society. Even it was suggested by these commissions to subsidize the education of the masses by collecting additional taxes from the rich class.

But it is unfortunate to note that the government failed miserably to implement these recommendations causing huge damage to the education sector. A number of factors are responsible for this utter failure of government in this regard. The most important among these reasons was that the government gave first priority to the development of industrial sector. Even in the education sector itself, over-emphasis was given to the higher education during the first decade of independence. Actually the number of students who needed higher education (who belonged to the higher strata of the society) was very small, still the commission appointed by the government focused more on higher education rather than on the primary education meant for large number of common people. It shows the government's negligence and apathy towards the mass education. The second reason is inadequate expenditure on education. The requirement of this sector during the first decade was above 15% of G.D.P. The government had promised to allocate 10%, but finally it was only 7.8% of G.D.P. was allocated to education. Ironically even government failed to spend the allocated 7.8% amount of G.D.P. for the education thereby creating a huge gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'.

Rajiv Gandhi took up the challenge of improving the educational scenario of the country. His government published a booklet entitled 'Challenge of Education' and it was

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followed by the announcement of New Education Policy in 1986. Among other things, this policy promised at least three classrooms to each school along with other educational tools like blackboard, chalk, maps and charts. This New Policy was also similar to the previous policies, in which the doctrine of 'Equal Education to All', irrespective of class, caste, creed and sex, was propagated. The announcement of this (new) policy by the government proves that earlier governments had failed to implement their own policies. In other words, till the announcement of New Policy of Education, thousands of schools in India were lacking in basic things like classrooms, teachers, blackboards, chalks, maps and charts. As generally happens, even after the announcement of new policy, no substantial change or modification was perceptible in education field.

- **Globalization, Liberalization and Privatization:**

Whatever scanty efforts made by the previous governments and educational commissions were further stalled with the arrival of liberalization, privatization and globalization. Though it was believed that this transition took place with the New Economic Policy of 1990, the process had already gradually started in 1980s. India had started imitating her western counterparts. The policy of liberalization, privatization and globalization further resulted in the downturn of the previous educational policies. While imitating the western countries, the propagators of Free Economy intentionally overlooked the fact that India has not invested properly in the development of her human resources.

- **Impact of Globalization on Education**

Globalization has a multi-dimensional impact on the system of education. In the new globalized scenario, education is considered to be an object that can be bought and sold in the market. Students and teachers have become the stakeholders. It was a drastic move in the educational field. Actually this process was the result of the Education Conference organized by the World Bank at Jametin in Thailand in 1990. This conference was called 'Conference for Education to All'. During this conference, World Bank forced the poor countries:

- 1) To cut the subsidies given to education,
- 2) To link the education with the market and
- 3) To implement education system that was to be funded by the World Bank.

The developing countries like India, which were under the enormous pressure of the loans taken from the World Bank, were left with no other alternative but to accept the suggestions of the World Bank.

In 1991, P.V. Narsimha Rao Government signed the agreement and started to implement (directly or indirectly) the policies suggested by the World Bank. Following the guidelines, the government was compelled to make drastic changes in its approach towards the education. It would have been more reasonable if the agenda of government itself had been considered for implementation. Accordingly, the government made an announcement of not spending for **the education of the rich**. This approach of the government made it lose its control over the education sector. In other words, the government allowed the rich to have their own separate education system. Now the rich were free to decide upon what kind of schools they wanted, the medium of instruction,

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the syllabi and the examination pattern they preferred to have. It means that different educational systems were allowed for the rich and the poor. It resulted in the substantial decrease in quality of education in government-run or government-aided schools. It gave rise to the No-Grant system and appointment of Shikshan Sevaks as the teachers. Education was wrongly equated with literacy thereby neglecting the formal schooling for the learners. And above all, the decisions about education were taken by external agencies and the funds were also provided by them. It means the government had completely distanced itself from the constitutional responsibility of providing education to all. To do away with its constitutional responsibility, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government amended the constitution. But while doing so, the original meaning of Article 45 was completely changed. According to Article 45, it was the responsibility of the government to provide free, equal and compulsory education to the children up to the age of 14 years. But in the Amendment age of the children was changed to 6-14 years. It means that the children between age group of 0-6 are deprived of their right to education. After this Amendment the government took further step by appointing Birla-Ambani Committee to look into the education system in India. The report of this committee was submitted to the Prime Minister's Office. This committee recommended the government:

- 1) To distance itself from all kinds of professional education including scientific and technological education and hand it over to the industry and
- 2) To decrease the expenditure on education below 2% of G.D.P.

If these recommendations are accepted, the professional education will become the monopoly of the rich class, and the poor will not get professional education as they cannot afford to pay an exorbitant amount towards their fee. It poses further threat to demarcate the rich and poor. Such kind of corporatization of education would make it elitist thereby creating two separate systems of education- one for the common people and the other for the rich. In short, liberalization and deregulation of the education system will defeat the very purpose of the principle of 'Equal education to all'.

After such insight into the different stages and, of course, different attitudes towards education, the basic question arises as to why are we concerned about this concept of quality in higher education? This rhetoric question can be plainly answered that we have become quality-conscious, having fully accepted the new policy of globalization, liberalization and privatization.

- **Education after Globalization and its Social Significance**

Education is considered as a commodity rather than a tool of social and cultural development of human beings as a human being. With the globalization, education became just a product or item susceptible to be sold and purchased. Naturally, the scientific and technological education became very expensive and so affordable to only the so-called established classes of the society. Conversely, the deprived class was unable to bear the burden of high cost of this new privatized education. So once again education became the handmaid of the established class thereby enabling the members of this class to get whatever high-paid jobs available in the market. It shows that this policy has denied the lower classes entrance into the new economic world. Since this education is not for the intellectually rich but for the financially rich, this is dangerous for social health. Such system of education will hand over the social health in the dangerous hands

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of financially rich but intellectually and morally impoverished doctors. These doctors who have hunted their degrees by shooting 30-40 lakh rupees, will look towards their patients as a 'hunt' rather than as a patient and smuggle various parts from the bodies of their victims in international market. The above analysis brings out the fact that the education system which needs to enjoy sound health seems to be gradually deteriorating as it fails drastically to cherish its basic objective - Equal education to all. In addition, perhaps, the government is moving forward with its hidden agenda of depriving the masses from education by introducing new stratagems to higher education.

1) Under the pretext of quality, the first decision taken by the government is to introduce the National Eligibility Test (NET) and State Eligibility Test (SET) as qualifying examinations for the aspirants willing to join as lecturers in higher education - degree college and university. The University Grants Commission, the body that looks after the higher education in the country, made it compulsory for the candidates to clear the NET/SET examinations if they desire to become lecturers in traditional faculties like Arts, Commerce, Science and Law. This compulsion of NET/SET has forced many good teachers to move away from the teaching fraternity of higher education. It has resulted in the scarcity of teachers in colleges and universities which leads to deterioration of the quality of education. But it is quite surprising to note that the same qualifying examination is not compulsory for the candidates who wish to join lectureship in Engineering and Medical colleges. This glaring disparity regarding the eligibility of the candidates for the post of lectureship in such colleges forces the intellectuals to think whether there is no need of quality teachers in engineering and medical fields or whether such colleges are not required to promote quality education or whether the teachers teaching there are self-sufficient? There is only one possible answer to all these questions and it is that most of these professional colleges are run by the politicians and by their relatives who charge exorbitantly for the education. If the qualifying exams like NET/SET were made compulsory for the teachers of these colleges, then these colleges will not get required number of teachers. And if there are no teachers, then the students who are paying them huge fees will opt for some other institute where there are teachers or even some may move to some foreign country, least bothering about their additional financial burden.

2) The other decision that the government took for its so-called quality in higher education is the establishment of National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). This autonomous body under University Grants Commission assesses and accredits the institutes of higher education. Its objective is to enhance and sustain the quality of higher education in the country. But the shocking thing about the process of assessment and accreditation of NAAC is that it does not have different methodologies of assessing different institutes of higher education based on their specific missions, goals and objectives. For example, during the British rule in 1919, Dr. Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil, a great social reformer and educational activist established Rayat Shikshan Sanstha for the free education of the rural masses. This institute now runs 672 schools and colleges in the rural parts of the states of Maharashtra and Karnataka. The history of Maharashtra shows that Rayat Shikshan Sanstha has played a very significant role in political, social,

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educational and cultural transformation of the common people of Maharashtra by providing them free education and thereby changing their lives. Now the NAAC does not differentiate between Rayat Shikshan Sanstha, that basically provides education to the first generation learners of deprived classes, and other institutes that are providing education to the students of urban areas. The NAAC needs to employ two different scales of assessment while visiting two colleges established with diametrically opposite locale and objectives. The NAAC will be perhaps justifying its mission if it could faithfully evaluate that how far the institutions have been able to meet and achieve their professed objectives for which they were established.

If this important aspect is not taken into consideration, it can be said that the government is playing a dual role through its agencies like NAAC and grading the institutes on wrong criteria thereby creating a false picture of quality in the society.

3) Now these agencies appointed by the government are sincerely working to fulfill the tasks given to them by the government. U.G.C. and NAAC are asking the institutes of higher education to go for autonomy and take all the decisions regarding their syllabi, examination and fee structure. If these institutions accept autonomous status, then the higher education will be further monopolized by selected few and the majority of students will be deprived of getting education. In other words, granting autonomy seems to be one of the means government is using to shun its constitutional responsibility of providing equal education to all.

- **Education after Globalization Favours Multinational Companies**

After globalization, the kind of education available for the masses proved quite irrelevant and failed to supply essential manpower to the multinational companies. And so the earlier system of education is being changed to suit the needs of multinational companies and their ambitions of expansion. That was why during the last decade, many of the manufacturing industries in India are closed to help the multinational companies in expanding their business. The shut-down of 56 cotton mills in Mumbai and the establishment of new 65 container yards in and around J.N.P.T. are the eye-opening examples of this new policy. The similar situation is found in educational field where English Medium schools and colleges with their skill-oriented courses are in great demand over the vernacular schools and colleges where more emphasis is given on knowledge than on skills. The MNCs require these skill-oriented graduates for their profit-making businesses. And the government and its agencies with their own agenda as well as under the tremendous foreign pressure are directly or indirectly helping these Multi-National companies.

- **Globalization and Sovereignty of India**

America and her allies, with the help of handful of so-called intellectual Indian supporters, have succeeded in implementing the policy of globalization. They are using educational system as a handy tool to expand their profit-making market policy. By that way the multinational companies have succeeded to confiscate the Indian economy. And once economy is confiscated, it becomes easier to confiscate the political system. So this

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new policy of globalization is a terrible monster which is dangerous for the sovereignty of India.

- **Globalization: Just One More Excuse**

The history of education in India shows that the government, perhaps, is using globalization only as one of the excuses to go ahead with its original approach and its hidden agenda of keeping the masses away from the benefits of education. Globalization is quite a recent phenomenon, but even before that, the approach and attitude of the government towards the education of the masses was equally unsympathetic and resembling to the principles of its hidden agenda. It has been stated above that in his ‘*Manusmriti*’, Manu prohibited the Shudras and women to have education. Since ‘*Manusmriti*’, little or no changes have taken place in the attitude of the ‘brain’ of the ruling class towards the welfare of the masses. If such kind of policies in the name of improving quality of education continues, the higher education will become so expensive that common man with humble financial background may not think of such education which is beyond their reach.

- **Conclusions**

It is a proved fact that the developing countries like India have failed to understand the need for sustained investment in educational sector which is indispensable to make the citizens competitive in the globalized scenario. Though the investment made in this sector takes more time to bear fruits, it should not be considered as a waste of public funds as its value goes on increasing in the long run. Careful planning and its effective implementation is the key to develop our human resources in the right direction. It can be said that the lack of strong will power to implement the right education policy on the part of the government and the lack of sincere and people-oriented approach on the part of intelligentsia are the main causes of sad plight of education in India. The government should not distance itself from its constitutional responsibility of providing quality and equal education to all.

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