

EDUCATION AND NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION IN FIVE DECADES OF INDEPENDENT INDIA: A MOVE TO EQUALITY IN 21ST CENTURY

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The well being of a nation depends upon human development and the quality of life enjoyed by the people. A healthy and educated population has the potential to contribute to increased productivity which in turn can contribute more effectively to national development. Development strategy, therefore, needs to continuously strive for broad based improvement in standards of people's living both physical and socio-cultural. High growth and growth rates are essential to generate sources for social spending. However, the fruits of growth need to be shared equitably among all sections of society, especially, to be ensured that the weaker and disadvantaged sections excluded to share the benefits of growth. The Constitution of India not only guarantees equality based on religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth but also empowers the state to practise protective discrimination in favour of weaker sections. This has been very well reflected in the successive five year plans, though success in achieving the desired level of equitable development is elusive, and it is need of the hour to highlight issues concerning social sector: education, health, women and child development, welfare and development of weaker sections which are the core elements in determination of human development.

The role of education in facilitating social and economic development is well recognized. Education, in its broadest sense of development, is the most critical input for empowering people with skills and knowledge and giving them access to productive employment. Education, as a social process is expected to enhance efficiency as well as overall quality of human life, as it is the sole factor in critical thinking and reasoning, an essentially in development.

India has the second largest educational system in the world after China with 7.68 Lakh (I-V), 2.75 Lakh (VI- VIII) in upper primary, 1.52 lakh secondary/higher secondary



schools in 2003-04. The higher education sector includes 18064 colleges and 378 university (23 central universities, 216 state universities, 110 deemed universities, 11 private universities), at the end of 10th plan. In addition there are 290,000 non formal education (NFE) centres for out-of-school children in the age group 6-14 and a massive volunteer- based literacy programme for adults in the age group 15-35. There are 107.8 million children enrolled in the primary stage, (classes I-V), 69.9 million in class, VI-VIII, 23.70 million in classes IX-XII, and nearly 14 million in institutions of higher learning. Despite the expansion of education system that has occurred very fast, it is evident that the system is under pressure to provide a sufficient volume of skilled manpower, equipped with the required knowledge and technical skills to cater to the demands of the ever growing economy, both at national and global levels this accelerated growth of our economy in modern era has already created a shortage of high quality technical manpower and our education system is to be geared for the same. Also, it is important to understand the expansion of education system in terms of certain key issues of equity- may gender or locale or caste- across all levels of education, school education and tertiary education.

To being with, female literacy, considered to be a more sensitive index of social development is negatively related with fertility rates, population growth rate, infant and child mortality rate whereas it shows a positive association with female age at marriage, increased life expectancy, participation in modern sectors of the economy, and above all, girls' enrolment at different stages of education. No doubt the female literacy rate has steadily gone up from 8.9 percent in 1951 to 52.7 percent in 2001 but as compared to male literacy rate of 75.91 it is far away from satisfactory level. Though the Census of India in 2001 shows encouraging trends with regard to female literacy (Bose 2001: 126-28), gender disparities in literacy have persisted across regions and communities. During 1991-2001, the growth rate of literacy has been higher for female at 14.9 percent in comparison with 11.7 percent for males. The gap in male female literacy rate has decreased from 24.8 percent in 1991 to 21.7 percent in 2001.

It is for the first time since independence, the 'absolute' number of illiterates has decreased from 328.17 million in 1991 to 296.21 million in 2001, this decline among males was 21.45 million and 10.51 million among females. Therefore, 189.56 million



females (64%) who are still illiterate in comparison to 106.65 million male illiterates. A large proportion of female illiterates are concentrated in rural areas and belong to socially and economically weaker sections of society. Despite significant gains, female illiteracy varies dramatically across states. Except Kerala, the large gender gap in literacy rate has persisted in all other states (Bose 2001 : 126-31). The gap in male-female literacy gap is high even in the industrial states like Gujarat (22%), Maharashtra (18%) and West Bengal (18%). The low literacy states of the Hindi heartland – Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh along with three offshoots (the new states of Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttaranchal) account for nearly half of India's illiterate female population. Bihar is the most illiterate state in India, with a female literacy rate of only 34 percent. Despite significant improvements in literacy, rural urban and inter group disparities are still very sharp. The urban females were twice as well off in literacy as compared to their rural counterparts. Scheduled Caste (SC) and Schedule Tribes (ST) are at the bottom of the heap.

Considerable progress has been made in terms of provision of facilities and enrolment of children in the relevant age groups of 6-14 and 14-18. However, the goal of UEE continues to be elusive. Secondary and higher education have been mainly an urban-middle-class phenomenon and continues to be so even after nearly six decades of educational development in independent India. The system continues to be characterized by sharp regional and gender disparities. This is largely on account of the inability of the system to enroll and retain girls and children more in case of rural areas from the disadvantaged groups in the schooling process. The failure to provide universal schooling is a stumbling block in human development, since it affects both economic and social returns from educational development. In higher education, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of around 11% which is very low, as compared to the world averages. The enrolment in higher education, as expected to be from relevant age group of 18-23 years, encompassed a large chunk from elder adult population as a result of expression of distance learning opportunities. To achieve optimum enrolment universities/college should grow raise at an annual rate of 8.9% by 2011-12. Needless to mention, after establishment of National Knowledge Commission, a number of initiatives have been taken during tenth and eleventh five year plans to establish institutions of higher



education for both academic professional courses as well as promoting research and extension. However, the networking of institutions of higher learning to provide education at affordable prices has not shown any improvement as far as concept of inclusive education is concerned. The neglect of basic sciences and social sciences is another matter of concern.

It is not only higher education, but school education as well, where to increase universal access universal enrolment, universal retention, universal achievement and equity, major schemes like DPEP, Mid-Day-Meal Scheme (MDMS), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBVS) have been launched. The schemes of Lok Jumbish and Shiksha Karmi were completed but DPEP went up to November 2008. KGBV has now been subsumed within SSA. SSA, the principal programme for UEE, is the culmination of all previous endeavours and experiences in implementing various education programmes. The launching of Rashtrya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) in 2009 aims at enhancing access to secondary education and improving its quality. It is worth mentioning to point out that access, enrolment, retention and quality achievement in this process are essential to build an environment for enhanced participation in tertiary education for skill development to contribute to productivity in the first stage and good citizenship as ultimate step.

A new thrust was given to adult literacy in the National Policy on Education 1986 and revised Plan of Action 1992, which advocated a volunteer mode of adult education, to eradicate illiteracy, and achieve a threshold level of 75% literacy by 2007. It is expected that this target will be achieved by the end of eleventh five year plan with a deserved reduction in male female literacy rate. In this line TLC PLP, CEP, Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS), projects of residual illiteracy during 1992-2008 have made a significant contribution. And new Saakshar Bharat launched in 2009 has been launched the special focus on accelerated female literacy to achieve the desired threshold of 80% literacy in near future. In spite of development of educational system in post independence India, especially during previous decades, the access to education—may be school education, higher education and adult education—has not been universal. The disparities in access to education across geographical regions, location, caste, gender or income have not got reduced to desired levels and it is a matter of concern for all educational planners to evolve education in its real meaning of ‘inclusiveness’. The



other concern is quality of education, at all stages from primary to territory, that makes it somewhat irrelevant in both in economic and non-economic aspects, development process. The socio-cultural aspect of education to enable the citizens morally and responsible citizens in civil society is glaringly missing. The market forces in the era of liberalization, privatization and globalization. (LPG) have reduced purpose of education to only commercial value and it has led to shift in human values where both individual and society are at risk. We are to look into role of education in human development. It is need of the hour that family, school and society own the responsibility for education with an emphasis on development of reason and incultation of economic, moral and aesthetic values for creating a value based society in modern era.

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