

CHALLENGES FOR TEACHER EDUCATION IN 21ST CENTURY

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INTRODUCTION:

Teacher education has to be responsive to the challenges faced by educational system in general and the school education in particular. Besides, teacher education is essentially a context-sensitive activity. It has to respond to various changes in its social, political, and economic as well as cultural contexts. Developments in science and technology during the last two decades have transformed human life and the world. New technologies related to storage and communication of information have impacted the instructional process, given rise to e learning and re defined the concept of library and library service. Education that does not review and rethink its content and processes soon loses its relevance. These concerns give rise to educational challenges i.e. challenges from within the educational system. The same are being described in detail in the following sections.



Fig. Challenges for Teacher Education in 21st Century

SOCIAL CHALLENGES:

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One of the major problems the country faces these days is the explosion of population, which is multiplying, in geometrical progression Tea while our resources are increasing at best in arithmetical progression. According to many the Malthusian forecasts are proving correct in the old case of national development of India. Its population growth is neutralizing the gains of development. Increase in the number of non-earning people is posing a danger to social security. Increase in the number of out of school-child population is a challenge not being fully met by the education system. Youth unrest and inter-generation conflict are now serious problems. The quality of life in family and society is declining. Unemployment has become a major concern for the state and its economy.

Indian society is pluralistic with underlying threads of unity. Regional, racial, caste and community differences could not generate any serious conflict in our society. However, due to various reasons this plurality or diversity, which was a means of enriching the quality of life, is now threatened. Social harmony and brotherhood, the feeling of associative living and neighborhood has received a setback. Erosion of social solidarity and cohesion can lead to a fractured society. If unchecked, caste identities may lead to caste conflicts. From a social category, caste has now become a potent political force. This is not a phenomenon confined only to Hindu society only. In this context, peace education and social harmony should receive special attention. Curriculum Framework (1998) suggested certain concrete steps to be taken by teacher education institutions, but only a few could take effective measures in this direction and much needs to be done in this regard. Communal tension is another social problem that calls for urgent attention. In the past it was a rare urban phenomenon, but it is now spreading to rural areas as well. Various sub-groups of the same community and believers of the same faith are developing suspicion and distrust about each other. Religious or communal intolerance has increased and created conflicts between the followers of different faiths. Teacher education needs to be more conscious of its responsibility in this regard. Teachers can develop inter-faith harmony if they are aware of the essential unity of religions and are professionally prepared for promoting this important national cause. It is a national issue and teacher education has to play an active role for promoting inter-faith harmony and support inter faith dialogue with a view to inculcate saner attitudes.

Teacher educators should objectively discuss and identify the causes of violence, terrorism, and turmoil in their expository presentations. Students should be convinced that use of violence, terrorism, subversive activities have no place in a civil society. Teacher education needs to build a strong bulwark against these practices and ideologies. This is a real challenge for teacher education.

To some extent, education has proved to be an alienating factor in Indian society by transforming the nature and character of the educated To some extent, education has proved to

be an alienating factor in youth. Further, the media has also made its contribution in this process. Even a literate person develops the tendency to get alienated from one's parents, family, and his background. His pattern of consumption changes. Migration of youth from rural to urban areas gives rise to a number of problems e.g. unemployment, transport, accommodation, sanitation, health and hygiene, adjustment, acceptability, crime and corruption. In the new set-up, the migrant becomes emotionally starved, and marginalized from his own group. Soon he becomes maladjusted in his social environment. If timely action is not taken it becomes a serious social problem. This problem demands the use of new strategies in education and teacher education has to provide effective remedy for this social menace. The traditional social order in India with its ascribed status, and role, is incapable of facing the challenges of science and technology, industrialization, westernization, and modernization. The behavioural pattern, age-old social customs, inter-personal and inter-group relationships, values, and norms of life are incapable of meeting the new challenges. Traditional vocations are no longer attractive. Some of these developments are really worth appreciation but they demand their critical appraisal as well. The primary purpose of teacher education is undoubtedly to inculcate professional values and skills among teachers. But as intellectuals, teacher educators cannot be apathetic to what goes on in the society. To make constructive social criticism, teacher educators are now more conscious of its social responsibilities and obligations. Teacher education curricula and their transactional modalities can help achieve this without much additional effort and inputs. It involves greater relative emphasis, change in attitudes and social commitment of teacher educators.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES:

Indian economy is primarily agricultural as seventy per cent of its people work in this sector. The attempts to bring about change in this sector are yet to achieve success. Formerly, the country was importing food grains to feed its people but now the situation has changed. We are not only self-sufficient in food but are also exporting it to other countries. The use of modern machines, increased irrigation facilities, pesticides fertilizers, improved seeds etc. have succeeded in bringing about a food revolution. Different kinds of land laws have induced the farmer to make investment in agriculture. All India Radio and television have also helped the farmers. In spite of this progress farmers in some states die of starvation and some farmers commit suicide because they do not get proper price for their produce.

In agriculture the law of diminishing returns operates. Chance factors and the monsoon play important roles. Erosion of fertile soil due to various reasons, scarcity and of rains, absence of facilities for storage of water and irrigation are other problems the country faces now. New crops demand more water and fertilizer, but beyond a limit, this decreases the fertility of land. The farmers are also not aware of the various ways of avoiding different types of calamity. Subsidiary and allied vocations like fishery, dairy, horticulture; floriculture, piggery, etc. are not

being given proper attention due to non-availability of qualified teachers for vocational education. In this context the preparation of vocational teachers, especially for new vocations related to agriculture needs to be given top priority. Teacher educators in these subjects are not available, as qualified persons of these trades look more for lucrative avenues. During the last two decades the 'compulsions of a backward economy' and the "demands of a developing economy" have become self-evident. Economic growth is not a question of ideologies and models. Ideology alone cannot increase production, as it is not transferable into goods and services. Ideology is more helpful in the distribution of gains but it cannot become a substitute for production, which demands certain managerial skills, economic and technical inputs, spirit of entrepreneurship a skilled work force etc. There is a need for developing greater awareness about grass-roots problems through education. Economics of education and political economy of education can be important constituents of teacher education. Teacher educators need to explore how educational planning and economic planning can be harmonized with one another. Poverty eradication in India demands state action, legislation and restructuring of society. But these measures alone are not enough. There is a need to develop critical awareness about social reality in teacher education. For this in addition to providing vocational and employment-oriented education, theoretical courses of teacher education may need to be restructured.

POLITICAL CHALLENGES:

Educational institutions and schools are supposed to be the nurseries of democracy. They are the places where democratic values are expected to be practiced. The quality of politics depends on the quality of the citizens who are expected to perform political obligations and duties and have commitment towards the self, the family, the community, the nation and making. It is true that in an ideal situation, the conflict between these obligations and commitments may not arise. But such conditions may not always exist and a conflict between them may arise. Under such circumstances, the golden rule for the citizen implies work for the greatest good of the greatest number. It is the duty of teacher education to develop skills related to social and political life and to inculcate necessary democratic values among prospective teachers for this purpose.

CULTURAL CHALLENGES:

Indian culture is basically a composite entity. It has been enriched by all ethnic groups in the country. Education is the process of transmission, transformation, assimilation, and qualitative enrichment of cultural heritage. Indian culture maintains a historic continuity with a marked characteristic of maintaining a happy balance between change and stability, tradition and modernity, unity and diversity. Teacher education needs to promote this process. Teacher education needs to develop a sense of pride among teachers in their composite culture, preserve its identity, take precaution against superficiality, guard the youth against rootlessness and

alienation, make them modern in their outlook and yet preserve their distinctive Indian ness. To make prospective teachers aware of India's contribution to the world culture is important role of education.

The weakening of cultural content of education along with certain other influences has witnessed a trend towards large-scale value erosion in our society. It has generated inter-generational conflict, weakened the moral fabric of society and increased permissive behaviour, especially among the educated youth. Even rural and tribal youth have not remained unaffected by it. Value conflicts of various types are widely prevalent in our society. This affects the quality of life of our people. Value inculcation has become an important function of education and teachers have to shoulder this responsibility and synthesize the values of our composite culture and modernity. The diminishing influence of family and other primary groups calls for the use of alternative educational approaches. Education now needs to collaborate with other agencies. Value inculcation has, therefore, to be integrated with all its activities: curricular and co-curricular.

CHALLENGES FROM SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY:

Scientific and technological revolution, specially in transport and communication, medicine and surgery, information and communication technology, cybernetics, genetics, biotechnology and life sciences like biophysics and biochemistry, nuclear science and quantum mechanics has opened new vistas for man. Science and technology have transformed everything. The world has become interdependent and is turning gradually into a global village. Now one has to think globally and act locally. The economy of scarcity has been transformed into economy of plenty, but even then, poverty has not been eradicated. The traditional concepts of matter and energy, relationship between man and nature, theological Beliefs and practices, superstition and obscurantist practices have changed. Machines are replacing men. The process of production is no longer arduous and tiresome. Material comforts and amenities of life are made available to all who can pay for them. But man has become spiritually poorer, and his privacy has shrunk. Scientific and technological education, especially in the information and communication technology has become necessary if India is to march with the world and make progress in every field. Educational programmers for teachers have not made full use of these developments. But there is another side of the picture also. Science and superstition are simultaneously flourishing in Indian society because adequate emphasis is not being laid on the development of scientific attitude and scientific temper of mind. Its application to anachronistic social and cultural contents is not being given due consideration. Teacher education has to take serious note of the situation and evolve effective measures; otherwise the gains achieved so far may be neutralized or even negative of life is to be assured, modern science needs to re-think itself and re-frame its priorities.

The impact of science and technology, information and communication technology and genetic engineering on society needs to be fully discussed in teacher education institutions. Scientific temper has to be developed and its application for the solution of problems of life has to be encouraged. Its potentialities for making a human social order need to be emphasized. Its teaching can promote values like impartiality, integrity, intellectual honesty, optimism, fellow-feeling, tolerance and humanitarianism. All these should figure prominently as valued goals and s. Value in objectives of teacher education.

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES:

Teacher education has to support the efforts for the solution of problems of education of the country. These problems can be divided into y in transport two categories: problems of education as a whole with special reference and commit to school education and problems of teacher education itself. The latter life sciences is includes general problems as well those caused by school education curricula which put the responsibility of its implementation on teachers. The education system now faces challenges from neo-colonialism, which is not the same as its traditional counterpart. It is economic, ideological, and cultural. If not checked, it will lead to further educational divide. Teacher education has to be responsible to this. It has to understand many dimensional consequences and take appropriate safeguards against it. The country has to fulfil its constitutional commitment of providing universal elementary education to all and achieve the obliteration of illiteracy. Education is a fundamental right. To meet this obligation many programmes have been initiated. For achieving the target, the country needs well-qualified and properly trained teachers. The system has to prepare them and also train under qualified teachers professionally. Culture-specific pedagogy is influenced by many tangible and intangible factors operating in society. Chief among these are the practices of child rearing in the family and the community, well-established methods of teaching and learning, indigenous educational practices and the ideas of thinkers and educationists of the society. India provides valuable opportunity for blending all these together for evolving culture-specific pedagogy not only because it has preserved a rich cultural heritage, a large variety of educational practices outside the school in different regions but also because it has its own thinking on matters pertaining to education. The thought and practices of Indian educationists can be useful for reconstructing a need-based indigenous, national and culture specific pedagogies. In India, need-based selective approach has to be adopted by teacher education. Blind adaptation of alien experiments may prove counter productive and wastage of precious resources. The guiding principle in this respect has to be the concept of 'working with community' and in this age of international competition, teacher education should not lag behind. In India, there exist many poor, exploited, neglected children, first generation learners, dalits and people living below the poverty line who constitute the largest section of out-of-school child population. They constitute special educational groups. The urban and the upper middle-class model of education may not help them

much. The language, which the teacher uses, the examples which he cites and the courses he is required to teach may not be most appropriate for them. They may not comprehend the texts and concepts properly as they do not form a part of their experience and background and are quite unfamiliar to them. It may not be possible provide separate teacher education programmes to teachers for teaching such children for obvious reasons. But special pedagogical strategies to teach such students can be developed which may fulfil the needs of such students without unduly straining the system. In-service teacher education programme, which plug the gaps in pre-service education of the teachers, can prove quite effective in this regard. Modern education, throughout the world, accords special attention Challenges. the development of mind. But over-emphasis on the cultivation of mental faculties ignoring the development of heart and spirit has its own drawbacks. It often leads to skepticism as well as cynicism. Teacher education cannot ignore spiritual and emotional aspects of human personality. An integrated human being can be developed only if one's mind, body and spirit develop harmoniously. Teacher education curricula should, therefore, cater to integrated development of learner's personality. Taking pride in being a part of the nation and enriching national identity should be a prized goal of an educational system. Teachers and educators should therefore, inculcate these feelings among students ensuring that it does not come into conflict with love of humanity.

EMERGING CONCERNs AND TEACHER:

The context of and challenges to teacher education have been discussed in the preceding pages. In addition to these, there are a few other emerging concerns which teacher education cannot afford to ignore. The national curriculum framework for school education (2000) and that of year 2005 have certain expectations from teacher education, which have been well, articulated in these documents. Information and communication technology (ICT), open learning systems, value education, development of life skills, healthy, and productive living, integration of subjects and three language formulas are the major concerns of these documents.

Valuable contributions have already been made by information and communication technology as an aid to teaching and learning within school and outside it. The opportunities for acquiring information and life-long learning have multiplied. A knowledge society is now taking shape in our country. It should, however, not remain an urban or metropolitan phenomenon or a privilege of the rich. Information and learning experiences acquired through ICT need to be interconnected and transformed into knowledge. If ICT is not utilized as an aid to the teacher, may create alienation between the teacher and the taught and the gaps between the schools managed by the rich for affluent children and the widen. A situation like this may create a national divide. Hence the ate school where children from poor families and rural areas study can necessity to devise need-based, affordable and 'alternative' but appropriate' ICT and plan its programmes, which are rich in cultural and educational values. Teacher educators involved in

the preparation of educational packages through ICT may have to exercise constant vigil about its intelligent and expedient use. In a knowledge society, student need to be empowered to reconstruct knowledge and utilize it when the situation demands. It is true that science and technology have made our future uncertain. Making any prediction about it has become difficult and risky. But despite this, certain trends.

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