



Empowering People Through Education – Indian Perspective

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Demographic, Life Skills Education, Surplus, Sustainable Development, Women Empowerment

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ABSTRACT *If India has to emerge as a knowledge society in the next few decades, it has to get its act together. Carefully working on the building blocks and dimensions that will make this happen. We need to empower people and the best way to empower people is through education. Education is the only way forward. Against this background, a modest attempt has been made to discuss the rationale and philosophy behind the Right to Education Act. The paper also outlines the need of life skills education, vocational skills training, information technology in the present scenario. Education should be developed so as to become an effective instrument of social, economic, and cultural transformation of India.*

Introduction

Globalization has brought in an astounding element of mobility in every walk of life, be it the mobility of goods and services, of capital and labour, of ideas and ideologies, of learning and scholarship, of news and views, of arts and culture and, of course, of good things and bad. The human society needs education of the highest standards of quality, utility and value that should shape the minds and hearts of all the learners, particularly of the generation-next. Only such empowered human capital will make a difference in the life of the human race in the coming years.

Developed – Developing Countries Gap

The highest priority in education spelt out as, education is the means for bringing about a transformation towards a more humane and enlightened society. The most important and urgent reform needed in education is to transform it, to endeavor to relate it to the life, needs and aspirations of the people and thereby make it the powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of the national goals. For this purpose, education should be developed so as to increase productivity, achieve social and national integration, accelerate the process of modernization and cultivate social, moral and spiritual values.

This is the real difference between the developed and the developing world. The gap between the developed and developing countries is not on account of the national highways of Europe or the autobahns of Germany. Nor is it result of the scale of their factories or the export figures or the GDP growth. The root cause of this gap is the wide chasm in education between the developed and the developing world. This needs to be addressed.

India's Tremendous Potential- Demographic Surplus

- Working age population to comprise over 63% of the aggregate by 2016.
- India only economy with declining age dependency ratios till 2030.
- A third of india's population below 15 years of age and 20 % of the population in the 15-24 age groups.
- In 2020, the average age in countries will be-

Indian 29 yrs	China & US 37 yrs	West Europe 45yrs	Japan 48yrs;
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- India with 69% of its population between 16-29 yrs — youngest country.
- India's demographic surplus will be 47 million by 2020
- However Educated without professional skills constitute

69% of the unemployed.

Over 70 per cent of Indians will be of working age in 2025. Over young demography is an asset and we should prepare this population for their future role by giving them a solid foundation. For this, increasing the availability of accessible and affordable higher education and providing training in vocational skills is a key requirement.

Development of Skilled and Efficient Manpower

All education commissions directly or indirectly talked about development of skilled and efficient manpower. NPE — 1986 talked about empowering bottom end of the pyramid. This can be achieved through training crafts, vocations, industrial and technical training.

Efficiency need to be the core focus of these skilled training which will add to value to any vocation. These are going to solve the major problem of unemployment and this is required for the stability of our country. Recent initiative by our Prime Minister of India in developing skilled workforce all over the country is one of the most important steps taken to eradicate unemployment problem and use of huge human resources.

Vivekananda's Educational Vision

Swami Vivekananda, the greatest Indian mind since Shankara, defines education as the manifestation of perfection already in man. He also defines religion as the manifestation of divinity already in man. Religion, according to him is also a process of education. 'If there is a choice between football and Gita, I would want the children to play football, as there is the whole life to learn Gita. 'Football teaches how to kick and our children must learn it'. Simultaneously he talked of value- education.

Indian educational philosophy had always stood for a peaceful international order. Gandhi ji had said "I do not want my house to be walled and windows to be stuffed. I want the cultural and educational winds of all countries but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. Education is not a game of chess which can be played without a referee. It is a field where whistle blowers are required. He said that the "Education is complete only when one's head, hand and heart get enriched through knowledge, skill and commitment concurrently".

Education for Sustainable Development

An emerging philosophical appreciation Vedic education in India as well as the accumulated volumes of knowledge of many of the great ancient civilisations of this earth promulgated the philosophy of biocentrism. However, with the ad-

vent of modern western philosophy top-upped with the spirit of Christian thoughts, the philosophy of biocentrism gradually turned into the philosophy of anthropocentrism. It was Rene Descartes who glorified the philosophy of humancenteredness composed of all-pervading attitudes of frontier mentality, which made everyone believe that human beings are the superlative creation of god so they have the divine right to exploit the nature for their own benefits. However the works of philosophies of education contributed by Rousseau, Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi refueled and revisited the biocentric vision of life mirrored with sustainable thoughts and spirit.

Education for sustainable development should focus on key issues like

- Climate change,
- Disasters reductions,
- Biodiversity,
- Poverty reduction,
- Sustainable consumption, etc.

The Right to Education Act, 2009

Throughout the last six decades it was deeply felt that, due to flexibility of the institutional arrangement, the expected goals of the constitution remained a distant dream. In this connection, the parliament passed the famous Right to Education Act (RTE), which was not notified as a law on 3rd September, 2009 as the children's Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act.

Main Features of Right to Education Act:-

The main features of Right to Education Act are —

- Free and compulsory education to all children of India in 6 to 14 age group.
- No child shall be held back, expelled or required to pass a board examination until completion of elementary education.
- A child who completes elementary education (up to from class VIII) shall be awarded a certificate.
- Calls for a fixed student-teacher ratio.
- Will apply to all of India except Jammu and Kashmir.
- Provides for 25% reservation for economically disadvantaged communities in admission to class I in all private schools.
- Mandates improvement in quality of education.
- School teachers will need adequate professional degree within five years or else will lose job.
- School infrastructure to be improved in three years, else recognition cancelled.
- Financial burden will be shared between state and central government.
- No child shall be subjected to physical punishment or mental harassment.
- Screening Procedure shall be punishable with fine.
- To constitute a school management committee consisting of the elected representatives of the local authority, parents or guardians of children.
- No teacher shall be deployed for any non-educational purposes.
- No teacher shall engage himself or herself in private tuition.

Right to Education Act (2009) is a landmark initiative of the government to strengthen the education system in India. Under this Act it is mandatory to complete elementary education of all children, who reside in Indian Territory. Now Education is fundamental Right of every Indian.

Women Empowerment through Education

Education is the key which opens the doors not only to men but women too, develop humanity and promotes national development. And the requirement of such initiative is more at rural level where the status is miserable.

Education plays an important role in increasing the aware-

ness level on women's rights. When both boys and girls go to same school and grow up with mutual respect and understanding, women are likely to find more rightful place in the family and society. But the general perception of the rural people is that boys are superior to girls and with this perception and attitude girls are given less attention in comparison to boys. As per the Census India as on Jan 2012, female literacy rate in rural areas is 58.75% in comparison to 79.92% in urban area. If we bifurcate the education level of rural female then as per the NSSO Jun 2010, 46.7% are not at all literate, 31.8% are literate up to primary level, 11.1% up to middle level and only 10.3% are educated up to secondary level.

Educating Rural India

As per District Information System for Education (DISE) 2011-12, a total of 14,12,178 schools under different categories are imparting education in the country, out of which 12,14,282 (85.99%) are located in rural areas. The category wise distribution of schools located in rural areas is Primary (62.55%), Primary with Upper Primary (17.74%), Primary with Upper Primary & Secondary/Higher Secondary (2.48%), Upper Primary Only (11.09%), and Upper Primary with Secondary/Higher Secondary (5.82%). The gap in ratio of Primary to Upper Primary Schools/ Sections (2011-12) in rural areas is higher than urban areas- 2.26 and 1.42, respectively.

Majority of the schools located in rural area do not have sufficient classrooms for their teaching work. On an average there are 3.10 classrooms for primary only, 6.40 for upper primary only and 3.7 for both the sections. The corresponding figures for urban area are 5.10, 5.10 and 8.60 respectively. Single room cases in all categories of schools are higher in rural area, and only 10% of these rooms were in good condition (DISE 2011-12).

Need of Life Skills Education

Life skills education enables students to translate knowledge, attitudes and values into action. It promotes the development of a wide range of skills that help children and young people cope effectively with the challenges of everyday life, enabling them to become socially and psychologically competent. Life skills can include co-operation, negotiation, communication, decision-making, problem solving, coping with emotions, self awareness, empathy, critical and creative thinking, assertiveness, and preparation for the world of work.

Technology is the New Solution

As the Information Technology (IT) revolution sweeps the world, it is difficult for anyone to be unaffected by it, whether it is a developed country or the developing world, a literate or an illiterate individual, a young person or a senior citizen, a rural or an urban dweller. Once exposed to it, the knowledge and expectations related to information technology continue to increase for the user.

Technology is the new solution to all problems. It will only make our lives easier undoubtedly. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is potentially a useful tool for reforming education. Today, the use of ICT in education extends beyond equipping classrooms with computers and an Internet connection. Use of ICT in educational institutions should be encouraged.

State-of-the-art of information and communication technologies allows us to consider practical implementation of the principle 'Learning without Frontiers.' The information and communication technologies existing today provide a realistic basis for creating a global system of distance learning in the 21st century.

Regardless of the physical distance, the IT environment can now simulate direct communication between the teacher and the student, a key feature of traditional education, and therefore provide the advantage of this interface.

National Knowledge Network

A high level committee was set up under the Chairmanship of Dr. R. Chidambaram, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, to coordinate and monitor the establishment of the National Knowledge Network (NKN). The architecture of the National Knowledge Network will be scalable and the network will consist of an ultra-high speed core (multiples of 10 Gbps and upwards). The core shall be complemented with a distribution layer at appropriate speeds. The participating institutions can connect to the NKN at speeds of 1 Gbps or to the distribution layer through a last mile connectivity bandwidth.

The NKN will provide nation-wide ultra high speed backbone/data-network highway. Various other networks in the country can take advantage of this ultra high speed backbone, with national and international reach to create independent and closed user groups. The NKN will have about 25 core Point of Presence (PoPs) and 600 secondary PoPs. It will connect around 1500 institutions. In the initial phase, a core Backbone consisting of 15 Points of Presence (PoPs) have been established with 2.5 Gbps capacity. Around 40 institutions of higher learning and advanced research have already been connected to the network and 6 virtual classrooms set up.

Conclusion

The nature of problems affecting the education system are so diverse and often deep rooted that the solution cannot lie in the alteration of any one single factor, it is not about just shortage of money or just shortage of trained teachers or lack of political will; all these undeniably contribute to the problems, affecting the country's existing education system. However, there is a need to look at the entire set of problems and deal with the issue holistically taking into consideration the specific context of different sections of the society. It will also require a constant and strong central support for policy, strategy, technical assistance, and monitoring and evaluation combined with increased decentralization within Government, stronger public-private partnerships, and improved accountability relationships between the service providers, policy makers, and the target population.

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