

The Education Crisis: Failing Education Systems In India

Key words :

Right to education, fundamental right, failing education, Universalisation of Elementary Education, compulsory universal education.

Education is crucial to the growth and evolution of a society. It is fundamental in establishing an equitable society. It imparts in the children the skills, knowledge and an understanding that makes a responsible and law abiding citizen. With the 'Right to education' enshrined in our Constitution as a fundamental right, free and compulsory universal education has been laid emphasis on with major goals of elementary education amongst others, on one hand, and on the other we encounter a failing education system. More focus on quantity (like universal retention of children up to 14 years of age) has apparently been achieved, but at the same time the dilute quality of education has been surfaced. There is a serious deficit of the people at all the levels that ought to be dedicated towards thriving in maintaining a reputable standard of education. From quality of teachers appointed, to the administration of an educational set up, to the visionary bureaucrats and the politicians, and the policy-makers, a level of dedication and devotion is required.

Ms. Swati Singh Parmar,
Assistant Professor, Amity Law School,
Amity University, Lucknow Campus
E-mail: ssp.swati@gmail.com

The Education Crisis: Failing Education Systems In India

*विद्या नाम नरस्य रूपमधिकं प्रच्छन्नगुप्तं धनम्
विद्या भोगकरी यशः सुखकरी विद्या गुरुणां गुरुः ।
विद्या बन्धुजनो विदेशगमने विद्या परं दैवतम्
विद्या राजसु पूज्यते न हि धनं विद्याविहीनः पशुः॥*

These lines of Sanskrit underline the importance of education in ancient Indian philosophy. It says that education is essential to a man, it is the ultimate power that a man can have. Through it one can achieve materialistic things, fame and happiness. It distinguishes a man from an animal, for without education, a man is merely an animal.

Since times immemorial, this fact has been backed by various philosophers. In ancient Indian philosophy, the life cycle of an individual had an age-based division. It had starting 25 years of an individual's life devoted completely to education, which we know as 'brahmacharya ashram'. This phase in an individual's life was marked by complete detachment from other allurements of world and was dedicated for the cause of education. Sadly, through recent decades, the time span and the gravity of the age-old concept of 'brahmacharya' in one's life have been seen to be diluting. This is contributed to multidimensional factors- from focus more on information rather than education to deterring factors like competitiveness and high fees of private educational systems. Education instils the values of co-operation, fairness, analytical thinking and reasoning, which are necessary for the smooth functioning of the society. In the words of Justice P.N. Bhagwati,

The child is a soul with a being, a nature and capacities of its own, who must be helped to find them, to grow into their maturity, into a fullness of physical and vital energy and the utmost breadth, depth and height of its emotional, intellectual and spiritual being; otherwise there cannot be a healthy growth of the nation.

A sound education system is essential to meet the needs of a society that is in a constant

state of evolution. Education is the backbone of today's society and the dilution of it would manifest itself in weakening of the society. In this backdrop, in current times, the ends and means of education stand at an impasse.

Where education is thought to impart values, cooperation and fairness, and knowledge to the masses, in contemporary times, the foundational base of educational system does not seem to be efficacious enough to achieve the abovementioned.

'The government-run schools at the primary level have a shortage of more than five lakh teachers, as per the estimation presented in the draft by the National Education Policy on May 25.'

In a democracy like India, where Constitution explicitly confers 'Right to Education' the status of a fundamental right and where we have a separate enactment of Parliament as well on the issue, we need to rethink and revisit the quality of education that we are aiming to provide in the name of 'free and compulsory education' for all. The plight of primary education is unimaginable. Absenteeism, retention, overcrowded classrooms, poor teacher-pupil ration, student drop outs, lack of resources, multi-grade teaching, lack of infrastructure, poor management, etc. severely affects the learning outcomes.

'A recent government-sponsored District Information System of Education report from India revealed the scaring truth about the prospects of over 80 lakh children studying in over 1.5 lakh schools, which are run by only a single teacher.'

Although there are number of problems at varied levels that devalue our current education system, but in the present article, I would like to find answers to these two research questions-

1. Whether quality of primary education in the name of 'free and compulsory education' in India has diluted?

2. Whether the private educational institutions add to the already existing education crisis in India?

These two questions are closely interlinked. In the name of 'Right to Education' as a fundamental right under Article 21 A of the Constitution of India, our main focus and thrust is on quantity, and quality is being sidelined and overlooked as a result of it. The number of students who complete their primary education cannot be accommodated in the government run higher educational institutions such as central as well as state universities. The private players, thus, come into picture and use this reason to their optimum benefit. Also, the students, who are not admitted to governmental educational institutions, have not many options but the private educational institutions.

The issues that education system is facing today are many and cannot be dealt objectively. Nevertheless, this article will make a humble attempt to analyse, discuss and rethink on few of the issues relating to the fall-outs of our contemporary education system.

1. THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

The purpose of education is to be analysed carefully in order to find answer to the above mentioned researched questions. Whether its purpose is to impart knowledge, or information and facts? Or is it to learn reading, writing and speaking? Or is its purpose is vocational needs? Or it is to inculcate respect for fairness, justice and co-operation? Or is it something else?

Different thinkers have stated the purpose of education differently. For instance, famous linguist, philosopher and historian, Noam Chomsky says -

'Education is really aimed at helping students get to the point where they can learn on their own.'

According to Swami Vivekananda (1878), Education means The manifestation of divine perfection already existing in man'.

In 1982, Paideia Proposal with the main aim of quality education for all children was published by Mortimore Adler. The proposal is an Educational Manifesto that lays out the fundamentals of a Paideia education, based on the principle that all children can learn. The leaders in the field of education joined their hands together to achieve the education of all American schoolchildren so that they can earn a good living, enjoy full lives, and contribute to a democratic society. Mortimore Adler stated in the Proposal that the objectives of schooling were:

- The development of citizenship
- Personal growth or self-improvement
- Occupational preparation

He wrote-

Here then are the three common calling to which all our children are destined: to earn a living in an intelligent and responsible fashion, to function as intelligent and responsible citizens, and to make both of these things serve the purpose of leading intelligent and responsible lives—to enjoy as fully as possible all the goods that make a human life as good as it can be.

Irina Das Ewen of North Carolina believes that the real purpose of education is to teach creative and analytical thinking, to spark curiosity, imagination, and love of lifetime learning. He says- I see education as a lifetime journey, not a destination or a transaction.'

Many businessmen believe that the purpose of education is to facilitate upward social mobility. This conception emphasises on the vocational aspect of the education. In that sense, it is a utilitarian meaning of the purpose of education.

Education is an important determinant of an individual's life, skills, goals, personality and behaviour patterns. Education can said to have different purposes as per the different societal expectations and individual needs of societies. This is why the real purpose of education must be examined in the light of the socio-political set up of the country. It is thus pertinent to understand

the purpose of education in a democratic society in order to understand the present education crisis in India.

2. EDUCATION AS ENLIGHTENMENT AND EDUCATION AS INDOCTRINATION

Education as a concept can be understood under two heads: education as enlightenment—that underlines that the highest goal of life is to enquire and to create - and education as indoctrination -imparting knowledge, analytical thinking, reasoning and replicating information and facts.

There is a constant discussion and debate amongst thinkers over whether education is enlightenment or indoctrination. And this debate rages back to hundreds of years, from Plato to Locke and Hegel to Rousseau. In the same discussion, famous thinker of contemporary time, Chomsky puts forth his view of education in an Enlightenment sense, in which he says-

'...highest goal in life is to inquire and create. The purpose of education from that point of view is just to help people to learn on their own. It's you the learner who is going to achieve in the course of education and it's really up to you to determine how you're going to master and use it.' Further, he maintains a distinction between education as enlightenment and indoctrination under which he treats the later as the opposing concept of education. He states that the indoctrination model of education imposes 'a debt which traps students, young people, into a life of conformity. That's the exact opposite of what traditionally comes out of the Enlightenment.'

Education as enlightenment highlights the higher goals of education as being self-realisation, inculcation of justness, fairness and basic human values, while education as indoctrination thrusts upon invoking curiosity and imparting information. Of late, our educational systems have been focusing more on professional studies and on imparting vocational training. Focus has now been shifting from human value based education to vocational utility and worth of a

student- from 'instilling basic moral values and enlightenment' to 'preparing students to compete in the global environment'. The focus is, in a way, shifting from higher goals of enlightenment to the worldly worth and physical manifestations and utility of education. The ends of education have changed, and so have the means. And in this change in the means to education and shift of focus to vocational utility, somewhere in between, the quality of education has been compromised.

3. THE STATE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS

3.1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF 'RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN INDIA':

Right to education has been recognised as a human right under various international instruments including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It is also stated as a human right under the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, 1948 in its Article 26. It says-

'Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.'

During the adoption of the Constitution in the year 1950, 'Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE)' was one of its aims to be achieved.

The Constitution of India had placed 'education in the State list, but in 1976, it became a concurrent list subject. Later, education was placed as a fundamental right under the Constitution of India by the eighty-sixth amendment to the Constitution in the year 2002 to provide free and compulsory education of all children in the age group of six to fourteen years.

'21A. The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.'

Later, in 2009, Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act was passed which came into force from 1st April 2010 that makes right to free and compulsory education a justifiable right.

These obligations for primary education for all on the State have been tried to be met with utmost enthusiasm with its main focus on the 'quantity'- quantity of children that have been enrolled in the school and quantity of primary schools established. But we need to analyse whether this focus on the primary education has been able to produce meaningful outcomes.

3.2 ASSESSMENT OF THE FUFILLMENT OF THE RIGHT:

The State has been long promoting free and compulsory education for all the children but an honest assessment of the state of education is to be made to know the real position. There remains a wide gap between the quality and quantity in the field of education in India. Although, in present times, the focus of primary educational institutions has been on the quality of education, but still there remains a grey area in the field. Education system partially suffered due to the economic policies of that post independent era. Economic policies of the 1980s substantially weakened the ability of governments to provide education, eroding the quality of education on offer, debilitating teacher morale, and also significantly undermining the capacity of poor households to invest in education.

'It is the quality of education, which is at present in the focus in all programmes relating to elementary education in general and primary education in particular.'

In this regard, in order to assess the fulfilment of the Right to Education, a 4As

framework has been developed by Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Katarina Tomasevski. The 4As are availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability. Most of these factors might seem to be fulfilled on papers but the reality is far from the picture.

'About 110 million children remain out of the schooling system, and about 60% of those who enrol in school drop out by grade 8.'

Out of the 193 million Children, of age group six to fourteen, population in India, 8.1 million children are out of school as per Government statistics of September 2004.

The primary education in India is crippled by irregular attendance of students, absenteeism of teachers, problem of repetition, infrastructural fall outs, lack of amenities, etc.

'Due to frequent absenteeism from school, children perform poorly which causes repetition which in turn makes children vulnerable to drop-out.'

Studies have constantly shown the problem of 'absenteeism' as a major one in this regard. Absenteeism is a common issue on the part of student as well as teachers. The issue of absenteeism is far more serious than it appears to be.

'In nearly 60% of schools, there are less than two teachers to teach Classes I to V.'

It is accounted on various reasons such as health grounds, reluctance in behaviour, social reasons (like attending a marriage party, visiting relatives, etc.) and lack of physical amenities in the primary schools.

'The availability of physical and academic facilities has considerable impact on learning outcomes. Some of the schools do not even have basic facilities like drinking water and toilets.' The shortage of infrastructure that also results in absenteeism is so much so that many primary schools' classes are conducted in open area and without any shade. Many schools do not have proper drinking water for the students.

'1 in 40, primary school in India is

conducted in open spaces or tents.'

In addition to this, absenteeism may also be related to the socio-economic background of the student.

'Factors such as parental education and the socio-economic situation of the children are associated with absenteeism.'

Few of these issues have been tried to be dealt with by various policies and programmes of the Government, such as 'mid & day meal' initiative, but still there are wide array of other issues that do not allow the situation to improve.

'...These initiatives have improved access and retention but problems of irregular attendance, extended absenteeism and repetition affect many across the country. Particular groups of children belonging to disadvantaged communities and living in remote areas are vulnerable to these problems.'

These are a few fall-outs of the primary education system of the country. The larger picture has many more players to decay the basic structure of the education system. Most of the students who study under such primary school systems may have passed in their examinations but in reality, they are not in a position to compete in this global village or to even sustain themselves in this progressive society. In the name of education, primary schools in India are established in great numbers but their delivery in terms of learning outcomes is of lesser worth.

4. PRIVATE PLAYERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Earlier, higher education was primarily dominated by the governmental educational institutions, but through later decades there was private participation in higher education as well. While Public educational institutions had the hallmark of quality education, the private run educational institutions focussed on the vocational and professional training of the students. Government-run institutions such as Jawaharlal Nehru University, Banaras Hindu University, University of Allahabad, Aligarh Muslim University

were major players in their field, that produced eminent prime ministers, national leaders, poets of world acclaim, philosophers and bureaucrats. These were the centres of excellence and quality education in the country that produced luminaries in various fields of knowledge.

Later, as the population increased at an alarming rate, the need for more universities and colleges was felt and this, in turn, was seen as an opportunity by the private players. Private institutions, that pre dominate the higher education in terms of their numbers, have prospects as well as consequences.

'While the public sector has historically dominated the higher education landscape, the role of the private sector has increased significantly over the last decade, with majority students currently enrolled in private institutions.'

With increasing private players in the field of higher education, it becomes important to weigh the good or the bad they are doing to the existing education system. Today, the higher education is largely dominated by privately run educational institutions: Universities, colleges or stand-alone institutions.

'Majority of the Colleges, (73%) are privately managed. Out of which, 58% are Private-unaided and 15% are Private-aided. Remaining 27% are Government colleges.'

They have better infrastructure, teacher-pupil ratio, etc but they do have some other problems that make our education system weak. They are expensive with profit as their sole objective. With this aim, they aim enthusiastically on enrolments and admissions a lot with lesser of emphasis on quality education in the later run of the educational courses. Because of immense competition they are motivated to work with all their potential to ensure an enriching experience to its students. For them better result means more profit. In some cases, they even resort to sub standard measures to show their cent percent results in academics.

'With the entry of private investors to this

sector there was a noticeable failure to improve the existing regulatory requirements to accommodate them. This led to incompetent players and illegal practices.'

The privatization of education is often seen by scholars with scepticism.

Since the early 2000s, the private sector involvement in the higher education was met with unwarranted scepticism. Firstly, the students enrolled found themselves under scrutiny, for their graduation colleges had no legacy to boast of unlike the IITs and NITs. Two, private universities were seen as a commercial entity, for the fee they charged were higher, sometimes twice, than what was being billed in central and state universities. Three, the quality of education imparted was under question, for they were not expected to meet the standards of IITs, NITs, and IIMs. Lastly, the resources employed by these private universities were not always a match for the ones in central and state ones, and hence, most students saw private universities as the last resort.

These private educational institutions have been time and again accused of issues like arbitrary fees, management quotas during admissions, and other violations and malpractices. Non-transparency in the admission procedure is also one of the allegations. Most of the allegations have been unfortunately been proved as well.

'In a very recent expose, violations and malpractices were discovered under colleges affiliated to the Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha (GGSIP) University, New Delhi. It is reported that colleges under this university are ill equipped to organise courses.'

'Violations of all norms in education have also been reported in the federal state of Madhya Pradesh where university officials have been arrested over the sex-for-marks scandal in Rani Durgavati Vishwavidyalaya (RDVV) in Jabalpur.' With aim of high enrolments of the students for the sake of profit and ever increasing population of the nation, quality has been sidelined at various fronts and in various degrees. The private players

have been working on the number of admissions of the students but at the same time, the increased number of teaching faculties that are required to cater the needs of increased admissions is overlooked.

'To keep the quality of an engineering education level with the quality it had 30 years ago (hardly an ambitious goal), the number of faculty would need to have increased 30-fold.'

Not only this, but it has been found in some studies that the private institutions continue to work in a sub-standard manner by greasing the palms of the officials of University Grants Commission (UGC).

'Corruption by officials of UGC and AICTE has often been reported in the various federal states.'

After an observation of the abovementioned problems that the higher education is facing, we will be able to club these issues under three main heads: regulatory, institutional and decision-making related. This race of getting higher number of enrolments every year and achieving cent percent result has made the private colleges and universities look like a degree-vending machine. The value that a degree from a government university held a decade ago is nowhere comparable to what the private colleges and universities are awarding to their students currently.

CONCLUSION

Education is a significant measure of evolution of a society. It is the most potent aid in the hands of the today's youth. In the context of a democracy that India is, education assumes a more significant status of instilling the values of co-operation, respect for each other, non-discrimination, fairness and justice. The system of education in a democracy must be aimed to serve the case for freedom, the goal of opportunity for all and objective of peaceful co-existence of each individual. The right-based approach to the education in India is a remarkable feature with free and compulsory primary education and

universalisation of elementary education as its keynotes. However, due to increased emphasis on quantity (in terms of enrolments of students) in primary education and the profit-motivated private colleges and universities in higher education, the growth of the education system in India has impeded.

The primary education is marked by severe issues of absenteeism, drop-outs, retention, repetition, poor teacher-pupil ratio, corrupt practices, lack of infrastructure, and so on. On the other hand, in the field of higher education, where we have more of private colleges and universities, the situation is even worse. These private colleges and universities are accused of malpractices, corruption, opaque rules, ambiguity in their bye-laws, etc. this creates a very dull picture of education that was bright when the Right to Education Act, 2009 was enacted.

We really need to think upon the decaying education system today, where government run primary schools are majorly sub-standard, and private run colleges and universities have reduced themselves to merely a degree vending machine. Perhaps if our education system is properly revised and refined, the young minds will bring a bright future tomorrow that will be enriched with the firm human values and fairness.

References:

1. Plight of Education: Minimum Requirement of Two Teachers for Every School Ignored, available at <http://www.edsys.in/poor-plight-of-education-minimum-requirement-of-two-teachers-for-every-school-ignored/>, retrieved on 07/06/2017
2. Ibid
3. Noam Chomsky, Institute Professor and Professor Emeritus at MIT, presented 'The Purpose of Education' recently at the 'kLearning without Frontiers' Conference in London
4. Adler, Mortimer Jerome, The Paideia proposal : an educational manifesto, New York: Macmillan, 1982
5. What is the Purpose of Education?, available at <http://www.parenting.com/blogs/mom-congress/melissa-taylor/what-purpose-education>, accessed on 08/07/2017
6. Supranote 3
7. Ibid
8. Article 26, Universal Declaration on Human Rights, 1948
9. Article 21A, The Constitution (Eighty-Sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 (12th December, 2002.)
10. Malhotra, K., Educational Priorities and Challenges in the Context of Globalization, Prospects: quarterly review of comparative education, Vol. XXX, no. 3, September, 2000.
11. Rama, T. N., et. Al., Survey Based Study on Causes for Absenteeism among Primary School Children in Baireddypalli Mandal of Chittoor District, IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME), page 13, available at <http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jrme/papers/Vol-4%20Issue-1/Version-2/C04121221.pdf>, accessed on 08/07/2017.
12. Wadhwa, S., Flawed Clause: How fundamentally right will the 93rd Amendment Bill be for India's children?, Outlook, December 10, 2001, New Delhi, 2001.
13. Absenteeism, Repetition And Silent Exclusion In India, Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), Page 1, available at http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/India_Policy_Brief_3.pdf, accessed on 08/07/2017
14. 7th All India Education Survey, 2002, available at <http://7thsurvey.ncert.nic.in/>, accessed on 09/07/2017
15. Supranote 13 at 2.
16. Supranote 12
17. Drèze, J. and Kingdon, G. G., School Participation in Rural India, Review of Development Economics 5 (1), 1-24, 1999.
18. Govinda, R. and Bandyopadhyay, M., Educational Access in India, Extended Country Policy Brief, CREATE, NUEPA / University of Sussex, Delhi and Brighton, 2009.
19. Jhingan, A., Foreword to Private sector participation in Indian Higher Education, FICCI Higher Education Summit, 2011
20. All India Survey on Higher Education, 2011-12, Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education, 2013
21. Dhanuraj, D. and Kumar, R. V., Understanding the Status of Higher Education in India: Challenges and Scepticism towards Serious Investments in the Sector, Centre for Public Policy Research, 27 January, 2015, Page 5.
22. Gupta, Tushar, Times Have Changed, Private Players In Higher Education Are Here To Stay, Swarjya, July 31, 2018, available at <https://swarajyamag.com/ideas/times-have-changed-private-players-in-higher-education-are-here-to-stay>.
23. Kumar, R., IP Varsity Colleges Schools for Scandal!, The Pioneer, August 12, 2014, available at <http://www.dailypioneer.com/city/ip-varsity-coleges-schools-for-scandal.html>, accessed on 09/07/2017
24. Dutta, A, MP govt to probe sex-for-marks scandal, Mail Today, March 5, 2011, available at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/madhya-pradesh-government-orders-probe-into-sex-for-marksscandal/1/131565.html>, accessed on 09/07/2017
25. Naushad Forbes, Higher Education in India: Growth with Challenges, Confederation of Indian Industry and Forbes Marshall Ltd., Page 85, available at http://www.wipo.int/edocs/pubdocs/en/wipo_pub_gii_2014-chapter4.pdf, accessed on 07/07/2017
26. Refer for instance reports on corruption in UGC and AICTE: Akshaya Mukul, CBI raids on UGC official over corruption, The Times of India, November 5, 2009, available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/CBI-raids-on-UGC-official-over-corruption/articleshow/5198163.cms>, accessed on 08/07/2017; Standing up against Corruption in AICTE, I Paid a Bribe, September 4, 2013, available at <http://www.ipaidabribe.com/champions/standing-against-corruptionaict#gsc.tab=k0>, accessed on 08/07/2017; AICTE officials held for corruption, Deccan Herald, 17 July 2009, available at <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/14204/F>, accessed on 08/07/2017; AICTE chairman suspended over corruption case, Indian Express, July 30, 2009, available at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/aicte-chairman-suspended-over-corruptioncase/495925/>, accessed on 08/07/2017

