

LearnIng CURVE



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From Azim Premji Foundation

The Frankenstein of Examinations

I met my friend's daughter recently when she came to join a Bangalore based tech multinational. She passed out of her engineering graduation with an awesome 98.4% from one of the top technology institutes in the country. During my discussion with her on her engineering experience she described her stressful experience of appearing for examination and also explained that she would now be doing something that has practically no connection with what she studied. She said, one thing she dreaded in life was "examinations".

Close to a lakh students attempt to commit suicide each year when examination results are declared, and over 4000 students actually succeed. I know of cases where suicide is attempted by students who had no parental pressure to perform better. It is just the standard that the students set for themselves. Upon not rising to their own standards, they accuse themselves, conduct the case, pronounce themselves guilty and also carry out the capital punishment for themselves.

When 50% of the children, on an average, fail every year in the 10th standard board examination, who is responsible for it? The teachers? The education system? The parents? The children? Or the examination system? Are we going to admit that all of us who are connected with the current education and examination system are guilty in some manner or the other?

A little more than 10% of the children who join Class 1 pursue education beyond 10th standard. Some of those who attempt continuing education get blamed for failure. Those who don't have the guts to take a drastic step, like committing suicide, survive with an inferiority complex for life.

Despite this knowledge, we do not even discuss changing the current examination system and

introducing an evaluation process that makes a genuine attempt to find out what the students know (rather than what they don't know), or reduce the stress and tension in the system.

We are tired of several people saying that examinations primarily test rote memory based knowledge and don't really measure achievement of curricular goals. If we accept this why don't we radically change the system? Instead of asking the name of the poet who wrote the poem on rain, why don't we ask children to narrate their experience of getting wet in the rain? Instead of teaching children the life cycle of a silk-worm on the black-board, why don't we show them the huge boards outside the classroom on which pupa are kept for drying?

When a small child attempts to say something, though in an incorrect manner, with pride we encourage the child to make an attempt to say it more clearly. We teach poems, nursery rhymes and songs to the small children and don't bother about how well they sing them. Why can't similar processes continue even after children grow older? Why is language not taught in the school the same way it is taught at home for young children? Or why don't children learn arithmetic the way a vegetable vendor learns to calculate? Probably we have not considered the process of education and evaluation as a natural and integral process of life.

The examination system itself is not really the point. The point is how do we make the entire education process more meaningful, less stressful and life relevant? It is important that the stakeholders of education learn to radically review the process of education differently and prepare confident children who essentially learn how to learn and not how to be successful in the examinations

Dileep K. Ranjekar
CEO, Azim Premji Foundation

CONTENT

- 2 Guest Column
- 6 Musings
- 8 Research Update
- 10 Foundation Update
- 11 Book Review

GUEST COLUMN

The Second Wave of Alienation from State Schools

A.K. Jalaluddin



While a large section of our marginalized population kept themselves away from the primary schools till the late seventies due to abject poverty or near destitution and lack of motivation, the scene is visibly different since the early nineties. Now, the poorest of the poor also see the relevance of basic education and are prepared to invest in the education of their children. This is because of their enhanced social awareness of the opportunities that education can provide in improving their conditions of living. This awareness has also made them critical of the value that a school can and should add to their children's learning through the process of schooling.

However, in the meantime, the growing middle class has been abandoning the public delivery system of education due to the latter's failure to respond to their changing perception of the quality of education and to become accountable for the delivery of quality education. Following their footsteps, the marginalized sections are also deserting the state schools and joining low fee charging private schools. I am personally aware of the fact that hundreds of state-run primary schools are being closed down in our metropolitan cities and even in other towns. This second wave of alienation, of a growing section of the population, from the state schools is silently pushing the public delivery of education to a crisis point, about which nobody, not even the educational planners, policy researchers and independent educational thinkers, are prepared to speak.

For a fairly long time, I have been privy to the inner functioning of the education departments in the states and center, and also to the initiatives in national, international and UN bodies responsible for mobilizing resources and launching various educational intervention programmes and projects. I can vouch, how embarrassed most of the above organizational leaders could be when we brought to their notice the gap between their public postures about the so-



called successes of their interventions and the problems of gross failure in the field, through numerous internal administrative and financial audit reports focusing on

endemic administrative and financial malpractices, indiscipline and misreporting. In such situations, the most sincere amongst them, including ministers, top political party leaders and senior bureaucrats, would tend to confide in closed doors how they themselves were frustrated with their failure in reaching out to the poor due to widespread corrupt and unethical practices, politicization of the system, irresponsible trade unionism and innumerable litigations against the education department due to the arbitrary and ad hoc nature of the departmental decision-making process. These closed-door discussions often end with blame-game and profound expression of personal integrity, and helplessness. The more pragmatic among the organizational leaders feel that the present system could not be repaired through any revision of norms or training. The wiser among them see this systemic dysfunction and chaos as symptomatic of the growing ineffectiveness of the traditional hierarchical, top-down, authoritarian models of governance of education, and at the same time indicative of wider opportunities for adopting new forward-looking participatory organizational design and management systems. Traditional school effectiveness research (SER) generally fails to capture these dynamics. Hence there is an attempt in SER to define equality and equity in education, drawing upon notions of social justice and social inclusion. This concern has been brought in focus through the establishment of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) to bring together researchers, practitioners and policy makers to co-construct knowledge about the study and processes of improving schools and making them effective in different international contexts where equity considerations have remained a key focus of many studies. Most recent studies conducted in US and UK now point to the existence of significant school and classroom effects, while acknowledging the influence of student background.



When the government-funded universities and research institutes in India and most other developing countries fail to explore the crux of the problems of failure of these countries



to stand by their national and international commitments to universalize quality education for all, international forums and UN bodies and research institutes happen to come out openly to expose these problems of failure.

The Drafting Committee of the World Education Forum had to record in its April 2000 session at Dakar: "Corruption is a major drain on the effective use of resources for education and should be drastically curbed." The United Nations Convention against Corruption held at the General Assembly, N.Y., in November 2003, adopted Kofi Annan's statement: "Corruption hurts the poor disproportionately by diverting funds intended for development, undermining a government's ability to provide basic services, feeding inequality and injustice and discouraging foreign investment and aid." The former Director of the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), Paris, Jacques Hallak and his co-author Muriel Poisson had to dig out hundreds of skeletons to produce a path-breaking overview of the field under the title: *Ethics and Corruption in Education: An Overview* (2005).

The IIEP paper, which happens to be the most quoted paper in recent years on the need for drastic reform of education systems, summarizes the situation, as follows: "In a context of budget austerity and pressure on international flows of funds, there is a clear demand for more efficiency in the use of public resources. Recent surveys suggest that leakage of funds from ministries of education to schools represent more than 80% of the total sums allocated (non-salary expenditures) in some countries; bribes and payoffs in teacher recruitment and promotion tend to lower the quality of public school teachers; and illegal payments for school entrance and other hidden costs help explain low school enrolment and high drop-out rates. The paper argues that the problems posed by corruption in education have been neglected for too long."

The most recent (2007) studies conducted by UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris, under the initiative of its present Director, Mark Bray, brings out the comparative perspectives on patterns and implications of private supplementary tutoring as an emerging huge industry in much of Asia and a fast growing one in Africa, Europe and North America. Private tutoring has a long history in both western and eastern societies. In recent decades, however, it

has greatly increased in scale and has become a major phenomenon and is driven by a competitive climate and strong belief in the value of education for social and economic advancement. However, tutoring also widens the gaps between the rich and the poor and also between urban and rural areas. Tutoring can also create dissonance with lessons in mainstream classes and can contribute to fatigue of both pupils and teachers. However, when tutoring services are provided by the state under the overall guidance of specialists and local schools, such services can address the dual issues of quality and equity, as it has been shown by Singapore to help the Malay community to catch up with the Chinese and Indian communities in education performance in that country.

Amartya Sen, in his 2001 Protichi Report lamented: "There is perhaps no better indicator of the under-performance of primary schools than the use of private tuition on which most students, whoever can afford it, seem to rely. The role of private tuition, as filler of serious gaps, is brought out by a comparison of achievement, which we were able to make. We examined 34 children from classes 3 and 4 in primary school, of whom 20 took private tuition and 14 did not. The percentage of children who could write their names proved to be 80 percent for those taking tuition, whereas the ratio was only 7 percent for those who did not have the benefit of being privately tutored. We may well ask: what, then, do they learn in school?"

An ethnographic study, conducted jointly by BRAC and Plan International (Bangladesh) in four government primary schools in Bangladesh in 2007, revealed that the classroom processes are designed in such a way that the teachers have just the time to give learning tasks to the students in the school and, according to the teachers, it is the responsibility of the students to learn the same at home. "The whole process evokes private tuition so that the children get support at home". It is noted, "both the children and their parents consider private tuition as a prerequisite for good results in the examination".



Another unpublished study, conducted by the Research Cell, West Bengal District Primary Education Programme (WBDPEP) in 2001, revealed that 70 percent of the households, on an average, in four districts of West Bengal, invest in private tuition in primary education to ensure "quality education for

the child". While the quantum of family expenditure on primary education varied between 1.96 to 7.32 percent of the total family expenditure per year, the expenditure on private tuition happened to be nearly 35 percent of the total family expenditure on education, an overwhelming majority of who belong to the most socially and economically disadvantaged sections of society.

The crisis in primary education in India has reached a state when the Planning Commission, Government of India, had to quote the World Development Report 2004 (Making Services Work for Poor People): "In random visits to 200 primary schools in India, investigators found no teaching learning activity in half of them at the time of visit." It is time that the major non-government education providers, foundations and the civil society in India take the lead in reforming the system,

taking advantage of the following policy pronouncement of the Planning Commission: "Public-private-partnership (PPP) is an alternative to the traditional approach of providing services through the in-house facilities. Community participation, through supervision of schools and involvement of non-profit service agencies, in providing social services is being increasingly favoured and encouraged by the governments."

Prof. A.K. Jalaluddin has held senior faculty and technical advisory positions at NCERT, Directorate of Adult Education, Delhi University, UNESCO, UNDP, and UNICEF. He has had a long association with educational research and training and has contributed significantly in the field of elementary, secondary and adult education in India and abroad.

Educational development index and what it reveals

Vimala Ramachandran



Government of India and National University for Educational Planning and Administration have developed an educational development index using four variables - physical access to an elementary school, infrastructure, teacher related characteristics and outcome, using retention and dropout rate, and an "exit ratio" being the proportion of children who enroll in class one and successfully complete the primary cycle. Educationists may squabble over the robustness of these indicators and we may be able to make this index more sensitive. Nevertheless it reveals a lot about the regional variations that exist in the country.

The five "worst ranking" states, on elementary education (composite primary and upper primary together), are Bihar (35), Jharkhand (34), Assam (33), Uttar Pradesh (32), Arunachal Pradesh (31) and West Bengal (30). The top five ranks go to Kerala, Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka. Though Delhi and Chandigarh rank quite high, they cannot be compared with large states having both rural and urban areas. The ranks of states traditionally seen as being educationally backward are Chhattisgarh 24, Madhya Pradesh 29, Orissa 27 and Rajasthan 25.

Here are some startling facts. If we take the ratio of primary schools to upper primary schools it is quite alarming to note

that the worst situation prevails in West Bengal where the ratio is 5.28, meaning that there is only one upper primary school (class 5 to 8) for 5+ primary schools. Next to West Bengal is Jharkhand with a ratio of 3.97. Perhaps this indicator drags the W. Bengal ranking down. Travelling across districts of the state reveal that the situation on the ground is indeed quite grave. A large number of children who complete class 4 are not able to access schooling because of a severe shortage of upper primary schools or high schools with upper primary sections.

Another set of sensitive indicators of quality and functionality are the percentage of single classroom schools, the percentage of single teacher schools and percentage of schools with a pupil-teacher ratio of more than 100.

The five states with high percentage of single classroom schools are Assam (52.59%), Andhra Pradesh (24.83%), Meghalaya (18.39%), West Bengal (15.04%) and Jammu and Kashmir (11.39%). Goa also has a high percentage of single



classroom schools being 23.94% - however the average size of the school is small with around 24 children per classroom. The percentage of children enrolled in schools with a student-classroom

ratio that is more than 60 (meaning 60 children in one room) is highest in Assam (74.47%) followed by Uttar Pradesh (60.27%) and West Bengal (52.39%). If we juxtapose this information with the percentage of single teacher schools, it is indeed revealing that the above states are not the worst, with Assam having 16.67% and West Bengal 5.11% only. The percentage of single teacher school is quite high in Rajasthan (26.17%), Arunachal Pradesh (48.08%), Jharkhand (25.70%), Madhya Pradesh (25.05%) and Goa (31.52%). The most alarming situation with respect to pupil-teacher ratio prevails in Bihar (18.13% schools with PTR>100) and Uttar Pradesh (15.22% schools with PTR>100).

It is therefore not a surprise that the retention rate at the primary level is alarming in states where there is little linkage between availability of schools at primary and upper primary levels, availability of teachers and school infrastructure. Only 42.34 percent children in Bihar are retained in school through the primary cycle (classes 1-5). The situation in Rajasthan (51.74%), Jharkhand (59.38), West Bengal (58.26) and Uttarakhand (52.31) are also as alarming, with less than 60 percent children completing the primary cycle.

The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (Performance Audit Reports 2006) confirms our fears with respect to the utilisation of funds.

“Five States/UTs failed to maintain the SSA norm of 1:40 for teacher student ratio. The PTR in primary schools to upper primary schools ranged between 1:60 and 1:130 in test-checked districts of Bihar. Cases of uneven distribution of teachers amongst schools were noticed. Rural schools were suffering for want of teachers.

75,884 of the primary schools in fifteen states were operating with one teacher only. 6647 schools in seven states were without any teacher. The position was alarming in the states of Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.” (Para 7.4.2)



“SSA guidelines provided for one upper primary school / section for every two primary schools. In nineteen states / UTs, out of 204,850 primary schools, there was a shortfall of 46,622 (23 per cent) upper primary schools in meeting this ratio” (Para 7.4.3.1)

Why are these statistics important?



It is now unanimously agreed that the biggest challenge facing Indian education has to do with quality and that access by itself is a meaningless indicator, unless we make sure that children are able to go to schools that

function and where teaching and learning happens. It is fairly obvious that in many parts of the country even bare essential requirements with respect to teachers and classrooms have not been met. Furthermore, if all children were to complete the primary cycle, there are not enough upper primary and high schools to absorb them. The educational system effectively ejects children at different points - end of primary, end of middle school and at the end of high school.

Two national programmes - District Primary Education Project (1993 to 2004) and now the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001 onwards), have allocated a lot of resources to augment infrastructure and appoint teachers. Utilisation of resources has been obviously rather skewed. A national debate is called for on why the system is structured in this manner and what the civil society can do to force the attention of the central and state governments and all the key political parties.

The situation will not change unless all concerned persons and organisations from the non-governmental sector, from the corporate world, and from the academic community start raising their voices and also come up with concrete strategies to bring about far reaching changes on the ground.

Vimala Ramachandran is an educational researcher and consultant. She was the first National Director of Mahila Samakhyas.

MUSINGS

'Enhancing' Effectiveness of Education System



This paper is an attempt to articulate my understanding of the concept of making the education system effective.

From a systemic perspective, the idea of the system needing 'enhancing' implies that it is not functioning optimally and requires inputs/interventions that will help it to reach the desired level of functioning.

I believe that the effectiveness of the education system cannot be seen in a vacuum. It has to be seen from the perspective of the demands and requirements that a society places on education. The culture of globalization and technological advancement creates new demands and requirements that need to be met by the education system. The issue is not one of enhancing the effectiveness. Instead, it is one of creating systems that are effective.

This paper takes the second line of argument. Let us briefly travel through the Indian Education Scenario to understand this argument.

The system of education in the pre-Colonial era (1820s) consisted of three types of Institutions, namely, Pathshalas, Gurukulas and Madrassahs. According to scholars like Thomas Munro and Leitner, every village had a school (cited in Dharampal 2000). The subjects taught were reading combined with writing and accounts/arithmetic. Teaching was across curriculum. A letter, for instance was learnt by looking at words beginning with that letter followed by a verse where there is a high frequency of using the letter that is being taught. The verse contained a moral or a religious instruction. Group learning and peer learning were widely prevalent. The processes used for learning were so advanced that some of these practices were exported to England (cited in Swarup Online). Girls generally received education at home. Children belonging to other caste groups got their education on the job, as apprentices. Contrary to the popular opinion, Swarup quotes from reports to show that education was open to all during this period. The emphasis of education was to impart traditional knowledge and help the next generation to continue their familial occupations. Education was geared to meeting the needs of the time and the effectiveness of the system was

measured on the basis of the extent to which these needs were met.

With the rule of the British, the education system in the country took a turn. Initially, when the British came, they did not pay any attention to the education system. The turmoil that the country was undergoing marked the beginning of the decay of the education system. When the British turned their attention to the system, it was to change the education system in ways that would help education to produce groups of people who would act as bridges between the rulers and the ruled. The pre-colonial system of education, as serving the local, economic, cultural and religious needs of people, gave way to a system that served the needs of the ruling British. In terms of medium of instruction, local languages gave way to English and Urdu bringing about a divide between everyday life and education. The contents of curriculum were also changed, contributing to an increase in the divide. The effectiveness of the education system during this period was judged on the basis of the extent to which it produced students who understood the 'minds of the colonial masters' and helped them rule by taking care of routine matters of administration.

After the British rule, the Indian educational scene was full of problems. The first problem that was addressed was the prevalence of widespread illiteracy. The focus was on making education a fundamental right. This meant bringing the disadvantaged groups into the folds of education. During this period, education was seen as a necessity for all citizens of the country to ensure that they reap the advantages of development. The issue of effectiveness of education was judged on the criteria of access, enrolment and equity.

1990s onwards became the era of liberalization and globalization. Across the globe, the socio-cultural climate enabled not only rapid technological innovations, but also its spread. Within the country, this development impacted the job market by bringing about several shifts. Some of these shifts were that of leadership changing from authoritarian to support, networking replacing vertical management, information flow becoming complex and multileveled,



initiative-taking replacing obedience, independent thinking being valued and fostered, etc. These shifts for successful performance required certain skills like critical and creative thinking, application of knowledge to the world of work, and communicative skills, for which neither students nor their teachers were trained. Education system, in order to become effective, has to meet the challenges of the changed



situation. It is in this context that we have to think of the concept of effectiveness of education system. The basis of this thinking is not to enhance, but to create, effective education systems that will

appropriately respond to the challenges thrown up by globalization and technological innovations.

Initiative(s) aimed at creation of an effective education system has to explicitly address certain important issues at the planning stage itself. Some of these issues are:

Effectiveness for whom: Create school effectiveness by targeting different sections of society - different caste groups, gender groups and socio-economic strata.

Effectiveness at What Levels: Effectiveness creation has to target structural factors like leadership, community/home-school partnerships, monitoring of academic progress, shared vision and goals of the school for education and social factors consisting of details like values, attitudes and perceptions, personal interrelationships and hidden school climate. It will include staff culture, student culture and school culture. So both macro-level (organizational) and micro-level (social) has to be targeted.

Effectiveness on what Dimensions: Effectiveness has to be created to cover academic, social and affective dimensions of students, teachers and school.

Effectiveness of Process: The process of creating effectiveness should look into the actual process as well. For example, in two schools a climate of discipline may be achieved. But in School A, the process could be achieved through authoritarian behavior while in School B discipline could be achieved by engaging students in a meaningful way.

The planning for initiatives must begin by elucidating factors that help to create an effective education system. There is, however, very little agreement on what constitutes an effective education system. This is because of differences in perception across cultures and countries. India being a multi-cultural country, it is possible to have several models of effective education systems. In a nutshell, enhancing effectiveness of education system has to be seen as creation of effective education systems.

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Devaki, Azim Premji Foundation

RESEARCH UPDATE

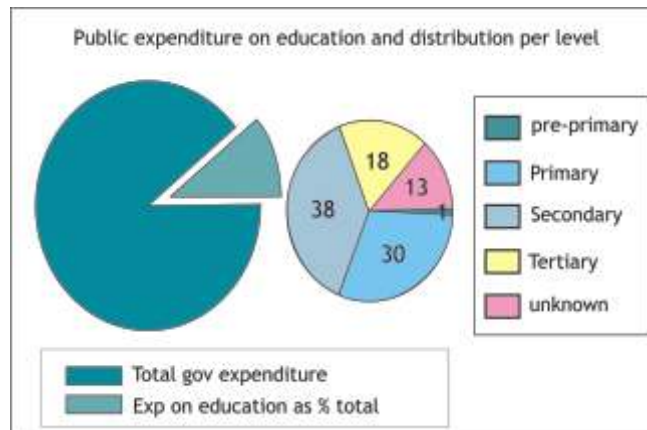
The urgent need for focus on secondary education in India

- A secondary research update

Basic education is widely recognized as an essential human right and a key to poverty alleviation. Attaining the objectives of Education for All (EFA) by 2015 has become top priority among the nations of the world. For this, the financing aspect of EFA has become a key issue. The 'Global Education Digest 2007', released by UNESCO's Institute for Statistics for the year 2007, focuses on the aspect of 'financing of education'. It has tried to provide a series of indicators to compare spending patterns across countries by mapping the latest education statistics from primary to tertiary levels in more than 200 countries.

The study observes that in India the distribution of funds is extremely uneven among its respective school-age populations. The reason cited is "low participation rates at higher levels of education"- majority of children do have access to low-cost primary education but they are largely excluded from higher level of education, where greater resources per student are invested. Equity issues are clearly at play given this uneven distribution of resources.

Ground reality



Source: UNESCO - UIS 2007

In India, public expenditure on education is 3.8% of GDP and 10.7% of total government expenditure (1999). Of the total public expenditure on education, 1% is invested at the preprimary level, 30% at the primary level (grades 1-5), 38% at secondary level (grades 6-12) and 18% at the tertiary level.

The government's education expenditure as a percentage of GDP has never ever risen above 4.3% of GDP, despite the target of 6% having been set as far back as 1968 by the Kothari Commission. The GDP seems to be rising at a much faster

pace than the government's education expenditure, to be able to reach the 6% target.

At primary level, we have been able to provide universal access. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is more than 100%. It is seen that 3% of the students repeat in the primary level and only 73% of the students survive till grade 5. What is more bothersome is that the GER at the secondary level is 53% and as you go higher up, at the tertiary level it falls down to 11%. In spite of the gross student intake rate in the last grade of primary being 90%, the GER at secondary level clearly shows that major chunk of students leave the schooling system even before entering the secondary level.



Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP (blue) and as a percentage of expenditure on all sectors together. Source: Education Ministry's web site

Some of the reasons for this dismal state of secondary education are low accessibility, mismatch between the demand and supply and poor achievements at the primary level.

Other possible reasons cited from time to time are:

- Prevalence of low transition rates (out of 100 entering grade-one, less than 50 make it to secondary level)
- Issues pertaining to demand side factors like high direct and opportunity cost of schooling
- Lack of information on the benefits of secondary education and the value of girls education
- Issues pertaining to supply-side factors like lack of adequate infrastructure (over 1/3rd of villages do not have schools in 5 kms. radius)

- Inadequate incentives for private sector to expand
- An inflexible delivery system which does not cater to the needs of the client.

India has a long tradition of partnership between the public and private sectors in secondary education. There are four types of school management prevalent:

- Government - established by state governments (as well as some centrally established institutions);
- Local body - established by elected local government bodies;
- Aided school - private schools that receive state government grants-in aid; and
- Private unaided school

Most of the growth of secondary schools, in the private sector, in the last two decades, has occurred among unaided schools (25% of schools). About 60% of schools are now aided or unaided. Enrolments follow roughly the same pattern. The DISE report states that 45.18% of integrated higher secondary schools have private unaided management. The above data clearly highlights the issue of accessibility to these education levels for the majority of the population, the issue of economic affordability, geographical accessibility and most importantly, social equity issues.

The above reasons may probably answer some of the questions on why only a selected few from the mammoth population get access to secondary and thereafter higher education and how a majority of the underprivileged, for whom the subsidies in higher education are meant, to facilitate their climb in the social ladder, never get to utilize the investment that is supposedly for them.

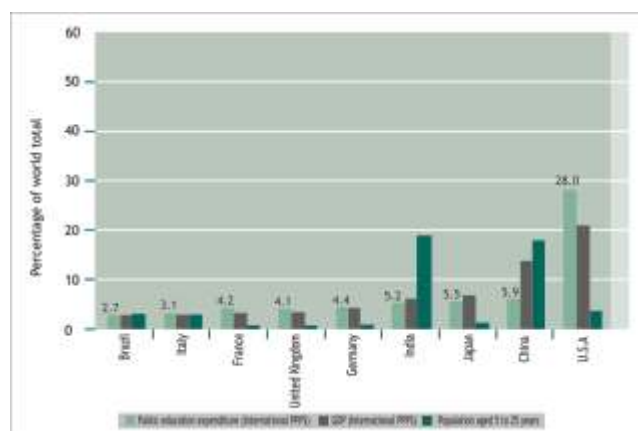
In order to address the above lacuna in the system, it is essential to appreciate the need to invest more in secondary education. A number of studies have shown how the benefits of secondary education not only impact the overall lifestyle of individuals, but also that of entire households. 'Secondary Education in India: Investing in the future' by the World Bank (2006), 'Education and Women's Labour Market Outcomes in India' by Geeta Kingdon and Jeemol Unni (2001), 'Return to Education: New Evidence for India' by Vasudeva Dutta (2006), are research studies that emphasize focus on secondary and higher levels of education. Marginal rates of return are high in secondary education, especially among women and it increases more so with upper secondary and tertiary

education. This is accompanied with social benefits like lower fertility rates, better health and intergenerational mobility, particularly when women are better educated.

Any talk of significant expansion at the secondary level only makes sense when the elementary education agenda is complete. There is a clear need for ensuring universal retention and quality at elementary level, as also the need to enhance access at secondary level at the same time.

Criticality of adequate funding

Though public expenditure in India is the largest on secondary education (38%), a number of issues remain to be addressed. The key requirement really is to increase the overall public expenditure on education. This issue has to be urgently addressed if the growth potential predicted for India is to be fulfilled. A number of studies around the world have stressed the importance of ensuring a sufficient and stable source of funding for education while identifying characteristics that are associated with progress towards education goals. (Colclough with Lewin, 1993; Mehrotra, 1998; Bruns, Mingat and Rakotomalala, 2003) The United States, which is home to just 4% of the global population aged 5 to 25 years, accounts for more than one-quarter of the global public education budget. It spends as much as all governments in six global regions combined: the Arab States, Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, South and West Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. On the other hand, India which is home to around 20% of the global population aged 5 to 25 years accounts for only 5.2% of the global expense.



Global distribution of public expenditure on education, GDP and population aged 5 to 25 years for selected countries, 2004 (Note: Data for China are based on a UIS estimate for 1999) Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.

Reality check

Comparing India's educational achievement with China, it is seen that India is more than 30 years behind China in terms of the proportion of the population with completed secondary and post secondary schooling.

This is not to belittle India's educational achievement but is more a reality check to capitalize on the need to prioritize the requirement of education in the country. Our failure to prioritize our budget expenditure on education will not only have economic repercussions but more so will aid social repercussions in terms of inequality and inequity in the years to come.

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S. Gayathri, Azim Premji Foundation

FOUNDATION UPDATE

The President of India, Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil launched a national portal for teachers www.teachersofindia.org, at Rashtrapati Bhavan on 5th September 2008, on the occasion of Teachers' Day. Launching the Portal, the President said that it is definitely a medium to improve the quality of education in schools and will also improve the teacher-student interaction in class.

Azim Premji Foundation has developed the Portal, with support from the National Knowledge Commission, which has been working for the creation of web-based portals on key issues for aggregating and disseminating knowledge. The portal for teachers will offer a platform for sharing best practices and generating discussion in the teaching community. Over the next few months the portal will offer content in several languages as

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Teachers of India portal. At the top, there is a blue navigation bar with the logo 'TEACHERS OF INDIA' and links for 'Home', 'About Us', 'Our Space', and 'Directory'. Below this, there are several content blocks: a 'Welcome to Teachers of India' section with a photo of a classroom, a 'Teacher of the Month' section featuring Hemraj Bhatt, an 'Our Space' section with a photo of a teacher, and a 'Resource Organisations' section listing Eklavya, Centre for Learning Resources, and National Council of Educational Research and Training. The footer contains contact information and a site map link.

<http://www.teachersofindia.org>

well as provide access to other communities such as students, parents, teacher educators, etc.

The initial phase of the portal envisages a space for teachers to express their ideas and share their thoughts on any subject that touches their professional lives. Phase one involves the

uploading of material created by and for teachers in five languages (Hindi, English, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada). These will be short articles written by teachers on subjects of their choice including classroom practice, their experiences in school, ideas that they tried to experiment on, etc. This phase also envisages the beginnings of a district-wise directory of resource organizations working in education, that will help teachers gain access to material and people in their own geographic area.

During the subsequent phases of the portal, teachers will continue to contribute their thoughts. Links will be provided to websites of other organizations, institutions and people to provide access for teachers. Resource material (articles, policy documents, manuals, tools, modules etc.) by experts in the field will be made available on the portal either directly or through links. Teachers will be able to interact with each

other and post questions, opinions, etc. The number of languages offered by the portal will gradually increase until all Indian languages are covered. The Home Page will also feature a "Teacher of the Month", in recognition of special efforts.

This portal will offer resources related to: Education Perspectives (Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, Economics), Classroom Practice (Principles of Pedagogy, Pedagogy of Language, Science, Mathematics, History, Geography, Political Science, Economics, EVS, Art, Music, Dance, Sports), including manuals, activities, modules, tools, etc., Subject Content (Language, Science, Mathematics, History, Geography, Political Science, Economics, EVS, Art, Music, Dance, Sports), Stories, Songs, Games that teachers can use in class, Reading Resources (including links to other websites/portals/online library), Research Information and specific Case Studies.

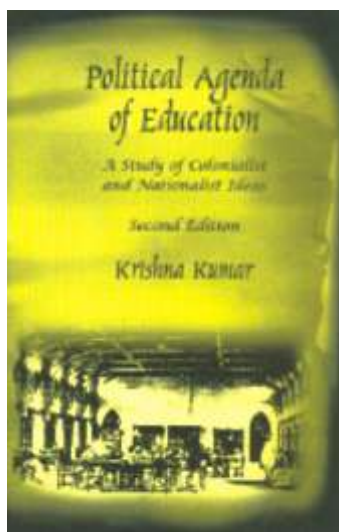
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BOOK REVIEW

Political Agenda of Education - A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas

By Krishna Kumar

Sage Publications, New Delhi (2005); 224 Pages



The state of education in India today concerns us all. The rote memorization of texts, the supremacy of the text book, the dictatorial role of the teacher in the classroom, the finality of the examination in deciding the worth of the student's achievement, the question of gender and caste, the government led and delivered curriculum and many other challenges

facing the education system in India are all possibly symptoms or causes of our colonialist and nationalist past.

Krishna Kumar in this book, *Political Agenda of Education*, delves into that past and analyses, brilliantly, the development of the modern education system. The book traces the roots of the education agenda from the beginning of the colonization of India to a nationalist revival and peels the various layers of political agendas that dictated the legacies that still linger on.

A common view often heard in India blames the British for designing an education system that systemically produced clerks to support the British Empire in India. Krishna Kumar challenges this view and calls it theoretically feeble and historically untenable and launches a historical enquiry to understand why colonial education had the effects it had. In his analysis of early colonial educational enterprise, he describes the varied goals that education was meant to achieve from a pursuit of order to developing a moral agenda for the creation of a civil society under the British empire in

India. Initial reports from British administrators offer interesting insight to understand the ideological roots of colonial education. Krishna Kumar says it was a complex idea, constituting elements of several different kinds of liberal-economic and political doctrines, paternalism and evangelicism.

Another interesting insight that is offered is the relationship of the nationalist movement and its educational agenda (as promoted by Indian intellectuals and reformers) with that of the colonial agenda. Krishna Kumar states that the central theme of colonial discourse on education, of a morally superior teacher and a society whose character was in need of reform, was a contribution of both movements. He further states that English education, as a means of modern western knowledge, suited the Indian intellectuals and leaders well, who were in search of an education discourse for India in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and that it reconfirmed the social distance between the masses and the upper caste families and bestowed upon them a moral superiority and a certain legitimacy.

Krishna Kumar then begins an enquiry into the question of what is worth teaching, and the context of the mid-nineteenth century choices made by the English administrators regarding the curriculum. He also closely examines the colonial education system and traces some of the problems in education that we face today. Drawing from various reports, he establishes the goals of the Indian traditional education system, where teaching was a specialized activity, with the teacher having complete autonomy over the classroom, the curriculum and over each child's individual progress. He then contrasts it with the goals of the colonial education system and draws out the reasons for a change in the teacher's position as well as of a curriculum that was based of facts and rules and governed by inspectors with prescribed texts and examinations.

In the second half of the book, Krishna Kumar analyses the dynamics of the freedom struggle and the quest in it for equality, self-identity and progress. The pursuit of these three value orientations, says Kumar, permit us to see how the prominent discourses on education combined discrete value positions to develop distinct configurations. For understanding these three complex non-mutual categories, Kumar looks at various efforts in the nationalist movement to understand the impact they had on education. He looks at Phule's struggle against Brahmanical dominance and Ambedkar's leadership in wielding the cause of the oppressed castes to better understand the question of equality within the bourgeois-liberal framework. He also discusses issues of positive discrimination and girl's education to locate equality within the educational agenda for India. He goes on to further probe the quest for self identity and the role that education played in the revivalist streak of politics in the freedom struggle, like the transformation of Hindi into a class dialect of the educated. He also looks at the term 'progress', defined in terms of industrialization and modernization as means of production. He argues however that the right of the state to define a secular 'national identity' did not succeed in an educational sense and that no attempt was made to alter the epistemological basis of colonial education. Lastly, in a telling way, Krishna Kumar concludes that after half a century of independence, cultural revivalism has resurfaced and that our modernized industrial base has served this revival. He warns us of this pursuit that, he says, has little patience for equality and justice and that the challenge to alter this equation still exists.

This is an excellent book for understanding the connection between education and its political leverage. A must read for those helping shape a more vibrant education system revival.

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