

Crisis Of Education System In India: Systemic Failures And Remedies

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Abstract:

The question as to whether education policy devised by the government from time to time can alleviate the perennial education crisis in India calls for a holistic attention to the embedded education system. The standard of education indicates the quality of citizens in a nation. The kind of education policy reflects the direction in which a country is heading to. The education system is messy in India and path Indian state has chosen to tread is bumpy. Factors wrecking Indian education system are startling. The misdirection of the will and commitment to vitalise education system has been a habitual norm. This paper is an attempt to delve into the crisis in education system in post-independence India.

Key Words: Culture; Government; Merit; Knowledge; System

Primacy of Education in India and the Efforts of the State

Education is undoubtedly an elixir for the advancement of a society. Education not only empowers individual, it also ensures human dignity (UNESCO, 2019). As J S Mill emphatically underlined that it is utmost important that education should be given to all citizens so as to enable them to perform their part well towards others and towards themselves (J. B. Schneewind, 2002). The origin of several issues in the underdeveloped societies are rooted in the chaotic education system. India has been facing crisis in education system since independence. The trend of haphazard education policy followed for decades is credited for the perilous backwardness in all spheres. Sensing the evils looming large, a legislative step, in the form of making education accessible to children, has been taken to reorient the course. Right to education is a fundamental right in the constitution of India today. Right to education becomes a fundamental right as per the constitution eighty sixth amendment act, 2002 which introduces article 21A (MP Jain, 2014). Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 came into force on 2010 and according to this, children between the ages of 6 to 14 years are to be provided free and compulsory education. This act is in alliance with UNESCO's vision of inclusive education—education for all (UNESCO, 2005). Right to education sounds a very pragmatic step to eradicate the root causes of many of the evils in India. This constitutional act of widening the access of education to people is hollow in several levels. Careful examination of such a step reveals that the implementation of this provision engenders multi-layered loopholes. For instance, this act does not state how states in the India within the quasi-federal system would be able to implement this. The direction to enact the laws in this regard by the states, education being in the concurrent list, is vague. More importantly, the fiscal arrangement of sharing the financial baggage between the states and the centre in this direction is unclear. This act states that the central government shall provide to state governments grants-in-aid of revenues and determine the percentage of expenditure in consultation with the state governments. But the need for a robust mechanism to supervise the proper utilization of the funds by the states is not listed in the act. In fact, the huge gap between the ideals in the constitution as a fundamental right and the level of actual materialisation on the ground is observable. Quite clearly, many of the constitutional provisions are notoriously violated in India on daily basis. Having a fantastic law enacted is different from being an expert in finding flaws as a way to justify any blatant act of violation of law.

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Having a legislation to make education a fundamental right is definitely a laudable step. But is this step all potent to address the primary causes of the crisis in the education system in India? The answer is not affirmative and rightly so. There are several aspects that cripple education system in India for ages which need to be seriously pondered over. Transforming education accessible to people in itself is never a panacea for many of the evils in India. At the same time, not having a sound education system is one of the fundamental reasons for the burgeoning perils. Addressing the problems of crisis in education requires a realistic approach to bring reforms in other domains, such as electoral politics, social structure, economic system and cultural ethos. The crisis in education system cannot be successfully tackled unless substantial reforms are brought in these domains. In fact, education system being implemented itself is the overall reflection of the Indian society. The perennial crisis of education system in India has much deeper roots. Clamouring for solutions to the decline of education in India, while keeping a blind eye to the internal causes, is akin to tackling with the syndrome rather than dealing with the proper diagnosis of the disease. Idealistic sloganeering and poetic rendering cannot invoke any feasible way-outs. Indian state, owing to multiple complicated calls, has failed continuously to clean up the dirt in education sector. As a matter of fact, any new policy on education devised by government cannot cure the decimating education system, except that it may produce some cosmetic transformation in terms of syllabus and curriculum formulation. It is because the surging problem is much deeper, and is not just confined to the pedagogy and curriculum trajectory.

Decay of Education and Structural Lapses in the Policy Making

The lapse of education quality in India can be clearly traced to many factors. As a tradition in Indian history, education has been elitist in nature and aimed at preserving the positions and privileges of the more advantaged sections. Even the Muslim rulers and British government did not dislodge this practice (Vinay Rai & Narendra Kumar, 2010). In the post-independence era, India has witnessed several committees and commissions initiated by government to bring reformation in Indian education system. Typical to the Indian system, the purpose of the formation of these committees and commissions are wrapped into oblivion, let alone the proper implementation of the recommendations. Often the mode of appointment of the member, motives and recommendations are endlessly censured left, right and centre. The overall system operating in India does not allow any new changes to work smoothly. Lack of political will, irrespective of any political party, is the one noticeable factor that hamper the timely restructuring of education system in India. Unlike the political system in China and USA where there prevail one party system and bi party system respectively, India's tiring experimentation with the flaw multiparty system also produces this ailment. Under the guise of democracy, no transformation of this political system is ever inoculated. Every political party backed by their party ideology crave for power both in states and centre. In the name of democracy, any progressive move is severely curtailed in every level. Political parties in India tend to interpret any major changes or reforms from the lens of their party interest. This is not exception in every attempt to bring changes in education system in India. For instance, if a ruling party proposes to make some radical reforms in the curriculum, the parties in the opposition would perceive the motives almost in the opposite way. Such lack of integrity and commitment among the political parties invariably obstruct any move to reform education system in India. For instance, the congress party, particularly Nehru, is blamed for establishing a left leaning education policy since independence, while the BJP is criticised for its attempt to introduce Hindutva oriented education policy. Political parties hardly perceive any initiative from the broad interest of the nation. It is beyond any doubt that political parties in India are ready to go to any extent to expand their vote bank in every possible circumstance. As the result, changes of committees, and overlooking the recommendations by the new regime is the trend. In such scenario, any pursuit of stable education policy to usher the standard output is put in the backyard. Besides, the genuine voice of the concerned citizens is met with political silence because of the flouted political system.

Interestingly, the kind of education needed to be imparted and developed in India is never seriously deliberated. The sole emphasis is put on the formal education in India. Knowledge, skills and traits,

outside the realm of formal education, required to be preserved and advanced further in society are perpetually degraded. The skills and knowledge system suitable for the progress of society are not the prime focus in India. Along with it, the idea of 'merit' is misplaced and defined based on some convenient criteria. Merit is not associated with knowledge or genuine aptitude or commitment in any given field. Merit is habitually perceived from the point of certain pedigrees, social standing, network, clout etc. This ill trend thins down the scope for the large sections in society to excel in various spheres. Since the idea of education is narrowly conceived, merit is also invariably defined within the domain of formal education. In the longer run, this manufactures a major factor that foments crisis in labour sector. As a matter of fact, everyone is not socially and economically equipped to take part in formal education. Sizeable sections in Indian society have been kept out of the formal education owing to the centuries-old caste system. This is even more so in the level of higher education. What B R Ambedkar expressed long ago about the sorry nature of higher education being cornered by the certain caste groups is still clearly resonated. Ambedkar lamented that higher education in India is the monopoly of Hindus and particularly of high caste Hindus. Untouchabilities are denied the opportunity of education. As they are under poverty, higher education is beyond their reach (B R Ambedkar, 1972). This essentially means the proper democratisation of education system is not the character of Indian tradition. Even the great B R Ambedkar had to fight for the education of the children of untouchables or the depressed classes who were refused admission to schools (Dhananjay Keer, 2009). In fact, Jotirao Phule fought for the rights of masses in education even in the pre-independence era. Phule observed that the education system in India 'tended to educate Brahmins and the higher classes only, leaving the masses in ignorance and poverty' (G. P. Deshpande, 2010). After the independence, when education is open for all, the conflict between the past rigid tradition and new democratic trend comes out in open. Hence, it becomes inevitable for the socially and economically dominant sections to monopolise the education sector. This is precisely the reason why the idea of 'knowledge' and 'merit' is not clearly understood even today. The incessant crisis in education system in India is intrinsically related to this vacuum. What should constitute the actual education in Indian context is still a big question unanswered. The modus operandi of highly structured and centralised system of education being imposed is not thoroughly assessed.

Unending Debates and Noisy Cacophony about Progress

The so called Indian civilization is so complex, so is the present entity called India. Having experienced bitter foreign invasion and long colonial rule, India in many ways is not rid of many past bondages. The present education system in India can be seen as the imprint of the colonial rule. The British introduced the western English education system in India to produce a class who could help in their administration. Introduction of English language in the education system is the one major instrument to this end. It is not wrong to say that in the post British India, no authentic education policy has not been rationally put into practice. One classic example is the undue admiration and reverence reserved for the English language in India. Yes, India being a multilingual society, English is used as a link language. The differences between a language being used as a lingua franca and the culture of worshipping that foreign language is never demarcated. Even the culture of elevating English-speaking tribe in the higher pedestal is shamelessly continued in India. During the British era, the imposition of English language divides Indians (Sunil Khilnani, 2004). It is still a peculiar character in India that such schism between those who can speak English and those who cannot. This trend illogically creates an unnatural hierarchy of knowledge system in India. The people who are at the helm of education policy making has been in the hands of foreign educated, so called the elite class. This is the reason why the medium of instruction in the educational institutions in India is primarily English. But what is ignored is the fact that every language is a huge reservoir of knowledge and undermining a language amounts to the loss of valuable knowledge. It is not to deny the importance of English language as it is the gateway to a vast ocean of knowledge. As C Rajagopalchari rightly stated that English language is the doorway to modern knowledge and progress (Ramachandra Guha, 2012). But what is required is to use English language as a tool to enrich the knowledge system. In

addition, education policy is largely in the line of the western educational system. Even today, Indian theory, philosophy, literature, arts are not given higher preference on par with western counterparts. The learning of indigenous medicine system like Ayurveda and Siddha are completely replaced by the western Allopathy system. This is the classic case of the ongoing colonisation of Indian education. No honest debate in this regard does take place.

The anglophile class in India who happen to be at the corridor of the political power ever since the independence, sets western education, particularly UK and USA, as the parameter to ape. This policy has been systematically discouraging any discourse or deliberation to devise the original system of education suitable for India. Instead the culture of pride and glory is deeply entrenched in the imitation of the western education system. As Ananda Coomaraswamy pointed out sarcastically that one of the greatest injuries inflicted on Indians by the British is the inception of English education which destroys all capacity to appreciate Indian culture and transforming them into strangers in their own land (Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, 1909). This not only breed the culture of inferiority complex among Indians, it also deters the culture of original thinking. In the process of emulating the west, our own indigenous knowledge system has been continuously discarded. Today, the primacy of indigenous knowledge is completely erased. People who advocate about the need for reviving the traditional knowledge system and making it a part of educational curriculum are repeatedly ridiculed as being regressive and conservative. Instead, people who breathe western ideas and practices are unduly regarded. But what is forgotten is that degradation of one's own language catapults the loss of indigenous creativity and knowledge production. With the structural obliteration of the native knowledge bank, the spirit for originality gets derailed. What is happening in Indian education system is nothing less than a colonial enslavement. As M K Gandhi rightly stated that 'though we are politically free, we are hardly free from the subtle domination of the West' (Mahatma Gandhi, 2017). In the job market, the merit of candidate is not screened through a test of candidate's aptitude and expertise in the subject or field. The overwhelming norm of deciding candidate's suitability for the job is fixed by the universities, preferably foreign universities, where they acquire degrees from. But what is not acknowledged is that that foreign educated scholars produce writings and books which are often found to be alien to Indian context. The scholarly or intellectual status are normally reserved for the foreign educated people. Very often the genuine scholars who have not gone abroad for study are bestowed with selective respect. This leads to the perpetual eclipse of the aim and purpose of progressive education which India needs to pursue. In the midst of all, a very cacophonous defence has been that India education also produces many world class scholars, engineers, entrepreneurs, et al. It is also true that many Indians hold high paying jobs and many of them are placed in the top post in corporate sector. But given the size of population, those successful are too few and minuscule. One way to explain their success is because they are trained in western oriented education system in India and hence they can adapt quickly in the foreign lands. In fact, if this view is true, then how would one explain why majority of graduates in India are found to be unemployable?

Lurking Challenges and Feasible Prescriptions for Remedy

Despite all the efforts, enormous issues continue to hinder education system in India. There is so much deliberation on the importance of creating quality education in India without actually examining what education is needed in society. Whether the kind of education being operated in educational institutions are really helping the country to leap forward is not really questioned. There is no proper mechanism to monitor the sort of education being essential in Indian context. So education policies are still followed in the institutionalised ad hoc manner. Despite many educational policies, there is no meticulous plan to mitigate the problem of 'dropout' in government schools. It is visible that the gap of learning outcome between government schools and private schools is huge. The rate of 'dropout' of children is high as the result of inability to learn and disinterest in education (Madhumita Bandyopadhyay, 2017). In India, the higher education is largely funded by the government. This system is not sufficient to meet the increasing demands to churn out the quality education. Being a poor and a populous country, there is a systemic decline in Indian education system. The system of funding to

educational institutions are not uniform and there is selective method of the distribution of the funds. Definitely, there is a space for the private institutions to play a major role. Unlike some advanced countries, private educational institutions in higher level do not thrive in India. Often it is blamed that there are too much centralisation of educational sector in India and the freedom to run institutions are curbed. Beyond this point, the real issue is the surreptitious approach often adopted by the private sector. The glorious educational history of United States where many philanthropic entrepreneurs distinctively contribute in founding world class universities cannot be the case in India. Indian story is basically laced with the wave of how rich politicians and businessmen launch educational institutions as a way to invest black money and to mint money. There are umpteen cases where huge fees are charged on students and degrees are literally available on sale. All talk about introducing public private partnership model (PPP) in education sector is still mired. Further, in the absence the real understanding of 'knowledge' and 'merit', all what people seek is good marks or grades. The idea of merit and knowledge is perpetually ensnarled by two degrading trends—merits and knowledge being defined from the platform of caste based occupation and the colonised English oriented interpretation. So the rote learning process which is but an exam oriented education is a dominant feature. It is because scoring good marks is considered as the hallmark of success. As a spiral effect, in the recruitment process for jobs, candidate's credibility is often judged based on the connection, recommendation, marks, caste etc. Job seekers also intend to secure the post by hook or by crook. This naturally breeds the ground for massive corruption in education sector. Demands for government jobs are extraordinarily high in India. There is an unreasonable pride in being a government servant in India. Majority of the people are in favour of salaried government jobs. This mind-set often generates loathsome and incompetent work culture in many educational institutions.

However, it is the time that there is a radical cultural redemption in Indian education sector. Practical steps are to be taken to shed the culture of long colonial slavery. Education policy-programmes suitable for the Indian milieu must be formulated. The indigenous knowledge bank must be nurtured and a sense of pride in one's own cultural ethos must be inculcated. The kind of education applicable in the real live conditions must be prioritised. As John Dewey rightly emphasised that education should not be only book based learning; education must be practical oriented (Will Durant, 1961). Political parties irrespective of their ideologies must render their support for the best education reforms. Political parties must not indulge in obstructing any timely changes in the education policy of the country. Vote bank politics should be completely detached from the education policy. What is called for is to ditch the trust deficit among the political parties and the government must wield 'political will' to implement pragmatic education policy. It is high time that a robust education policy is in place. It must be noted that education is a double-edged sword (Olof Sandkull, 2007). Education can reduce social evils, and it can also increase them. Further, proper laws and regulations must be framed to allow private sector to shoulder the responsibility along with the government in education sector. Private sector must be allowed to play a significant role in bringing out the best education system in India. Given the size of population, it is so irrational not to allow private sector to take part in education sector. For this to happen, the conundrum between centralisation and autonomy must be settled in a realistic manner. Most importantly, teaching profession commands less self-esteem and low social standing. Alleviation of this setback is utmost essential by bring a drastic change of mind-set and perception about teaching profession (Mool Chand Sharma, 2013). Along with it, a culture of respecting all professions must be introduced in curriculum. All occupations whether government or private, manual or intellectual must be treated equally. This means all subjects or disciplines must be treated equally, particularly in higher education. Dignity of labour must be cultivated in the minds of the people. This will eventually curb the mad rush to grab white collar jobs in India. It can also sanitise the poor work culture in educational institutions. What is needed is the unstinting commitment of all the stakeholders to be realistic enough to address the malaise of certain social and cultural practices which ail Indian society in general and Indian education in particular. Given the decades long population explosion and accelerating rate of mass scale poverty, a radical reform in education sector is an utmost necessity. It is beyond any doubt that India is endowed with huge potential of human resources with young population. At the same time, unless the abundant human resource is not

harnessed through suitable education system, the unimaginable demographic disaster may fall upon India in the near future.

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