

Corporatization of Technical Education in India

Departure from Social Justice and Economic Equality

A Critical Evaluation

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It is really possible to eradicate poverty, unemployment, to improve the lives of the people in general and rural poor in particular, to free the farmer from sufferings, to end all sorts of inequalities, to attain qualitative progress in the living standards of people so as to protect the democratic values and ultimately to realize social justice only with the “Technical Education” which is expected to provide “technical skills associated with social consciousness”. This will pave the way for the process of building socio-economic structures based on equity. What is the nature and state of this highly significant “Technical Education” in present India? How is it being articulated and for whose interests? What is its effect on our structures of economy, social justice, democratic relations and human values especially in the context of intensification of corporatization of “Technical Education” in India? All these issues are to be analyzed and discussed seriously to create a favourable environment for the emergence of socially conscious technical education.

Technical education itself will not become an instrument automatically to achieve economic equality and social justice in India where all kind of inequalities based on class, caste, gender and region have been rooted strongly in the structures of society. It is not an automatic tool. It needs to be linked with the consciousness of studies of social sciences and humanities to transform it into an efficient and effective means to build the structures of society on the basis of equity and rights. It is known to all, that Albert Einstein who invented “Atom Bomb” had seriously perturbed and worried by looking at the violent effects on Hiroshima & Nagasaki during World War II. He strongly opined that “*social consciousness is a necessary pre-condition for scientific and technical education*”. Therefore, he categorically stated as early as in 1954 that “*it is not enough to teach a person a specialty. It is essential that the student acquire an understanding of and a lively feeling for values and a vivid sense of the morally good. Otherwise, the person with specialized skills and knowledge, more closely resembles a “well-trained dog” rather than a harmoniously developed person*”. The nature and pattern of use of the development, inventions and innovations of science and technology determines its effect. If it is used with the social consciousness, then it is possible to move towards ending all sorts of exploitation, oppression and violence so as to build humane structures of society.

Does the introduction of technical education in India with the perspectives of self-reliant economic development and social justice?

The emergence of industrial revolution in England resulted in the origin and development of present technical education. At that time, India was under the colonial rule of England. The then government implemented several policy measures including discriminatory tariff system to deindustrialize India to destroy technical expertise and manufacturing activity so as to transform India as a market for the survival of British machine-industries. The articulation of Indian economy according to the needs and development of England resulted in the backwardness and its perpetuation till now.

In this context, can we expect the objective of the policy measures of British Indian Government towards the development of Technical Education was really to make India as self-reliant economy?

In the Pre-Independence period, the then British Indian Government tried to expose itself that it gives importance to technical development in India and constituted a committee in 1945 under the chairmanship of N.R.Sarkar for the creation of adequate number of technically skilled persons. Why do we need adequate number of technical persons? For whose benefit? What is the real interest of British Government? To meet the post-war needs of the Britain and to revive its industrial development was the real purpose. The origin and articulation of present technical education in India itself was not from the perspective of the development of Indian economy but the needs of dominant countries especially Britain at that time. This trend has been established, expanded and strengthened strongly.

The committee in its report in 1946 has recommended that it is necessary to establish four Indian institutes of Technology (IITs) on the lines of Massachusetts Institute of Technology [MIT] in US. However, it was

astonishing to note that the government of 'Independent' India in the Post-Independence period wanted to invite American Team to give suggestions to establish IITs in India. The team naturally lacks perspective on the social and political realities of India. They did not search for alternative ways of technological and national development of India. They failed to achieve any co-ordination between IITs and Democratic values as well as needs of our country. This clearly states that the rulers have totally forgotten to think about our economic conditions and identify the political and social realities. Thus, the establishment of the institutes of technical education took place not to solve our problems and are totally unrelated to the challenges of our country. Therefore, their pattern of organization has been articulated according to the needs of global market and to the agenda of corporate powers. Did the IITs play any role in the economic development of our nation or in the protection of democratic values? What is the justification to allocate huge amount of scarce resources to maintain them? These are the serious questions.

What will be done by the engineering graduates trained in these institutions which have been articulated as per the agenda of corporate forces? They tempt to work in affluent countries and in multi-national corporations. They leave the country for the self-centered advantages. This phenomenon of leakage of high quality technical persons has been named as "Brain Drain" and the consequent serious harm done to the nation has been intensively discussed during 1970's.

As early as in 1961, the "Nayudamma Committee" has seriously recommended that there is an urgent need to redesign engineering syllabus with inter-disciplinary approach and curricula should be made broad based and flexible. Moreover, it should contain substantial studies in social sciences and humanities including heavy dosages of basic and biological sciences. All this is warranted to humanize the professions as well as the professionals and technical experts. Unfortunately, the government did not put any effort to implement these recommendations which are significant for building humane socio-economic structures.

It is astonishing to note that the origin and development of privatisation has been closely associated with the development of IITs which are exclusively under the control of Central government. A mushroom growth took place in the establishment of various private coaching centers to give coaching exclusively for IIT entrance test. It is really a paradox to identify the implicit connection between seeds of privatisation and the development of institutions of technical education under the control of central government. This trend advanced further and on the name of "IIT Foundation from secondary school education", the private corporate schools have been charging and collecting high fee and made school education more costly. This is the bitter reality of the present day.

The forward linkage of articulation of IITs according to the needs and interests of corporate forces resulted in the backward linkage of growth of privatisation. At present the number of IITs in our country are 21 when we take into account the promise of central government in its budget 2014-2015 to establish 5 IITs. These are followed by National institutes of Technology [NITs]. They are 30 in our country. The next status goes to constituent engineering colleges of universities. All these institutes of Technical Education come under public sector.

Our Technical Education sector, since its inception, has been moulded from the perspective of the interests of corporate forces and will naturally be attractive for private investments which work for profit. Therefore, the private institutes could enter and expand into the technical education sector as early as the Third five year plan and huge growth can be seen in the non-grant technical institutes that run with capitation fee from 1974-75. They could get strong support from the state governments. This trend is strong especially in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu and undivided Andhra Pradesh.

By 1985, as many as 33,578 engineering students are in private institutes while only 24,313 are in public institutes. Similar trend can be seen even at the diploma level where 62,998 students are in private institutes where as 51,927 are in public institutes. This clearly shows the relative strength of private institutes when compared to public institutes. The accelerated growth and expansion of private technical institutes resulted in the deterioration of academic standards and the quality of teaching and training. The process of termination of social consciousness among students has been strengthened.

Public policies have been formulated to accelerate privatisation in the technical education sector even prior to the entry of globalization in the name of New Economic Policy in 1990-91. The National Education Policy, 1986 will be a clear evidence for this trend. The University grants Commission has initiated various reforms according to the prescription of the policy. It is a known fact that in the era of globalization the term

“**reforms**” itself indicates the creation of favourable environment for the development and expansion of privatisation. This resulted in the abnormal multiplication of private technical institutes which run exclusively with self-financing courses and capitation fee. At the end of Tenth Five Year Plan, their number is 45,122 and enrolment of students stand at 7.83 lakhs.

Moreover, the State governments have formulated Private University Acts to legalise the process of Privatisation of Technical education. The domination of Private sector in the institutes related to engineering and management has been increased with the establishment of Jawaharlal Nehru Technical University [JNTU] in the undivided Andhra Pradesh, the best example for this trend. 1) How many people have the capacity to pay the high fee charged by these institutions? 2) What is the guarantee of profits for the managements of these private technical institutes? In order to solve the second problem i.e., to give guarantee to the profits for private managements, the government has introduced ‘Fee Reimbursement Programme’ in the name of ‘provision of corporate technical education to the poor is the responsibility of the government’. The pro-corporate measure has successfully been shown as pro-poor measure. Moreover, is it not shame on the part of government to state ‘corporate’ is superior to public institutions? These private managements possess enormous political strength. Further, they successfully misused the ‘Fee Reimbursement Programme’ in various ways to appropriate government funds and became further rich. The constitution of ‘Vigilance Committees’ in Telangana in recent days, to arrest the misuse of funds, indicates the extent of misappropriation of government funds. Meanwhile, they stopped ‘Fee reimbursement’. The management class, which could appropriate all the benefits from this programme so far, have been throwing the incidence of burden from stoppage of fee-reimbursement onto the teachers and staff. It is very difficult for the teachers to survive without pay for months together. Their lives became miserable. In fact, working in these institutes itself is very difficult as always they have to prove that they are profitable to the institute.

Many people are of the opinion that the real intention behind **the stoppage of fee-reimbursement is to create a favourable environment for the initiation of insurance-based technical education system** as “the provision of loans for education”. This “creation of insurance-based education system” is a strong proposal of the World Bank. The remaining programme is to weaken public institutions so as to encourage private institutions. This resulted in **the shortage of teachers in prestigious institutes to the extent of 36 percent in IITs and 41 percent in NITs**. Private engineering colleges, whose sole aim is profit, are appointing fresh B.Tech graduates to teach B.Tech students. Enrolment of engineering students in these institutions stands at 15 lakhs, while the **shortage of teachers is as high as 80,000**. This is the state [fate] of so called “efficient” private colleges. Out of 15 lakh engineering graduates, only 5 percent are going to PG level. It is astonishing to note that as low as 1 percent of them could go upto Ph.D level. However, the standards are controversial. Everybody knows that the research basically lacks seriousness, sincerity and discipline. Is it possible to expect to realize the recommendation of Nayudamma Committee - “**research towards humanizing professions**”?

Keeping aside the characteristics of social consciousness, respect for democratic values, self-confidence, self-respect, protesting injustice, fight for justice that an engineering graduate is expected to possess, do they deserve their degrees in terms of at least expertise? The phenomenon of “Easy going” which is created and strengthened by the process of globalization is the answer for that question. On one hand, they study in private colleges, and on the other, to learn additional knowledge in IT and computers they move around private coaching centres which can be seen everywhere on the roads. The public sector leads to private, private leads to private. Privatisation and its expansion is like octopus. If the purpose of education is to meet the needs of market then it will be dictated by private sector only. Though the education is linked to employment, the estimates of National Association of Software and services Company [NASSCOM] reveals the bitter fact that **out of 85 percent engineering students who belong to self-financing engineering colleges, as low as less than 20 percent could get jobs**. What is the fate of unemployed engineering graduates? They cannot earn anything for their livelihood. They are useful neither to themselves nor to the society. These self-centred, easy going youth will not question the imperialist exploitation and the domination of corporate forces. Of course World Bank wants and perpetuates this kind of tendency. Moreover, the youth who are caught in the lure of luxurious life have been forced to become criminals and earn something through the activities of fraud. The media is disclosing about the lives of women where they are compelled

to become sex-workers sometimes. All these deterioration and decay is the result of corporatization of technical education. Still, Public policies have been formulated to intensify this crisis is the biggest tragedy.

What is the nature of Public Policies?

The intensification of the crisis due to government decisions and public policies is because of the fact that they declare the cause of the problem as the solution. Public policies have been formulated to invite corporate institutes by stating “Corporatisation of technical education is the only way to achieve development”. Now corporate companies can start courses with the permission of AICTE. With this, the government states that it is possible to raise the enrolment ratio to 21 percent by 2017. The department of Human Resource Development Ministry has been initiating various reforms to accelerate corporatisation of technical education. Now, the challenge, they feel is how to attract corporate investments? For this, they chose the model of Public-Private Partnership [PPP] and Build-Operate-transfer-Model [BOOT]. It is a fact that both the models are pro-corporate and anti-people.

It is stunning to note the statement of government and its network that as technical education is profitable to the private sector and corporate forces, it is their responsibility to make investment in this sector. This explicitly states the abandonment of the goals of the social justice and the protection of democratic values.

The issue is what kind of technical education and for whose benefit does the corporate sector provides technical education? The technical education “**will be for the corporate sector, of the corporate sector and by the corporate sector**”. The approach itself is corporate forces-centred, while people’s interest is totally missing in it.

The National Knowledge Commission which is popularly known as Yashpal Committee estimates that there is a need to establish more than 1000 universities and more than 10,000 colleges to raise the enrolment ratio in the Higher Education sector. Moreover, it is necessary to attract High-Calibre teachers and encourage research. It concludes that all this will be possible only through corporatisation. According to the estimates of this committee, the market value of our Higher Education sector is 20 billion US dollars. Therefore, it requires an investment of 20 billion US Dollars in the next 10-12 years. Who will make investment at this level? It is possible only for the corporate forces. Therefore, the question is how to attract these forces? A forthcoming white paper of confederation of Indian Industry [CII] entitled “Discovering New Models of Increasing Private Participation in Higher Education” is expected to address the issues of quantification of investment required, identification of sources of funds, the level of private participation required, the experiences of various countries and how to take loan from World Bank and Asian Development Bank. All this is a clear evidence of mortgaging our technical education to corporate forces on the name of raising enrolment ratio, provision of quality education and bridge rural-urban divide.

However it is not the independent decision of our government to corporatize technical education. It is because of the strong international pressures, especially the pressure of the World Bank.

What are those International Pressures? What are its effects?

The dominant capitalist countries along with their local network could succeed in creating conditions to compel major socialist countries to step backward which resulted in the end of ideological confrontation. This cleared the way for aggressive and arrogant growth of capitalist system. The capitalist/corporate forces could unite strongly. The emergence and accelerated growth of globalization is the result of the consolidation of the corporate forces. The World Bank could play key and strategic role to create ideological basis as well as real conditions to strengthen this trend. The corporate forces will sustain and continue without any questioning if they control education sector with which they can direct and dictate youth and mould them accordingly to their needs. They can command entire structures of economy. Consequently imperialist exploitation will continue without any hindrance. In this process, the World Bank released a report in 1994 entitled “Higher Education - Lessons of Experience”. This created a strong basis to eradicate government control over higher education system including Technical and professional education, to strengthen privatisation and ultimately to bring the higher education system under complete control of corporate forces.

The process of intensification of privatisation results in the demise of courses that are called as intellectual capital which is an essential pre-requisite for the social progress. The engineering and management courses assumed significance. Moreover, the courses related to computers and IT became the indicators of knowledge. The youth who are trained in these lines always tries for opportunities in foreign countries and high salary

package jobs at any cost but will not have any kind of social consciousness. They are totally illiterates about social justice and human relations. No self-respect at all. Moreover, they are characterized by timidness which results in the tolerance of all kinds of oppression, exploitation and injustice. The youth with slave mentality is very much essential for the sustenance of imperialist exploitation.

To stiffen this trend and to establish the argument that 'There is no alternative for corporatization' World Bank has released a report entitled "Constructing knowledge Societies: New challenges for Tertiary education" in 2002. The essence of the report is that Higher Education means engineering and Management courses and this kind of education will be provided effectively only by corporate forces. No one else will process the capability.

The corporatized institutes of Technical education will naturally take the form of big business corporations in the market. Their strong assumption is that the "Market is the solution for every problem". Therefore, deep knowledge is unnecessary. The student will become customer or client. The courses are offered on the basis of market demand. No need to think about the requirements of people or society. No place for morality. The regulations are to be followed- *that's all*. The techniques are above to all the values. The wage differentiation will be so great where no two individual employees in any organization will have same wage. No question of unionization and consolidation. The employees cannot unite on any issue. No employment on permanent basis. The casualization will be a dominant phenomenon. The institution of education has been managed as a company. The low standards will be the actual phenomenon. They follow 'Market Driven Strategy'. The public institutes will be thrown on to 'Death Bed. No one will be there to debate and discuss about the society critically. If the Nobel Prize awardees spoke on these issues, then it is ok. Prior to corporatization, any ordinary normal academic person can talk about social issues where as now the moral leadership is totally transferred to Nobel laureates. Therefore any normal academic either teacher or student will have no autonomy to speak or discuss about social issues and democratic values. If they speak, they are termed as criminals and terrorists and liable for legal action. The incidents of University of Hyderabad and Jawaharlal University (JNU), Delhi are the best examples for this.

On the one hand, UNO's UNDP publishes Human Development Report with various indices of human and gender development but the models developed by countries which are in the highest position in Human Development have not been accepted by the World Bank. This is a serious contradiction. The World Bank will not agree to the best models of education of Scandinavian countries such as Norway, Sweden which are in the forefront of Human Development. Unless they are market- oriented and there by pro-corporate, the World Bank will have no trust on them. The pro-people models are termed by the World Bank as 'Worst Models'. Further, it will criticize that their Higher Education sector is characterized by "Too much student welfare, Too much State control, Too much academic independence, Too much public involvement, Too little cost sharing by students, Too little market considerations". Thus the World Bank will accept, popularize and pressurise the globe especially developing countries like India to take serious measures towards corporatization of Higher Education as well as Technical Education. The aim of building 'Knowledge Societies' itself is to strengthen the domination of corporate forces.

As a result of corporatization of Technical education as part of Higher Education, the poverty is increasing, no livelihood, and extreme inequalities on the rise. The majority people are deprived of education and health services. The Oxfam Report categorically states that it is necessary to emancipate the education and the health sectors to lessen the intensity of inequalities. Therefore, it is the greater responsibility of the progressive groups who have faith in people- centered approach to mobilise people in this direction.
