

Education Budget - 2023 : 'Amrita Kaal' to Corporates – 'Visha Kaal' to Students

On the one hand, millions of people are struggling for their survival due to the crisis created by Corona. On the other hand, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman described the current budget as 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav'. She said the budget was not just for one year, but the next 25 years with a vision of India@100 for the future.

The Oxfam report, published during the 2022-23 budget, highlights the growing economic inequality in India. According to the report, the Covid-19 crisis will reduce the income of 84 percent of households in the country by 2021 and cause the loss of 4.6 crore jobs. At the same time, 77 percent of the country's assets are owned by just 10 percent of the wealthy and the number of billionaires increased from 102 to 142. According to report, the wealth of the rich increased from Rs. 23.14 lakh crore to Rs 53.16 lakh crore in 2020-21. Talking about Finance Minister 'Amrit kaal' would be a mockery of the people in a situation where the incomes and living standards of people from all walks of life are declining, except for unemployment, hunger, poverty, commodity prices, and the assets of billionaires.

The corona effect in particular is also severe in education. The academic year has not been full since the institutions closed in March 2020. Also, about 15 lakh schools and 14 lakh Anganwadi Centers were closed during this period. According to a UNICEF study, nearly 247 million children do not go to school for more than a year. In line with this, the Modi government has adopted a corporate-friendly approach to the entire education system in the name of 'online education'.

A survey conducted in August 2021 by leading sociologists in 15 states under 'School Children Online and Offline Learning' found that only 8 percent of rural students and 24 percent of urban students were regularly educated online. That means more than a quarter of school children in India have been out of the range of online learning opportunities for the past two years. Almost all poor students have lost their educational opportunities. Most of the students who are far from education have become daily laborers to help their distressed families. In this context, the Union Education Budget-

2023 should be aimed at strengthening the education sector and providing education to poor students, which is completely different.

The total central budget for 2022-23 is Rs 39.45 lakh crore. Of this, Rs 1,04,277 crore (2.64 percent) was earmarked for education. Of this, Rs 63,449 crore has been earmarked for school education and Rs 40,828 crore for higher education. If we look at the budget allocations in the education sector... The Finance Minister said that the stagnation of the education sector due to the corona has had a severe impact on the primary education of rural students, SC, ST, and vulnerable children in Govt. schools for two years. Thus announced availability of e-Content to compensate the academic loss of all the students.

The Prime Minister will expand the education program from 'One Class-One TV Channel' to 200, currently having 12 TV channels from Class 1 to Class 12. There will be one channel per class and teaching in regional languages through TVs. There will be instructions through the internet, mobile phone, TV, radio. Teachers are trained on digital skills. A digital university will be set up to make world-class education accessible to students. Courses are available in several Indian languages in collaboration with top universities. It has been announced in the budget that five higher education institutions in different regions will be made centers of Centers of Excellence. Rs 250 crore will be spent on each center. Syllabus, quality, etc. are overseen by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE).

The Center has announced in the budget that it will allow the setting up of international universities in the Gujarat International Finance Tech (Gift) City in Gandhinagar, exempting them from domestic norms. International universities are allowed in the 'Gift' City to teach courses in Financial Management, Fintech, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics to mobilize expert human resources in the field of financial services. An Arbitration Center will also be set up in Gift City to resolve international disputes. The Finance Minister also announced to setup 750 virtual labs for science and maths to enhance creativity in technical courses and 75 e-labs by 2022-23.

Additional allocations have also been diverted to trickle-down schemes such as the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shikshan Abhiyan (RUSA) and the Exemplar. On the other hand, the cost of financial aid schemes for depressed, minority, poor and female students has been reduced. There is no key announcement in the budget on scholarships and fellowships pending student education waivers.

More importantly, the cost for PM-Poshan Shakti Nirman, formerly known as the Midday meal Scheme, has been steadily declining over the past few years. In 2020-21 it was Rs. 12,900 crore reduced in 2021-22 to Rs. 11,500 crore, in 2022-23 Union Budget Rs. 10,233.75 crores. This further deprives poor children of basic education.

The highest priority for digital education is in the central budget. But how many people in our country are in a position to receive that education? About 24 percent of Indians own a smartphone and only 11 percent own a computer. 15 percent in villages and 42 percent in towns have internet facilities. There are over 50,000 villages without electricity in our country. 37% live in a single room. All these statistics show that our country does not have adequate facilities for online education.

The first to lose out through online education are the Poor, backward, Dalit, and Adivasi students, as currently 77.8% of the Adivasi students, 69.4% of the Dalit students, and 47.8% of the poor and backward students are studying in government educational institutions. Socially and economically distressed family living conditions are the main reason why most of the people in those communities study in government schools. 96% of tribal students are away from computers and 89.3% from internet services. 96.2% of Dalit students are away from computers, 85.7% are away from the internet and 80.1% of students from other poor and backward classes are away from computer and internet services. From this, it is clear that this budget is for corporates.

Also, India's expenditure on education is less than 3 percent of GDP. Expenditure on education was 3.2 percent of GDP in 2011-12, 2.8 percent in 2018-19, and 2.7 percent in 2021-22, 2.64 percent in 2022-23. This means that the emphasis on education is gradually declining. Among the BRICS countries, Brazil spends 6.3 percent of GDP on education, South Africa 5.9 percent, and the United Kingdom 5.4 percent. Also, the world average on education in GDP is 4.2 percent. Where are we compared to these?!. To strengthen education, According to the Dr.D.S. Kothari Commission (1964-66), 6% of GDP should be allocated to education. But no government in independent India has given so much importance to the education sector. As part of that, the BJP government has also been neglecting education.

Oxfam estimates that the country can maintain a 25-year education budget with the wealth of the ten richest people in the country. A tax of 4 percent on the 98 richest would be enough to cover two years' spending by the country's health and welfare department. Midday meal schemes for poor children can be maintained for 17 years. If one percent tax is levied, seven years of 'AYUSHMAN BHARAT' will be enough to cover

the cost. But even during the Corona crisis, the government ignored the plight of the poor people and gave tax breaks to corporates.

The Central Government has digitized the entire education sector through the Education Budget - 2023. 'Online education, which is increasing the digital divide, is tying the education market to corporate companies and pushing education away from poor students. So students should oppose this central budget.