

The Power of one...to several... continuing tale of the Sower

Ismat of Haoreibi Mayai Leikai, a village near Imphal, had to study mostly in candle light since electricity was available for three-four hours a day in the troubled state of Manipur. This 18-year-old, seventh in his family, lost his mother when he was 18 months old. And his father, a primary school teacher brought home about Rs.2,000 a month...Nevertheless, Mohammed Ismat topped the 2012 all-India CBSE exam with 99.6 per cent marks.

Prema Jayakumar a 24 year old, in early 2013 topped the nationwide Chartered Accountancy test. Studying from a 300 sq feet tenement in a chawl, daughter of a migrant auto driver with an annual income of Rs15000, nothing seemed to deter this hard working genius from Malad, Mumbai.

Outstanding performances, fuelled by a resolute spirit and an ardent desire to make the best of an opportunity to a decisive change in living and life.

Dharampal Saini, aimed to better the state of education of tribal girls in the hinterland of Chhattisgarh. From one ashram and 4 reluctant girls to 37 ashrams now where formal education till 12th standard is being imparted. Dharampal's persistent work for 4 decades has brought the literacy rate of the region from 1 per cent in 1976 to over 65 per cent at present¹.

As we pause to think of scores of other young girls and boys who may stand to represent their spirit but may not be making headlines..and also of a dedicated host of others from family to teachers, individuals to communities to societies who too come to share in their moments of triumph by standing in, making it possible to reach their goal of pursuit. A well defining moment and a vibrant mesh of progressive, vital relationships..that bring us to, make us unto, what we necessarily embody.

Education Poverty

Poverty is conventionally defined in terms of income, number of people below the poverty line and is measured in different ways, predominantly in terms of meagreness of income to acquire a minimum level of calories. It has been observed, "Human poverty is more than income poverty; it is a denial of choices and opportunities for living a tolerable life" (UNDP 1997). In this sense, denial of

opportunities and human rights itself constitutes poverty; accordingly a rights-based approach to poverty eradication has been increasingly heard. Education is one such important opportunity, deprivation of which in itself represents poverty -- poverty of education or 'education poverty' thus becomes an integral part of human poverty².

Right to Education and Dropout rate

The Right of children to Free and Compulsory Education Act came into force from April 1, 2010. This entitles children to have the right to education enforced as a fundamental right. Every child in the age group of 6-14 years will be provided 8 years of elementary education in an age appropriate classroom in the vicinity of his/her neighbourhood. Secondary Education is a crucial stage in the educational hierarchy, the policy at present is to make secondary education of good quality available, accessible and affordable to all young persons in the age group of 14-18.

Although World program for Education for all and the enactment of Right of children to free and compulsory education (RTE) in India, children today still are out of schools due to one or more reasons. There has been a gradual decline in the annual average dropout rate from 9.1 in 2009-2010 to 6.9 in 2010-11 but there has been more children dropping out in 2010-11 as compared to 2009-2010 in 10 out of the 30 states where RTE has been notified³.

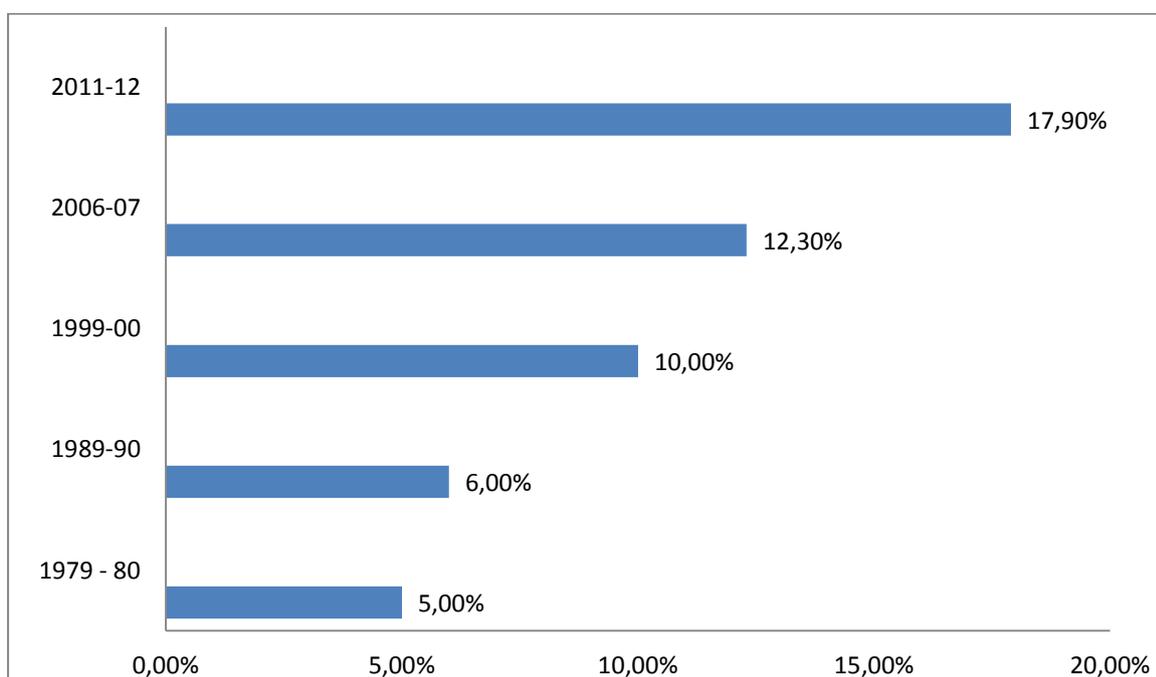
With eight million children never having stepped inside a school and 80 million dropping out without completing basic schooling, the United Nations Children's Fund has described the situation as a national emergency and called for equipping the government and civil society to implement the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009⁴.

Higher Education and GER

Currently, every sector in India seems to be affected by the recent slump in the economy. However, higher education seems to be the least affected by the economic downturn, which is clearly evidenced by the increasing number of engineering colleges, business schools and enrolments in the last two decades. A survey, *Higher Education in India: Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012 –2017) and beyond* by Ernst and Young, FICCI and Planning Commission of India the subsequent results, analysis provide for relevant current realities in Indian Higher Education.

The number of universities has grown more than six times in the last four decades. India has more than 33,000 colleges with one-third of the colleges having been set up in the last five years. 12,748 diploma-granting institutions in the country as on 2011–12. The Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) for the universities is at 4.6%. The CAGR for colleges stands at 5.6%.

The student enrollment in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has grown 12 times in the last four decades. Private institutes account for the majority of the HEIs as well as student enrollment. The enrollment rate at private institutions stands at 58.9%, while for the state institutions it is 38.6%. Central institutions have recorded the lowest enrollment rates 2.6%.



GER in Higher Education (%)

The current Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) stands at 18%. General courses account for the largest share of enrollment, but enrollment in professional courses such as engineering and medicine has witnessed a higher growth in the last five years. Professional courses account for a third of enrollment, the fee for such courses is significantly higher than general courses, resulting in majority spent towards such courses.

Fig 2: (Enrollment by field of study 2011-12)

The Government has contributed to the development of higher education sector through its Five Year Plans. During the Eleventh Plan, significant progress was made in the areas of expansion, inclusion, quality improvement and increased

private participation. The Government has planned expenditure of INR 1,107 billion on higher education during the Twelfth Five Year plan (2012-17), 1.3 times higher than the planned expenditure in Eleventh plan.

Education will be the most important driver for our nation's social, economic and political transformation. A well educated population, equipped with the relevant knowledge, attitudes and skills, is essential for economic and social development in the twenty-first century. (Shashi Tharoor, Minister of State for Higher Education and Development).

Issues and Challenges

Having said thus, while achievements are impressive by themselves; there has been no significant improvement in terms of quality of higher education delivery. The current political ramifications have pushed the reform process in higher education into the back burner for the time being. The problems of access, utility and inadequacy of financial outlay compounded over the years have now assumed serious proportions.

Demographic contours

According to the National Commission on Population, it is expected that the age profile of population of India will experience changes in the coming years. By 2016, approximately 50 per cent of the total population will be in the age group of 15-25 years. It is projected that a vast population would enter the working age group in the next 15 years, leading to increase in productive activities and also savings rate. In other words, there would be a tremendous rise in the number of employable workforce, which would demand commensurate investment in education.

Given the demographic profile advantage, the average Indian will be only 29 years old in 2020 as compared with 37 years for China and the US, 45 years for West Europe and 48 years for Japan⁵. The global demographic profile, in future, would, therefore, lead to shortage of productive workforce globally but India will experience a surplus. Strategic interventions and foresight in terms of encouraging investments in education and skills development by policymakers are needed to reap maximum benefits of demographic dividend.

Gross Enrolment Pattern

India today has of the largest higher education systems in the world and ranks second in terms of absolute numbers of student enrolment. However, India lags

behind the rest of the world with a low Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education of less than 20 per cent, unacceptably low when compared with the world figure of nearly 30 per cent and in the community of nations, 84 per cent in the US, 59 per cent in the UK, 55 per cent in Japan, and 28 per cent in China⁶.

However while male GER has gone up to 19%, for females it is a distant 15.2%. As for enrolment ratio among SC students it stood at 11.6% and for STs 7.7%. The OBCs on the other hand recorded a respectable 14.8%. Urban-rural divide, 30% in urban areas versus 11.1% in rural areas⁷. A wide disparity is observed across the spectrum. Enrolment in public universities is largely concentrated in the conventional disciplines whereas in the private self-financed institutions, the student enrolment is overwhelmingly in the market-driven disciplines.

Employability

Despite the large number of students studying in various streams, no major shift seen in the productivity as skills and talents are deficient to support economic activities, hence, there is a serious concern on employability of these educated persons.

A forecast made by McKinsey has observed that the Indian industry will need more than 73 million by 2015. This will be 50 per cent more than what is existing today. A report published by NASSCOM has found a disturbing trend. It states that only twenty five per cent of the total B.Tech graduates in the country are employable. This observation was made on the basis of the technical skills, communicative skills, team work and presentation skills. Only 15 per cent of the total graduates in the country are employable. According to a survey conducted among 800 MBA students across different cities in India, only 23% were considered employable.

Much greater challenges continue to exist with respect to quality and the provision of relevant education. Curricular reforms leading to regular revision and upgrading of curricula, introduction of semester system, choice-based credit system, and examination reforms are yet to take place in all higher educational institutions across the country. Exceptions apart, majority of our higher education institutions perform poorly in the area of quality on a relative global scale.

Affordability of Education

Education costs in India have gone up by far in recent years making higher education opportunities beyond the reach of a considerably large section of the

population. Government schemes of scholarships for socially weaker, backward classes, women; schemes by state governments in some cases, few by institutions themselves are available, but the overall coverage has not been of much consequence. Most of the scholarships do not adequately cover the amount of the fee, particularly if pursuing professional courses. In quite a few cases, due to lengthy disbursement procedures, the assistance was not received in time and there were also reported leakages in disbursement.

The fee structure in Government-owned/sponsored institutions is inexpensive. However, in some private sector institutions, which have the freedom to prescribe fee structure, and despite broad guidelines from certain state governments, fees go beyond the capacity of poor and deserving students. If higher education becomes prohibitively expensive this may be a definite barrier to deserving candidates just for the fact that she or he does not possess the required financial resources.

Equity and social justice

Since Independence, successive Indian governments have had to address a number of key challenges with regard to education policy, which formed a crucial part of its development plan. Yet ensuring equitable access to quality higher education for students from disadvantaged families continues to challenge despite policy measures. More, yet to be translated into action to eliminate gender inequalities, to improve access for differently abled students in all institutions of higher learning. Institutional growth had not been uniform across the country, giving way to regional/disciplinary imbalances. Large scale private sector participation resulted in a skewed growth more towards technical and professional education.

Therefore there is a compelling need to address the ground realities of policies and practices, if India attempts at holistic reform in the Education System. Access, Quality, Social Justice in Higher Education now seem to be the core in any plan of Education.

Way Forward?? Twelfth Five Year Plan 2012 - 2017

Over the past few years, higher education sector no doubt has witnessed tremendous growth. While India has shown impressive growth in the number of institutes and enrollment in the country, it still faces challenges on several fronts. The current political ramifications have pushed the reform process in higher

education in to the back burner for the time being. The Twelfth Five Year Plan proposes initiatives to resolve, some of which through increased funding for disadvantaged groups, governance structures, provision of incentives for research and so on. The Government intends to achieve enrollment of 35.9 million students in higher education, with a GER of 25.2%, by the end of the Plan period. The private sector can be expected to play an instrumental role through the creation of knowledge networks, research and innovation centres, corporate-backed institutions, and providing support for faculty development. Both the government and the industry are now pooling in resources and working towards developing workable implementation strategies that will move the higher education in the right direction to take the Indian economy to a higher trajectory and meet the society's needs.

B Skill and vocational Education

Another vital front of Education. A survey, *Knowledge Paper on skill Development in India Learner First by Ernst and Young, FICCI* some of the analyses, ensuing results pertinent to this paper are given here. India lags far behind in imparting skill training when compared to other countries. 10% of the total workforce in the country receives some kind of skill training (2% with formal training and 8% with informal training). 80% of the entrants into the workforce do not have opportunity for skill training¹⁰. India features also among the countries where employers find difficulty in filling up the jobs - lack of applicants, shortage of hard skills, lack of suitable employability, including soft skills are some of the reasons.

Fig3 (Percentage of Work force receiving skill training (2008))

Projected growth and sector demand

India is expected to grow at a rate of 8%, on an average, in the next 10 years. More than 700 million Indians are estimated to be of working age by 2022. Out of these, more than 500 million require some kind of vocational or skill development training⁶. Further, it is expected that the ageing economy phenomenon will globally create a skilled manpower shortage of about 56.7 million by 2020. With the rising trend of outsourcing work globally, India has the opportunity to become a global reservoir of skilled manpower, enjoys a unique advantage not only to fulfil its internal demand of skill manpower, but also cater to the labour shortage in other countries.

In 2009, the government formulated the National Skill Development policy that laid the framework for skill development. The objective of the policy is to expand

on outreach, equity, access of education and training, The private sector recognized the importance of skill development and has begun facilitating through three key dimensions — non-profit initiatives, profit enterprises, and as a consumer. Currently, there are several skilling opportunities shaped by the government, private sector and in collaboration between the two (PPP mode).

It is estimated that 50–70 million jobs will be created in India over the next five years and about 75%–90% of these additional employment avenues will require some vocational training. 20 high-growth sectors of industries and services that have the ability to provide expanded employment have been identified. 10 high-growth sectors on the manufacturing side and an equal number on the services front. Out of these, the key sectors are manufacturing, textile, construction, automotive and health care⁸.

Accessibility and Adaptability

However, the accessibility of skill-based training faces a huge challenge on account of India's large geographical territory, difficult terrain and varying social economic conditions. Significant disparities exist across states in terms of socio-economic factors such as education levels, income levels, industrial growth, etc.. The economic growth over the years has also brought forth the shortcomings of skill development processes. Learners require a vocational qualification framework that offers vertical mobility for those pursuing skills and enables to shift from skill-based training to academics and vice versa. A more formalized structure for vocational training will also help elicit greater respect and acceptability at large. To go forward, there needs to be more emphasis on the learners' challenges, apprehensions regarding vocational education and training.

Learner - centred

Thus far the development of skills has been driven by the requirements of the market. While much progress has been made it is parody that little has been done to understand the needs of the learner who are at the heart of the skill development mission. The perspective of the learner regarding skills and vocational training is little known, at the same time judgement of learners clouded by the challenges of survival. There could be a surplus of opportunities, but there is much resistance when it comes to carving a career path outside of conventional education. Hence a situation has been created where opportunities are available in terms of employment and training but the users are often

unaware or not motivated enough. Therefore it is critical that expectations of learners are in synch so that Vocational training is considered honourable and dignity of labour restored.

Education and Training are both strategic necessities which deliver employment enhancing skills in turn increasing productivity and accelerating future economic growth of the country. A sense of realism and realization has evolved among both the government and private sector, through their pooled endeavours may eventually lead the country toward further economic prosperity believe the Planners.

Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself (John Dewey)

These times are unprecedented in human history, vast human capital, powerful information sharing networks, tech savvy generations on one hand and on the other communities at risk, communities in dire necessities at the receiving end of political, social callousness ... All we have to do is find ways to channelize their immense capability into right lines... more to solve, build and bridge communities, nations and humanity. Mere governmental allocation in education sector may not achieve the transformation required for now. Not alone contemplating in demand and supply lines or working toward economic restructure but contributing constructively in the larger life as well. This aside, a real education is one that challenges the intellect, questions paradigms, not one of conformity. A serious but disturbing trend is observed in more recent times that of declining values, self aggrandizement, seeking instant gratification, lacking empathy/respect, refusal to accommodate... further leading on to horrific violence and shocking ramifications. Adaptation to the highly paced speed of change as well of life must go hand in hand with a re-iteration of enduring values.

'Ausbildungshilfe'

Almost 54 years ago an idea emerged while contemplating over the compelling need of the day that went on to providing opportunities of education to the underprivileged youth of the country. That was Education Fund. Having been part of the journey, now 5 decades later we are at cross roads where it all began. Analysing, seeking to be more relevant, to break away from conventional thought processes, more connected to the need of our times. We must come away from mode of charity to building responsible, progressive, contributing younger generations who value life and make the best of a given opportunity as well. Require to raise the bar above not only for ourselves but our stakeholders as well.

Equal opportunity, quality and excellence need to come into our strategies. More conscious, interactive with the environment and inviting each person as a unique and one opportunity of a good change.

We seem to be in a state of flux, in every milieu especially in the political spectrum at present, evolving newer equations almost daily! Changes are often the result of an awareness of new ideas and new needs. The efforts taken to realise our collective and cumulative commitment to holistic Education as an enabler bringing in honest, right thinking and socially conscious individuals towards forming newer communities in hope. And thereby proactively acting on the environment be it the Church or society or community or family become the change themselves. *Ausbildungshilfe*, an idea, a brave challenging process of change, we have come to be the trustees of this, that helps us to reaffirm Equality, Sanctity and Uniqueness of each life which signifies us to be what we are –*You are the salt of the earth and You are the light of the world.*

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