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GLOBALIZATION AND EDUCATION- A CRITICAL INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

Education in the world is always a matter of serious debate. The forces of globalization and liberalization since last quarter of earlier century has brought serious contentious issues regarding teaching and learning in forefront, particularly for developing economies with huge social divisions like us. The article tries to situate some of the issues of Indian educational sector in the context of international developments and have attempted to throw some lights in the journey to find out pragmatic strategies. Of course, a brief analysis of pandemic related problems is also included.

Keywords: Education, Globalization, Growth, Inclusive knowledge, Government

INTRODUCTION

Aristotle, a founding philosopher of our learning and education process believed that education is central to human existence and a fulfilled person is always an educated one. His deep ethical and political concern for education led him to believe that there must always be a clear philosophy of life infused in the education system, the educator and the learner both must be guided by that. At the same time the famous Greek believed that the roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet. Perhaps standing in our contemporary period, in the context of a globalized world system, Aristotle would not have any hesitation in amending his beliefs to a great extent.

At present we are being situated in a context where the roots of education are not only bitter as well as the fruits of education are perhaps more bitter creating multiple cleavages and differentiations, giving birth to huge ethical and political dichotomies. On the one hand we are craving for the development of inclusive knowledge societies with increasing sharing of information by empowering local communities and on the other, the existing system of education is creating umpteen numbers of differentiations instead of being inclusive. The four prime pillars of knowledge society, i.e., freedom of expression, universal access to education through information and knowledge, respect and equity for cultural and linguistic diversity and access to quality education without any discrimination are somehow been attacked from different corners leading to huge differentiation in education. Instead of the prime thrust of the knowledge society to ensure world peace, sustainable economic development, holistic and welfare oriented lifestyle and increasing intercultural dialogue we are heading towards a world society marred by innumerable forms of sectarianism.

The most assuring factor that we have to remember in this context is that globalization and liberalization of the education system is not anything new, at least for India. More than thousands of years before Indian education started to mingle with dissemination of knowledge

and information from different parts of the world along with trade, travel and migration. Various kinds of global interactions facilitated the spread of international knowledge and information to India and to the interacting countries at different parts of the world. However this earlier spread of education at international level is completely different from the concept of modern form of education in the globalized era. Earlier internationalization of knowledge was not coterminous with westernization as evident from the present globalization. Since the last quarter of the earlier century the agenda of liberalization, globalization and education have received an altogether new dimension which demands serious exploration. We all know that the main objective of the education system is to shape the development of human mind and collective consciousness of welfare. Currently this very objective is being seriously questioned unfortunately.

Education lies at the core of the sustained growth for any country, it is an instrument for developing human resource and for this education receives a prime emphasis at the policy making level of any country. Innovation and experimentation are integral components of education as with changing time, space and sociopolitical scenario at national and international platforms we genuinely need change in education system, both from structural point of view and in its content. Initially the onslaught of globalization in the educational sector was not considered as dangerous in India as well as in other developing countries. The initial enthusiasm considered globalization as a beneficial set of processes which ultimately imbued with the objective of a better understanding of social inequality, instability and conflict and thereby can offer the healing measures for their reduction. Unfortunately neither the economic cost of globalized education nor the impact of globalization on Indian economy at large and education in particular were assessed properly at the beginning.

Let us digress here for a brief understanding of globalization and its relationship with education from both structural and content perspectives. A commonly used definition of globalization considers it as a process of integrating economies, cultures, politics and societies through cross border transmission of ideas, information, technologies, capital, goods, services and people. From this perspective relationship between globalization and education demands maximum unification of curriculum following similar methodology, as far as practicable, up gradation of knowledge and imbibing skills for ensuring employability. Above all, this scheme releases education from public domain and makes it an agenda of private sector. Instead of remaining as welfare service education becomes a good to be consumed as per the capacity, more specifically financial capacity, of the consumer. For India, the process of globalization along with liberalization and privatization quickly grab the educational sector with an aim of its total overhauling. Different kinds of reformatory measures are initiated in the context of the present highly competitive world towards expansion, excellence and inclusion of the educational sector. Practical, job-oriented and highly skill-based information oriented education started replacing the age-old theoretical knowledge based system. The entire process has been very aptly expressed by a scholar who has said that internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization. (Knight:2004) In other words, this very statement is a reminder of the fact that earlier form of global perspective of education is completely different from the present scheme of globalization and education. To

be more specific, currently the globalized educational system is operating in the context that can be identified as a post-Fordist approach. In the earlier century like other sectors education was also predominantly marked by a kind of Fordist approach, where mass production and easy access to consumption were the key indicators of development. However, with the beginning of globalization post-Fordism became the major pointer of educational sector. It is actually a new kind of stimulating approach for recent educational restructuring combining diverse frameworks, application methods and conclusions. (Carter: 1997) It actually operates as a general metaphor incorporating "tightly defined conceptual narratives". The result often is that the different meanings ultimately conflict with each other and collapse and is less able to provide any incisive perspective on educational change. Interestingly, it also raises broader issue of educational theorization, identifying mediating structures by linking economy and education very closely. More precisely role of politics and ideology in education become extremely important.

Coming to the specific issue of globalization and education in India we find that before the WTO's Uruguay Negotiations, started in 1986, public services like education and health were not included in the international trade agreement. The big change started since 1995 when General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) became operative for 144 countries covering 161 activities falling within 12 services, which of course includes education. Coming to the Indian education scenario in particular the prime question that is often asked is that why India could not get an exemption in education from applying GATS rules? Actually GATS rules are applied to all services that are not exclusively provided by public sector and have some amount of commercial purpose even. In India education, medium and higher levels of education are not free and clear profit motive is prevalent for long. Actually total public monopoly in education is almost not found anywhere and thus almost all educational services of the world fall under GATS spectrum.

Education as a sector is considered of prime importance in rapidly globalised economy. This sector has seen globalization due to widespread liberalization around the world including domestic deregulation and opening up of the system before foreign competition. Interestingly, the globalized growth in the educational sector is predominantly driven by the middle income countries, whereas higher income countries have reached almost a stagnant phase. Globalization of education refers to sharing of knowledge with clear profit drive. Educational services have to be transformed into profitable goods involving monetary benefits including buyer-seller dimensions. Thus to Anthony Giddens understanding regarding globalization of education is decoupling of space and time in instantaneous communications of knowledge and culture that can be shared around the world bearing multiple meaning, often contradictory in reality also.(Giddens:2002)

According to Verified Market Research Group the global higher education market was valued at USD$ 224.19 billion in 2018 and is projected to touch USD$ 562.83 billion by 2026. At the same time growth of satellite and telecommunication also has drastically changed the pattern of distant and online education markets. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of global online education market at present is at 9.23% with USD$ 187.877 billion in 2019 with a projected growth of USD$319.167 billion in 2025. Advancement in the field of artificial

intelligence and Internet of Things (IoT) will continue to enhance user experience and expand the online education platform.(researchandmarket.com:2002)

With an extremely large population of almost 500 million in the age group of 5-24 years education market of India is definitely the largest one. The education sector of the country was estimated at USD$91.7 billion in the 2018 financial year and it further rose to almost USD$101.1 billion in 2019.It is also the second largest hub of e-learning after USA only and this sector is also expected to touch USD$1.96 billion by end 2021. According to the data released by the Department for Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade (DPIIT) the total amount of Foreign Direct Investment in educational sector of India stands at USD$ 2.47 billion between April 2018 to March 2019. The Ministry of Human Resource Development has also raised about Rs. 1 lac crore (USD$ 15.52 billion) from private companies for the improvement of the educational infrastructure of the country in 2019. India has signed a loan agreement with World Bank under Skill Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion (SANKALP) to enhance institutional mechanization and skill development essential for livelihood earning. (ibef.org:2019)

However, these increasing financial investments do not signal complete positive indications for the education sector of India in particular and for the entire social sector in general. The essential ingredients of globalization in education, i.e., increasing emphasis on privatization, unrestricted entry of foreign funds, quick cutbacks in social welfare policies and budget of the government and unquestionable trust on the free market based education as answers for problems of employment, social justice and human happiness in the country always contain serious doubts. The entire education system of the country is now facing serious challenges from multiple sectors in several unprecedented ways. Incompatibility between the national goals and the goals of foreign and private investments are no doubt a very important point of contention. A developing country like India, where 24% of world's poor reside, conflict between private motive of education and demographic realities are inevitable. The ground realities of existence have always proved that education is always positioned at last in the list of basic requirements of human existence coming after food, water, shelter, sanitation and health. The Indian Human Development Survey Report released on May 2019 clearly stated that almost half of the Indian households (47.9%) are severely deprived in all these six indicators.(BS:July2019) In such a context the probability for the parents to buy quality education for their kids is always a big question, particularly in the context of the present development paradigm. The issue of quality education has become extremely important with the introduction of globalization in the education sector. Since 1990s the elitist and subaltern division in the primary and secondary education system is manifested highly through the division in the medium of instruction. Local language versus English as medium of educational instruction has become a great divider in the broader education system giving rise to innumerable complexities, which are not easily resolvable also.

The union budget allocation for education has fell down from 4.14% in 2014-15 to 3.4% in 2019-20. Side by side government spending on school education also came down from Rs. 38607 crores in 2014-15 to Rs. 37111 crores in 2018-19. However the higher education budget has increased from Rs. 19549 crores in 2014-15 to Rs. 24817 crores in 2018-19. (BS: September2019) This

uneven distribution of fund is correspondingly associated with unequal distribution of resources in the mentioned areas naturally. Chances of profit accumulation in higher education is always larger than in school education thus the different governments, like the private players, are now more interested in investing in higher education leading to weak educational foundation for the entire human resource of the country. However, in the annual budget of 2021-22 some kind of reassurance of the education sector was found again. In the first ever digitally presented budget a marginal positive change is noted in terms of monetary allocation. We find 3.5% budgetary allocation for education sector, this however is not a thing to be enthused at all. But in the first post NEP budgetary allocation gross imbalance between the primary and higher education has been addressed somehow. Thus we find an allocation of Rs. 54,873 crores for school education is made against Rs. 38,350 crores in higher education sector. (India Today:2021) This is definitely a welcome move towards progress by amending age old imbalance. Though the result is yet to be evaluated.

According to Pratham's Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2013, close to 78 percent of children in Standard III and about 50 percent of children in Standard V cannot yet read Standard II texts. Arithmetic is also a cause for concern as only 26 percent students in Standard V can do a division problem. The same ASER report of 2019 has stated that 90% children of 4-8 age groups are enrolled in some kind of education system and more boys in this age group are enrolled in private institutions in search of a better quality of education while girls are mostly enrolled in low cost government educational institutions. The ASER 2019 reiterates the finding of the New Education Policy Draft, 2019 which states that India faces severe deficiency in learning. The latest report finds that half of the children of Standard III are behind the curriculum expectation of Standard II and thus two years behind the expected level and this gap continues to increase with age growth. (ASER:2020)

The lopsided development of the education sector with the ushering in of globalization is manifested in the unbalanced allocation of governmental funds and policy declarations as well. The New Education Policy Draft released in 2019 suggests an increasing spending on education of total government expenditure by 20% within 2030. However, there is no funding available for such a huge increase. (BS:September 2019) Currently most of the spending in education, almost about 75% to 80%, comes from the states, as per the report of the NEP draft itself. After the 14th finance commission period, i.e., 2015-16 to 2018-19 proportion of states' spending on education has reduced in several cases. Thus how the states could manage the increasing requirement of NEP without proportional central government funding is a highly doubtful area. Famous educationist Prof. Sukanta Chaudhury is also quite critical of the National Education Policy draft, 2019. To him, "the document contains something of everything: it could support diametrically opposite policies". (Chaudhuri:2019) The policy draft though ticked on all high-minded boxes like primacy of government sector, autonomy and empowerment of both institutions and individual teachers, a budget of 6% of GDP, almost twice over the prevalent one, but it is "short of practical measures". The NEP actually has to be reviewed in the context of Education Quality Upgradation and Inclusion Programme (EQUIP) and of course the Union budget. EQUIP contains recommendations for Higher Education only and for school education it is completely silent. In union budget also no school level programme was mentioned.

However, NEP has recognized school education as the bedrock of any educational order. So, unless public funded proper school system is developed gross demographic waste is evident for a country like India. In different cases children's right to education has been denied in the tenth year of the enactment of this act as NEP admits that where full-fledged schools are financially unviable "alternative models" might be followed. The market driven approach to education definitely is going to affect the basic right to education for a considerable number of children. Some provisions related to higher education in the draft policy also cast major surprise. Unprecedented emphasis is placed on liberal arts, language, culture, especially ancient Indian culture while it notionally just includes reference of basic science; "deafening silence" is noted on mathematics and natural science is completely ignored. Even computer education at school level also receives marginal reference of a single paragraph. Most importantly, any kind of research work, its funding and approval is subject to consent of the National Research Foundation (NRF) to be chaired by the prime minister. The aspects of critical thinking and robust cultural inquiry are strongly neglected. Following Chaudhuri's analysis it appears quite clearly that extreme obsession with global ranking of the educational institutes is dampening the very roots of the education structure. Institution selective nurturing promoted by the government is bound to create serious anomaly in the overall education system. It will pave the way for further emphasis on private institutions, very few of which are of outstanding quality and mostly of mediocre or worse standards. Chaudhuri very prophetically has said that a condominium cannot rest on a raft of shanties. "Education planning is like a landscape gardening, the designer does not live to answer for the outcome".

In this discussion on globalization and education in general and Indian context in particular we can very well say that education sector at present is perhaps the most uncertain sector grossly marked with large scale unpredictability. Enormous changes are taking place almost every day in the content and structure of education from the beginner's level to the highest one though definite and positive results are yet to be found. We are undeniably standing at a critical juncture and the urgent need of our time is to evolve indigenous models with international orientation. Indian society with extreme socioeconomic differentiation definitely needs a perspective from below to understand the ground realities and to evolve measures pertaining social justice and thereby to make education as an inclusive phenomenon. At the same time if we only confine our vision within the periphery of our own situation we will also surely emerge as losers. Humanitarian and culture specific approach to education has to be juxtaposed properly with key ingredients of modernity involving global learning. In this context we must remember that by modernity I am not referring to the western hegemonic forms only. At present in the post-colonial globalized world system different versions of modernity are available and the pluralistic connotation of modernity must be accepted.

Moreover, the unprecedented impact of COVID-19, which is also a globalized phenomenon with indigenous consequences require special attention in this regard. However, in this article author prefers not to deal with this issue at length as it demands a completely separate analysis. Only a few very pertinent issues related to this problem will be mentioned here. The exceptional consequence of COVID-19 in education sector of India, particularly in the primary education has developed so many stumbling blocks that will be enormously difficult to

overcome. The closure of the schools and traditional classrooms has created the level of damage in education sector which may leave a complete generation beyond repair. The shift of teaching and learning to the digital mode and subsequent great digital divide among the student population reveal in reality only the tip of the iceberg of the real problem evident before common eyes. Absence of schooling does not mean absence of learning for the majority of the student population at all. The physical health and nutrition of the students and their mental health have been affected in such a way that will take years to recuperate. A grave apprehension is that the human resource of the country is going to be wounded in an unimaginable way. The complete data regarding this highly divisive issue is yet to be explored. In a J-PAL-India and Asian Development Bank collaborative project report (Vegas.et. al:2021) it has been alarmingly found that only one in five children of the sample were enrolled in schools that do not offer any remote instruction during school closure for non-availability of facility required. Again among the children whose schools have provided remote instruction a little more than half has attended. Amartya Sen's Pratichi Trust in its extensive report has also stated, "So long the focus was on enrolling as many students as possible and reducing the number of missing children, but the pandemic has brought a situation where the schools has gone missing". (Singh:2021) The report also has pointed to the serious nutritional growth of the students which has dampening effect on their mental growth.

It can be well derived that economic lockdown and crises generated by Covid-19 may be retrieved once the medical precautionary restrictions are completely withdrawn and but school lockdown is definitely going to have more perilous and long term effects. The UNICEF report very justifiably has mentioned that sound mental health is every bit as important as physical health for achieving developmental milestones. It helps children with their emotional well being and social skills. Grief, bereavement, fear, uncertainty, social isolation, increased screen time, parental fatigue have destabilized the mental health of the students severely. In this context naturally infrastructure development cannot be the sole priority of the government and a very sensitive and empathetic approach is required with serious research behind it.

In reality success of education system is a continuous and unending journey which calls for nonstop up gradation and inclusion of techniques, contents and of course people. India as one of the most popular democracy in the world has the advantage of a strong human resource to meet the challenges of globalization. At the same time the multifarious nature of this very human resource is also its most important problem. In the age of globalized economy the gap between the rich and the poor is widening quite fast. Environmental and ecological degradation caused by the rapid and unreasonable expansion of global capital is depriving thousands of people of their basic rights every day. The process of development is completely lopsided in nature throwing more and more people at marginal state. In this context unless the education policies are chalked out and implemented in a very meticulous and sensitive way highlighting the issues of social justice and equity a country like India is going to suffer extremely in the long run. Neither mere aping of west nor the complete backward looking approach is going to benefit the country in any way. Right to education should be complemented with freedom of choice in education. Equity, access, quality, autonomy and regulation all should receive simultaneous emphasize in a complementary manner with welfare orientation. It is specifically

in this context we can look at Rabindranath's concept of education. To quote the words of Uma Dasgupta, the noted educationist, Rabindranath was interested in assimilating education with everyday life and experience.(Dasgupta:2010) His opposition to western model of education must never be considered as any anger towards western form of education as such, but he was always against blind aping of west as their approach was not in any way attached to Indian life and society. He thought that by copying western form of education blindly we will not attain development for the country, contrarily it would generate huge sense of alienation among people and Rabindranath throughout his life was interested in eradicating this sense of alienation through education. In his Viswabharati he thus tried to make a repositioning of Indian education system in the daily life of the students by making a proper blending of ancient culture of our own and future oriented scientific and technological of the west.

To end this essay on globalization and education we can refer to some lines of Rabindranath Tagore who in an essay captioned Shikshar Herfer (Diverse forms of Education), read at the Rajshahi Association in 1299 (bangabdo- Bengali year) expressed some very interesting observations which are quite well applicable in the present globalized scenario of education. He was of opinion that there is no doubt about the fact that unprecedented types of raw materials now have been accumulated; we surely did not have so much bricks and cement to build the mental edifice before. But if we consider learning of accumulation techniques as equivalent to construction of mind we will make a big mistake for the entire process of education. Accumulation and construction have to proceed simultaneously for any strong and permanent work. We have to learn the use of accumulated ingredients properly and fruitfully, we have to understand those ingredients and their utility thoroughly; then we have to relate the process of developing our mental life and along with the shelter of life. That is education. If different aspects of human development process are not synchronized in a symmetrical way with the education process and structure true education is not possible. Above all learning and education should be aimed at human happiness and should facilitate the process of critical thinking and imaginary power for all. Only by making infrastructural arrangements and accumulating raw materials without relating them with life structure and life pattern, by developing a structure devoid from ground realities we will only pile up unnecessary elements. Tagore was scared that in his time the education system of the country was heading towards that aimless direction. At present in the context of globalized education system we are also quite scared as infrastructure and raw materials are often blurring the real content of education. However, we have to remember that globalization is an inevitable and irreplaceable phenomenon so instead of just grumbling about its negative impact we have to manipulate its positive elements from welfare and futuristic vision and have to chalk out schemes for equity based education system ensuring the objective of securing human happiness and fulfillment. The task is no doubt extremely difficult but not unattainable.

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