

Reflections on the Dual System of Education in India

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India has a long history of organized education. The British introduced the current system of education with its western style and content in the 19th century following recommendations by Lord Macaulay. In order to cope with the growing student strength in universities which has risen, according to the University Grants Commission (UGC) survey conducted in March 2005, to a staggering 99.54million, the government has had to devise ways and means to provide quality education to larger numbers. The Central Government has thus had to revise some of its policies and has now permitted self-financing courses to operate, thus introducing a dual system of education in India.

To understand the present system one has to delve into the past. The first millennium saw the flourishing of higher education at Nalanda University, Takshashila University, Ujjain University and Vikramashila University, which started from Buddhist monasteries. Nalanda University, the biggest among these universities, handled all branches of knowledge and housed up to 10,000 students at its peak. Some of the subjects taught included law, warfare, theology, art, literature, arithmetic, astronomy, metaphysics, medical sciences and logic. Students represented all classes of society.

Informal education was imparted through the Pathashalas, Gurukulas and Madrasas. The Pathashalas and Gurukulas are informal schools

where the students would stay in the homes of the guru or teacher and learn from him. The Madrasas were informal schools established by the Muslim rulers. They basically taught traditional classical learning and religion. According to a survey made by William Adam in 1830, nearly one million such schools existed in Bengal and Bihar alone. Note that for the formal school system, a survey conducted by the government of the Madras Presidency in 1823-24 indicated that there were 13,000 schools and 740 colleges at roughly the same historical period.

The British colonial government introduced western education in the latter half of the 19th century. From this point, the traditional system of education diminished and the ruling British took over the role of providing education to the masses. In 1857, the British established colleges and universities in Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Chennai. Later on, a number of affiliated colleges came into existence based on the British University system. The university set the curriculum and the affiliated colleges were expected to follow it. Thus, quality education was ensured in these educational institutions.

After Independence from the British in 1947, education became the responsibility of the State. The State refers to the each of the 28 administrative regions of India with people who share similar culture, language and habits. The State is a different level of governance compared to the Central

Government, which refers to the government elected by the people of various States, and which manages the important portfolios of the country. The Central Government is based in Delhi, the capital of India, and has the responsibility to coordinate and specify standards for education. In this regard, the University Grants Commission (UGC) was established by an act of parliament in 1956. The UGC framed regulations on minimum standards of education. It also received grants from the Central Government and allocates and disburses it.

This state of affairs continued until 1976 when the Kothari commission was formulated. The commission recommended that education is the responsibility of both the State and Central government and so the Center represented by the Ministry of Human Resources, Department of Education and the State formulated the educational policy and planning. The Government of India made a commitment that by the year 2000, about 6% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would be spent on education. The budget allocation for education in 2005–2006 was 18.337 million Rupees, and more than 75% of the expenditure goes towards payment of teacher's salaries. The state governments also share this expenditure.

In the current system, all the Universities offer four principal levels of qualification: undergraduate (UG) or Bachelors, post-graduate (PG) or masters, M.Phil. or Pre-doctoral, and Doctoral.

According to the UGC report published on March 31, 2005 there are 342 universities, 17,625 colleges, with 104.81 million students, and 4.71 million faculty members in affiliated educational institutions. As per the census of 2001, the overall literacy rate in India has gone up by 10% from 1991 to 2001, which indicates that nearly 100 million people have become literate. Out of this an average of nearly 10 million more people will be entering the portals of universities in any given year. So there was a need to create an additional 8 to 10 million college seats. Considering the impossibility of doing this given the present financial crunch, the government has permitted the functioning of 'self-financed colleges.' Self-

financed colleges are owned by private individuals, managements or organizations and do not get any funds from the government. However, they are affiliated with the government universities and have to abide by the caste based reservation system mandated by the government for 50% of their seats; but the other 50 % of their seats can be disposed of by the managements of these institutions. However, the already existing government institutions owned by private managements (it should be noted that under the present system there are government funded colleges owned by minority religious groups) after their regular working hours open their doors to a fresh batch of students who fund their own education. These students use the already existing infrastructure but pay for their teachers' salaries and other expenses incurred by the colleges. This policy of the government has introduced the dual system of education. The dual system of education refers to the already existing government funded courses functioning side by side on the same campus with courses not funded by the government but managed through tuition fees.

The Dual system of education ensures that government funded universities continue to operate in the present format with budgetary support from the government. Self-financed courses co-exist within the same campus without government support. So students opting for courses in the self-financing stream have to pay a heavy tuition fee which is almost five times larger than the one paid by his/her counterpart in the government aided sections. To attract students, the self-financed stream usually offers only the most popularly rated courses like Information Technology and other computer related courses, undergraduate and post-graduate programs in Business and Commerce, Visual Communication, Biotechnology, and Mass Communication. The students of the government-aided stream leave the campus at 2pm, and the self-financed students start their day at 1pm and go on up to 6pm. There are even colleges that have a third stream on the same campus starting at 6pm.

However, while a student doing a B.Com program in the government stream pays 3,000

Rupees per term as fees, another student doing the same course in the same college under the self-financed stream will pay 15,000 Rupees per term though she undergoes the same program in the same ambience.

This system also has two types of faculty within the same campus with two different types of pay scales. The government stream follows the UGC recommended scales of pay and a lecturer entering service starts with a scale of 13,800 Rupees with an increment of 420 Rupees per year for the first five years. The government also reviews the Dearness Allowance. The DA is part of a person's salary and is calculated as a percent of the basic salary and is reviewed every six months against inflation. So every six months there is a marginal hike in one's salary. A faculty member entering the self-financed stream may get a basic salary of 8,000 Rupees with 280 Rupees per year or sometimes a flat scale of just 5,000 Rupees depending on the educational institution hiring them. Due to this, the attrition rate among faculties is very high in the self-financed stream. Job security is absent as they are hired on a contract basis. On the other hand, the faculty members belonging to the government stream are government employees and enjoy a lot of privileges like job security, pension scheme, constant Dearness Allowance hikes based on inflation rates, bonus, among others.

Students belonging to the self-financed section initially came from affluent families only due to the high tuition fees. But of late, with a number of banks offering attractive student loans, children of the middle and lower income groups also opt for the 'job-oriented courses' offered by the self-financed stream. But it should be noted that the government colleges do noteworthy service by catering to the rural poor and first generation learners in small towns and villages by offering education at a low and affordable cost. Due to this education has been accessible to a vast majority of the people. With the entry of self-financed colleges, there is the fear that quality education may soon become the prerogative of the privileged. This is also because the government is trying to slowly withdraw support to universities and affiliating

colleges so that it can concentrate on primary education. So the thrust is on making universities and colleges self-supporting.

On another concern, it has often been perceived that students belonging to the self-financed stream harbor a lot of resentments initially, as their counterparts belonging to the long established government stream seem to enjoy a lot of privileges. But it seemed that they soon settle down and take things in their stride. One wonders if this in the long run would create two different sets of students with two different sets of value systems. It has also been noticed that the thrust in these self-financing institutions is on making students job-worthy and attractive to prospective employers. This has caused a certain amount of concern as the perspective in many of the self-financed institutions is not on holistic education with a focus on inculcating values. The job worthiness of the student is focused upon and the role of the student in society is neglected. This is because of the powerful market forces and the inability of students and parents to perceive the essence of a good education as they are swept by this wave. This is in sharp contrast to the government aided institutions where the focus of the faculty and managements are different. Most of the faculty members in the government-aided stream are the inheritors of the Socialist philosophy of early independent India. They are basically free and fair thinkers without having the pressure to bow down to an independent management or fear students who pay their salaries. So the quality of education provided by them has been more holistic compared to the faculty in self-financing colleges where the poor pay does not attract the best talents.

Quite interestingly, almost all the missionary institutions offering this self-financing programs are service oriented, and so do not see the self-financed stream as a money spinner for the institution. The faculty members in these institutions have the missionary vision in their psyche as they seek teaching not as a mere profession but as a vocation. So again the quality of education is perceived to be better and more holistic. Missionary colleges do perceive that privatization

of education may in the long run be inevitable. The effects of globalization and power of market forces have eroded the long-standing vision of inexpensive education that is accessible to all people. Now the vision of these missionary institutions is to work against the commercialization of higher education by providing cloisters of refuge where education is not seen as a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder. Their constant aim is to provide quality

education at cheaper rates to the deserving among the teeming millions of India. To do this, their fee structure should be affordable compared to similar private institutions in the various States. Emphasis has also never shifted from the concept of providing a well-rounded education in all these institutions. Only time can tell the long term effects of the dual system of education which is prevalent today.