

INAUGURAL ADDRESS
BY
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AT THE CONFERENCE
OF
EDUCATION MINISTERS
OF
THE STATES AND UNION TERRITORIES
ON
29 AUGUST, 1985
AT
VIGYAN BHAWAN, NEW DELHI

NIEPA DC



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Pantji, Chairman UGC, Hon'ble Chief
Ministers, Ministers, Secretaries.

I would first like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to talk with you about some ideas on education. During the past months I have talked a lot about what I find are deficiencies and shortcomings in our education system. But before I go into these in more detail, I think it is necessary to see what we have achieved, what are the positive aspects of the education systems as it is today. If we go back to 1947 and try to find how many people had come through our education system and had made a mark in the world - whether it was on the cultural side or scientific side or political side - the education system was responsible for producing very few of them. Most people, who excelled, had been educated abroad, and had a very specialised education. Now if we compare that with today, we just have to go to any laboratory in the world where they might be doing the most advanced scientific research or technological development, we have to go to any hospital to see doctors; no matter where you go in the world you find Indians in the top posts. Indians who have come through this very educational system. So it has ~~been~~ achieved; most certainly it has achieved.

A question then is why are we questioning the whole system if it has achieved this and if it has been able to produce people who rise to the highest levels. The question is not so much of the past, it is more of the future. The world is progressing tremendously rapidly. The only thing that can keep India abreast of this progress is a solid grounding in education for all our peoples. This is basically the question that has been tackled in the paper that has been put in front of the nation a few days ago. How are we going to prepare the nation to meet the challenges of the next century and to meet the challenges of the latest and newest technology as it comes?

Development, no matter how we try to look at it from what angle, from what perspective, it has to mean absorption of the most modern techniques at the most basic levels in our society. We cannot cut ourselves off from the rest of the world and carry on in a Bullock-cart age - not just because we want to advance and we want to have fancy gadgets and fancy things - but because it is just too expensive to do so. We cannot afford old technology that costs us very much more. And when we look at the cost of our old technology, it is not just a matter of seeing how many people are employed and how many are not employed but what is the productivity for a given investment. When we are talking of investment we are not talking of Government money, we are talking of money that belongs to the poorest people in the country. Every paisa that is wasted due to inefficiency is a paisa that deprives anti-poverty programmes. This is what we must understand. That is why I talk of modern technology, of using modern technology, using it efficiently, for the benefit of the people who are the worse off in our country.

This paper is really a paper to provoke a debate. It is not a paper which is an end in itself. We want to provoke you, we want to hear your views. More than that, we want to hear the views of everyone in the country, because this is a subject which will affect every single person. And we must have a proper national debate on this in the media, in the academic circles, on radio, TV and in journals and everywhere. It must be debated openly. All views must come forward, uninhibited, so that we can see, read, understand and then, when the final paper is to be made, we must consider everything that has come forward in the intervening period and hopefully we produce a document which will lead India to the forefront of technologies, to the forefront of development.

Education has a long gestation period which is another reason why we must act very very quickly and get the system going preferably from 1986 onwards. When we talk of education we are really talking of our people. For too long, we have considered our population as a problem and as a liability. It is time to change this, change our population into an asset and strength. This can only be done by human development and education is the core of human development. When we talk of education, we must keep in mind the broader perspective, not just what falls within the purview of the education system as we talk of at the moment, which takes us through a predetermined course and ejects us out into the wide world. A 20-21 year old today comes out with a very dubious piece of paper which says that he has qualified, but no-body in the country seems to believe that piece of paper. The education system is much more than that. The education system when it is conceived must also consider further education. Education throughout our working career - although not necessarily discussed here, must be kept in mind. Is it adequate that somebody joining the administrative service or the foreign service goes through an initial training period and then we jettison him out and never call him back for another proper training? Is it good enough that a policeman is never called back for a refresher course on new techniques, on new methods and on problems that his colleague might have faced in other areas which would help him to overcome those problems? It is the same with all our services.

It is the same

We have to make our younger generation think. Unfortunately the education system, as it is today, stops anyone from thinking. You prevent people from asking questions; you drill in a set syllabus and you ask him to reproduce that during the exams. This is not good enough. The system must be such that young boys end

girls are provoked into asking questions, are provoked into making the teacher explain things they do not understand instead of just memorising it. It will not only be good for the children, it will be good for the teachers because they will have to answer questions. A system will develop, new ideas will come not only in the education system but right across. I find that we tend to build walls between different generations. A senior bureaucrat will not consult the junior bureaucrat. A senior policeman will not talk to a junior policeman. A teacher will not talk to a student. You talk down to them. This has to change. These are basic things which don't need money to change. It is an attitude. It is a way of thinking.

The education system must build the character of the nation. Nationalism must be strengthened. Our heritage and our culture must be imbibed. Today even our history is not taught in our schools.

Apart from higher education we have also been talking about vocational education. To really give vocational education a push and a thrust, we have to produce or build a demand for people with vocational education. It is no use giving vocational education if there is no demand for people with such education in the open market. Again this brings me to a much wider perspective. And the new education system, when you think about it, must be seen in this perspective. We must first build a picture of what we want India to be like fifteen years or twenty years from now. What will the industry be like? What will agriculture be like? What will our service industries be like? What will all the other departments in the country be like? From that we must work back and build an education system which will serve those needs. If we are to give vocational education, if we are to make better motor mechanics or better carpenters or better builders or whatever, there must be demand in the market. There must be understanding why it is better. Only then it will work. So all these linkages must be built, must be thought about now.

It is not only linkages after education; there are also linkages that must be built in into the system, between the various departments that are handling education. We have the agricultural universities under Ministry of Agriculture. We have ITIs under Labour. We have law colleges under the Law Ministry. We have electronics under Electronics and there are other three or four like this. This is ~~apart~~ from what the Centre does and what the States do. So there must be proper understanding between each of these system and if we look at a specialised college or institution, it must not be with such a narrow vision that a full education is not given to students coming through those units. It is not good enough to train somebody in an agricultural college and limit him to a very narrow perspective. The basic requirement of education

which is building the character of the individual, which is preparing him to face the world when he leaves the institution. This must not be lost just because an institution is highly specialised in a particular field.

You have raised the question of finances. I have been discussing this point with the Planning Commission, and I am very glad to be able to tell you that we have managed to squeeze out 1500 crores over and above what was allocated originally for human resources development. A very large chunk of this, I am sure, will go to education.

When we look at our education system, we look the challenges that are ahead in just sheer numbers, it is mind-boggling, frightening. And we have to see how we can mobilise best. A primary question is, can Government bear the sole responsibility for the full education system ~~when~~ for the rich or for the poor. This question needs thought. In the next century, at the rate which our population is growing, we could well have 500 million illiterate persons in the country. We cannot afford to do that. That is why this thrust on education. Education again has to be a primary tool in stabilising our gains, gains from our freedom struggle, gains our development. It must not such that it destabilises. This too is a point that you must keep in mind.

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We have looked at this document from various aspects. Some are covered in more detail, others have not been gone into in adequate depth. Vocational education is one such sphere. We have not been successful in our system of vocationalising education. We must learn from those who have. If we find that that model does not adapt to our system, we must develop a new model. It is not good enough to keep on beating the same path. Where we know we are not making progress we must change our attitudes, accept the challenges and progress on a new route. We have to see how trained manpower can be used best for bringing about changes. Today we employ almost uneducated illiterate people to run our major industries, power stations and public sector units. Will this be feasible tomorrow? Will a power station, which will be put up in the next 5 or 10 years, be run in the same way? Or will it have a very large amount of electronics, will it be computer controlled, will it be micro-processor controlled and will that same person be able to run that? How are we going to educate our labour classes to be able to run our industries in 1990, in the 2000s. This is what we must think of, when we think of vocational education. It is not just making a carpenter a better carpenter. It has to go much deeper than that. What is going to be the role of an average worker towards the end of the century? How will we prepare children for that role today?

We too have got a block about the brain-drain. We should not worry about the brain-drain. We should worry about producing the best brains in the country. And I know India definitely has amongst the best brains in the world. We must concentrate on creating conditions in the country where these brains will work. And we must accept the fact that a certain number of these brains will go abroad, will get experience and will come back for our benefit. Training does not and education does not end when you leave colleges. It is a continuing process. You keep learning as you keep working and even if we get a scientist or an engineer or a doctor back to our country when he is 50 or 60, we have not really lost. We will be richer for the experience that he has gained in his work outside India. He will bring that back for the benefit of our country. We must build and develop the brains in India. to work all over the world, not just in India. At the same time, we must see that we do not lose out on this and that adequate numbers are working in India, are coming back to India. And I have seen during the last few years, there is a tremendous involvement of Indians abroad with India. They want to come back, and I am sure, they will come back. We must not look at this as a loss. We must look at it not as a brain-drain, but as a brain-bank which is collecting interest, just waiting for us to withdraw the amount and to use again in India.

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One other concept which has got lost in our drive for mass-education has been that of excellence. We seem to have forgotten that there was such a thing. Everything is reduced to mediocrity, may be even lower than that. This must be changed. This is something that you must tackle here and in the next few months. We have developed a scheme of model schools-points of excellence-which we hope we will be able to put up in each district during the next five years. But this is only as a challenge to the rest of the system so that it might strive to reach their standards; You must see how the whole system can be made to live itself up. Without excellence, there can be no positive results.

Examinations are another very sore point with everyone, most of all with students. They have unfortunately become almost a farce. If almost every gets a distinction, is there a difference between a distinction and the third grade? Is it enough to just live with the system as it is today? When we think of examinations-again when we think of the system-what we have to think of is not just the system that we are developing for today. What we bring out in the Paper in 1986, after debates and discussions, must be such that it is not bound by time. It must be such that it can develop with changes as they happen in India, as they happen abroad. It must be flexible, it must be open-minded, it must have that vision in it. The two basic questions for an education system are : one, does it realise the value that India stands for-secular, democratic, socialistic society? Does it stand, does it build non-violence, and Satya into our people? These are the sort of questions that need answers. And two, does it go down to the lowest level, or are there barriers for certain social groups or economic groups? Does it reach down to every woman, girl, scheduled tribes, scheduled castes and other weaker sections? Does it give them the full opportunity to develop their intellect? This is what you must think of. Will it help in social stability or will it provoke social unrest? The problems of equal opportunity must be faced head on by us. Social tensions must be soothed and not provoked by the education system.

One of our biggest limitations to economic progress is the rate of growth of our population. Again were education has spread, specially amongst women, the birth rate has come down tremendously so education goes much deeper than that. As equally fundamental issue is the development of value system in our society and the development of an intellectual framework that will allow us to find our own solutions.

We talk of self-reliance. But what does self-reliance mean today? Mostly, it means that we manufacture under licence, something which somebody else has developed:

I am not trying to deride these scientists, those technologists who have developed Indian technology and we have some of the best, specially in those fields where technology has not been made available to us. We are close to the frontiers of development. But by and large our self-reliance has been limited to manufacturing what other people are developing. It has also been limited in thinking, in thinking of solutions, in applying our own remedies to our own problems.

The education system must go beyond these barriers. It must be able to develop the Indian mind, get it out of the colonial cast, make it much more outward thinking, make it more aggressive on intellectual questions. We must make it so, so that the solutions are found in India and not abroad. These are basically the issues that I wanted to talk about.

There are other nuts and bolts questions. I won't go into these in depth because I fear that I have taken more time than what I should have. There is the question of how much should higher education be regulated. How many people should go in and how many should not? Should professional education be subsidised? The beneficiaries are public sectors and private sectors who can afford to pay for that. At what stage should the branching off to vocationalisation take place, matching between cost and content, needs and the absorptive capacity of the community? How are we going to utilise the mass media and the other media for educating and building our younger generation? There are other questions: The nature and extent of de-politicisation; how earnestly we should look into the Reports of the Teachers' Commissions; reforms in the governance of universities-better performance, more accountability; reorganisation of under-graduate, graduate programmes on a modular basis where the student has the option of combining theoretical knowledge with communication skills; how can a student mix his theoretical courses with vocational courses? And the question of the 10+2+3. How has it worked? Has it done as we had ~~wished~~ it would do? If there are shortcomings, have we failed in doing something that needed to be done? Has there been shortcomings in the methods of implementation. I have just said that we have put a lot of money aside but the fact is that even that may not be enough. Better utilisation of the funds that are available is worth seeing and looking into as is the quality of school buildings, quality of facilities that are available. There are two very definite views: We can choose that we will give only a basic education and it can be done under the mango tree. It will not change the content of what is being given. There is also the view that when a school is complete in every aspect-a good clean building, good toilets, bathrooms, good facilities-then that becomes the core of development and organisation in that village. It gives the incentive for the whole village to start-actually moving ahead. Of course, we

can not afford to have such schools in every village. But we have to compromise somewhere in between the two. We cannot pretend that just supplying teachers and mango trees will be enough to educate our young.

Perhaps the most difficult question to tackle is that of the Centre-State relations with regard to education. It is necessary to look into this aspect further to see how education is to be developed and how Central funds and State funds can be best utilised for a better education?

Perhaps the most important aspect is the teacher. On how good the teacher is, depends on how good the pupil will be. As some one put it, a mediocre teacher tells. Most of our teachers tend to tell. A good teacher explains, a superior teacher demonstrates and an exceptional teacher inspires. We must inspire to develop these teachers. This is what we have to work for. We are going to concentrate on schools. I think before we even get into that, we must concentrate even harder on teacher training, teacher upgrading, teacher refresher courses and further teacher education. Lastly, I hope that you will all participate in this debate over the next few months, and aggressively participate, because that is what will throw up the ideas that we are looking for. As the Rigveda said, "Let us move together, let us speak together, let us come together for learning for common goals".

Thank you.

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