

Impact of Neo-liberal Policies on Elementary Education

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ABSTRACT

The term 'Liberalization' has come to dominate discourse in economic development. Liberalization means freeing of trade in goods and services, investment and capital flows between countries without hassles. The quality of human resources of country normally depends upon the quality of education of the country. Liberalization put tremendous effect on Elementary Education and this paper is aimed to find out the impact of liberal policies on Elementary Education in India.

Keywords: Liberalization, Liberal Policies, Elementary Education.

Introduction:

Neo liberalism is a policy prescription for the withdrawal of the state to facilitate the participation of the private sector. It claims that the government has become too large and dispersed and that it has lost focus and public administration has given way to New Public Management (NPM) which represents the synthesis of public administration and private administration. The neo-liberal policy's tendency of budget cuts and fiscal deficit discipline, irregular and inadequate recruitments and less allocation of funds has further exacerbated the problems of public institutions. And at the same time more private educational institutions have been permitted to come up in small and big urban localities. Private corporate educational institutions have also come up in a big way. Indiscriminate growth of private educational institutions has an ill-effect on the overall functioning of the public institutions. The unbelievably rapid growth of the private sector has resulted in crowding out or displacing or damaging the public sector in no time.

The public good nature of education and the education as a democratic right (John Dewey, 2013) entails 'welfare state' which is at stake due to neo-liberal policies. The emergence of Indian welfare state is rooted in the ideals espoused by Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar and others etc. during the making of Indian constitution. Though, the emergence of Indian welfare state was a compromise between capitalism and

socialism, yet it required near complete state intervention in some social sectors like education sector.

However, the neo-liberal policies have created a compulsion on the state to withdraw, seriously affecting social sectors like education sector. The liberalization, privatization and globalization policies are not only leading to commercialization of education but also leading to shrinking space for public education. The state withdrawal and intervention are the competing tendencies that reflect the larger global scenario of neo-liberalism.

The study tries to explore and understand the emergence of Indian welfare state and how neoliberal policies after 1991 led to the decline of public education and increasing privatization led to the issues of equity, quality and accessibility in Indian Education System. In this context, my study enables to know the link between growing presence of the private sector due to withdrawal of the state and the declining space for the public funded education system in India. It also enables to know how privatization of education is leading to increasing inequality, inaccessibility of quality education to the underprivileged sections of the society. Meagre budgetary allocation, not recruiting permanent teaching staff, contractualization of the staff, encouraging private sector with fee-reimbursement would all be resulting in increasing crisis in public education system. Until and unless increasing privatization is addressed, my study argues, there

would be little scope for the improvement of the public education system. It is in this context, there is need to understand and explore the emergence of Indian welfare state and its constitutional legitimacy and how state withdrawal has become imminent due to neo-liberal policies. And as a result, how increasing privatization of Elementary Education in India.

Objectives Of The Study

1. To describe and briefly analyze the emergence of Neo-liberalism in India.
2. To study the effect of neo-liberalism on Indian School Education System or Elementary Education.

Impact of Neo-liberal Policies:

NPE – 1986 marked the beginning of the free – market or neo-liberal agenda in school education, though it contains a provision for Common School System. It introduced Non-Formal Education (NFE) that was suggested for the out of school children in the age group 6 – 14 with instructors in place of regular, qualified, trained and well-paid teachers was nothing but abandoning the constitutionally mandated goal of these children to going to regular schools. The policy also proposed to set up an elite layer of schools like Navodaya Vidyalaya's whose quality would be far above the regular government schools.

By signing the Jomtien Declaration 1990 at Jomtien, Thailand, Indian government committed itself to privatize the education sector, there by transforming education into a means for profiteering. Instead of education being a vehicle to build a conscious citizenship, declaration defines education merely as 'basic learning needs', thus reducing education to acquiring literacy, numeracy and life skills.

Introduction of DPEP in 1993-94 replaced the larger goal of constitutional commitment of providing eight years of elementary education with just five years of primary education. It reduced the holistic goals of education to literacy- numeracy. It replaced regular teachers with under-qualified, ill-trained and under-paid teachers appointed on short term contract called para-teachers. Twenty-five percent reservations in Private schools under RTE Act, 2009 : Many people thought that all the poor children in the country would obtain quality education in private schools. The data collected by the HRD Ministry's DISE in 2010 reveals

that even if all the private schools had fully implemented the provisions of 25 per cent reservation, a maximum of 18 lakhs children from weaker sections would be admitted in class I under RTE Act. An overwhelming majority of 2 to 2.5 crore more children would be knocking at the doors of the government school system. Apart from the inadequacy of the private schools, it exhibits the government's deliberate attempt to stay away from constitutionally mandated social responsibility and it is admitting its inability to run quality schools, despite having the experience of running Navodaya and Kendriya Vidyalayas which are amongst the best in the country.

Possibility of private schools discriminating against the children admitted under Right to Education are high, as these schools are in the business of making money and profits, unlike institutions which are run on charitable and humanitarian values seeking to promote the welfare of humanity. Quality Measure through Rigorous Randomized Control Trial (RCT): Another important aspect is the quality of education. The assumption is that private schools will provide quality education to the disadvantaged sections of the society, once admitted. But truth of the matter is that quality goes beyond the binary of public and private schools and depends on larger social and economic background of the families of the students (D.D. Karopady, 2014).

This was amply proved by an extensive study conducted and carried out during 2008 to 2013 in India by Azim Premji Foundation, involving a sample size of 10000 (ten thousand) children and a rigorous Randomized Control Trial (RCT) design, in collaboration with the Government of Andhra Pradesh. The most important finding relates to the learning achievement of the disadvantaged children who moved to private schools with scholarships provided as compared to the children who continued in government schools. Cut in Allocation and failure to identify critical aspect: Going by the estimated allocation of finances, the pronouncements of Eleventh Five Year Plan, 86th Constitutional Amendment Act and Right to Education Act, an impression of educational transformation would tend to be created. But the neo-liberal policy-oriented tendency held back the state and the amount spent was only Rs 78000

crore (Twelfth Five Year Plan, Volume III: Social Sectors, P.54) which was less than half of the estimation made by MHRD. Besides meager financial allocation, the Planning Commission did not question the continuation of Non-Formal Education Centers and refused to realize the critical role of the well-qualified and trained teachers and the need to do away with the large number of under-qualified, under-trained and under-paid para-teachers being recruited everywhere.

Increasing Privatization and Institutional Shift

As per ASER, 2018 national findings, there has been a steady increase in the percentage proportion of children aged between 3-16 years enrolling in private schools since 2005. The percentage proportion of enrollment in private schools increased from 16.4 in 2005 to 30.9 in 2018. Apart from increasing privatization of school education since 1990s, by 2010 Indian state has reached to a threshold point where the institutional shift was taking place from free education by non-profit oriented institutions to the setting up of profit-oriented PPP model institutions and increasing privatization of school education. And most of the government schools were being run with inadequate staff including para, contract and untrained and un-qualified staff along with mushrooming presence of neighboring private schools.

All this has been happening, in spite of the law that prohibits commercial for-profit organizations to provide schooling; all private-aided/ unaided schools have to be non-profit organizations under the Societies Act. The Supreme Court in 1993 had ruled that “Commercialization of education cannot and should not be permitted”. But, the Mid-Year Analysis of the Budget 2010 -11 tabled in parliament recommended that “it is advisable to discontinue with the non-profit trust requirement and allow schools to be profit-making” (GOI, 2010) have shed all inhibitions and declared that private sector needs to be involved more meaning fully in expanding the reach and improving the quality of elementary education in the country.

Draft National New Education Policy: The Draft New Education Policy, 2019 without speaking about the increasing role of private sector and resultant privatization and commoditization of the education

sector, is trying to project itself as having all-encompassing educationally idealistic vision of ‘quality’ at the cost of equity and accessibility. The word ‘quality’ runs many a time throughout the document while the constitutional values of equity and secularism are given little importance.

New Education Policy, 2020: NEP -2020 policy is replete with many reforms with many systemic changes at school and higher education that will have far reaching consequences. The reforms are intended to create new institutions and new paradigms in curriculum that is sought to be implemented through technology oriented online and offline mode. But the fundamental issues like commercialization and privatization, lack of adequate teaching faculty in general and quality teachers in particular, lack of adequate resource allocation for public education due to neo-liberal budgetary constraints would make the educational system inaccessible and inequitable.

Effects on Elementary Education

The serious mismatch of presence of a very few quality government institutions and the huge demand for them is not only affecting quality and equity of higher education but also affecting school education. From 6th standard onwards the students are forced to undergo rigorous training in sciences that is Mathematics, physics, Chemistry and Biological Sciences of plus 1 and plus 2 standards, at the cost of totally neglecting the languages and social sciences which otherwise would enable a student to appreciate the issues of the society and the beauty of the life. The appreciation for art and literature and the resultant beauty of the life is totally ignored.

Growth and support of Private Sector at the cost of Public Institutions and precious resources:

The earlier trend (before the beginning of neo-liberal policies) of setting up of full-fledged educational institutions has given way to populism of schemes like fee-reimbursement where in the government reimburses the fixed amount of fee so as to enable a poor student to pursue a course in any private college which resort to all possible and innovative dubious methods in attracting and weaning them away from government colleges. This has significantly affected

the level and composition of public funding in state budgets, with a shift from funding public institutions to students in private colleges.

The amount spent for the fee reimbursement scheme and other schemes could be utilized for establishing new colleges with permanent faculty and world class infrastructure facilities definitely improving the overall education scenario in the country to cater to the needs of the nation state rather than resources being transferred to private sector. The unbelievably rapid growth of the private sector has resulted in crowding out or displacing or damaging the public sector in no time. Now, there is practically no space for the government to set up a full-fledged institution. Only when the government is sole or at least the major provider of free education, the balanced and comprehensive education, instruction aiming at the larger social benefit is possible. Only then all the courses – basic sciences, liberal arts, languages and the technology courses will be developed equally for the betterment and all-round development of the individual, society and the country at large. The realization of constitutionally guaranteed values of free, equitable, just, secular, scientific, and democratic education would not be possible as long as the national policies aim at promoting private sector participation in tune with neo-liberal policies in Education Sector.

Before and after economic reforms, Indian state, either out of electoral compulsion, or out of constitutional mandate or out of positive liberalism, has remained as welfare state. Before economic reforms, the vision of development was one in which the focus was on regulating capitalism to ensure that the fruits of development were equitably shared. After the reforms, the emphasis is on unfettering capitalism. The transition is from socialistic pattern of development to capitalistic pattern of development where welfare expenditure is looked down leading to cut in subsidized goods and services to the poor and peasant farmers. In a liberalized economic order, while the government still has the right to determine the levels of access to precious resources and to well-groomed public institutions, its role is seen as one of providing such access as part of a process of encouraging private sector led growth. In such a situation, corruption becomes systemic as the resources and

the share in public undertakings are to be handed over, out of policy compulsion, to private corporate sector at cheap rates.

In the social sectors like health and education, private sector participation with all the support and encouragement from the government with simultaneous negligence, in terms of understaffing, contract staff, lower budget allocations, of the public institutions providing these services would lead to precarious situation of inaccessibility of these basic services to the underprivileged sections of the society. These basic services become unaffordable even to the middle-class people. Whatever welfare expenditure that is being spent in already very much neglected public institutions has been projected to be wasteful expenditure. As the public institutions are being crippled, private sector participation with state support in terms of reimbursement schemes would get legitimized further benefitting the later with huge transfer of public resources. The welfare spending has been confined to populist welfare schemes with short run benefits. This contradiction between welfarism and neo-liberalism has been making the coverage of welfarism piecemeal and inadequate and dilapidated in India since late 1980s and early 1990s.

Conclusion:

In this context, some describe whatever little or declining welfare orientation that is there is only a short run affair when elections are in the offing. 'Politicians find it very difficult to win elections merely on the basis of rational explanation of reform policies, especially when they are presumed to cause hardships to the poor and needy. Some welfare measures are inevitable if ruling parties want to survive in democratic politics. It appears that for him, economic reforms were a long-term strategy while populism (welfarism) was a short term tactic to win elections (K.C. Suri, 2005). And there is need to study the relationship between populism and economic reforms to know the long-term ill-effects of the populism. The historical, democratic and constitutional compulsion of welfare state in India is still found to be relevant and necessary and entail large scale state intervention as against the neo-liberal policies which consider the state intervention as unnecessary and futile.

Finally, it is the social sector where the reforms

have a direct bearing on the lives of the poor and many policy makers and economists like Amartya Sen and Jean Drez (2013), in their book 'The uncertain Glory of India', for that matter since long time, have been advocating that in social sectors like education, health and public distribution system, there should be active state intervention and they should not be left to market forces. And they view, with comparative analysis of BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China and recently joined South Africa not included) and some states like Himachal Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu where active state intervention produced better social indicators than other countries and some states in India. The active social policies and old-fashioned public institutions, even though economic reforms are irreversible in the context of larger globalization, would make the difference in the lives of the people. There is a need to study the efficacy and necessity of public institutions and the ways and means to improve them in the fast-changing world of neo-liberal globalization.

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