

ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT

Education / A P BHUPATKAR

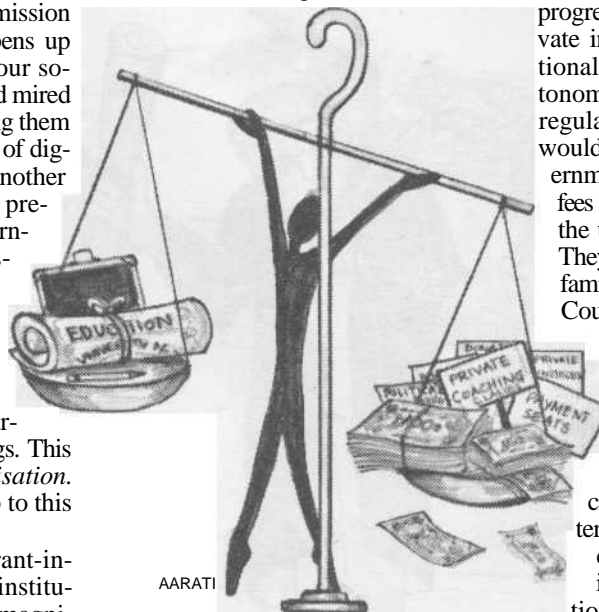
The Democratisation Of Education

Many experiments in education focus on method and content devoid of their social context. They are out of reach of the masses and function in closed quarters.

The present educational system is set in a milieu of social, economic, political and cultural change. It serves the interests of those sections of society who hold the levers of political and economic power. The modern industrialising elite sees it as a means for consolidating and perpetuating its power. Education has a role to play and a mission to carry out. At one level, it opens up opportunities to vast sections of our society, who have hitherto remained mired into tradition and ignorance, urging them to shift into a new living process of dignity, honour and fulfillment. At another level, it allows vast numbers to prepare themselves speedily to modernise agriculture, crafts and industry. Together, the participation in the process of modernisation and directing one's life towards dignity and fulfillment create yet another possibility, viz, people can acquire a voice of their own and articulate their thoughts and feelings. This is the purpose of real *democratisation*. Education in India must wake up to this large social and historic role.

The Government deems the grant-in-aid as a favour done to private institutions and tries to minimise its magnitude. The institutions have to literally scrounge for funds and are not sure, if expenses incurred will ever be reimbursed. Even after stringent rules are framed for recruitment of teachers and staff, there are nominees from the University and the Government on the selection committees. Selections are delayed, and so are approvals and consequently teachers are deprived of their pay for many months, forcing them to look for other options like private coaching. The principal's focus is to get grants and

all else such as care for students and their learning is secondary. Managements in such situations turn to other avenues to earn money. Old colleges start collecting donations to escape the provisions of the law. These are the very same colleges which earned their names on the basis of selfless service of generations of teach-



ers. What right would the teachers have to demand ethical conduct from their students?

Courses on moral science and ethics can have a legitimacy only in those schools which practise equality of opportunity, transparency and fair financial dealings. Students definitely need to be exposed to the science of moral values. They need to appreciate the connection between individual gain and collective good and that one cannot automatically guarantee the other. The courses definitely do not "teach" ethics but can make the students aware that every action of theirs has an ethical dimension. These courses by their very nature have

to be taught by persons with high standards of probity in institutions.

The pitfalls in the present educational system therefore are linked to the fundamental cause of making education available to the disadvantaged and the dispossessed. Lack of funds is usually advanced as the main reason for slow progress. This creates the ground for private initiative and ownership of educational institutions. They demand autonomy from the Government rules and regulations, on the ground that they would not take a paisa from the Government. They are free to charge other fees at any other rate, while keeping the tuition pegged at the official rates. They attract students from well-to-do families. Looking at this situation our Courts have also resigned to sanctifying the system of "free" seats and "payment" seats. This has come to stay for the foreseeable future in our country. The elite institutions attract teachers in large numbers, offer greater facilities and create the myth that students entering these institutions constitute the cream of talent while the others fall into the mediocre category. Education which is supposed to liberate the minds of students, in reality results in lowering the self-esteem of a large number of students.

The way out of this impasse is to propose alternatives of clean, low-cost and high-quality education while making young persons realise the social and political dynamics behind the whole process of education. The myth of the "cream of talent" needs to be exposed. Students need to think and make choices based on their experience so that they do not fall into the "technology trap", succumbing to the latest, because it is the latest. We have to demonstrate that education is a process which allows students to unfold their potential, rather than constrict it.

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