

# Indian education bereft of n

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**E**DUCATION is an empowering phenomenon which equips the people to combat social injustice and exploitation, and which provides the necessary synergy for a structural socio-political transformation, says Professor G. Ram Reddy, former chairman of the University Grants Commission, in his book, Higher Education in India, Conformity, Crisis and Innovation. A collation of articles, speeches and convocation addresses, the book critically analyses the state of higher education in India and presents an agenda for modernization and reforms.

Professor Reddy sees an umbilical cord connecting education and development and observes that in the evolution of education activity, the progress in education accompanies economic progress and accelerates development. There is increased production, modernization of society, social and national integration, development of democratic values, secularism and synthesis between scientific and cultural values. In fact, according to a study conducted

in 75 countries by F. Harbison and C.A. Myres, it was found that there was a positive correlation between education and economic development.

There are some more interesting statistics: the percentage of adult literacy is 98% in the industrialized countries, 72% in the middle-income countries and 32% in the low-income countries. According to M.J. Bowman and C.A. Anderson, a literacy level of 40% was necessary for a sustained level of economic growth and 70%-80% for rapid expansion. And with a literacy level of 52.11% we do not need economic wizards to prognosticate our development graph.

Such being the case, what is India's policy towards higher education? Whatever the policy, there appears to be a general drift at the institutional level. Prof. Reddy says that the access, quality and obsolescence of our institutions is a matter of great concern. "We cannot have democracy in the political system and aristocracy or elitism in education..." and "When the country is competing in the global market, quality in higher education is imperative".

slightly at variance with the main thrust of national development.

Another anomaly was the highly centralized governance. Decision making was monopolized by central campuses which cater to only a small proportion of students, while the affiliated colleges, which met the educational needs of a majority of the students, were neglected and under-represented in the decision making process.

Making a strong case for more funds, Prof. Reddy suggests the establishment of a University Finance Commission, so that universities need not worry on this score and continue to perform their role effectively. In this context he calls for opening educational infrastructure to foreign students, by creating something like 10% supernumerary seats (without adversely affecting the interests of our own students). Our premier institutions like the IITs, the IIMs, Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore, having world class standards, would have no problem in attracting foreign students.

This would help us in two ways; by charging a differential fee for the foreign student, our educational institutions could raise some additional funds, and politically, India would be able to spread goodwill in the developing world.

# Modern socio-political

Thus the country has to spend much more on higher education than it is currently doing. The Government has earmarked only eight percent of the total Eighth Plan outlay of education on higher education. Compare it with 28.7% in Canada, 25.1% in the USA, 21.8% in China, 21.4% in Japan.

At the same time, Prof. Reddy calls for excellence and feels that discriminatory approach and elite institutions cannot be ruled out from our academic system (possibly hinting at the reservation quotas). "... obviously a democracy cannot flourish unless it has at its disposal the services of highly trained and powerfully motivated educated class". There appears a contradiction with his earlier stated view, but a deep introspection will reveal the rational bridge connecting the two.

Delivering a severe indictment on the Indian University System, Prof. Reddy avers that it had failed to respond to the challenges of identifying and evolving exhaustive agenda for national development, in post-independence era. This was because the class which dominated the Indian university system, hap<sup>1</sup> its interest