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Educational Vouchers, Ideological Slug Fest And The Way Forward In Primary Education

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ABSTRACT

India's concern for higher inclusive growth is under serious ideological challenge because of recent rumblings to opt for educational vouchers for people Below Poverty Line. Our Constitutional mandate for socio economic justice as encapsulated in RTE Act, 2002 is giving way to a strident call for market economics. Empathetic educational policy is the fulcrum to higher Human Development Index. India's recent policy voyage to ramp up manufacturing through the Make-In-India campaign would require high Total Factor Productivity. This paper takes a review of our journey towards Right To Education due to the judicial activism leading to universal enrolment, its concerns on quality and more specifically the need to opt for higher private schooling by providing educational vouchers to people children below poverty line as the preferred educational policy. It explores possible implication of the ideological slugfest between free market economics and leftist ideology on the role of government towards this merit good sector. Needless to say that clarity on a new educational policy will have significant implication on future generation of students to grapple with the advantage of globalization.

Keywords: HDI, RTE, Make-In-India, BPL, TFP

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INTRODUCTION

With the appointment of Dr. Arvind Panagariya as Vice-Chairman of "Niti Ayog" the question of giving educational vouchers worth Rs.2000/- per child to children aged 5 to 14 years of parents who are in the bottom 30% of income distribution has gained currency and drawing strong informed public debate. As per Prof. Panagariya's assessment based on population projection for 2007 72.6 million children from the BPL families would benefit from it involving 0.4% of the GDP in 2005-2006. This is considered to be a pro-poor initiative and would offer the marginal sections of the society who are captive to government schools an option to choose to private school of their choice. On the other hand Prof. Amartya Sen is skeptical of the whole concept of education voucher by asserting that privatization of primary education will lead the school to become **"extractive money making machine with modest educational offer"**. Based on his study he finds that the private schools are not doing much better than government schools. **His finding has also been corroborated in World Development Report (2014)**. What Prof. Sen strongly advocates for is **universal coverage with good quality education backed by adequate state funding**. Prof. Muchkund Dubey is strongly against the endemic attempt to privatize education and its commercialization aspect and **recommends strongly for state supported and state controlled common school system based on the concept of neighborhood school system**.

The RTE Act, 2002 has been watershed legislation in India as it has ensured near universal enrolment even in rural areas. A number of studies have been conducted to assess the relative quality of public school vis-à-vis private schooling by Ramachandran (1997) in respect of UP & MP, PRATHAM, NGO (2006), Muralidharan & Kremer (2006) in Delhi, DD Karopady (2012) in Andhra Pradesh. However these studies appear to be inconclusive. Prof. Sen on the other hand avers that the switch over may not offer substantial gain in terms of learning outcomes. Neo classical economics champions the cause of market forces. A country like India which is wedded to high growth and committed to higher inclusivity as per

the 12th Plan seems to be taking an ideological summersault which has the potential of exposing the vulnerable section to the brink of economic despair.

This paper attempts to bring out

- (a) Genesis of RTE Act, 2002 and its Impact
- (b) The Allocation Trends and its Impact on Access and Quality
- (c) Efficacy of Private School vis-à-vis Public School in terms of Quality
- (d) Educational Policy & Make-In-India Campaign

GENESIS OF RTE ACT, 2002 AND ITS IMPACT

USA, the prime global power, has given primacy to education and its quality with its corporate sector consistently funding state of art research in the universities. In *Brown vs. Board of Education*, Earl Warren, C.J., speaking for the U.S. Supreme Court emphasized the right to education in the following words: Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments...It is required in the performance of our most basic responsibilities, even service the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is the principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education.

Justice Bhagwati has been the strongest supporter of Right To Education. In the landmark judgement (*Francis Coralie Mulin Vs. Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi (1981)*) wherein he gave an expanded meaning to right to life (Article 21) by including Right To Education. In (*JP Unnikrishnan Vs. State of Andhra Pradesh JT 1993(1) SC 474*) the court clearly averred "Education up to the age of 14 years to be fundamental right...It would be therefore incumbent upon the State to provide facilities and opportunity as enjoined under Article 39(e) and (f) of the Constitution and to prevent exploitation of their childhood due to indigence and vagary". Therefore the landmark RTE Act, 2002, though late in coming, has helped in massive enrolment of children for basic education as would be evident from the following tables.

Table-1 and Table-2 bring out the improvement in the literacy percentage for rural-urban, SC, ST and across the state.

Table-1 : Literacy Rates: Trends

Literacy	1981	1991	2001	2011
All India (Rural)	36.01	44.69	58.74	68.91
All India (Urban)	67.23	73.08	79.92	84.98
Schedule Caste	21.38	37.41	54.69	56.49
Schedule Tribe	16.35	29.60	47.10	49.52

Source: India Public Policy Report 2014

Table-2 : State wise Literacy Rate

All India/States	1951	1991	2011
All India	18.3	52.2	73
Kerala	47.2	89.8	94
Uttar Pradesh	12.0	40.7	67.7
Tamil Nadu	-	62.7	80.1
Maharashtra	27.9	64.9	82.3
Odisha	15.8	49.1	72.9
West Bengal	24.6	52.9	72.2
Bihar	13.5	37.5	61.8

Source: Registrar General of India, MHA

It would be seen from the above that there has been significant improvement in the literacy rate during the last decade. However the SC, ST communities are still lagging behind compare to other communities. The following table brings out the enrolment ratio on education in 2002 compared to 1993.

Table-3 : Enrolment Ratios Primary & Upper Primary Trends

Item	1993	2002
Gross Enrolment Ratios (%)		
Primary Education (Grades 1-5, ages 6-10)		
All students	82	95
Male	90	98
Female	73	93
Upper Primary Education (Grades 6-8, ages 11-14)		
All students	54	61
Male	62	65
Female	45	56

Source: Wu, Kaul, and Sankar (2005)

It would be seen from the above that in the primary education segment there has been a phenomenal improvement in gross enrolment ratio for both male and female compared to 1993.

THE ALLOCATIONAL TRENDS AND IT IMPACT ON ACCESS AND QUALITY

While universal enrolment has received wide encomiums, inadequate allocation to the education sector in general and to primary education in particular has been a disconcerting feature as would be evident from the following table.

Table-4 : Allocation to School Education (Rs. Crore)

Major Programmes	2012-2013	2013-2014 (BE)	2013-2014 (RE)	% Change of RE (13-14) over (12-13)	2014-2015 (BE)	% Change over BE (13-14)
Total	45631	52701	50136	+9.8%	55115	+4.6%
(a) Elementary Education	35929	37150	35668	-0.8%	42696	+15%
1. Sarva Sikshya Abhiyan (SSA)	9842	8079	8079	-18%	9294	+14.9%
2. National Programme for Mid day meals in Schools	4135	3918	3886	-6%	4418	+13%
(b) Secondary Education	9241	10027	9335	+1%	6160	-39%

Source: India Budget: Demand No-59, 14-15, MHRD

It would be seen from the above that (a) overall increase in allocation to primary education and secondary education is only 5% (b) there is a drastic reduction of (39%) in allocation for secondary education (c) endemic short fall in actual spending (5%) during 2013-14 compared to budget estimates. Colclough and Levin (1993) had made an assessment that for universalization of primary education 3.1% of GDP is required whereas the actual allocation was only 1.2%. In other words at-least 2% additional GDP needs to be allocated to provide basic infrastructural support for primary education. However the various studies on achievement of primary schools by India Human Development Survey, 2004-05, ASER Survey, 2011, PROBE Revisited, 2006, CORD-NEG Village studies, 2010-11, WIPRO-EI Quality Education Study 2011 reveal the following disquieting picture.

Table-5 : Achievements in Primary School: Findings

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only half of all children aged 8-11 years enrolled in a government school are able to read a simple paragraph with three sentences. Less than half (43 %) of these children are able to subtract a two-digit number from another two-digit number More than one third (36%) are unable to write a simple sentence such as 'My mothers' name is Madhuben Only 58% of children enrolled in classes 3 to 5 can read a class-1 text. Less than half (47%) are able to do a simple two-digit subtraction In classes 5 to 8 only half of the children can use a calendar Only 37% of children enrolled in class 4 or 5 can read fluently Less than half (45%) are able to divide 20 by 5 One third are unable to add with carry over Out of 110 children enrolled in class 4 or 5 only half were able to recognize a two-digit number Less than one fourth of these 110 children were able to subtract a two digit number from another two digit number Reading and Maths skills of class 4 pupils in India's top schools are below the international average Only 16% of class 4 pupils could master the measurement of the length of a pencil with a ruler Only 22% of class 6 pupils could understand that crumpling a paper does not alter its weight.

Sources- India Human Development Survey, 2004-05, ASER Survey, 2011, PROBE Revisited, 2006, CORD-NEG Village studies, 2010-11, WIPRO-EI Quality Education Study 2011

The other disturbing trend is the dropout rates. The following tables bring out the details as also the major reasons for drop outs.

Table-6 : Dropout Rates: Trends

All India/States/UTs	1981-82	1992-93	2004-05	2010-11
All India Class I-V	53.5	45.0	29.0	27.0
All India Class I-VIII	72.1	61.1	50.8	40.6
All India Class I-X	82.3	72.9	61.9	49.3

Source: India Public Policy Report 2014

It would be seen from the above that the overall reduction in dropouts after 2004-05 is not significant. Particularly disconcerting is the dropout percent in states like MP, Odisha and Bihar. The Kothari Commission (1966) had brought out that the dropouts were mainly attributable to poverty as nearly 50% were below poverty lines.. Recent studies, however, bring out the following disaggregated picture.

Table-7 : Reasons for Dropout

Reason	Boys	Girls
Economic Reasons	27%	23%
Domestic Work	24%	24%
Lack of Interest in Studies	21%	20%

It would be seen that while economic reasons and poverty still predominate, poor quality of teaching also contribute significantly to the dropout.

EFFICACY OF PRIVATE SCHOOL VIS-À-VIS PUBLIC SCHOOL IN TERMS OF QUALITY

The growing popularity of private schools, post RTE Act, has led to concerns regarding quality of public schooling and possibility of further economic and social stratification. The mandate to reserve upto 25% of the seats in private schools for children with disadvantaged background is testimony to such an impression. In this backdrop it would be useful to look at various studies conducted to **make an assessment of the quality of private schooling vs. public schooling and to what extent to educational vouchers to poor family would improve their choice of schooling for their children.**

PRATHAN (2006) brought out that in public schools 6.6% children were able to read level-I text in the first grade while only 8.3% was from second grade students who could read upto level-2 text. Disconcertingly enough only 53% of student's upto 5 level grade would read level-1 text. Teacher absenteeism was observed in most public schools. Muralidharan & Kremer (2006) brought out that 28% of rural children opted for private school which has characterized by higher attendance, less absenteeism of teachers. Prof. DD Karopady in his perceptive article (2014) has brought out the findings of Andhra Pradesh school choice research where a sample of 10000 students was taken to study (a) how private school children perform compare to public schools and (b) what is the impact on learning outcomes of students when they move from government to private schools in different subjects. The results are summed up as under

Table-8 : Learning Levels of Children by Type of School in West Godavari District

Class	Government School Children		Private School Children	
	Telgu (%)	Math (%)	Telgu (%)	Math (%)
1	39.0	29.1	62.2***	56.0***
2	39.9	25.5	57.7***	43.3***
3	35.9	21.7	53.4***	37.5***
4	32.1	19.1	46.7***	30.5***
5	42.4	26.1	55.6***	42.0***

Significance levels: *** 1%.

Source- Article by DD Karopady in EPW, December, 20, 2014

Table-9 : Year-End Learning Achievement Test Results (Mathematics, Mean%)

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Group 1+2 (Children in government schools)	23.9	34.1	31.6	24.6	24.9
Group 3 (children who shifted to private schools)	28.5***	35.2	31.2	24.4	24.3
Group 4 (children in private schools to begin with)	46.8***	45.2***	52.3***	39.1***	34.0***

Significance levels: *** 1%.

Significance of Group 4 is with respect to other two groups while significance of group 3 is with respect to Groups 1+2

Source- Article by DD Karopady in EPW, December, 20, 2014

It would be seen from the above

- That the private school children perform better than the public schools when they move to private schools the performance in subjects like Telgu and Maths does not improve significantly while in case of English it is initially better. However in the long run there is no significance difference in the learning outcomes. All the same parents preferred private school as English as a subject a major attraction, students use smart uniform and get an opportunity to mix with affluent sections.

In an earlier study undertaken by Ramachandran in MP and UP he had observed that private schools are unlikely to be availed by SC & ST and poor section of the society. The teacher pupil ratio lower in private school and the teacher salary are significantly higher in government school. **The mean test score in both the states in private school is however found to be low.**

Meera Mitra (2014) has made an impact analysis of introducing educational vouchers in Delhi. She has observed that this has led to significant number of poor children opting for education in private school of their choice. There has been perceptible improvement in their learning outcome. The biggest lament, however, has been discontinuance of the system after four years.

It would be seen from the above finding that given a choice poor families would opt for private school which have better infrastructure, more responsive teaching environment and grater expertise in subjects like English. Since India is getting increasingly globalized and India's mainstay in export has been in the IT sector, proficiency in English, Maths and Science would be critical for students who would opted for college education and hope for better employability in the global employment market.

In this backdrop Make India campaign has a close nexus with our educational policy.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY & MAKE-IN-INDIA CAMPAIGN

PM Modi's main concern is with the manufacturing sector which accounts for 14-16% of GDP with 85% of employment in unorganized sector, with a 'missing middle'. This is unlike manufacturing hubs in Korea, China, Germany and Japan where 50% of the firms are large with benefit of economy of scale and 20% are SEMs. **Value addition in global value chain for India was only 1% in 2009 as against 9% by China and Germany.** National manufacturing Zone (NMZ) 2011 policy is limping big time in the absence of Centre State synergy, tardy land acquisition and long drawn environmental clearance. **Subir Gokran has rightly observed that increase in Incremental Capital Output Ratio (ICOR) from 3.1% (2005-2006) to 5.9% (2012-2013) is largely attributable to supply constraints like power-coal imbalance and in ordinate project delays.**

For Improving a Country's Manufacturing Capability the quality of workforce would be critical. **Prof. Solow, a Nobel Laureate**, in his seminal paper had brought out the importance of **Total Factor Productivity (TFP)**. His equation $Q = A * K^{\Delta} L^{\beta}$ where **Q is the production function, A is the level of technology and scale, K & L are factors of production Δ & β are factor efficiency has demonstrated how US has become the premier technological hegemon after the second world war.** A case in point is the phenomenal growth in China from 1979 as would be evident from the following table. Almost 50% of the GDP growth is attributable to total factor productivity growth.

Table-10 : Sources of Growth in China

Parameter	1953-1978	1979-1994
Output Growth	5.8	9.3
Capital Input Growth	6.2	7.7
Labour Input Growth	2.5	2.7
TFP Growth	1.1	3.9
Contribution of Production	18.0	41.6

Source: A.P. Thirlwall - Economics of Development-Theory and Evidence

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The clamor for educational vouchers is predicated on the assumption that it would be less costly, cumbersome and would afford children of poor family the choice of better schooling. However we need to be cognizant of the vast numbers of poor people who are clearly aspirational and impatient to climb up the social ladder at par with their more affluent counter parts of the society. Adam Smith, the high priest of market economics, had observed that "Private pursuit of self interest would lead as if by an invisible hand to the well being of all". In the aftermath of the global financial crisis 2007 **Prof. Joseph Stiglitz, the nobel laureate as a riposte had observed "What is germane to the debate is not the invisible hand of the market but the visible compassionate hand of the government"**. Education is a vital cog for a fast growing economy like India and it should transcend political and religious ideological slugfest. The government needs to invest handsomely in education and research and consider the whole gamut of education from primary to college education as a merit good. It must facilitate a synergy between reputed foreign universities, Indian academia and industry. A symphony between private schooling without crass commercialization and public schooling with proper infrastructure and accountability of teachers would be the right cocktail for resurgent India.

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