

Education In Peril- Thwart the Allout Attack:

An Analysis of the Onslaughts on Education

Including NKC Yashpal Committee Recommendations

The education system of our country is presenting a highly distressing picture. The governments are trying to completely shirk off the responsibility of funding education and instead are allowing private investors to make fabulous profits by converting education into a costly commodity. Fees are enhanced to astronomical heights at all levels of education. Not only the fees, books, education related materials, hostel charges etc. and miscellaneous expenditure linked with education are increasing at a rapid pace. As a result education as a whole is drifting out of reach of the poor, lower middle class and middle class students. It is becoming impossible for even middle and upper middle class parents to bear the huge costs of educating their wards. Haunted by the extreme sense of insecurity of life they are making all-out attempts to secure the 'future' of their wards by purchasing education at any cost. They are mortgaging properties, selling away the valuables or securing loans at high interest, just to pay fees. The other crores and crores of half-clad and half-starved poor families cannot think of educating their kids up to primary level even. Many meritorious students cherishing their dream for higher pursuits in education and better 'future' being unable to pay exorbitant fees and are forced to end their studies abruptly. Many are committing suicide out of utter frustration. It is heart rending that some students are even selling their blood or subjecting their bodies to medical experiments as guinea pigs to meet high expenditure of their studies. Not only is the scope of education completely denied to millions of common students, but also the core and content of education has been undergoing a drastic change. This is the prevailing scenario of our educational system after more than six long decades of independence.

In the Independence Day speech on 15th August 2007 Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said, "I wish to see a revolution in the field of modern education in the next few years." Such a lofty desire has been expressed at a time when the entire country is writhing with pangs of crisis. Crisis is engulfing each and every field within the society. Unemployment is soaring high. Millions and millions of unemployed youths are craving for any kind of employment in order to procure minimum means of subsistence. Due to incumbent pressure of tremendous price rise people are bent down to the ground. Suicides of farmers failing to repay the debt and of workers thrown out of jobs have become the order of the day. In this backdrop the significance of the slogan of 'revolution' in the field of education raised by Dr. Manmohan Singh must be judged and examined.

Regarding the system of education of our country a strong discontent is prevailing among the teachers, students, guardians and education loving people at large. There is a general feeling that education is day by day becoming costlier, but the standard of teaching and learning is fast deteriorating. Something should be done to improve teaching and learning. Can this so-called 'revolution' satisfy them? The Prime Minister, the Union HRD Minister, the former Chairman of the National Knowledge Commission, Mr. Sam Pitroda, everyone is talking about 'expansion', 'inclusion' and 'excellence', as if to describe the present thrust in the field of education. Euphoria is being created regarding the explosion of 'knowledge', which is newly defined in the context of globalization as an equivalent of the term education in the twenty first century. The Union HRD Minister is frequently issuing a variety of statements regarding this or that issue of 'educational reform'. He is claiming that India always suffered due to brain drain of the best talents of the nation to the advanced western countries. Now education in our country is sought to be developed in such a way that this trend will be reversed. There will be 'brain gain' instead. They are claiming that a large number of 'world-class universities' will be established in India to compete with the educational superpowers in the west. Henceforth there will be no need to rush to the outstanding institutions in those countries, rather the institutions themselves will come to India to make it a centre of 'knowledge' where the talents from all over the globe will converge! So there is speculation if some sort of explosion of higher education is in the offing?

Is it a fact that the government is sincere in its attempt to obliterate the age-old curse of illiteracy, child labour from the society and alleviate the miserable plight of higher education through such explosion of 'knowledge'? Particularly the manner in which, following the National Knowledge Commission, The Committee to Advice on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education, with a renowned educationist like Mr. Yashpal at its helm, denounced the mushrooming of private universities and stressed on quality and excellence in higher education, that has kindled hope among a section of the academicians. Furthermore, already the Right to Education Bill has been passed in Parliament. Is it not a sincere attempt to guarantee the 'free and compulsory education' to all children of the country up to the age of fourteen years? Is it not a serious drive on the part of the Union HRD ministry led by Mr. Kapil Sibal to announce a 'hundred day's agenda' to implement the 'revolutionary reform' of education without any delay? We must examine all these questions to understand whether this hectic drive can really fulfill the long cherished demand of education loving people for real education.

Since Days of Freedom Movement the Dream of Secular, Scientific and Democratic Education Remained Unfulfilled

During the days of renaissance and freedom movement of our country a movement for modern education, i.e. secular, scientific and democratic education arose. Man-making, character building, developing a scientific bent of mind had been considered the object of education. It was viewed as a weapon to remove the medieval darkness, religious bigotry and blindness prevalent within the society. In order to produce socially conscious, harmoniously

developed man, the leaders of the educational movement demanded that the educational system should be completely free from the clutches of religious tutelage, unscientific and obscurantist ideas. Only scientifically proved and accepted subjects should be furnished in the courses of education. The course should be based on secular democratic ethos and values and it must develop scientific bent of mind, faculty of reasoning and commitment towards society and people. Such education should be universal. No citizen of the country should be deprived of education due to his or her poverty, caste, creed or social standing. The responsibility to provide education upto the highest level to all its citizens must be shouldered by the government. Lala Lajpat Rai, the stalwart of the freedom movement said, "Education is the first necessity of such a nation and it should be the first-charge on all national revenues." As a part of the concept of democratic education it was viewed that the government should provide the funds for education but should not intervene into the process of education. Martyrs of freedom movement laid down their lives with a dream, among other things, that after independence, that kind of an educational system would be established. The demand for such a system merged with people's cry for emancipation within the freedom movement.

With independence people's yearning for the real emancipation was not realized as the state power was transferred from the British imperialists to the native capitalist exploiters. They usurped the fruits of independence subjecting the common people to yet more savage exploitation. As a result the educational system of the country had also been designed and patterned to serve the overall interest of capitalism and had been altered from time to time with the same objective. As the society was a class divided society, so although there was talk of national interest or national policy on education but educational policies formulated by different governments at various times only aimed at preserving, protecting and fulfilling the interests of the ruling class. But the policy of curtailment of education was although pursued on the pretext that higher education should not be for all. Since increase in quantity sharply reduces the quality and larger amount of public exchequer is spent for higher education, so it should be preserved for the most meritorious section of the students, who are few. Rest of the students should be content with literacy or at best a minimum level of education, which is elementary education. Those who like to pursue further education should go to the vocational courses, job oriented education etc. Due to the strong impact of freedom movement within the society and due to the undeniable influence of the then rapidly progressing socialism in USSR, China and other erstwhile socialist countries, the policy planners couldn't altogether deny that the government should shoulder the responsibility for providing education to its citizens. Hence, during the phase since independence up to the middle of the eighties, restriction of higher education through 'seat restriction scheme' or 'moratorium on opening of new universities' imposed by the UGC and diversion of larger section of students towards job-oriented education had been the main thrusts of attack.

The NPE 86 Brought a Paradigm Shift in the Approach Towards Education

The complexion of attack completely changed when in 1986, the Congress-led government at the centre with Mr. Rajiv Gandhi as the Prime Minister, introduced the National Policy on Education 1986 (NPE '86). It argued that in view of the technology explosion of the 21st century there should be some basic change in the system of education. Not only the course and content, but there should be overhauling of the mindset of the people, the approach towards education. Instead of considering education as instrument of man making, it should be viewed as a 'unique investment', as a tool for moneymaking. That 'the government will pay for people's education' this age-old expectation should be done away with. Those who want to get education must be ready to pay. Grants to the colleges and universities should be drastically slashed; fees or donations should be collected from students to run the institutions. Self financed courses or self financed institutions should be the main thrust of development. This paradigm shift in approach opened up the floodgate for fee hike, privatization and commercialization in this sector. All the education commissions and committees constituted by central or state governments led by different political parties, subsequent to NPE'86 like the Ramamurthy Committee, N. Janardhan Reddy Committee, Justice Punnayya Committee on university education, Ambani-Birla Committee, National Knowledge Commission, and finally the Yashpal Committee, have added fillip to the ongoing process of privatization-commercialization. The governments continually slashed the grants to the aided institutions and promoted the policy that 'for students' education, students should pay.' Due to resource crunch schools, colleges and departments in various universities have closed down or have been handed over to the private managements on the plea of development. Aided colleges and universities are introducing so-called self-financing courses where students and their guardians would have to bear the entire financial burden of the course. Innumerable such self-financed institutions have sprouted all over the country taking the form of private limited companies. As a result, students are being forced to pay, starting from several thousands up to several lakhs of rupees as annual fees, depending on the market value of the course, apart from a few more lakhs of rupees by way of capitation fee or donation under management quota, NRI quota, payment quota etc. Since the year 2008 the IIT's fees have been increased to Rs.50, 000 per semester while the IIM's fees have been raised from Rs. 5.5 to 11 lakh per annum.

Drive to Convert Education into a Tradable Global Commodity as per GATS

This is not a feature of our country alone. World capitalism is in the midst of unprecedented crisis. One after another phase of depression is setting in. Industries are being closed. Millions and millions of workers are being retrenched from jobs. For any capitalist investor, investment in any field has become extremely risky and uncertain. Search for newer fields for investment began with the onset of Globalisation. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) brought forth the GATS to convert service sectors into trade. Among all the service sectors education and health offers highest possibility of securing profit for. The GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) is nothing but a set of rules and code of conduct prescribed by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in order to conduct open trade in a particular service sector of a country in the form of a common agreement by all the member countries of the WTO. Whether education will be in the list of GATS, regarding that there is still now unresolved dispute. But much before the decision of WTO, India had signed the proposal to include education in the list of GATS. From that it appears that the ruling Indian capitalist class is much eager to convert education into a trade. According to the definition upheld by the GATS, education is a 'trade', the investors are 'providers', the teacher is a 'facilitator' and the students are 'consumers'. Even the term 'knowledge', which is on and often used nowadays, in this phase of globalization, is redefined as information, based on information technology. According to the GATS, government of a particular country must allow Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in its service sectors like education. The Government of India, in order to usher in and regulate FDI has of late brought the 'Foreign Education Providers Bill' in Parliament. Since formation of the WTO and introduction of the GATS in the middle of the 90's, world capitalism, and as a partner of that, Indian capitalism has started a planned drive to convert the entire field of education into an open trade, a field for investment. The education commission led by Mukesh Ambani and Kumarmangalam Birla, which was formed in the year 2000, submitted its report in the year 2001 to the Union HRD Ministry. It is curious enough that the central government entrusted two leading corporate investors of the country instead of any educationist to review the system of education of our country and make recommendations. Obviously the recommendations of that commission reflected the desire of the corporate sector, as well as the ruling capitalist class of the country in the field of education. The Report commented: "This is not the time for just reforms. It is time for a revolution. The green revolution in agriculture ushered in high productivity and prosperity through the use of technology. Likewise, a revolution in education that embraces information and communications technologies, fosters freedom and innovation and induces a market oriented competitive environment that is vital for progress and prosperity in the information era." (Report, Birla-Ambani Committee, Art 8.5). Furthermore, "Rates of return in education are also better than rates of return in other sectors such as agriculture, industry and infrastructure." (Report Ambani - Birla Committee, Art 1.4). The report also showed that capitalism, in order to achieve stability in the phase of crisis and globalisation must convert education into a field of investment and trade. It commented, "Globalisation and a shift to a market-led, knowledge-based economy demands that education must become the cornerstone of development if India has to find a place at the top of the League of Nations." (Report, Ambani - Birla Committee, Art 1.17) This report made a set of recommendations for overhauling the educational system in order to facilitate private investment in the field of education. It strongly recommended that in order to provide a 'level playing field' to the indigenous and foreign investors, certain restructuring of the educational administration, system of monitoring of the institutions, approach to and method of funding, process of teaching and evaluation, evaluation and accreditation system of the institutions etc. will be a duty of the government.

Yashpal Committee's Criticism of Reckless Profiteering- Only an Eyewash

Close on the heels of the Ambani-Birla Committee recommendations two other national level commissions had been formed which submitted their report viz. the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) 2006 and the Yashpal Committee (2009). Both these committees submitted recommendations to the Union HRD Ministry for carrying out total restructuring of education understandably for implementation of GATS. In the course of all out drive for privatisation, commercialisation of education, the NKC's recommendations present a comprehensive plan for converting the entire field of education into a market for trading. The NKC said "In three professions – engineering, medicine and management- there has been a *de facto* privatization of education so that two-thirds to three-fourths of the seats are in private institutions. But private investment in university education, where more than 70 per cent of our students study, is almost negligible. It is essential to stimulate private investment in higher education as a means of extending educational opportunities. We must recognise that, even with the best will in the world, government financing cannot be enough to support the massive expansion in opportunities for higher education on a scale that is now essential." (NKC, Note on Higher Education page12). As a result of this unbridled drive for expansion through privatisation and commercialisation of education, private institutions formed as private-limited companies started mushrooming all over the country. Many of the institutions adopted a variety of techniques to swindle the students. These developments created strong grievance among the guardians. A need was therefore felt under the pressure of people's resentment that even while pursuing the policies of privatization and commercialization of education, the situation can't be allowed to go out of control. Then came the Yashpal Committee recommendations which even while following the above policies was instrumental in managing the situation by being critical of 'reckless' commercialisation. It is neither opposed to converting education into a commodity nor to 'selling' education. The report of the Committee in fact stated, "In order to reach the goals of doubling the higher education capacity from the

present level, it will be necessary to encourage participation of the private sector. At the same time it must be emphasized that governments cannot afford to abandon the responsibility for further augmentation of the existing capacity entirely to the private sector. In fact we must recognize the need for different layers of institutions in the field of higher education, including state-run, private and those established through public-private partnerships.” The committee supports selling education but delivers the sermon that the trade must be fair, i.e. while selling education the customers must not be cheated. It also lamented that only the professional courses like medical, engineering, management etc. have thus far been commercialized. He delineates the plan to commercialise the general education, including even the undergraduate education.

Investment in Education for Profit Only

The Yashpal Committee, like other commissions, has talked a lot regarding the sanctity of investment in education. It has piously hoped that there will be private investment in education but that this will be non-profit and philanthropic in character. Nothing can suppress the fact that the entire educational system is now being converted into a trade. The NKC has recommended tax exemption to attract private investors there should be tax exemption for investment in education. It is true that during the freedom movement and in the decades following independence, many good institutions had been set up at private initiative. People of a locality or some benevolent person established schools and colleges, with the object to render social service through spread of education, in different parts of the country. The government or the UGC later recognized these private institutions and provided aid. During this phase education was considered a social service, an instrument for dispelling the darkness of ignorance. Therefore these private institutions emerged with a non-profit character. Establishment of such institutions at private initiative was considered part and parcel of the movement for universalisation of education. But there was a feeling that without sincere attempt on the part of the government, through such philanthropic activities at private initiative it was not possible to universalise education. Regarding that question Lala Lajpat Rai, the stalwart of freedom movement and national education movement, said: “Any attempt to provide for national education by private agencies and private funds is futile and to attempt it is to attempt the impossible”. The great litterateur Saratchandra also said that unless the government shoulders the responsibility to educate the masses it is impossible to ensure universal spread of education. But as after the introduction of NPE 86, the objective of education itself has fundamentally changed, privatization has assumed a different character. Whatever might have been said regarding the non-profit character of the investors, obviously it was eyewash. We have the instance that the Supreme Court by its order ‘banned’ capitation fee and condemned profiteering in education. But how in a self-financed institution fees will be determined regarding that it prescribed the method from which it was evident that education was viewed as a commodity for selling in the market and making profit. In that order it delineated that fees would be determined by taking into consideration all the expenses for running the institution and also adding a ‘reasonable surplus’ for ‘future development’ of it. Apart from that, the Supreme Court allowed auctioning of a certain percentage of seats, in the name of management quota or NRI quota. By that didn’t the court allow the private managements to resort to unbridled profiteering and extortion of capitation fee in a camouflaged form? Very soon under the pressure of the investors the Supreme Court, stage by stage, modified its verdict and virtually legalized the capitation fee. The Yashpal Committee itself had to recognise: “Since the norms for fixation of fees are vague, the quantum of fees charged has no rational basis. The illegal capitation fees range from: Rs. 1-10 lakh for the engineering courses; Rs. 20-40 lakh for MBBS courses; Rs. 5-12 lakh for dental courses; and about Rs. 30,000-50,000 for courses in arts and science colleges, depending on the demand.”(Yashpal Committee Report, Art 2.3.4). In spite of all these the committee opined: “The solution to the unscrupulous methods of some private investors should not mean doing away with their participation in the field of higher education altogether.”(Yashpal committee Report, Page-33).

PPP Means Public Funding to Ensure Profiteering by Private Investors

There is no doubt that now the investors are investing in the field of education merely to extort maximum profit. It is obvious from the fact that the government, during this phase of extreme crisis of world capitalism is urging the capitalists to invest in the field of education to sustain the so-called ‘growth’ of capitalist economy. An IIM economist suggests at a discussion on the global meltdown by the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce & Industry “Can India sustain revised growth levels of 6-7%? Is the government and the RBI doing enough to shield India from future financial meltdowns?... Let’s build many state and central universities the PM has been urging us to build,” (Financial Express, Fri, Oct 24 02:59). For investment in education three models are being proposed by the policy planners. a) Private Investment, b) Public-Private Partnership (PPP) and c) Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Regarding PPP NKC has said “It might be possible to leverage public funding, especially in the form of land grants, to attract more (not-for-profit) private investment. The present system of allotment of land, where political patronage is implicit, discourages genuine educational entrepreneurs and encourages real estate developers in disguise. In principle, it should be possible to set up new institutions in higher education, not just more IITs and IIMs but also more universities, as public-private partnerships where the government provides the land and the private sector provides the finances. Such public-private partnerships which promote university- industry interface would also strengthen teaching and research.” (NKC, Notes on higher Education, page 12).

The Yashpal Committee Report also has commented “In order to reach the goals of doubling the higher education capacity from the present level, it will be necessary to encourage participation of the private sector. At the same time it must be emphasized that governments cannot afford to abandon the responsibility for further augmentation of the existing capacity entirely to the private sector. In fact we must recognize the need for different layers of institutions in the field of higher education, including state-run, private and those established through public-private partnerships.” (Yashpal Committee Report, Art 2-3.3, page 34). Furthermore it has said “The ability to attract partnership from private sector, either in the execution of its programmes or in more enduring relationship will be conditioned by the demonstration by the university as to how well it is organized and by the level of its performance which would be judged by the criteria as suggested in this report and to be worked out by the apex body in the field of higher education.” (Yashpal Committee Report, Art 2-3.3). Thus, obviously, according to this PPP design, the private investors, to extort maximum profit, will utilize the public finance, land and infrastructure built through state funding. Even the NKC urges upon to ascribe the authority to the private management to invest the fund of the institution to share market or such other fields. It commented “laws should be changed so that universities can invest in financial instruments of their choice and use the income from their endowments to build up a corpus.” When the entire management is engaged in devising ways to extort more fees and generate more funds for more and more profit, can they focus on man-making or cultivation of knowledge?

What Should Be the Attitude Towards Fees?

The attitude towards fees is very important to judge a system of education. During the freedom movement of our country it was a cry that education should be totally free and available to all. Lala Lajpat Rai in his famous book, Problems of National Education wrote: “Universal popular education must be provided by the state and should be the first-charge on state revenues....The old idea that state was only concerned with making provision for elementary education is also gone. All over the world it is recognized that the duty of the state does not end with elementary education....nor can the state ignore the necessity of higher education.” Rabindranath Tagore also said, ‘we the ill fated maintain the façade of education with empty materials culling the leftovers after grand feast of Police and Military department with public exchequer.’ It was the spirit of the days of freedom movement that education be available to all, both rich and poor, with equality, like the rays of sun or raindrops. Furthermore, in the sixties of last century when there was a powerful influence of the Soviet Russia and the socialist camp and due to its impact on the people of the world most of the capitalist countries, including ours, were forced to talk in terms of ‘welfare state’. As the Soviet Russia and all the then socialist countries considered well being of people as prime concern of the state and guaranteed education up to the highest level to be freely available to all; the capitalist countries, verbally at least, couldn’t deny the responsibility of providing education and other welfare services by the state. Reflecting the same spirit prevalent in the society, the Kothari Commission constituted (1962-64) by the then central government, in its report, regarding source of fund for education, commented, “It is undesirable to regard fees as a source of revenue. They are the most regressive form of taxation, fall more heavily on the poor classes of society and act as an anti-egalitarian force. ... We recommend therefore, that the country should gradually work towards a stage when all education should be tuition free.” The advocates of fee hike argue those who can afford it, why should they not pay. Only the really poor students should be given scholarship. That transpired from the view that education is a commodity. That should be purchased. Only the real poor’s can be given that as a charity. But according to the concept of welfare state the state is duty bound to provide education to its citizens. It collects tax from the citizens to render such public welfare services. A student, even the rich, should receive education as a right, as an invaluable gift of the society. It is not purchased. That is why the student is reciprocally duty bound to the society. They must render their sincere service to the society. When education is purchased there is no such duty. Moreover, in an institution, when some students are paying hefty sums while some other students are admitted through charity, the payees are more favoured, while those receiving charity are treated as second class citizens. That is why the fees act as ‘anti-egalitarian force’.

But what attitude have the NKC and Yashpal Committee showed regarding students’ fees? The NKC has said: “in most universities, fees have remained unchanged for decades. In theory, universities have the freedom to decide on fees. In practice, however, universities have not exercised this freedom in part because of some genuine concerns about access but in larger part because of the rhetoric and populism in the political process. The problem has been compounded by the UGC’s method of providing grants-in-aid to bridge the difference between income and expenditure. Consequently, there is no incentive for universities or colleges to raise income through higher fees as that sum would be deducted from their UGC (or State government) grants. The low fees in public universities, without any test means, have meant unquantifiable benefits for unintended beneficiaries. But private players and foreign institutions have not been restrained in charging fees that the market can bear...fees should meet at least 20 per cent of the total expenditure in universities. In addition, fees need to be adjusted every two years through price indexation. Such small, continuous, adjustments would be absorbed and accepted far more easily than large, discrete changes after a period of time.”(NKC, notes on Higher Education, page-11) It means there will be all-out fee hike at all levels of higher education. This is amply clear from the recommendation for enhancing fees up to 100% in all government

funded universities. This is termed as 'rationalization of fees.' The Yashpal Committee spent many words regarding unscrupulous extortion of excessive fees by private agencies. It talked of the need of blind admission policy but ultimately it did not oppose fee hike and reiterated the oft repeated excuse, i.e. to solve the fee hike problem by offering scholarships and loans. Regarding fees approach the Yashpal Committee is no different from NKC or Birla Ambani Committee. It said "While it is true that a large number of students in our universities need to be funded by their institution and the State, there does exist a large student body that can also afford to pay for their education. There is no reason why both these two categories of students be placed on the same level when it comes to financing their education. No student should be turned away from an institution for want of funds for education. Absence of differential fee has led to subsidization of a segment of student body that can afford to pay for its education. Guaranteed student loans at low interest rates for those who can take loans and free education for those who cannot afford it at all will be necessary to educate India." (Yashpal Committee Report page-42) Furthermore, "The primary focus should, therefore be on making education affordable, either through scholarships or loans. An assured loan to every student (and a scholarship based on merit for the needy) in accredited institutions should be the aim (and our recommendation). Institutional funding can then be for capital costs and research, and based on the worthiness of the institution. Once a student qualifies to enter an institution of her choice, she should not be deprived of education for want of money. It is the duty of the institution and the state to provide for her education through means as suggested above." From these quotes the sharp contradiction between the attitude of the days of freedom movement, attitude of the Kothari Commission of sixties and attitude of NKC and Yashpal Committee is evident. It is noteworthy that whenever government enhanced fees, it talked of scholarship or bank loan. When due to excessive fee hike the entire education is drifting out of reach of the common students can scholarship and bank loans address the problem? However much the number of scholarships be increased it is only for a small section of students. If a student is admitted, then only the question of scholarship arises. Now most of the fees are collected during the admission and admission fees are very high. So a large number of students don't get admission at all! And the private investors, who suck blood of the students through a variety of fees, want that the government or the nationalized banks provide facility of loans to students as car industrialists want that banks provide car loans obviously not for charity. That will just virtually increase the purchasing capacity of the students and thus guarantee profit of the investors.

Trading and Investment Starts from the Very Beginning of Education

The process of privatization-commercialisation of education starts from the very primary level of education. Not only in professional or higher education, the fee hike and process of privatization- commercialization has started from the pre-primary and primary level itself, with the rapid proliferation of private English medium schools as a parallel and dominant system of education. In the general schools, the governments now have been appointing contract teachers in place of permanent teachers to reduce the 'burden' of expenditure. Further, the governments are declaring that panchayats are to be entrusted with the responsibility of providing primary education and fund mobilization for it. What an idea to destroy the school education! By directing them to mobilize their own resources the panchayats and schools will be pushed to be at the 'mercy of industrialists'. Already corporate companies like Infosys, Wipro and Reddys' Labs etc., are clamouring to 'finance' the school education. So, in all fields of education, the trend is to abdicate the responsibility on the part of the government of providing education and to create a fertile ground for indigenous and foreign investors to reap super profits. During the month of October 2009 the Union HRD Ministry in a significant move proposed to introduce PPP in the government school system. A spokesperson of the Union HRD Ministry, in a press meet in Bangalore said: "There is a large unfulfilled need for quality education in the secondary education sector. It does not appear feasible for state governments to fill this gap in the short term due to constraints on budget and capacity. PPP emerges as viable alternative to improve access to quality school education while ensuring equity and social justice." According to the Report the ministry worked out two models. One is the 'basic model' where the private partner would have the responsibility for providing building, infrastructure and its maintenance, having no role in providing educational services. The second is the whole school management model where the private partner builds school infrastructure and appoints staff and manages the institution while government pays an amount to the private partner proportionate to the number of students studying in government quota! The fee is determined by bidding among private partners! In addition the private management is allowed to have a management quota with higher fees! So the very process by which the rampant profiteering, auction of seats and swindling of students has started in the private medical-engineering colleges, that is being introduced in the school level of education too.(Times of India, Kolkata edition, October 8, 2009).

The Right to Education Bill: An Illusion of Universalisation of Elementary Education

Apparently with the gesture that the government not only intends to convert education into a trade but it is also very serious to universalise education, the NKC 'emphasised' that the Bill to guarantee 'Right to Education' should be immediately enacted. It said: 'Legislation at the national level is required to affirm the Right to Education, which is a

fundamental right mandated by Article 21A.’ (NKC Rec. on Right to Education, dated October 23 2006). On 4th August 2009 the Right to Education Bill has been passed in Parliament. The Bill is having the provision of so-called ‘free and compulsory’ education for every child of 6 to 14 years of age, penalty of Rs. 10,000.00 or more if anyone causes any hindrance to school going of any child of this age. The Bill also bans pass-fail system in annual examinations up to class VIII. All the provisions are ostensibly to prevent school dropout, abuse of children of this age as child labourer and to ensure free and compulsory education to all of them. The curse of school dropout and child labour is rampant in our country due to extreme poverty. While it is true that there are some cases of ruthless exploitation and abuse of children but in most of the cases the parents who send their children to work, do that only because they have no other means of subsistence. Unless there be sufficient compensatory financial support to those poverty stricken families or measures for alleviation of poverty, merely punitive measures don’t solve the problem at all. In fact this step is merely to shift the onus of dropout, illiteracy, poverty and existence of child labourer, from the government to the poverty stricken guardians and others.

In this Act there is provision for penal action against anyone causing detention of any student of this age group. By making no-detention up to class-VIII a legal compulsion, on one hand, the Bill would help to destroy the very foundation of education, i.e. the thorough knowledge of 3R’s. On the other hand, it shifts the onus of school drop out on teachers, guardians and the pass fail system. The Bill, by proposing education for children from 1st standard up to 8th standard only to be free and compulsory, indirectly asserts that the government is not going to shoulder the responsibility of other levels of education, which will be virtually left to the process of rampant privatisation and commercialisation. Furthermore, the Bill fixes VIII-th standard as the Minimum Level of Learning, which also is strongly condemnable. The Bill has not made it clear what will be the exact attitude of the government regarding pre-school education. It is most unfortunate that when the existing multi-layered school system is creating inequality and discrimination among our children, the Bill by confining itself to making proposals for admission of students in these multi-layered institutions is promoting and strengthening more discrimination and more inequality. Already the Bill has been adopted and made an Act. Now the process of implementation of this Bill is going on in every state. There is strong grievance among the guardians regarding the removal of pass-fail system up to class VIII.

Noteworthy is the fact that the Bill has allowed two parallel systems of schooling by allowing private costly English medium schools, but has not clarified what the government must do to ensure best standard of education in the general schools within the purview of Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan, when severe shortage of teachers, lack of educational infrastructure, including class rooms, toilets, drinking water, etc., are posing great hurdle for the children’s education in general schools. But this issue has not been addressed at all! Instead the Bill has allowed deployment of teachers for census, election duty and disaster relief, and such other non-educational purposes. In many states it is a serious problem that primary or secondary teachers are engaged in such non-educational works due to which they don’t find any time to teach. In the name of universalisation of elementary education, both the Central and State governments, at the behest of the World Bank and other foreign agencies had initiated District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). Later, in keeping with that plan, the governments launched the so-called *Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan* (SSA). Both DPEP and SSA have brought forth a fundamental change in the approach towards teaching and learning process at the primary level. All time-tested teaching methods and pedagogic principles are completely undermined under this scheme. SSA emphasizes on multi-grade teaching without appointing sufficient number of teachers. Instead of permanent teachers, only contract or *para* teachers will be appointed. In the name of so-called “child centered” and “activity oriented” approach, the teacher is reduced merely to ‘class room manager’. Virtually there is no teaching. It is expected that the students would learn themselves! According to SSA there is no necessity of acquiring a thorough knowledge of 3 R’s, i.e., Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. While proposing to introduce no-detention policy, it has recommended for a switch over from grammar-translation method to the ‘direct’ or ‘functional’ method of study of the languages. It is said that English teaching is to be totally abolished in the primary level. In this way the very basic knowledge of 3 ‘R’s, which is the foundation of education, is being altogether destroyed. The sole purpose of imperialists - capitalists to promote this design of SSA is to deny higher levels of education to the vast millions of students and to paralyze their thinking and to obstruct the growth of their intellectual ability and emotional faculty.

‘Expansion’ of Education Market

The main thrust of restructuring the field of higher education that transpired from the recommendations of these three commissions and also statements, comments of Prime Minister or Union HRD Minister during this phase, and 11th plan programme has demonstrated that the Union HRD ministry is popularizing a slogan of ‘expansion, inclusion and excellence’. As for expansion, the Union HRD Ministers, both earlier and present, have lamented for entering the twenty first century with so few universities and so few comparable to world standard. So, he set the task to expand the scope of education substantially and guarantee the inclusion of a large segment of student population to the system of education. The NKC report has commented: ... universities are the life-blood of higher education. ...’ (NKC, Notes on Higher Education P-1). ‘India has about 350 universities. This number is simply not enough with reference to our needs in higher education, or in comparison with China, which has authorized the creation of 1250 new universities in the last three years. Yet, some of our universities are much too large for ensuring academic standards and providing good governance. We need to create more appropriately scaled and more nimble universities. The moral of the story is not only that we need a much larger number of universities, say 1500 nationwide by 2015,

but also that we need smaller universities which are responsive to change and easier to manage.’ (NKC, Notes on Higher Education P-3). The way to expand higher education that both the NKC and Yashpal Committee report have recommended a) By establishing world class universities or academic institutions as ‘Centres of excellence’, b) By disaffiliating foreranking colleges affiliated to different universities and upgrading them to the standard of universities, c) By allowing foreign direct investment (FDI) in the field of education, i.e. by allowing entry of reputed foreign universities for opening their branches in India. Many students who can pay don’t get admission.

The expansion of higher education is a long standing demand of AIDSO as well as the education loving people at large. It was a demand of the days of freedom movement that education should be universal and available to all. Not only primary education but higher education also should be free as much as practicable, or within the reach of the poor people. In the post-independence days the government tried to keep higher education restricted within a select few, so they argued that only the best students and most outstanding scholars should take up the pursuit of higher education. They even discovered a contradiction between quality and quantity. With this objective the government utilized the UGC as a tool to restrict higher education. The UGC imposed moratorium on opening up of new universities or imposed the much decried ‘seat restriction scheme’. The student organization AIDSO all along organized the opinion of the students and academic community against the restrictive measures. But now does this drive for ‘expansion’ really fulfill the long cherished demand? Not at all! This expansion is not for wider spread of education, rather expansion of the education market, expansion of the scope of investment in the field of education.

Inclusion Means Rich Must Have Ample Opportunity

Since independence up to the early ’80s of the last century, the governments verbally couldn’t altogether deny the responsibility of providing education to the students. They only imposed seat restriction or moratorium on opening up new colleges-universities, on the plea that the increase in quantity diminishes quality. The University Grants Commission (UGC) was constituted by the central government to disburse grant to the colleges and universities but it was used as a tool to impose these restrictions. The first Chairman of UGC, Mr. C.D. Desmukh said “We want to restrict higher education in order to minimize the number of educated unemployed.” They restricted higher education on the logic that only most intelligent and meritorious students should pursue higher education. The rest of the students, after school education, should go for vocational or job oriented education. In this phase, although restrictive, but as fees of many fore-ranking institutions like Ravenshaw College in Orissa, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, Jadavpur University, Presidency College, affiliated to Calcutta University, many prestigious medical and engineering colleges all over the country, had been quite low, many students from poor or lower middle class families had been admitted in those institutions owing to their merit. At the same time many students from upper middle class or rich families didn’t get admission in such premier institutions due to lack of merit.

But in the education business the ability to pay is much more precious than ‘merit’. If the rich is restricted on the basis of merit the education business can’t flourish. The term ‘inclusion’ used by the NKC means inclusion of those who can pay. So, for the sake of expansion of the education business there should no more be any ‘restriction’ or ‘moratorium’. Rather for marketing so-called ‘knowledge’ they are talking of ‘expansion’ and ‘inclusion’, encouraging opening up of new colleges and universities, all of which will obviously be ‘self financing’ that is evident from the recommendations of NKC. Thus, if students can pay there is no contradiction between quantity and quality. All the institutions newly built under the drive for expansion would be ‘self-financing’ or profit-based. So, there is no restriction, no screening on the basis of ‘merit’ but it is open to ‘all’, i.e. to those who can pay. Thus, it is crystal clear that even if the number of universities in India should jump from 350 to 1500 that will not provide more opportunities of higher education to the vast sections of students of middle class, lower middle class and poor families, but that will only cater to the needs of a small elitist section who can afford to pay high fees. Thus inclusion means to drive to expand market base and augment capacity for purchase by the consumers.

Excellence Means Quality of the Saleable Commodity

‘Excellence’ is now a much vaunted word in the field of education. By excellence they say that the quality of teaching and research and creation of new knowledge befitting in the scenario of ‘knowledge explosion’ in the 21st century should be undertaken with all urgency by making the institutions for higher education suitable for creation of knowledge and excellence. For that they recommend i) Universities and institutions of higher education should concentrate on creation of excellence and for that they should be free from the task of spread of education (disaffiliation of best colleges from the universities, creation of unitary universities, and establishment of world class universities as centres for excellence). ii) In the institutions of higher education the administration and governance should be separated from the process of research and development so that the best scholars can be freed from the process of governance and can concentrate on creation of knowledge and excellence. For that there should be total overhauling of the educational administration. iii) There should be total overhauling of examination-evaluation pattern also in order to ensure creation of excellence. iv) Rules and regulations for running the institutions should be such that best scholars can be properly utilized for creation of excellence and the institutional environment can be free from outside disturbances. If we look at the recommendations for creation of excellence we shall find that the entire drive is

not for achievement of excellence in cultivation of knowledge. Obviously for earning foreign exchange by attracting the international students and allowing the corporate investors to reap profit by selling education there should be a hype of excellence.

Establishment of World Class Universities as Centres for Excellence

The concepts of 'Centres of Excellence', 'Pace Setter Institution', model school etc. had been first propounded by the National Policy on Education (86). The argument was that in view of the technology explosion of 21st century, there should be new type of institutions, which will be suitable to confront the challenges of the 21st century. In general the government will not fund the institutions. But the government at its own expense will establish some such exemplary institutions the model of which will be emulated by others. The NKC recommends for establishing 50 national universities as 'centres of excellence', which will utilize all these methods and will be used as an example to attract the investors, "We recommend the creation of 50 National Universities that can provide education of the highest standard. As exemplars for the rest ... National Universities can be established in two ways, by the government, or by a private sponsoring body that sets up a Society, Charitable Trust or Section 25 Company."

Furthermore, "Since public finance is an integral constituent of universities worldwide, most of the new universities shall need significant initial financial support from the government. Each university may be endowed with a substantial allocation of public land, in excess of its spatial requirements. The excess land can be a subsequent source of income generation. Exceptions need to be made in existing income tax laws to encourage large endowments. Further, there should be no restriction on the utilization of income in any given period or in the use of appropriate financial instruments. And these universities should have the autonomy to set student fee levels and tap other sources for generating funds." (NKC, Notes on Higher Education). Thus, by providing public fund, land and a variety of other facilities the government will help some private agencies to be owners of highly equipped and furnished universities which can earn huge amount of profit.

Earlier, in accordance with the National Education Policy 1986 it suggested to establish some 'model' schools, pace setting institutions, 'Centres of excellence'. AISO strongly opposed this idea with the argument that in this capitalist system, due to uneven development of capitalism there are always some well equipped, advanced elite institutions and some ill equipped, poor institutions. It should be the task of the government to concentrate more on how weak and underdeveloped institutions can be backed and helped to advance. But the government should not establish elite institutions and can't be instrumental in widening the gap between the rich and poor, advanced and backward institutions. It is opposed to the principles of universal and democratic education to pursue such a discriminatory policy. The Central Government following the recommendations of the Birla-Ambani Committee has made accreditation by NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) compulsory for colleges-universities. The UGC is now pursuing the policy of funding on the yardstick of NAAC rating. (Under the UGC initiative, if colleges with potential for excellence status are autonomous and have the accreditation by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) then they are given a one-time grant of Rs. 1 crore. However, if the colleges are not autonomous, the grant by the UGC is Rs 65 lakh. In case a college does not have NAAC accreditation and autonomy, the grant is Rs 35 lakh. Ref: UGC asks Calcutta University to identify colleges with 'potential for excellence' Express News Service Nov 7 2008). This automatically widened the gap between the institutions. The institutions providing market oriented and self-financed courses attained higher NAAC ratings. Many state governments made attempts to stop poorly rated institutions where usually students from poor and lower middle class families used to study. In Orissa the state government made an attempt to close down 400 such colleges. In Jharkhand, a tribal dominated state where many more colleges are required for enlightenment, there in Ranchi the building of a college is being handed over to a private company to establish a five star hotel. In Karnataka also the state government is going to close down many colleges on the excuse of their 'low' standard.

Disaffiliation of Colleges to Create Unitary Institutions Suitable for Private Investment

For expansion as well as 'excellence', NKC favours disaffiliation of colleges from universities and granting them so-called autonomous status or even uplift of certain colleges to university status. The excuse NKC provided is "This system of affiliated colleges for undergraduate education, which may have been appropriate fifty years ago, is neither adequate nor appropriate at this juncture, let alone for the future. It is cumbersome to manage. And it is difficult to ensure minimal academic standards across the board." This sort of autonomy is a misnomer. Disaffiliation from universities has nothing to do with 'autonomy'. Affiliation of colleges to universities was essential because universities are the institutions where best scholars and academicians of a region have assembled. They decide the course, content, time frame, examination pattern and system of evaluation of students, fee structure and other academic aspects. A college affiliated to the university follows that pattern. In this way best scholars of a region guide even the remote and less equipped institutions. On the other hand, even a poor village student who is unable to go to good colleges, in a university can even from a backward remote college appear in the university examinations and excel due to his endeavour. The value of his degree will be assessed not by the college he studied in but the reputation of the university to which the college is attached. If all colleges are disaffiliated he will be recognized if he passes out from a fore ranking institution only. What is the actual purpose of this disaffiliation? The plan of disaffiliation is closely connected with accreditation of the institutions. The fee structures of the colleges affiliated to a university are similar. Certain fees like tuition fee, examination fee etc., are usually the same and it is not possible to change the fee

without a decision of the policy making academic bodies of the university like Senate, Court or Academic Council. But the investors want to determine the fees of the institutions they invest in. If colleges are accredited by NAAC or any such agency, the investors want that the fees of a college should be according to its rating. An 'A' grade college should have 'A' grade fees accordingly. This is not possible in affiliating universities. The investors are not interested to invest in large affiliating universities, committed to standardize weak as well as strong colleges. There they can invest in some self-financed department only. This an institution will do only if it has public commitment. Investors will invest in those institutions, which will engage in sale of education or degree. Again on the pretext of 'empowering students and parents with reliable information', the Commission proposes multiple accreditation agencies for giving ratings to different educational institutions like in corporate companies.

That is evident from the fact that when foreranking colleges are being disaffiliated from their respective universities they are being upgraded to the status of university basing on the principle of 'Public-Private-Partnership (PPP)'. In all the institutions that have undergone this process, students' fees have been substantially augmented on the excuse to meet the demand of extra fund. Instead of general courses with comparatively low fee-structure the so-called self-financing courses offering 'greater market value' against much higher fees have been given priority. An example is the prestigious Ravenshaw College in Cuttack, Orissa. This front-ranking institution of the state was earlier affiliated to Utkal University. Now it has been disaffiliated and upgraded to Ravenshaw University. As a result, fees of every department have been hiked 3 to 4 fold. Furthermore, market oriented, costly self-financing courses have been introduced. Those profit-earning courses are being given all importance and the general courses are being totally neglected. In the Ravenshaw College, Orissa, which has been disaffiliated from the Utkal University, there, after its disaffiliation and upgrading to the status of university, only self-financing courses have been introduced and facilities of the general courses are being slashed. There are eight student hostels of which two now have been vacated and are being used for holding classes of some self-financing courses. Even in allocating the hostels, preference is being given to the students of self-financing courses who are paying much higher fees. In many such institutions teachers who used to teach the general subjects are now being utilized to teach in self-financed courses. As for example, in many such institutions teachers of chemistry department and zoology department are being utilized to teach in microbiology course, which is a self-financing course, while studies of zoology or chemistry are suffering.

FDI Cannot Ensure the Quality of 'Foreign' Education

Furthermore, as a term and condition of GATS and as a part of the plan to ensure 'expansion' and 'excellence' of the education market the government is allowing FDI in education. It is being done in the reciprocal interest of the Indian corporate investors too. If FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) in education is allowed then only according to GATS the Indian investors will be able to invest in other countries, which is an attractive opportunity for the Indian corporate investors. On the other hand, by allowing FDI here, India can be an attractive education market. That is obvious from the comment of the NKC: "India is not an attractive destination for international students, not even as much as it used to be 30 years ago. It is time for us to make a conscious attempt to attract foreign students to India for higher education. This would enrich our academic milieu. This would enhance quality. This would be a significant source of finance. Even 50,000 foreign students charged fees at an average rate of US\$ 10,000 per annum would yield US\$ 0.5 billion: the equivalent of Rs. 2300 crores per annum in current prices at current exchange rates. The other side of the coin is perhaps even more important. Estimates suggest that there are about 160,000 students from India studying abroad. If their average expenditure on fees and maintenance is US\$ 25,000 per student per year, Indian students overseas are spending US \$ 4 billion: the equivalent of Rs. 18,400 crores per annum in current prices at current exchange rates. This has an enormous potential as a source of finance for higher education in India, if only we could create more opportunities for students with increased places and enhanced quality in our system." (NKC, Notes on Higher Education, Page 39). Toeing the same line the Yashpal Committee Report has commented: "India is in a unique position to serve as a destination for affordable higher education for a vast number of students from countries in southern hemisphere. At present, our system manages to attract only a small fraction of the potential clientele. If systemic impediments are removed and academically imaginative and flexible programmes are made available, the participation of foreign students in our higher education can significantly increase." (Yashpal Committee Report, page 43, para2, Art 2.3.6.1). But as the Yashpal Committee all along has tried to create an impression that it is against reckless commercialization, it has commented: "giving an open license to all and sundry carrying a foreign ownership tag to function like universities in India, most of them not even known in their own countries, would only help them earn profit for their parent institutions located outside or accrue profit to the shareholders. If the best of foreign universities, say amongst the top 200 in the world, want to come here and work, they should be welcomed." (Yashpal Committee Report, page-40). But is there any mechanism to restrict their entry at all? The proponents of FDI in education exult saying that many reputed foreign universities will invest and open their branches in India. In that case, the students who spend huge sums to go abroad will be able to procure the same in our own country at a much cheaper rate. It will be possible to stop the brain drain and wastage of national resources by keeping the best students within the national boundary. It is true that a large number of Indian students migrated to England, USA, Australia, Canada and such other western countries. Many of them went there with the hope of good education, better opportunities for learning and research. A large number went there seeking better job opportunities. Whatever might be the objective by allowing FDI in education there is no reason to think that the standard of education will be very much uplifted. But

obviously, the quality and standard of education to procure which students go to top-class universities like Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Princeton, and Sorbonne etc. will not at all be available here by dint of FDI. These universities are world famous as seats of learning. Great scientists, historians, philosophers, devotees of different branches of knowledge, with their dedication to learning, commitment to cultivation of knowledge created an environment in these institutions which kindled the thirst for acquiring knowledge in a student, produced galaxy of outstanding scholars. This was created as a result of social struggle. During the days of Renaissance and bourgeois democratic revolution, the struggle against feudal oppression, religious bigotry, created the urge to discover truth and cultivate knowledge. This urge helped develop these world famous seats of learning. Due to absence of that struggle there also the standard of cultivation of knowledge is fast declining in those institutions. Just investment, completely segregated from social struggle can't create that lofty standard. In our country too, during the days of freedom movement, as a part of freedom struggle, scientists like Acharya P. C. Roy, Jagadish Bose, Satyen Bose, Meghnad Saha, C.V. Raman, and many others, by dint of their devotion and selfless struggle, made significant contributions in the field of science without well-equipped infrastructure facilities and financial support. Their struggle created the reputation of the institutions they worked. Campuses established by the foreign universities in other countries on commercial basis cannot provide the environment for which they are reputed. That will be just a sale of the brand name. Students who have the ability to pay will only be able to buy a so-called foreign degree paying the price for 'brand name' of the institution. The corruption, malpractice, lack of sincerity etc., has degenerated the academic environment in our country. Just finance and investment cannot alleviate the problems and create that environment here.

Can the Reform of Examinations Really Create Excellence?

In this plan for overhauling the entire examination-evaluation pattern there are some aspects linked to each other. 1) The semester-trimester system instead of external examination after two years or one year. 2) Instead of marking introduction of gradation system and 3) Stress on internal assessment and continuous evaluation. 4) Introduction of interdisciplinary approach and course credit system. The NKC states "The nature of annual examinations at universities in India often stifles the teaching-learning process because they reward selective and uncritical learning. There is an acute need to reform this examination system so that it tests understanding rather than memory. Analytical abilities and creative thinking should be at a premium. Learning by rote should be at a discount. Such reform would become more feasible with decentralized examination and smaller universities. But assessment cannot and should not be based on examinations alone. There is a clear need for continuous internal assessment which empowers teachers and students alike, just as it breathes life back into the teaching-learning process. Such internal assessment would also foster the analytical and creative abilities of students which are often a casualty in university-administered annual examinations. To begin with, internal assessment could have a weight of 25 percent in the total but this should be raised to 50 percent over time." (Notes on Higher Education, page 4). The Yashpal Committee condemning the external examination system reiterated the same approach, "The examination system, even in the case of the relatively better equipped and less rigid institutions has remained quite manifestly traditional and incapable of distinguishing between different talents of students in a reliable manner. Similar to what happens at the school level, university level evaluation practices also simply broaden the scope of memory based questioning with the occasional rote based 'application' question masquerading as real world problem solving. ... As a result of lopsided emphasis on evaluation of students, what is considered knowledge in the prevailing setup is at best a body of facts." (Yashpal Committee Report, Page-18) According to this plan, the UGC has directed all the universities since the year 2009 that they must change their examination evaluation method.

Not only at the university level, but also this pattern will be implemented from the very beginning of education at the school level. Already in accordance with the recommendations of the Right to Education Bill, that has been passed in Parliament, the Pass-Fail system has been abolished and no-detention policy has been introduced up to class eight uniformly in all the states. Furthermore, as a part and parcel of this plan the Central government has announced that after class X and class XII the public examination conducted by different state boards and councils for secondary and higher secondary education will be optional. The Yashpal Committee has said, 'National tests like GRE should be organized round the year and students from all over the India aspiring to enter universities should be allowed to take these tests as many times as they like. Their best test score can then be sent to the universities to their choice, which can admit them when they satisfy other criteria set up by the universities. This requires a rethinking on the need to continue with state board of secondary education and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) which are instruments for normalizing school level competencies - a purpose equally accomplished by the national tests mentioned here - and seriously think of reviving our faith in each school and its teachers to credibly evaluate its own students.' (Yashpal Committee Report, Page-42-43). Usually a student has to undergo three types of tests, the purpose of each type being different from the others. Firstly, admission test, the object of which is to verify whether a student is fit for a particular class. Secondly, internal tests, the purpose of which is to check whether he is learning regularly, to locate where in which subject more attention is required to be successful in the final exam, etc., and to create confidence in him for final examination. And third is final external examination, which should be tough, to assess whether he has properly learnt and is fit for the next stage. So the purpose of internal assessment and external

examination is completely different. The standard of internal assessment will widely vary from school to school, so external examination, impersonal evaluation method is needed for uniform evaluation.

Stress on Internal Assessment Will Augment Corruption

In the erstwhile affiliating system the university examinations were supposed to judge students, in so far as practicable, in an impersonal manner. A university which affiliates a large number of colleges, there, during examinations, answer sheets of one college are usually sent to an examiner of some other faraway college, who is supposed to evaluate the answer sheets without personally knowing the examinees. Even the centre of examination of an examinee was usually fixed away from his or her college. But when colleges will be disaffiliated, colleges and universities will be converted into small self-sufficient units for the benefit of the investors, the teachers teaching the students will be setting the question papers themselves and they themselves will be evaluating the answer sheets of the students, they are acquainted with.

The continuous evaluation, where a teacher evaluates his students on the basis of their round the year performance, is an ideal system which is feasible only when the entire educational system is driven by the lofty ideal of cultivation of knowledge, commitment to truth, education and people. But nowadays, as an outcome of extreme commercialisation, vile practices like sheer careerism, opportunism, selfishness etc., are vitiating the academic environment. Already the all-out drive for privatisation and commercialisation of education is not only making education dearer and out of reach of the common students but is also engendering many evil and corrupt practices. Taking advantage of degeneration in the teaching and learning process in the institutions, business of coaching centres is flourishing day by day. Question paper leakage rackets, fake mark-sheets, illegal admission in professional entrance examinations and a variety of other educational malpractices are also thriving along with such coaching centres. The condition had reached such a pass that the number of students from poor or lower middle class families pursuing higher studies is on the decline. Those who can spend more can fare better in the examinations, that is the general feeling prevailing today.

Moreover, the advocates of no detention policy argue that annual or final external examinations are causes of extreme tension for the students. To provide 'relief' to them the system of external examination should be done away with? When in this system the government is not ready to guarantee anything to a citizen; to get admission in the higher stage of education, to get a job, everything is left to fierce competition, a single failure there can deliver a lethal blow to his life, may force him even to commit suicide, where the rich always has heavy advantage, in such a system to make the examination optional -- is it really to provide relief to the students? If in a social system where the government, the society shoulders every responsibility of the students, considers them as valuable wealth, gives guarantee to their education, jobs and proper utilization for the society, only there such a system of internal assessment and no detention is possible. In this environment of all-out privatization and commercialisation of education, when profit is made the driving force of the educational system, what can this stress on internal assessment produce? In fact, during the days of freedom movement, in spite of many defects and shortcomings in the system of education, great scientists like P.C.Roy, J.C. Bose, C.V. Raman, Meghnad Saha, Satyen Bose and many outstanding scholars in different branches of knowledge, had been produced due to the commitment to society and to cultivation of knowledge. Today, in spite of much development of infrastructure compared to those days, no such scholars are produced. There is a general feeling among the education loving people that the standard of education is being rapidly degenerated day by day. In the primary level, after introduction of the no detention policy in different states, the minimum standard of learning of 3 R's of the students who don't have good academic background in the family are sharply declining. In such a situation, whatever a student learned under the pressure of examinations, that too will be totally diluted if no detention policy and continuous evaluation is introduced. In the absence of any commitment to learning, any impersonal and pro-people approach among the private profit greedy institutional authorities, there is every chance that this power will be abused. Nepotism, corruption, blackmailing and other vices are increasing in college and university campuses throughout the country. In such a situation favouritism or victimization on the basis of political, casteist, communal, financial factors will come into play. The manner in which commercialization is engendering corruption and how it is degenerating the assessment-evaluation process, that is evident from the extremely shocking incident of PTC college, Patan, Gujarat, where many girl students were continuously sexually exploited, taking advantage of the internal assessment. In fact such incidents are occurring almost everywhere but don't always come to the surface. Not only in our country, the example of the colleges-universities of England, which had been considered models of cultivation of knowledge, now due to commercialisation have substantially degenerated. Prof. Geoffrey Alderman, former chairman of the academic council at the University of London, warned that "Degree standards in many British universities are in danger of collapsing because lecturers are under pressure to "mark positively" and turn a blind eye to plagiarism, ... universities have been particularly lenient with overseas students because they rely on them so heavily for fee income – so much so that they turn a blind eye to plagiarism and cheating." Furthermore, "There are universities where instructions go round to staff reminding them [that] awarding more top-class degrees will push their institution up both the national and international league tables." (Article by Richard Garner, Education Editor, The Independent, London, 17 June 2008).

The Yashpal Committee Report had also to recognize that extreme commercialisation is leading to a variety of corrupt practices, particularly as regards the assessment system. It has commented, "In many private educational

institutions, the appointment of teachers is made at the lowest possible cost. They are treated with scant dignity, compelling them to award pass marks in the internal examination to the “favorites” and fail marks for students who protest illegal collections and so on.” (Yashpal Committee Report page-33)

So is it not very difficult to maintain “Our faith in each school and teachers to credibly evaluate its own students” as the Yashpal Committee has urged us to do after advocating in favour of stress on internal assessment?

Semester System is Detrimental to Thoroughness

The gradation system is required for bringing uniformity in the process of evaluation of different school boards and universities spread all over the country in order to create a uniform education market to facilitate commercialisation of education and private investment. The semester/trimester system will divide the educational courses into small modules or packages. In the concept of secular, scientific and democratic education it has been considered very important to study in a comprehensive and holistic manner. Even in a subject, one topic is connected with other. So it is considered very important that different chapters are studied part by part, then after one or two years a thorough revision of the entire course considering all components of the course together in view of the final examination might help develop comprehensive understanding of the course. With that in view the matriculation examination covered the total course of IXth and Xth standard, the Higher Secondary examination covered the XIth and XIIth standard and BA/ B Sc part one covered two years of course. Now when the courses are divided in small packages or modules of four or six months, students may forget whatever they learnt in earlier semester/trimesters and never approach the course in a holistic manner. This semester system in earlier times existed only in some technical courses. This may be at best viable in certain technical courses, but for general courses this is very much detrimental to thoroughness. Moreover, more examinations in a year means more admission and examination fees. Students also will be engaged round the year always facing the threats of examinations, having no time to pay attention to any social, political and educational problems.

Interdisciplinary Course Credit System Will Destroy the Holistic Development of Knowledge

Apart from overhauling of the examination evaluation pattern, the Yashpal Committee proposes to introduce the inter-disciplinary course and course credit system in its plan for pursuits of excellence. Course credit means a student will have to earn a minimum credit mark to be a graduate. If he fails to earn the credit mark with a particular combination of subjects, whatever is short can be made up by earning the required credit mark from some other subject. That even may be of completely different discipline. Suppose, with Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics, if a student fails to earn the minimum credit mark for graduation, he can seat in examination for accountancy or Sanskrit, and earn the required deficit credit mark to be the graduate. The Yashpal Committee has argued, “... graduates should be sufficiently exposed to inter-disciplinary experiences, which can sustain them when the demand for a particular job market changes.” (Page-10) Furthermore, ‘This universal approach to knowledge demands that boundaries of disciplines be porous and scholars be constantly on guard against the tendency towards ‘cubicalization’ of knowledge’. This ultimately supports what the NKC has said regarding the course credit system. “The present system is characterized by too much rigidity and too few choices for students. Universities that are smaller, or run semester-based systems are obviously more flexible. Even in large universities, however, it is necessary to use greater diversity and more flexibility in course structures. This would be the beginning of a transition to a course credit system, where degrees are granted on the basis of completion of a requisite number of credits from different courses. Every student should be required to earn a minimum number of credits in his/her chosen discipline but should have the freedom to earn the rest from the courses in other disciplines.” (Notes on Higher Education, Page-4) Furthermore, “Degrees should be granted on the basis of completing a requisite number of credits, obtained from different courses. Each student shall be required to earn a minimum number of credits in his/her chosen discipline, and shall have the freedom to earn the rest from courses in other disciplines. The academic year shall therefore be semester-based and students shall be internally evaluated at the end of each course. Transfer of credits from one National University to another shall also be possible.” (NKC, Notes on Higher Education, page-17)

AIDSO always opposed the conspiracy to restrict and compartmentalize the subjects with the slogans of relevance and specialization. It is a long standing demand of AIDSO that up to quite a higher level of education, the syllabus should be common, and should have sufficient stress on language, literature, mathematics, sciences and the social sciences for comprehensive development of mental faculty of a student. During the Renaissance period many stalwarts emerged who displayed prowess in different fields of knowledge. But we must understand that the authorities who are making commercialisation the motive force of reform of education, for the sake of commercialisation they are talking of market relevance of the courses. In fact, in spite of this ‘crusade’ against ‘cubicalisation’ of knowledge the so-called ‘market relevance’ of a subject or some topic is considered the yardstick for overhauling of the educational system. From the very primary level of education thoroughness and comprehensive development of knowledge is being destroyed by introduction of the ‘functional’ approach. The NCERT in reframing the syllabus has proposed to introduce this very approach up to higher secondary level. In the argument that what is the use of studying language or literature to a student who will study science and technology, the NCERT has proposed to introduce English for science and technology or Business English after class VIII in the school level. With the same approach the NCERT has proposed to introduce business mathematics or mathematics for science and technology in the school level after VIIIth standard. The government and policy makers time and again raising the

argument of 'relevance' undermined the compulsory study of literature in the graduation courses, which was very important for development of social commitment among the students of various disciplines. Therefore, it is obvious that this eagerness of the Yashpal Committee for interdisciplinary course is not to free education from compartmentalization and is nothing new. It is the reiteration of the interdisciplinary course proposed by the National Policy on Education '86, which is the origin of this drive for privatisation and commercialisation of education, and also what has been proposed by the Ambani-Birla committee and NKC. In fact, in the concept of secular, scientific and democratic education, upto quite a high stage of education the syllabus should be common. The syllabus should contain the subjects of science, social sciences, language and literature. After that at the college level there should be diversion in different disciplines. Whatever might be the discipline, the students should continue to study good literature at this level also. But the combinations of subjects in different disciplines have developed on the basis of scientific interdependence and interlink between the subjects. Suppose the combinations like Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics; Zoology, Physics, Chemistry; History, Economics, Political Science; etc. developed on the basis of this interlink of subjects. As for example, in the mathematics course of the undergraduate level there are many things, without knowing which it is not possible to study physics. In the same way the other combinations are also developed on the basis of the conduciveness of the subjects. Therefore, in the name of interdisciplinary course or course credit, actually the attempt is there to totally destroy the process of thorough and comprehensive development of knowledge.

Lethal Blow on Democratic Education

A very important aspect of the secular, scientific and democratic education is the autonomy of the institutions and democratic rights of the students, teachers as well as non-teaching staff. According to the concept of secular scientific and democratic education the government should only fund the institutions but running of the institutions, determination of the course and content, methods of examinations and evaluations – everything should be determined by the democratically elected bodies formed by the teachers, educationists and representatives of students, guardians (in case of school), and the non-teaching staff. This is the standing concept of autonomy which the government must not encroach upon. The so-called autonomy of the institutions advocated by the NKC has completely destroyed the real concept of autonomy. It is autonomy of the capitalist investors to extort profit from the students by sucking blood of students and exploiting the teachers and non-teaching staff at will, without any restriction or intervention. Whatever might be the defects of the older system of the universities, its objective and purpose was supposed to be the cultivation and spread of knowledge. The large structure of the universities, system of affiliation, system of governance through democratically elected academic bodies like Senate, Syndicate, Academic Council, Court etc., was part of the concept of democratic education. The system of affiliation of colleges by universities, the check and balance by university, on the one hand, and statutory bodies like UGC, Medical Council of India (MCI), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and such bodies, on the other hand, had been considered part and parcel of democratic education for spread of education and ensuring minimum quality and standard of the institutions. Though, it is true that the UGC and such other bodies had often been used to carry out the government's agenda in the field of education. Both the NKC and Yashpal Committee have strongly advocated that, the system of affiliation and cross checking being a fetter, the entire educational system should be converted into a field of investment. Both the reports have opined that in order to facilitate private investment in the field of education there should be small 'unitary' institutions, which are easier to handle by the private investors. Suppose where there are large democratically elected bodies like the Senate and Syndicate, and in order to increase fees approval must be taken from these bodies, then for the private investors it is not possible to handle the institutions according to their whims. Hence large affiliating system must be done away with. On the other hand, the private investors are unwilling to take clearance and approval from different authorities. Suppose if an institution is to be established then it must be affiliated to some university, it must get recognition from the UGC and for its Medical, Engineering or Law departments it must take approval from and comply with the terms and conditions fixed by Statutory bodies like MCI, AICTE, LCI, etc. So, in order to convert the field of education into a field of investment, the rules and regulations and governance mechanism should be simplified to satisfy them. Both the commissions have suggested to provide a 'level playing field' and single window system to satisfy the investors. According to the plan all institutions should be discrete self-sufficient units. Exactly following the prescriptions of GATS, NKC suggested to establish an Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE) for according recognition, accreditation, licensing to grant degrees and disbursement of government funds to universities and colleges, existing as well as newly established by indigenous and foreign investors. The NKC commented, "It would apply exactly the same norms to public and private institutions, just as it would apply the same norms to domestic and international institutions."

The Yashpal Committee further modified the suggestion and changing the name charted out the plan to form a single omnipotent body NCHER. It has commented, "It became clear to us, therefore, that the overall regulating structure for all higher education should be just one. This would imply that the UGC and AICTE should be subsumed within a single Higher Education Commission. There is no need for separate Councils for various areas and the responsibilities of various existing Councils should be changed to define the floor-exit qualifications of personnel who exit from the respective institutions. Knowledge and curricular details would be determined by appropriate universities under guidelines of appropriate structures set up by various wings of Higher Education Commission. (Yashpal Committee Report, Foreword, page-3). Now in order to provide single window system to all the private investors

according to the recommendations of Yashpal Committee, the Union HRD Ministry has prepared a Draft Bill to form the National Council for Higher Education and Research (NCHER), which will soon be placed and passed in Parliament. Once the Bill is passed it will be enacted within one year and automatically the UGC Act, 1956, The AICTE Act, 1987 and NCTE Act, 1993 will be liable to cancellation. Understandably these three bodies will totally cease to operate and their entire responsibility will be discharged by the new body. The function of the other central statutory bodies will be very much restricted. Thus far UGC used to give approval, recognition or affiliation to the institutions; but instead the task of NCHER will be to provide 'authorization' of the institutions. Then, according to the definition of the concept, the universities will no more have the power to grant degrees. The NCHER will only have the power to award degrees to the students.

Fascistic Centralisation of Authority

What is the proposed structure of the NCHER which is supposed to regulate and authorize more than 21 thousand institutions of higher education of the country? There will be a Chairman and three other full members who will run the commission. Three other temporary members of the commission will be appointed by the President of our country for five years tenure. The full members will be nominated by a Selection Committee which will comprise the Prime Minister, Union HRD Minister and Health Minister, Speaker of the Parliament and leader of the opposition. There will also be collegiums comprising more than fifty fellows from among eminent Indian and NRI educationists, which will mainly act as an advisory body to the commission. So, virtually if this Bill is enacted the entire higher education of the country will be regulated by only four persons nominated by the government. Though both the NKC and Yashpal Committee has expressed the desire that this regulatory commission should be 'at arms length' from the government but is it not evident that only the four members nominated by the government and having authority in the field of education will be instrumental to establish fascistic control? So, on the one hand the single window regulation will be to create a uniform market of education and provide level playing field to the investors; on the other hand, these will bring on the possibility of fascistic control and regulation of the entire educational system in order to serve the interest of the ruling capitalist class.

Governance and Administration of Institutions

In spite of much hue and cry about 'autonomy', the definition of autonomy which even an academician like Mr. Yashpal has provided, is horrifying. It is a long standing demand that the educational institutions should be run by the academicians through democratically elected academic bodies. But on the excuse of improving quality the Yashpal Committee Report argues, 'There is an urgent need to improve governance by developing expertise in "educational management" and avoid burdening good academicians with administrative chores. One way to go about this is to encourage universities to start programmes in management of educational institutions. A separation between academic administration and overall management (including fund-raising) may be desirable.' (Yashpal Committee Report, Article-2.4.1 P-45). Obviously the educational institutions will be run by professional bureaucratic administrators, management experts of technocrats, even IAS, IPS officers. As the educational institutions will take the shape of private limited companies it will be managed in the same way, driving the last nail in the coffin of democratic education.

Obviously, in order to ensure unfettered implementation of the process of commercialization the ruling class as well as the administrative authorities will want to rule out the possibility of development of any movement by the students, teachers or non-teaching staff. The NKC has strongly opined for depoliticisation of the universities. It is interesting that making the political activities of students always responsible for deterioration of the academic environment of the universities the government has framed, one after another, rules to curtail the democratic rights of the students of elected student unions. Already several draft legislations like the 'Private Universities Bill', the approach paper to the Model University Act, and even some court judgments have advocated for some 'code of conduct' of students' union elections and or restriction or curtailment of hard-won democratic rights of the students and teachers. The NKC, regarding the academic bodies, has commented "... experience suggests that implicit politicization has made governance of universities exceedingly difficult and much more susceptible to entirely non-academic interventions from outside. This problem needs to be recognized and addressed in a systematic manner not only within universities, but also outside, particularly in governments, legislatures and political parties." With the same objective, the J.M. Lyngdoh Committee prescribed many undemocratic restrictions on conduction of students' union elections such as age limit of the contesting candidates, percentage of attendance, fixation of maximum expenditure limit, etc. Even in some states, governments or judiciary have already imposed ban on students' union elections. These restrictions and imposition of so-called 'code of conduct' is in fact to patronize the politics of the parties in power and their affiliated student organizations and, on the other hand, to suppress the genuine students' movement against several attacks on education. Already many colleges like the Patna College of Magadha University have openly declared that any demonstration, dharna etc. within the campus will be treated as criminal offence. The right of elected students' union is a long standing democratic right of the students. While it is true that many incidents of violence occur centring the student union elections but by imposing a straightjacket code of conduct that could not be kept at bay. Could a variety of code of conducts imposed by the election commission restrict poll violence? But elected student union is students' own instrument of struggle. It can play an important role in fighting against fee hike and privatization and commercialization of education. By imposing the code of conduct and arming the authorities

with the power to switchover to nomination instead of election and lodging FIR against any student if they participate in any programme like dharna or demonstration within campus, the ruling class in fact is eager to nip the possibility of student movement in the bud and ensure unfettered implementation of commercialization of education.

Teachers are Treated with Scant Dignity

According to the definition of GATS, while the investors are producers of education, the teachers in an institution are facilitators, i.e. virtually salesmen appointed by the authorities. Furthermore, astonishingly the NKC prefers the incentive 'salary based differentiation' among teachers within the same university and within the same department by rating their performance as in a private limited company. The NKC and Yashpal Committee allow the provision that a private management, in order to attract students may invite some reputed teacher at a much higher salary, while others will be handed a meager sum. The salary of a teacher will depend on the marking and rating by the students. What a humiliating plight to which teachers are being pushed. They will have to virtually appease the students to manage their salary. This will be detrimental to the teaching profession because it will lead to awkward professional competition, jealousy and ego-clashes among teachers. How the private managements treat the teachers regarding that the Yashpal Committee has commented: "In many private educational institutions, the appointment of teachers is made at the lowest possible cost. They are treated with scant dignity, thereby turning away competent persons from opting for the teaching profession. A limited number of senior positions are filled at attractive salaries, especially from other reputed institutions, mainly for prestige. Otherwise, there are many terrible instances of faculty being asked to work in more than one institution belonging to the management; their salary being paid only for nine months; actual payments being much less than the amount signed for; impounding of their certificates and passports; compelling them to award pass marks in the internal examination to the "favorites" and fail marks for students who protest illegal collections and so on." If teachers are treated with such indignity is man making and pursuit of excellence possible in this environment of commercialization?

Vocationalisation is no Panacea for Unemployment Problem

For a long time, there was a trend among the policy planners to discourage higher education, particularly general education on the pretext that it has no 'relevance' or 'practical utility'. While total encouragement was given to vocational and technical subjects, general subjects like Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Language and Literature, History, Political Science, Sociology etc. were very much discouraged. The policy makers often tried to impress that the existing educational system does not impart any productive and useful knowledge for procuring employment. Many students and guardians are also under pressure from ever increasing unemployment, and being confused preferred professional courses over general studies. This has generated a craze among the students for the professional courses. The private managements are successful in expanding their markets by taking advantage of the craze and the direct patronization of governments. Newspapers and media controlled by the corporate houses are also trying to create an illusion that in the age of globalization the demand of the market is changing and students, as regards selecting their studies, must take into cognizance the changing employment pattern. Lured by the false prospect of employment and bright future in industries, the students and their guardians often go beyond their means and crowd in the professional colleges paying astronomical fees, and falling prey to the profit greedy investors.

Nowadays, in this phase of open market economy and globalization, where virtually the entire education has been left to the market forces, the courses and contents are also undergoing metamorphosis. As the government is withdrawing the financial support to the institutions, they are being established or run by the private investors with only those subjects or courses in which the investors are sure of the returns. As a result of this market orientation, only some 'lucrative' professional courses like Medical, Engineering, Business Management etc., and certain job training courses like fashion designing, animation graphics, hotel management, tourism development etc. are flourishing. The policy makers are also encouraging such courses on the plea that in changing economic scenario, in view of the future course of 'development' the earlier approach to education is obsolete and must be changed. Obviously, the real import of this approach is to confuse the students and youth regarding the root cause of unemployment, directing the allegation towards general education for its incapacity to provide jobs. But it is known to all that the problem of unemployment is something that is related to the economic system and it has been proved beyond doubt that this crisis ridden capitalist economy is unable to solve the problem of unemployment in any manner. Rather, unemployment keeps on growing in the capitalist economic system. After implementation of globalisation, more than 17 lakhs of small and large-scale industries have been closed down. A million more are in line, awaiting a similar fate. In the Indian Railways and the Banking sectors alone, more than 5 lakh posts have been abolished. In all public sector industries combined, an estimated 20 lakh employees have been fired. It is estimated that there are more than 25 crore unemployed in India. The new industries, which are coming up here and there, are only few in number and are in fact capital intensive in nature, employing barest of manpower, that too highly skilled labour.

Whatever propaganda was done regarding golden prospects of 'development' by open market economy and globalisation, with the rapid shrinkage of the market it is thoroughly exposed. Even the much-advertised IT industry is also facing trouble and throwing many out of jobs. The total number of people engaged in IT sector is only 0.4% of the nation's aggregate working force of 40 crores. Even the job market in BPOs and Call Centres are not permanent. Already there are signs of several multinational companies outsourcing their jobs to countries like China where labour

is much cheaper than in India. The process of retrenching employees in IT sector has already started. In view of the ever-shrinking job market it becomes clear whatever skill the students acquire, they cannot get employment in organised sectors. While thousands are retrenched, only a few are newly recruited that too under the policy of hire and fire. The working conditions in IT sector referred to is worse than slavery of the middle ages. Again the so-called growth of IT will obviously aggravate unemployment in other sectors as it is intended to minimize the labour power. It has already led to loss of job opportunities to the extent of 1 crore in the rest of the economy. According to one source, while the youth population in our country grew by 13.2%, employment among young people grew by a mere 3.8% or less. The overall job market is on the wane. So it is nothing but a big hoax that vocationalisation or job orientation of education provides solution for unemployment. It is an attempt to hide the fact that this crisis ridden capitalist system is the root cause of unemployment.

Knowledge is not a Private Property

It is a well-established fact that education cannot be a commodity, nor can mankind's vast treasure of knowledge be a property to be owned privately and used for selfish ends, nor can it be viewed as a tradable service. Joint efforts and mutual cooperation of so many people down the ages went into building up of this impressive edifice of knowledge. Many scientists, philosophers and historians were necessarily required to put in individual efforts and innovations to dig out the truth from myriad of facts, but once it is done the knowledge or the truth becomes the property of the entire mankind.

In every scientific invention or discovery, knowledge and ideas acquired earlier are put to use making it impossible to assign absolute credit to any person involved. Neither can the findings belong to any single individual nor is it ethical for him or her to benefit from its commercial applications, otherwise, according to Madame Curie, "It would be contrary to the scientific spirit." Although the individual is remembered with due reverence for the service she or he has provided, but the tyrannical rulers of all ages have tried to confine and gain control over the knowledge to safeguard their interests and existence.

The pioneers and great thinkers of all ages and of the Renaissance, both in Europe and in India, had therefore fought hard to free knowledge from the hegemony of the feudal and the colonial rulers. They had struggled hard to ensure unhindered access and free exchange of knowledge among people irrespective of caste and creed, because they had realized that the progress of humanity and human civilization is intrinsically dependent on this. During the period of Renaissance this realization had led them to raise the slogan of secular, scientific, democratic and universal education.

But the ruling class, the capitalists and imperialists this time, trying to steer clear from mounting crisis and to retain their rule of injustice, are striving to impose their sole control over mankind's vast resources of knowledge and to privatize and commercialize it. They are employing WTO and GATS declarations to impose embargo on free use and exchange of ideas, thoughts and works through patent rights, TRIPS etc. Desperately looking for profit, they are trying to seize every bit of human accomplishment, from abstract mathematical formula to the traditional food crop varieties, by patenting them. This has already resulted in significant stagnation in many fields of human endeavour and scientific researches, particularly in medicine, biophysics and biochemistry where every piece of finding is heavily guarded due to its high commercial viabilities. The rulers have also put bridle on the spread of knowledge through heavy curtailment of education, severing all roads to knowledge. Thus denied of education, a huge section of productive forces are made idle and kept unutilized, thereby keeping vast human resources unexplored.

Sex Education out to Destroy Moral Backbone of Society

Meanwhile, the study of serious and very important subjects are being viewed by the policy makers as 'burden', 'irrelevant' but now the governments are very much enthusiastic to impose on the adolescent students a new subject, sex education which is being launched in different states in the name of 'Life Style Education', 'Adolescent Education' etc., In the name of combating the menace of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and sexual anarchy among adolescents and viewing human sexuality as a mere biological instinct as in an animal, sex-education is being imparted for the school children throughout the country. On the basis of recommendations made by the NCERT and international agencies like the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF etc., who are behind such ill-boding strategies, educational bodies and AIDS control societies of different states have enthusiastically joined the bandwagon on this so-called adolescent education programme.

It is true that in the age of adolescence, curiosity regarding sex creates certain complications among teenagers. But we cannot view human sex separated from human values, tastes, aesthetic sense and moral-ethical concepts i.e., the entire cultural ambit of the society as well as sense of social responsibility. A look at the curriculum, modules and manuals on adolescence education containing graphic description and crude examples prepared for class room teaching will tell us that the attempt is nothing but an advocacy for practicing safe sex. Not only that, the campaign that is going on in full swing all over the country with the avowed objective of creating awareness on AIDS and safe sex is a propaganda of bad taste and open encouragement of unethical sexual behaviours. The message behind the

whole hog of this campaign unmistakably appears that one can have any type of sexual relation provided if he or she takes cautionary measures. This entire shameless exercise of the governments may promote the business of some companies but cannot prevent AIDS. Rather, these remedies will aggravate the disease as has been reported in America, Canada, Britain, Thailand etc., where such education was introduced long back.

In reality adolescence problems that are causing so much worry to parents and guardians stem from a crisis in values and cannot be tackled through introduction of sex education. They have to be combated on a different plane by releasing a powerful current of social and cultural movements based on higher ethics and morality. Moreover, adolescents are to be treated individual-specific and the approach will vary from person to person. Open classroom is not the place for it, nor are the teachers properly equipped for the job.

Presently the biology subject of the high school curriculum deals sufficiently about human anatomy, reproductive system, and health hygiene etc. There are lessons even on AIDS and its prevention. Even the children can obtain the necessary information in the best way from their parents and family. Elderly people guided by high sense of values and enjoying the respect of society can in some situations do the job. Help may also be taken from the medical fraternity or psychological counselors. Ignoring all these, governments are hell-bent on introducing sex education only to wreck the moral backbone of young generations and to create permissive culture among them so that they will fall victim to degraded sexual behaviours and cultural degeneration.

The Crisis Ridden Capitalist Class is Mortally Afraid of Knowledge

The great Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy commented, "The strength of a government lies in the ignorance of the people." The crisis ridden capitalism is unable to solve any of the basic problems of people's life, like price rise, inflation or unemployment. So they are always afraid of people's outburst against this exploitative capitalist order. They have take lesson from history that just discontent can lead to sporadic outburst but can't lead to a systematic well organised battle against the social order. Thinking faculty, rational bent of mind, elements of consciousness among the people are most dangerous ingredients which they are afraid of. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, a leading Marxist thinker of this era, whose thoughts enlightened the path of struggle of the AIDS, showed that in the face of this extreme crisis, capitalism, in order to wear out the threats of revolution resort to fascism. It is mortally afraid of truth, scientific reasoning. So, in the system of education capitalism, on the one hand, tried to destroy and obliterate and develop a sense of negligence regarding those aspects of science which develop scientific bent of mind; on the other hand, it emphasizes only on the study of technical aspects of science, which they cannot totally avoid. On the other hand, it encourages study of obscurantist, spiritual matters. The all out commercialisation, emphasis on only market oriented, technical courses, conversion of entire education into a lifeless commodity, total obliteration of democratic environment in the institutions, obliteration of all democratic rights of students, teachers and non-teaching staff, fascistic bureaucratic control of the entire educational system, de-politicisation of campus and ban on all sorts of movement by students and teachers, in all these things the footsteps of fascism are clearly audible.

Attack on Ethics and Culture

Compounded with the attack on education, we witness worst ever onslaught of capitalism-imperialism on cultural, ethical and moral backbone of the nation. Through the willful attack on moral character of the nation, the ruling class is trying to extend the lease of its life. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh has shown us, "... People's power asserts itself and stands up if the masses can retain their moral standard and find the correct ideology." Mortally afraid of such consequences, capitalism is out to crush all kinds of human values and ethics among the students and youth. This is the reason behind the widespread consumerism that has penetrated deep into the psyche of the nation, courtesy the electronic media.

Though all the basic wants and necessities like food, water, health care or education have not reached the people, the governments are more eager to ensure such hapless, starving people get access to electronic media. Through these media outlets the capitalists are not only publicizing their products and various programmes, and propagating the most obscene, vulgar and pornographic films, serials and advertisements, but also infuse imperialist philosophy, their culture, outlook and lifestyle among the consumers. This is to keep the people in a trance, stuffing their dreams, thoughts with vileness. It makes them live in fantasy, forget their miseries and privations, and creates a permissive mental make-up that teaches how to be tolerant towards all evils.

It must be understood that the policy of globalisation is not just an attack in economic and political spheres. But it is a comprehensive scheme of imperialism-capitalism to destroy education and culture. Taking lessons from all the working class revolutions of the past and being mortally afraid of future revolution, which is historically inevitable, capitalists-imperialists have designed this policy to protect the system from its ultimate doom. This is why the education system is being patterned in such a way that the scientific bent of mind and approach do not develop among the students, with the help of which they can find out the root-cause of all social problems and thereby find out the

solution. Simultaneously moral and cultural backbone of the students is being destroyed so that they may not be in a position to boldly stand up and fight even if they know the cause of their problems.

Globalisation Brought Prosperity to a Few and Untold Sufferings to Millions

The central government and all the state governments are hailing the so-called 'progress' and 'development' ushered in by 'globalization'. With newly grown high-rise complexes, lustrous shopping malls, meandering flyovers, seven star hotels and the era of so-called IT revolution etc, the governments are presenting a dazzling panorama of metropolitan India. Media is panegyric about the exploits of Indian billionaires whenever they take-over or acquire the top notch companies of Asia or Europe, joining the world's billionaires' club and finding place in the list of the top rich. The rosy picture of 'new' India, the 'shining' India, 'prosperous' India is being presented before the world and the young generation is asked to emulate and imitate its achievements.

But this so-called 'shining' India is only one facet that belongs to the microscopic minority of the rich, corporate houses, businessmen, corrupt politicians and officials who are amassing wealth. Beneath this entire razzle-dazzle the other facet of India belongs to the millions of oppressed and suppressed whose future is made bleak and frustrated. Advent of open market economy has robbed even the modicum of protection of the working class from the economic onslaughts of the indigenous and foreign multinational corporate giants. The consequences of market economy and globalisation that brought poverty, hunger, destitution and privation to the millions of people are dreadful. Unemployment, lay-off, lockout, retrenchment, suicide of jobless workers, peasants entangled in debt trap, have risen to alarming heights today. The bloodthirsty juggernaut of globalisation is off to convert every field of human activity — health, education, sports, culture and even tender human feelings into a commodity, salable in the market for amassing huge profit. In the face of such onslaughts all the sublime human essence like ethics, morality, human relationship and family ties are fast degenerating. Ugly consumerist culture, cult of sex and violence, variety of perversions and mental aberrations, crimes and particularly crimes committed by the adolescents are sharply rising within the society. This is an ominous sign to the very existence of humanity, culture and civilization.

Now as a part of globalization, the Special Economic Zones are mushrooming everywhere. In the name of development, thousands and thousands of peasants and agricultural workers are being evicted from their land. They are rendered homeless, jobless and utterly deprived. The intake in industries set up under SEZ is very minimal. Even for those few employees there are no labour laws, no protection from the ruthless exploitation of the employers in these 'Special' Zones.

These SEZs are virtually emerging as the slaughterhouses of the peasants and workers paving the way for unbridled loot and plunder by the corporate giants. The fiendish attempts to evict the poor peasants from their fertile land in the name of development and industrialization and put those lands in the hands of the corporate giants as in Raigarh in Maharashtra, Kalinganagar in Orissa, Singur, Nandigram in West Bengal, Mahaboobnagar in A.P. and many other places have evoked militant resistance from the people across the length and breadth of the country.

In SEZs the corporate and multinational companies enjoy several concessions provided by the governments. There will be tax holiday for these companies for 10 years. The governments will provide electricity, water and all other infrastructure facilities at cheaper rates. All these will lead to loss of government revenue to the extent of one lakh seventy thousand crore rupees. In order to meet this deficit in revenue loss, governments will have to impose fresh taxes on common people who are already over burdened and back broken. As thousands of acres of agricultural land are being converted into real estate business under SEZs, there will be fall of agricultural production and scarcity of food in the near future. So SEZs are not only affecting the peasants and workers but also all other sections of the society.

In order to establish such SEZs, the CPI(M) led left Front government in West Bengal perpetuated fascistic crimes on the protesting people and womenfolk and is forcibly trying to acquire people's land to hand over to corporate giants. These so-called lefts are raising the bogey of 'industrialization' at a time when industrialization is a thing of the past i.e. establishment of uninterrupted labour intensive industries is no more in vogue, and when economic recession, closure of industries and unemployment have become the order of the day because of intense economic crisis of world capitalism. Claiming itself to be a Marxist party (!) the CPI (M) is clamoring that pro capitalist policy of SEZs will usher in progress, industrialization and employment. It is simply a hypocritical stand and in a way it is a heinous attempt to befool the people and subserve the capitalists, here and abroad.

Strengthen AIDS - the Only Instrument of Students' Struggle

This, in a nutshell, is the situation prevailing in our society, in general, and education system, in particular. As the capitalist system in which we live today became reactionary and moribund, it cannot deliver any good to humanity except war, destruction, poverty, hunger, insecurity of life, and degeneration of moral and ethical values. It has to be replaced by a higher social system i.e. a socialist system. Although at present there is darkness, despair and despondence engulfing the entire social life, an urge for social change, a search for a new ideology is growing in the whole society. In all imperialist-capitalist countries, oppressed people are coming out in big numbers against the onslaughts of ruling classes. Even in America, the bastion of world imperialism, people marched in millions denouncing its wars of aggression. The entire world is witnessing a surge of movement against capitalism and

imperialism. In our country too, after the disastrous globalisation and market economy pushed the people to the wall, they have no other course left than to resist and fight back. But all the parliamentary parties like Congress, BJP, BSP, RJD, SP, Shiv Sena and others are trying to protect the reactionary capitalist system by extending its lease of life. Even the so-called leftists like CPI (M), CPI in their rat race for power and position want to prove themselves worthy of capitalism. All these parties are nakedly exposed in their true colours. People are disgusted with such parties.

Historically now the force armed with the great ideology of Marxism-Leninism and the thoughts of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh alone can uphold the noble banner of struggle and social transformation. People are being tremendously influenced by these great thoughts and enthusiastically joining the path of emancipation. So it is the best of times to rouse and to organise the masses for sustained struggle conducive to the radical transformation of the society.

In this critical hour, it becomes a bounden duty for students and youths to stand up boldly before the threatening prospects of imminent fascism. But it is amply evident that nearly all the student organizations are cynically indifferent to this threat of fascist menace. The so-called nationalist student organizations like NSUI and ABVP, servitors of capitalism have openly lent their support to all anti-people education policies. The ABVP itself has participated in the effort to communalize the education and is instrumental in spreading religious and communal bias among the students. But painfully even the so-called left student organizations like the SFI and AISF, apart from some occasional and verbal criticism of the policies of ruling class education, have done precious little to organize students' movements. On the contrary, they have become partners and supporters of the same anti-student, anti-people policies when such policies are being implemented in the states where their parent parties are in power. That is why we see the SFI activists torturing and furiously beating up the AIDSOS workers for developing students' movements in those states.

This implies that once again it is the AIDSOS alone that has to shoulder the task of mobilizing the students to organize protracted movement based on higher ideology against all these onslaughts on education and culture. We know that at every critical juncture of civilization, history has always bestowed upon the students the responsibility to pave the way for humanity's march to progress and social transformation. Here we recall the teachings of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh with great reverence, "...at every stage of development of the society, in every country it is the students and young people who come forward, being influenced by and imbued with the revolutionary ideology and completely dedicated, go to the masses, rouse the masses, organize them in thousands and help them in creating their political power. Then the time comes for the masses for action – that we call revolution."

Hold High the Banner of Students' Struggle

In fact another social transformation is in offing, the ruthless onslaught on anything unfavourable and detrimental to the interest of the capitalist regime and all encompassing degradation are infallible pointers towards that. The fascistic attacks of the ruling governments or the ruling parties on the fighting workers in Gurgaon, peasants in Raigarh, Kalanganagar, Singur and last but not least, Nandigram, are only glaring examples of that. But no matter whatever coercive instruments and military might such regimes may possess, the strength of organized people's struggle always break all such barriers of oppression and suffering to march towards victory. The indomitable spirit of the valiant fighters of Nandigram has upheld that truth once again. As an instrument of students' struggle, AIDSOS has also proved time and again its worth. We have, to our credit many historic movements at the state as well as at the national level. Movements against seat restrictions, anti-people language policy and National policy on Education are only a few of them. Presently, our movement against the all-out attack of privatization and commercialization of education has made tremendous impact all over the country.

Hence the organization, AIDSOS possesses the necessary ideological orientation based on Marxism-Leninism and thoughts of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh and the revolutionary capacity to unhesitatingly stand against the fascist onslaught on education and build up mighty resistance movement against the privatization, commercialization and communalization of education, against bringing education under the purview of GATS, against introduction of sex education, disastrous globalisation and SEZs. We are firm and determined on our course; victory is bound to be ours!

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