

Address as chief guest by Hon'ble Mrs. D. Purandeswari MOS (HRD) on 29-12-2007 at Hyderabad on the occasion of Pragna Bharati Annual Pragna Puraskar Award to Dr. L. Rathaiah and Dr. V. Malakonda Reddy for their outstanding contributions for promotion of the education in Andhra Pradesh.

Dr. Chowdary and other eminent guests and friends,

It gives me great pleasure to address this distinguished gathering on the occasion of Pragna Bharati's Annual Pragna Puraskar Awards to Dr. L. Rathaiah and Dr. Malakonda Reddy who, I understand, have made yeomen's contribution in the field of professional education by funding engineering colleges. It is, indeed, a highly laudatory and imaginative move on the part of the Pragna Bharati to honour persons and recognize meritorious contributions made by great personalities in several fields for promoting the cause of education in Andhra Pradesh. At the outset, I congratulate Dr. Rathaiah and Dr. Reddy on receiving the richly deserved honour. In course of the Pragna Bharati could consider the possibility of extending the range of their selection on an All-India basis rather than restrict it to Andhra Pradesh only so as attract bigger talents for the award.

Education to my mind is not only a goal in itself but is a powerful facilitator of social and economic change. Education builds up what the Noble Laureate Amartya Sen rightly calls "human capabilities" and it is one of the most powerful instruments known for laying the basis for sustained socio-economic growth. Education and education alone could provide the foundation of an enduring value-

based and egalitarian society. The examples of tiny countries like Singapore and Israel are good examples of what human resources, properly motivated, can achieve in ensuing sustainable growth.

While higher education in India has achieved remarkable progress in regard to increasing number of institutions, faculty, teaching-learning infrastructure, and enrolment, there are yet a number of challenges that need to be addressed urgently. The foremost priority, to my mind is the problem of enhancing access to higher education. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) has to be raised to a minimum threshold level of about 20 percent for sustained economic development. The target of 20 percent shall require us to substantially increase the intake capacity. So the 11th plan has set the target of 15 percent and this appears reasonable. As we do so, we have also to ensure that the higher education is made equitable and inclusive, meaning thereby that the regional and social imbalances prevailing in the higher education system will have to be tackled. No less critical is the issue of relevance and quality of higher education. Quality and excellence in higher education has been a matter of concern and we have to take necessary steps towards promotion of excellence in teaching-learning processes and outcomes in the forms of research, publications and creation of intellectual capital. These call for improvement in the higher education system, particularly focused on the implementation and operationalisation of a host of measures that have been recommended since the Radhakrishnan Commission of 1948. This is crucial in order to make our higher education system responsive to

the needs and challenges of the knowledge economy. It is high time that we undertake thorough stock taking and review of the higher education scenario in the country.

Education, especially higher education in India has expanded manifold during the past six decades. Since the advent of independence in 1947 the number of universities in the country has increased from 20 in 1947 to 378 whereas the number of colleges, which were no more than 1500 at the eve of independence, has gone up to 18064. No less significant has been the increase in the number of teaching staff, which has gone up from a meagre 15,000 to nearly 4.80 Lakhs during the same period. The number of students enrolled in higher education too has gone up from 1 Lakh in 1950 to over 112 lakhs in 2005. Obviously, the institutional capacity of higher education has increased by several folds. Increase in educational institutional capacity has improved access to higher education and enrolment ratio increased from less than 1 % in 1950 to about 10% in 2007.

However mere access to higher education is not enough for the purpose. Making quality education accessible is as important as the access to higher education itself. We must also ensure that the higher education system is able and made capable of providing quality education and achieve excellence in the arena of creation and dissemination of knowledge. Our higher education system is characterized by varying degree of inter-institutional differences in quality and excellence. I understand that as per the rating of

universities and colleges by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) a dominant majority of the higher educational institutions can at best be described as average or below average. This is an extremely depressing situation.

It is really disappointing that the quality of college and university education in India has not kept pace with its quantitative growth. This is all too evident at the beginning of each academic year, when students and their parents have an agonizing time trying to get admission in good colleges, whose number is too small to cater to the growing demand. With a background of about more than 150 years of Modern Education in English medium, this languishing trend of quality education in the country is beyond one's comprehension. We must do some self-introspection and some honest heart-searching to find why we are unable to improve the brand image of our universities.

The nation to-day is fully committed to providing education for all by 2010, the priority areas being free and compulsory education of children till the age of 14 years, education of the girl child to reduce gender inequality, education of children with special needs and education of children belonging to the weaker sections of society and minorities. We are also focusing on bringing about consistent improvement in the quality of education through teacher's education and training programmes. The Sarva Shiksha Abhyan aims at imparting functional literacy and attaining threshold literacy level of 75% by next year. The Eleventh Five Year Plan emphasizes on increasing the expenditure on education to 4 per cent of the GDP and

eliminating tuition and incidental fees for rural students during the nine years of compulsory education period.

The quality of education in the US universities is acknowledged to be very high. The reason is that 70% of the living Nobel Laureates are teaching in the US universities. Unfortunately in our country, the best don't go into teaching. We must also remember that the best universities in the US are not of the government but all of them are privately founded and funded. Eg: Harvard, MIT, Stanford, Georgia Tech etc. As against this, except for a few medical, engineering and increasingly large number of management institutes, the private sector has hardly any presence in India in the higher education sector. There are no Harvards and Stanfords or Oxfords and Cambridges in India, institutions funded largely by private money. Of course, the number of Indians who are wealthy enough to make really significant donations to educational institutions is minuscule in comparison to the numbers in the US. But this cannot explain the virtual absence of any Indian university financed largely by private sector funding. I believe it would be a good idea if our great companies like Tata, Reliance, L&T, Satyam, Infosys, Wipro, Infotech, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories set up colleges and built universities around them. Then there would be a triple benefit namely Industry Academia collaboration; distinguished company executives with high salaries teaching in the universities on deputation and companies promoting research.

What should be the role of private players in our perception of over- all educational system ?. It is wrong to say that government is against the private players who are establishing and managing educational institutions. We are quite aware of the fact the element of profit can not be fully eliminated when the private participators are called upon to make substantial investment in the field of educators. But then the profit motive should not be the only criteria in private investment. Even Communist China has realized this and therefore it is encouraging non-government, private enterprises and colleges in every sector including education. It is well recognized that in order to improve the quality of education we must introduce competition between colleges and universities. While competition will necessarily will be forth- coming within the Indian colleges, to further improve the quality and to supplement the resources we are not against investing even foreign universities to establish their campuses here, preferably in collaboration with Indian enterprisers. We may note that Communist China is already permitting a number of foreign universities to operate in their country . What private participation and competition can accomplish is being demonstrated in telecommunications where supply in excess of demand is created, users are having choice and prices are coming down to be within the reach of hundreds if millions because of the operation of market forces.

I would also like to emphasize that the role of private investors including foreign investors can be acceptable subject to some specific conditions. First is that when private players permitted to set

up an institute of higher learning, it should be made obligatory for them to produce a vision document, which should inter alia contain vision objectives and the road map for realizing the objectives.

Secondly the private players must be function under well-laid regulations containing specific rules relating to admission norms, fees, subsidies, curriculum and delivery of services. In relation to foreign players there should be an arrangement in place to ensure that the foreign institutes of higher learning must be enjoying wide support recognition and credibility in the country of their origin.

To sum up, the phenomenon of privatization has led to the emergence of market economy. In the field of education too, there have emerged various compulsions in the public provision of education, which have given rise to the growth of private educational institutions in the last two decades. It is however imperative that a regulatory frame work is put in place so that there is no commercialization of education and also there is effective prevention of racketeering and exploitation in this regard. Subject to this, we should have no inhibition to allow private players to function in the country with a reasonable degree of autonomy and freedom for providing quality education. We need to draw up proper regulatory guidelines for the private sector, to ensure the quality of higher education. it is, therefore important that we develop effective regulatory framework for the private universities, particularly in terms of their admission, fees, teaching-learning process and governance. We must however ensure that in the name of *regulating* the private

institutions, we desist from making any attempt for *controlling* them. All we should do is to remove the bureaucratic shackles which lead to the undermining of the initiative and independence of private players.

With these words, I have great pleasure in commending the good work being done by Pragna Bharati in the realm of education and knowledge which, I hope, they will continue in years to come.

Jai Hind