

**Address of Smt. D. Purandeswari MoS-HRD (HE) in the National Seminar on "Private Universities – New Challenges" at Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University at the NTR Auditorium, Hyderabad on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2007.**

I have great pleasure in participating as the Chief Guest in the national seminar on "Private Universities – New Challenges" here at the NTR auditorium. The name of Potti Sreeramulu conjures up in our mind the life a complete sacrifice whom literally gave up his life for a noble and seemline cause to who the whole Telugu population in the country down the ages would ever remain grateful. Before I deliver my address, I offer my respectful homage to the illustrious leader.

The subject for to-day's seminar relates to the role and relevance of private universities in the scheme of educational reforms in the prevalent scenario. I welcome this subject.

I am convinced that quality higher education is that endeavour which could catapult India into a higher orbit of development. It is that enterprise which will, in innumerable tangible and intangible ways, benefit all our other activities in diverse fields of development. The linkage between education and development is direct and simple. Higher education enhances human capital, which in turn makes higher growth possible; and universal education universalises the fruits of development.

Education is primarily a function of the Government. However, it is impossible for any government particularly of a large

developing country like India to undertake the task entirely by itself. The Supreme Court recognized this principle in the Unnikrishnan Case (1993(I)SCC 645) and evolved a formula to help operationalize the scheme of public-private partnership in professional education. Of course, the scheme had to be modified again and again through a series of judicial decisions in various case laws like T.M.A Pai Vs State of Karnataka and others (2002), Islamic Academy vs State of Karnataka (2003) and P.A. Inamdar vs State of Maharashtra. In view of the need to reconcile competing interests and to promote social justice in a critical sector of development and human rights.

Before, I articulate my views with regard to to-day's subject, it is worthwhile to reflect on certain trends evolving in liberalisation of trade in services generally and education/training services in particular.

Firstly, the increasing use of information-communication technology including Internet and world wide web have revolutionized the mode of delivery of educational and training services making direct physical regulation less and less relevant. Distance education across boundaries through virtual classrooms is a reality today. Educational institutions are teaming up with IT service providers to take education and training at the doorstep of consumers. Knowledge economy will endeavour to perfect this mode of delivery and market it to aspiring students,

job-seekers and self-employed persons enabling them to acquire the knowledge and skills at a pace suited to their convenience. This inevitably will reduce the scope of regulation in terms of physical facilities (campuses, building, classrooms, teachers, etc.) and establishment systems.

If higher education is intended to include education beyond the secondary school stage, there is today a number of statutory bodies like the University Grants Commission, the AICTE, the BCI, the MCI and the respective enactments under which Universities are established already occupying the role of regulation. They do control private higher education in order to maintain educational standards and to ensure fairness in administration. These regulatory systems with some modifications will remain as they are intended to promote certain public policy goals having constitutional sanction.

Every country is discussing today on how and on what terms foreign Universities and educational/training service providers can be allowed to operate from their territory. I recently read in newspapers that India has overtaken China as the country that sends the largest number of students - 68,000 last year - to study in universities in the United States. This means that there is an enormous outgo of foreign exchange from our country on account of so many students going abroad for higher studies.

I am not suggesting that they should not go. Indian students who study abroad contribute to our nation-building in many ways. But the issue that I would like to pose is: Why shouldn't we make India an attractive destination for similarly large number of foreign students - from both developing and developed countries - seeking quality school, higher and professional education? This will bring numerous benefits to our country. Above all, a systematic endeavour in this direction will lift the standards of higher education across the board and benefit Indian students.

India is not a desired destination today for higher education for students from other countries. While over a lakh of Indian students every year migrate to other countries seeking higher education, the country receives well below one tenth of that number and that too from the countries in Asia and Africa only. One needs to ask why it is so despite India having a long tradition of English-based higher education in over 300 Universities and institutes at comparatively cost-effective prices. The politics and economics of higher education coupled with unprincipled interventions from State agencies have eroded the dynamism and competitiveness of governing structures of educational institutions. For several decades curriculum remained unrevised. Teaching was geared more to examinations rather than to acquisition of knowledge.

### **Access to Quality Education:**

Access cannot be measured merely in numerical terms. Access to quality education is as important as access to education. I share the concern of many educational and developmental experts 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.

Similarly, I welcome UGC's decision to create a fast-track mode of developing colleges and university departments with a proven track record as Centres of Excellence. To use a current business terminology, we should improve the brand image of our universities. If our IITs and IIMs today have a global brand value, why shouldn't we groom many universities and colleges across the country to acquire similar national and international acclaim? However, to do this, we need to carefully understand the reasons for the success of the IITs and IIMs and ensure that the lessons are followed.

The third reform imperative is to expand the scope of Public-Private Partnership. Although the Government has considerably increased spending on higher education, it is obvious that the need far outstrips the provision. Hence, we need to adopt innovative and flexible methods of leveraging the financial, managerial and teaching resources in the private sector. For example, is it not possible to lease the physical infrastructure of government-run or government-funded colleges to private educational institutions to run a second shift for imparting training in specialized skills and services? Similarly,

to offset the big gap in competent and qualified teachers, can we not enable managers and professionals outside the formal academic system to work as part-time teachers?

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. The emergence of foreign education providers in India is an offshoot to the process of privatization and globalization of educational institutions. Since there is no regulation at present to control the activities of foreign Universities, it is imperative that regulatory frame work is put in place so that there is no commercialization of education and also there is plaintive presentation of racketeering as per in the directives of the apex court.

With these words, I would like the issue of “Private Higher Education: opportunities and Challenges” to be discussed and debated at various for a in the country so that a clear consensus may evolve thereon to facilitate action by the government.

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