

**Key note address of**  
**Smt. D. Purandeswari MoS-HRD(HE)**  
**At the Indian School Of Business, Hyderabad**  
**In the social responsibility conclave on the**  
**“A Perspective On The Scenario Of Education In India”**  
**On 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2007**  
**At 10 am in Hyderabad.**

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I have great pleasure in inaugurating the Social Responsibility Conclave organized by the Indian School of Business and to deliver the keynote address on ‘A perspective on the scenario of education in India’ this morning.

Education to my mind is not only a goal in itself but is a powerful facilitator of social and economic change. Combined with sound macroeconomic ‘policies, education is fundamental for the build up of democratic societies. It is key to creating, applying and spreading new ideas, which in turn are critical for sustained growth. 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 and sound and stable governance, assuring justice and equity for all. Education and education alone could provide the foundation of an enduring value-based and egalitarian society.

Few global goals have as consistently and as universally been supported as the notion that every child in every corner of the world should have complete exposure to modern education. The World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien in 1990 set this process in motion by adopting that the goal of Universal Primary Education be achieved by 2000 AD. The World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 reaffirmed and extended this commitment. Universal primary education with complete gender equity in primary and secondary education was affirmed again in the same year as Millennium Development Goal.

India stands committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which had envisaged: **“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit”**. India is also a party to the convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which *inter alia* recognizes the development of child’s personality, talents and mental and physical ability to their fullest potential. India is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1992 which made it incumbent to protect and monitor the rights and privileges that our children had been guaranteed or enumerated in the convention. The initiative taken by India in this direction was to adopt the National Charter for Children in 2000.

In 1993, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, declared that right to education was a fundamental right. Earlier it was considered that the Government's obligation to elementary education was restricted only to Article 45 of the Constitution in Part IV thereof which was not juridically enforceable. The 1993 judgment of 1993 made it clear for the first time that the right to education as a fundamental right emanated from the Right to Life in Article 21 of the Constitution. The debate on the need for a separate provision in the Constitution making right to education as an enforceable right started seriously thereafter and in 2002, the 86<sup>th</sup> Constitutional amendment was enacted to make education a fundamental right in terms of the newly inserted Article 21-A which declared: **“The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.”** The contemplated legislative intervention in Article.21-A, when implemented, would bring about a metamorphosis in universalizing education on a mass scale. Serious dialogue is on between the Union and State Governments in regard to this matter. The other significant change was the addition to Article-51A making it a fundamental duty of the parents to provide opportunities to their children or wards to get education between the ages of six and fourteen years. This was aimed at supplementing the efforts of the State in extending the mass base to the goals of education.

May I, however, point out that long before **Art.21-A** was written into our Constitution in 2002, we could conceptualize and bring into operation a centrally sponsored scheme to boost the universal primary education and to improve the nutritional status of the children of primary classes. This was started pursuant to the FM's Budget Speech in the Lok Sabha on **15-03-1995**. A National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education or the Mid Day Meal Scheme was launched on 15<sup>th</sup> August **1995** to give a boost to universal primary education. It was expected to increase enrolment, attendance and retention and improve the nutritional status of children in primary classes in Government, local body and Government aided schools. From October **2002**, the programme has been extended to children studying in the EGS/AIE centers. The Mid Day Meal Programme through which we have tried to boost the nutritional intake of our poor children and to increase the retention rate in school, is not like any other ordinary Government Scheme. Hailed by the world-renowned Economist and Nobel Laurate Amartya Sen **“as the biggest pro-poor initiative since the land reforms of Seventies”** the Mid Day Meal Scheme in **9.52** lakh schools for **12 crore** children is fast firming up complete with a well defined implementation and monitoring process. For us, therefore it is a mission, a matter of faith which we have to fulfill in any case at any cost. With our unflinching belief that **“feeding children is feeding**

**development”** the scheme is sure to enter final phase of qualitative stabilization very soon.

The other main vehicle at present for providing universal education to all children is a comprehensive programme called Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), which was launched in 2001-02. This programme was built upon the experience of several primary education programmes that preceded it. It is a partnership programme between the Central and State Governments, which seeks to improve the performance of the school system through a community-owned approach, with specific focus on the provision of quality education. SSA is a time-bound mission, with the objectives of ensuring Universalization of Elementary Education and bridging of gender and social gaps by 2010.

National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), is an important component of SSA, which provides additional support for girls' education in educationally backward blocks by way of girl-child friendly school, and supply of stationery and uniforms to under – privileged / disadvantaged girls. Another important component of SSA is the Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education (EGS & AIE), which is specially designed to provide to children in school-less habitations and out-of-school children, access to elementary education. The scheme supports flexible strategies for out-of-school children through

bridge courses, residential camps, drop-in centers, summer camps, and remedial coaching.

Since the introduction of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2001, State Governments have reported a significant decline in the number of children not attending school. When the programme began, the number of out-of-school children in India was estimated to be about 39 million; since then, this figure has fallen steadily, and in November 2005 it was reported to be around 10 million and the number is since declining gradually. SSA was launched to ensure that all children between the ages of six and 14 would attend school and receive quality elementary education within a fixed time period. Central outlays for SSA were increased from Rs.1600 crore in 2001 to Rs.7156 crore in 2005-06. A 2% education cess was levied from 2004 to provide additional finances for elementary education and the rate of cess has been increased to 3% during the current year's budget (2007-08).

In my perception, an ideal educational system should be generally pyramidal in structure in which there are fewer people at each level as you proceed from the base to the top. The base at this structure should include all children and this should represent the stream of elementary education up to the age of 14 years. The middle of the pyramid should represent secondary education for the students within 14-17 years with emphasis on vocational education. What we

have to ensure is that there should be a vocational bias at the end of secondary education in the absence of which, students are presently proceeding to higher education pursuing degree course in general education resulting in the creation of surplus manpower who do not fulfill the productive requirements of the country. The developed countries like USA, England, Japan, France and Germany and more recently China have all attained a high growth rate and one important reason is the adoption of vocational education on a universal scale. I have no doubt whatsoever that if we follow the same route, success will undoubtedly be ours and India will soon firmly be on its way to a global power.

India is emerging on the world stage as the largest economically powerful, culturally vibrant, multi-ethnic and multi-religious democracy. With a population of over 1 billion people, an expanding middle-class of 300 million and GDP growth rate of nearly ten percent, India cannot be ignored. Together we are building a strong and resurgent nation whose confident march forward is being keenly watched by the whole world. What has expedited India's growth is our belief that a country's educational system is central to its competitiveness. Of the 9 parameters used by the World Economic Forum, Geneva to judge an economy's competitiveness, 5 are connected to the quality and quantity of its education system. On the whole, higher education in India has done extremely well in training

people. That we are the 11<sup>th</sup> largest exporter of services in the world, when we are the 29<sup>th</sup> largest exporter of goods, says it clearly enough. That there are concerns in the West about the threat from Indian service exports, speaks volume of the strength of our human resources. The IITs especially, have become a global brand. If any proof is needed that it is the quality of human capital that determines the economic performance of a country, then it is India. We have to leverage our young demographic profile to sustain and enhance this advantage. How our education system performs is therefore critical to this process.

I would now like to turn to higher education. 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 11<sup>th</sup> plan has set the target of 15 percent and this appears reasonable. As we do so, we have to also 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. As of now, while the 11<sup>th</sup> plan proposals for higher education are at advanced stages of finalization, it is high time that we undertake thorough stock taking and review of the higher education scenario in the country.

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 manifold and this in turn has improved access to higher

education and enrolment ratio has increased from less than 1 % in 1950 to about 10% in 2007.

Notwithstanding this progress, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) as I said earlier, is still not more than 10%, which compares poorly with 60% in USA and Canada, and over 40% in several developed European countries and more than 20% in many developing countries. International experience shows that no country could become an economically advanced country, if GER in higher education is less than 20% which on all accounts seems to be the threshold level of higher education to contribute to rapid and sustainable economic progress.

However mere access to higher education is by itself not enough for the purpose. Making quality education accessible is as important as the access to higher education. We must also ensure that the higher education system is able to provide, 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 described as average or below average. This is an extremely depressing situation to say the least.

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 baffling and beyond one's comprehension. One needs to ask why it is so despite India having a long tradition of English-based higher education in over 350 Universities and institutes at comparatively cost-effective prices. If our IITs and IIMs today have a global brand value, why shouldn't we be able groom to our 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 drawn there from are also followed in the field of higher general education. 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 spread of higher education was achieved through active state support whereby public funding was considered necessary in

order to provide equitable opportunities of higher education to all. It has, however, been a proclaimed policy of the country to also encourage private investment in higher education so long as they are driven by charitable and non-profit motives because although the Government has considerably increased spending on higher education, it is obvious that the need far outstrips the provision. 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 have no inhibition to allow private players to function in the country with a reasonable degree of autonomy and freedom for providing quality 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.

I hope that these and other relevant issues would be deliberated upon in this Conclave which could provide a necessary input to the policy framers in this regard. With these words, I wish the Conclave all success for having a meaningful discussion on the need and feasibility of reforms in the education sector so that it may have an effective impact on growth and development in our country.

Jai Hind

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## B-school News

### **ISB Hyderabad Holds Social Responsibility Conclave** **Post-event Press-release**

Students of the **Net Impact club** at the Indian School Business held their **Social Responsibility Conclave** on October 20, 2007. The theme of the discussion is both important as well as relevant and it revolved around the perspective on the scenario of education in India. India's literacy rate is being hampered due to problems such as ignorance, illiteracy and social inequalities.

Delivering the Introductory Speech was **Smt. D. Purandeswari**, Honourable Minister of State for Higher Education, who said that with the 21st century being a century of knowledge and with the world looking at China and India as great economic powers, education did not remain a goal by itself. Applying new ideas and technology to education would help it in creating a key.



**Smt. D. Purandeswari, Minister of State for Higher Education, Speaking at Social Responsibility Conclave at ISB**

She summarized the initiatives taken by the government, saying that these could help bring about a metamorphosis in the education system. "The government is committed to ensure universal education with *Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan*, that there is a school within every one kilometer radius," she said.

Stressing on the importance of education for the girl child, she said it was necessary to bring girls into mainstream education. Issues such as child labour and domestic labour are keeping children away from schools and the *Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan* is trying to bring education to these children with initiatives such as summer camps and bridge courses.