

Speech of Smt. D. Purandeswari, MoS(HRD-HE) at the meeting of
JSS, Prayas on 6th March, 2007.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the General Body of JSS, Prayas and other collaborators, I am have great pleasure in being with you to-day in the Prayas Juvenile Aid Centre (Society) which is a renowned national level organization functioning in close collaboration with various governmental and non-governmental organization and is deeply committed to cause of disabled and marginalized children, youth and women. The organization, aptly named as Prayas, as I understand, was established in 1988 when a devastating fire born out in Jahangirpuri, one of the biggest slums of Delhi. Beginning with just 25 children, the Prayas, I am told, has during the 19 years of existence, come a long-way and to-day it seeks to reach out across the country through its various growth-propelled projects which distinctly impact upon the quality of life of the weaker sections of the society. This is a very laudable achievement of the Prayas and I convey my sincere congratulations to the authorities and collaborators of the organization on their very successful and meaningful performance in the realm of social and economic welfare and the life of the community.

I observe from the background note on the Prayas that the organization that spread out to various field activities which has equipped it with self-confidence in dealing successfully with many challenging projects. Time constraint will not permit me to speak on all the various sectors and I would like to refer only to an important subject, namely vocational education and training.

The importance of vocational education in our scheme of education planning and management is too obvious to merit a detailed discussion. The University Education Commission headed by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan rightly recognized its importance. In chapter seven of its report the commission observed as follows:

Professional education is the process by which men and women prepare for exacting, responsible service in the professional spirit. The term may be restricted to preparation for fields requiring well informed and disciplined insight and skill of a high order. Less exacting preparation may be designated as vocational or technical education.

The Education Commission rightly advocated the introduction of work experience at all levels of education, primary, secondary and higher. Work experience means participation in productive processes, learning the dignity of manual labour, social and national service and community living. These indeed were the prime principles of Gandhiji's programme of basic education also that constitutes the first attempt in India to synthesize the dignity of manual work with the power of intellectual learning. The Commission was further of opinion that General education and vocational education should proceed together. And that the latter might begin as soon as a boy or a girl's some live interest in the field.

Secondary and higher secondary education are important terminal stages in the system of general education because it is at these points that options are exercised by the youth to enter the world of employment or to go for technical training or pursue higher education. Educationists and experts have consistently recommended that education at these stages should be given a vocational bias to link it

with the world of work. The Kothari Commission (1964-66) was of the view that for a majority of occupations, university degrees were not necessary; and these jobs could be competently performed by trained higher secondary students. This Commission felt that it should be possible to divert at least 50 per cent of students completing 10 year education to the vocational stream, reducing the pressure on the universities and also preparing students for gainful employment. Despite the priority accorded to this programme in the report of the Kothari Commission, the erstwhile National Policy on Education (1968) as well as in successive Five Year Plans, the implementation of the programme has remained weak. Many State Governments no doubt started vocational programmes but, because of inadequate resources, lack of proper management infrastructures, technical expertise and inadequate teacher preparation the results have not been commensurate with expectations.

This inadequacy was taken care of in the National Policy on Education, 1986 which accorded high priority. It opined that the introduction of systematic, well - planned and rigorously implemented programme of vocational education was crucial in the proposed educational reorganization and that vocational education should be a distinct stream intended to prepare students for identified vocations spanning several areas of activity.

A detailed framework of the programme of vocationalisation of education to be launched in the country was formulated in consultation with experts and discussed in the Conference of State Education Ministers held in April 1987, and a broad consensus was arrived at on various components of the Programme. In the Conference the State representatives were of the view that liberal financial

assistance by the Centre was necessary for implementation of this programme. Accordingly, it was proposed to commence a Centrally sponsored scheme of Vocationalisation of Secondary Education under which substantial financial assistance was to be provided to the State Governments for Implementation of this programme as envisaged in the NPE.

The Main objectives of the scheme of Vocationalisation of Secondary Education as spelt out in the NPE were to provide diversification of Educational opportunities so as to enhance individual employability, reduce the mismatch between demand and supply of skilled manpower and to provide an alternative for those pursuing higher education. Vocational Education will be a distinct stream was intended to prepare students for identified occupations spanning several areas of activity. These courses were to be provided in general education institutions after the secondary stage with flexible duration ranging from one to 3 years. The selection of institution and type of vocational courses would be expected to conform to the nationally recommended pattern.

It is estimated that as on to - day only around 7 per cent in the age group 18-24 are able to access higher education. Vocational –technical training is accessible only to around 5 per cent in formal institutional situations. No dynamic system ever hesitates to acknowledge the unpleasant realities that may have emanated from the implementation of its policies and programmes. So a resurgent India can ill - afford to neglect the levels of learner attainments in schools, the lack of training in vocational and technical skills, decline in quality at the level of higher education, inadequacy of institutions of higher education, in numbers and also in dynamism.

To sustain a high level of economic growth, it is essential to have a reservoir of skilled and trained manpower. Shortages have already emerged in a number of sectors. Moreover, we can take advantage of the demographic dividend thrown up by an increase in the working age population only if our young men and women have the required skills. The Prime Minister spoke of a Vocational Education Mission in his Independence Day address in 2006. A task force in the Planning Commission has been chalking out strategies for vocational education programmes. Alternate models may be adopted, but the approach may be based on public-private partnership. In the Budget for 2007-2008, the F.M. made an initial provision of Rs. 50 crore for beginning work on this mission.

It is also heartening that the Government has taken up a programme for upgradation of 500 ITIs over five years beginning 2005. Revised courses in the first lot of 100 upgraded ITIs were started in August 2005 and in the second lot of 100 upgraded ITIs in August 2006, and 1,396 ITIs are to be upgraded into centres of excellence in specific trades and skills under public-private partnership. Under the proposed scheme, as mentioned by the F.M. in his recent budget speech the State Government, as the owner of the ITI, would continue to regulate admissions and fees; the new management will be given academic and financial autonomy; and the Central Government would provide financial assistance by way of seed money. ITIs will be encouraged to start a second shift. Once a tripartite MoU is signed among the three stakeholders. At least 300 ITIs every year, beginning 2007-08, were proposed to be upgraded. A sum of Rs. 750 crore has been provided in the Budget 2007-2008 under the PPP mode.

CONCLUSION:

Half of the Indian population is below 24 years of age. There are around 120 million young persons in India in the age group of 17 to 22. Only 7 percent are in higher education. On the other side, it has been estimated that the IT sector would face a shortfall of half a million skilled workers in the next three years. The system, if allowed to remain as it is or permitted to drift as per past practices is incapable of sustaining the growth rate and bring about the much sought after “wider dissemination of the fruits of growth and development”. It is encouraging to note that this aspect is receiving attention from the captains of industry. They are realizing that they can no longer keep themselves aloof from the going-on in education, such as the basic inadequacies that have plagued the system for years and also the emerging need for a well educated, skilled, articulate and willing to learn workforce. The corporate sector needs to come in a big way at the center stage of vocational education. Education must come through the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values, drawing the best of head, hand and heart. India’s experience in imparting technical skills and the vocationalisation of education very clearly establishes that policy changes make no difference if adequate preparation and attitudinal response have not been put in place.

With these words, I hope that organizations like Prayas would come up in large numbers so that they are in a position to comprehend the future requirements and recommend suitable changes and modifications in the content and process of vocational education.

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