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Letter from the Bhavan's President

The Role and Responsibility of Education

R. Venkataraman

The educational system as it is currently structured should inherently carry the seeds of social change, not through force but through voluntary acceptance. Ideally, education provides us with a frame for action.

When looking at the relationship between education, the labour market and employment, the role and responsibility of education and training in the employment context must be defined carefully. Education is neither causing unemployment nor does it increase the overall level of employment.



Changes in educational policy cannot do very much to remedy

overall imbalances. The remedy for unemployment lies in the overall growth of the economy and not in the reform of education only. At the same time, however, education can facilitate smooth transition from learning to economic activity. There are three main issues in regard to a study of traditional educational systems and employment problems. Firstly,

education is a means through which non-apparent rural inequalities and unemployment manifest into visible and often audible signals and urban unemployment. So long as the process of education is influenced by urban-biased perspectives, considerations and instruments, it will be difficult to appreciate the role of education in rural development and of the benefits from education for the rural communities and groups. Secondly, the educational system aggravates the dysfunctions between levels and types of education on the one hand, and working-age population and labour absorption capacity of the economy on the other.

In fact, neither the type of education provided, nor the spirit prevailing within the existing educational systems, offer youth the means to find their way through the societies awaiting them after completion of their studies.

The situation is still more critical for those who have been left behind or are on the

periphery of the education system—who have abandoned or have been rejected by the system either due to societal handicaps or because the system was unable to offer them courses of study or educational experiences which would be meaningful and useful to them in their socio-cultural settings and in their field of economic activity. The type of education imparted should correspond to the societal tasks and economic roles to be played by the educated.

It is not enough to accumulate knowledge and store it. This could better be left to print or electronic media which are now available increasingly in centres of technological studies and research in humanities. What is imperative is that you should apply the theoretical knowledge to practical tasks.

Leadership in society means leadership to lead people into avenues of productive employment, whether it is in the field of self-generated venture or in established organizations. Our society suffers from a variety of

imbalances and inequalities. As you go forward in life, you must necessarily engage yourself in economic and social development which narrows down disparities and gradually assists society in raising its standards of behaviour and morality. Poverty has many faces but the worst is the poverty of ideas.

The diversity of our nation is an asset and, in no case, should it be regimented into set patterns of thinking. You must not impose any pre-conceived, pre-determined models on her. In arts, humanities and sciences, there is an infinite avenue for new experiments, but these experiments must be founded on ethical and moral principles and accepted universally as recognised truths of life.

Cultural regeneration does not imply cultural isolation. It implies that while each group will foster its own cultural forms and arts, it will try to learn from other cultures about the basic foundations of our national heritage and thereby inculcate values such as national unity and

integration, tolerance, harmony and a sense of togetherness in moulding a common destiny. This would undoubtedly, encourage nationalism and patriotism on the one hand and make community life meaningful and full of sweetness and light. When our social institutions grow in such an invigorating environment and processes like education derive their vitality and moorings consistent with societal tasks and relevance, we can look forward to the emergence of enlightened and enterprising individuals and of a vibrant and dynamic society.

Education is an endless process and we go on learning day after day in the vast laboratory of mankind. There is a dialectical relationship between the system of education today and of tomorrow. The educational system as it is currently structured should inherently carry the seeds of social change, not through force but through voluntary acceptance. Ideally, education provides us with a frame for

action. A great deal of thought is being bestowed on the reform of education particularly after our dynamic Prime Minister has come out strongly against the *status quo*.

Any movement for reform should have a goal and unless goals are defined mere permutation and combination of teaching systems will be passed off as reform. For instance, when I was a student in the secondary school, we had an eleven year school course, two year intermediate course and a two year degree course. When my children came to that stage, they had an eleven year school course, one year pre-university course and three year degree course. When my grand children are now going to school, they have a 10+2 secondary education and a three year degree course.

These additions and subtractions have not made the children wiser merely by the change in the years at each stage. If anything, these constant changes have just left the students very much where they

were without any qualitative improvement in education. The foremost goal of any education is the inculcation of noble qualities like patriotism, devotion to duty, national integration, communal harmony and virtues like honesty, punctuality, discipline and so on. No nation however advanced in military power or in sophisticated science and technology will survive as a nation if it has no basic qualities and virtues detailed earlier.

The best time to educate one on these qualities is in the kindergarten and primary stages. Children should be taught the glory of India, its heritage and its ancient culture. When some of the most advanced countries in the world were either not discovered or living in comparative barbarity, Indian civilization had spread throughout Asia and other regions of the world. Every Indian child should know this even before it learns the alphabets and arithmetic. Instead of the present text books

which teach A for Apple, B for Bat and C for Cat, new text books should teach A for Allah, B for Buddha and C for Christ and so on bringing out the unity of religions. Virtues like discipline and punctuality inculcated in the early childhood will remain ever as part of the human system.

The Central Government should draw up a syllabus for human development and insist that at least one period each day in the primary school curriculum should be devoted to moral development. In my view, no educational reform that neglects character building at the impressionable age will bring any results. Secondly, the concept that higher education is a passport to employment should be demolished. When in the middle ages scholars went to Oxford and Cambridge and the great seats of learning in Europe, they did so to seek knowledge and not employment. Since the

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British wanted scribes to fill their administration they used the universities as recruiting agencies for their subordinate services. If we make recruitment to each service on the basis of a test of the qualities required for that class of service and not on the basis of the academic qualification, the rush for university education of students totally unsuited to pursue higher education will abate. Thus, job selection should be based on the job needs and not on academic qualifications.

We have today, recruiting agencies for each and every kind of service and if those agencies hold tests without insisting on a pre-requisite academic degree, the indiscriminate rush for

university education may be contained. In this connection, I should like to repeat that students in the universities should have the freedom to study any combination of subjects like economics, psychology, mathematics, political science etc. instead of taking a rigid combination of pre-determined subjects in science group or in the arts group. Now that the semester system has been adopted in our country, it should

be easy to follow the western pattern of education which requires only a certain number of credits in subjects of the students' choice. Under our pattern, a genius in mathematics may not even obtain a degree if he does not make good in the other combination of subjects. Such freedom of choice will help students to develop their faculties to the fullest extent. New Universities may give this experiment a trial.

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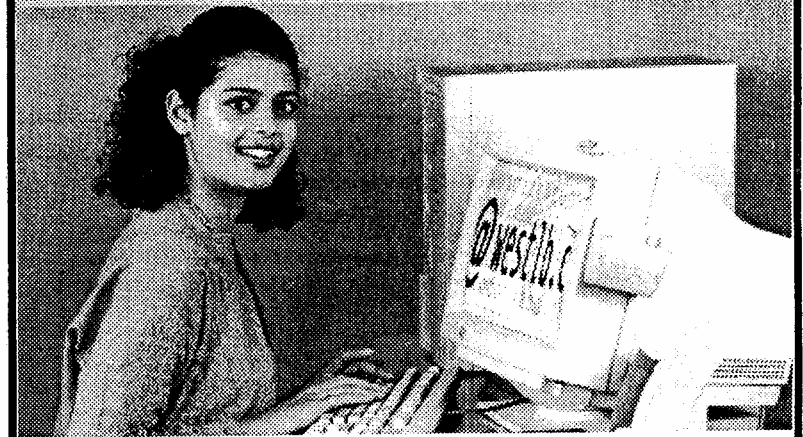
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