

THE ELITE CHARACTER OF INDIAN EDUCATION

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Your editorial (UT, 15 April) and the historic Supreme Court Judgement (27 April) to regulate the fees in Delhi Public Schools motivated me to express myself on the elite character of Indian education. Indian education policy has been lop-sided and it failed to deliver the goods as envisaged in our constitution. We failed to achieve 100 per cent literacy rate even after 57 years of our independence. Ignoring merit in academics, we have provided 50 per cent reservation in admissions at all levels in general and professional courses and then in jobs to appease a few categories of Indian citizens, which is nothing but a slur on our education system. The commercialization and globalization of Indian education has added a new dimension and strengthened the foundation for the elite character of Indian education further. Earlier, it was the IAS lobby which provided a fillip to the elite character but now our IIT and IIM professionals are proving to be trend-setters. I am really amused to read the contents of the paper prepared by the faculty of IIM, Ahmedabad (UT, 15 April) in defence of high tuition fees and autonomy.

It is for the first time in the history of Indian education that students of an Institution are fighting a case in the apex court of India against the reduction of annual tuition fees. Normally, they always agitate against the fee hikes in educational institutions. This smacks of a deep-rooted conspiracy in favour of elite

character of management education in India. I fully agree with your editorial comments : "The real effect of the fee reduction will be felt down the line by the private shops who are making a mega buck. The whole show is just to protect the private profits. It is only to allow money sharks to continue in higher education and more especially management and technical education to reap a rich harvest of profits". The position paper vehemently opposes the fee reduction idea of Murli Manohar Joshi on the plea that it interferes with the autonomy of IIMs. Just read the arguments in the paper : "Fees at IIM-A are highly affordable. In cases, where the students cannot afford the fees, the institute steps in to give scholarships. There is no economic rationale for subsidizing MBA education."

Let us come to the ground realities of Indian education system and its impact on the elite character of Indian society. The British Government created elite institutions, called public schools, for the education of Indian princes and recruitment of civil servants. We continued the British legacy on the war footing by opening Army public schools, a chain of private public schools on hill stations for the wards of neo-rich Indians and now commercialization of higher education allowed by UGC and AICTE at all levels. Who are the key players? I confine my discussion to the state of Punjab only.

Till 1950, we had only one Yadvindra public school at Patiala for the wards of rich aristocracy of Punjab. Doon School, Dehradun and Mayo College, Ajmer also attracted rich Punjabi boys for elite education. Most of the pass outs opted for a career in the Indian army. After the Green Revolution in Punjab, the Sikh landlords became rich and the Christian missionaries opened

public schools in all big towns of Punjab offering English-medium education. This craze for public school education created a rift in Punjabi society as educating children in english-medium schools became a status symbol. During 1990's, the network of public schools spread to the village level and the key players are NRIs, Industrialists, Sant Babas, Religious Societies like Chief Khalsa Diwan and some 'benami' bureaucrats who have means to amass wealth by corrupt practices. I know of a rich landlord who invested a few crores in industry but failed. He joined hands with some bureaucrats and commission agents of Chandigarh and opened a chain of professional colleges around the 'City Beautiful'. He claims to have made huge profits in a few years. The profits were used to open a chain of hospitals and nursing homes in Punjab. This is what the Editor UT calls 'money sharks' being promoted by IIM culture.

Currently, it is a joke in Punjabi : "You can send your ward to a professional college, if you have the capacity to pay whatever the merit of the candidate be. Admission to B.Tech is easier than admission to B.A. in social sciences." The collapse of Punjab Technical University was due to wholesale commercialization of technical education. It has yet to recover from the aftershocks of the corrupt political regime prevailing at that time. It is no wonder that academic Vice Chancellors almost failed to survive in the universities of Punjab but those who ruled the roost have been great manipulators of men and materials. To overcome the financial crunch, the paid seats are sold to NRIs at exorbitant rates and some of the VCs enjoyed foreign jaunts also financed by NRI lobby.

I also wonder at the logic of proposed linear relationship between fees and academic excellence at IIMs. Education was free in Europe when I entered the University of Paris in 1970. Even food was subsidised in the University hostels. As a consequence, most of the foreign workers joined French classes to have free access to subsidised food and lodging facilities in the University. I could

survive on a scholarship of Rs. 500 per month in Paris as there was no tuition fee! Leaving aside USA, Indian education is as costly as anywhere in Europe, rather it is more costly according to my own survey. University of Abertay, Dundee in Scotland (considered among the top ten in UK), charges a tuition fee of Rs. 5.5 lakh per annum for MBA degree of one year duration, which is almost half the tuition fee charged by Indian School of Business (11.8 lakhs).

Let the IIM faculty/management respond to my queries; and let them score the point, if any :

- (i) How many scholarships are disbursed to poor students joining the IIMs annually?
- (ii) What is the average per capita income of IIM sponsored candidates, i.e. parents supporting their wards?
- (iii) What is the research output of IIM faculty?
- (iv) How many patents/innovations have been registered by IIM faculty at national / international level?
- (v) How the cost per capita for training in IIM is more than a science post graduate in India?
- (vi) What is the student- teacher ratio in IIMs?
- (vii) What is the 'corpus fund' generated in IIMs and how is it being utilized?
- (viii) Do we need more high profile managers or trained scientists in India?
- (ix) If outsourcing of jobs by MNCs is stopped, what will be future scope of IIM products and worth of pay packets?
- (x) It is a known fact that our IIT professionals failed to contribute to Indian industry. What is the impact of IIM graduates on the Indian scenario?