

ACCESS AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION

- Dr. gururaj Karajagi,

Chairman, Academy for Creative Teaching, R.T.Nagar, Bangalore – 560032

ABSTRACT

Education is the most potent instrument of social change and transformation. Education is the foundation for a vibrant democracy in which informed citizens exercise their franchise to support the internal growth of the nation and its constructive role in the world community. It is the foundation for growth in productivity, incomes and employment opportunities and for the development, application and adaptation of science and technology to enhance the quality of life. Education is the foundation for access to the benefits of the information revolution that is opening up vistas on the whole world. Education is also the foundation for improved health care and nutrition. Success in raising literacy rates and school enrolment rates while reducing drop-out rates, especially for women are closely correlated with the delayed onset of marriage and child birth, improved mortality for both mothers and children, and reduction in family size. In fact, a successful education policy forms the bedrock of all fields of national development—political, economic, technical, scientific, social, and environmental.

The first step in the process of change and transformation is to provide access to education to everyone. Providing access is a challenge that society has been facing for many centuries. Still A large number of our young men and women are deprived of this basic need. The very recent survey monitored by UNESCO on 'Education for All' in March 2008 is an eye opener for the statesmen and policy makers of educational system in India.

The global monitoring report 2008 on 'Education for All' by the UN body speaks highly on the grim educational affairs of children belonging to the remote and disadvantaged areas of the country.

Besides the launch of national flagship programme like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), India has missed its 2005 target of achieving gender parity and as per the report will miss the target of 2015 for attaining total literacy.

The next stage in the process is to provide equity. Equity does not truly mean equality. It is a way of providing that specific kind of knowledge that brings out the best in the person and realizes her potential. In the present scenario it appears distant. The equity has to cross the barriers of gender, economic, social, cultural, linguistic and regional discriminations. The 1990 Jomtien Declaration of the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) commenced its preamble by highlighting the failure to achieve access and equity in education:

More than 40 years ago, the nations of the world, speaking through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, asserted that "everyone has a right to education." Despite notable efforts by countries around the globe to ensure the right to education for all, the following realities persist:

- ❖ Over 100 million children, including at least 60 million girls, have no access to primary schooling;*
- ❖ Over 960 million adults, two thirds of whom are women, are illiterate, and functional illiteracy is a significant problem in all countries, industrialized and developing;*
- ❖ Over one third of the world's adults have no access to the printed knowledge, new skills, and technologies that could improve the quality of their lives and help them shape, and adapt to, social and cultural change; and*
- ❖ Over 100 million children and countless adults fail to complete basic education programs; millions more satisfy the attendance requirements but do not acquire essential knowledge and skills. At the same time, the world faces daunting problems: mounting debt burdens, the threat of economic stagnation and decline, rapid population growth, widening economic disparities among and within nations, war, civil strife, violent crime, the preventable deaths of millions of children, and environmental degradation. These problems constrain efforts to meet basic learning needs. The lack of basic education among a significant proportion of the population prevents societies from addressing such problems with strength and purpose.*

The third and the most important stage of growth is to provide quality education. Quality is like beauty. It cannot be defined but it can be identified when one looks at it. The concern expressed by many scholars all over the world is that in the name of standardizing education are we making it insensitive to the cultural contexts. When one visits the University campuses all over the world she is struck by the similarities that they present be it in the dress of the students, design of huge cement buildings, food habits on the campus and the all pervasive technology. They almost look identical. Does this uniformity take away the ethos and Value systems characteristic of the land?

All these issues of access, equity and quality are inextricably interwoven are connected with Values that we wish to propagate. There has been a yawning gap between what we speak and what we practice. The education that desires to provide access, equity and quality has to be transformative rather than informative. And this should start with the training of the teacher, who is at the very centre of this process of education.
