

Educational Standard Under Scrutiny

Since the World Bank provides monetary assistance to our education, it must be interested to know how that money is being used and to what result. For long the standard of our higher education has become a cause for concern and hardly any attempt from any quarter has been noticeable to improve the situation. Both academic and non-academic reasons — the latter dominating the former most of the time — have been responsible for a gradual decline in our higher education. The contribution of primary and secondary levels cannot also be ignored, for the rot actually began at the earlier stages of our education and the tertiary level receives what the primary and secondary levels of education produce.

The World Bank has in principle declined to finance our higher education because of its poor standard. Does it also propose to stop financing our primary and secondary education? If it goes by the same token, it should. One may have a hundred and one reasons to withdraw funds but to say that a declining standard has prompted the move is far from the truth. In fact, in a crisis situation? like this any country's education actually needs more investment and an appropriate policy to follow. Look at the WB's prescription. Its recipe is to involve NGOs in higher education. What business do the NGOs have to improve the standard of education?

We appreciate the effort of these aid-dependent organisations in the area of mass literacy and non-formal education. But this is no alternative to mainstream and formal education. To reach a poor and distant segment of our population, they have devised a noteworthy formula. A special situation or emergency demands a special solution. In the literacy movement, such measures were needed and they provided those measures to good effect. This does not mean they can do the same in case of higher education.

We have already seen how education has become a highly priced commodity at the hands of private entrepreneurs. If this is what the WB has in mind to turn our higher education into, we are afraid it has prescribed euthanasia for the patient. The right to education is violated in our society that is full of inequality. What is surprising is that the WB is silent over a much-needed reform of our education system. Instead of making higher education a prerogative of the rich only, it should be made an inalienable right for the truly deserving and meritorious students. The upgrading of our higher education is a must. But at the same time we must admit that higher education in its general form must be limited. Instead, we need to widen the scope for vocational and technical education based on knowledge. We need to build up a technological and technical base of education and to do that we need money. The WB has not found any merit in such an effort. Shrinkage of higher education is welcome in exchange for an alternative that produces self-employed graduates or skilled hands for whom there is demand in the employment market. The WB could do well to suggest such an alternative and a reform for our education, particularly at the secondary and higher secondary levels.