

# Unit 23

## Education: Social Commitment vs. Commodification

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### Learning Objectives

This unit deals with dichotomy between social commitment for and commodification of education. After reading this unit you should be able to:

- explain the various commitments made for the educational well being of the community by the state in India;
- examine the social commitment for the expansion of education by various international bodies and the conventions;
- analyze the emerging facets of commodification of education across the globe; and
- discuss the dichotomy between the social commitment for education and its commodification.

### 23.1 Introduction

Every society expresses its own commitment for the social development of diverse sections of the population through diverse means. These commitments are to be implemented through various institutionalized means. Education is one of the important means for the community, well-being and effective tool for social development. The Indian State has expressed its concern for educational well being and has framed various strategies towards this endeavour. Various international organizations have also expressed their commitment for educational well being of society and have directed member states to initiate actions to fulfill these commitments. This unit aims to highlight various commitments made for the educational well being of society both by the nation state and international communities. It begins with an overview of the constitutional and legal commitments made for educational development in India. It also looks into the various recommendations made by several important committees and commissions for education.

All heads of the State of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) have committed themselves to make education a tool for empowerment of the marginalized in the World Development Summit, 1995. They have also committed themselves for "Education For All". The Dakar Commitment (2000) has made it very explicit. The Millennium Development Goal of the UNO has pledged to eradicate illiteracy by 2015. Most of the member states of UNO have also signed General Agreements on Trade in Services (GATS) of WTO. This has paved the way for commodification of education by designating education as a tradable service. This unit also discusses the diverse facets of commodification of education and its implication

on the social commitments made by the State and international communities for the educational well being of the society.

## 23.2 Social Commitment for Education: Dimensions

Education plays the central role towards economic development, technological advancement, effective social and political participation of people by paving the way for human resource development, upward social mobility and collective conscientisation of society. Education as an enabling mechanism is a corollary to the processes of empowerment and an important component of power. As an emancipatory force, it has always been recognized as a means to improve personal and collective endowment and capacity, enhance human capital, and expand the bases of opportunities and choices of individuals and groups. The National Human Development Report of India (2001) recognizes that education “is not only a means to enhance human capital and productivity but also a critical invasive instrument for bringing about social, economic and political inclusion and a durable integration of people, particularly those excluded from the mainstream of society”(GOI 2001:48). Hence, according to UNESCO “The right to education is a fundamental human right. It occupies a central place in Human Rights and is essential and indispensable for the exercise of all other human rights and for development. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized, adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty, and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities” (UNESCO, 2006).

However, due to several social, economic and historical reasons all sections of population have not got equal access to education. Even among the literate or educated sections only a few have got access to higher, professional and technical avenues of learning. Consequently these vast sections of the population have remained deprived of the avenues and processes of human development and capacity building for upward social mobility. The state and the society have also remained deprived of the human potentials of these sections of society. Inequality in access to education has been historically rooted and socio-culturally circumscribed. In India, for example, traditionally only the upper castes have had access to education and the lower castes and the indigenous people were deprived of access to education at all levels. Such situations are available in many other parts of the world as well. For example, in the North American countries the Blacks and the indigenous people lag behind in their educational achievements.

It has long been realized and recognized that lack of education and unequal access to education has emerged to be a potential cause of socio-economic backwardness, poverty, ill-health and all forms of human deprivation. Since the significance of and disparities in access to education have widely been recognized, there have been several commitments to enhance access to education both by the state, international bodies and the civil society organization. Most of these commitments aim to:

- recognize education as the cornerstone of social and human development,
- enhance access to education to all sections of population,
- arrange special provisions for ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities,
- provide special attention for children, women and other vulnerable sections of society,
- arrange adequate resources for expansion of education,
- save education as a tool for national integration,
- use education as a tool for mainstreaming marginalized.

Let us now focus on the commitment to education specifically made in India through the constitutional and legal arrangements.

Why providing education to all shall be considered by the state as a social commitment to its people?

### **23.3 Constitutional and Legal Framework for Educational Development in India**

India has recognized education not only as a tool for social and economic development, but also a force for social revitalization of human resources for all sections of the population. In the post independence period India has committed itself to the educational well being of all the segments of the society and has made several constitutional provisions towards this endeavour. The Constitution of India outlines general principles for guiding and governing educational development in the country. These provisions have tried to ensure educational interests especially of children, weaker sections and women, religious minorities, linguistic groups etc. The government of India has also appointed several committees and commissions towards these endeavours. Let us briefly explain the constitutional provisions first.

#### **Constitutional Provisions**

- Article 45 of the Constitution enjoins that the State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of 10 years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years. This constitutional obligation has been time and again deferred to 1970, 1980, 1990 and then to 2000. The Approach to the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) has set the target of all children completing five years of schooling by 2007.
- Article 29(1) provides that any section of the citizens, residing in the territory of India and any part thereof, having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.
- Article 29(2) lays down that no citizen shall be denied admission to any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.
- Article 31 enjoins that all minorities, whether based on religion or language shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- Article 32 lays down that the State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.
- Under Article 46 the State is obliged to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and, in particular, of the Schedules Castes and the Schedules Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (National Human Development Report 2001: 59).

#### **Committees and Commissions: Overview of Social Commitments**

The Government of India has appointed several commissions and committees on education from time to time. All of these committees have invariably suggested measures to improve the state of literacy and education among the marginalised sections of society. In pursuance of the National Policy on Education 1986, several schemes are made for the (a) abolition of tuition fee in government school at the primary and the secondary levels, (b) reservation of seats in higher education including IIT, IIM etc., (c) relaxation of cut points for admission

in the IITs, (d) special coaching (e) linguistic developments etc for the Scheduled castes and the Scheduled Tribes students. Several programmes have also been launched for the minorities. For example, (a) Area Intensive Programme for the Educationally Backward Minorities, (b) schemes for financial assistance for modernization of *Madrasas* etc. The Programme of Action (1992) of this education policy has suggested various proactive measures to be initiated for women, Scheduled castes, Scheduled Tribes, educational minorities, and the physically handicapped.

**Box 23.1 : Higher Education as a social commitment**

Higher education has always been assigned a special role to promote the cause of nation building, economic prosperity, expanding the base of highly trained manpower in the country. Several commissions and committees were set up over the last five decades to analyze and recommend the changing need of higher education in India. According to the Radha Krishnan Commission (1947) higher education in Indian society has to be committed to promote the 'social purpose we profess to serve', 'to produce community values and ideas', 'to promote human well-being, faith in reasons and humanity, democracy, justice, fraternity', 'to promote professional education to satisfy the occupational need of the society' (Radhakrishnan Commission 1947) The Education Committee on Higher Education emphasized that higher education should aim 'to promote self-reliance', 'economic growth, employment', 'vocationalisation through scientific and technical education' and to promote 'social and national integration' (Education Committee 1966). The Education Commission of 1966 widely known as the Kothari Commission viewed the role of education in India from a wider perspective. According to this Commission education in India must seek 'to seek and cultivate new knowledge', 'to provide leadership to help individuals to develop their potential', 'to promote social justice, 'to bring the individual closer to the community' (Education Commission 1966).

The National Policy on Education 1986 committed itself to enhance equity and relevance of education and also to make education a tool to enhance the pace of social change in India. It laid special emphasis on the removal of disparities and to equalise educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far. Let us highlight some of the important commitments this policy has made for women, SC, ST, religious minorities, physically handicapped and others.

- i) **Education for Women's Equality:** Regarding women's education, educationist say "education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of woman. In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions.
- ii) **The Education of Scheduled Castes:** The central focus in the SCs' educational development is their equalization with the non-SC population at all Stages and levels of education. The measures contemplated for this purpose include:
  - Incentives to indigent families to send their children to school regularly till they reach the age of 14;
  - Pre-matric scholarship scheme for children of families engaged in occupations such as scavenging, flaying and tanning to be made applicable from Class onwards;

- Constant micro-planning and verification to ensure the enrolment, retention and successful completion of courses by SC students;
  - Recruitment of teachers from Scheduled Castes;
  - Provision of facilities for SC students in students' hostels at district headquarters, according to a phased programme etc.”
- iii) **The Education of Scheduled Tribes:** The following measures will be taken urgently to bring the Scheduled Tribes on par with others.
- Priority will be accorded to opening primary schools in tribal areas.
  - The socio-cultural milieu of the STs has its distinctive characteristics including, in many cases, their own spoken languages.
  - Educated and promising Scheduled Tribe youths will be encouraged and trained to take up teaching in tribal areas.
  - Residential schools, including Ashram Schools, will be established on a large scale.
  - Incentive schemes will be formulated for the Scheduled Tribes, keeping in view their special needs and life styles.
  - The curriculum at all stages of education will be designed to create an awareness of the rich cultural identity of the tribal people as also of their enormous creative talent.
- iv) **Minorities:** Greater attention will be paid to the education of these groups in the interests of equality and social justice. This will naturally include the constitutional guarantees given to them to establish and administer their own educational institutions, and protection to their languages and culture.
- v) **The Handicapped:** The objective should be to integrate the physically and mentally handicapped with the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence.

In Indian national perception education is essentially for all and the state has a moral commitment to make education accessible to all. This is fundamental to our all-round development. The country paper of the government of India presented at the UNESCO conference on Higher Education, Paris (1998) suggests that 'there is a need to place greater emphasis on enrolment of students from underprivileged backgrounds such as the rural areas, the Scheduled Castes and tribes and other backward groups, minorities, the disabled and others who have suffered from discrimination which has existed for centuries. Hence, special attention has to be given to all these groups through various strategies to be adopted in the university system, especially for access to the system and qualitative development of performance (Govt. of India: 1998).

Notwithstanding such commitment a vast section of Indian population has not got access to education. They have mostly remained illiterate. These sections of the population mostly belong to the categories Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women, and the rural population. You must have realized that literacy rate in India has remained quite low. As per 2001 census the overall literacy rate is 65.2%, male 76%, female 54%, rural 59%, urban 80%, Scheduled Caste 37%, Scheduled Tribes 29%.

Hence besides adhering to several constitutional commitments, the Indian state has also been a partner of several commitments made by important international bodies collectively. Let us examine India's commitment to 'education for all' which is a global commitment.

## 23.4 India's Commitment to Education for All

Since the 1990s the commitment of the world communities towards the educational well-being of the society have been very explicit. This has widely been reflected in the formulation of a global view on "Educational for All", that emerged out of a World Conference on Education for All in 1990 whereby representatives from 155 countries and 150 civil society organization made World Declaration on Education for All pledging to provide education to all segments of population. In this conference at Jomtien, Thailand it was highlighted that children, youth and adult would benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning need; and that education would be flexible, tailor-made, adapted to the needs, culture and circumstances of learners.

In view of the above objective India has formulated an elaborate plan of action in achieving goals of the 'educational for all' specifically to increase the access, retention, achievement and monitoring of education. So far as the access is concerned the government of India has committed itself to ensure universal enrolment of all children, including girls and persons belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. To improve the extent of retention it has committed to the reduction of dropout rates between Classes I to V and I to VIII to 20 and 40 per cent respectively; and for the improvement of school facilities by revamping Operation Blackboard programme upto the upper primary level also. The state has also committed to achieve the minimum levels of learning by approximately all children at the primary level, and to introduce of this concept at the middle stage on a large scale. For the purpose of monitoring it has formed the local level committee, with due representation to women and teachers, to assist in the working of primary education to oversee its functioning; and improvement of the monitoring system for universalisation of elementary education (MHRD 1995 Govt. of India).

In India the programme of education for all has taken the form of a social movement. Several missions are attached to this movement. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is an integral part of this movement towards achieving the long cherished goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) through a time bound integrated approach, in partnership with State governments. SSA, which promises to provide useful and quality elementary education to all children in the 6 -14 age group by 2010, and to provide community owned quality elementary education in mission mode. It also envisages bridging of gender and social gaps. The main objectives of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan are as follows:

- All children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007;
- All children complete eight years of schooling by 2010;
- Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life;
- Bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education level by 2010;
- Universal retention by 2010 (Govt. of India 2006)

It has been categorically noted that education of girls, especially those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, will be one of the principal concerns of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. There will be a focus on the educational participation of children from SC/ST, religious and linguistic minorities disadvantaged groups and the disabled children (Govt. of India 2006). To know more about the SSA you are advised to refer to the unit on Elementary Education.

### Reflection and Action 23.2

Discuss the strategies adopted by Indian government to fulfill its commitment towards "Education for All"

## 23.5 International Commitment for Educational Well being

The international communities have committed themselves to espouse the cause of educational well being of humanity. Let us explain the nature of these commitments as expressed in the Social Development Summit 1995, Dakar Declaration 2000, and in the Millennium Development Goal 2001.

### The Social Development Summit: Commitment for Education

In 1995 all heads of the states of United Nations Organization met in Copenhagen over the World Summit for Social Development and committed themselves to empower the people to maximize their capacities, resources and opportunities. In the wake of globalisation and initiation of new structural Adjustment Programmes they expressed their commitment to eradicate poverty, promote employment, social integration, human dignity and universal and equitable access to quality education. As indicated, in this Summit all the heads of the states committed themselves to ensure all the tools which are essential for effective human development. As education is one of the vital components of social development, their commitment to education was rather very elaborate. Let us depict in length the commitment the Social Development Summit on education.

The Summit declared: "We commit ourselves to promoting and attaining the goals of universal and equitable access to quality education, without distinction as to race, national origin, gender, age or disability". As a strategy the Summit committed that "at the national level, we will:

- a) Formulate and strengthen time bound national strategies for the eradication of illiteracy and universalization of basic education;
- b) Emphasize lifelong learning by seeking to improve the quality of education to ensure that people of all ages are provided with useful knowledge reasoning ability, skills and ethical and social values required to develop their full capacities;
- c) Ensure that children, particularly girls, enjoy their rights and promote the exercise of those rights by making education, adequate nutrition and health care accessible to them, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- d) Take appropriate and affirmative steps to enable all children and adolescents to attend and complete school and to close the gender gap in primary, secondary, vocational and higher education;
- e) Ensure full and equal access to education for girls and women, recognizing that investing in women's education is the key element in achieving social equality, higher productivity and social returns in terms of health, lower infant mortality and the reduced need for high fertility;
- f) Ensure equal educational opportunities at all levels for children, youth and adults with disabilities, in integrated settings, taking full account of individual differences and situations;
- g) Recognize and support the right of indigenous people to education in a manner that is responsive to their specific needs, aspirations and cultures, and ensure their full access to health care;
- h) Develop specific educational policies, with gender perspective;

- i) Strengthen the links between labour market and education policies, realizing that education and vocational training are vital elements in job creation and in combating unemployment and social exclusion in our societies, and emphasize the role of higher education and scientific research in all plans of social development;
- j) Develop broad-based education programmes that promote and strengthen respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- k) Focus on learning acquisition and outcome, broaden the means and scope of basic education, enhance the environment for learning and strengthen partnerships among Governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, local communities, religious groups and families to achieve the goal of education for all;
- l) Establish or strengthen both school-based and community-based health education programmes for children;
- m) Expedite efforts to achieve the goals of national health-for-all strategies, based on equality and social justice in line with the Declaration on Primary Health Care;
- n) Promote, in all educational and health policies and programmes, environmental awareness, including awareness of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.”

At the international level, the heads of the states committed to

- “Ensure that international organizations, in particular the international financial institutions, support these objectives, integrating them into their policy programmes and operations as appropriate.
- Strengthen intergovernmental organizations that utilize various forms of education to promote culture; disseminate information through education and communication media; help spread the use of technologies; and promote technical and professional training and scientific research.
- Intensify and coordinate international support for education and health programmes based on respect for human dignity (UNDP 1995).

#### **Dakar Commitment**

The collective commitment for education achieved a new dimension in Dakar, Senegal in 2000. The Dakar framework for action entitled: *Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitment* stipulated clearly that “Governments have an obligation to ensure that EFA goals and targets are reached and sustained. This is a responsibility that will be met most effectively through broad-based partnerships within countries, supported by cooperation with regional and international agencies and institutions.”

The representative of Governments accepted ‘Education as a fundamental human right’ and collectively committed themselves to the attainment of the following goals:

- a) expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
- b) ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
- c) ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;
- d) achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;

- e) eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;
- f) improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills."

To achieve these goals, the governments, organizations, agencies, groups and associations represented at the World Education Forum pledged themselves to:

- a) mobilize strong national and international political commitment for education for all, develop national action plans and enhance significantly investment in basic education;
- b) promote EFA policies within a sustainable and well-integrated sector framework clearly linked to poverty elimination and development strategies;
- c) ensure the engagement and participation of civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies for educational development;
- d) develop responsive, participatory and accountable systems of educational governance and management;
- e) meet the needs of education systems affected by conflict, national calamities and instability and conduct educational programmes in ways that promote mutual understanding, peace and tolerance, and help to prevent violence and conflict;
- f) implement integrated strategies for gender equality in education which recognize the need for changes in attitudes, values and practices;
- g) implement as a matter of urgency education programmes and actions to combat the HIV/AIDS;
- h) create safe, healthy, inclusive and equitably resourced educational environments conducive to excellence in learning with clearly defined levels of achievement for all;
- i) enhance the status, morale and professionalism of teachers;
- j) harness new information and communication technologies to help achieve EFA goals;
- k) systematically monitor progress towards EFA goals and strategies at the national, regional and international levels; and
- l) build on existing mechanisms to accelerate progress towards education for all.

The Dakar commitment also emphasized our need of political will for the effective and successful implementation of the above strategies. It also affirmed that no countries seriously committed to 'education for all' would be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources. (UNESCO:2001). Towards this endeavour there would be concerted efforts for

- i) increasing external finance for education, in particular basic education;
- ii) ensuring greater predictability in the flow of external assistance;
- iii) facilitating more effective donor coordination;
- iv) strengthening sector-wide approaches;
- v) providing earlier, more extensive and broader debt relief and/or debt cancellation for poverty reduction, with a strong commitment to basic education; and

- vi) undertaking more effective and regular monitoring of progress towards EFA goals and targets, including periodic assessments (UNESCO 2001).

### Education in the Millennium Development Goal

The United Nation has articulated the Millennium Development goal. In its goal No.2 it talks about education: To achieve Universal Primary Education by 2015, it aims to ensure that “by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education.” The UNO recognized that better education is fundamental to the prospects for economic and social development and poverty eradication.

#### Reflection and Action 23.3

Discuss the various features of commitment for education as expressed in the Social Development Summit 1995. Also compare Social Development Summit’s commitment for education with those of the Dakar’s Commitment

All through these declarations and the goals the international communities have committed themselves for the educational well being of all sections of population irrespective of age, sex, caste, ethnicity, religious, language. They have also committed themselves to eradicate the problem of finance that may come in the way of ensuring the process of access to education by all sections of population. Several strategies are indicated towards these endeavours.

In the fast changing globalised world most of the nations’ economics are getting transformed into knowledge economy. In knowledge economy knowledge as an economic capital has acquired a commodity value. No knowledge economy can prosper without elaborate educational arrangement for that society. Against this backdrop, social commitment for educational well being is but a prerequisite for survival of the present state of a country’s economy, its transformation and integration with knowledge economy, with the process of globalisation and contemporary economic order.

Different segments of the population are having different educational needs. National and international communities have committed for the expansion of education at all levels (primary, secondary & tertiary), of all types (professional, vocational, liberal arts, science), at all stages of life (lifelong learning) and through all means (conventional, ICT based on line/web based etc.). This leads to more and more need of knowledge and education and thereby its commodification. Hence besides social commitment, commodification has become another aspect of education in the contemporary world. Education is not only a basic human right for the full expression of human potential; it is also a tradable service, a capital that can be sold and purchased in the market. Marketisation, privatization and commodification of education are considered important aspects of these endeavours. Thus in the social commitment for education, the significance of market forces are underlined. For example, the Social Development Summit highlights the significance of the linkages between the education and labour market. In the next section of this unit, we shall be discussing the issues of commodification of education.

### 23.6 Commodification of Education

In the previous two units of this block we have discussed the issues of privatization and trade in education through the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) of the WTO. We have also discussed the emerging socio-economic contexts of globalisation, proliferation of information and communication technologies, emergence of knowledge economy, which have in one way or the other contributed towards commodification of education.

In the era of globalisation, social commitment for education cannot be seen only as the commitment of the state and to be fulfilled by the state alone. The intervention of the international agencies, civil societies, and that of the private players in education are to be taken into consideration as a social reality. Simultaneously the revolution in the information and communication technologies has made a tremendous impact on education. In this complex situation the state should not remain a passive observer to the market take over of education. Rather, the state should commit itself to provide quality education not only through the conventional means as and where absolutely necessary, but also through all advanced means to match the knowledge requirement of society, hence there is a need to reformulate the educational policy in India.

### Emerging Thrust of Educational Reforms

Societies in India are undergoing rapid process of social transformation specifically caused by planned development of the economy and industrialization in the 1950s, the Green Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1990s and penetration of ICTs in 1990s and thereafter. In response to these transformations education needs to meet the emerging requirements of the society. Against this backdrop, educational reform has been a serious concern in India. The committees and commissions on education (e.g. Radhakrishnan Commission on Higher Education (1948-49), Laxamaswamy Mudaliyar Committee on Secondary Education (1952-53), the Kothari Commission (1964-66), National Policy on Education (1986) etc.) have made significant recommendation pertaining to universalisation of elementary education, vocationalisation of secondary education and to strengthen higher education. However, most of these goals were not achieved due to the slow and haphazard and half-hearted implementation of the plan of action, decline in the allocation of resources to higher education, inadequate infrastructure and lack of coordination among various bodies.

### The Policy Framework for Educational Reforms in India: A Guide to Commodification

In the wake of implementation of the structural Adjustment Programme, proliferation of ICT based knowledge economy in India, the government appointed a committee to suggest a framework for educational reforms in India. *The Policy Framework for Reforms in Education* known as *Ambani-Birla Report* highlights some of the crucial state of education in India. This report initially recognizes that education has become even more vital in the new world of information. "Knowledge is rapidly replacing raw materials and labour as the most critical input for survival and success. Knowledge has become the new asset. More than half of GDP in the major OECD countries is now knowledge based. About two thirds of the future growth of world GDP is expected to come from knowledge led businesses." According to this report India's education system is highly skewed. Her literacy rates are not only low, but also highly skewed on gender, state-wise spread and urban-rural spread.

While highlighting educational divides in India this report emphatically points out that as the larger world embraces the information age, the world of education in India encompasses different 'worlds' that live side by side.

- One world includes only a fortunate few with access to modern institutions, computers, Internet access and expensive overseas education.
- A second world wants to maintain the status quo Teachers, administrators, textbook publishers, students - all have reasons to prefer things to remain as they are or change only gradually.
- The third world struggles with fundamental issues such as no books, wrong books, teachers desperately in need of training, teachers with poor

commitment, rote learning of irrelevant material, classrooms with hundred students, dirty floors and no toilets. India cannot hope to succeed in the information age on the back of such three disparate worlds.”

According to this report as the developed world moves to forging an information society founded on education, India cannot remain behind as a non-competitive labour oriented society.

It suggests as against this backdrop that it is “imperative for India is to raise standards of the vast majority with poor education, break the education sector free from its inertia and forge a society that places knowledge as the cornerstone of its development. Thus, the vision for education in India would be “To Create A Competitive, Yet Co-operative, Knowledge Based Society”. Towards this endeavour this report has suggested several strategies:

- Provide quality primary education facilities to every citizen of India, preferably within a distance of one kilometre from his residence.
- Provide and support the private sector in the establishment of high quality, secondary education facilities in every taluka.
- Integrate education with information and communication technologies
- Market India as a destination for affordable, high quality education.
- The government should establish an education development fund for primary and literacy education with donations to this fund exempted from income tax.
- Government should also progressively reduce the funding for universities and make them adopt the route of self-sufficiency. Concurrently, a credit market for private finance of cost of higher education should be developed.
- A Private University Bill should be legislated to encourage establishment of new private universities in the fields of science and technology and management.
- Existing centres of excellence should be encouraged to establish international centres to attract overseas students. Foreign direct investment in education should be allowed, to begin with, limited to science and technology and management areas.
- All political parties should come to an understanding that they will keep away from universities and educational institutions.
- Any form of political activity on campuses of universities and educational institutions should be banned.
- Regional Engineering Colleges must be provided autonomy and resources and facilities must be upgraded.

According to this report the education sector in India needs a revolution that embraces information and communications technologies, fosters freedom and innovation and induces a market oriented competitive environment which is vital for progress and prosperity in the information era.

### **Social Implications of Commodification**

The Birla Ambani Report though has been widely successful in capturing the imagination of the knowledge society, in articulating the role of education therein, and in establishing the prevalence of educational divide in India, its suggested strategies predominantly pave the way for the commodification of education. Its recommendations for encouragement of private sector in education, marketing India as destination of higher quality education, reducing funding for universities, private finance in higher education, establishing private universities, promoting foreign direct investment in education, banning of political activities in the educational campus, etc., not only encourages commodification and privatization of education, but also discourages the state

from fulfilling its social commitment for the educational well being the community. Can a developing country like India afford the state withdrawal from higher education? This report leaves primary education with the state. However, it does not spell out the obligation of the state to provide free quality primary education to all children. The private players are already there, in the primary sector to breed inequality in education at an early stage. Will the privatization of education or in that sense commodification of education be a panacea for all ailment, backwardness, inequality, inaccessibility and stagnation in education?

**Argument in Favour of Commodification of Education:** Commercialisation of education has been a contentious issue not only in India but all over the world.

Many are of the view that true competition in the education sector would improve the quality; that social accountability of education institution would be fixed by the conscious uses of these educational facilities; that the access of the marginalized group to education be increased by attracting them to the quality of education and by making education there need based and that private schools are more accountable than Government run schools. It has also been pointed out that in the spite of constitutional mandate the state has failed in last the 60 years in eradicating illiteracy and in ensuring the access of the marginalized groups in quality education. It has been suggested that the initiative of the state should continue in providing financial assistance, infrastructure etc. for educational development and the private sector should be encouraged to generate a creative and competitive environment to impart education.

You must have observed that in recent decades all over India the attraction towards private schools has increased. A careful scrutiny of facts would reveal that this has been mostly because of

- callous attitude of the bureaucracy towards Government schools,
- unsupportive and inadequate management in these schools,
- declining student-teacher ratio,
- lack of motivated teachers,
- lack of proper infrastructure,
- lack of accountability,
- proliferation of private schools with better management, better teacher-student ratio, good infrastructure and teachers and better accountability.

Such a scenario has helped only to breed inequality in quality of education and thereafter unequal access to education. While the private English medium schools have emerged to cater to the need of the elite segments of society, the vast sections of the students who are mostly from either the poor or the average economic background join the government run vernacular medium school.

It is important to mention that equal access to education is widely determined not by the progressive policy formulation of the state alone but by its democratic ideals and strong political will and commitment to ensure greater equity in education and its willingness to share power with all sections of the society. It is argued that commodification of education will help to ensure equality against the backdrop of the state's failure in providing quality education for all.

**Arguments Against Commodification:** A group of scholars are of the opinion that commercialization of education would lead to privatization and that as there would not be adequate control the quality will suffer, and in the process

of commercialization only market oriented academic programmes or courses would be given preference while other streams would suffer; that the commitments to enhance the marginalized groups' access to education would suffer and that the profit motive would get preference over social commitment.

- As you have understood education has several important roles to play especially for social development, collective empowerment and in advancing social and economic well being of society, accumulating and sharing knowledge and cultural capital. It is also a means for individual development and expression. As education plays the critical social role it cannot be reduced to a mere tradable commodity. It is important that economic forces unclashed by the forces of globalization endeavour to treat education as a marketable commodity ignoring its social and national role.
- The National Union of Students in Europe (2001) points out that it is imperative for the state to ensure free education at all levels. However, in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Covenants on Social, Cultural and Economic Rights which has called for open access to higher education, many states in Europe introduced tuition fees to augment finances in higher education in the 1950's. This has resulted to an exclusion of student specially from disadvantaged backgrounds from the corridors of University education and where the elite students have got comfortable access.
- The structural adjustment programme of IMF and World Bank have let to extensive privatization of higher education in the post 1970's and after wards. The profit motive of the private providers has ignored the vital social, cultural and economic role of education and furthered the exclusion of learners from the disadvantaged groups from higher education.
- The liberalization of trade in education services under the GATS of the WTO imposed several binding obligation for specific sectors on the member states of the UNO. The most important obligation is that of "*most favoured nation principle*" which means service suppliers from different countries have to be treated equally. Again there are rules for unlimited market access and the so-called national treatment, which means all providers of education have to be treated equally with the to national one. The phenomena of transnational education in the form of on line education, internet-based universities, branch campuses or offshore education institutions, etc., have got prominence under the GATS regime.
- The expansion of transnational education undermining the significance of the social and national role of education have not only furthered commodification of education but have also ignored the fact that education is a basic human right and has to be made accessible to as many as possible. Such conceptualization jeopardizes the basic democratic, liberal, moral and social significance of education in all parts of the world. To them the process of commodification of education would lead to the expansion of an elitist, exclusive, profit-oriented education system. (The National Union of Students in Europe [www.esib.org/issues/tne.php](http://www.esib.org/issues/tne.php)). In this context Stephen J. Ball (2004) says that in the process of commodification of academic labour the student explicitly becomes the consumer, degree becomes a commodity which can be exchanged for a job rather than preparing the student for a life. Again curriculum is recognized under the process of commodification as a sequence of knowledge goblets, which can be referred as credits with a cut and paste, repackaging mechanism. In this process the pedagogic relationship and values are marginalized and the student as consumer becomes a passive learner. To quote him "privatization is not simply a technical change in the management of the delivery of educational services – it involves changes in the meaning and experience of education, what it means to be a teacher and a learner. It changes who we are and our relation to what we do, entering into all aspects of our everyday practices and

thinking – into the ways that we think about ourselves and our relations to others, even our most intimate social relations. It is changing the framework of possibilities within which we act. This is not just a process of reform, it is a process of social transformation. Without some recognition of and attention within public debate to the insidious work that is being done, in these respects, by privatization and commodification - we may find ourselves living and working in a world made up entirely of contingencies, within which the possibilities of authenticity and meaning in teaching, learning and research are gradually but inexorably erased (J. Ball 2004).

- In the Indian context, the issue of commodification of education has several social economic and political ramifications. “Traditionally, investment in education was considered more of a social obligation, which the state had to fulfill. However, ever since economic reforms were introduced in India in the early 1990’s, resource allocation for higher education has consistently followed a downward trend. With the Government’s ability to finance higher education reaching a saturation level, it was argued that higher education might be considered as a ‘non-merit good’, as the benefits accrue more to individuals than to society in general.” As an implication of such formulation (a) the Government would stop providing subsidies to non-merit goods, (b) withdraw itself gradually from the pre-given social commitment of open access to higher education, (c) smoothen the way for privatization and commercialization of education. As a further ramification to such processes of commodification and privatization of education more and more attention could be paid towards the market driven courses, while the general courses like General Science, Social Science, Humanities, Art and Literature will be areas of least priority. It would become no longer appropriate to read Shakespeare, while courses like Communicative English, Professional writing or Business English would become the order of the day. The economic non-viability of certain courses cannot become a justification for their withdrawal (Sudha Sitaraman, 2004).

## 23.7 Conclusion

The right to education is a fundamental human right. The State, international bodies and the civil society have committed themselves to ensure this fundamental right. This unit has dealt in detail with the commitment made in the Constitution of India for the educational well being of all sections of population – women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, religious and linguistic minorities. However, in spite of such commitments the curse of illiteracy has been looming large on the horizon of Indian society. Several committees and commissions have recommended several remedial actions to ensure education for all and to enhance access to quality education by all sections of the population. The World Development Summit, the Dakar Conference, the UNO have categorically expressed and all the members States of the UNO have accepted the commitment for the eradication of illiteracy and promotion of professional education among all. All the member States of UNO have also committed towards the philosophy of commodification of education and have liberalized their market to introduce trade in education. The contradictory processes of commodification on the one hand and of social commitment on the other have severe implications for the members of society. In this unit we have discussed all these implications in detail.

## 23.9 Further Reading

Stephen J. Ball 2004 “*Education for Sale!*” *The Commodification of Everything*. King’s Annual Education Lecture 2004, Institute of Education, University of London.

The National Unions of Students in Europe 2006. *Transnational Education*.  
<http://www.esib.org/issues/tne.php>