



# UNIVERSAL FREE EDUCATION: REMAINED MYTH IN INDIA

**Mr.Pradeep B S**

Assistant Professor, Department of Studies in Social Work, Davangere University, Shivangotri,  
Davangere-577007, Karnataka.

Email: [pradeepwagonr@gmail.com](mailto:pradeepwagonr@gmail.com) mo: 9019367431

## ABSTRACT

This paper is an effort to evaluate if universal free education in India is a myth or a reality. Provision of education to its citizens has been considered an important responsibility of the Government right from the early days of independence in India. Accordingly, States and Centre have been providing highly subsidized education through various schools and colleges. The Right to Education Act, 2009 mandated the provision of 'free and compulsory' education to each child up to the age of 14 years. This provision has been extended up to Secondary education in the recently unveiled NEP 2020. The new National Education Policy (NEP), approved by the Union Cabinet, seeks to align itself with the Sustainable Development Goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all in the next 20 years. The policy has brought into its ambit children in the age group of 3 to 18 years. The fundamental right of equality clearly signifies that in the eyes of law no one can be discriminated on the basis of status, caste, sex, class or creed. Equal opportunities should be provided to everyone in the country including those related to education.

Key Words: Compulsory Education, NEP, Right to Education, Fundamental Rights

## INTRODUCTION

Literacy is the ability to read, write and comprehend information in order to communicate effectively. From reading the newspaper to understanding road signs, literacy is the only tool that helps you make sense of your surroundings. It is empowering and fuels social and human development. Literacy serves as the foundation of basic education for all. The knowledge of social conventions combined with problem-

solving capacities of people is what determines them as being literate. In India, while the adult literacy rate is measured for people aged above 15 years, the rate of youth literacy is measured for people aged between 15-24 years.

There used to be a wide-spread belief among the illiterate masses before partition that in Free India, milk and ghee would be supplied free to every child; all sorts of medicines would be available in the hospitals without any cost; customers would get provisions and sweet-meats in the market without having to pay any price. And in the same train of ideas came the fanciful notion that education up to the highest degree would be free. Ours is a land, where people seem to believe in all seriousness that Aladin 's Lamp is still preserved in the Moghal Fort at Delhi and Herculean tasks like the manufacture of penicillin, construction of moon-rockets and installation of thermonuclear plants can be accomplished without entailing any cost to ourselves. When, for our defense, we can confidently depend upon the arrival of the Lord Himself with his Sudarshana Chakra, and consider all military preparations unnecessary, is there any wonder that we also believe that some superhuman race of teachers will come someday descend on earth-in this part of it- and convert, by magic touch, all students into doctors, engineers and lawyers without demanding a penny by way of remuneration?

There are no shortcuts in the scheme of nature. We can deceive ourselves into the belief that in a free country, we can get amenities without having to pay anything in return, but we cannot deceive nature. Most people have been disillusioned by now and no longer would labor under the myth that they can freely help themselves with a rosagulla at the confectioner's shop and nobody bothers them about the price. Provisions, medicines and other necessities have to be paid for even in Free India; and if someone is getting them free, rest assured, someone else, not always in sight, is paying the price. Whenever we get comfort and have not paid for it, we must realize clearly that we are enjoying it at somebody else's cost.

Even poorest families spend as much as Rs.350 per child per year (which amounts to more than 10% of the monthly income of a family that is able to earn Rs. 100 per day) for uniforms, stationery, transport, and more if tuition is added. The introduction of User Fees further adds to the burden of the 'invisible' costs that are borne by families who struggle to access health and education, and also negates the 'costs' that are already paid by the poor by way of their recognized economic contribution to the overall GDP of the country.

## **EDUCATION FOR ALL CAMPAIGN IN INDIA - MYTH OR REALITY?**

"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." - Maimonides. This is what education is. This is the importance of education. India lost its past glory it had

in the field of science and technology. It suffered under foreign invasion including the British. In these times, not much was done to develop education system. It was expected that a revolution would take place after independence. It has been over 60 years and we still are waiting for that revolution. There has been a very gradual rise in literacy. A new momentum is expected to be given by the 'Education for all' campaign, however looking at the problems plaguing the educational system and corruption going on everywhere, it seems more of myth than reality.

### **MYTH:**

1. A simple and primary survey of number of available schools and the number of children in India will show that this campaign is just a myth.
2. There is no adequate infrastructure available to bring such campaigns into reality.
3. We can argue that as campaign proceeds, the infrastructure will develop, but it is far from easy. Building and developing schools is a time consuming task. It's not just the building. It also includes capable teachers.
4. There are not enough good teachers to man these schools. Without good teachers, no quality of school can impart good quality education.
5. Many children live in rural and inaccessible areas. It's been more than 50 years and still the governments have not reached them. It is to be overconfident to assume that this campaign will suddenly make a difference and reach all of them in few swoops.
6. Education for all also includes women and girls literacy programs. The cultural fabric of the nation is so rigid when it comes to traditions that a campaign like this can hardly dent it. Even today women are seen to be confined to the house in most of the rural areas apart from the agricultural labor they perform.
7. The Bill that has made free and compulsory education available to all children between six and fourteen years is very inadequate. It remains silent on the quality of education to be provided. Quantity trading off for quality is not useful at all.
8. One of the major sore points in the Bill is that the responsibility of guaranteeing education to children is of the parents and guardians. We agree that parents need to be made conscious of the importance of education for their children; however it is often their economic conditions that prevent them from sending their children to school.
9. Such mighty and lofty goals were there right from the independence. It was the political will that lacked. Currently too it is the lack of political will that is taking this campaign.

## REALITY:

- The increase in literacy levels presents the reality.
- It is not just the percentage increase but also the absolute number of literates has increased. As per the contrary belief, it is the number of women literates which has increased by a lot.
- We can argue regarding infrastructure. Though India lacks infrastructure, India can utilize its informal structure to impart formal education. Many a times, schools with small number of students are held in open like the Gurukul method of ancient India.
- Adult literacy is another area which is catching on. Teaching adults in informal environment like out in the open or holding classes in someone's house has paid dividend. Education is not merely going to school. It's imparting skills of reading, writing and developing capacities to understand things going on around us. This also includes building capacity to adopt newer techniques and technologies. Farmers using cell phones, credit and debit cards, and making investment decisions is a living proof of the education campaign benefits.

## CONCLUSION

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." - Nelson Mandela. It can be imparted in any form as long as it can be used by the recipient for his/her own or society's progress. There might have been many failed attempts to achieve the lofty targets; however that does not mean that we must stop trying. It only means that we need to change our strategy. Every big step was shrugged off or dismissed as a myth, an unachievable ideal. Constant efforts and the attitude of not giving up have brought these dreams, ideals and goals into reality. We must leave this cynicism aside and contribute towards making this campaign a success.

The campaign 'Education for All' needs to be made a reality. Many social, cultural and voluntary organizations can play an important role in translating this dream into reality. Education and economic growth go hand in hand. The 'Open Schools' have proved very successful and useful in this respect. They need to be popularized especially among the villagers and economically weaker sections. School education should be made compulsory and free. Only universal and purposeful education can lead India to the high road of progress and prosperity.

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