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EDUCATIONAL ALTERATION IN KERALA: EXPERIENCE AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Kerala achieved a remarkable achievement in educational development with involvement of governments, private agencies and social reformers. However, currently Kerala focuses on quality education rather than mass education. Growing concerns on quality education forces parents to deviate from public to private institutions leading to emergence of numerous unaided and self-financial institutions. Since the 1990s, higher education in Kerala has been subject to significant policy shifts, which hold long-term implications for the general arts and science segment. Thus, while people with higher purchasing power can procure quality education and thereby invest more fixed capital in the form of education, people with less purchasing power are forced to procure less quality education. This unequal distribution of quality education creates wide income gap leading to social and economic imbalance.

KEYWORDS

educational development, quality of education and socio economic changes in education.

INTRODUCTION

Educational accomplishment is one of the most important factors that distinguish Kerala from rest of India. In contrast to the delayed growth of education elsewhere in the country, Kerala experienced a continuous process of educational expansion since the last decades of eighteenth century (Nair, PRG 1976, Salim and Nair, PRG 2002). An emerging literature since the 1990s, has dealt with higher education in Kerala in the context of macroeconomic policy shifts or what may be designated broadly as globalization. Much of this literature looks at the economics of higher education framed in the context of macro resource constraints but ranging from issues of financing and costs to entry barriers to professional and technical education (Salim, 1995, 1997, Devasia 2008, Mathew 1991, GoK, 2006). In the traditional system, education was confined to the upper caste students and the lower castes neither had the right nor felt the necessity to get education since caste-based work division was prevalent. By the end of the 19th century, primary education for all was accepted as the government responsibility resulting from various movements and agitation for mass education. As a consequence, the overall literacy rate in Kerala is higher than the all-India average and ahead of other Indian states (ADB 2007, Patnaik 1995, Tharamangalam 1998). Government intervention is indispensable to overcome this discrepancy to ensure optimum quality education to desirable members of the state. This seems to have contributed to the scarcity of teachers in many private aided colleges. The Kerala State Higher Education Council (KSHEC), which was set up in March 2007, proposed several moves to generate the informational base for restructuring higher education. At least three sets of policy move in the recent past have altered or hold the potential to alter significantly the context of general arts and science education in the state. This paper examines the relevance of quality education in the context of Kerala. The educational alterations in Kerala, impact of educational development on socio-economic changes, challenges for development of quality education are also discussed briefly in this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of Technical education, Growth of technical education and the quality of education has been the focus of a number of studies carried out in recent times. A brief review of some of these studies has been made here.

Education has become a powerful tool of social change, especially in a society in which the majority is poor. The Supreme Court of India declared in 1992 "Education is a means for life with dignity". A study by World Bank (The Hindu, 24 March 1998) also opined, "Education is a corner stone of economic growth and social development and a principal means of improving the welfare of individuals" (Salim 2004). Private sector gets little awareness in India's education debate, but it makes an important contribution. In 2001, 42 percent of institutions of higher learning were privately owned; they served 37 percent of the students enrolled in higher education. Their quality varies greatly. A few are among India's most-respected institutions, including the Christian Medical College in Vellore and the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad. So far, the government's support of private investment in education has been limited (Hangaragi 2012). The Indian Constitution determines to provide quality education to all. In the effort to fulfill educational needs of the country, particularly for the various societies and cultures of the country the government has chalked out different educational categories namely, Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Higher Education Adult Education, Technical and Vocational Education. Institutions of excellence in higher education were formed with a view to provide subsidized quality higher education to build a self-dependent and modern India. Government funding on higher education has been moving back on a year basis for more than one decade. In the view of withdrawal of government support to finance higher education private institutions has been allowed to take over the responsibility of imparting education to all. Further, in government aided universities the model of self financing and self-sustaining institutions has been introduced (Singh 2012). Equality of educational opportunity in higher education is considered essential because higher education is a powerful tool for reducing or eliminating income and wealth disparities. If higher education is fully privatized and priced at its full cost, only those who can afford will buy it. The stability of the society will be disturbed if it consists of sections of the population which get higher education obtain income and assets at increasing rate while large proportion of the population remains deprived of higher education and remain poor. The idea of equalizing educational opportunities also lies in the fact that "the ability to profit by higher education is spread among all classes of people. There are great reserves of untapped ability in the society; if offered the chance they can rise to the top. A great deal of talent of the highest level is, in fact, lost by an egalitarian system of education. At present the education sector as a whole in the state is characterized by the existence of a dual system: one segment comprising high-quality institutions catering to the affluent five percent of the population and the second consisting of low-quality institutions meant for the masses (George and Ajith Kumar 1999). The author examines here the equity and the quality in the higher education sector of the state, principles highlighted in the National Policy on Education, 1986, in the context of the current trends and tendencies, in the face of steady withdrawal of the Government from the financing of education in general and of higher education in particular, a mushrooming of the unaided, self-financing institutions has set in Kerala during the past few decades (Nair 2008). The professional education enjoys considerable prestige in India. In fact, the entire school education, especially, at the higher stage, is regarded by the section of the population as an elaborate preparation for entry into professional courses (Sivasankaran and Babu 2008).

OBJECTIVES AND RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Technical Education is one of the most significant components of human resource development spectrum in improving the quality of life of the people. In recognition of the importance of this sector, the planners have accorded priority to this sector. There has been phenomenal growth in the field of technical education during the previous plan periods. The established the Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Institutes of Management and Indian Institutes of Science were a vital step in the development of technical education in the Indian subcontinent. The ability of these institutions to produce competent and hard core intelligent scien-

tists and engineers had managed to change the outlook of Indian on the global front. The technical and management education sector has made immense contribution to the country's economic and industrial development. It has produced high quality skilled, technical and managerial manpower. Therefore the major objectives of this paper are:

1. To examine the growth of technical education in India
2. To analyze the quality of technical education in the state of Kerala

METHODOLOGY

The present investigation makes use of analytical and descriptive techniques to fulfill the objectives of study. For analyzing such facts, data for the study has been gathered from secondary sources including Tenth Five Year Plan 2002-07, Economic Survey 2014-15, Economic Review of State Planning Board 2013, Report from Universities, AICTE, Books, Journals, News Papers and Books on technical education and other articles written by eminent authors.

EDUCATIONAL ALTERATION IN KERALA

Kerala has long and rich tradition of education even during the pre-British period. However, this system of education was limited to the upper class minority and the lower caste neither had the right nor felt the necessity to get education since caste-based division of work was common in the society. This system started to change gradually, and attained momentum right from the last decades of the eighteenth century. (Nair, PRG 1976). Private sector exploited the government support for educational development leading to an increase in number of schools in private sector. Private agencies used this favorable atmosphere; leading to an indiscriminate expansion of low quality education, emerging as communal pressure groups, and commercialization of education with regard to admissions and appointments. The gross enrolment ratio (GER), a widely used indicator of access to higher education is also used to denote the educational advancement of a region. It is the ratio of persons enrolled in higher educational institutions regardless of age divided by the number of persons in the relevant age group. The GER for Kerala has tended to suggest different trends depending on the source of data used to compute it. Although governments introduced various measures for mass education right from the last decades of the nineteenth century, the unprivileged majority was alienated from educational mainstream until the left government introduced the Kerala Education Bill of 1957 for social control over education system. Government involvement in education through the direct payment forced the private institutions to follow government norms for student's admission, which ensured educational opportunity to all who were alienated from educational mainstream on the grounds of caste disability. Along with expansion of general education, higher education attained momentum during the post-independence period. Number of universities and colleges increased remarkably during this period (Velayudhan 2010).

IMPACT OF EDUCATION ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES IN KERALA

Educational development in Kerala contributed significantly to the complex processes of technology dissemination, individual earnings, reduction of poverty, development of healthy families, gender equality, creation and sharing of values, responsibilities of citizenship, and quality of life (ADB 2001, Adams 2004). According to Dreze and Sen (1996), Kerala's experience powerfully brings out the dialectical relationship between educational progress and social change: the spread of education helped to overcome traditional inequalities of castes, class, and gender. Kerala made an early start down that road, in the nineteenth century, leading to wide-ranging social achievements later. Education elevated the self-esteem of the most oppressed and is one of the reasons for loosening the rigid social structure and greater civic involvement ranging from more participation in political decision-making to more parental involvement in local schools. For several decades now the inadequacy of the colleges to meet the needs of undergraduate arts and science education in the state, was addressed, however poorly, by the provision for private registrations. Unlike other states of India, people in Kerala are more politically conscious and are active in the democratic process indicating the significant role of education. Education empowered women, which influenced birth and mortality rate in Kerala. The birth rate depicts rapid decline before the intensification of family planning programme; and the impact of this fall has already begun to be felt in growth rate of primary school enrolment. There is no reason other than influence of education for better performance in demographic changes of Kerala. Educational development helped economic development of Kerala by increasing economic efficiency; improving quality of life; producing both public and private benefits. The repressed classes and untouchables passionately sought the opportunities of education as a means of liberation from caste disabilities since social situation in Kerala was wretched during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Equity concerns are implicated in the fees charged in higher education as well as the dearth of scholarships. The impression that higher education is free in Kerala or involves very low fees has been questioned. In short, Kerala experience reveals that education improves capabilities of individuals and becomes a catalyst for all the closely interrelated economic, social, cultural, and demographic changes.

CHALLENGES OF QUALITY EDUCATION

Kerala has achieved educational development at the level of developed economies. Governments, private agencies and several progressive and social reform movements have contributed significantly to this achievement. The recent ferment in higher education may be located within the context of changes in political economy that gained a new coherence in the 1990s with what may be referred to as globalization and raised rather new challenges. They include the relevance of higher education as the basis of new employment opportunities in an economy that was fast opening up to global forces. It has been pointed out that on higher education, Kerala fell behind several Indian states on several dimensions of access but especially on the availability of educational opportunities within the state relative to population and the number of students enrolled in these institutions (Tilak 2001). Currently, Kerala focuses on quality education rather than mass education. Growing concerns on quality education force people to deviate from public to private institutions. Exploiting the concerns on quality education along with the resource constraints of government, business minded people initiated several unaided and self-financing institutions. Thus Kerala witnessed a reemergence of unprecedented growth of unaided and self-financing institutions that had vanished from Kerala about half a century ago. These profit oriented institutions made education a consumer product rather than a social investment. People with high purchasing power can buy quality education with high price. Restoration of old educational system, which was extinct from Kerala, gave managements freedom for commercialization of education, through admissions and appointments.

CONCLUSION

Kerala has achieved a remarkable accomplishment in educational development with involvement of governments, private agencies and social reformers. Even in pre-British period, traditional system of education had both primary and higher education facilities. However, this system was confined to the upper class minority, which stated to change right from the early decades of nineteenth century. By the end of nineteenth century, government recognized primary education to all as its responsibility. Consequently, governments introduced various measures to promote mass education. Government interventions in education at various period ensured equal educational opportunities to all irrespective of caste or class consideration. Now Kerala focuses on quality education rather than mass education. Growing concerns on quality education forces parents to turn from public to private institutions, which led to emergence of numerous unaided and self-financial institutions that had vanished from Kerala about half a century ago. Adequate facilities, availability of regular teachers and the quality of teaching are key factors in the provision of quality higher education. The casualty in the process is a policy environment that would provide incentives to deliver quality higher education while also ensuring regulations that prevent profiteering or the use of education to dispense patronage. In this context, the current reforms are marred by the suspicion it has generated among the reputed private aided colleges that they are yet another effort to enable political interference in their affairs. This creates a situation in which people can purchase quality education depending on their purchasing power. Consequently, people with higher level of investment will be able to get better returns and people with less purchasing power will be marginalized in the society. Whatever is the reason, unequal distribution of education is good enough to create social and economic imbalance. Unequal distribution of education distorts equitable distribution of income, which in turns welfare of the society. In this context, government intervention for social control over education is necessary to ensure optimum benefit from quality education to the maximum number of members in the society.

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