

## HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: TRANSITION FROM SOCIALISM TO CAPITALISM

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### **Abstract**

Socialism in India emerged during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as part of the Independence movement and gained strong hold as it espoused the causes of the under privilege section of the society. It influenced the principle economic and social policies of the Indian government after independence until the 1990's when India took a step towards a neo-liberal economy.

The hegemony of neo liberal ideology as reflected in the adoption of free trade, market economy, privatization and predominance of corporate culture that actually calls for progressive decrease of state involvement in the governance, finance and administration of the higher education system in India hijacked the idea of a welfare state. This led India to gradually drift away from socialism to capitalism.

This paper outlines the impact of neo-liberal capitalism on Education. It examines neo-liberalism as coerced concepts of corporatization and commercialization of higher education in India. It highlights that neoliberalism would polarised the society.

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**Keywords:** Neo-liberal Capitalism, Corporatization, Commercialization, Higher education

### **Introduction:**

The Preamble and the Directive Principles of State policy clearly state that our goal is a Welfare and Socialist state through democratic means. Education therefore was primarily state responsibility as it would help break the rigidities of social stratification, promote equal opportunities and would pave the path for country's development.

But from early 1980s, and more rapidly since 1991, economic policies moved in a sharply neoliberal direction and limited the role of the state. The pressure to expand coupled with the fiscal constraint of the state compelled Indian government to adopt market friendly reforms to support education sector. These reform included cost recovery and income generating measures in public institutions and encouragement of private higher education institution, which do not depend on state funding, culminating into marketization and corporatisation of education sector.

### **Neoliberalism and Education:**

Neo-liberalism is a new form of capitalism. For neo-liberals profit is everything and there is nothing beyond profit. The insatiable demand for profit is the motor policy, not public good or social good. Thus privatised utilities such as the education and health sector are run in the same manner just as the factories and business houses, to maximise profits and rewards, rather than to provide a public service.

Neoliberal policies globally have resulted in-

1. A loss of equity, economic and social justice for citizens and for workers at work.
2. A loss of Democracy and Democratic Control and Democratic Accountability

3. A loss of Critical thought and space.

For Neoliberal Capitalist, it is insignificant to provide high level education to all future workers. In fact they advocate a highly polarised system of education, where education should not strive to transmit a broad common culture to the majority of future workers but instead it should teach them just some basic skills.

Dave Hills outlines the following capitalist agendas on Education:

1. Reduction in expenditure on public education services.
2. Capitalist agenda for schooling and education.
3. Capitalist agenda in schooling and education.
4. New public managerialism mode of organization and control.

These Agenda of global neoliberal capital and its international and national supporters have an anti-human and anti-critical business agenda for education.

### **Higher Education A Market:**

In line with classical economic view of education, neo-liberalism defines the person to be educated in economic terms, as “homo economic us”, a labour market actor whose life and purposes are determined by their economic status. These twin sets of values are reinforced with a third set of educational purposes, namely, the conceptualisation of the person to be educated as a highly individualised, self-regarding and consuming economic actor. This has profound implications for the operation of education as a social practice. With the rise of neo-liberal agenda there is increasing attempt to privatise public services, including higher education, so that citizens will have to buy them at market value rather than have them provided by the state.

### **Higher Education a Commodity:**

With the decline in the value of Manufacturing industry in terms of investment returns and the rise of the value of the service sector in both scale and profitability, there is an on-going movement to define education as a tradable service world-wide. The pressure to move education from a public service to tradable service is very much part of the ideology of the WTO and GATS, the purpose of which is to liberalise all service in all sectors of the economy globally.

Education today is an industry offering new opportunities for investors in profit terms. The free market philosophy has already entered the educational institutions. After independence higher education was entrusted with the responsibility of protecting the constitutional provisions for positive discrimination. It was considered as a promoter of economic growth technological development and a tool of equal opportunity and upward social mobility. This helped in giving importance to social justice around the issues of caste, tribe, class and gender. But since 1991 the shift in the economic policies of government of India has dramatically changed the otherwise privileged position of higher education leading to social exclusion.

### **Academic Capitalism:**

There are many ways in which academic capitalism is fostered through the funding of research (patenting) and in ancillary services associated with college entry such as tutoring and test preparation. The University which was considered to be the power house of learning is becoming a business organization with productivity targets. In reality Universities are becoming like any other departments stores/malls or music shops offering variety of courses at their shelves. The course which is very popular will have long shelves life than the one which is not in demand. This is clearly evident from the weakening position of the arts, humanities, languages particularly Indian and critical social sciences which has no buyers as

a result many departments are closing down in the Universities. In such circumstances Teachers today are reduced to more like a sales persons assuring their customers (students) that they are getting a good deal and helping them to try on new outfits or shoes from the latest stock. If the charade is adequately performed, the customers exit the educational mall happy with their purchases.

The social relation of the educational institution is replica of the economy. Students enter as customers and graduate as finished products. Teachers and support staff are production workers and administrators act out as the role of boss. Everything from student evaluation procedure to curriculum development and from scholarships to student evaluation of teachers (customer satisfaction) is purely based on factory modes of production.

Everything what one does must be measured and counted and only the measurable matter for all the stake holders in education industry. For students in the form of credit system where their presence in the classroom, their active involvement in the classroom, and behaviours in the classroom....will fetch them marks. In the name of liberating students from the conventional canons of the past and from “antiquated” teaching methods, the neoliberal ideology in generating a society in which students will become compliant citizen, un-complaining workers and above all consummate consumers in a global culture that comes dangerously close to nihilism.

For teachers in the form of CAS where one is rewarded with points for attending seminar, publishing research papers, books and journals, there is little incentive to invest in teaching, in the rat race to score in API Teachers forget that important part of their duty is to impart knowledge. There is increasing pressure on teachers to undertake research whether they have inclination or not. This has resulted in mushrooming of research assistance provided by private individuals selling research papers and publishing house where one pay some amount and get the research article published. Plagiarism is another issue born out of forced research.

The Universities have taken another step in the factoryisation of university system by having a biometric attendance system for teachers, ‘No work no Pay’ orders are passed in University when faculty members go on strike. Universities in the name of streamlining impose mechanical, standardised systems of entrance examinations. There is a very long list of how the control over methods and of teaching and academic engagement and the disciplining of students continue on an everyday basis. Neoliberalism presents itself in diverse ways in these locations, through consensus as well as coercion. Resistances have paved the way for negotiations, which in the longer run have added to the weakening of labour struggles against the onslaught of capital.

The rise of consumerism, a growing push for accountability and declining public support for education are contributing to what we may term as “Corporatization” of higher education. Non-profit colleges and universities are adopting corporate models, cutting costs and seeking profit making opportunities.

For the students, faculty and the public alike these changes bring concerns that institution of higher learning are losing their very soul: students committed to learning, professors committed to educating and researchers committed to following their intellectual passions rather than corporate agendas.

### **Polarization of the Society:**

The effect of neoliberal capitalism is far reaching on the university. It is more drastic than industrialization, urbanization and secularization combined. It is the biggest challenge that the university has ever faced for more than a century and a half. It has caused a major restructuring of the economy, and government has reacted within a capitalist and technocratic

frame work to create new technology based industries. This has created moves to reform higher education in order to produce the necessary technocrats at the cost of higher education.

This move of the government will split the society into two: those at the “social core” and those who hang on their finger nails to the “social periphery”. In the country like us where yet we have to achieve 100% literacy, yet to provide access of higher education to large number of population, yet to establish institutions for promoting education at all level, great urban-rural divide, India within Bharat will further polarise the society into the haves and the have not’s. This is further going to penalise the participation of brilliant students coming from disadvantage groups. The traditionally excluded social groups which are far behind the advanced groups in their access to education are now victims of a double whammy. Privatization of higher education makes it more expensive and beyond the reach of the marginalised groups. The little hope which this group had due to public funding of education is hijacked by the neo-liberal ideology.

The ignorant parents and students may fall prey to the attraction of various course and programmes offered by foreign universities and in the process may get uprooted from their own national links to the employment and higher education sectors and may not be competent enough to compete in the global market.

In nation building an overwhelming emphasis on corporatization and commercialization also involves risk of undermining the inculcation of higher values of sacrifice, service and commitment to the country, a lost that may be difficult to overcome. It may contribute for developing a generation who are materialistic and individualistic. This will further strengthen the already existing belief amongst villagers that education alienates persons from their grass roots.

No doubt neo liberalism will create an opportunity for those who are aware of the benefits, who have the information, knows from where to get the information, who have easy access to information and have the inquisitiveness to get more and more and reap the benefits out of it. In India very small percentage of people will be able to utilise this opportunity and demand for more and more. It is threat to majority of the people who are ignorant and has no information and no means to get this information and are not aware from where to get information to the extent that some may even not know that they don’t have information. This group which is large enough to ignore, would remain backward.

University traditionally is designed to serve the weakest and most vulnerable in society as well as powerful economic interests, it has major responsibility to inform and vivify the work of public sector, and the voluntary community and care sectors both locally and globally. It is the lynchpin of civil society, laying the intellectual foundation for cultural, political affective, ethical and social life as much as for economic life. It is therefore, vital for the university to create alliances with those sectors of society that share its core values and public service purposes. Rather than being bewildered and overwhelmed by neoliberal rhetoric, we need to build a discourse that is based on the principles of democracy and equality that are heart of the public education tradition.

If we want India to progress, we need citizens who can think and speak boldly, whose souls are nurtured towards creativity and innovation, who embraces diversity through empathizing with others, who are committed to promoting a more just and inclusive society, who are able to think independently and freely. We need to look for alternative model of education. For that we don’t have to copy the Western Market model of Education. Just revisit our past, we would come across number of Philosopher Educators who have not only proposed the true Indian model of Education but also lived with it.

If the university does not take seriously and rigorously its role as guardian of wider civic freedoms, as interrogator of more and more complex ethical problems, as servant and preserver of deeper democratic practices, then some other regime or ménage or regimes will

do it for us, in spite of us, and without us. (Toni Morrison, 2001, cited in Giroux, 2002,n.121).

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