

Education in Crisis
An Interdisciplinary Seminar

Organised by

The Department of Economics
&
The Department of English
Gauhati University

Education at every level-primary, secondary and tertiary- is in a situation of crisis today. As evidence from all over the world shows, this is a global phenomenon and probably has its sources in the disjunct between demand and availability, between institutional educational goals and the job market, between a liberal-humanist approach that focuses on the individual and one that creates efficient earning machines, and between quality and quantity. Education regarded as the means for the all round development of the human being, has become a market commodity.

In India these problems are compounded by the promise of education for all and the inability to provide the infrastructure (teachers, school buildings, text books etc.) to fulfill this promise. Millennium Development Goals which include the universalization of primary education within a stipulated time find expression in India in the Right to Education Act. But with the gradual withdrawal of the State from the sector there are doubts about its implementation.

A dimension of the problem related to all these issues is that of quality- the formulation of good curricula, effective delivery mechanisms and efficient evaluation methods. But cutting into this intention is the measuring of brilliant performance and right action by quantitative indicators that homogenize difference and devalue branches of knowledge that are incompatible with such assessment. An aspect of this is the existence and role of an external quality adjudicating body like the NAAC that, in the absence of a sensitive, department specific approach (and we use the word department here to indicate academic and administrative departments of institutions) that is able to attend to the more abstract goals of education like confidence, empowerment through knowledge, emotional fulfillment and stability, is forced to fall back on ridiculous documentation demands and obsession with numbers.

A further important area is the threat of increasing centralization through efforts to evolve a centralized commission to direct Higher Education. In this situation of crisis, the challenges facing us should be the following:

- To make education student –friendly
- Ensure quality
- Enable students to realize individual potential
- Ensure teacher satisfaction
- Streamline education administration

Questions of *proper funding, a national curriculum with region-specific components, right policies and efficient external and internal quality assurance mechanisms* are implicit in this view of the challenges.

Since Gauhati University has in the last few weeks played host to both the Task Force inviting consultations on the proposed NCHER (National Commission for Higher Education and Research) and the NAAC undertaking the process of reaccreditations of the University, and there have been mixed feelings about both visits, the organizers feel that this is the right time to engage in serious debate about the crisis in education and at least raise and disseminate these crucial questions.

For the two day seminar 4 panels are planned with the following topics:

- Educational Policies
- Making Education student friendly
- External and Internal Quality Assurance
- Funding of Higher Education

Each panel will have one keynote paper that will set the program for discussion and open up areas to the participants.

The seminar will be held on 26-27 April, 2010 at the Phanidhar Datta Seminar Hall, Gauhati University.

Interested persons are requested to confirm participation at the earliest and submit papers/abstracts latest by 20 April , 2010

Registration fee : Rs. 200/- (Rupees two hundred) only per person

Convenors

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