

Inclusive Growth and Education: On the Approach to the Eleventh Plan

Inclusive growth is regarded as the new mantra of development. This paper critically looks at the approach to the development of education outlined in the Approach to the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, some of the new and not-so-new strategies proposed, a few controversial proposals, the assumptions that underlie them, the issues conveniently ignored and highlights the weaknesses and the continuation of the big policy vacuum.

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The Indian economy is experiencing a high rate of growth of above 8 per cent per annum, and it is anticipated to grow at a higher rate in the near future. It is already being considered as a “transforming” economy, as one of the best performing economies in the world, and not a developing economy any more.¹ The impressive economic growth and the economic reform policies being vigorously followed also lead many to fear that the high growth might be exclusionary in nature and be characterised by jobless growth, ruthless growth, voiceless growth, rootless growth, and the futureless growth, that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1996) warned against. That the growth of the Indian economy has been exclusive and that there is a need to make it inclusive is, in fact, long felt [e.g., K N Raj in Mody 2006; Kannan 2006]. Clearly now India is recognised as an economy with a “stunning” but “jobless growth” [UNDP-ILO 2007], and a “booming economy with growing gaps” where the spectacular successes made have not been shared by all equally [World Bank 2006]. The Planning Commission has also realised that economic growth has failed to be sufficiently inclusive, particularly after the mid-1990s. It noted in the approach to the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, “While the performance reflects the strength of the economy in many areas, it is also true that large parts of our population are still to experience a decisive improvement in their standard of living.... Far too many people still lack access to basic services such as health, education, clean drinking water and sanitation facilities without which they cannot be empowered to claim their share in the benefits of growth. These problems are more severe in some states than in others, and in general they are especially severe in rural areas” [Planning Commission 2006: 1]. Further, given the experience of most other countries which saw a high rate of growth in a decade followed by a big fall in the subsequent decade, it is feared that the growth in India may not be sustainable, unless it is made inclusive. Thus, inclusive growth has become the new mantra of development. After pursuing a policy of vigorous growth ever since the introduction of economic reform policies in the country, as it was believed that “there cannot be inclusive growth without growth itself” [Ministry of Finance 2007: 15], India has adopted, as recommended by the World Bank (2006), a development strategy of inclusive growth and set “faster and more inclusive growth” as the focus of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-12).

As the World Bank (2006) described it, inclusive growth is “the only sure means for correcting the deeply ingrained regional imbalances, inequities and for consolidating economic gains”, as inclusive growth is the growth “with emphasis not only on the distribution of economic gains but also on the security, vulnerability, empowerment, and sense of full participation that people may enjoy in social life”. Inclusive growth is, however, not new, though it seems to be a new concept. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines inclusive growth as growth that “does not exclude any section of society”. It is akin to the development strategies such as “growth with justice”, “growth with equity”, “growth with distribution”, “growth with a human face”, “pro-poor growth”, etc, suggested by many starting with Dadabhai Naoroji in the beginning of the 20th century, and attempted at one point of time or the other by many countries during the last 50 years. The new mantra is now at the heart of mainstream development economics [Ali 2007]. Inclusive growth is expected, like the above mentioned earlier development strategies to focus on the poor, the marginalised, the neglected, the disadvantaged and deprived sections of the society, and the backward regions of the country. An added dimension of the new development strategy also includes linking growth to the quality of basic services like education and healthcare.

Inclusive growth presupposes inclusive education – good quality education that is accessible to all. The role of education in ensuring inclusive growth is very critical. As noted in the *Economic Survey 2006-07*, “the inclusive nature of the growth itself will be conditioned by the progress that is made in the areas of education” [Ministry of Finance 2007: 16]. Hence education needs special attention as an instrument of achieving as well as a constituent of inclusive growth. The Planning Commission recognises this and notes, “a strategy of inclusiveness and broad based participation in the development process calls for *new emphasis on education*, health and other basic public facilities” (p 45; emphasis added).

What is the new emphasis that the Planning Commission proposes to place on education, and how does it plan for “empowerment through education”? The approach paper stated, “the provision of good quality education is the most important equaliser in society ... We must go beyond primary education, to tackle the looming problems in secondary education and also in higher education” (p 75). The approach paper does refer to quite a few important aspects relating to education. But many programmes and policies it does refer to are not necessarily new, and one

hardly finds any new added emphasis given to any of the policies and programmes. The new strategies that have been proposed do not seem to be sound and their likely effect also seems doubtful. Equally importantly, many faulty assumptions and approaches seem to have been allowed to continue. This short paper critically looks at the approach to the development of education outlined in the approach paper, some of the new and not-so-new strategies proposed, a few controversial proposals, the assumptions that underlie them, and the issues conveniently ignored, and highlights the weaknesses of the approach of the Planning Commission and the continuation of the big policy vacuum.

Elementary Education

Universalisation of elementary education has been the most important goal of educational planning in independent India and was to be reached by 1960 as per the Directive Principles of the Constitution. But this continues to remain an important unfinished business, as described by Naik long ago (1966). Almost every five-year plan reiterated the goal and even promised to reach it by the end of that respective plan. What is the approach of the Planning Commission in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan to elementary education? The gross enrolment ratio in primary education is above 100 per cent and the corresponding ratio in upper primary education is only 70 per cent in 2004-05, the latest year for which such official statistics are available. According to some crude and quick estimates, the out-of-school children could number 30-40 million, if not more. The commission does not note any of these statistics and instead, it believes that “near 100 per cent enrolment of 6-14 year olds is likely to be achieved by the end of the Tenth Plan” (i.e., by 2007), suggesting that one need not bother any more about universal enrolment of children. This is contrary to not only the findings of several research studies and survey reports, but also to what the Ministry of Finance (2007: 17) observed only a few months ago in the *Economic Survey*: “a large number of school-age children still remain to be enrolled in primary schools” (emphasis added).² Thus, to start with, the approach to elementary education seems to be based on a questionable premise.

The only major strategy identified by the Planning Commission for elementary education, which is not new, is the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).³ It was launched in 2000 as an umbrella scheme and a time-bound programme of universalisation of elementary education. It set the following goals and targets [MHRD 2003]:

- Enrolment of all children in the age group 6-14 in schools/education guarantee scheme (EGS) centres/bridge courses by 2003.
- All children in the 6-14 age group to complete five years of primary education by 2007.
- All children in the 6-14 age group to complete eight years of schooling by 2010.
- Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life.
- Bridging of all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education by 2010.
- Universal retention of children in schools by 2010.

The approach paper recognises the importance of the SSA and the goals of the SSA relating to universal enrolment by 2010, reduction of rates of dropouts and improvement of rates of retention.

It also notes the importance of the mid-day meals programme and recommends involvement of mothers’ cooperatives to improve the quality of meals and its provision and the merger of the programme with the SSA. The approach paper is aware of the importance of SSA, as the SSA “aims to bridge all social, gender, and regional gaps with the active participation of the community in the management of schools” (p 45), but refuses to recognise the weaknesses of some of its provisions and instead, argues for continuation of the SSA. The SSA, inter alia, formalised and nationalised the poor and ineffective EGS and the para-teacher system and aims at universalisation of elementary education through formal schools, EGS centres and bridge course centres. Thus all alternative poor forms of providing education are accorded status equal to formal schooling, thereby making formal school not a basic necessity; an EGS centre or a centre for bridge courses is good enough. Moreover, the EGS is a demand-driven model of setting up centres for primary education in response to a formally expressed demand for a school, which is, in fact, expected to be provided by the government as an entitlement or a right of the people. Universalisation of elementary education through such questionable methods does not yield sustainable positive outcomes. They may give rise to serious problems not only in the long run, but also in the medium and even short run. But the Planning Commission does not seem to be bothering about these aspects. Further, the provisions in SSA relating to sharing of responsibilities of financing of elementary education by the centre and the states are already under strain.

The commission does propose quite a few new strategies in elementary education. It proposes a long-term goal to have all schools equipped with physical infrastructure and quality and level of teaching equivalent to that of the Kendriya Vidyalayas. This is a positive recommendation of the commission on improving school education. It goes beyond the Operation Blackboard programme and if implemented well, should minimise differences between schools across the nation, in terms of infrastructure and the overall learning environment. It would, of course, require huge resources; but then quality education does not come cheap. The government should be prepared to invest sizeable resources in it. Even though it is regarded as a long-term goal, significant efforts need to be initiated in the Eleventh Plan itself.

But equally, if not more, important challenges remain. Such as, how to attract the children into schools, reduce dropout rates and improve retention rates – the three most important problems of elementary education. According to official statistics, 50 per cent of the children enrolled in standard I drop out before reaching standard VIII and 62 per cent before reaching standard X. The approach paper assumes that the EGS along with the mid-day meal scheme will mitigate the most often found reason for non-enrolment and children dropping out of schools, viz, poverty and other economic factors of poor households. But several research studies based on National Sample Survey data [Tilak 2002] have found that school-related costs such as fees, expenditure on books, stationery, uniforms and transport are also important in this regard and hence there is an urgent need to provide truly free education, besides improving the school infrastructure. The draft Right to Education Bill (earlier known as the Free and Compulsory Education Bill) [MHRD 2005] which is still pending even after five years of the 86th amendment to the Constitution, refers to these aspects, but the approach paper is silent on these aspects and on the bill itself.

The commission is concerned with poor levels of learning in primary schools and the need to set national testing standards, reduce teacher-absenteeism, and improve teacher-training. But it refuses to note the critical role that the teacher plays, the need for well qualified and trained teachers and the need to do away with the large number of underqualified, un/undertrained and underpaid para-teachers being recruited everywhere. Adoption of the para-teacher system also presupposes that we do not require qualified and trained teachers any more, and that anyone can teach. As a part of the economic reforms, downsizing of public sector has been attempted in all sectors, including in education. As a result, for several years, recruitment of regular teachers has been discouraged and appointment of para-teachers favoured. State governments also find it helpful as it reduces the problems of teacher-management, besides helping in reducing the financial burden – the current salaries, pension and the like. The approach paper is totally silent on this issue.

One of the most controversial proposals that the commission makes refers to the need to recognise and respond to the principle of parental choice in choosing schools for their children. The approach paper favours enabling of parents to have a choice in elementary education – to choose between public and private schools, thus creating competition between schools. The principle of “ability to pay” and “individual/parental choice” are generally regarded as most irrelevant in case of universal elementary education, as they go against the concept and philosophy of free and compulsory education. These principles also go against any move towards developing a common school system and a neighbourhood school system that the Education Commission (1966) has strongly pleaded for. Of course, the approach paper does not refer to the neighbourhood school or common school system, which could in fact be the best mechanisms of creating an inclusive society. Basically the principle of parental choice and reimbursement of expenses to the private schools strengthen the forces of privatisation in elementary education, while privatisation of education in general and of elementary education in particular, is not favoured by many in developed as well as developing countries. Few advanced countries are found either in the past or in the present, relying on private sector specifically in case of school-level education. The approach paper also promises to provide more support to the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and voluntary sector to improve the status of elementary education.⁴ Further, it also advocates public-private partnership in information and communication technology (ICT) for disadvantaged children, though the rationale is not clear for public-private partnership in case of ICT education that too for disadvantaged children.⁵ Thus the approach of the commission strongly favours privatisation of even elementary education.

The approach paper also favours decentralisation of educational planning and management, and recommends active participation of the community in education, and their accountability to local self-government. In general, decentralisation has become a fashionable approach in education and other areas in recent years. Decentralisation per se is desirable; it is also particularly advocated in large size developing countries like India, where central governments may not be able to effectively plan, provide, manage and supervise the education systems in all parts of the country. While few doubt the importance of decentralised approaches to educational planning and administration, it is also important to note that some governments find it convenient to

use decentralisation as a mechanism of abdication of its own responsibilities of educating the people. The methods of decentralisation we have adopted in the recent years aimed at mobilising more and more non-governmental resources for free elementary education on the one hand, and to dilute, if not completely to abdicate the responsibilities of the state – central and state governments in education. For example, the village education committees and the like are seen as a substitute to the school inspectorate system of the government, which is made to disappear. The dangers involved in decentralisation are too serious to ignore [Tilak 2006a]. But neither are these weaknesses taken note of, nor are any new methods of decentralisation suggested in the approach paper.

The approach paper considers introduction of education cess of 2 per cent in 2004-05 as “a major step ... to ensure effective funding of elementary education”. Education cess was introduced as a separate, dedicated non-relapsable fund for elementary education and the revenues from the cess are allocated to elementary education – SSA and the mid-day meal programme. The union government is able to increase its plan allocation to elementary education largely because of the education cess. In fact, the government admits in the *Economic Survey* (2006-07) that the increase in budget outlay for elementary and adult education was possible with the imposition of the education cess. The predominance of education cess in the union government’s budgetary allocations to education, also suggests the reluctance or inability of the union government to increase the allocations from the common pool of revenues to elementary education.⁶ It also appears that the education cess has come to stay, though one expects that special earmarked taxes/cesses of this kind would be used only for a short-term, and in the long run education is funded generously out of general tax and non-tax revenues of the government. But it appears that most of the budgetary allocations for elementary education would be made out of revenues received from the cess only [Tilak 2006b].

Basically elementary education has to be provided free and compulsorily to all without relying on the private sector, NGOs and the voluntary sector. It is an important responsibility of the state in most civilised societies and is financed normally out of general tax and non-tax revenues. Even after elementary education was made a fundamental right in the Constitution with the 86th amendment, one does not notice any difference in the approach of the government in providing it as a fundamental right. In fact, the approach paper makes no reference to the constitutional amendment or to education as a fundamental right.

Secondary Education

Probably for the first time the government has recognised that universal education of eight years is not enough for a country that aims at 8-9 per cent, if not a higher rate of economic growth. The approach paper states, “As we ready ourselves to the knowledge economy, we cannot be satisfied with universalisation of primary education. A person with a mere eight years of schooling will be as disadvantaged in the knowledge economy dominated by ICT as an illiterate person is in modern industry and services.” It also notes the rising pressures on the demand for secondary education, given the improvement in elementary level of education, attributed to the SSA. The current gross enrolment ratios in

secondary education are far quite low: 52 per cent in secondary education and 28 per cent in senior secondary education (2004-05). These ratios need to be enhanced considerably. Though the government has been thinking of universal secondary education in recent years [CABE 2005a], the approach paper does not refer to any such proposal.

The approach paper however recognises the need to expand secondary education and to raise the minimum level of education to standard X. But how is it to be expanded? It proposes to extend the SSA model to secondary education (i.e., up to standard X) and improve the quality of education. Though there has been zero growth of public and private aided schools at secondary level of education, as the commission notes, instead of opening schools on a wider scale in rural areas, it proposes schools for clusters of villages. It also proposes integration of upper primary level with secondary level.

The commission notes that state governments have “nearly stopped increasing funding of public secondary schools and aided schools”. Instead of arguing for reversal of these trends, it proposes expansion of secondary education with public and private efforts – “primacy of public responsibility” that also allows increase in the scope of the private schools to expand. It also proposes vouchers to promote equity and quality in secondary education. It also expects, quite contrary to the general knowledge, private schools to give freeships to the students. The private schools are outnumbering public schools and the proportion is actually increasing at a fast rate, as the commission rightly notes. But surprisingly the commission is silent on expansion of public schools. If at all public schools are to be set up, they should be set up, according to the commission, “to provide competition to private schools” and in areas unserved and undeserved by private schools (p 48).

But for the overall goal relating to expansion of secondary education and to raise the minimum level of education to secondary (not senior secondary) level, many of the strategies proposed in secondary education sector are questionable. First, it favours adoption of the SSA mode in secondary education. Unfortunately the SSA model has formalised some questionable and undesirable practices in elementary education and if allowed, they will seep into secondary education. While these mechanisms help in saving financial resources in the short run, in the long run they may have serious adverse effects on the quality of education, and reduce demand for secondary education. Second, for effective universalisation of elementary education, a constitutional goal, recent efforts have been towards integrating upper primary level with primary level of education, and not upper primary level with secondary education. The transition rates between the standards V (end of primary level) and VI (first year of upper primary level) are expected to increase if the upper primary level is integrated with primary level. Separation of upper primary level from elementary education and its integration into secondary level may help secondary education, but this will affect elementary education. Further, it is only recently that upper primary level is being considered as an integral part of elementary education; otherwise the upper primary level was and continues in many places as a part of the secondary school system. Thirdly, voucher schemes are rarely designed to promote equity and quality in education; instead, they are the best mechanism to promote private schools [Gauri and Vawda 2004]. Fourthly, it has to be recognised that any expansion of education that relies on the private sector cannot be inclusive.

Vocational and Technical Education

The approach paper recommends an increase in enrolment in technical and vocational education from 2-3 million to 15 million by the end of the Eleventh Plan. It is also proposed to expand the number of industrial training institutes (ITIs) and to increase the range of skills to be imparted in these institutions from about 40 to 400; the new areas to include banking, insurance, tourism, retail trade, etc, to build the knowledge economy.

Vocational and technical education did not take off in the country in the past, essentially because it was planned as a poor substitute to higher education, in fact, to reduce demand for higher education; and for the same reason no linkages between vocational/technical secondary education and higher education were forged. The poor rightly felt it as a conspiracy against them to keep them away from higher education and to confine them to manual jobs, and hence the demand for vocational and technical education has been very poor. Secondly, vocational and technical education requires more resources than general education, as it is more capital-intensive. But allocations to vocational and technical education have never been satisfactory [Tilak 1988, 2003]. Instead of seriously attempting at improving vocational and technical education at the secondary level, the government has introduced in recent years vocational and technical courses at undergraduate level in higher education. Now the Planning Commission proposes to concentrate on ITIs to build a knowledge economy.

One may wonder at the very idea of building a knowledge economy with the help of ITIs (not IITs). This is conceptually a weak proposal. Building of a knowledge economy requires high quality manpower produced by institutions of higher education, institutions of science and technology, and other higher level institutions that produce “specialised” human capital. The assumption behind creating a knowledge economy with the help of ITIs is flawed: it implies that knowledge is equal to skills. ITIs may help in building a skill-based economy, but it may not be right to expect them to help in creating a knowledge economy. Further, it may also be argued that service-oriented areas like banking, insurance, and tourism require not vocational skills but general skills and knowledge that general secondary and higher education can impart.

Higher Education

The Planning Commission realises the need to expand higher education, as the current enrolment ratio is very small, compared to those in many other countries. Though it does not set a target, it notes that the ratio in many developing countries is between 20 and 25 per cent.⁷ The UGC (2006) in its draft proposals for the Eleventh Five-Year Plan proposed a target of reaching 15 per cent enrolment ratio.⁸ The Planning Commission proposes to set up new colleges and universities and upgrading of at least 20 universities with the potential of excellence.⁹ At the same time, it recognises the problems of quality and standards in higher education and the difficulties faced by higher education institutions in attracting good faculty.

While the need to expand higher education is being increasingly felt, it is important to note that increase in enrolments in higher education requires strengthening elementary and secondary education. The current enrolment ratios in secondary education and the transition rates between secondary and higher education are very low. Unless these are improved significantly,

significant increase in enrolment of quality students in higher education may not be possible.

Expansion of higher education requires resources. The commission argues for rising levels of budgetary support, which, it says, "must be accompanied by internal resource generation by duly and realistically raising fees." The commission does not care to note that the current levels of fees in not only private institutions, but also in public institutions are already high, rates of cost recovery have reached very high saturation levels in several universities, higher than the levels recommended by some committees in the recent past [such as, CABE 2005b] and that any further increase in fee levels will go against the goals relating to inclusiveness. There is absolutely no effective mechanism of regulating the fee structure in public and private institutions. Universities also find it convenient to raise more and more resources by introducing self-financing course of all kinds, some of which may even go against the very purpose of these universities. All these create hurdles in improving equity in the system.

The commission proposes "a wider merit-cum-means based loan and scholarship programme through the banking system and other agencies". The scholarship programmes of the governments that aim at helping the weaker sections have been based largely on the principle of merit-cum-means. Now loans might replace these scholarship programmes. Obviously few scholarships are offered by the banking system and "other agencies." It is also important to note that the loan programmes operated by the commercial banks in India largely cater to the demand of non-weaker sections of the society, besides their overall numbers being very small [Tilak 2007b]. The approach paper notes, "Access to high quality institutions is extremely important for equity since they provide opportunities for the poor and socially disadvantaged to advance themselves". Normally this is ensured through liberal public funding, including a large programme of scholarships, and rarely through increase in fees, loans, etc. But the commission seems to believe that it is possible through fees and loans. The scholarship programme needs to be viewed and planned independently of the loan schemes. There is a need to strengthen and expand the scholarships to promote equity and also to promote excellence in higher education. Loans cannot be expected to serve either function.

There is a strong need for large-scale recruitment of quality faculty in most institutions of higher education in the country, necessitated by long-term de jure and de facto banning of recruitment, as many universities are severely starved of faculty, and are run with the help of those who can at best be described as para-teachers, even though the term of "para-teachers" is normally confined to school education [APSCHE 2005; Tilak 2006c]. While the approach paper recognises this problem, it does not favour recruitment of faculty; instead, it argues for relying on the open university system, where faculty does not form a limiting factor, and where of course, the quality is questionable, completion rates are low and rates of cost recovery are high.

Conclusion

The approach paper states, "Education is the most critical element in empowering people with skills and knowledge and giving them access to productive employment in the future. The Eleventh Plan should pay special attention to this area" (p 45). This short article critically examined the attention paid to education, the goals set for it, if any, and the strategies it proposed.

But for recognising the need to expand secondary education and to improve all schools to the level of *Kendriya Vidyalayas* in terms of infrastructure and quality of education, there is nothing significantly new in the approach of the Planning Commission to the Eleventh Plan, and the overall vision of the approach seems to be very much limited, skewed and faulty. Skills are equated to knowledge; knowledge is dominated by ICT; and knowledge economy is to be created by vocational and technical education. There is no reference to the role of higher education in building a knowledge society. The approach to funding education is confined to education cess and internal resource generation through fees and loans and a few general statements that the central government should assist the states and state governments should provide adequate non-plan expenditure (p 75). There is no reference to the Free and Compulsory Education Bill, still pending after five years of the constitutional amendment. There is no reference to internationalisation of higher education, which is also related to the growth of the private sector, and on which government has already initiated several efforts even to the extent of making a commitment to the WTO under GATS. The very silence of the commission on many of these important issues itself may speak volumes about its approach.

There is an overall preference towards promoting privatisation of education at all levels, through various mechanisms such as public-private partnership, enabling parental choice to choose between public and private schools, introduction of school vouchers, student loans, raising of fee levels, etc. One doubts how these measures will help in ensuring inclusive growth. Instead of having a critical review of the private school system that has produced dualism in education, social inequities and even imbalanced development of education, the commission strongly opines that the private sector has a "critical role to play in achieving the objective of faster and more inclusive growth" (p 2). Public-private partnerships in most cases lead to reduced role of the state and tend to tilt the balance in favour of privatisation. Even the earlier models of public-private partnerships such as of private aided schools (not to speak of the new private institutions which are given land at concessional prices and several "appropriate" tax concessions, in addition to direct development grants for research, etc, in case of higher education), end up promoting private interests with public money. That these institutions evolve effective mechanisms of preventing the poor from coming to them is well known. There is a much bigger problem with the public-private partnerships and the private schools. By arguing that government should concentrate on unserved and undeserved areas, one is actually arguing for vacation of space by the government for the private sector to increase their activities. Once the private sector becomes dominant, there remains actually no space for the government to come in even for promoting social equity. This is already happening in higher professional education in many states. Particularly when one is concerned about inclusive growth, one would expect to have a critical look at the role of the private sector in education development.

The approach paper is indeed found to be full of contradictions, lack of vision for development of education, and absence of a critical outlook of the strategies required. Very few new strategies are proposed, or existing strategies are emphasised to tackle some of the persistent problems and many important issues are conveniently ignored. Recommendations made by the

commission regarding accountability, monitoring, decentralisation, role of NGOs, private sector, etc, broadly correspond to the suggestions made by the World Bank (2006).

Our approach to educational policy and planning has been fragmented, looking at elementary education or secondary education or higher education, but not adopting a holistic approach of looking at all levels of education as an integrated system. The approach paper also adopts a fragmented and disjointed approach to education. It is important to recognise that there are close linkages between the three levels of education, and that the three levels are also inter-dependent on each other. Due attention needs to be paid to all levels of education and to education as a whole. Most importantly, but for the piecemeal measures of reforms here and there, there has been a big policy vacuum in Indian education in the recent years. Any attempt to fill it is yet to be seen.

One would be seriously disappointed at the approach paper, if he/she expects it to focus on inclusive growth, to be concerned about glaring and even widening inequalities in education – social, economic, gender and regional, and to propose clear strategies of developing an equitable system of education. There is no reference to any of these aspects, except a minor reference to Other Backward Classes (OBCs), which is also necessitated by recent developments. In fact equity is not the main concern of the approach paper; it is quality that occupies the attention of the Planning Commission and the commission assumes that quality would automatically promote equity. It states, “The provision of good quality education is the most important equaliser in society and its time we launched a major effort in this area” (p 75). But few of the strategies and initiatives proposed in the approach paper aim at equity or quality. In brief, many of the proposals, including the ones in practice that the commission endorses, go against building any inclusive education system necessary to promote inclusive growth of an inclusive Indian society. [E]

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Notes

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- 1 *The Times of India*, New Delhi, July 25, 2007.
- 2 Many documents including the Economic Survey(s), the present approach paper, etc, do not maintain a clear distinction between primary and elementary education.
- 3 However for the Planning Commission, SSA seems to be a new one and a starting point, and according to it, the nation made a good start on primary education only through SSA (p 75).
- 4 In fact, the Planning Commission promises to prepare a draft National Policy for the Voluntary Sector, so that a broader involvement of NGOs in many sectors is encouraged (p 76).
- 5 A sub-group of the Planning Commission (2004) has proposed public-private partnership in all sectors including in education.
- 6 State governments are also becoming reluctant to allocate resources for education from the common pool of resources and hence they also think of an additional education cess (and a cess for health). *Sunday Times (Times of India)*, New Delhi, July 23, 2007, p 11.
- 7 The ratio in many developing countries, excluding some of the Latin American countries, is much below 20 per cent; only in many advanced countries it is above 20 per cent.
- 8 The National Knowledge Commission (2007) also proposed a similar ratio. See Tilak (2007a) for a comment on the commission’s report.
- 9 There is a fresh proposal from the Planning Commission to set up 30 mega-campus world class universities during the Eleventh Plan period, *Indian Express*, July 26, 2007.

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