

# Shiksha Swaraj: Equal Access to Relevant and Quality Education for All

## *SWARAJ ABHIYAN Policy Draft for discussion*

### **Perspective:**

Education lies at the heart of our ideal of swaraj. Self-rule presupposes capabilities in various domains. The citizens must be capable of contributing to collective well-being in the domain of production, innovation and consumption. They must also develop understanding required of a democratic citizen and a member of society. Finally, every person must develop capability to rule over oneself. Cultivation of these capabilities is the principal responsibility of the system of education. Needless to say, the present system of education achieves very little in this direction. It neither makes our young generation employable, nor does it make them good citizen or a good human being. The education system today has become a perfect instrument for transferring inequalities of one generation to another. It offers schooling, but not education. It offers degrees but not skills or knowledge. It pushes young generation into employment market for white collar jobs but does not make them employable. It encourages mental and cultural slavery without adequate appreciation of the cultural heritage of the globe. It reinforces prejudices and narrow-mindedness without genuine respect for our own cultural heritage, languages and traditions.

Shiksha Swaraj is a movement to overhaul the present education system so as to achieve swaraj in ideas. SWARAJ ABHIYAN is firmly committed towards State provision of equitable access to quality education to every child in the country. This commitment becomes all the more relevant as there is enhanced demand for education especially among the most marginalised sections of the society. However, this demand is accompanied by an increasing stratification of education. Various shades of private education have emerged. This spread of private schools across rural and urban area has become a significant segment of education today with nearly a quarter of Elementary Education, majority of Secondary Education and three-fourths of Higher Education being privatized. This has led to opportunities for education being distributed in an unequal manner, depending on income. The historical deprivation from education of disadvantaged groups - dalits, girls, minorities, adivasis, children without home and shelter, migrating children, is further exacerbated when left to the mercy of the market. This deep inroad by the private sector reinforces the view that better opportunities from education would go to those who can afford it, while the poor and the marginal would be confined to minimalist literacy-numeracy education. And it is against this background that SWARAJ ABHIYAN – which is committed to the well-being of the last person, the *aam aadmi*, as the touchstone for our policy and politics – affirms its commitment to ensuring the provision of truly equitable access to all sections of society, irrespective of their ability to pay.

We need to move beyond some familiar and unproductive debates. Discussions on the structure and content of education are often caught in a debate of 'state vs. community' as the provider of education and 'modern vs. indigenous/traditional' sources of knowledge as the basis of education. SWARAJ ABHIYAN believes in the need to re-imagine an education system beyond these dichotomies, which draws upon on the strengths of both. There is a need to evolve a modern education system, which is

able to draw and interact meaningfully with the diversity of Indian society and communities; which is grounded both in the ethos of democracy, secularism, equity and justice as well as India's diverse cultures and ways of life. While the State needs to remain as the provider of education, there is a need to creatively involve India's diverse communities in the process of education. The absence of an engagement with people, their ways of life, language, worldviews and sources of knowledge has led to children being alienated from the school and its curriculum and their dropping out from the education system. Therefore, having context-specific elementary education, in the mother-tongue, is an essential element of ensuring true access and equity in education. Another important element is to break the divide between work and education, between the vocational and the academic. SWARAJ ABHIYAN stands for vocationalization that is not based on dual class based division of academic and vocational and does not strip the idea of work from its relationship to resources, labour, or creative satisfaction.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **A) Role of the State in providing equitable access to education:**

- Commitment to the implementation of the Right to Education Act to ensure the right of every child and student to free access to equitable education.
- Support strengthening public education system through adequate budgetary allocation, recruitment, capacity building, participation of parents, teachers and children
- Adequate sum (indicatively, 6% of the GDP) to be spent on education
- Support removal of barriers that hinder access and survival of first generation learners from poor families to cross to reach and survive in school
- Given the needs of first generation school-goers, arrange intensive training inputs, rethink on the existing models of pre-service and in-service teacher trainings, create work environment where teachers are part of wider deliberations on meaning and functions of education in an inegalitarian society.
- Accept responsibility for educating our next generation with our own resources without dependence on foreign loans and involvement of foreign agencies in elementary education
- As an acknowledgement of the responsibility of public authorities towards public education, all the peoples representatives and government servant should be asked to educate their own children in government-run schools

#### **B) Opposition to Privatisation of Public Education and Profiteering in Education**

- While we not advocate the shutting down of private educational institutions, we are opposed to the privatisation of the public education system.
- Oppose privatization of government and aided institutions and find alternatives to mushrooming of low-quality, private, unrecognized schools
- Stop PPP models in various arenas of public education and support strengthening of capacities of public education institutions

- Put an end to rampant profiteering and other forms of corruption in the private sector education such as exorbitant and unaccounted fees, underpaid teachers, under-equipped institutions.

### **C) Community Involvement in School Education**

- Support community involvement in schools based on self-determination and participation.
- Accountability of school/teachers to local body like Gram Sabha or Mohalla Sabha
- Create space for the involvement of the local community – urban or rural – in the creation of a context-rooted and context-relevant curriculum.
- Set up a process of co-creation of a context-rooted curriculum

### **D) Curriculum and Pedagogy**

- Support child-centred pedagogy that views the child as a co-creator of knowledge and not merely a recipient of information.
- Curriculum that is grounded both in the ethos of democracy, secularism, equity and justice as well as India's diverse cultures and ways of life.
- Education till Class 5 to be based largely on the local context and resources, with lesser use of textbooks. Concepts, principles and analysis to be built upon from the concrete realities of the local context.
- Integration of work and education, of academic and vocational subjects; work to be used as pedagogical tool for academic knowledge.
- Ethics, principles and human values to be interwoven in the pedagogy and curriculum and not 'taught' as a separate subject.
- Curriculum and pedagogy to focus on building a 'life-long learner' and 'learning how to learn', rather than merely the acquiring knowledge/information about specific subjects

### **E) Language**

- We are committed to teaching in the mother-tongue or vernacular. Principles of pedagogy and swaraj require that for the first five years, the medium of instruction should be as close to mother-tongue as possible, before a child makes a transition to one of the Scheduled languages.
- Promote multi-lingual classrooms as the norm and an ideal – no promoting or insistence upon English at the cost of Indian languages.
- English to be taught as an additional language to all students from Class One onwards.

### **F) Early Childhood Care and Education:**

- The nomenclature should change from pre-school or pre-primary education to ECCE in order to ensure that this intervention is not treated only as a 'preparation' for school, but acknowledges that ECCE addresses a holistic approach to the child's development in the critical period of 0-6 years.
- Bring ECCE under RTE – thereby giving the education/ care of this age group due importance and establishing appropriate norms and guidelines and set in place a regulatory framework so that children's development is not compromised.
- To provide ECCE of equitable quality to all children, by way of developmentally appropriate curriculum, learning that is contextualized, trained and adequately rewarded teachers, with an encouraging style of supervision, appropriate teacher-child ratio and group size and infrastructure supportive of children's needs

#### **G) School Teachers: Education, Working Conditions and Autonomy**

- Teachers need to be trained, regularized, compensated adequately and continuously trained to ensure quality teaching; the practice of contractualization of school teaching needs to be immediately corrected.
- Upgrade initial teacher education by enhancing the entry qualification and duration of training making it equivalent to a degree programme with a balanced training in pedagogy, teaching methodology and on understanding the child.
- Greater autonomy for teachers instead of a mechanical monitoring and target setting for each day at the school for teachers.

#### **H) Vocational Education**

- Re-imagine and promote a conception of vocational education that is not based on a dual, hierarchical division between the academic and skill/vocation; that is not merely increasing employability in the job market, but also re-conceiving the value, creativity and satisfaction of human labour.
- Vocational and academic education to be integrated in the school curriculum, in such a way that both forms of knowledge enhance the understanding of the other.
- Work to be used as pedagogical tool for teaching academic subjects. Vocational courses to have a major internship component, where a skill/vocation would be learnt with a practitioner, rather than divorced from its context.
- Vocational education to respond to the needs of the social context. Participation of the local community in designing and teaching the work-based component of the curriculum.
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#### **I) Higher Education**

- Higher education policy to be determined by needs of Swaraj and nation-building, not by the imperatives of the market.
- Massive expansion of higher educational institutions and seats in the public sector, so that a greater proportion of school passing students can take up higher education

- Universal financial aid scheme that combines student free-ship, scholarship and loans (to be under-written by the government) in such a way that no deserving student is excluded from higher education for want of money
- Shift away from the current obsession with Central universities and a handful of national institutions; substantial portion of the higher education budget to be used to support State Universities
- Ensure access to higher education for students from disadvantaged sections of society. Fee structures, scholarships to be made available accordingly. Funds to be committed for academic support mechanisms for students from disadvantaged/ marginalised groups.
- Need to have greater regulation – both on content and fees – of private institutions of higher education.
- Affirmative action to be mandatory for private institutions of higher education.
- Academic higher education to be inter-disciplinary and research oriented.
- Greater autonomy from government's interference in the institutions of higher learning

Swaraj Abhiyan does not presume that we have all the answers to what needs to be done in this arena. We are here to learn from teachers, educational administrators, policy thinkers, education activists, parents and indeed the students. We begin with a conviction that education needs to be at the heart of public debate and action in our country. Swaraj abhiyan proposes the following policy action points in the hope that it would encourage public debate and eventually better action.