

TEACHER EDUCATION AND NCTE: FENCING EATS THE CROPS

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Abstract

The article critically examines the role of the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) in shaping teacher education in India. While the establishment of NCTE aimed to ensure planned development, maintain quality, and prevent commercialization of teacher education, the study highlights significant shortcomings in its functioning. The author discusses issues such as corruption, ineffective inspections, substandard teacher education institutions, lack of emphasis on ICT and modern teaching methods, and political influence in decision-making. The article argues that, despite the expansion of teacher education institutions, the quality of teacher preparation has declined, undermining the original objectives of the NCTE. The study emphasizes the need for reform and greater accountability to align policy intentions with actual outcomes in teacher education.

Keywords: *Teacher Education, NCTE, Quality Control, Educational Policy, Professional Training, Teacher Preparation, India, Curriculum Framework, Regulatory Challenges*

It is rightly said that 'there can be marvellous teaching in muddy walls and muddy teaching in marble halls'. What it means is that a school does not mean simply a magnificent building with beautiful gardens and lawns, rich laboratories and libraries, and a large playground; rather, it means a 'learning environment' created by visionary and imaginative teachers. Education Commission (1964-66), in its report, emphasized the importance of the quality, competence, and character of teachers and their professional preparation for qualitative improvement of education.

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"Investment in teacher education can yield very rich dividends because the financial resources required are small when measured against the resulting improvements in the education of millions. The essence of a teacher education program is its 'quality' without which, it becomes, not only a financial waste, but also a source of overall deterioration in educational standards", the Commission added. When India became free in 1947, it was expected that the post- independence era would witness revolutionary changes in the basic structure of education. But, unfortunately the colonial system was allowed to continue and it still continues. Within education, teacher education has been most neglected till now. As education system in our country expanded after independence, the need of more and better teachers increased.

Quantitatively, the teaching profession is the largest among all the professions of equivalent status with about 6 million members-5.5 million working at school stage and 0.5 million at higher education stage. In spite of the fact that teaching is not a preferred vocation for most of our graduates, teachers constitute a major portion of our workforce. As evident from the share of funds allocated in the plan and non-plan budgets, 'education' is not a significant sector of economy for our government. On the other hand, general public is also not satisfied with our education system, especially, the performance of teachers. There is a general complaint that teachers at all levels either 'do not teach' or 'cannot teach'. The reasons for 'do not teach' may be related to their social and moral aspects of behavior while those for 'cannot teach' may be traced in the process of their academic and professional preparation.

The National Policy on Education-1986 laid greater stress on quality of teacher education than ever before and proposed that the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) should be given a statutory status. The proposal was approved by the government through an Act of Parliament in 19°1. The statutory NCTE was created 'to achieve planned and coordinated development of teacher education system throughout the country and to ensure the maintenance of norms and standards in teacher education system', and also 'to stop its commercialization'. The organization started functioning in August 1995. The first major task which NCTE undertook after its inception was to ask the existing teacher education institutions to seek from it a formal recognition of their courses. For this purpose inspections were conducted by the NCTE which accounted for huge expenditure from public funds. The process of inspection followed by formal recognition of old institutions continued for at least five years. It was difficult to understand why an institution functioning for over a hundred years should

seek formal recognition from the NCTE after awarding thousands of (unrecognized?) degrees and diplomas. It is difficult to justify the expenditure, which ran into millions of rupees, on this exercise. It would have been more reasonable had this process been adopted only for creating new and quality teacher training institutions.

With the inception of NCTE as a quality control mechanism, it was expected that teacher education system in India would undergo a radical change. But unfortunately, the new teacher education 'curriculum framework' developed and published by it in 1998 also followed the traditional lines. It included traditional theory courses and practice teaching to be conducted by the traditional methods. The only significant and noticeable changes, as proposed by then experts of the NCTE, were the ones regarding extension of the duration of training courses from one year to two years and revival of the four-year integrated teacher education programs. It appeared that the thought processes underlying the formulation of the new curriculum framework were least influenced by the new developments in information and communication technology. The ICT has revolutionized the teaching learning process at all levels and in all fields, but teacher education has not seen the light of the day, courtesy the 'traditional outlook' of then NCTE officials and experts. Unfortunately, our experts and policy planners go by folklore without carrying out field surveys themselves or taking any clues from available research literature. The NCIE never thought of analysing the teachers' job to identify the desired teaching behaviors and competencies and develop curriculum accordingly. Such an effort would have been a genuine gesture of sympathy to the poor taxpayers who finance such huge projects.

The single publicly visible achievement of the NCTE is that it has multiplied the number of teacher education institutions through a process of development of norms, conduct of inspections, and award of recognition to all those institutions which could somehow make the inspection teams submit favourable reports to the concerned regional committees. This process involved rampant corruption. When an element of corruption crept into the process of inspection many senior teacher educators either withdrew voluntarily or deliberately excluded from the panels because they were 'inconvenient and non-cooperative'. Gradually, the 'envelope culture' of underhand dealings took strong roots and selected people who were ready to rub their palms with the NCTE functionaries for sharing the grease, became professional inspectors. Now, the stage has reached that teachers of small degree colleges with a few years

of experience are repeatedly sent by the NCTE for conducting inspections because they are 'convenient and cooperative'. A clan of politicians and businessmen as 'B Ed mafia' has developed over the years which dominates the decision making process through their political links. The structure of regional committees of the NCTE provides a live evidence of this fact. Sometimes, members of the inspection team do not even formally visit the institution and write the inspection report inside the air-conditioned lobbies of the starred hotels hired in advance by the hosts to ensure their comfortable stay. One interesting thing is that proposals of owners of private institutions are processed very expeditiously while those of central universities gather dust for years. This is simply because central universities cannot do what private people can. One who is interested to know more about the functioning of this organization is advised to read the report of the Anand Swaroop Committee which was appointed to inquire into the affairs of some teacher education institutions in Bihar and West Bengal under Eastern Regional Committee. The opening sentence of the report reads as follows: "This is a narrative about the so-called Fake Institutions for Teacher Education, which reportedly came up in Bihar following the establishment of NCTE in 1995, after the NCTE Act came into force on the 7th of August 1995." What happened to this report is not known. Maybe, as usual, it has gone to a waste-paper basket.

The net result is that secondary teacher education institutions have gone up from only a little more than 600 in 1994 to more than 3000 (most of them having substandard quality) within a short period of one decade. Nobody, including the NCTE officials, seems to be concerned about the quality of training imparted in these institutions. It appears that saving their chairs/positions is the topmost item on their agenda. Taking full advantage of the situation, the clever businessmen abandoned their traditional dealings in onions and potatoes and started B Ed colleges in the go-downs thus vacated, because they saw in it huge monetary returns for meager investment. The designation of principal has been renamed as 'director' by private managements where most of the, so-called, directors are superannuated who could rise not higher than the position of a lecturer in their regular job. Has the NCTE approved such designations? Instances have been reported where a single qualified person is shown working as lecturer in several B Ed colleges while, in fact, he works nowhere and draws partial salary from all of them. The persons with B Ed degrees are teaching B Ed students on meager salaries. The general feeling among teacher educators is that the quality of teacher education was better before the inception of the NCTE. Of course, some pseudo-educationists made hay at the sun-

shine during the formative years of NCTE. It was like an old-age home for them. They travelled by air even for short distances of 250 kilometres at the cost of poor people of the country. If air bills of a few persons associated with the NCTE those days are re-examined, startling facts will come to light.

Unfortunately, teaching is not recognized as a profession by our government at par with professions like engineering, medicine and law. No non-medico can be posted as Chairman of Medical Council of India. But, in the case of teacher education this principle is not followed. The government just picks up anybody irrespective of his seniority and caliber and places him on the highest position in the field of teacher education. That is why all chairpersons of the NCTE appointed by the government so far have been persons without any formal training/degree in teacher education. The genuine teacher educators have been content with only the second position. But, they have had hard times because their bosses had stronger political connections. It is really interesting to see that training is essential even for a primary school teacher, but a person who controls the entire teacher education system of the country does not require any kind of formal training. If a person can become 'the best teacher educator of the country' without formal training, then existence of such a large system of teacher education is not justified. If one has a casual glance over the list of members of various Regional Committees constitutes by the NCTE, one finds that these committees are full of those who have nothing to-do with education and teaching, not to talk of formal training as teachers. This tells the underlying story and gives the message that teacher education is not recognized by the government as a specialized professional training.

Institutions are created with great fanfare, but while manning them, they are hit at the very roots. The body, as a quality control mechanism, was created to fulfil the twin objectives of achieving planned and coordinated development of teacher education and stopping its commercialization. Unfortunately, since the inception of NCTE the quality of teacher education in India has gone down and its commercialization has risen to its peak. The results are contrary to the intentions. The fundamental problem is that NCTE never recognized its regulatory functions which were assigned to it by the Act of Parliament in 1993. There has been a mismatch between the vision and the ground reality. It passed most of its time in writing curriculum frameworks and books on educationists which should have been a secondary business, the primary being making efforts for determination and maintenance quality. Now, it

is high time for the government to think whether the existence of NCTE or any such organization is worth the expenditure involved in its maintenance. We already have the NAAC which is also a regulating body for higher education institutions including those of teacher education, then why do we need another organization for the same purpose? Let us not forget that poor people pay for these projects.

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