

State education policy: Social discussion needed for change



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Education has been shifted from the State list to the concurrent list. But in practice, it looks as if the subject is still in the Union list. Though states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala etc. have voiced their opposition on this count, the union government implements several things related to education through its orders and officials.

Discussion on education policy

During the union government's formulation of its new education policy, no state in India had responded or reacted. But Tamil Nadu alone opposed it and launched a discussion on a large scale. Debates were held at the levels of panchayat, district and state. The Tamil Nadu Science Forum played a pivotal role in the discussion on the Union Government's New Education Policy. Over 50 teacher and student organisations took the initiative forward. A people's draft on alternative education policy was

released and debates were held on it. Even during the elections, the National Education Policy was the focal point of discussion.

Against this background, the Tamil Nadu government's state education policy was announced, triggering great expectations among the people and the educationists.

Generally, the Union Government wants to hold under its thumb all affairs of administration. So, it has to be pondered how a state's education policy will make an impact and to what extent the state concerned will implement its policy. It is not known if we are going to adopt the union government's recommendations and policies on education in different names and in different ways. The education policy committee has sought suggestions, also through e-mail, on the important features of the education policy such as long-term vision, primary, high, higher secondary, college and university education, physical training education, vocational education, online education and standard education etc.

However, we have to press the same demands to the Tamil Nadu government as were put forward to the Union Government a few years ago. At present, zonal meetings are being held to solicit views from the people. Yet the government must take more initiatives in this regard.

Propagation and transparency

The meeting organised to seek public opinion have been held only in a few districts. They are not prevalent. Even at the meetings held there was no transparency. No prior announcements were made about them and the teacher and other organisations were not duly informed.

So, such meetings should be held at as many places as possible. The government may plan to release a final draft on the education policy and then conduct elaborate meetings soliciting views. Even

then such meetings must be held at several places after duly informing the stake-holders on this count.

Of course, Tamil Nadu is at the forefront in education ahead of other states. But the education policy is a document prepared with long-term goals for our state's development. Hence, the policy must be subjected to an elaborate social debate.

The overall social discussion must delve deep into the following questions: Is it the right education system that always keeps teachers, students, parents, officials and the overall society on tenterhooks? Why are there partialities in education? Why has the system been made marks-oriented? What were the circumstances that made education a running race? Is the education a modern reality, which demands sacrificing of not only childhood but also children? Or is the reality thrust on us? Will this reality change?

We must use the State Education Policy as a good opportunity to launch on a large scale a social discussion on all these questions and in the long run, bring about good changes in the education sector. Every one of us must participate in it. The opportunities for participation must be made prevalent.

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