

CALL FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN THE NOVEL 'LAMENT ON THE DEATH OF A MASTER OF ARTS' AND ITS REALIZATION THROUGH NEP 2020: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The present paper focuses on the need to totally recalibrate our education system as the contemporary job market puts several challenges for traditional learning. It is the demand of time that we should modify the current education system mechanism. Skill development has become must for sustainable economic growth. In the novel *Lament on the Death of Master of Arts* the novelist describes the struggles of Nur, the protagonist, who is the victim of faulty education system. Though he is an M.A. yet fails to find a job and his education without any skill proves to be a total waste. NEP-2020 is a boon to our education system and promises to create new job opportunities. The novel is very much in tune with the policies of NEP-2020 and suggests the areas that can be improved.

Key Words: Education, NEP-2020, job, Master of Arts, degree, skill.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays pivotal role in our lives and paves the way to reach our highest potential and unleash our creative energies. Education is a great tool for growth and development of a nation. High quality education is a major catalyst of growth and has a potential to transform people's lives. Mulk Raj Anand's novel 'Lament on the Death of Master of Arts' alarms the nation to overhaul the education system. Anand was highly dissatisfied with the education system in pre-independent India where people were denied the right to education on the basis of caste. But even after independence, there were many shortcomings in the education policy. The novel exposes the flaws of education system and shows how even higher education fails in practical life without skill development .

THE PROTAGONIST AS A VICTIM OF FAULTY EDUCATION SYSTEM

Nur, the protagonist, is a victim of social and economic forces, despite having the degree of Master of Arts he actually suffers the pangs of poverty. Since his childhood he was very good in speech and was a handsome boy. So his father and others in society expected him to get higher education and a good job. Their expectation was very high when they said:

He ought to be sent to the government school when he grows up, for he will surely become a babu with his pretty speech. And because he had a lovely pink face, with dark brown eyes....he will surely pass his M.A. and become a Deputy Collector sahib. (Lament 15).

After completing M.A., Nur faces very difficult situation in his life, he does not get a job. He finds himself a misfit in the society where it is not the academic merit but economic independence which is valued most. He fails to find the job of an officer and cannot do manual labor as he possess the degree of Master of Arts. Education without skill proves to be of no use to him. This idea of skill development is very much in tune with Skill India Campaign that was launched by P.M. Modi on July 15, 2015, with an aim to train the youth in different skills. P.M. declared that he wants to make India the skill capital of the world. NEP-2020 lays much emphasis on skill development to empower youth by improving their employability and providing with requisite skills to fuel the growth of the nation. Many skill based vocational courses like, fishing, tea plantation, fitness, beauty and wellness, fashion technology, food processing, craft, tailoring and organic farming are introduced by many Indian Universities. Nur, though having the honour of being a Master of Arts remains unemployed because he has no other skill to meet the requirement of the job market and is frequently ridiculed by people:

The streets of the city in which everyone knows him and whispered as he passed by, "there goes Nur, the son of the confectioner who is an M.A. pass, but who sits idle, with one hand on another, and kills flies because he can't get a job". (Lament 61).

Nur's school-mate, Gama, now is a tonga-driver, visits him in the hospital, as Nur is a T.B. patient and is in critical situation. They both remember their school days and discuss the futility of modern education system, Gama says, "What is there in education brother? Waste of time". (Lament 32). Nur replies and tells him the importance of education:

Education, education means wisdom; wisdom means the correlation of the growth of body and mind: the correlation of the growth of mind and body is achieved through knowledge and knowledge is power: if you have recommendations. (Lament 32).

THE PLOT AND NEP-2020 : A COMPARISON

Self-Reliant India Campaign promotes re-skilling and up-skilling of individuals to make them self-reliant and to contribute to the economic development of the nation. In NEP-2020 vocational or skill based learning is included in the curriculum from the school level. In India, we have much love and respect for degrees and ignore to up-skill ourselves and the result is the growing problem of unemployment. In the novel we see that Gama, the tonga driver is earning well, whereas Nur, the degree holder, is struggling for life. Nur's comment on Gama reveals the fact:

He was earning more than hundreds of M.A.s, had a feeling of inferiority engendered by the exaggerated respect for degree that people had. (Lament 32).

The writer also reveals the fact that seeking a government job is a dream of all the degree holders and a government servant attracts a good dowry. Nur tells Gama:

My father wanted me to apply for admission to all Government services, one after another, believing that since I had got a degree I had a free ticket for admission into the paradise of officialdom. And, in anticipation of my future position as a dignified member of the Government of India, he married me off.... That poor silly girl, Iqbal, was as much a pawn in the game which her father was playing with mine and I was in the game which my father was playing with her's; her father thought that I would get into the Imperial Service with my first class degree, and

my father thought that the daughter of a respectable Veterinary surgeon would bring a good dowry. (Lament 48).

Further, Nur explains the tragedy of educated unemployed youth who only hankers after government job and has no respect for manual labour. He says:

Any kind of manual labour was bad, was low and unworthy. It was not respectable to exert one's hands...the only izzat was in Government service. (Lament 63).

Nur is a victim of an ill-framed system of education in India, that is totally marks oriented neglecting other important aspects of personality. Mulk Raj Anand dreams of a classless society where equality, liberty and fraternity must prevail.

NEP-2020 has the objective that the current education system should provide each and every child the opportunity to learn and excel, no one should be prevented to get education on the basis of his background and caste etc. Bridging social gaps in access, participation and learning outcomes in school / college education is the major goal of NEP-2020. In the novel at many places we hear Nur saying that he could not get a government job because he is the son of a confectioner. He makes a confession:

Yes I must confess....but the shame of knowing that I was the son of a confectioner, if I am to be honest, lessened the thrill of my own perfection. I never looked at my face in the glass afterwards without casting my eyes on my feet also immediately, like the peacock who weeps to see its ugly paws. (Lament 50).

He further says:

And was it my fault that I couldn't get into any of the Services? Was it not because I was his son, who couldn't get any recommendations? (Lament 76).

If NEP is implemented successfully, it would transform education system of the country by making education accessible, equitable and inclusive. The novelist is aware of the learning crisis in India where learning by rote and only to get passing marks is the trend of the day. The dialogue between Gama and Nur throws light on this system:

After all, you used to let me copy the sums from your notebooks during the vacations- although do you remember the occasion on which my father almost broke my bones when he caught me copying your answers ...? (Lament 34).

NEP-2020 now recognizes the need to evaluate higher-order skills, such as analysis, critical thinking and problem solving etc. To translate the vision of NEP-2020, a thorough restructuring of curriculum, pedagogy and content is required. A satire on higher education system is discernable in the following paragraph:

...while all of us just wasted our time ragging each other and gossiping as we sat in the fields ...only talked scandal about which boy was in love with whom and what professor had an alliance with which boy. (Lament 45).

NEP-2020 gives students a fair chance to choose the job of their passion. Before it, students were pressurized by their parents to choose the occupation of their choice. In the novel we come to know about Azad who loved writing poetry but did not get anybody's approval and was facing the pressure to become a deputy collector but when he failed in his attempts he got frustrated and became mad. Nur tells the readers:

He went mad because the torn and battered soul of India was struggling inside

him, because he seemed to have understood the hopelessness of our lot. (Lament 43).

At home Nur is also going through this mental torture when his father always keep him telling that the son of Pir Baksh has become a deputy collector and the son of Kalyan Singh has become a sub-judge and he is unable to secure a job for himself. His frustration comes out in the following paragraph:

Oh where could one hide one's face? Where could one go? One couldn't even go and become boot-black in a different town as the news would spread,.... and the fear of being laughed at by the world (Lament 63).

NEP-2020 also talks about creating higher performance standards for teachers and to redefine the teaching and learning process. Nur has suffered from the hands of his teacher. He tells us about his teacher Kanshi in the following way:

He did remember for he had suffered from Kanshi, who had established a vendetta against him, because he refused to accept the privilege of taking private tuition from the master. (Lament 33).

Mulk Raj Anand comments on the stress-full teaching environment in our educational institutions. If educational activities are joyful and engaging it will enhance the learning capacity of the students. NEP -2020 also advocates stress-free learning. We can feel the stress of the students and their desire to have fun through this statement:

But how far away seemed those endless days when he trudged to and back from school from this house ,days of utter loneliness only relieved by the few hours of play and an occasional fair to which he was taken by his grandmother . (Lament 34-35).

The novelist believes that the education of the young people should be with aim to promote better habits and create values and should release their potential creative energies, nothing should be imposed on them. The learners feel suffocated like prisoners in a stressful learning environment.

The novelist notices many loopholes in the education system. Young people despite having higher degrees and academic achievements remain unemployed. Gradually they sink into the ocean of despair and depression. Depressing condition of Nur in his last days is akin to several highly educated unemployed youth:

Then, as the last remaining desire in life, he had wished between periods of hopelessness and blank despair and endless, bottomless misery for the gift of a little job howsoever insignificant and humiliating, even the job of a peon. (Lament 62).

NEP-2020 is a welcome change for our nation and promises to create new employment opportunities. NEP is offering such programmes and degrees in education across arts, languages and humanities etc. will surely expand high quality opportunities for employment.

CONCLUSION

The above study surprises us with the futuristic vision of the novelist. Many decades back he could see the drawbacks of our education system and a need for complete recalibration of our

education system. The novel *Lament on the Death of Master of Arts* very concisely highlights the grim situations created by the present education system. NEP-2020 seems to offer remedy for all these situations. The novel has gained much popularity and become more relevant with the launch of NEP-2020.

WORKS CITED

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