



Majoritarian mobocracy, higher education and Vikasit Bharat 2047

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Abstract

'Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely' (Lord Acton, 1877). This dictum makes it mandatory for a democracy to support critical reasoning and scientific temperament to protect it from becoming a majoritarian mobocracy. Cultural majoritarianism across the globe display common tendencies. Identification of a cultural enemy, mostly hatred towards migrants or minority religious groups as a cultural unifying force, setting a narrative and spread the same and curb all other narratives through all possible means to remain in power, and a national cultural pride, claiming to be a world power, super power etc have been at the centre of majoritarian mobocracies in general. German Nazism, Italian fascism and almost everywhere one can easily observe those characteristics. Once in power majoritarian mobocracies tend to convert all institutions of scientific reasoning and critical thinking, including academic institutions to function as cultural propagandists. Academic institutions, specifically higher educational institutions by the production and dissemination of scientific and critical knowledge transforms individuals to become scientific tempered, critical thinkers and to act as public intellectuals by which citizens in particular and nation in general becomes capable of facing future socio-economic challenges. Cultural propagandist education institutions focus on inculcating a national pride of the great past through false narratives which lacks scientific evidences and critical scrutiny. Therefore, any democratic nation that aims to be a developed nation, where citizens enjoy high standards of socio-economic well-being, scientific temperament and critical thinking-based education is the only option. The paper tries to analyze the reports and policy documents of Education commissions and National Education Policies of independent India, to see what extent policy documents incorporate and promote science-based education or retard the educational institutions to function as cultural propagandists. Cultural propagandist institutions are antithetical to socio-economic development of the nation.

Keywords: Majoritarian mobocracy, Higher education, Vikasit Bharat 1947

Introduction

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education institutions focus on inculcating a national pride of the great past through false narratives which lacks scientific evidences and critical scrutiny. Therefore, any democratic nation aims to be a developed nation, where citizens enjoy high standards of socio-economic well-being, scientific temperament and critical thinking-based education is the only option. The paper tries to analyze the reports and policy documents of Education commissions and National Education Policies of independent India, to see what extent policy documents incorporate and promote science-based education or retard the educational institutions to function as cultural propagandists. Cultural propagandist institutions are antithetical to socio-economic development of the nation.

Socio-economic development: a trait or pride?

Socio economic development is a "man-made" phenomenon, reflecting how a society chooses to adapt, innovate, and grow. Therefore, conscious and rational choices by the society only leads to development. Emotional, irrational choices and decisions, blindly following religious traditions, rituals, family values and traditions etc., cannot necessarily lead to development. Development is a process, and not a programme. A social change as such does not constitute the development, but those changes that are beneficial to society, even it may

result in negative side-effects, or, consequences that undermine, or, eliminate existing ways of life that are considered culturally positive. Development is increasingly recognized not just as an economic or technical process, but as a fundamental cultural process and trait. It is inherently embedded in the values, beliefs, material artifacts, and social behaviors of a society. As a cultural trait, development is learned, shared, and transmitted socially across generations. Therefore, socio-economic development of a nation is solely depend upon, conscious and rational choices made by that society or nation towards improving the living standards, protecting individual liberty and freedom etc.. Every constitutional democracy is directed towards this objective of development. Societies experience "cultural lag" where non-material culture (beliefs, values, religious faith and practices) struggles to catch up with socio-economic developments (science & technology). This lag is expressed as developed nation, developing nation and underdeveloped nation etc... There are many nations which are economically advanced but socially still a developing nation and vice versa. Therefore, many aristocracies and dictatorships under economical parameters might appear developed but on social terms still stands less developed.

By production and dissemination of the knowledge, Education in general and higher education in particular is considered to be the vehicle through which societies improve rationality, critical thinking and scientific temper. Therefore, quality and quantity of higher education become very crucial for the socio-economic development. Any attempt to use higher education system to propagate a cultural pride through fake narratives which lacks evidences and scientific scrutiny leads to socio-economic retardation and to cultural mobocracy than a constitutional democracy.

Constitutional democracy Vs majoritarian mobocracy

Looking back at the history of transition of modern democracies from aristocracies, it is very clear that the democracies inherently possess majoritarian mobocratic tendencies. If not effectively secured by checks and balances envisaged in a written constitutional democracy those majoritarian tendencies shall convert democracy to a mobocracy. The rise of Adolf Hitler, in Germany (1933) and many other dictators after him indicates this transition of democracies into mobocracies and soon to dictatorships. Written constitutional democracy of India, considers every single individual as a citizen of India, neither as an imperial subject nor as a *praja*, and is founded on core principles of justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, and secularism. Any citizen, whether aristocrat, bureaucrat, technocrat or a *chaivala* (road side tea vendor) all have the same right and potential to become the head of the state under the democratic law. Preamble of Indian constitution declares:

"We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic and to secure to all its citizens: justice, social, economic and political; liberty of thought,

expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation; IN OUR constituent assembly this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do hereby adopt, enact and give to ourselves this constitution". (Preamble, Constitution of Republic of India, 1949).

It is very clear that written constitutional democracy identifies every individual as citizen of the republic means any citizen can become the head of the republic by securing majority votes. It is a major shift from aristocracies where the right to rule was reserved only to aristocrats and all others were remained as subjects forever. Constitutional democracies, aim at socio-economic growth and wellbeing of all without considering the differences of minority, majority, caste, creed, religion and class. The four pillars of constitutional Indian democracy: Legislature, Executive, Judiciary and Media are envisaged as to be constantly vigilant to ensure and strive for the efficient functioning of constitutional democratic institutions. Constitutional democracies are always a work in process towards an ideal society where citizens enjoy socio-economic wellbeing in a equal and just society irrespective of their differences of minority, majority, migrant or citizen, upper or lower caste, differences in creed or follow different religious beliefs.

Majoritarian mobocracies across the globe exhibit common characteristics. Firstly, majoritarian cultural mobocracies focus on polarizing the majority against minority through fake and hate narratives, because identification of internal cultural enemy works as the only unifying force for the cultural majority in mobocracies. Contrary to constitutional democracies, hate to each other than understanding and mutual cooperation between the citizens becomes the major unifying force for cultural majority in mobocracies. Therefore hate narratives against religious minorities or migrants, xenophobic tendencies become the daily routine in mobocracies. Secondly, glorification of past as ideal and looking backward in history to identify instances to inflate the pseudo national pride, mostly majoritarian cultural pride to cover up or deviate the focus from the real and acute problems faced by its citizens on the ground. Thirdly, mobocracies exhibit war mongering towards neighbors, through military might based, hard power glorifications as super power, *vishwaguru* etc.. In a close look it becomes clearer that it is founded on a fake cultural pride which emanates from an inferiority complex, and insecurity expressed in popular parlance as "majority is in danger" "*hum khatare me hi*" etc. Majoritarian mobocracies comes into power through the democratic process of election but once in power as executives, mobocracies try to dismantle, weaken and control tightly other pillars of constitutional democracy like legislature, media and judiciary through policies and narratives to remain in power. In majoritarian cultural mobocracies, elections become a process to keep all others away from power by any means, hook or crook. Majoritarian cultural mobocracies are nothing but quasi dictatorships disguised as democracy.

In accordance with the differences in the outlook and perspectives between the constitutional democracy and the majoritarian cultural mobocracy, the role and function of higher educational institutions varies. In constitutional democracies socio-economic development is a byproduct of an education policy founded on rationality, scientific temper and critical thinking. Majoritarian mobocracies perceive socio-economic development differently. It reduces the development to economics. Social well being becomes secondary. Gross domestic product and other gross values are considered as development where as Human development Index, Women empowerment, and equity becomes irrelevant or relevant only if it supports fake cultural pride that mobocracy stands for. It tends to control mass media to propagate preferred type of narrative only. It allows different views to that extent that it signifies and highlights the necessity of the preferred narrative of pseudo cultural pride. For example, say Indian media house invites foreign nationals from Pakistan and ask them to speak against India by providing means and money. Due to anti-India rhetoric, Indian channel improves its TRP (television rating point) and earns money through advertisements and Pakistanis are happy because they could speak against India in Indian media and for that, being paid by Indians too. It's a win-win for both media house and Pakistani guest. Listeners and Indian audience of that channel are only fooled with a fake pride that the channel anchor bashed the Pakistani guest at his face etc. Governing principle of the mobocracies is not to improve the socio-economic well being of its citizens but to do all that by which they can remain in power. Actual concerns of the people, facts and real data, are not considered relevant, on the contrary either furnish the data to look good and supportive to the cultural narrative or release only those data and facts which are in support of the preferred cultural narrative. Both constitutional democracy and majoritarian cultural mobocracy understand and consider the Higher education as ideal vehicle to reach their objectives, though they differ in their objectives drastically. Those differences in objectives and implementation strategies practiced by constitutional democracy and majoritarian mobocracy makes this enquiry relevant. Does the Indian democracy show the mobocratic tendencies? Do Indian higher education policy documents support and envision the constitutional democracy or majoritarian cultural mobocracy? Indian Education Commission reports and National Education policy documents of independent India and their vision statements as the primary data, the study focus on finding insights for Vikasit Bharat 2047.

Higher education institutions and Education commissions of India

Educations systems in general and Higher education system in particular have been seen as an essential vehicle for achieving socio-economic well being by the knowledge commissions of India since 1835. With the establishment of three universities in erstwhile Calcutta, Bombay and Madras by the colonial British government for the dissemination of modern western knowledge to Indian subjects, university based Higher education system came into existence in India.

“We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.” (Minutes of Macaulay 1835).

By Adopting English as the only medium of instruction, oriental knowledge systems represented through Sanskrit (*gurukul*) and Arabic (*madrassa*) languages were considered as only religious and antithetic to scientific temperament. Though *gurukuls* and *madrassas* continued to receive grants from central and provincial governments in British India, for government services and scientific institutions, English education became mandatory. Immediately after the independence different education commissions were established to study and plan the future of India through educating its masses. Education was considered as most efficient vehicle for nation building. In order to study and plan the higher education system University Education Commission (1948-1949) under the chairmanship of Dr. S Radhakrishnanan was established. To strengthen secondary education in India, the Secondary Education Commission (1952-1953) under the chairmanship of Dr. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar was constituted. To make provision (grants) for the co-ordination and determination of standards in Universities, University grants commission was established in 1956. To modernize and trust the destiny of Indian education towards scientific temper and critical reasoning, the Education commission was established under the Chairmanship of Dr. D. S Kothari, UGC Chairman in 1964. Government of India under Prime minister Nehru also adopted a resolution on scientific policy and developed high quality scientific and technical education institutions such as IITs, IIMs, and AIIMS. In 1966, National council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) was established to advise both union and state governments in formulating and implementing education policies.

Education policy documents and their vision statements

Vision statement of a policy document is like the preamble of a constitution. Just as a fruit bearing tree emerges from its seed, full-fledged policy document emerges from its vision. Nobody can deny the fact that a tree is identified from its fruits. Therefore even the study of vision statements of policy documents becomes crucial to identify the tree and fruit that it bears. University education commission of India 1949, does not give a vision statement as such but deals a chapter on aims of university education. University education is conceived by the commission as a vehicle to transform Indian citizen to a virtuous person who is capable of discerning wisdom from knowledge and knowledge from information '*jnanam vijñana sahitam*' and emphasizes that “the outlines of the social philosophy which should govern all our institutions, educational as well as economic and political, are indicated in

the preamble to our Draft Constitution".(Report of the university education commission, 1949, p. 31).

While Mudaliar commission 1953 looked into the secondary education, National committee on Women education under Durgabhai Deshmukh focused on women education. Education commission of India 1965 under the chairmanship of Dr. D.S Kothari shifts higher education from virtuous citizen building to education for nation building. The headline of the report 'Education and National development' set the tone clear and resolute.

"The destiny of India, is now being shaped in her classrooms... In a world based on science and technology, it is education that determines the level of prosperity, welfare and security of the people. On the quality and number of people coming out our schools and colleges will depend our success in the great enterprise of national reconstruction whose principle objective is to raise the standard of living of people. (Report of the education commission 1964-66, 1966, p.1).

The National Policies on Education (NPE) are policies formulated by the Government of India at different decades to promote and regulate education in India. These policies cover elementary education to higher education of both rural and urban India. The first NPE was promulgated by the Government of India by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1968, the second by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1986, then third (Revised version of 1986) by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao in 1992, and the fourth by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2020. National policy on Education 1968 was based on the recommendations of Kothari commission 1966. NPE 1968 reasserts the Kothari commission's recommendations and declares:

"The government of India is convinced that a radical reconstruction of education on the broad lines recommended by the education commission (1966) is essential for economic and cultural development of the country, for national integration and for realizing the ideal of a socialistic pattern of society. This will involve a transformation of the system to relate it more closely to the life of people, a continuous effort to expand the educational opportunity a sustained and intensive effort to raise the quality of education at all stages, an emphasis on the development of science and technology and the cultivation of moral and social values". (NPE 1968, p.38)

Free and compulsory education and academic freedom of the teachers were another highlights of the NPE 1968 policy. "Academic freedom of teachers to pursue and publish independent studies and researches and to speak and write about significant national and international issues should be protected"(NPE 1968, p.39).

National policy on Education 1986, and its revised policy in 1992 states its vision as "education is essentially for all. This is fundamental to our all round development material and spiritual. ...Education refines sensitivities and perceptions that contribute to national cohesion, a scientific temper and independence of mind and spirit, thus furthering the goals of socialism, secularism and democracy enshrined in our

constitution. Education develops manpower for different levels of economy...it is the ultimate guarantee of national self-reliance. In sum education is the unique investment in the present and the future." (NPE 1992, p.4)

Draft national education policy 2019 which has been debated widely has its vision statement as follows. "The National Education Policy 2019 envisions an India centered education system that contributes directly to transforming our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all".(Draft National Education policy,2019) Vision statement of NEP 2020, is most striking and takes a different path all together.

"This National Education Policy (2020) envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower. The Policy envisages that the curriculum and pedagogy of our institutions must develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values, bonding with one's country, and a conscious awareness of one's roles and responsibilities in a changing world. The vision of the Policy is to instill among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen". (NEP 2020, p.6)

A reading through different visions envisaged in education commissions and National policy on Education, one can clearly see that policies up to Draft NEP 2019, moves from a virtuous citizen building towards for nation building through free and compulsory education based on science and technology for the raising standards of living, socio-economic development and to become a knowledge society. This trajectory is indeed very much in accordance scientific temperament and critical reasoning which supports socio-economic well being of the country. Vision of NEP 2020 not only disagree with the same but also emphasizes that an education based on Indian cultural ethos instead of scientific temper and critical reasoning can make India a knowledge superpower. Secondly Pedagogy and curriculum of the courses shall focus on how to make a bonding with one's country. At the root of bonding is an emotional connection. So NEP 2020 replaces emotionality for rationality and critical reasoning. Thirdly instilling a deep rooted pride in being Indian through education takes away the basic freedom of an individual to be confident and come to his or her evaluations through critical reasoning about own culture. Therefore the vision of NEP 2020 places higher education and educational institutions as suitable vehicle for cultural propagandist paradigm of majoritarian cultural mobocracy than a constitutional democracy which guarantees rational, scientific and critical thinking based education for all.

Conclusion

Education and educational institutions are the true investments for the future. Whatever independent India as a nation has achieved till today or going to achieve in future, all is directly related to what degree India can base its educational policies on scientific temper and critical reasoning. Cultural pride is the least that one shall achieve by university education. Sudhanshu Bhushan asserts,

“by the political economy of the curriculum, I mean the curiosity-based scientific basis of determining or designing the curriculum for students. It is decided through a critical examination of knowledge for the benefit of the general public at large, reflecting the aims of public education. The curriculum is determined by subject experts and the state plays a role in providing legitimacy to the whole process of curriculum design and its delivery to the students. However, if the influence of political power dominates curriculum design instead of scientific inquiry, it leads to a curriculum that is corrupted by ideology. It is important to understand the directions of change in curriculum design which are influenced by market forces rather than the interests of the people and the nation. Curriculum design is also shaped by the extent of academic freedom. If academic freedom is compromised, then the process of knowledge generation itself gets mutilated” (Sudhanshu Bhushan, 2023).

What India need at the moment is a globally oriented Higher education policy that transforms Indian students to study, work across the globe and contribute to knowledge creation and wealth creation globally. ‘Indian in colour but global in outlook’. India needs a policy that focuses on knowledge creation based on scientific temper and critical reasoning that transforms us into confident citizens than inflating cultural pride and backward lookers of the past glory. Pawan aggarwal (2006) argues, “Higher education system in India so far has developed an inward-looking approach concerned primarily to meet the domestic demand for higher education. with the integration of the country with the rest of the world and growing trade, investment and mobility of people there is a need for outward looking approaches in higher education. The Indian higher education should not only be able to meet the domestic demand but also international demand for qualified and trained manpower” (Aggarwal pawan 2006, p.140). On this context, it becomes timely to recall the Altbach’s (1993) comment on Indian education policy making. “When all is said, language policy in education in India has been more a matter of political bargain and choice than of academic requirements and practical considerations. For the policy makers, the context of policy making will remain for decades to come as a dilemma between (1) the rational choice with a development objective in long term perspective on the one hand, and (2) an emotional choice with a narrow political objective in short term perspective on the other. Meanwhile, education drifts along,(Altbach, 1993,p.113). For India a U-turn from cultural majoritarian mobocratic tendencies which inflates a fake cultural pride towards a secular constitutional democracy which guarantees socio-economic development of all is the only way ahead.

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