



## Eminent Scholar Lecture Series

# Philosophy of Education as a Knowledge Field



### Prof. C. Seshadri

*Formerly Principal, RIE, Mysore and  
Consultant, UNESCO and DFID*



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**March 31, 2008**



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## **Philosophy of Education as a Knowledge Field**

**- C. Seshadri**

I am beholden to the NUEPA for inviting me to deliver a talk under its eminent scholar lecture series. I feel greatly honoured.

My association with the institution (as NIEPA) is decades old. NIEPA and NCERT (with which organization I was associated for nearly 3 decades) functioned from the same campus and this presented me a great opportunity to interact with my NIEPA colleagues, now and then. It is with pleasure that I recall those occasions. I also feel very happy that I am visiting the institution after it has enhanced its stature by becoming a university. From a technical resource support institution to an autonomous central university is a big leap forward. I rejoiced when I came to know of NIEPA's transformation to NUEPA.

### **The theme**

The theme of my talk (*philosophy of education as a knowledge field*) is mainly inspired by the consideration that my academic training and professional engagement has been, for the most part, in the area of philosophy of education although during the past few years I have been doing mostly project work of the kind that field educationists do in the areas of basic education, literacy training and teacher training, an engagement qualitatively different from serious academics. A further justification arises from NIEPA becoming NUEPA; the change entails a drastic qualitative change in the institution's lifestyle and culture; it also raises new hopes and expectations. A university is a university; it cannot be conceived without values integrally linked with it: academic freedom, autonomy, liberalism and pursuit of excellence. The change implies that NUEPA would now address its mandated functions in educational planning and administration with greater freedom and its contributions will be characterized by intellectual scholarship of a high order and deep understanding of educational theory and practice. I hold that philosophy of education contributes to the development of such understanding and also provides the needed perspective for intellectual dialogue and debate.

Like in other disciplines, there are different traditions in philosophy as well. The dominating one is conceptual analysis (I also use the terms 'analytical', 'critical' to denote this trend) which characterizes most of current writings in the field. I hold this as the paradigm tradition and begin by giving a summary account of analytical philosophy of education. I follow this up with a critique of philosophy of education as it is understood in India and its status, alongside citing work that I consider as contributions of a philosophical kind to the field. As the meager output and general lack of quality in this area appear to stem from a lack of appreciation of the wide scope and richness of the field, I provide illustrations of the nature and variety of philosophical work carried out drawing from national and international sources. I then turn to the NUEPA function areas of school and higher education, NFE, inclusive education and women's empowerment and provide illustrations of issues and problems of a philosophical / theoretical kind that, in my view, provide a broader perspective for addressing practical tasks related to educational planning and administration

### **Philosophy of education, the analytical model**

Philosophy of education in its present critical / analytical mode owes its origin to the analytical work of British philosophers (although Plato, Kant, Dewey and several other philosophers also addressed educational problems before). Historically, C. D. Hardy's *Truth and Fallacy in Educational Theory* (1942) is acknowledged as the first work of this genre. Analytical philosophy itself was the offshoot of the 'philosophical revolution' inspired by the work of Russell, Moore and Wittgenstein at the beginning of the last century. The outstanding feature of this revolution was a reinterpretation of the nature and scope of philosophy in the light of developments in the theory of knowledge and increased understanding of the relationship between language, thought and reality. Philosophy, according to this view, is not to be looked upon as a *body* of knowledge (a system of true propositions) but as a *method* or *activity* of analysis, clarification and criticism. All propositional knowledge is subject to tests of public verification, reliability and coherence and these are truth criteria that are satisfied only by the deductive and empirical forms of inquiry of mathematics and science. It was realized that philosophical questions are 'second order' logical and conceptual questions and cannot be tackled by the axiomatic method of mathematics or the observational experimental method of science. The philosophical method is in essence analytical, clarificatory and critical concerned with such tasks as elucidation of concepts, logical appraisal of different kinds of statements and arguments, validation of theories and justification of grounds of belief and knowledge. Philosophy of education is such an activity performed on *education*, its concepts, theories, beliefs and arguments.

Since the concern of philosophy is with the purely logical and conceptual questions the philosopher of education begins his work by demarcating such areas and problems in education as legitimately belong to his domain. Discourse in education because of the practical nature of the enterprise embraces a number of different contexts cutting across the scientific, practical and ethical spheres. A fundamental task of analysis is to disentangle these different contexts in which education is discussed and consider the basic ideas and appropriate logical criteria relevant to each. The analytical function covers almost all the aspects of the language of education, its concepts, beliefs, inferences, theories.

To sum up, philosophy of education, as Prof R. S. Peters the chief architect of concept analysis in education says, is to be seen not as a body of true propositions but as a method, an intellectual activity of conceptual analysis and elucidation. It involves such formal tasks as: analysis of educational concepts, logical appraisal of different kinds of educational statements, validation of theories and justification of prescriptive conclusions of the theory. Further, as a meta activity of analysis and criticism, philosophy can be 'done' on any field of human inquiry, science, literature, art, mathematics, history, politics and education. **Philosophy of education is the analytical function carried out on educational concepts, policy, theory, programmes and practice.**

The concept analysis paradigm has cast enormous influence on educational theorizing; it has come to characterize most of philosophical literature produced in the English speaking West. The lasting contributions of concept analysis (apart from the light it has shed on many of the educational concepts and theories like 'education', 'teaching', 'learning', 'knowledge'), however, are the dispositions it seeks to promote: clarity, consistency, rigour of thought, concern for semantic meaningfulness, methodological

awareness and consciousness of assumptions. These are particularly significant in the Indian context wherein philosophical thinking in education lacks clarity and rigour.

### **The Indian scene**

“Philosophy of education” is used, in India, to refer either to undifferentiated discourse (sometimes empirical, sometimes historical and generally hortatory) about aims, curriculum, methodology and other aspects of education or, in its not so inarticulate form, to the application of the speculative thesis (metaphysical, epistemological, axiological) of general philosophy, to draw ‘implications’ for educational theory and practice. For a long time philosophy had come to mean only the study of individual thinkers / systems / schools; the view that this is all there is to philosophy of education dies hard. This restrictive paradigm has spelled doom for the growth of the field. The analytical movement seems to have had little or no influence on this area of study

Philosophy of education in India presents a sorry spectacle. In all aspects - as a subject of academic study, as a foundational input in teacher education programmes, as an area of scholarly research and as a perspective for intellectual dialogue and debate – it has suffered neglect. That this should be so in a country known for its hoary philosophical traditions is indeed ironic. The problem with philosophy of education, however, is not something unique to it. It is the general problem of low quality inputs – students, teachers, curricula – and the impact of market forces facing most liberal and humanistic studies especially in institutions of higher learning. This does not mean rationalizing the status quo. It is only a reminder to the academia to rethink ways and means of checking this downward slide and restore to philosophy of education its rightful place in educational studies.

There is another problem facing philosophy of education (again this is not peculiar to India), the absence of communication between ‘pure’ philosophers and philosophers of education. Whenever such communication is attempted through professional meets, the agenda of educational philosophers faces the risk of being pushed to the background in favour of ‘pure’ philosophical issues. I attended a national seminar on pedagogy and epistemology hoping that fresh insights would be shared on pedagogy, *as we educationists understand* - something that deals with teaching, teachers, students and schools. The domination of the academic philosophers abstracted the concept from its natural home and educational / empirical moorings and converted the seminar into a discussion on highly abstruse philosophical theories which were way, way out of the concerns of the educational theorist not to mention the practical classroom teacher.

A similar outcome resulted in another national seminar on ‘value education’. Its importance lay in that general philosophers would address the issue of value education which hitherto had been debated only within and by the “educational” community. The seminar debated conceptual and methodological issues as well as normative dimensions of the problem. But that was all; on-going, ‘live’ concerns having to do with educational policy, programmes and practice and the recommendations of the several committees on the theme did not engage the attention of the seminar at all. The point of mentioning these instances is to show how it is becoming difficult for philosophy of education to stand up and be counted and claim its rightful place in discussion of issues which are at heart educational

## Writings with philosophic flavour

Notwithstanding these gloomy observations, it is cheering that dormant philosophical activity can be witnessed, now and then, in deliberations of national educational resource and research institutions in the form of critiques of policy, programmes and practices. There are also contributions of a philosophic kind from lay individual thinkers. These have found expression in seminar proceedings, journal articles and news paper write-ups. **If one does not take too technical a view, they can be cited as philosophical contributions as they exhibit the spirit and rigour of philosophical thinking. My point is that we have to build on this tradition and strengthen it.** I have enjoyed reading these contributions and appreciated the potential they carry for further philosophical work. I quote a few to substantiate my point:

- NIEPA faculty's analytical articles on the NPE and critiques of different aspects of national policy relating to UEE, the planning strategy of pan-Indian reforms and centrally sponsored schemes
- NCERT's in-house analysis of the concept of *Minimum learning levels* (which acquired a kind of policy status) attempted to lay bare hidden conceptual difficulties. Also, the institution's critique of the Planning Commission's *Report on value orientation of education* exposed the muddles of the value education debate.
- *Learning without burden*, the GOI report on school bag load is a philosophical commentary on learning and teaching in the nation's schools.
- *National Curriculum Framework 2006* has interesting philosophical content interspersed with text; 'critical pedagogy', 'knowledge as construction', 'teacher as reflective practitioner' find a mention. Most *Focus Group Position Papers* (Aims of Education, Education for Peace, Work and Education) have raised many philosophical questions.
- *The Journal of the Krishnamurty Schools* is a treasure house of readings (philosophical in temper) on a host of educational issues from the Krishnamurty perspective: *The Three Great Arts in Education, Krishnamurty and the Scientific Temper, Observation, Leisure and Learning, A True Art of Learning: Dialogue in Education, An Experiential Approach to Language Learning* (vol1,1997) and *Comparison and Education, The Insight Curriculum, Knowing and Being- The Two Aspects of Education, Media and Young Minds, Creativity in Grammar Classes, And I thought I was teaching Chemistry!* (vol2 1998).
- *Effective Environmental Education Needs 'New' Science* by I. Jackson, M.G., (2002, *Indian Educational Review*) makes the point that the 'contradictions' revealed in environmental education cannot be removed without questioning the assumptions about current science and technology that school textbooks project. The author presents an alternative coherent worldview with a more effective set of working principles in the shape of 'new' science, systems science or ecological science. The new paradigm claims that no system of knowledge is the absolute truth and that one must question all structures and evaluate them in terms of their

practical consequences. A thought provoking piece of research with special significance for education

- *History and Philosophy of Science, Cognitive Science and Science Education*. (Indian Educational Review, NCERT) is a review and summing up of developments in the philosophy of science and the research responses it has triggered in curriculum and teaching methodologies of science by Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, Mumbai (2002). The authors point out that since the 1960s, science education research and curriculum development have been subtly or explicitly influenced by theories of learning of Piaget, work of Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos and Toulmin and developments in cognitive science. They argue that an awareness of these trends might help avoid scientism in science education, that the philosophy of perception and representation might guide research while work in the tradition of situated cognition might hold promise for a philosophy of praxis and action.

### **The rich terrain of philosophy of education**

I have already made the point how the limited, but dominant, view of philosophy of education as study of the educational ideas of individuals and institutions within the framework 'isms' has virtually made the field stagnant and aloof from on-going happenings in education. In contrast, the field remains vibrant in the English speaking West with its continuous engagement with current debates about such issues as: educational aims, policies, curriculum, pedagogy, testing and measurement, administration, access, equity, anti-racist education, indigenous knowledge and culture, democracy, citizenship and peace. Even a casual web scan will point to the dynamism of the field and the variety of activities with which it is abuzz.

By way of illustration, the *British Journal of Philosophy of Education* (February 2007 - Vol. 41 Issue 1) carries such titles as: *Wellbeing and Education: Issues of Culture and Authority*; *Disability, Dependency and Indebtedness?*; *Essentialism Regarding Human Nature in the Defense of Gender Equality in Education*; *How to Think about Environmental Studies*; *Reconstructing Pragmatism to Address Racial Injustice*. Also in evidence is application of contemporary philosophical theories to education: the journal carries a review of the book: *The Responsibility of Parents for the Education of their Children: A Foucauldian Analysis of the School Education Act, 1999* by Wayne S. McGowan. In *Is teaching for social justice undemocratic?* Eric B. Freedman examines the extent to which critical pedagogy can be considered a democratic form of education by comparing Paulo Freire's notion of dialogue to Jürgen Habermas's "ideal speech situation". It is also interesting that the JPE, Nov 2007 is a special issue devoted for The Common School. The discussion includes sub themes like: *On the Necessity of Radical State Education: Democracy and the Common School*, *Educational Justice and Socio-Economic Segregation in Schools*, *Common Schools and Multicultural Education*, *A Question of Universality: Inclusive Education and the Principle of Respect*.

**The point of this elaboration is to reemphasize that as a knowledge field philosophy of education is dynamic and concerned with the understanding of 'here and now' issues of educational policies, programmes and practices as they affect children, schools and the community**

## **NUEPA concerns and philosophy of education**

I now turn to the main thrust of my presentation, to point out the relevance of philosophical analysis to the educational planning and administration concerns of NUEPA spanning school and non-formal education, higher education, women's empowerment and inclusive education.

At the outset, it is to be appreciated that whatever be the specific nature and level of engagement in education – teaching, training, institutional management and administration, policy and programme planning, evaluation and research – one must not lose sight of the broader perspective of *the real point of it all, of what education is all about*. Education can be considered as a process of transmission of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that we consider as desirable in accordance with our concept of the good life. We value education not just for its extraneous benefits to the society but also because we consider it as something that is good in itself. The case for UEE rests as much on the intrinsic value of education as on its social and economic returns. Such education is a fundamental right of human beings. Educational aims after all emerge out of an image of the human individual and a vision of the good life and ideal society as these are conceived from time to time. In our zealous appreciation of its social and economic returns and linkage with development, we should not lose sight of the values of justice, liberty, equality and respect for the dignity of the human individual that constitute the moral foundation of the envisioned social order. **Ultimately, it is within this broader value framework that ground level activities of educational policy formulation, planning and administration are to be conceived, understood and justified.**

The dispositions that philosophy seeks to promote – clarity, consistency and rigour of thought, concern for semantic meaningfulness, methodological awareness, consciousness of assumptions – are general prerequisites for the intellectual pursuit of knowledge in any field, whether it pertains to the physical or the social world. In the case education, an essentially *human* endeavour, they acquire an added significance for both the educational practitioner and the theoretician. Educational decisions necessarily involve value judgments and they cannot be settled by empirical methods alone; they need a good deal of hard clear thinking of a philosophic kind. Conceptual analysis increases and deepens our understanding of the various aspects of the educational enterprise and makes explicit the dimensions in which educational decisions have to be made. Practical action relating to policies, programmes and evaluation cannot avoid dealing with logical and conceptual issues. Controversies arise many times due to lack of conceptual clarity. More than all, all practical action in education has to keep before it the aims of education as formulated by the society. It behoves on the educational policy planner and practitioner to constantly check whether action on the ground – policies, plans, programmes, strategies and practices - is in harmony with the societal vision of the good life. **Philosophy of education aids us in this scrutiny. It also provides a perspective for intellectual dialogue and debate besides deepening our understanding of issues related to educational theory and practice.**

With this justification, I now make an attempt to delineate ideas, issues and questions that I think may be of particular interest to the NUEPA concerns. These have been raised in journal and newspaper articles and also seminar deliberations (notably by Padma

Velaskar, *National Commitment to education of Dalits*; Madhu Prasad, *Autonomy, Privatization and Commercialization*; Sudesh Mukhopadhyay, *Commission's vision on Inclusive Education*; Anita Ghai, *Gender and Inclusive Education at all levels*; Seshadri, *Perspectives on Society, Education and Values: The Education Commission and After*; Anil Sadgopal, *Learning about barriers, National Focus Group position paper on Work and Education*). They deal with on going debates on educational concepts, plans, policies, strategies, programmes and practices. Some of the observations are very perceptive and critical; they have gone deep into issues laying bare assumptions, pointing out conceptual inadequacies, flaws in arguments and questioning underlying theories and generating fresh insights. Some of them may appear as speculative, some as emotive expression of fear about the future scenario. Whatever may be their characteristic and nature, they have brought to surface issues of a more theoretical and philosophical import. The implication for NUEPA is that its **institutional actions relating to teaching, training, extension, policy planning and research, programme administration and evaluation need to be perceived and understood in the light of the broader perspective provided by these observations**

### ***1. Neo-liberalization / Globalization (a transverse theme)***

#### *Ideology*

Globalization, neo-liberalism, neo-colonization

#### *Observations:*

- Liberal ideology and developmental model endorses 'state programme of capitalistic development' laying more emphasis on modern economic development and less on social transformation. It fails to acknowledge the fundamental conflict of interest between rapid modernization and egalitarianism in a resource-poor country.
- Globalization = Neo-colonization? (Editor's review of *African Education and globalization: critical perspectives*, Ali A. Abdi et al., *Harvard Educational Review*, Spring 2007)
- Neoliberalism is the most dangerous ideology of the current historical moment. ...civic discourse has given way to the language of commercialization, privatization, and deregulation and that, within the language and images of corporate culture, citizenship is portrayed as an utterly privatized affair that produces self-interested individuals...corporate culture functions largely to either ignore or cancel out social injustices in the existing social order by overriding the democratic impulses and practices of civil society through an emphasis on the unbridled workings of market relations (Henry A. Giroux in *Neoliberalism, corporate culture, and the promise of higher education : The University as a Democratic Public Sphere*, HER)
- In a globalized world citizens are recast as consumers. Locus of control shifts from the public domain of politics to an individualized / privatized world of economic cost benefit analysis. The outcome would be a society of self-interested individual consumers working for personal gains

- Globalization leads to ‘state organized feminism’ replacing feminist politics on the ground – government programmes aiming at empowering women only to the extent of harnessing women’s contribution to growth can never be enough for empowerment
- “Ethics of globalization has altered the sense of morality of the nation (equality, justice, democracy)”
- Globalization and free market economy lead to commoditization of knowledge and shifting of responsibility for education from State to the community
- Globalization and neo-liberalization value privilege and exclusiveness while public education aims at fighting them

### *For Reflection*

How shall national educational planning and administration respond to forces of globalization / neo-liberalism?

How does one confront selective and uneven nature of globalization exacerbating existing inequalities, producing new divisions, reduction of the public sector expenditure, and growth of the private sector?

Is economic liberalization a threat or an opportunity for educational development?

Do liberal education ideals and social purposes of education face a threat under neo-liberal economic policies?

“The forces of globalization are moving the global economy toward a single unified economy and, by extension, the world’s education systems toward a universal model”. Is such a trend in the interest of India?

## **2. The Concept and Aims of Education**

### *Conceptual / Ideological*

Meaning of education, its status as a good, justification of education, individual and social aims of education

### *Observations*

- From individual self-realization through training of a citizen, education today has come to mean schooling in practical skills (English, information processing, arithmetic and soft skills) as would equip one to be an efficient worker in a corporate economy. Would one accept this as *education*? Is it not more job training?
- As a consumer good education has met the same fate as other material commodities operating in a market economy driven by the profit motive. Market has influenced not only the distribution of education, but the meaning of education itself. Education is treated as an instrument for developing skilled manpower; its intrinsic value makes no sense in a market economy
- Educational quality and excellence are narrowly interpreted to fit the globalization paradigm. Delinking of social relevance of education from discussions on quality is a disturbing fall out of marketization
- Holistic purpose of education related to social relevance and pedagogic quality of education is allowed to become subservient to market

- Corporate emphasis on skills is at the expense of social purpose of education. Skill development is looked upon as preparation for the market and not as an objective integral to good education

*For Reflection*

What does education mean? What is its status as a good? Is it a merit earned good or a basic need of all?

What are its aims and purposes with reference to the individual and society?

Is education justified for its instrumental use or for its intrinsic value? Is development an end or an instrument?

**3. Human rights and right to education, UEE strategies, policies, programmes**

*Conceptual*

The logical and conceptual features of human rights and right to education, their ontological status and justification

*Critique of policy and programmes:*

- Provisioning for women does not challenge the hegemonic core; SSA provision NPEGEL only tinkers with the system
- NFE / alternate schooling is not an appropriate and adequate response to deal with the gender problem in education - access, participation, empowerment
- Parallel streams like NFE negate inclusion. Systemic reforms, not marginal additions, are needed.
- Approaches recommended reaffirm the hegemonic core, ratify child labour and patriarchy; NFE valorizes the very centre that is problematic to begin with

*For Reflection*

What is the ontological status of human rights? Are human rights rooted in a transcendental reality?

Is the right to education a fundamental or derived right (derived, that is, from more general rights, for example, the right to life)? What are its features?

Is our formulation of right to education as a basic human right adequate? To how much education does everyone have a right? How is this to be defined – in terms of educational opportunities or outputs? What should be the role of the State vis-à-vis this right?

How is education for all to be justified, constitutionally mandated fulfillment of a basic human right or for human capital formation and social and economic returns?

**4. Inclusive education – women, disabled, SC/ST**

*Conceptual flaws and inadequacies / ideologies*

- Womanhood and disability are conceptualized around hegemonic core of culture of normality (normativity) and patriarchy; gender stereotyping;

- Women are homogenized; intersection of gender with class, caste, disability, rural-urban divide needs to be properly addressed
- Girls' education is justified in instrumental terms, not as their fundamental right
- Neo-liberalism values individualism and not interdependence; the disabled is perceived as having a deficit
- Disability is seen as a limiting condition, an individual problem and not as a social category requiring serious academic engagement and research.
- Education is seen in more instrumentalist terms than as genuine empowerment; the disabled is seen as not being able to contribute to production and denied of a real chance of becoming gainfully employed and living a healthy life

*Critique of policy and programmes / strategies:*

- None of the policies challenged the hegemonic core of patriarchy which prevents girls from getting their due;
- Policies for the disabled are guided by the medical constructions that encourage cure/overcoming theories. The suggestions in the PWD Act, 1995 belie the thrust on inclusion
- The insidious ways in which globalization and commodification of education under GATS further marginalizes the weaker sections including women.
- SSA negates inclusion by promoting parallel streams in education for children with disabilities.
- Unless **gender budgeting** becomes a part of the fiscal policies the difference between intent and action will not become perceptible;
- Correlation between literacy and infant mortality, women's empowerment is really an illusion;
- No concerted movement to attack the breeding place of inequality, the fragmented school system, and make schooling inclusive
- Equality of opportunity treated as a decontextualized and ahistorical notion without acknowledging the material and cultural reality of dalits; the notion of equality of opportunity is that of a meritocracy and not of social justice.
- Equality of opportunity is an inadequate concept to combat inequalities; we need to ensure equal conditions of success as well
- It is a problematic whether 'education vouchers' can improve accountability and quality or whether it would only increase existing divides and divert public money to private schools

**5. Higher Education**

*Conceptual*

The nature of good that is higher education, concept of higher education and its objectives, values associated with higher education and higher education under neo-liberalization

### *Issues and policy criticisms*

- Liberal education objectives of higher education (free pursuit of knowledge for its own sake as a human excellence) face a threat as their usefulness is judged in market criteria
- In the light of increased need for skilled manpower in the knowledge sector expand the system. Accept in spirit, letter and practice the inevitability of private funding of higher education
- To advocate privatization and withdrawal of the state from this sector on the ground that only privileged groups have benefited is to confuse symptoms with the cause; elites dominate higher education because of the state's failure to universalize quality elementary and secondary education
- The dilemma of privatization (and FDI under WTO, GATS) in the context of the globalization of the knowledge sector and India emerging as the global hub for higher and technical education - equity considerations and cultural values, the importance of retaining the system's independence from the control of global political and economic vested interests
- Ensure equitable access through reservation of seats for SCs, ST, and OBCs
- Autonomy: A selective approach focused upon emphasis on promoting financial autonomy as a means of effecting cost efficiency may end up doing more harm than good.
- Commoditization of education and judging efficiency and accountability in market criteria has led to change in social perception of higher education. It is ignored that higher education is a public good and not just a private benefit for sponsors or students. The critical and transformatory purpose of education has receded into background.
- In the altered framework, only that education has value, or 'excellence', which allows the student-consumer to fetch a good market price for the skills she has acquired.
- Autonomy, excellence, academic freedom, accountability, equity have acquired market connotations under the impact of neo-liberal economic ideology

### *For Reflection*

Is higher education a merit earned or basic right good? How is its place to be conceived in the future scheme of things?

What are the cherished objectives / social purposes of higher education? Do they face a threat from neo-liberal economic policies and demands arising from globalization? Do they need a review?

Is FDI in higher education inevitable? How will it help the cause of national development? Does it involve any risks? What are they? Are existing regulatory mechanisms impeding FDI flow? Do we need more deregulation? Is the FDI bill too restrictive?

## **6. Knowledge and Curriculum**

### *Issues*

Legitimacy of the school curriculum, inegalitarian division of school knowledge as high and low status knowledge, school - community knowledge linkage, curricular space for subaltern ideologies

### *Policy criticism*

Curriculum is seen as value neutral and equal; there is absence of subaltern groups' culture and ideologies in the recommended curriculum

- The dominant discourse is of a cultural majoritarian nationhood; Dalits challenge this high caste epistemology and knowledge; We need development of theories that are vibrant expressions of critical multiculturalism and would create a new moral order for Indian society
- The principle of broadening curriculum to include different traditions of knowledge; the question of validation of local / community knowledge
- Disconnect between formal, school knowledge and the lived reality of the child (seamless continuity to be established, but how?)
- The multiple dimensions of knowledge and different ways of knowing vis a vis the monolithic view that only scientific phenomena and rationality constitute knowledge

### *For Reflection*

Is school knowledge (curriculum content) value neutral, an epistemological category in itself or is it socially determined? Does it hinder the life chances of the socially marginalized? How does it get its legitimacy?

How is indigenous knowledge to be defined? Does liberalization pose a threat to indigenous knowledge? How?

### **Conclusion**

The concerns and functions of NUEPA cutting across departments are such that they cannot avoid coming face to face with basic questions of a philosophical kind. I have illustrated a few of these embedded in current criticisms of policies and programmes. The point is that instead of circumventing them they need to be addressed squarely and head-on. NUEPA carries out a great deal of empirical work related to educational planning, administration and evaluation. Philosophizing provides a second order critique of the institution's work with regard to conceptualizations, assumptions and theories thereby enhancing and deepening our understanding of issues involved in educational decision making

The fact that there is now a Department of Foundations of Education acquires special significance in this context. I learn that it "examines, from an inter-disciplinary perspective, various social forces, institutions and human relations which under gird both theory and practice of education and form the bedrock of educational programmes and policies. Its major thrust areas include quality of education, alternate paradigms looking beyond schooling and projecting trajectories for the future, and lifelong learning with particular focus on educational needs of youth". Well stated, indeed! My very best wishes to NUEPA to move forward!