

# BW EDUCATION

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**AJEENKYA D.Y. PATIL**, President,  
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Remembering  
**Dr. Pritam Singh**

# 'EDUCATION MUST FOCUS ON SKILL DEVELOPMENT'

Photograph by Rachit



**INSIDE**

Punjab Education Minister **VIJAY INDER SINGLA** talks to BW Education about his state's 'Ambassadors of Hope' campaign

# “Taking the best from east and west can lead to better systems of education”

In an exclusive interview to BW Businessworld, Ajeenkya D.Y. Patil, President, DY Patil University shares his thoughts on the draft National Education Policy (NEP) and the structural changes needed to improve the quality of education in India. Excerpts:

**Taking the vision of your father ahead, where do you see DY Patil University headed? What kind of challenges do you face?**

Despite strong existing regulatory framework in the country, education is being given a lot of importance through various steps from the government. Slowly but

surely, it is unshackling. We, as a university, are growing both in traditional as well as non-traditional fields, though our focus on future has slightly changed. We see that technology is changing the market dynamics and disruption is happening faster than we had imagined.

So definitely, the edu-

cational space too is going to be disrupted, and we need to be prepared for the technological challenges. We have put in a lot of research in some of the areas, and our backend has been prepared for the challenges that we have faced over the last 15 years.

**A lot of our employ-**



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**able youth are moving out of the country. How can we get the better of this situation and make our companies absorb more Indian talent?**

Employability and education have to change. A lot of attention is being given to ITIs and skills that won't really have value in the future — it will be more of people from humanities or those who are multi-talented and have multifaceted qualities. There is a concept which is explained by the alphabet 'T' — the top part of 'T' denotes understanding of all the subjects and the bottom (vertical line) is specialisation. For instance, in the case of engineering, the bottom of T stands for specialisation in engineer-

**Speaking of the education system, were you a part of the National Education Policy framework? And what is your assessment of the new policy?**

We gave our inputs on the draft National Education Policy (NEP), and the overall assessment is fairly good.

**The Draft NEP promises revolutionary changes in the education system. How do you think the policy can contribute in reducing the industry-academia deficit?**

There is a huge gap between industry and the educated force. I won't claim that we will produce the perfect employable youth. We have a



**“Rather than coming to a campus for four years, I would suggest letting the students work in an industry for two years”**

ing and the top of it would include HR (Human Resource Management), Finance, Marketing, and other skills required to make a successful company. Consequently, the education needs to evolve in this form — it shouldn't be restricted to one traditional subject.

fake system where, for example, there are non-affiliated institutes with students not knowing what to do as they move in the industry. We need to take steps to fix this.

Technically, a radical change is needed in the way we teach. Rather than coming to a campus

for four years, I would recommend letting the students work in an industry for two years. The credits earned at the end of these two years should be allowed to be transferred to the university system.

Education needs to be flexible, and for this we will require a lot of policy changes. However, regulator bodies won't allow changes in norms pertaining to, say, attendance or exams. For instance, if an automobile



student can assemble and has the practical knowledge to work in the industry, attendance should not matter. To me, he is a successful engineer. Similarly, many systems need to change in the way universities operate. Lastly, if we don't do these things, how can we cope with technological changes, which can't be controlled anyways.

**Do you think that there should be a single regulator governing the**

**education system instead of multiple bodies like the UGC, AICTE, etc?**

I think it is already happening elsewhere, and someone has to take that step here. For example, institutions like Harvard or Stanford provide courses that are accessible across the globe. However, I am not allowed to do the same because of the regulatory issues. This I don't find to be fair. If I can offer a course (online), why should I go through a cer-

tain process and then only be able to offer it, while foreign institutions are allowed without any such conditions? I am talking only about online courses and not the traditional brick and mortar operators.

**Do you think the government needs to spend more on education as a percentage of GDP?**

The government has been spending and, in fact, grants are provided to pri-

vate institutions – some of the engineering colleges get a government funding called 'Samaaj Kalyaan'. It is helping the economically weaker section of the society. Though it's obligatory for the government to offer education to masses, it can look at private players as complimentary services. Say, if I have a quality product to offer and my fees is Rs 2-5 lakh. However, if the government subsidises that, the same can be offered at Rs 30,000-40,000 to bring the cost at par with government institutions. If the government does not work along similar lines, the private players won't ever bring the cost down because in order to provide quality education they need to have the best faculty and pay accordingly. All am saying is that the cost of education should come down. Even though we offer cheap education compared to the rest of the world, a majority of our countrymen cannot afford quality education.

**It is recognised that rational thinking, cognitive ability, entrepreneurship, and emotional intelligence will become key elements of pedagogy in the coming decade. How do we train our kids for this?**

It is a big challenge that



does not have an easy formula or a magic pill. I face this challenge with my kids, where I explain them that there has to be a mix of everything but they believe only in a certain way of education. They are hooked on to their gadgets and for everything they are dependent on Google. Essentially, in the future, machines will do everything. Disciplines like humanities, which

has been ignored, should be considered for not just getting a degree but for understanding the knowledge that you require. The next generation has to be very different as the education imparted presently will be completely irrelevant.

#### **What is the way forward in such a scenario?**

In the ancient knowledge systems, a lot of these skills are already there.



The ideal combination would be to have the best practices of the east (including India, China, and Japan) and the west (American and British systems), and amalgamate both these systems (we will eventually become knowledge-based economy in the future). DY Patil is starting a programme like this. It is known as human engineering for social change wherein we are going to incorporate the traditional and the modern education systems.

#### **Stats have shown that 70-80 per cent of our youth are unemployed due to lack of soft as well as hard skills. How do we address this huge challenge?**

This is largely due to mushrooming of new institutions that do not offer quality education. Many players get into the education sector thinking there is a lot of money to



be made. One needs to be very careful with the system as a child's future is in question. Hence, a lot of this unemployment stems from the quality of graduates that we produce and not just because of a slow-down in the industry.

**Do you think as a country we suffer from these challenges more because of the volume play? Can we adopt Finland's education system which is known to be the best in the world?**

If we increase our education budget and incentivise private players, we can have the same roadmap as Finland as they have a completely subsidised system. A risk here is that government institutions could get the better of private players, which may eventually kill the private education system. Both needs to flourish at the same time, and if the government can't cope

up with the huge load, it should incentivise the private sector.

**Speaking of skill development programmes, how do you see them in relation to proper degree pro-**

**grammes?**

In India, traditional education has been given too much importance. Skill development is something that has to be the focus for the future.

**What needs to change as far as cost is concerned? The draft NEP says that children should be given free education till the age of 18**

**years. What will be the challenges in granting free education?**

A major challenge is that of infrastructure. We lack the infrastructure to support such a large base. Then, enrolment is another challenge as

in our system children drop out after the fifth or sixth grade. To overcome these two challenges, the government has to give grants and subsidise the whole system. This is not impossible but it will take a 5-10-year plan.

**How can we inculcate entrepreneurship in our curriculums right from school education?**

We can make it compulsory and mandatory in our syllabus by updating and upgrading it in terms of entrepreneurial skills. Education is about providing manpower for the economy and industries, creating entrepreneurs

for the country. However, the whole setup needs to be thought about. I would urge to have a think tank of leaders from different fields to come together and build a vision for the country for the next 30 years, rather than just having a 5- or a 10-year plan of a particular government. Let there be a perpetual think tank for the great good of the country. ■

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