

Knowledge Character Unity
Pragyik Vidyarthi Parishad, Nepal
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GATS and Its Ramification

We in the east inherit a great civilization that has its foundation on understanding and appreciating man as a co-member in society and not as a commodity to sell in the market, or to make use of when you need and throwaway when you can dispense with. Our civilization has therefore stood the test of time and is eternally surviving although boundaries have changed, rulers have come and gone and the outlook of the society has dingdong with the changing times. But the essence of our existence, the understanding of universal brotherhood and the union with the divine, which brings us into the concept of a single global family, is intact and shall remain eternally intact. This is an unshakable truth about the east and the legacy of human understanding it inherits.

The success and failure of a nation cannot be determined based only on the economic parameters. We in the east have been named 'third world' by the big market players, who have themselves, conferred the right to divide the world into smaller worlds and place them at its summit. Some other calls us underdeveloped. As we appear so under the market spectacles. And yet there are some other, who appear very sympathetic to us and come to offer a lift, in the global market as in their own tone, they have developed themselves and now want to see us developing in their pace. When, in a culture and society based on human values and help, we find hard to find the mahamanav of such merit, particularly in the present time, what reasons do we have in hand to believe that the Big Western players will come to ensure our food and shelter? When and where have they left examples for us that, in the name of charity they offer, they have done charity and no marketing? History shows that they cannot be relied, at least when they come in the role of troubleshooters.

One very big game plan, which appears sympathetic at the surface and is indeed very heinous at the core is the concept of QTO and its byproduct General Agreements of on Trade in Serveses GATS. These sugarcoated marketing strategies do carry the potential to allure and we have the fear of submitting ourselves to the western powers, for which the world is a Big, Big market. The nations like South Africa, which have been the victims of the western power play, have failed to see through the insipid design behind it. What Nelson Mandela said recently about it, validates our apprehension.

We are firmly of the belief that the existence of GATS, and now the World Trade Organization as a rule based system provides the foundation on which our deliberations can build in order to improve...As we enter the new millennium, let us forge a partnership for development through trade and investment."

Nelson Mandela

(Summit to mark the 50th Anniversary of the General Agreement of Trade and Tariff- GATT/ World Trade Organization-WTO multilateral trading system, Geneva May 1998)

We have therefore enough reasons to be apprehensive about GATS and the concept of trade it carries. We need to begin with WTO the insipid brute. Right after the Second World War, the western trading giants felt the necessity of global trading forum, for which the general agreement on Trade and Tariff was proposed.

The idea was approved in 1998 and GATT became operational. In 1998, Mr. Dunkel, the chairman of GATT drafted the infamous Dunkel Draft, which bore the idea of internal trade offers from GATT members. In April 1994, many nations, including the developing Asian countries came under it. As a result of the document, the WTO was founded in January 1995. A GAT is a part of the WTO provision.

The WTO is a big chapter in the global market and I think it proper to stick to the GATS for our discussion here.

General Agreement on Trade in Service (GATS)

This is a provision under the WTO, whose essence lies in the fact that not only industry and its product, but services too can be brought under the purview of trade among the member nations. Nothing so far sounds objectionable. The entire framework is worked out in the Doha Ministerial Meet of the WTO members, 12 services sectors were included under GATS. They are : Business, Communication, construction and Engineering, Distribution, Education, Environment, Finance, Health, Travel and Tourism, Recreation, Transport and Others. Under these sectors there are 16 subsectors. Under education, the sub sectors included are Primary, Secondary, Higher education and adult education.

There are four provisions for the trade overseas:

1. **Cross Boarder Supply**-The provision for providing the services of one country to another. E.g. Call centers, distant Education etc.
2. **Consumption Abroad**- To go abroad and avail its own services like going to the foreign countries for studies, medical purposes etc.
3. **Commercial Presence**-Opening the commercial organization in foreign countries.
4. **Movement of Natural Persons**- Going to the related persons to other countries for providing the services. E.g. visiting professors.

The nations, which come under the purview of GATS, will have to follow certain necessary codes of conduct. They will have to open their doors to all with equal privileges. The trading foreign companies should be given the same treatments and privilege, as a domestic company, all regulations and laws concerning trade should be made transparent. The countries should gradually loosen their constraints and restrictions of trade and the foreign agencies should gradually have the access to all the trading sectors.

GATS and Education

How are we to take the proposal to include education under GATS? Does it come under the purview of trade? Can we open for profit, the foundation of which our age-old civilization that defines us in totality rests? The answers are No, No and a very emphatic no.. the Pragya Vidyarthi Parishad (PVP), Nepal at least can never give in, for it considers that the design is impish enough to ruin our cultural foundation. But we need to find a logical defense for our answer.

When the proposal was brought out for consideration, the member states themselves were divided into three factions. One believed that it was a smart idea that would lead them toward profit. They thought that it would ensure a greater flow of knowledge globally and foster international goodwill and understanding and open an area of profit. The second category opined that it was unfair to turn education into a saleable commodity. They were

apprehensive of the fact that if foreign companies enter into the education field, the domestic institutes will be demoralized as they cannot come in par with the rich foreign institutes and consequently the local studies will be affected. They also warned that the privileges being enjoyed by the domestic institutes will be divided and hence they will face the risk of closure. The third party was of the view that since their opposition was not going to create any effect, it would be better for them to stand and stare and try to get maximum profit out of the evolving situation. We align with second category.

In fact opening of education for international trade is highly objectionable. The PVP has always opposed this and shall continue denouncing it, for, it bears the root of our own destruction. The educational institution from across the country entering with a commercial motive will be interested only in courses commercially rewarding, and hence other process will fall into eclipse. As for example pure science will be replaced by practical science the courses & the subject like the basic science, and those connected with the national history, art, culture, philosophy and literature will suffer a setback. It will affect the government subsidy of higher education that had been the major factor in developing and sustaining the system of higher education in countries like ours.

The cost of education will go up with result that the poor and the lower middle classes will find it beyond their capacities. This will in the turn widen the gap social disparity. It will erode the authority of the national government and the national regulation bodies to determining and direct the policy of education.

This state of affair is more likely to lead to the closure of a number of native institutions that find it difficult to stand up in the face of the competition from the rich players from across the border. With education coming increasingly under the control of the WOT and GATS regime, the government's hold on education is sure to decline. It is also likely that foreign education providers will give priority to only those courses, which are less profit yielding, will be neglected. When the introduction of the academic courses is determined by the considerations of market demand, the subjects of national interest will certainly be eclipsed. There is a possibility that in these foreign institutions students from economically weaker and socially deprived sections may not find any pace leading to increase in social imbalance.

It is therefore high time that we stand against this insipid and evil design and repel it. The PVP volunteers to shoulder the leadership of this socio-intellectual campaign. The beginning of GATS is itself very controversial and the big powers are themselves seeking their immunities. As for example, out of so many member nations, 44 had sent their offers to include services in the GATS up to 2005. Out of these too, only 21 offered to open primary education, 23 secondary educations, 21 higher educations, 20 adult education and 12 others. What is interesting is that, America itself, which encouraged the enactment of GATS, did not offer its educational sectors, except adult education and training, it did not even open its higher education sector. This unbuttons the wicked American design behind GATS.

For these reasons, we need to be very alert and stand against the invasion of GATS in education. We can encourage local area strategies to propagate education. Sharing of skill and expertise among the neighboring nations or even globally is not bad. Education can be opened for the private sector, which is charity based and not profit based. Distant education can be encouraged and the use of internet can be made easier. The priorities are to be set according to the national interest and local necessities and according to the waves created in the global market.