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HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: MAJOR, CONTEMPORARY, INTERNATIONAL CHALLENGES

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Introduction

The destiny of India," is now being shaped in her class rooms. 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 of and number of persons coming out of schools and colleges will depend our success in the great enterprise of national reconstruction, the principal objective of which is to raise the standard of living of our people. The universities serve as the conscience of the nations, encourage individuality, variety and dissent, within a climate of tolerance, assist schools in their attempt to qualitative self improvement; improve standards by symbiotic development of teaching and research; and create a few centers of world class competence." Kothari Commission.

The Indian constitution resolves to provide quality education to all. The government has chalked out different educational categories namely, Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Higher Education, Adult Education, Technical and Vocational Education. Institutions of excellence in higher education were formed with a view to provide subsidized quality higher education to build a self – reliant and modern India.

Higher Education in India

India had an ancient tradition of imparting higher education and had an elaborate university system. The great universities of *Takshashila* and *Nalanda* were well known seats of learning. In India *Nalanda* was a Buddhist center of learning from around the fifth century CE to 1197CE, much before the emergence of European universities. The word *Nalanda* means 'insatiable in giving'. There were four more universities – *Vikramashila*, *Somapura*, *Odantapura* and *jaggadala* and together this five formed an interlinking group for Buddhist studies. India has occupied an important place in learning for thousand years. The modern higher education in India began with the establishment of *Hindu College at Kolkata* in 1817. For the first time in 1857 three universities in presidencies of *Bombay*, *Calcutta*, *Madras* were established. At the time of Independence 19 universities throughout the country. The *University Education Commission (1948-1949)* recommended rapid expansion of higher education on a priority basis.

At present, India possesses a highly developed higher education system which offers facility of education and training in almost all aspects of human's creative and intellectual endeavors such as arts and humanities, natural, mathematical and social sciences, engineering; medicine, dentistry, agriculture, education, law, commerce and management, music and performing arts, national and foreign languages, culture, communications etc.

India is witnessing unprecedented expansion of higher education and mushroom growth of colleges and universities. There is admittedly a state of near anarchy even in the administration of existing facilities leading to social tensions. Higher education has expanded quantitatively over the years and it expanded dramatically first in U.S.A and then in Europe, currently the focus of expansion in the Third World.



Challenges in Higher Education

The beginning of new millennium finds higher education systems the World over in a state of flux. In the first decade of the 21st century academic administrators will have to continue to grapple with perennial problems carried over from the last century. These issues were in many ways related to rapid largely unplanned, expansions of system that took place in the post Independence period. Higher education has always been considered as being essential for human development. The number of universities has increased from 25 in 1947 to 677 in 2013. The number of colleges has increased from 700 in 1947 to 35,539 in 2005. The total enrolment increased from a meager 0.1 million in 1947 to 21.80 million in 2013. The colleges that are affiliated to 131 universities constitute the bulk of higher education system in India which contribute around 89 per cent of the total enrolment. With 600 universities and 32,000 colleges the Indian Higher education system is currently the third largest in the World, after China and United States. According to All India Association of Teachers Educators (AIATE) nearly 17 million students seek admission in Indian universities every year which makes for 10 per cent of the total university level enrolment in the World. While China invested more than 1.5 per cent of its income on education in 2010 and increased its number of central universities to over 2,300. India spent less than 0.5 per cent on education in the same year and has set up no new central universities in the last three years. With 12 education related Bills currently struck in Parliament, plans for setting up new institutes and accrediting old ones remains a distant dream.

At present the institutions of higher education in India fall into four categories.

1. Those established by Acts of Parliament or of State Legislatures.
2. Degree awarding institutions established under Acts of Parliament such as IITs
3. Deemed universities under the provision of UGC Act.
4. Diploma awarding institutions which are neither established by Act of Parliament nor are deemed universities.

According to 2001-2002 annual report of department of secondary and higher education, Ministry of Human Resource Development the higher education system has witnessed a thirteen fold increase in the number of universities, twenty five fold increase in number of colleges and thirty fold increase in enrolment of students since Independence. Higher education in general was a state responsibility until 1976 and was then brought into concurrent list. In the first Five year plan the government plan fund allocation to education was 7.8 per cent of the total plan funds of which higher education got the share of 9 per cent. It came down to around 7 per cent of the plan allocation and the ninth plan saw the rise to 12 per cent. Universities and other higher learning are storches of knowledge and creators of those who make knowledge grow. Higher education must play an important role in the transformation of our institutions and values. The function of a university according to Nehru was to train the student in books mind and spirit.

Major Challenges in Higher Education

Access and Equity

Ensuring equitable access to higher education is a challenge with disparities seen across gender, regions and socio-economic groups. In higher education India about 15 per cent lags behind to a great extent as compared to the development world as well as the other developing countries. There will be heightened demand for access and thus expansion of enrolments in many universities. Limited funds and desire for efficient allocation of scarce resources will come into direct conflict with demands for access. UGC has now advised all universities to generate

their funds as it is not in a position to meet the growing demands of higher education. For higher education the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) has risen from 0.7 per cent in 1950-51 to 1.4 per cent in 1960-61, and 8 per cent in early 2000. The current GER which is about 17 per cent stands very low when compared to the world average of 23.2 per cent, and an average of 54.6 per cent for developed countries, 36.3 per cent for countries in transition, and 11.3 per cent for developing countries. Due to regional disparity in economic development and uneven distribution of institutions of higher education, it is not equally available to the different sections of the society.

Administration, Accountability and Governance

The administration of higher education in India should become more and more professional as in U.S.A and other developed countries and the country should be well prepared to meet such a challenge.

Knowledge creation and dissemination

Research publication of journals and books is an important issue now. Issues of access, communication, control and technology are intertwined which would gain lot importance in the years to come.

The Academic Profession

Demands for accountability, increased bureaucratization of institutions, fiscal constraints and increasingly diverse student body have all challenged the teaching profession, maintaining autonomy, academic freedom and a commitment to the traditional goals of the university will provide a serious challenge.

Private resources and Public Responsibility

Privatization has been the means of achieving the broad policy goals. Recent supreme court judgement on the admission of students professional colleges in India is a bit challenge to private managements of professional institutions. Since education is a social service extreme in this regard cannot be permitted. In the year 2000-2001, out of 13, 072 higher education institutions, 42 per cent were privately owned and run catering to 37 per cent of students enrolled into higher education, that is approximately 3.1 million out of total 8.4 million. It is also likely that most of the growth in the rapidly expanding higher education sector took place in private unaided colleges or in self financing institutions. Approximately 50 per cent of the higher education in India is imparted through private institutions, mostly unaided involving high cost.

Diversification and Stratification

It is taking place to meet the new needs. Academic system has become more stratified- once an individual is within a segment of the system, it is difficult to move to a different segment. Therefore diversification will also be an important challenge in the coming decades.

Economic Disparities

In India the third world countries with dramatic budget cuts the universities find it difficult to function not to mention of improving quality and competing in the international challenge.



Political and Academic forces

In third world students movements will continue to be an important political and academic force. Lack of equity of distribution and adequacy of coverage , lack of people's participation, poor linkages between education and modernization , poor financial allocation to the educational development and improper utilization of existing resources, very little emphasis on character building in educational institutions, lack of administrative capability and competence, lack of coordination and linkages , deteriorating quality of education, out dated evaluation system, impact of globalization , liberalization, adaptization of higher education, outdated methods of technology and learning.

New Challenges in Higher Education in India

The educational system has acquired a dualist character. It operates with a strong class bias. There is a wide disparity in quality. While 75 per cent of our Indian children go through an educational program of poor even rock bottom quality provided mostly by government schools and colleges, 25 per cent benefit from a small number of quality institutions runs by private organizations. The former hail from the lower strata of society while the latter come from the elite class. The resources are adequate. So the facilities offered in our schools and colleges are below the level of qualitative viability. In the 1st plan the government of India allocated Rs 153 crores for education (0.7 per cent of GDP). In the 9th plan, the allocation was to the tune of 20,381.6 crores (3.7 per cent of GDP). The proportion is much less in comparison with many countries. Academic and administrative problems faced by our educational institutions are further compounded by government control and council or university regulations. Government policies and programs are not effectively implemented. There are administrative, operational and financial problems. Reforms within the system or structure are slow. Political interference is rampant. They use the institutions to gain credibility with their political bosses and to climb the political ladder. For a young ambitious man hailing from a middle class family , it is sheer waste of time , energy and money to have spent three or four years in a college. Our educational institutions in general become “knowledge industries” manufacturing graduates and post graduates unfit for our society. It is a fact that higher education has become costly like other commodities because of a steep increase in demand. The frustration of parents to admit their wards in particular institutions so that they can gain some social status. It has been the routine business of the parents and their wards to make a beeline for the offices of schools and colleges for admissions. India lives in villages. Majority of the villagers belong to SC/STs. They are, by and large illiterate. The SC and ST literacy rates are 20 per cent and 33 per cent respectively. Women literacy rate is very poor, just 50 per cent.

If we look in the past history since our Independence we have taken the concept of British to develop our education system. At that time this is good to implement that we have no other choice and started contributing to our education system in three main presidencies developed in Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai. Indian national congress tried to moderate the pace of education in India and laid emphasis on technical and vocational training programs which are still running. After that, Nehru came to emphasize with his schemes like “Education for All” and for industrial development plotted a significant step to develop the education system. Rajiv came with a new policy as “*National Policy on Education*” which emphasizes on “Rural Education” and tried to provide schools within the area reachable to students easily. The existing higher education system in India needs thorough information to deliver goods facing new challenges in today's competitive world. Several commissions have been constituted by the government of India like the *Radhakrishnan Commission* (1945), the *Kothari Commission*(

1966) and the *National Knowledge Commission*(2007). There were major changes done in the education scheme with the help of *UNESCO* and they developed non formal education system which contributed a lot in the education of the women. It becomes harder to make education accessible to all segments of the society. Maintaining standard of education in more than a million schools nation wide, offering training programs to teachers and keeping good balance with education system world wide are big challenges. According to our Constitution it is the responsibility of Central and State governments to build good education system. For that we need to have funds. The cost of education is very high. The ethnic diversity in India poses a challenge to implement consistent education nation wide. There are more than 300 languages spoken in the country which makes it difficult to offer education tailored to specific social segment. The time is now to modernize our education system so that our country can get much more technically graduated people which can help our country to become a developed state. Today's youth always try to go to abroad for their higher education, as they have much better facilities and quality of educational system. Institutions have adopted various quality management system initiatives like *ISO9001* certification, *six sigma*, *National Assessment and Accreditation Council* (NAAC) , *National Board of Accreditation* (NBA) and more importantly have started applying Total Quality Management concept in education.

Challenges of Present Higher Education System in India

India requires a major investment to make human resource productive by coupling the older general disciplines of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and commerce to their applications in the new economy and having adequate field based experience to enhance knowledge with skills and develop appropriate attitudes. Central government prepares policies and plan while responsibility of State government is run those policies on ground. Government tries to make different policies which are implemented but quality never checked. Majority of fund goes in the pockets of officials working for this. The process of education is not merely digesting books. It is also about doing several co-curricular and extra curricular activities that give broader meaning to life. There is a lack of universities and institutes for education but one most important fact is that the quality of education is absent in higher education. The teachers are not having proper knowledge of subject even and resources to student community are very poor. The students are not capable enough to produce new technology. There is a great need to revolution in higher education. Ensuring equitable access to quality higher education for students from poor background are put to further disadvantages since they are not academically prepared to crack highly competitive entrance examinations. Research in higher education institutions is at its lowest ebb. There is absence of a well- informed reform agenda for higher education in the country. Experience has taught the new generation that success stories are built not on pursuing ideals but on negotiating profitable deals. Competitive, consumerism, hedonism, stark materialism and unabashed possessivism have become the yard sticks of respect in society. We do not talk of the old ideals. The goals become making big money quick, achieving status and living well. Character and individuality lost significance. Worldly success, comfort and vulgar exhibitionism have become most important concerns. The context of higher education has changed with the aggressive advent of economic liberalization, market globalization and technological leap forward is to an information age and knowledge based society. The *Swaminathan* and *Punnayya* committees looked into the possibilities of resources mobilization in technical education and the funding of central universities respectively. The *Swaminathan* committee recommended the stream lining of teaching and other facilities. The *Punnaya* committee recommended the revision of the tuition fees and other fees. The *Birla*



Ambani Report (1993) has strongly advocated privatization of higher education in India. It pleads for the reduction of government funding for the universities and self generation resources and recommends legislation of a private University Bill in the fields of science, technology and management. As the *Radha Krishnan commission* had stated the UGC role is that of friend of the universities and not that of a policeman or inspector. Politics, crime, corruption entering the portals of universities – campuses are plagued by party politics, universities are replace with teacher politician and student politicians.

Our country needs the student faculty with outstanding quality, institutes are not in a position to produce them. The first and foremost cause is the rigid curriculum and the students who cannot fit themselves into the type of education they should undergo in colleges and universities, take up the courses due to pressure from their parents and struggle a lot even to complete the course. The faculty who lack experience and required pedagogical skills. Many institutions which have been established by people without educational background, experience in academics and above all a philanthropic attitude, do not maintain standard. So institutions gives false hopes, through advertisements students finds it difficult to choose the right kind of institution.

Contemporary challenges I higher education

Global competition

India being a signatory of WTO is bound to open up its market for trade in services including education but it does not have a clear policy for strengthening its education sector to compete with giants in the world. Policy restrictions stop the competent institutions from making necessary changes in the processes of admission, recruitment and salaries of faculty/ staff and opening campuses abroad. In lack of proper policy provisions in time, higher education sector in the country is adversely affected. Globalization as a process no doubt has given importance to decentralized educational governance and control.

Vocationalization at the First Degree Level

In conformity with the National Policy on Education 1986, a scheme to provide career orientation through education at the first degree level was launched in 1994/95. Under the scheme a university/ college could introduce one to three vocational courses in 35 identified subjects.

The major challenge is of achieving quality academic environment in education as well as that of maintaining that. Improving quality of all the levels of education including curricula ,faculty, training and infrastructure. The demand of jobs as per the number of passing out graduated is much more than the jobs available in order to bridge this gab there is a need to nurture the spirit of entrepreneurship among the students . The third uphill task in front of quality higher education is to make itself accessible to the economically weak and the poor segment of the society.

International Level Challenges in Higher Education

There are two main challenges. The first challenge is the role of super national organizations like UNESCO in advancing the prospection of trends and improvement. The second is to encourage international cooperation between institutions in order to share knowledge across borders and facilitate collaboration which further more represents as essential element for the construction of a planetary and post cosmopolitan citizenship. The assumption of interdependence, deterritorialisation, participation, co responsibility and

solidarity among all inhabitants of the planet. Changes in the universities as institution and at the level of internal organization. These changes should aim to improve the resources. Universities continue their mission to educate and train and carry out research through an approach characterized by ethics, autonomy, responsibility and anticipation. Changes in knowledge creation, changes in education modes, new learning and teaching approaches that enable the development of critical and creative thinking should be integrated. The competencies common to all higher education graduates should be determined and the corresponding expectations should be defined. In knowledge society higher education should transform us from disoriented projectiles into guided missiles.

Suggestions and Recommendations to Improve the Standard of Higher Education

To improve higher education as stated earlier expert committees recommended number of measures. For example as far back as in 1966, Kothari Commission set forth eight conditions for improving the quality of higher education.

1. Strong central and state Governments that would be committed to educational development.
2. Stable political conditions in the country
3. Declining birth rate of population
4. A growth rate national income 6 per cent per annum
5. A lessening of social tensions due to effective developments
6. A strengthened and revitalized bureaucracy
7. A committed and competent body of teachers.
8. A community of students dedicated to the pursuit of learning.

The National Education Policy 1986 document, which made the following important recommendations to improve higher education.

1. Delinking of degree from jobs.
2. Diversification of courses
3. To stop expansion of conventional pattern of colleges and universities.
4. Selective admissions to higher education.
5. Decentralization of educational planning, administration and monitoring
6. Depoliticalisation of academia.

As a matter of fact, education should be focused on the learner and in real sense emphasis should be laid on 'student-centre learning' as it aims at all round development of the students total personality. The following suggestions are offered for qualitative up gradation of higher education system.

1. To develop world class higher education, feeder stages of education are required to be developed.
2. Institutions should have proper missions ,resources and purposes
3. Introduction of effective administration and managerial reforms are a prerequisite for better command and control.
4. Teaching of skill development courses by practicing professionals and continuous up gradation of curricula with latest development in technologies are required.
5. Internship should be made compulsory in all professional courses
6. Curricula must contribute towards development of character and overall development of student's personality.
7. New market driven professional courses should be developed.
8. To attract proficient faculty, liberal salary/ perks should be introduced.



9. In order to enrich the higher education a substantial number of potentially great academicians and scientist from abroad to work with our students and teachers instead of importing mediocre foreign universities to set up shops in the country.

Conclusion

In the changing context of emergence of knowledge economy, higher education institutions need to embrace the concept of lifelong education and training. The functional character of higher education should imply and support the technological society by producing knowledge workers. In India the higher education was traditionally looked after by the Government, but in view of lack of resources to meet the increasing demand, private sector emphasize more on commercial aspect than creation of knowledge which leads to deterioration of quality of education. Indian economy is impacted by its higher education in a systemic manner. There is tremendous increase in institutions of higher education. To achieve success there is an need of financial resources , access and equity, quality standards, careful selection of staff. Internal self evaluation and external education must be conducted. We need educational system that is modern liberal and can adopt to the changing needs of changing society, changing economy of changing world. There is a great need for financial innovation for this sector. The world bank has made an interesting analysis according to which higher education is generally heavily dependent upon government funding leading to fiscal adjustment problems in developing countries.

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