



## HIGHER EDUCATION ON THE VERGE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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### Abstract

*The present paper is an effort, to identify and discuss a number of critical issues, of Higher Education in India. Education is a process by which a person's body, mind and character are formed and strengthened and as a nation we can't break away from the moral obligation of providing high quality higher education to each and every young citizens of this country. India in last two decades has been credited to the higher education system which has been able to produce skilled manpower for the speedy industrialization and knowledge based economy and has become the hub of Information Technology (IT) & IT enabled services industry and manufacturing industry. To keep pace with the range of the demands of modern society the institutions of higher education have similarly been forced to diversify. Higher education in India thus, has been finding it difficult to meet the challenges of unplanned expansion, educated unemployment, uneven growth, commercialization of education, financial crises, teacher burnout and the digital divide of quantity versus quality, equity versus excellence, and creativity versus conformity which are posing continuous threats. However, there are gaps between the situations also in developing and developed countries, within urban and rural areas, between the wealthy and the poor, males and females, and among different ethnic groups.*

**Keywords:** *Higher Education, Society, Current scenario, Emerging Challenges*



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### 1. Introduction: The Indian higher education

Education is one of the significant factors instrumental to the development of a country. Education in India dates back to its early civilization time where teaching and learning process revolved around the 'Gurukul system'. Modern concept of University mode of education centers were established around 6 BC at Nalanda and Takshila . Today, India with second largest population is home to the third largest higher education system in the world by volume of students enrolled.

In the current day globalized world India and China are two countries which are redefining the human race equation in-terms of population, political power, economy and volume of consumption of natural resources. Education is the key factor in determining the budding superpowers. Higher education in these two countries has centuries old history which is demanding the changing times with respect to technology. India in last two decades has been credited to the higher education system which has been able to produce skilled

manpower for the speedy industrialization and knowledge based economy. India has become the hub of Information Technology (IT) & IT enabled services industry and manufacturing industry. The advancement which has been made in last two decades has not reached all sections of the society. India, even after 69 years of its independence, is far away from the goal of universal literacy. The system of Indian Higher education is the second largest in the world which fulfills the educational requirements of millions of students who come from different sections of the society since it is the student community that can help to generate healthy academic atmosphere in institutions of higher learning.

The Education Commission 1964-66 described the role of education in social and economic transformation through a statement-the density of a nation is shaped in its class rooms. The mission of higher education is to achieve access, equality, justice, quality, employability, inclusiveness and create a knowledge society/ economy. Methods of higher education also have to be appropriate to the needs of four pillars of education, learning to learn, learning to do, learning to be and learning to become. (Ganihar &Bhat 2006). Higher education provides specialized knowledge and skilled persons for national development. Higher education in India has been finding it difficult to meet the challenges of unplanned expansion, educated unemployment, uneven growth, commercialization of education, financial crises, teacher burnout and the digital divide of quantity versus quality, equity versus excellence, and creativity versus conformity which are posing continuous threats to higher education. The present paper is an effort, to identify and discuss a number of critical issues, of Higher Education in India.

## **2. Higher Education and its roles that the society expects**

Today a large percentage of the young generation is enrolled in higher education. Higher education in India has practiced phenomenal expansion since independence. Higher Education provides opportunities to the people to reflect on the critical social, cultural, moral, economic and spiritual issues facing humanity.

Universities have become mass institutions in modern societies, at least in the greatly developed countries, though this is not as much in the developing countries and lately industrializing countries. Modern universities are mass institutions in a good sense. In the highly developed countries in particular, a huge section of any age group is vigorously engaged in higher education. Overall they symbolize a high percentage of the population between the ages of 18 and 65, that is, the active working populations. To keep pace with the

range of the demands of modern society the institutions of higher education have similarly been forced to diversify.

The following are the five main functions which a society expects its institutions of higher education to fulfil,:

- To providing education and training within a structure which combines research and teaching.
- they provide professional training. Universities have been preparing students for professions such as medicine, teaching and the law.
- they are responsible for carrying out research in a broad range of disciplines, interdisciplinary work, and training a constant supply of qualified people for all fields of employment.
- they have a part to play in regional development and also in developing international contacts.
- they have a social function in fostering the intellectual and social development of society.

### **3. Current scenario of higher education system in India**

On 13th June, 2005 Government of India constituted a high level advisory body known as National Knowledge Commission (NKC). It was headed by Sam Pitroda and submitted its report in November 2007. It recommended setting up of 1500 universities by 2015 so that gross enrolment ratio increases to 15 percent. It has also called for establishing an Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE) to monitor the quality of overall higher education in India. The Ministry of Human Resources Development notes that since 1950 until 2009, university and university level institutions in India have increased approximately 18 times (from 27 in 1950 to 504 in 2009). Despite this increase, the required capacity remains much higher. Conservative estimates showed that by 2006 India required “at least 3,000 more universities each having the capacity to enrol not less than 10,000 students” to meet its demands (Bhargava, 2006). Nevertheless, the application of science and technology and the production and use of “knowledge” of the excellence of information and supervision have now become the keys to economic growth. At present, there is a strong demand for the ability to create and apply this “knowledge” which is essential to economic growth.

At a global level, the privileged style prevalent earlier to mass higher education has changed. The trends towards greater diversity among students and institutions and towards lifelong education have progressed. However, there are gaps between the situations in developing and developed countries, within urban and rural areas, between the wealthy and the poor, males and females, and among different ethnic groups.

#### **4. Problems in Indian Higher Education:**

There are many basic problems faced by higher education system in India. It can be found in the 'Report to the Nation 2006' of the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) which concludes that, 'there is a quiet crisis in higher education in India that runs deep, and that it has to do with both the quantity and the quality of higher education in India'. Many factors have contributed to the degradation of higher education system since independence in 1947 which can be broadly grouped into the following factors but not limited. Financing of higher education, Quality of human resources in higher education, Quality of the research infrastructure, mismanagement of the system and lack of accountability, Society and ethics, Lack of industry academia collaborations in research, Lack of importance for natural and social sciences. There is, indeed, a multitude of interrelated problems that India faces in its higher education system; it suffers from several systemic deficiencies, such as – the unwieldy affiliating system, inflexible academic structure, uneven capacity across various subjects, eroding autonomy of academic institutions, and the low level of public funding are well known. However, India continues to face stern challenges.

#### **5. Emerging Challenges**

Today a large number of problems pertaining to poverty unemployment, disappearance of moral and spiritual values have cropped up in India. The quality of education in India whether at primary or higher education is significantly poor as compared to major developing nations of the world. In the last few decades a countrywide problems/challenges have emerged in Higher Education system in India and they are discussed as under.

- **Expansion:** The first challenge to overcome is to increase the present rate of enrolment of 20 per cent. We have only 722 universities, as against the National Knowledge Commission recommendation of 1,500. Our aim and plan for the next 20 years should be to arrive at a proper estimate of universities and undergraduate

institutions. Our heterogeneous education system, based on geographical, rural-urban, rich-poor set up have posed in great challenge for the educational institutions.

- **Disparities:** Another challenge that confronts India is in the disparities in terms of economic class, gender, caste and ethnic and religious belonging that stands before access to education.
- **Declining Quality:** The quality society can be produced only through quality education. We need more quality teaching institutions at the undergraduate level. The influence of academicians on policies and the fascination with a defective notion of excellence in terms of it being only about research have destabilized the focus of having good teaching institutions. Nobody denies that research has more utility, but it should not be forgotten that imparting knowledge is also equally important. The higher education of India needs mechanisms to improve the quality of education provided through universities and other degree awarding institutions. The mechanism should pay attention on refining, diversifying, and upgrading higher education and research programmes.
- **Privatisation:** Approximately 50 per cent of the higher education in India is imparting education through private institutions, mainly unaided which involves high cost. Today in India the ambition of middle class and poor students to endure higher and technical education is becoming a dream due to the massive quantity of fees charged by the money minded private colleges. In India, 'Higher Education' should be made affordable to all deserving students.
- **Quality Textbooks:** Now that teaching in most undergraduate and State universities is in the regional languages, good textbooks and quality translations from the original English books are a must if a student is to make progress. Teaching in the regional languages would make one's understanding relatively easy while minimal language competence in English should facilitate student access to English books. An example that can be cited is in Japan where translations have enabled greater educational access for the student.
- **Education of relevance:** Having an education that is relevant to the economy and society is another challenge. The development of human resources for the economy has been translated into action through vocational and professional education. But similar efforts are lacking in social education. As the American educationist,

Professor, James A. Banks, said: “the role of education in the 21st Century is to prepare students to know, to care and to act in ways that will develop and foster knowledge and skill needed to participate in effective action.”

#### **6. Suggestive Measures to Improve the System of Higher Education:**

The Ernst & Young LLP is a Limited Liability Partnership, registered under the Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008 in India suggests the following strategies to be adopted:

- Merit-based Student Financing: This should ensure admissions to meritorious students independent of financial background
  - Internationalisation of Education: This would entail aligning different aspects of education (curriculum, faculty, etc) to international standards
  - Enabling a Research Environment: This would involve creating adequate means of research funding and practical application of research
  - High Quality Faculty: The need of the hour is to create a conducive environment and provide incentives to attract and retain high quality faculty
  - Improved Technology for Education Delivery: Leveraging technology for enhancing the teaching-learning experience will ensure better outcomes
  - Employability: Making education-industry relevant and practical would be the right way to ensure a highly employable talent pool.
- a) **Cross Culture Programmes**- There should be a multidisciplinary approach in higher education so that student’s knowledge may not be restricted only upon his own subjects. After education, tour to every places in India and world as far as possible with the cooperation of government is necessary so that one can realize about people, culture, arts, literature, religions, technological developments and advancement of individual society in the world
- b) **Action Plan for Improving Quality**- Higher educational institutes should improve quality and reputation. Academic and administrative audit must be conducted once in three years in colleges by external experts for ensuring quality in all aspects of academic activities. The self-finance colleges must approach forward for accreditation and accomplish the requirements of accreditation. Hence, Universities and colleges should recognize the need for quality education and come forward with action plan for improving quality in higher educational institutions.

- c) **Good Infrastructure:** There should be a good infrastructure of colleges and universities which may attract the students. There are large number of colleges which are functioning all over the country that still suffer from poor physical facilities and infrastructure.
- d) **World Class Education-** Government must promote collaboration between Indian higher education institutes and top International institutes and also generates linkage between national research laboratories and research centers of top institutions for better quality and collaborative research. India must aspire for the international standard in education. Many national universities like in the USA, UK, Australia, etc. allow studies in higher education for foreign students in their countries. In the same way India can also offer courses of studies to foreign students taking advantage of the globalization process. To achieve that goal it must adopt uniform international syllabus in its educational institutions. There is a need to implement innovative and transformational approach form primary to higher education level to make Indian educational system globally more relevant and competitive.
- e) **Personality Development-** Finally, education must be for the flowering of personality but not for the suppression of creativity or natural skill. Universities and colleges in both public private must be away from the political affiliations, favouritism, money making process should be out of education system etc. That is the way the world can be developed for peace, prosperity and progress by able and skilful men.
- f) **High-tech Libraries-** Our university libraries have a very good collection of books, but they are all in mess. A library must be online and conducive for serious study. Indian universities should concentrate more on providing quality education which is comparable to that of international standards.

## 7. Conclusion

A large number of added students continue to knock at the doors of our institutions for higher education. Education is a process by which a person's body, mind and character are formed and strengthened and as a nation we can't break away from the moral obligation of providing high quality higher education to each and every young citizens of this country. India is a land of huge human resource potential, to make the most of this potential properly is the issue which needed to discuss. Knowledge is not only going to be the driver of Indian economy, but also, it is going to pervade into all the strata of Indian society for a better quality of life and living conditions. Thus, It is necessary to raise the quality of various aspects, including teachers, students, facilities, equipment, educational materials and

methods, and financing. India needs more efficient and educated people to drive our economy forward. The actual need of the hour is the new policies and strategies by our policy makers and leaders that will give a rise to larger number of high quality institutions. There is an urgency to find the solution to these problems as we are now engaged in using higher education as a powerful tool for creation of a knowledge-based information society that will take India into a bright new future. India thus need to rise right away and reorient its higher education system to be alive, competitive, significant and persistent; besides, there is absolutely no substitute to quality of higher education. Despite challenges higher education system of India equally have lot of opportunities to overcome these challenges and have the capability to make its identity at international level.

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