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A STUDY ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA AT THE CROSSROADS

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Abstract

In day to day Higher education is fast becoming a "commodity" by its very nature and is being strutted as a "package" which rids the educated from the ills of unemployment and poverty. The process of commercialization of education is paradoxically leading to its self destruction, and corrupting young minds through grossly mismanaged educational systems. This paper describes out a highly critical scenario of the higher education system in India, which the author believes is at the cross roads and is plagued by an uninspired equipped academia, shortages in funding, progressively consumer driven market, entry of private enterprise, globalization and a variety of other concerns amidst the issue of long pending reforms which urgently needs to be addressed to bring about a meaningful restructuring of Indian higher education system and also provides critical perspectives on and valuable insights into, several issues concerning tertiary education that have not been examined so closely and argues the reflections over a period of higher education system that changes. India has one of the largest systems of higher education in the world. Since independence it has enormously expanded in terms of quantity and diversity of fields of knowledge. However, it has remained relatively unchanged insofar as the structure, the system of management and even functional objectives are concerned.

Key words: Education, Literacy, management, UGC, IT sector.

INTRODUCTION

At present, India has more than 26,000 higher educational colleges and just fewer than 10 million students. More than two-thirds of these colleges are classified by the University Grants Commission (UGC – the apex government regulatory body for higher education) as "Arts, Science, Commerce and Oriental Learning Colleges" In recent times there has been an exponential growth of professional colleges (especially engineering, management and medicine), as well as those offering private vocational courses catering especially to the IT sector. The fact that India has less medical colleges but just two in public health indicates the priorities and interests that shape Indian higher education. India produces more lawyers than doctors and nearly 0.7 million

students were enrolled in engineering/technology. Enrollment ratios vary across Indian states, with the Southern and Western states faring better than their Eastern counterparts. The higher educational institutions in India are regulated by the University Grants

Commission (UGC), it exercises control over several public (or private) universities. Consequently, public universities are not hamstrung in their ability to compete against their rivals. Finally, public universities have considerable flexibility in setting fees. In view of the subsidy from the state government, the fees are not as high as those charged by private universities but they are substantial. In-state students pay anywhere between 30 to 50% of the total fees charged by private universities while out-of-state students may pay as much as 75%. The fees ensure that the universities have the resources necessary to attract first-rate scholars for appointments to their staff as also establish labs and other infrastructure.

STATE POLICIY IN INDIA FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

From the earlier 20th century, there have been many high level commissions matched up to provide policy orientation to the develop the education in India. The University Education Commission, presided over by Dr S. Radhakrishnan reported that university education should be placed in the Concurrent List in 1949 so that there is a national guarantee of minimum standards of university education. The constituent assembly did not agree to it. It was much later, in 1976, which education was made a concurrent subject with the 42nd Amendment of the Constitution.

The Commission of Kothari (1964–66) has verified every aspect in education at different levels and gave the report of full details on it. This report became the first step to change the National Policy on Education, 1968. With this, a basic structure of education (10+2+3) was introduced and implemented by most states over a period of time. In schools there have been implemented that mathematics and physics are compulsory subjects. A beginning must be created to restructuring undergraduate level courses.

In 1985, an existing educational scene was made. This was followed by everyone in the country. It was noted that results were impressive in themselves, it get translated into a detailed strategy of implementation, accompanied by the assignment of specific responsibilities and financial and organizational support.

The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 was put in place. It was noted in the preamble for the policy that in India, Education is at cross roads and neither normal linear expansion nor the existing pace and nature of improvement of the situation would help. It was also noted that education has an acclimatization role. By accepting the fact that education is a unique investment in the present and the future, a very own comprehensive policy document was approved in 1986. This was supplemented with a Program of Action (PoA) in 1992.

On review now, one sees that many of the recommendations of the NPE, 1986 read with PoA, 1992 have been only partly fulfilled. Moreover, there has been not done any effort to modify the previous policy prescriptions or

to develop a new one. After the economic reforms were undertaken in early 1990's, their influence on developing the higher education has been ignored. With the economic reforms of the 1990s, the private sector has come to occupy a central role in the economic development of the nation. There is a need for a holistic review of the instruments currently available for managing the system of higher education such as the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act, the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) Act, and so on, which have become outdated in the present context. In this context, it is very important to develop a new national policy framework for higher education in the current and emerging contexts.

RECENT TRENDS IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in India has received a lot of attention over the past few years. There are four reasons for this recent focus. At first higher education in country has been blamed for ill equipped manpower and skill shortages in economy several sectors. Secondly, the quotas of reservation in educational institutions, mainly the more reputed once that provide high access to the high status growth and distributive justice, high stats and best paid jobs. Thirdly, from the first two developments the back drop has been dropped and they are argued that the development growth and maintain competitiveness unless problems with higher education are fixed. Lastly, the demand for higher education is grown continuously due to the growing population of young people and the knowledge they are gains in schools educations is increasing through there middle class and rising aspirations.

W believe that due to the increasing in technology and shift demography provided in India with a opportunity to productively engage in huge pool of human resources and become a leader in both the rapidly expanding sectors of services and highly skilled manufacturing. Hence many steps have been taken to improve quality and fix many of the problems faced by higher education. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) has been implemented to examine the education sector to make several useful and important recommendations. The Indian Government has increased funding to the education sector significantly during the Eleventh Five-year Plan. Many new institutions have been planned and some of them are already operational. Several suggestions appear to be merely impressionistic views of individuals than being more supported by data and research. Institutions of higher education today are an integral organ of the state and economy. India's history, diverse culture and the complicated nature of Indian policy process make higher education very complex enterprises in India.

INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION A STATUS CHECK

The latest official data on students and colleges in India indicates a healthy growth in institutional capacity, according to UGC. Between 2004 and 2010, colleges will be increased by more than 10,000 and student enrollment increased by 4 million students. In 2010, India had about 26,500 higher educational institutions- the largest in world. Close to 2/3 of these are general education (Arts, Science and Commerce) colleges and these account for about 80% of the enrolments. Engineering is the one of the most preferred professional course,

followed by Pharmacy and Management courses. Despite the number, nearly 1-2 higher education institutions in India make it to the top rankings such as the FT-Top 100 Global MBA Rankings. The growth rate of this market is 24.5% Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) with close to a 160,000 students going abroad for studies. From the past 25 years, enrolments in higher education have been growing at a CAGR of 6%, because of the growing enrolments we expected to be 15% by 2020. Utilization Capacity is a key concern and directly impacts the 33,000 new institutions target of an additional 24 mn students. We have 15-30% underutilized capacity.

Even though we have ranked, third highest number of students in world. The GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) is extremely low (12%), as compared with other countries (Brazil is at 34% and China at 23%), Not only that there are regional skews and the elite system of education is less. And the last 10 years show GER is increasing at 3.09% CAGR as opposed to Brazil's 13.39% and China's 19.24% (2000-2007). India's 2020 target is 30% GER. Distance Education (DE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) have about 7% CAGR over the past 20-30 years with ITI/ITCs accounting for 43% while vocational education in senior schools accounting for 33% of capacity. Since India has a large young, independent population with a median age of 25 years, this demographic dividend (68% of population in 15-64 years segment by 2020) has to be capitalized upon using DE and VET.

Private sector only spends there 2/3rds of the total gained from the Higher Education. Government spends 0.6% (USD 4 bn, Central Government) of its budget on Higher Education which has the potential to grow compared to countries like Finland who allocate 1.6%. The largest allocation of this spend is General Education (about 38%). This share is growing (35%+ CAGR). But there are certain skews in the distributions of State and central funding across general and professional education. Now day's women constitute about 40 % of all enrollments in college, but in some areas it is low of 24% in Bihar to a high of 60% in Kerala. Nearly 2/3 of students are joining in the arts and sciences, remaining 18% are joining in Commerce and Management.

THE CAUSE OF IRRELEVENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM INDIA

1. The main causes of the irrelevance are from the urban base of institutions in higher education. The Indian population is overwhelmingly rural. But the higher education institutions are not only located in urban centers, they create urbanized individuals far removed from the rural ethos.
2. Indian population is at cursory look at the major components and their interest and the course structure on the Indian universities is enough to prove the irrelevance of higher learning, 90% of the Indian population is engaged in or dependent on agriculture. There are some agricultural universities. There have great funding agencies to support agricultural research because such interests there are some conventional universities exists.
3. Language in education has a main role in maintaining and as well as lowering the quality of education in India. The elite are in favor of English, which they consider a status symbol. As education has bypassed

the majority, the national consensus is in favor of a switchover to regional language media which is expected not only to increase the educational access, but also establish a viable relation between tradition and change.

4. It is main reason to prove the labor hard for mere additional infrastructural input is likely to future accentuate the existing inequities and contradictions. The present education system have succeeded while establishing the measures among the elites across class,

   caste and regional boundaries, While the present education system has succeeded in establishing a measure of cohesion among elites across class, caste and regional boundaries, increasing the difference between the school, highly schooled and not so highly schooled community and region.

5. There is no wonder therefore that the values of the beneficiaries of development will be reflected in the education system. The concept of university "as being our society's engagement with pure value" is almost nonexistent.

6. The University Grants Commission, in spite of many academic innovations to its credit, had been working more as an administrator of grants rather than an organization upholding standards. The UGC has not been able to resist political pressure for the creation of regional universities. There are instances where departments in some universities are being manned only by a temporary lecturer owing to a ban on recruitments. Sadly, UGC have been unable to stop such practices. Also, UGC have been powerful lobby which gives permissions for setup up of professional colleges sans requisite infrastructure/faculty for a reasonable price. It will not be able to stand up to the fraud perpetrated by unscrupulous academics and not so alert Vice-Chancellors.

7. In some universities have given 3 posts during the 3rd plan for a certain discipline. These 3 posts are distributed among three other disciplines. These 3 posts were distributed among three other disciplines. These posts were claimed and obtained for strengthening the non-existent department during the Fourth Plan. It is policy coordination with the Government ensuring compatibility between educational policies and policies of recruitment of various jobs, more specifically because the Government today is the largest employment agency. The professional colleges had already triggered considerable resentment.

8. The UGC Planning Commission has planned to improve the man power to be effectively carried out in central and state. What is crucial, however, is a strong political will to change and nationalize education. Without college and university teachers establishing professional standards and without the students alert about the future of education, many of the maladies cannot be checked and rectified. Institutions and individuals at the helms of affairs, however, cannot escape responsibility and accountability.

9. There need to be reforms led by the regulating authority, the Distance Education Council, to growth facilitate and expansion of distance education in the country. Special Education Zones and Special Knowledge zones are being seen as a mechanism to allow greater autonomy and space for innovation for

private players. There must improve key ratios such as the number of students to a computer, which stands at 229:1 for the average Indian college as opposed to the 4:1 or 2:1 verified by AICTE.

10. The reasons for poor levels of research have to do with the quantity & quality of PhDs (less than 1% of total HE students complete a PhD and these numbers are declining), the quality of teacher guides are being important factor along with the time spent on research activities. Grants for research are at a miserable USD 0.25 bn, about 5% of Harvard University's spend on research in 2008! Specialized government interventions in research have virtually isolated themselves from Higher Education, adding to the malaise. Interestingly, private HE sector R&D is not performing too badly in comparison to public HE counterparts. Key issues are funding, system of rewards, IP frameworks, collaboration and raising the quantity & quality of manpower for research.

CONCLUSION

The data mentioned above supports the arguments propounding urgent for changes in Higher Education system- both policies and Delivery Mechanism, there is a need to adopt latest technological advancements such as– Financial innovation, use of ICT/technology, focus on useful research, thrust on vocational education & training (VET) and changes to the regulatory framework. Quality issues in Higher learning system which really is suffering from the shortage of faculty (There is a need for about 45,000 PhDs and an equal number of M. Phil's) and poor infrastructure. Have an extremely high student to teacher ratio (22:1) as compared to developed country averages of 11.4 students to a teacher. However, this healthy growth in numbers has its share of paradoxes and problems. It becomes obvious that in comparison with other growth indicators like GDP or number of cars, higher education has seriously lagged behind. Yet, there are signs of overcapacity and disillusion. The rate of growth of teachers (faculty) is slower than the number of universities and colleges. Number of colleges has been grown at a rate slower than growth of GDP resulting in talent shortage and continued demand for talented and skilled workforce Does that mean India will need many more colleges to meet the growth rate of the economy? Yes. But, then paradoxically why are seats in several professional colleges remaining vacant. The answer lies in what is not captured by these statistics of growth and that is quality and employability. Students are seeking education which will improve their prospects for getting job and upward mobility without concern regards to the employment scenario in that particular area. Institutions and policy-makers need to listen to the qualitative dimension of the demand and adapt to it to remain relevant and competitive.These reports are not quite comprehensive insofar as they do not bring out certain systemic aspects of failure of the sector in India such as that of a heavy weight curricular structure, absence of basic livelihood infrastructure, deficiencies in teacher training, systemic shortcomings in educational planning, education management capability, innovation in learning technology, weak educational data collection and analysis and so on.

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