

## Higher Education in India: Challenges and Recommendations

**Ravi, T. S.**

Associate Professor, KSS P.G of Dept., of Education & Research Centre, Davangere, India

### Abstract

Education is a basic need of every society. A better education system can enhance the social, scientific, and technological improvement of a country. The human resource development of a country depends upon the quality of education imparted in country (Mohanthy, 2000). Higher education caters to the education in the colleges and universities. Allen (1988) observed “It is academically consider suitable to present distinctive feature of two stages for the purpose of clarity of concepts and avoiding duplication” Higher education is admittedly a separate stage quite distinct from primary, secondary, elementary, and higher secondary stage. (Best, 1994). Higher education has great importance in the development of a country. But unfortunately, its importance is yet to be realized in South Asian developing countries. For over a decade, countries have been working to uplift their educational standard by providing quality higher education to their citizens but there are many obstacles and hurdles that are emerging. These challenges (quantity, equity, quality, etc) are very common in nature but require proper procedure to address in the best manner.

**KEYWORDS:** Higher Education, Challenges, Quality Education, Development, Recommendations

### Introduction

Education is a process by which a person’s body, mind and character are formed and strengthened. It is bringing of head, heart and mind together and thus enabling a person to develop an all round personality identifying the best in him or her. It is a humanizing process. Education is for transformation, to be able to think by oneself, to be able to relate to others meaningfully and to understand the world and society clearly. A nation advances in proportion to education and intelligence spread among masses. Development of any country depends 20% on natural resources, 16% on infrastructure and 64% on human resources and social factors. This calls for a high quality and well trained human resources from our education systems.

Without education one cannot discern what is good or bad? What is right or wrong? What is true or false? What is lovely or ugly? The purpose of education is, therefore, to make human beings capable, competent and wise to meet the challenges of life. Jawaharlal Nehru declared that if all were well with our educational institutions, all would be well with the nation. Educational institutions are intimately linked with society at large. They are the temples of knowledge. They are the agents of social change and transformation. Therefore, the general condition of our schools, colleges and universities is a matter of great concern to the nation. The Kothari Commission has beautifully said: ‘The destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms. This we believe is no mere rhetoric. In a world based on science and technology it is education that determines the level of prosperity, welfare and security of people. On the quality and number of persons coming out of our schools and

colleges will depend our success in the great enterprise of national construction whose principal objective is to raise the standard of living of our people’.

### **Higher Education System in India**

Though the Indian Higher Education Structure can be traced back to Nalanda and Takshashila Institutions, still “The foundation for modern education was laid by the Britishers. They set up network of schools to impart western education in English medium (Perkin, 2006). First such college to impart western education was founded in 1818 at Serampore near Calcutta. Over the next forty years, many such colleges were established in different parts of the country at Agra, Bombay, Madras, Nagpur, Patna, Calcutta, and Nagapattinam. Its historical landmarks are McCauley’s Policy of 1835 to promote European learning through English, Sir Charls Woods’ Dispatch of 1854 which for the first time recognized the need for mass education with private and missionary help and gave up the policy of selective education known as the ‘filtration theory’ and finally the first Indian Education Commission of 1882 which recommended the initiative of private agencies in the expansion of education”.

The objective of the system of education conceived by the British government for India was to produce a class of intermediaries between the ruler and the rules. Thus “the main aim in starting of the schools for children’s as well as the institution of higher learning in the 18th century was to propagate Christianity, to have competent scholars in the Muslim and Hindu Law, and to train the British civilians in Indian languages, Indian law, and Indian history”. Out of ignorance about the great tradition of learning and education in India, Macaulay planted a system of education, which had its roots not in India but elsewhere. It was to this that Mahatma Gandhi referred to when talking about the education in an independent India, at Chatham House, London on October 20, 1931, he said:

*I say without fear of my figures being challenged successfully, that today India is more illiterate than it was fifty or a hundred years ago, and so is Burma, because the British administrators, when they came to India instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. They scratched the soil and began to look at the root, and left the root like that, and the beautiful tree perished.*

An important step in the history of Indian education is marked by Sir Charles Wood's epoch-making Dispatch of 1854, which led to (1) the creation of a separate department for the administration of education in each province, (2) the founding of the universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras in 1857, and (3) the introduction of a system of grants-in-aid. Even when the administration of India passed from the East India Company into the hands of the British crown in 1858, Britain's secretary of state for India confirmed the educational policy of Wood's Dispatch.

The newly established universities did not initially undertake any teaching responsibilities but were merely examining bodies. Their expenses were confined to administration and could be met from the fees paid by the candidates for their degrees and certificates. The then existing 27 colleges were affiliated to these three universities. Later on more universities were established. At the time of independence in 1947, there were 19 universities and several hundred affiliated colleges. Although

the establishment of the universities resulted in rapid expansion of college education and the products of the new learning displayed keen scholarship, the value of learning started decaying. In such circumstances it was ironic for the Indian Education Commission of 1882 to declare, “*The university degree has become an accepted object of ambition, a passport to distinction in public services and in the learned professions.*” Another undesirable practice was the domination of the universities over secondary education through their entrance examinations.

### ***Higher Education in India: As it grows***

After independence, which coincided with the post-Second World War era, India made concerted efforts to improve access to higher education and the system grew rapidly after independence. By 1980, there were 132 universities and 4738 colleges in the country enrolling around five percent of the eligible age group in higher education. No doubt Indian higher education is one of the second largest, other one is China and the United States. Yet is one of the most complex ones. Uptill 1980, the growth of higher education was largely confined to liberal arts, science and commerce. Not only the government supported higher education by setting up universities and colleges, but also took over the responsibility of running the institutions set up through private sector, which were known as grant-in-aid (GIA) institutions or private aided institutions. *In such institutions, though the private sector financed major part of the capital costs, public subsidies were provided to them to meet a part of the recurrent costs, and occasionally for some capital works. Public funding was accompanied with considerable regulation of private institutions by the government* (World Bank, 2003).

Over a period of time, private aided institutions became a mirror image of the government run institutions. This had serious repercussions on the future of higher education in India. *During this period, this de facto nationalization of private higher education not only killed community-led private initiatives, but gave a serious blow to the standards of the private colleges, many of which had over the years set high academic standards for themselves.*<sup>3</sup> On the other, the growing demand for higher education resulted in rapid growth in enrolment as its relevance in business and industry was felt by people and also due to the affordability of the middle income group. Increased demand for higher education laid considerable stress on governmental resources which resulted in private participation in higher education. The state had no choice than to accept private participation for two reasons: (i) Quality-wise they had maintained standards and (ii) State Resources were limited.

The reforms in early 90s saw the middle class population larger, younger, richer and the country supported entrepreneurship. Thus, education was seen not only as a status symbol but also as a means to get ahead of others. Privatization of higher education has been natural outcome of several policy changes such as liberalization, privatization, privatization, etc. during 1991. All these set a pace for accelerated growth of higher education by the private sector in the country. Till late 1990s, there was of affiliated colleges in the universities. Yet, there was realization amongst the promoters of private institutions about the powers of the regulatory mechanism of the universities and the state governments with regard to checks and balances on key items such as admissions and fee regulations. Thus, the autonomy of private institutions was not questioned. Thus the efforts towards moving out of the strangle held of affiliating universities lead to the establishment of deemed-to-be universities

and a way to get the degree granting powers. Between 2000 and 2005, 26 private-sponsored institutions got the deemed university status.

Since education is on the concurrent list and the State governments can themselves establish private universities through legislation in the state legislature. By early 2005, seven private universities were set up in different states and were also recognized by the UGC. Attracted by the advantages of the above, a newly constituted state -Chhattisgarh in central India set up of 97 universities with all India jurisdictions in the year 2002. These had neither established proper structure or functions or structure function relations. This was struck down by the Supreme Court in February 2005 leaving the fate of nearly fifty thousand students registered in these universities astray ; the future of those who acquired degrees from these '*so called*' universities remains uncertain. The Chhattisgarh case is an example towards a caution to the regulatory system as the gaps that exists in these regulatory bodies and its impact on the system.

There has been an appreciable growth in the number of universities and colleges in India since independence from 25 and 700 in 1947 to 354 and 17625 in 2005. The total enrolment increased from a meager 0.1 million in 1947 to 10.48 million in 2005 resulting in twelve fold increase in number of university level institutions and twenty-eight fold increase in number of students. Yet it can cater to only 7% of the age group population viz 18 to 25 years which is lower than even that of developing countries as Indonesia (11%), Brazil (12%), and Thailand (19%). This small proportion of the targeted population enrolled in formal education at the tertiary level is indicative of the huge gap between *access and demand* for higher education in India. The demand is so high that no country in the world, no matter how rich it is, can afford to meet by the state funds alone, especially such types which are tuition free or highly subsidized by the state. The total enrolment increased from a meager of 0.1 million in 1947 to 10.48 million in 2005. The bulk of the higher education system lies in its 131 affiliating universities. It contributes around 89 per cent of the total enrolment.

### **Structure of Higher Education in India**

In India the institutional framework consists of *Universities* established by an Act of Parliament (Central Universities) or of a State Legislature (State Universities), *Deemed Universities*, *Institutes of National Importance* and *Institutions established by State Legislative Act* and *colleges affiliated with the University* (both government-aided and unaided).

In India technical education is treated as a separate sector. There are 65 centrally funded institutions like IITs, IIMs, NITs, IISc, etc. Additionally, State Governments have also set up technical institutions. AICTE and equivalent sectoral regulators (like the Medical Council of India) both approve and regulate technical institutions in engineering/technology, pharmacy, architecture, hotel management & catering technology, management studies, computer applications and applied arts and crafts. Vocational Education is another stream of higher education in India. For this a network of public and private polytechnics and vocational institutions exists, controlled and supervised by the Councils specializing in each discipline. India has also developed an Open University system to encourage distance learning. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was the pioneer and now there are 14

open universities in India. The open universities in India are regulated by the Distance Education Council of India (DEC), New Delhi which maintains the standards, encourages and organizes the activities of Open and Distance learning in India (ODL). Distance education with new information and communication technology (ICT) promises to expand the frontiers of Higher Education as never before. This is because it costs 66 per cent less and the students need not leave their homes or profession. The internet and satellite technology are being put to use to further the cause of distance education.

The Higher Education sector ensures the quality of the educational process with the help of accreditation agencies established for the purpose. The main agency which accredits universities and colleges in general education is the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) established by the UGC in 1994, whereas a similar function is done for technical education by the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) set up by AICTE in 1994, and for agricultural education by the Accreditation Board (AB) set up by ICAR in 1996. NAAC proposes to introduce the India Education Index (IEI) for ranking institutes based on academic, research performance and other parameters. The outcome will help in the international comparison of institutes. NAAC has entered into an MOU with higher learning institutes of the United States, Taiwan, Norway, Kuwait and with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to facilitate collaborative work on quality assurance in higher education institutions (HEIs). Universities in India, both private and public, are spread across the length and breadth of the nation. The number of universities in India increased from 20 in 1947 to 504 in 2010, a 25 times increase.

### **Challenges in Higher Education**

In present scenario the challenges in higher education are:

**Quality Education:** Quantity and quality of highly specialized human resources determine their competence in the global market. According to a recent government report two-third of India's colleges and universities are below standard. However, according to MHRD annual report 2009-10, a proposal for mandatory accreditation in higher education and creation of an institutional structure for the purpose of regulation is under consideration. India's highest-quality institutions have severely limited capacity. In order to increase the supply quality should be maintained. Recently MRD ministry has decided to derecognize as many as "44 deemed universities". These 44 deemed universities have 1,19,363 students at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In addition, there are 2,124 students pursuing research at MPhil and PhD levels and another estimated 74,808 students pursuing distance education programmes. As many as 41 of the 44 deemed universities have several constituent institutions under them, which would further swell the number of affected students.

**Research and Development:** Research and higher education are complementary to each other. According to the available official statistics the expenditure on R&D in the field of Science & Technology as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) was 0.8 percent during the year 2005-06 in India. For perspective, countries spending the most on S&T as a percent of their GDP were Israel (5.15 percent), Sweden (4.32 percent), Japan (3.14 percent), South Korea (3.15 percent), the United States (2.93 percent), Germany (2.76 percent) and France (2.32 percent). Among other countries, China (1.65 percent), Russia (1.85 percent), U.K. (1.92 percent) and Brazil (1.04

percent) have spent more than India. Moreover, India's higher education institutions are poorly connected to research centers. So this is another area of challenge to the higher education in India.

**Faculty Shortage:** According to a recent report of HRD Ministry premier educational institutes like the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Management (IIMs) are facing a faculty crunch with nearly one-third of the posts vacant. According to a report published in IANS around 35 percent posts are vacant in the central universities, 25 percent in the IIMs, 33.33 percent in the National Institute of Technology (NITs) and 35.1 percent in other central education institutions coming up under the Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry. However in order to overcome this, government is planning to have short-term measures like raising the retirement age in teaching posts from 62 to 65 years and enhancement in salaries and other benefits for teachers. Also some long-term measures have also been initiated for attracting young people to opt for this (teaching) career. These include enhancement in fellowships and attractive start-up grants in various disciplines.

## 5. Key Initiatives

The key initiatives of the government to improve the quality and further development of higher education in India are as follows:

- A proposal for establishment of an autonomous overarching National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER) for prescribed standards of academic quality and defining policies for advancement of knowledge in higher educational institutions. The said proposal is based on the recommendations of Yash Pal Committee and National Knowledge Commission.
- A proposal to prevent, prohibit and punish educational malpractices.
- Law for mandatory assessment and accreditation in higher education through an independent regulatory authority.
- Establishment of a national database of academic qualifications created and maintained in an electronic format which would provide immense benefit to institutions, students and employers.
- A proposal to establish 14 innovation universities aiming at world class standards.
- Setting up 10 new National Institutes of Technology (NITs).
- Launching of a new scheme of interest subsidy on educational loans taken by professional courses by the economically weaker students.
- Setting up of 374 Model degree colleges in districts having GER for education less than the National GER.
- As part of reforms in All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) norms, the HRD ministry announced an increase of almost 200,000 seats in

engineering courses, additional 80,000 seats in management and 2,200 seats in architecture courses. The ministry also made it mandatory for technical institutions to reserve 5 percent seats for the weaker sections of society.

- HRD ministry has liberalized the norms for land requirement for engineering colleges. Now lesser space will be needed for establishing technical institutes. While an engineering college in rural India will need 10 acres of land, just 2.5 acres of land will be needed in urban areas.
- Conduction of special evening in the areas of Engineering, Technology, Architecture, Town Planning, Hospitality and Pharmacy by AICTE-approved institutes.
- Introduction of Section 25 of Company's Act to allow good corporates to set up Technical Institutions.
- Review of the functioning of existing Deemed Universities.
- Passing of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill.

### **Recommendation**

As per the present scenario of the higher education in India the following are the suggestions in order to meet the further challenges:

- i. Government should offer tax concessions/fiscal incentives for setting up campuses of higher education by private/corporate sectors.
- ii. Open Universities need to be encouraged to offer quality programmes at the least cost.
- iii. Government should encourage foreign universities to come to India to set up independent operations or collaborate with existing Indian Institutions.
- iv. A regulatory set up is required to ensure that there is no cheating or hoax and , fixation of fees should not be in state control.
- v. There is great need for providing broad band connectivity to all students along with low priced computer accessibility.
- vi. Good salary packages and benefits to the faculty so that good brains can be attracted to this profession. Private sector should run universities not for a profit-basis through charitable trusts/societies but as a part of a corporate social responsibility (CSR).
- vii. Possibilities for foreign collaboration and participation as 100% foreign direct investment (FDI). The government can encourage this initiative to improve the quality of formal education, particularly, in government run institutions.

### **Opportunities in Higher Education**

- Participate in high-level masters/doctoral courses.
- Receive double/multiple/joint degree from consortium of excellent universities.
- Improve linguistic skills, intercultural experience.
- Improve employability of students through recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad
- Academic exchange of knowledge, ideas, contacts

- Scientific and cultural cooperation by the students unions and scientific boards of universities.
- Use of the comparative studies to present the content of existing educational programs.
- The cause the effective and more international scientific cooperation among the universities.
- Enrichment of university environments for educational and research activities according to the global standards.
- The planning of educational programs according to the time needed through regional and international cooperation among universities.

## Conclusion

The overall standards of academic research in the country are very poor. Several measures are required to be taken to ensure that India has a respectable position in its research performance. These measures would include increasing the level for funding academic research in India and altering the funding mechanism, improving physical and information infrastructure for quality research through a nationally coordinated approach, putting in place objective measures for assessing research performance and rewarding performance and promoting collaboration along with competition in research in India.

There are several other challenges that we face in higher education in India today. Prima Minister in his remarks made in the Harvard Alumni meeting on March 25, 2006 noted that paradoxically, our (Indian) educational system faces the conflicting threats of anarchic growth in quantitative terms and moribund stagnation in qualitative terms. We need a balance between populism and over-regulation; between unbridled marketisation and excessive bureaucratization. We need an educational system that is modern, liberal and can adapt to the changing needs of a changing society, a changing economy and a changing world. The thrust of public policy for higher education in India has to be to address these challenges.

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