



An Overview of Higher Education in India: Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Education is the backbone of a progressive nation. Indian higher education system is the third largest in the world, next to United States and China. Since independence, India's higher education sector has witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of Universities/University level institutions and Colleges. Their role in the present time is to provide quality based education and research to empower youth for self-sustainability. However this sector is facing many challenges like financing and management including access, equity and relevance, reorientation of programmes by laying emphasis on values, ethics and quality of higher education and research. It needs greater transparency and accountability, the role of colleges and universities in the new millennium. India needs well skilled and highly educated people who can drive our economy forward. This paper aims to give an overview of higher education in India, the key issues and challenges it is facing and also suggestions for improving the higher education system.

Keywords-- Education, Higher Education System, Colleges, Universities, Research

society with full of dignity (Bordoloi, 2011). Educational institutions have become the source of agencies to weed out the orthodox society of illiteracy in all developing and developed countries all over the world. The spirit of a country is essentially attributed in its culture and the main function of education is to transmit the culture of a country to its future generation.

The developing countries like India, Srilanka, Nepal and Bangladesh have taken a step forward with the rapidly developed and advanced countries with the noble motto to in establishing the institutions of knowledge, spark of divine and temple of vision. It is universally accepted that civilization and education are two sides of a coin and they travel together. Thus education is the back bone of a progressive nation. (Dhanurkar, 2015)

For twenty years after Independence no change was made by the Nationalist government in the colonial education policy of the British rulers. In 1964 the government realised that a change was needed in the educational system. Thus, an Education Commission under the chairmanship of Professor D.S. Kothari was constituted, which submitted its report to the government in 1966. The government on the basis of the recommendations made by the Education Commission announced its National Education Policy in 1968.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is not simply imparting knowledge in a particular faculty or subject or making one fit for securing jobs or fair well in exams, but at the same time is also a training in logical thinking which helps the coming generations adjust to the ever changing environment. It also means opening the doors of the mind, cleansing the soul and realization of the self (Pabla, 2011). Education should aim at making human life better not only through economic upliftment of individual but also through social, moral and spiritual strengthening. This will not only improve human life but also realize the "higher truth" i.e. "*Tamaso Ma Jyotirgamaya*" from darkness to light. Thus education is not only a way of earning but it also helps to develop human personality with skills, values, morals and enhancement of different attributes of man. So education is a vital means for the potentialities of a human being to emerge in a positive direction so that a man can live in

II. NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION

In August 1985, the government provided a policy perspective and hoped to formulate its new education policy in the light of the debate generated by it. The National Policy on Education (NPE) was announced in 1986. It accorded a high priority to the qualitative improvement of education, especially technical and higher education, vocationalisation of secondary education, development of regional languages, strengthening of monitoring and evaluation machinery for effective implementation of plan programmes, etc. The New Education Policy also stressed the importance of dynamic and beneficial

linkages between education, health, social welfare and employment programmes. NPE was revised in 1992.

The National System of Education as envisaged in the NPE is based on a national curricular framework, which envisages a common core along with other flexible and region specific components. While the policy stresses widening of opportunities for the people, it calls for consolidation of the existing system of higher and technical education. It also emphasizes the need for a much higher level of investment in education of at least 6 per cent of the national income. The highest advisory body to advise the Central and State governments in the field of education is the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) reconstituted in 2004.

At present, the higher education system in India is functional within the framework laid down by the National Knowledge Commission, Yashpal Committee and the 11th Plan document. Emphasis is on four crucial parameters: expansion, equity, excellence and relevance.

III. HIGHER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

The Indian higher education system is one of the largest in the world in terms of the number of colleges and universities. While at the time of Independence, there were only 20 universities and 500 colleges with 0.1 million students, their number has increased to 713 universities and university level institutions and 36,739 colleges upto 2013-14. A large-scale expansion in university education was initiated during the Eleventh Five Year Plan by setting up new educational institutions comprising 16 Central Universities, 7 new Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), 7 new Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), 10 new National Institutes of Technology (NITs), 5 Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs) and 2 Schools of Planning and Architecture (SPAs). Other important initiatives include up gradation of State engineering institutions, expansion of research fellowships and provision of hostels for girls, reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs, focus on backward, hilly and remote locations including the North-East, facilitating greater participation of students belonging to minorities, girls and persons with disabilities, scholarships, provision of educational loans with interest free subsidies, setting up of polytechnics in unserved areas, and degree colleges in low GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) districts. It is undoubtedly true that because of all these initiatives, the enrolment of students in institutions of higher education has increased considerably over the years. (Puri & Mishra, 2015)

Gross Enrolment

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education in India is very low. Out of every 100 children attending elementary school only 21 reach the graduation level. Only about 21 per cent of the students who completed secondary education enrolled for higher education which did not compare well with the figure of

about 70 per cent in some developed countries. India's GER of 21 per cent is low compared to the world average of 23 per cent. It is behind to 36.5 per cent for countries in transition, in Europe 50 per cent and 55 per cent for developed countries. It is 60 per cent in the U.S. and Canada.

The main objective of the 11th Plan (2007-12) was expansion of enrolment in higher education with inclusiveness, quality and relevant education. The 11th Plan had set a target of increasing the enrolment from 12 per cent to 15 per cent by 2012. The Ministry of Human Resource Development wanted to increase it to at least 21 per cent during the 12th Plan (2012-17) and 30 per cent by 2020.

The GER in higher education has nearly doubled from around 11.6 per cent in 2005-06 to 21.1 per cent in 2012-13, with 29.6 million students enrolled in 2012-13 as compared to 14.3 million in 2005-06. However, the lower penetration into higher levels of education leads to higher dropouts, especially among the secondary and upper primary students, consequently to accumulation of less educated and less skilled job seekers at the bottom of the pyramid. The percentage educated also falls progressively with higher levels of education (Economic Survey, 2014-15).

The National Education Policy advocated access to higher education to all. According to a report of the National Knowledge Commission, 550 million of the Indian population would be of 25 years age by 2025. It was a huge reservoir of human resource to be capitalized upon by providing them opportunities not only for pursuing higher education but to do research which has been a major concern in the universities.

Research

Research leads to quality teaching and quality teaching further enriches research. An institution is judged by the extent and level of its research. New knowledge is created through an arduous process of research. India lags behind in the research activity compared to other developing countries and advanced countries. About 16 per cent of the faculties are engaged in research in India whereas it is almost cent per cent in most foreign countries. Only 150 in every million people were engaged in research in India while it was at least nine times more in China, and in Japan and the US it was 30 times and 40 times respectively. Indian Universities account for only five per cent of country's research activity while it was 35 per cent in the case of Canadian Universities. India's share in world's patents and publication of research papers was only two per cent and the indigenous issues or topics for research are just one fourth of the research being done in India.

According to the information given by a former Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology, in the year 2000, 50 per cent of the technology in India was foreign technology used without alteration, 45 per cent was foreign technology modified and adapted to our needs and the remaining 5 per cent was indigenous technology. India could not expect to become a world power by depending so heavily on foreign technology.

The capacity to innovate and generate new technologies had to be improved to add to the progress that had since been achieved.

The Government of India was promoting research and high quality higher education by establishing more IITs and other Central Institutions but the critical factor here was shortage of faculty. According to the UGC, in Central Universities, the percentage of vacancies in the lecturer category is 29, readers 34 and professors 42. The teacher shortage in the State Universities is 30 per cent. To encourage quality in teaching and attract good brains to the profession, the teachers were being offered better salary than the Civil Services Officers and other benefits. Net qualification was made compulsory for teachers' recruitment.

IV. EDUCATION IN INDIA AND DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

In India, expenditure on education is not considered as an investment in human resources, yet in Government Plans, which are meant for promoting economic growth, education finds a place. However, the proportion of public expenditure on education to GDP in India had stagnated for three decades since early 1950s. However, even now public expenditure on education in India is most inadequate. Among one hundred and six countries for which the relevant data are available, India ranks as low as eighty sixth in terms of the proportion of the public expenditure on education to GDP (World Bank, 2010). Recognising the importance of education, public expenditure on education was increased considerably during the Eleventh Plan - from 3.3 per cent of GDP in 2004-05 to over 4 per cent of GDP in 2011-12 (however, even now, this is less than the goal of 6 per cent of GDP). About 43 per cent of the public expenditure on education was incurred for elementary education, 25 per cent for secondary education and the balance 32 per cent for higher education.

Budget Allocation

At present, government expenditure on education as a whole is only 4 per cent of Gross National Product (GNP). The sectoral allocation for higher education is a meager 0.37 per cent of the GNP. Going by the recommendations of the Kothari Commission and a committee appointed by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), public expenditure on education should be increased to at least 6 per cent of GNP, of which 25 per cent should be set apart for higher education.

The Eleventh Five Year Plan, which was described by the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh as an 'Educational Plan', for instance, devotes considerable attention to the improvement of the quality of higher education. A nine-fold increase in the financial allocation for higher education was considered as expression of this intent. The Rs.3,00,000 crore allocation for education in the XI Plan was a five-fold increase over the X Plan allocation. And the share of

education in the total Plan had gone up from 7.7 per cent to 20 per cent representing a credible progress towards the target of six per cent of the GNP. Substantial raise was made for higher education in the XI Plan period for spending nearly Rs.85,000 crore from the Rs.9,000 crore allotted during the previous plan period. The present allocation for research is less than one per cent, compared to the developed nations that cater over three per cent of the GNP for research.

The indicative Twelfth Five Year Plan Gross Budgetary Support for Ministry of Human Resource Development is 4,53,728 crore of which 3,43,028 crore is for Department of School and Secondary Education and 1,10,700 crore is for Department of Higher Education (Planning Commission, 2012).

Under the various Plans, education facilities have been expanded at all levels in India and as a result, not only the literacy rate has risen but the percentage of children availing school education has also increased over the years. At present, this country has abundant facilities for higher and technical education.

V. QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The quality of higher education is a major problem, where the pass-outs were nowhere near international standards. Excluding a few 'centres of excellence', the quality of education imparted in other institutions -private, government or self-financing - is so poor, in terms of infrastructure and intellectual resources, that they do not deserve to be recognized as institutions of higher learning.

Improvement in the quality of higher education would largely depend on the nature of the undergraduate system which is currently the weakest part of the structure. Yet, in the present dispensation, it receives the least attention. All discussion, initiatives and investment now concentrate on professional education, so much so that higher education is identified with professional courses. Education in humanities, social sciences and pure sciences which caters to more than 80 per cent of students is at present, a poor cousin. As a result, undergraduate education is in an appalling state, without adequate number of qualified teachers, necessary infrastructure or sufficient intellectual resources. In some states, there are colleges that exist only in government records.

The improvement in the quality of education requires an all-embracing modernisation of the system-physical infrastructure, intellectual resources, quality of teachers and pedagogical practices. It is a gigantic effort for which large-scale investment is needed. The Eleventh Five Year Plan has made a substantial allocation for higher education and it has continued in the XIIth plan also.

VI. ROLE OF THE TEACHER

India is a country, where teachers get utmost respect. Teachers are given an important place in our society, next only to parents and the God. The well known adage "Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnu, Gurudevo Maheswaraha" clearly establishes the respect accorded to teachers in our culture. The role of teachers had changed and continued to change from being an instructor to becoming a constructor, facilitator, coach, and creator of learning environments. Teachers need new pedagogical skills to take full advantage of the potential of technology to enhance student learning.

Teachers must update their knowledge to keep themselves with rapid progress in knowledge. Teachers should update themselves as far as educational technology is concerned. Teachers will play a key role in training human resources. Teacher is a learner always as he or she had to keep on learning while teaching the students. Quality of a teacher decides quality of education which in turn depends on research. Teachers have to do a lot to improve quality of education. In the past, teachers were committed to their profession. But now, at least 50 per cent of them are striving for existence. People who see teaching as just a job for money can never make a mark in the profession. (Ramanjaneyulu, S. 2011)

VII. CHALLENGES IN INDIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The education system in India suffers from a number of problems and faces a number of challenges. The country's mean years of schooling at 5.12 years is well below the other emerging market economies such as China (8.17 years) and Brazil (7.54 years) and significantly below the average for all developing countries (7.09 years).

The higher education system at present suffers from several weaknesses, such as proliferation of substandard institutions, deterioration of academic standards, outdated curriculum, failure to maintain academic calendar and lack of adequate support for research. Moreover, there are wide disparities between rural and urban areas. Apart from these problems, higher education is highly subsidised which has put unnecessary financial burden on the government.

At present in the area of technical education, various imbalances and distortions exist. Over the years quantitative expansion of technical education has lowered the standards and now there is a structural imbalance in skill requirement of the business sector and the traditional curriculum followed by the engineering and management institutions. The infrastructural facilities available in most of these institutions are inadequate and yet there has been enormous increase in public expenditure on technical education.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

If education has to raise the quality of human resources, the following changes will have to be made in the existing educational system:

First of all, restrictions should be introduced on higher education. The essential conditions for University education should be laid down and only those who satisfy them should be admitted to postgraduate courses. Most of the research work done in Indian Universities is unproductive and the expenditure involved is a colossal waste. For making research both meaningful and productive, emphasis should be on quality and not on quantity. **Secondly**, education should be made job-oriented. In other words, emphasis should be on vocational education rather than on general education. **Thirdly**, education in science is costly and its expansion should be carefully planned. There is no point in producing science graduates if they can get only clerical jobs. For these jobs, commerce and arts graduates will not be less competent while the expenditure on their education will be much smaller. **Fourthly**, in rural areas emphasis should be on agriculture and vocational education. General education has been found less useful in these areas. In certain cases it has proved to be disastrous. For instance, rural people after getting some education lose interest in agriculture and migrate to cities in search of employment where very few jobs exist for them. **Fifthly**, technical education should be properly planned. Since it involves heavy cost, the government must ensure jobs to all the technical hands. Further, if a person getting technical education at the State's expense wants to go abroad, the government must claim the money which it has spent on his education from him. **Sixthly**, instead of opening new colleges and higher secondary schools, the government must try to raise the standards of education at higher secondary and university levels. **Finally**, the government must investigate the reasons for the large number of dropouts and should make attempts to solve this problem.

In India, it is necessary to increase ethical values, philosophical thinking, study, research and moral development in education system. For building an ideal structure for education, an amalgamation of eastern culture and western methods, liberal thinking and advancement in science and technology of the West would be the best for future generations.

IX. CONCLUSION

Education should aim at making human life better not only through economic upliftment of individual but also through social, moral and spiritual strengthening. Higher Education in India has expanded rapidly in the last six decades after independence yet it is not equally accessible to all. No doubt India is facing various challenges in higher education but to tackle these challenges and to boost higher education is utmost important. India is a country of huge human resource potential and to utilize this potential properly is the most critical issue. Based on continuous monitoring and evaluation of the educational system, necessary

modifications and improvements need to be made in the education system like need to relook at financial resources, access and equity, quality standards, relevance, infrastructure and responsiveness. These issues are important for the country, as it is now engaged in the use of higher education as a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based information society of the 21st century.

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