

Challenges before Higher Education: With A view towards Commerce and Management

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Higher Education in India

India has been a major seat of learning for thousands of years. The present format of Higher education in India was started in 1857 with the inception of universities in the three presidency towns. 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, today, is considered as a talent pool of the world, having qualified and educated human resources in abundance. This has been one of the primary reasons for transformation of India into one of the fastest growing economies in the world since liberalization in the 1990s. As the economist Clark Kerr observed, "On a global scale, wealth and prosperity have become more dependent on the access to knowledge than the access to natural resources." But, the major challenge before the Indian higher education system is to bring equity in quality of education across the length and breadth of the country.

There exist socio-economic, cultural, time and geographical barriers for people who wish to pursue higher education (Bhattacharya and Sharma, 2007). This is more close to the heart of students in rural, semi urban and urban areas, because they also wish

to be able to participate in the new economic revolution. Education is the driving force of economic and social development in any country (Cholin, 2005; Mehta and Kalra, 2006). Lower status of women, lack of easy access, lack of implementation of existing programmes, inadequate utilization of resources, absence of political will and inadequacies in coordinated actions across all equity fronts within institutions seem to be the other reason. Several social, economic and political reasons seem to act as constraints to access and equity in higher education in India. Poverty leads to high drop-out rates even at primary, middle and secondary school levels. Financial constraints also often form a significant factor in advancing equity.

India has a billion-plus population and a high proportion of the young and hence it has a large formal education system. The demand for education in developing countries like India has skyrocketed as education is still regarded as an important bridge of social, economic and political mobility (Amutabi and Oketch, 2003). India, like any other knowledge economy, depends on the development of its educational sector. Higher education drives the competitiveness and employment generation in India. However, research findings have shown that the overall state of higher education is dismal in the country. The issue of accessibility to quality higher education needs to be addressed in the light of the vast economic and social disparities, cultural and linguistic diversities, and extremely uneven opportunities of learning at the school level together with the aspirations and capacities of the potential

students. Therefore, the question of access to higher education needs to be addressed at the local, regional, national and international levels from trans-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary and discipline-specific perspectives. The issue of accessibility of quality higher education arises in the context of the transition in the country from elitist to mass education in the post-independence period. The issue has significant implications in the sense that it demands a redefinition of the aims of higher education.

Challenges before Higher Education in India

The new challenge before India in 21st century is to become a developed society by the year 2020. According to the world declaration on Higher Education for the 21st century (1998) higher education is facing a number of important challenges at the International, National and Institutional levels. Because of interdependence and integration of world economy in recent years, the Indian higher education system has a new role and a challenge to provide to the nation and the world at large, skilled human power at all levels, having breadth of knowledge and confidence to effectively confront the social and economic realities. It is worth noting that while India has the second largest system of higher education, next only to USA, the total number of students hardly represent 6 percent of the relevant age group, i.e., 18 - 23, which is much below the average of developed countries, which is about 47%. Thus, access, equity, accountability and quality should form the four guiding principles, while planning for higher education development in India. It is true that enhancing social access to higher education is still important in the country. Following are features of the current higher education sector in India:

- India has a total of 610 universities. 43 central universities, 299 state universities, 140 private Universities, 128 deemed

universities and 5 institutions established through state legislation, 30 Institutions of National Importance.

- There are 45 technical institutes, 13 management institutes, 4 information technology institutes, 6 science and research institutes and 3 planning and architecture institutes
- Currently, the Government spends around 3.8% of its GDP on education.
- Less than 1% of the \$38 bn of the Government spend on education was towards Capex (2008-09)
- According to the 2011 census, the total literacy rate in India is 74.04% compared to the world average of 83.4% (2008)
- The female literacy rate is 65.46 % and male literacy rate is 82.14 %
- FDI inflows in the education sector during May 2012 stood at \$31.22 mn

The challenges before the education system in India can be said to be of the following nature:

Access to education- There exist infrastructure, socio- economic, linguistic and physical barriers in India for people who wish to access education (Bhattacharya and Sharma, 2007).

Quality of education- This includes infrastructure, teacher and the processes quality. There is a severe constraint on the availability of skilled labor (Agarwal, 2006).

Resources allocated- Central and State Governments reserve about 3.5% of GDP for education as compared to the 6% that has been aimed (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2007).

There exist drawbacks in general education in India as well as all over the world like lack of learning materials, teachers, remoteness of education facilities, high dropout rate etc (UNESCO, 2002).

Table 1: Participation of Indian students in Education.

Stage of Education	Gross Enrolment Ratios
Elementary	85%
Secondary	39%
Tertiary stages of Education	9%

(Source: Department of Higher Education, 2007)

Thus, the participation rates of the Indian population in education, and especially in higher education are quite low.

Growth of Higher Education in India

Before Independence, access to higher education was very limited and elitist, with enrolment of less than a million students in 500 colleges and 20 universities. Since independence, the growth has been very impressive. The number of universities (as

on 31st March 2006) has increased by 18 times, (from 27 in 1950-51 to 367 in 2005-06). The number of total colleges has increased by 35 times (i.e. from 578 in 1950-51 to 18064 in 2005-06). The colleges for general education has increased from 370 in 1950-51 to 14400 in 2005-06, while the colleges for professional education has increased from 208 in 1950-51 to 3664 in 2005-06. In its size and diversity, India has the third largest higher education system in the world, next only to China and the United States. As it is evident from tables below.

Table 2: Growth of Colleges and Universities

Years	Colleges for General Education		% change	Colleges for Professiona l Education		Times	% change	D eemed	Universities/ Univ./Institut es of National Importance	
	Times	Times		Times	Times				Times	% change
1950-51	370		Nil	208		Nil		27		Nil
1990-91	4862	13.141	1214.054	886	4.260	325.962	184	6.815	581.481	
1991-92	5058	1.040	4.031	950	1.072	7.223	196	1.065	6.522	
1992-93	5334	1.055	5.457	989	1.041	4.105	207	1.056	5.612	
1993-94	5639	1.057	5.718	1125	1.138	13.751	213	1.029	2.899	
1994-95	6089	1.080	7.980	1230	1.093	9.333	219	1.028	2.817	
1995-96	6569	1.079	7.883	1354	1.101	10.081	226	1.032	3.196	
1996-97	6759	1.029	2.892	1770	1.307	30.724	228	1.009	0.885	
1997-98	7199	1.065	6.510	2075	1.172	17.232	229	1.004	0.439	
1998-99	7494	1.541	54.134	2113	2.385	138.488	237	1.288	28.804	
1999-00*	7782	1.038	3.843	2124	1.005	0.521	244	1.030	2.954	
2000-01*	7929	1.019	1.889	2223	1.047	4.661	254	1.041	4.098	

2001-02*	8737	1.102	10.190	2409	1.084	8.367	272	1.071	7.087
2002-03*	9166	1.049	4.910	2610	1.083	8.344	304	1.118	11.765
2003-04*	9427	1.028	2.847	2751	1.054	5.402	304	1.000	0.000
2004-05*	10377	1.101	10.077	3201	1.164	16.358	364	1.197	19.737
2005-06	14400	1.850	85.042	3664	1.725	72.505	367	1.504	50.410

** Includes institutions for Post-Matric courses.

(Source: Educational Statistics 2004-2005.MHRD
2007)

Table 3 : Percentage change in number of Colleges and Universities

Time Period	Percentage Change in the Colleges for General Education	Percentage Change in the Colleges for Professional Education	Percentage Change in the Universities/Deemed Univ./Institutes of National Importance
1950-51 to 1990-91	1214.054	325.962	581.481
1991-92 to 1998-99	54.134	138.488	28.804
1999-00* to 2005-06	85.042	72.505	50.41

(Source: Educational Statistics 2004-2005, MHRD 2007)

The government initiative for the planned development of higher education in the country and establishment of University Grants Commission has transformed the elitist system of education favoring the rich and higher class to a more democratic and mass based system. Around 40per cent of enrolments now comes from lower socio-economic strata, and women comprising of approximately 35per cent of the total enrolments (Tilak 2004).

India's aspirations to establish a knowledge society in the context of increasing globalization, is based on the assumption that higher and technical education essentially empowers people with the

requisite competitive skills and knowledge. It has been realized that it is the quality of education that prepares one for all pursuits of life and in the absence of an acceptable level of quality, higher education becomes a mere formalism devoid of any purpose or substance. As a result, from around the turn of the century, increasing attention has also been paid to quality and excellence in higher education. Post-independence India has witnessed an above average growth in the number of higher educational institutions vis-à-vis its population. While there were just about 20 Universities and 500 Colleges at the time of independence, today these numbers have grown exponentially.

Funding of Higher Education

Higher Education in India has been receiving continuous financial support from both the Central and the State Governments. At the start of the planning process in 1950, the total allocation for higher education was only Rs.170 million which has now gone beyond Rs.90,000 million. This impressive increase is offset to some extent by the rise in prices (inflation) and rise in number of students entering higher education. An analysis of government expenditure on higher education shows a real annual growth rate of 7.5per cent in the 1950s, 11per cent in the 1960s, 3.4per cent, in the 1970s, and 7.3per cent in the 1980s (CABE Report 2005). From the Annual Financial Statistics of Education Sector 2003-4, it is clear that the total expenditure by the government on education has increased by 243per cent during the period 1993-94 to 2004-05. It is interesting to note that the plan allocation for higher education which went up to 28per cent in the fifth plan period(1974-79) has been slowly decreasing on a year on year basis and came down to 6per cent of total plan expenditure during the tenth plan period(2002-2007). Further the priority was given to technical education by allocating 10.72per cent against 9.53per cent of higher education during the tenth plan.

Issues and Concerns

Although Higher Education has expanded several times since independence, issues of access, equity, and quality still continue to be the areas of concern.

Access and Equity: On one hand Gross Enrollment Rate stands low for the overall population, while on the other hand there exists large variations among the various categories of population based on gender, urban or rural habitation and rich and poor. Due to regional disparity in economic development and uneven distribution of institutions of higher education, the higher education is not equally available to the different sections of the society.

Caste-based Reservation: To overcome the deep rooted problem of social inequity, successive governments have introduced caste based reservations in higher education. At present the caste-based reservation is applicable in only government funded institutions, which includes institutions of excellence and amount to approximately 49per cent of the total seats. Due to the cast based reservation, better talent coming from non-reserved category is deprived of the admission in good institution, which creates social unrest and used as a tool to make vote bank by the political parties.

Quality: The higher educational institutions suffer from large quality variation in so much so that a NASSCOM-MacKinsey Report-2005 has said that not more than 15per cent of graduates of general education and 25-30per cent of Technical Education are fit for employment. The various regulatory bodies regulating higher education have constituted an autonomous bodies for monitoring quality standards in the institutions under their purview. For example, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) by UGC, National Board of Accreditation (NBA) by AICTE, Accreditation Board (AB) by ICAR, Distance Education Council (DEC) by NCTE etc. Though, there exist autonomous bodies for assessment and monitoring quality standards in the institutions of higher education they suffer from two major deficiencies. First, the quality norms of such councils are not comparable with international standards. Secondly, the enforcement process is not stringent. Further political interference and corruption dilute the role and impact of these intuitions in ensuring the desired quality standards.

Cost of Education: Government funding on higher education has been diminishing on a year on year basis for more than one decade. In the view of withdrawal of government support to finance higher education private institutions has been allowed to take over the responsibility of imparting education to all. Further, in government aided universities the model of self-financing and self-sustaining institutions has been introduced. All these

developments have added to the cost of education significantly. Though, the education loan has been made easy to facilitate higher education still the terms and conditions imposed by banks in terms of guarantee and criteria of minimum income of family restricts the talent coming from the poor families to go for higher education.

Shortage of Teachers: Economic growth led by industrial and service sector during the last decade has created more opportunities and faster career growth for the young talent. Further, the lucrative salaries and glamour has acted as catalyst in attracting talent to such fast growing sectors. Higher education in India which has been passing through transition on account of privatization and withdrawal of financial support from the government has been finding it difficult to attract adequate number of young talent to teaching job. It is a big challenge for higher education sector to sustain in future due to lack of availability of faculty.

Declining Enrolment in Traditional Fields of Knowledge: The changing economic structure coupled with cultural transformation in terms of life style has led to shift in choice for studies. The major chunk from youth opts for professional courses leading to early employment and faster growth. Therefore, the teaching and research in such faculties is able to attract the best of the talent leaving only a few for fundamental research in basic sciences, literature, art and languages. It, thus, poses the challenge to the sustenance and the development of these basic pillars of knowledge.

Red Tapism: It is an irony in India that the bureaucracy restricts the modernization and expansion of higher education by private players intended to impart quality education. At the same time a large number of institutions without having adequate infrastructure and offering sub-standard education are not only surviving but flourishing. Therefore, to develop a professional, transparent and efficient mechanism to ensure expansion of quality education at a fast pace is greatly desirable.

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. As a result, a number of job oriented programs lasting for approximately 6 months to one year have been introduced in the colleges/ universities.

Autonomous Colleges: To keep up with the changes in higher education due to globalization, institutions which has infrastructure and other facilities are given more functional autonomy. By the yeas 2005 there have been 138 colleges functioning as autonomous colleges in eight states in the country. It is a good initiative from government but needs to be promoted across the country.

Privatization: In India both public and private institutions operate simultaneously. In the year 2000-01, 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 (Agarwal, 2006).. 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. Since grant-in-aid to private colleges is becoming difficult, many government funded institutions/ universities have granted recognition/ affiliation to unaided colleges and many universities have authorized new „self-financing“ courses even in government and aided colleges. Approximately 50 per cent of the higher education in India is imparted through private institutions, mostly unaided involving high cost.

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 the 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. In an environment of global competitiveness it is important that Indian products of the higher education institutions are as competent as graduates of any other country, not only in their scholastic attainments, but also in terms of the value system and richness of their personality. Unless the quality and standard of Indian higher education institutions is enhanced zealously and sustained at a high level through innovation, creativity and regular monitoring, it seems to be difficult for the Indian academics/professionals to compete in the World scene.

This calls for suitable assessment and accreditation mechanisms to be available in the country to ensure the quality and standard of the academic/training programmes at higher educational institutions. The assessment has to be continuous and the process has to be transparent to gain the acceptance of the society at large. Many institutions of higher education in the country are excellent in the sense that their infrastructure, resources, faculty, programmes of teaching and research are almost as good as the best in the advanced countries. But, the same cannot be said of the average institutions of higher education in the country. They do not come anywhere near the level of average institutions of higher education in the advanced countries. This vast gap in standards and facilities has been a cause of constant anxiety and concern to the policy planners of higher education in India. Here comes education for sustainable development which emerges as a paradigm for revising and reorienting today's education.

Conclusion

In India, higher education was traditionally looked after by the government, but in view of lack of resources to meet the increasing demand, private sector has been allowed to share the responsibility. The country has a well-developed educational set up

in terms of range of programs and their acceptability in local industry, but it lacks in terms of international quality standards. Higher education institutions managed by private sector emphasize more on commercial aspect than creation of knowledge which leads to deterioration of quality of education. The councils and government bodies responsible for quality assurance do not have internationally matchable quality norms on one hand and an effective system to monitor and control violation of the existing norms by the institutions on the other. Further, the political parties manipulate the issues of access and equity in higher education for their vested political interest rather than taking the right steps to enhance the quality of higher education. As a result those who can afford the high cost of higher education look forward for the opportunities abroad while the others have to compromise with sub-standard education. If India has to emerge as preferred location for higher education in the globalizing world it will have to develop a national policy to address the challenges of sub-standard quality, ineffective systems of monitoring and control, red-tapism in growth and development and political interference.

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