

## CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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*The paper presents an overview of the historical background of higher education (HE) in India, changing policies for improving the higher education system and the challenges. The paper provides reasons for deficiencies in higher education in India and discusses few policies and commissions which were set up for improvement at the higher level of education. Further, it elaborates the recent developments in higher education and provides some suggestions for revamping the higher education system in India.*

**KEYWORDS:** Higher Education, Government Initiatives, Educational Policies, Challenges

### INTRODUCTION

Today, we have almost 711 universities and more than 40760 affiliated colleges, enrolling more than 26 million students (Annual Report, UGC, 2014-15). We have central and state universities as well as deemed universities and institutions of national importance. We have private universities also in this country. Higher Education is important at a micro as well as macro level. At the micro level, it equips an individual with such knowledge and degree which can help him/her to earn money and social status. At the macro level, the system of higher education provides a steady and continuous supply of that human power which is demanded by various sectors of national economy.

The present curriculum is such that it does not offer anything new. Thus, it does not satisfy market needs and students (outputs) get degrees but they do not find themselves relevant as an input by various sections of the economy. Teachers keep on teaching those age-old things which students can easily memorise and reproduce them in examinations. Even if, some changes are made with regard to curriculum by the time they are introduced they will be out-dated. They do not satisfy demands of the present world.

### **PRESENT STATUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND CHALLENGES:**

Over the last decade, higher education sector in India has been on a steep growth trajectory. India now has the largest higher education system in the world in terms of the number of institutions and the third largest in terms of the number of students after China and USA. Despite of impressive growth, our higher education system is facing a lot of challenges over the decades, more so in recent years. Analysis of the present status of higher education sector in India reveals that the three greatest challenges are access, equity, and quality.

#### **1. Access**

While India has made significant progress in ensuring access to primary education, the proportion of students who remain in the education system until higher education is considerably less. Despite impressive growth during the last decade, India's higher education Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 20% (2012-13) is currently well below the global average of 27%. The 'Gross Enrolment Ratio' (GER) is the total number of students enrolled in higher education, regardless of their age, divided by the total population in the age group 18-23 years. In effect, it is a measure of the extent to which the population is availing itself of opportunities in higher education. It can be considered a measure of access to higher education. A target of 30 % Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) by 2017 from 15 % in 2012 was set in for the XII Plan.

In addition to low GER, there is a problem of demand-supply gap. The government plans to increase GER in higher education to 30% by 2020, which will mean providing 40 million university places, an increase of 14 million in the next six years, as India currently has 26 million students enrolled in tertiary education. It would need another 800 universities and over 40,000 colleges in the next six years to provide the planned additional 14 million places. Thus, India needs to drastically increase the number of places at universities and enrolment through distance learning programmes.

#### **2. Equity**

Ensuring equitable access to higher education is also a challenge with disparities seen across gender, regions and socio-economic groups. Despite efforts to spread the location of higher education institutions more evenly

across the country, there is a wide variation, particularly between urban and rural areas and also between states. There are still significant multi-dimensional inequalities in enrolment rates between rural and urban populations, rich and poor, minority and mainstream communities and between men and women. 'Inclusive growth' should be the priority for reform in Indian education.

According to AISHE 2014-15, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education in India was 24.3%, which is calculated for the age group of 18-23 years. GER for male population is 25.3% and for females, it is 23.2%. For Scheduled Castes, it is 19.1% and for Scheduled Tribes, it is 13.7% as compared to the national GER of 24.3%. There are regional variations too – Chandigarh (56.1), Delhi (43.5), Jharkhand (15.4), Daman and Diu (5.7). These figures reflect some of the significant imbalances within the higher education system.

### 3. Quality

Quantity and quality of highly specialized human resources determine their competence in the global market. Ensuring quality in higher education is amongst the foremost challenges being faced in India today, with very few institutes having achieved global recognition for excellence. There are various dimensions on the basis of which the quality in education can be judged such as content, mode of delivery, infrastructure and facilities, employability, etc.

- Infrastructure

Higher education institutions that are run by the public sector suffer from poor physical facilities and infrastructure. The higher education system also suffers from misalignment of supply in the sense that while there are courses in which the demand is in excess of the available number of seats, there is excess capacity in others.

- Faculty

The shortage of Faculty and the inability of the educational system to attract and retain well-qualified teachers have been posing challenges to quality education for many years. There is high student - teacher ratio, due to the shortage of teaching staff and pressure to enrol more students.

- Curriculum and Pedagogy

Lack of autonomy in framing course curriculum would result in an out-dated and rigid curriculum. The curriculum is often not oriented to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation among students. Pedagogies and assessment are focused on input and rote learning; students have little opportunity to develop a wider range of transversal skills including critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving and collaborative working.

The adoption of new modes of delivery such as technology-enabled learning has not yet become widespread.

- **Employability**

The Indian education system, on the whole, is not aligned to the skill and manpower needs of the market. Skills shortage across sectors is accompanied by high levels of graduate unemployment highlighting the need to include employment-linked modules in courses. In addition to job-related skills, graduates are often reported to be lacking adequate soft-skills such as communication and inter-personal skills. Placement services in many universities are very limited resulting in a lack of co-ordination between employment seeking graduates and prospective employers who are looking for suitably qualified candidate.

- **Research and Innovation**

There is inadequate focus on research in higher education institutes. The causes include insufficient resources and facilities as well as limited numbers of quality faculty to advise students. There is systemic segregation of teaching and research; most teaching-focused universities (the vast majority) do not provide students with research experience or the skills which would prepare them for research careers. The number of students taking Ph.D. and research related job is very low. During 2012-13, out of the total student enrolment in Higher Education less than 1% were enrolment in Research/Doctoral programs. Unfortunately, for a nation aspiring to become a knowledge economy, a trivial 1% enrolment in research would not be praiseworthy. During 2011-12, only 13691 M.Phil. and 17631 Doctoral (Ph.D.) degrees awarded. The number of research degrees (Ph.D.s) awarded by various universities increased from 20,275 in 2012-2013 to 22849 in 2013-2014.

## **RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH INNOVATIONS**

It is widely believed that technological advances and a shift in demographics provide India with a window of opportunity to productively engage its huge pool of human resources, and become a leader in both the rapidly expanding sectors of services and highly skilled manufacturing. This would, however, require revamping the higher education sector. Hence many steps have been taken to augment supply, improve quality and fix many of the problems faced by higher education. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) that was set up to examine the higher education sector (amongst other things) made several useful and important recommendations. The Government of India has increased funding significantly during the Twelfth Five Year Plan. Many new

institutions have been planned and some of them are already operational. There are many good ideas in the plan document. All these efforts, however, appear to be somewhat disconnected. Some even appear to be at cross-purposes with each other. Several suggestions appear to be merely impressionistic views of individuals, rather than being supported by data and research.

Recently Higher Education in India is one of the most developed in the entire world. There has in fact been considerable improvement in the higher education scenario of India in both quantitative and qualitative terms. In technical education, the IITs, and in management, the IIMs have already marked their names among the top higher educational institutes of the world. Moreover, the Jawaharlal University and Delhi University are also regarded as good higher educational institutes for doing postgraduates courses and research in science, humanities and social sciences. As a result, students from various parts of the world are coming today for higher education in India.

#### **MAIN INITIATIVES IN LAST DECADE BY THE GOVERNMENT**

The government has taken a number of initiatives to restructure every aspect of higher education such as funding, management, quality assurance, accountability, relationships with industry, international collaboration and the way research and teaching are conducted. If these reforms succeed, the breadth and depth of the change will be transformational. The key government initiatives to overcome challenges and to improve the higher education system are as follows:

- The central govt. has planned & implemented several centrally sponsored schemes to promote education system in India. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) launched for the promotion of primary education likewise Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) was launched for secondary education & Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) for higher education. If we want to transfer our society in knowledgeable society then we need quality in all different stages of education, especially in higher education.
- The 12th Five Year Plan (2012-17) is a rejuvenating and massive plan for higher education in India as in this plan, the main focus is on to promotion of economic growth, inclusive growth, sustainable development in social justice-social equity and also to generate research-based knowledge for developing the skilled and educated personnel. The 12th Five Year Plan for higher education addresses three overarching challenges: Access, Equity and Quality.

- The three central pillars of India's 12th Five Year Plan are:
  1. Expansion -Creating the capacity to meet the rising demand.
  2. Equity - Providing educational opportunities to all citizens, regardless of social position, economic ability and geography.
  3. Excellence- Improving quality for better learning outcomes and employability.
- To prohibit unfair practices, to enhance the quality of higher education institutions and to attract foreign educational institutions some of the education-related bills introduced (which are yet to be passed) in the Parliament by the government are:
  1. **National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010:** It postulates that every higher educational institution and every programme conducted by an independent accreditation agency in order to certify 'Academic quality.' It means the quality of teaching, learning and research and consequently their contribution to enhancement of knowledge and includes physical infrastructure, human resources (including faculty), administration, course curricula, admission and assessment procedures and governance structures of the higher education institutions.
  2. **The Educational Tribunals Bill, 2010:** It provides opportunity for the establishment of the State Educational Tribunals and the National Education Tribunal. The National Education Tribunal would exercise power and authority over any dispute between a higher educational institution and any appropriate statutory regulatory body and all other matters pertaining to higher education.
  3. **Prohibition of Unfair Practices in the Technical Educational Institutions, Medical Educational Institutions and Universities Bill, 2010:** It bars in accepting admission fee and other charges other than those declared by the institution in the prospectus.
  4. **Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operations) Bill, 2010:** It prescribes regulations for allowing foreign universities to operate in the country.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Looking at the present scenario of the higher education in India, there are some suggestions and expectations from Government, Industry, Educational Institutions, Parents and Students to meet the challenges and to improve the system of higher education to become major player in the global knowledge economy are:

### **Towards a Learning Society**

As we move towards a learning society, every human activity will require contributions from experts, and this will place the entire sector of higher education in sharp focus. Although the priorities, which are being assigned today to the task of Education for All, will continue to be preponderant, the country will have to prepare itself to invest more and more in higher education. Simultaneously, measures will have to be taken to refine, diversify and upgrade higher education and research programmes.

### **Incentives to Teachers and Researchers**

Industry and students are expecting specialized courses to be offered so that they get the latest and best in education so that they are industry ready and employable. Vocational and Diploma courses need to be made more attractive to facilitate specialized programs being offered to students. Incentives should be provided to teachers and researchers to make these professions more attractive for the younger generation.

### **Innovative Practices**

The new technologies offer vast opportunities for progress in all walks of life. It offers opportunities for economic growth, improved health, better service delivery, improved learning and socio-cultural advances. Though efforts are required to improve the country's innovative capacity, yet the efforts should be to build on the existing strengths in light of new understanding of the research innovation-growth linkage.

### **Mobilization of Resources**

The decline in public funding in the last two plan periods has resulted in serious effects on standards due to increasing costs on non-salary items and emoluments of staff, on the one hand, and declining resources, on the other. Effective measures will have to be adopted to mobilize resources for higher education. There is also a need to relate the fee structure to the student's capacity to pay for the cost. So that, students at lower economic levels can be given highly subsidized and fully subsidized education.

### **Transition towards Information Age**

The world is entering into an Information Age and developments in communication, information and technology will open up new and cost-effective approaches for providing the reach of higher education to the youth as well as to those who need continuing education for meeting the demands of the explosion of information, fast-changing nature of occupations, and lifelong education. Knowledge, which is at the heart of higher education, is a crucial resource in the development of political democracy, the struggle for social justice and progress towards individual enlightenment.

### **Student-Centred and Dynamic Methods**

Methods of higher education also have to be appropriate to the needs of learning to learn, learning to do, learning to be and learning to become. Student-centred education and employment of dynamic methods of education will require new attitudes and skills from teachers. Methods of teaching through lectures will have to subordinate to the methods that will lay stress on self-study, personal consultation between teachers and pupils and dynamic sessions of seminars and workshops. Methods of distance education will have to be employed on a vast scale.

### **To Provide Need-Based Job-Oriented Courses**

All round development of personality is the purpose of education. But the present-day education is neither imparting true knowledge of life and nor improving the talent of a student by which one can achieve laurels in the field one is interested. So, a combination of arts subjects and computer science and science and humanities or literature should be introduced so that such courses could be useful for the students to do jobs after recruitment in some companies which would reduce unnecessary rush to higher education. The programme must be focused on graduate studies and research and developing strategies and mechanisms for the rapid and efficient transfer of knowledge and for its application to specific national and local conditions and needs. Meritorious doctoral students should be recognized through teaching assistantships with stipends over and above the research fellowships. Finally, based on knowledge only vision of the future life and work can be had; based on this vision only a broad ambition can be fixed for oneself; based on this ambition only one can lead an interesting life doing a satisfying job to do remarkable achievements in some field in the world.

### **International Cooperation**

Universities in India have been a primary conduit for the advancement and transmission of knowledge through traditional functions such as research, innovation, teaching, human resource development, and continuing education. International cooperation is gaining importance as yet another function. With the increased development of transport and communication, the global village is witnessing a growing emphasis on international cooperation and action to find satisfactory solutions to problems that have global dimensions and higher education is one of them.

### **Towards a New Vision**

India realizes like other nations of the world, that humanity stands today at the head of a new age of a large synthesis of knowledge. The East and the West have to collaborate in bringing about concerted action for universal upliftment, and lasting peace and unity. In this new age, great cultural achievements of the



past have to be recovered and enriched in the context of the contemporary advancement so that humanity can successfully meet the evolutionary and revolutionary challenges and bring about a new type of humanity and society marked by integrated powers of physical, emotional, dynamic, intellectual, ethical, aesthetic and spiritual potentialities.

### **Cross Cultural Programmes**

After education, tour to all the places in India and world as far as possible with the cooperation of government is necessary so that one can understand about people, culture, arts, literature, religions, technological developments and progress of human society in the world.

### **Action Plan for Improving Quality**

The academic and administrative audit should be conducted once in three years in colleges by external experts for ensuring quality in all aspects of academic activities. The self-financed colleges should come forward for accreditation and fulfil the requirements of accreditation. Universities and colleges should realize the need for quality education and come forward with an action plan for improving quality in higher educational institutions.

### **Quality Development**

Quality depends on its all functions and activities such as teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, building, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment. It also requires that higher education should be characterized by its international dimension which includes exchange of knowledge, interactive networking, mobility of teachers and students and international research projects, while taking into account the national cultural values and circumstances. The level of education and knowledge being imparted by many colleges is not up to the mark. Instead of concentrating on quantity, these institutions should concentrate on quality.

### **World Class Education**

The Indian government is not giving priority to the development of Standard in education. India should 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 and through correspondence courses as well. In the same way, India Universities of world-class education can also offer courses of studies to foreign students taking advantage of the globalization process. To achieve that goal, it should adopt uniform international syllabus in its educational institutions.

### **Personality Development**

Finally, education should be for the flowering of personality but not for the suppression of creativity or natural skill. In the globalized world opportunities for the educated people are naturally ample in scope. As a result, business process outsourcing (BPO) activities have increased competition in the world trade leading towards the production of quality goods and their easy availability everywhere in the world market. That is the way the world can be developed for peace, prosperity and progress by able and skilful men.

### **Fair Quality Assurance System**

Colleges and Private institutes should set up Internal Quality Assurance Cell and must follow a minimum standard to give degrees. The quality assurance system must be independent of political and institutional interaction and it must have a basis in the legislation. There should be operational, financial and academic autonomy coupled with accountability. There is a need for an independent accreditation agency with a conglomerate of government, industry, academia, society etc. means all stakeholders of the education to ensure that the stakeholders particularly the students are not taken for a ride. They should be able to know whether a particular institution delivers value or not, then things can be under control to some extent. It is also important that all institutes of higher learning must make public the acceptability of their courses and degrees.

### **To Increase Quantity of Universities**

We need more universities because we are more in number and the present number of universities is too less. On 13th June, 2005 Government of India constituted a high-level advisory body known as National Knowledge Commission (NKC) to advise the PM about the state of education in India and measures needed to reform this sector. It was headed by Sam Pitroda and submitted its report in November 2007. NKC has 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.

### **CONCLUSION**

We need a developed Higher Education system in India recognized uniquely in the entire world. There is in fact need of considerable improvement in the higher education scenario of India in both quantitative and qualitative terms. In technical education, the IITs, and in management, the IIMs have already marked their name among the top higher educational institutes of the world. If we will provide qualitative education at the higher level also, it will sustain the

rate of growth of students, if more students will be enrolled then there will also be the need of more institutes and human resources.

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