



RESEARCH ARTICLE

PROBLEMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education in India had a long glorious historical past. After the advent of British the aim and objectives of higher education in India was to produce English knowing Indians for doing the subordinate government service and clerical jobs. Higher education was an elitist in character. After independence the Indian higher education system has undergone many important changes. Now it is available to the masses. Higher education in India has expended quantitatively not qualitatively. In spite of different achievements, the higher education in India is facing very severe strains and stresses. Poor quality of higher education creates unemployment among the youths. Unionization and Poor remuneration has become a major problem for the Indian education system. It fails to attract best of the brains in teaching profession. Invasion on the university autonomy and financing of higher education are very acute problems in India. Governments, both at the centre and in the states, are showing an increasing reluctance to support higher education. It became a non-merit subject. Imbalance funding has encouraged many private agency to establish colleges in the professional areas of studies. The globalization helps growing numbers of Indian students seeking admission in the abroad. While the number coming to India has been stagnant. The research work in the country in any field is far from satisfactory. Recent trend in the country shows that most of the Indian students prefer subjects related to Engineering and Business over Humanities subjects. So total reengineering is required to raise the level of higher education in India.

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INTRODUCTION

Problems of Higher Education: Higher Education in India has a long historical past. Universities like Taxkshila, Nalanda, Bikramshila were well known all over the world. The Chinese pilgrims visiting India between 400 BC and 800 AD referred in their travel accounts to the excellent work done by these higher learning institutions. These institutions of ancient India are also attested by significant developments in intellectual fields like literature, literary criticism, philosophy, logic, medicine, mathematics and astronomy. After the advent of British the aim and objectives of higher education in India have been changed. They imposed upon India a English model of education. Aims and objectives of higher education is British India was to produce English knowing Indians for doing the subordinate government service and clerical jobs. The British Government followed the "Downward Filtration Theory". The theory was to educate middle classes. But the theory was total failure. Education did not spread among the common masses. No proper arrangement was made to educate the backward classes and women did not get access to it.

After independence the earlier institution could now become a part of the general system and the effort was now made to convert the entire system of education to the national pattern. In an inaugural address at All India Educational Conference convened by the Union Education Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru told, great changes have taken place in the country and the educational system must also be in keeping with them. The entire basis of education must be revolutionized. Report of University Grant Commission presenting vital statistics pertaining to higher education from 1950-2013, there are 700 degree-awarding institutions in the country. Of these 44 percent, i.e. 306 are state universities, followed by 129 or 18 per cent deemed universities, central universities and institutes of national importance are 6 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. There are only 154 private universities accounting for 22 per cent share¹. This shows the tremendous growth of higher education. Out of these, the UGC funds 39 central universities, 153 state universities, 24 deemed universities and 5,420 colleges. In 1950, the total number of universities was 30, mostly government-run or funded, and the number of colleges was 695, giving an average of 23 colleges per university. In 2011, the number of universities grew 30 times to stand at 634 while there are 33, 023 colleges, averaging about 53 colleges to each university. In actual fact,

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the pressure of colleges on universities is much more than it appears because many are private universities or unitary universities². The student enrolment in higher education has also obviously risen manifold. It was 3,97,000 in 1950 growing steadily to 83,99,000 in 2001. After this, the next ten years saw an unprecedented surge in enrolment rising to 1,69,75,000 in 2010-2011³. Thus the Indian higher education system has undergone many important changes, the most significant being its unprecedented growth and its consequent transformation from an elite system to a mass system. The fact that higher education is available to the masses, including the underprivileged and weaker sections of society, is an achievement. It is also creditable that we have been able to create some undoubted centres of excellence.

In spite of these achievements, the higher education in India is groaning under very severe strains and stresses. Some of these problems are the outcome of the growth of numbers which make the system unmanageable and inevitably lead to a fall in standards because the resources available in terms of money, materials and teachers are far short of the needs of expansion. Higher education in India has expended quantitatively. In terms of quantity, India stands at 3rd place after US and China but in terms of quality higher education, India is certainly trailing behind. In fact, only 1% of student population gets exposed to quality education as brought out earlier due to limited number of good institutions. As a result of that many students after graduation/post-graduation find it extremely difficult to get job which, in turn, leads to frustration amongst the students. The main reason of the unemployment is poor quality graduates. This is a serious problem and causing dissatisfaction amongst the student community and they are losing faith over the system of education. Unionization of teachers and non-teaching staff is another problem faced by higher education. Teacher are regarded as fulcrum of the academic structure and traditionally they have been object of respect. Teacher are to be respected because they accumulated knowledge and wisdom for garnering the students. Teacher also expected to set up examples not only of learning but also character and moral values⁴.

Poor remuneration has become a major problem for the Indian education system. In India teaching is not a lucrative job in terms of remuneration in comparison many corporate sector jobs. In fact, teaching is a very ill paid job at every stage of education and as such it fails to attract best of the brains in teaching profession. Many meritorious scholars from India even prefer to take up small time job in US rather than a job in India as teacher. This aspect needs serious attention on the part of our policy makers. Invasion on the university autonomy is another important challenge in higher education. University autonomy has to be distinguished from academic freedom which signifies freedom of expression for professionals. Autonomy has several aspects, namely, financial, administrative and academic. It is difficult for university of India to have full financial autonomy as they depend for 90 percent or more of their income on the Government grants moreover they were also required to get approval for specific scheme from the UGC. There are hardly any interference of the government in academic autonomy of the universities. Financing of Higher Education is a very acute problem in India. The report of the Education Commission (1964-66) strongly agreed devoting 6% of the GNP to education. The Majumdar Committee (MHRD, 1999) reiterated the same. The National Policy on Education 1968 and 1986 also categorically

laid down and endorsed that the GNP allocation to education should be at least 6%. The NPE 1992 stated that the VIII Plan onward the GNP share will uniformly exceed 6%. But the target could not be achieved. India spends around 3.7% of its GNP of which 0.56% is the share of higher education which is less than that in 1970-71 and 1980-81 which was 0.77% and 0.98% respectively. Thus, there is a considerable decline in the state funding of higher education⁵.

Governments, both at the centre and in the states, are showing an increasing reluctance to support higher education. A recent discussion paper (Government of India, 1997) entitled 'Government Subsidies in India' identifies the spending on higher education as a "non-merit" subsidy. The reason for this categorisation is apparently the belief that the benefits of higher education (unlike those of primary education) do not extend beyond the immediate recipient. This categorisation of higher education funding as "non-merit" subsidy is unfortunate for it does not recognise the very positive role of higher education in socio-economic development. The indications are that in the near future government support to higher education will be progressively decreased. The message to the universities clearly is that they should generate resources in increasing amounts and control their spending. In spite of this efforts must continuously be made to convince the government that it has high stakes in higher education and that it is its duty to provide adequate finances to the universities. The imbalance between the demand for, and the supply of, higher education facilities has encouraged many private trusts and bodies to establish colleges in the professional areas of studies, mainly, medicine, engineering and technology, and management. Additionally, a large number of tutorial classes have cropped up all over the country and apparently attract a large number of students. This 'privatisation' of education is a matter of concern for many. While some of the colleges established under private initiative have a professional approach and are striving to impart high quality education, a depressingly large number lack proper facilities and are in effect business enterprises, established with the primary objective of securing financial profit and political power. Strict academic and administrative control of these colleges is essential.

However, if the government is unable to make larger allocations for higher education, private initiatives become necessary and society in general, and industry in particular, will have to play a larger role in higher education. Industry should come forward to finance and design institutions that meet its specific requirements⁶. The globalization of the Indian economy was started in 1991 with new economic reforms in the field of trade, industry, agricultural development and education. This process of globalization is a major factor behind the large and growing numbers of Indian students seeking admission abroad. Prior to 1990s only few higher income groups could afford to send their children to abroad for higher education. Globalization helped the dramatic rise of a new Indian middle class and increased wealth of the Indian upper class, the number of students able to pursue foreign education has skyrocketed. While the number of international students going to the western countries has increased almost exponentially, the number coming to India has been stagnant. During 2004 there were 1,10,000 Indian students studying abroad, nearly 75,000 in USA, 14,000 each in the UK and Australia and 5,000 in Canada and New Zealand. In contrast there were only 7,791 foreign students studying in India, mainly from the developing country like Nepal, Malaysia,

Kenya, Srilanka and Bangladesh⁷. The situation needs to be remedied. In order to welcome the international students, the infrastructure in academic institution should be strengthened, streamline of admission procedures and need for academic restructure have to be taken care. Initiatives should be taken to make courses more modular and flexible to facilitate institution to reach international standard.

Presence of greater number of international students will help broaden the horizons of Indian students by exposing them to new cultures and perspectives. From the long-term viewpoint the international students turn out to be effective ambassadors of our culture, ideals and thoughts. From the more practical viewpoint, if charged differential fees, they can provide the much needed financial resources. The universities, in turn, have the responsibility of providing the international students proper facilities and making their stay comfortable. The research work in the country in any field is far from satisfactory. Despite the fact that India produces 2.5 million graduates every year, yet, India is unable to produce quality research work particularly in the field of pure research. The amount of pure knowledge that is added by India is miniscule in comparison to USA. There is hardly any patent product against the name of India. The quality of research work is very inferior and, therefore, majority of research papers do not get any recognition at world level. On the other hand, India is reasonably good in applied research. Indian private sector companies have good R&D establishments which churn out products to compete in the domestic market but many a time these companies face stiff challenges from multinational companies in maintaining the quality control and price hike. Overall, the situation in research sector is not very encouraging. It is, in fact, quite grim and needs radical reforms to come upto desired standard.

Recent trend in the country shows that most of the Indian students prefer subjects related to Engineering and Business over Humanities subjects mainly from the employment point of view. It is seen that students with scientific background pick up job quicker and better than the students with Humanities background. Many Humanities departments remain undersubscribed because of this reason in large number of colleges. As a result, majority of good students decline to study Humanities. This has resulted into sharp decline in quality of research that comes out from the Humanities departments. Since, the students are less interested in the subject, the standard of education automatically drops to unacceptable limit. This needs to be arrested because Humanities are equally important and due weightage and respect is to be given for the prosperity of nation and proper development of society⁸.

Due to defective curriculum and defective examination system, lakhs of students fail every year. These create the problem of wastage and stagnation in higher education. So there is need for change of existing examination pattern in higher education. I think there should be introduction of the globally accepted credit based choice (CBC) system. Under this system student can chose subjects on their own also ask the examiner to conduct the examination when the students are ready for them. The Constitution of India has enshrined in it the principle of equality of men and women. However, we find that women of India still lag behind in many respects. The economic survey of 2006-2007 noted that the number of women students risen

from 2.45 million to 4.04 in 2004-2005. Data on the faculty wise distribution of women show that of all the women enrolled in higher education the largest percentage (51.01%) are enrolled in the faculties of Arts and Humanities, 20.18% are enrolled in the faculty of Science, 16.46 in the faculty of Commerce and while remaining 12.35% in all the professional faculties. Although the participation of women in all stages of education has risen rapidly but it is still bellow fifty percent¹¹. All higher education institutions need to be given full autonomy to establish linkages for academic and research collaboration with their counterpart academic and research institutions, industry and professional organizations both in India and abroad. There is a strong need for developing effective synergies between research in the universities and their application in and utilization by the industry to the mutual advantage of both the systems. Likewise industry should be persuaded to establish organic linkages with the universities to seek solutions of problems faced by the industry.

After having examined various challenges which Indian higher education system is facing, I have come to this conclusion that total reengineering is required to raise the level of higher education in India as well as West Bengal. It is a long drawn and very tedious process but India has to go through it bravely lest she becomes totally redundant in days to come. There is no reason why India cannot do it. Indian brains are, perhaps, one of the best in the world and can match with any other individual of developed world. Most importantly, the resources which are available in the country need to be optimally utilized. Public funding which has been systematically reduced has to be raised till the process of upgradation is stabilized to the large extent. With continued financial support judicious mix of accountability and autonomy is also essential. There should be Introduction of effective administration and managerial reforms for better command and control of higher education. In India, certainly, public universities have the potential to be world class institutions. The government is fully aware of the requirements and has identified institutions and programmes of national prominence. These institutions should be adequately and consistently supported to match with the best in the world. The remuneration of the teachers should be attractive enough to attract the best of the brains in the field. Fellowship and research grant should be made sufficiently lucrative to attract young researchers to pursue academic and research career in the country. Most importantly, the structures are to be placed in right place to permit building and sustaining top quality programmes even if resources are provided. The complacency and shortcut in pursuit of academics need to be eradicated and a systematic approach is to be adopted for better results. I think the above head possible remedies would help in overhauling the existing higher education system for qualitative growth.

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