

SCENARIO OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

(A JOURNEY SINCE INDEPENDENCE)

Introduction

At the time of independence, the status of higher education was very unfortunate in the country because people were very poor as the political and social conditions were very miserable. So at that time, seeking higher education was a myth for a common person. Only persons who have economically sound status can go for Higher Education either within the country or abroad. At the time of Independence there were only few Universities for providing Higher Education in country, like Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), Calcutta University (CU) etc. But in the last sixty year significant change in the Higher Education has been taken place. Various Universities and Private institution have been evolved in these last 20 years and started providing Higher Education to a large number of students throughout the country. Due to economical advancement in the country, now, every person wants to get higher education for better opportunities in the future through these institutions / Universities.

Expansion of Higher Education in India

The number of universities for Higher Education has been increased many folds since independence from ~20 in 1947 to ~400, colleges from ~500 to ~19,000, teaching staff from ~15,00 to nearly ~5.0 lakhs and students population in higher education from ~1 lakh in 1950 to over 120 lakhs in 2008. Many fold expansion in institutional capacity of higher education has enhanced enrolment ratio from less than 1% in 1950 to about 10% in 2007.

Since independence, the number of universities has been increased to ~25 folds and ~50 folds in terms of number of colleges in the country in comparison to an elitist system of education of the British India.

The success stories of 'green revolution', 'space technology', 'nuclear energy' and 'information technology superiority India has achieved' - we owe these all to the higher education system as it evolved during 60 years of India's independence. It can not be denied that it is Indian higher education system that to a significant extent has contributed to India rising to become the World's second fastest growing economy, *the World's third largest economy, fastest growing mobile phone market, owner of the largest bandwidth capacity and contributing second largest portion of scientists and engineers in the world.* Thus to suggest that India's higher education system is basically a robust, resilient and cost effective system cannot be termed to be unfair and unrealistic. No doubt by no means we are suggesting that it is adequate and does not suffer from wants, rather our passionate plea here is for greater concern both public as well as private for reforms and rejuvenation of the system

Expansion with Equity

India has experienced appreciable growth in the number of institutions of higher education during last six decades and particularly since 1990. This growth has already been because of expansion of number of State Universities and institutions deemed to be Universities. The period since 1990 has also seen the emergence of private Universities. The expansion of central universities has rather been slow and skewed in terms of regional distribution. (Seen in this context the recent announcement by the government and provision in the XI plan for setting up 30 Central Universities at least one each in the states not having any central university established so far is very laudable). It be also mentioned that a significant majority of

Universities, particularly managed by the state governments are affiliating in nature. Given the current number of universities in the country the burden of affiliating colleges per University is unmanageably high and incongruous, in some cases the number of colleges affiliated to a University runs as high as many hundreds. Thus, despite appreciable growth in number of universities there is scope rather need for further expansion in the number of universities and also colleges.

If the enrolment from the eligible group has to rise from present 10% (approx.) to 15% (which is much lower than U.S. and Canada where the enrolment is somewhere 40% and even in case of other developing nations where the enrolment is about 20%), the portion of India's population that enters higher education is around 7%, which is half the average of Asia. There is about *one University for nearly four million people*. This figure is too small for any significant impact of higher education on the country in the changed time where societies unlike in the past are fast growing into knowledge society, where knowledge is wealth. Thus we need more number of Universities and colleges. While establishing these new institutions the planners need to respond to the need for removing disparities in higher education system's operation and make it easily accessible to every deserving and desiring citizen whether he or she belongs to rural, backward or other marginalized groups or geography.

Expansion that has taken place reflects rural – urban disparities, inter-state variation, inter-religions group disparities, disparities across income, and caste and gender disparities. Speaking illustratively according to the figures available for the year 2003 the gross enrolment ratio between rural and urban; female and male; Muslims and Hindus: rural poor and non-poor; urban poor and non-poor has been 7.76 to 27.20; 11.02 to 15.25; 8.19 to 12.00; 1.30 to 7.12 and 5.51 to 27.15 respectively. Thus there is not only need but urgency for expansion with equity.

While talking of accessibility, it needs to be emphasized that accessibility would not only add to the nation's financial burden but would also result in waste of human resources unless we are able to ensure that what is made accessible is 'quality education' and an education which is relevant. Simply producing graduates after graduates and adding to the queue in front of the employment exchanges is to add to the frustration of youth leading to a culture of cynicism. According to a study, out of 4, 95,000 engineering graduates produced annually only 8 – 10 per cents are employable.

Inclusiveness and Equality

The 11th plan emphasizes on inclusive and equitable higher education. This will call for conscious efforts to ensure that the achievement in higher education does not suffer from disparities across region, gender, social groups such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward castes, minorities, physically challenged and poor. The 11th plan strategy for inclusion recognized three imbalances namely inter – regional, inter-social group and gender. The Plan proposed some measures to reduce these imbalances.

Firstly, it proposed to financially support universities and colleges located in districts having lower enrolment rate to increase the number of students from Prime Minister's initiative.

Secondly, since the districts with lower enrolment rate also happen to be from the rural, hilly, remote, tribal and border areas and small towns, the UGC proposed additional support to the universities and colleges in these areas.

Thirdly, simultaneously, it also proposed that the colleges/universities with high concentration of SC, ST, OBC and Muslim students will be provided with enhanced support.

Fourthly, since the strategy for mitigating group imbalances will require support to SCs, STs, OBCs, Minorities, particularly Muslims, women and poor. The plan provides assistance for fellowship, hostel, and programmes for competency improvement, including remedial coaching and other specific schemes for girls. Even more important is the establishment of Equal Opportunity Office in all Universities and colleges to deal with all schemes under one office.

Quality and Excellence

It is to be emphasized that when we talk of 'quality' it is essential to bear in mind quality to whom and quality education for what. In other words 'quality' needs to be understood in objective terms and in the context. It is saddening to note that 128 universities who got themselves accredited by the NAAC only 32 percent could get 'A' or above level of rating while another 52 percent of them could manage with 'B' or above grade. The remaining 16 percent fall in grade 'C' or above.

NAAC assessment indicates that 68% of colleges are rated as 'B' while another 23% colleges are rated as 'C' grade; and only the remaining 9% are A grade. Universities are somewhat better for only 46% universities are rated as B grade while another 23% are C grade; and the remaining 31 are A grade.

Ensuring quality education demands structural and institutional reforms in addition to committing enhanced financial resources. Imparting quality education would entail better infrastructure; greater use of ICT; teaching and learning in smaller groups; granting autonomy to the faculty, department and individual teachers. But more than that, imparting quality education requires 'faculty development' or what many call 'faculty recharge programmes' so that the faculty does not go stale, it retains its vibrancy and dynamism in doing research, in learning, and innovating and in devising new methods of teaching.

Faculty development demands providing better research facilities, creating more teaching fellowships, and better service conditions. In order to attract more qualified and more meritorious to join teaching faculty it is important to give them incentives, more so when today private industry and multinational corporations are in a position and are willing to offer attractive and mind boggling pay packages. The salary structure of teaching faculty needs to be respectable, faster promotional avenues, of course linked with teaching and research performance, and giving more autonomy in terms of mobility and exchanges are some of the measures, which could be adopted for faculty development and recharge.

No quality enhancement can be perceived unless the course curricula are periodically revised – revised not only to reflect the latest developments in concerned subject to study but also responding to the needs of the context such as of industry, profession and community. Greater accountability of institutional leadership to all involved stake holders and also of faculty to students and community constitutes an essential component of any plan designed to introduce quality enhancement of education and educational experience of its recipients.

Methods of assessing the students require thorough reexamination. Instead of aiming at testing the capacity of student to memories and reproduce, the system needs to assess itself as to how much it has been able to identify student strength, and to what extent it has sharpened those strengths and creativity in students. A student needs to be assessed on a regular basis as to how

critically, analytically and creatively he or she can think. There has been the talk of introducing semester system and introduction of schemes of grading of students' performance rather than giving marks are probably suggestions which need to be tried at least in some of the well established Universities such as central Universities. These and other such suggestions of course constitute the menu of bring a revolution in doing the 'education' and in 'kind of education'. But it is needed if India has to march ahead in this age of knowledge economy. India can reap the advantage of being a young nation with its 54% of the population being below the age of 30 years contrasting to other development nations who are aging fast. This can be achieved only if India's youth is equipped with quality education and relevant education.

The 11th plan proposed four fold strategy, which include (a) bringing of non 12(B) institutions under the orbit of UGC's grant (b) reducing the quality gap by helping B and C grade institutions (c) setting up of new universities / colleges / institutions with quality infrastructure, quality faculty and efficient academic and administrative governance and (d) focus clearly on I improving the adequate availability of quality of teachers.

Firstly, the 11th plan proposed strategy for bringing non – 12 (B) colleges and non – 2(f) universities under the ambit of assessment and development assistance mechanism of the UGC with joint support by centre, state and individual institutions with matching contribution for development of the needed physical facilities and other facilities to make them eligible to receive development assistance from the UGC.

Secondly, it also proposed to reduce the quality gap by bringing C and B grade universities and colleges at par with those in grades A again with the joint efforts of the Centre and state Governments.

Thirdly, it recognized that quality improvement will have to specially focus on ensuring quality improvement will have to specially focus on ensuring quality faculty in adequate numbers. This calls for strategies to attract and retain the best brains as faculty members including incentives and rewards for promoting excellence in teaching and research and by developing a comprehensive scholarship / fellowship program.

Fourthly, it proposed that new 16 central universities and additional 14 universities and 350 colleges in districts with lower enrolment on the Prime Minister initiative will be based on model institutions with potential for quality and excellence.

Funding of Higher Education:

Access, equity increase in enrolment requires enhanced funding. We still lack behind the national commitment of investing 6% of GDP in education. Responding to the need of investing more in education, it is believed that the 11th five year plan is proposing 19.8% of its outlay for education, and higher education is set on a steep growth curve. Contrasting to 10th plan outlay for higher education of Rs. 8928.5 crore, the 11th plan proposes outlay of Rs. 84943 crore for higher education. A major portion of this enhanced funding would go in setting up – 30 new Central Universities, 8 IITs, 6IIMs, 10 National Institute of Technology, 5 Institute of Science Education and Research, 20 IITs, and 2 Schools of Architecture, and thus not leaving sizeable amount for improving existing facilities of 18,000 colleges and 400 universities. The importance and need of setting up these new institutions of higher and professional education can hardly be ignored, but investing in existing facilities and institutions should be no less a priority. Where from to generate needed funds?

Fee hike suggested by many can hardly bring the required resources. We by no means are suggesting that fee need not be rationalized. In addition it is suggested that there is need for building a robust and strong private – public partnership for funding and improving the quality of higher education. We have no hesitation in endorsing the suggestion as we see the practical and mutual advantages to private houses, industries on one hand and the higher education institutions and recipients of higher education on the other. For example, the Universities and research institutions can do the research and innovations which may provide competitive edge to Indian industry and industry may provide on the site based experience to students.

However, while talking of private possible partnership, we would like to send a note of caution – private funding in higher education must largely be inspired and guided by a strong commitment to ‘philanthropy’ and ‘public good’ rather to stark focus on ‘profiteering’ and ‘commercialization’ of higher education. Some of the most successful examples of this kind of partnership have been the *Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Tata Institute of Social Sciences and Indian Institute of Science*. In fact the higher education during initial years of independence got the highest boost in the hands of private-public partnerships particularly in States like Maharashtra and Karnataka. Institutions established by many societies and trust such as *DAV or Khalsa chain of colleges are the example of private – public partnership inspired by a strong sense of philanthropy and commitment to contribute to public good*.

Academic and Administrative Reforms:

Unlike expansion, equity/inclusiveness and quality/excellence, where efforts are in making, the policies concerning reforms in the arena of academics, administration and governance are already well formulated and publicity announced. These are all elaborated upon in detail in the reports of Radhakrishnan Commission (1948), Kothari Commission (1968), National education Policy (1986), Programme of Action document (1992), CABE committee reports, resolutions of the conferences of the Vice Chancellors organized by the UGC and the AIU and a host of other committees constituted by the UGC and MHRD from time to time.

While these recommendations about credit system, semester system, more of international assessment and less written examination component, teachers evaluation by students, inter-institutional mobility etc have been generally accepted, quite a few of them have not been implemented and operationalised as yet. Some of these have been tried and failed while some others have been implemented on selective basis. As a result there is a lot of institutional variations in admission, examination, faculty and governance related practices.

Besides there are issues related to governance, including appointment of Vice Chancellors.

Role of Private education:

The spread of higher education was achieved through active state support whereby public funding was considered necessary in order to provide equitable opportunities of higher education to all. It has, however, been a proclaimed policy of the country to also encourage private investment in higher education so long as they are driven by charitable and non-profit motives. While universities have largely been in the public domain, India has had a history of having large number of colleges established and maintained by private management. In recent times, the private self-financing institutions colleges and other degree awarding institutions have gained prominence. At the same time, there has also been witnessed a tendency among the public funded institutions to start and run courses on self-financing basis. More recently, the private

universities, either under state legislature or through the deemed university mode have also come to be established.

As situations prevail today, the system is characterized by rapid expansion in private self financing colleges specially in medical, engineering, dental and education, self-financing courses in government and government aided colleges, private universities and also in unrecognized private institutions offering diploma and certificate programmes.

We do need proper regulatory framework for the private sector, to ensure the quality of higher education and also the equity. It is, therefore, important that we develop regulatory framework for the private universities, particularly in terms of their admission, fees, teaching-learning process and governance. The regulation of self-financing courses in government and aided colleges and also those in the self-financing institutions with respect to fees, quality and inclusion of girls, socially and economically deprived groups is imminent.

Internationalization of Education:

The issues concerning internationalization of higher education can be discussed into two broad heads, which represent two broad dimensions of the issue. The first aspect deals with the demand for opening Indian higher education for international service providers while the second aspect deal with the internationalization of Indian higher education. Going abroad for higher education has long been the most cherished goal for students of underdeveloped and developing countries. While most foreign students were known for their diligence and dedication and were often a source of pride for their universities, they were seldom seen as a source of revenue. But things have changed a great deal in the post WTO/GATS regime.

Developing countries are now seen as a market for higher education and foreign universities from other countries are competing each other to increase their market share. As the demand for opening the higher education sector in India for international service providers is increasing, the issue of providing appropriate regulatory framework for international education providers is under consideration of the government. Effective regulatory mechanism is required to ensure quality higher education with equity and accountability.

The second aspect of internationalization deals with as to how can Indian universities and colleges benefit the most by the process of internationalization. Indian higher education is widely recognized and respected across the globe. The Indian faculty in foreign universities is generally well respected for their teaching and research abilities and Indian students abroad are rated at par with the best students of the world. We, therefore, need to identify reasons for the same and find out ways and means to addressing those in order to attract international students on our campus.

It was also felt that foreign universities must not be permitted to encourage in gross commercialization and debasement of higher education and that only universities of repute are permitted entry and that such universities should be required to set up their full-fledged campuses in India rather than resorting to franchising and courseware renting. It was also felt that Indian universities and colleges should be permitted to form strategic alliances with international universities and other institutions of repute and that universities in India should be permitted to take up collaborative research with foreign universities but the arrangements should be such where Indian counter parts share Pattern Rights and copyrights.