

Present Scenario of Higher Education in India

NAZMUL HUSSAIN LASKAR

Assistant Professor & Head

Department of Political Science, Dr. Gour Mohan Roy College
Monteswar (University of Burdwan), Purba Bardhaman (W.B.) India

Key Words : Higher education, Indian society, Civilization, Vedic

INTRODUCTION

Indian society, from time immemorial, has been regarding knowledge as the highest virtue of man. Since the dawn of civilization, our great saints and seers have been showing the entire world the path of enlightenment leading to the ultimate truth. Even during the Vedic and Upanishadic period, India had some of the prominent institutions of higher education which attracted scholars from distant places to come to India in pursuit of knowledge. The contemporary society is considered a knowledge based society and the UN agencies and the World Bank have declared that economies are built not only through physical capital but on the foundation of information and learning. According to a recent study conducted by the World Bank in 192 countries, physical capital and the natural wealth account for only 16 and 20 per cent, respectively of the total wealth. Whereas human capital account for the rest of 64 per cent of the total wealth. In fact, there is a direct relation between the extent of human capital and economic prosperity.

Indeed, there has been a phenomenal expansion in higher education in the country during the post-independence period, in terms of the number of educational institutions and universities, disciplines and courses, student's enrolment and the number of teaching faculty. As the statistical data reveal that universities have increased from 20 in 1950 to 799 now, the number of colleges has increased from 700 in 1950 to 39071 and the number of students to 34.6 millions. The number of teachers has increased from 15000 to 15 lakhs in 2017. In spite of the impressive quantitative expansion of higher education, the country falls short of the figures of the developed countries. We spend less than 4 per cent of GDP on higher education. Likewise of the total students, only one-fifth students enrolled in professional course and the rest are in general education. While in the advanced countries only one-third of the college going population is in general education, rest is in professional courses. There is a general lack of interest in science and technical subjects. In 2017, nearly 800 technical colleges in the country are facing closure as they have very low enrolment. It is reported that 4633 courses and 527 institutes have been closed in the past five years. Now the AICTE is toying with the idea of merging two colleges in the vicinity of each other, and even considering proposals of buyouts to resolve the lingering issue of vacant seats in technical colleges (Times of India, 2017, p.1). However, without advancement in science and technological research institutions, providing a critical mass of skilled and educated people, higher education in no country can ensure genuine

endogenous and sustainable development.

In our country, after independence though the phenomenal growth in the field of higher education is impressive, the quality of higher education is declining. Compared to the higher educational institutions in other parts of the world, the standard and quality of higher educational institutions in India is very poor. In the 2017-2018 Times Higher Education Ranking, only two Indian institutes have got the position of above 400 are IISc Bangalore (251 to 300) and the IIT Bombay (351 to 400). Institutes like IIT Delhi, IIT Kanpur, IIT Kharagpur, IIT Roorkee are ranked between 501 and 600. Institutes like Aligarh Muslim University, Delhi University, BHU, IIT Guwahati, IIT Madras, ISM Dhanbad, Jadavpur University have secured ranks between 601 and 800 (Times of India, 2017, p.5). Hence, the need of the hour is to give importance on the quality higher education. Universities and colleges are institutions of higher learning which intend to equip the learners with confidence so that they could face the unknown future. Higher education institutes should educate students to become well informed and deeply motivated citizens, who can think critically, analyze problems of the society, look for solutions to the problems of society, apply them and accept social responsibilities. The system of higher education needs to be made dynamic and responsive to the felt need of the country. In view of this, there is a tremendous need of giving serious thought for reforming the present system of higher education. A review of the observations and recommendations of various commissions and the debates on the subject at various levels indicate that there are certain major issues in higher education which need to be addressed. These are- quantitative expansion and access, qualitative assurance, restructuring curriculum, faculty development, quality research, governance and autonomy crisis.

Major Challenges of Higher Education in India:

Quantitative Expansion and Access :

Managing quantitative expansion and ensuring access to various segments of population is an important challenge. The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education in India is 24.5 per cent. This is much below the corresponding figures in most of the developed and developing countries. The enrollment ratio in higher education is about 100 per cent in Canada, 80 per cent in USA, 50 per cent in France and UK. Even in some of the less developed countries like Thailand, Indonesia, Mexico and Brazil enrollment ratios are higher than India. Even if we satisfy ourselves with a target of 30 per cent enrollment ratio to be achieved in the next few years, the existing facilities and infrastructure will have to be substantially increased, to say, about three times.

Equity is another issue closely linked to access. Studies have indicated that 70 per cent of the university graduates come from the top 20 per cent to 30 per cent of the income groups. The benefit of high subsidies in education is thus denied to poor people who are deprived of higher education. Again the university enrollment indicates a disproportionate distribution. The women account for about 35 per cent of the total enrollment and those from under privileged section of society have about 15 per cent of the total share. There is need for ensuring a better access to these segments of population in order to ensure equity.

Qualitative Assurance :

Although there has been a massive expansion of higher education in India during the last five decades, the quality of education has been deteriorated as per reports of various committees appointed by the UGC. According to MHRD Report, nearly two-third of India's colleges and universities are below standard. Reports put up by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) have

time and again emphasized that most of the higher education institutes face an acute problem in terms of shortage of academic and physical infrastructure. The curriculums are outdated, the courses are irrelevant and the quality of teaching is below average to poor. On an average, every year some six million people join the ranks of employment seekers. An extremely disappointed feature of this disturbing phenomenon is that a large proportion of these belong to the educated class who are unemployable. Our education should make our graduates useful, employable and entrepreneurs. Our higher education in the 21st century must have quality, which should embrace its various functions and activities *i.e.*, the quality of courses, the quality of curriculums, the quality of teaching and the quality of research. Our infrastructure such as buildings and classrooms, laboratories, libraries etc. have to be of international standards. A major weakness lies in this area. The technological developments especially the availability of internet facilities are going to have far reaching implications at all levels.

Restructuring Curriculum :

The quality of curriculum depends upon two major issues. First, the curriculum needs to be both relevant to socio-economic needs and up-to-date in content. The second important criterion for quality curriculum is professionalization of curriculum development. The universities will have to be responsive to the changing needs to the society of which they are a part. They should introduce courses which enable the students to enter the world of work rather than to be a burden on the society. So, it is necessary to restructure the curricula as per the job requirement in the market. Introduction of new courses keeping pace with the developments and updating of the curriculum should help in maintaining the quality.

Faculty development :

Today the faculty engaged in higher education is facing many new challenges in the dispensation of teaching responsibilities. It is not merely the command over the subject and the communication ability that counts, the teacher should have responsibility for facilitating, motivating and inspiring students in the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values. Therefore, besides recruiting quality teachers, there is always a need to create among teachers, sustained motivation and commitment for quality teaching and their teaching competence has to be continuously upgraded. Teachers have to play an active role in the development of their respective disciplines by way of involving themselves in research activities. Dr. S. Radakrishnan has said, “unless and until we have dedicated and committed teachers, who take teaching as mission in their lives, we cannot have good educational system.”

Quality Research :

The quality of teaching in higher education goes along the quality of research. One of the reasons for poor quality of education in India is that we are lagging far behind in terms of research. As per the World Intellectual Property Organization's statistics 2013, the domestic and foreign patents filed in India per million populations are far less than other countries. India registered 34.4 patents per million populations in comparison to 4037 by Korea, 2579 by Japan, 1806 by USA, 607 by China and 357 by United Kingdom. In universities, the research topics of various disciplines have no relevance to the present life. Teachers publish research papers mainly for API score. A two phased strategy is required to improve the quality of research. The budgetary allocations need to be substantially increased and research careers should become more attractive than teaching.

At the same time, research must be socially and economically more relevant with various sectors of society like industry, agriculture etc. (Chauhan, 2012, pp. 17-21).

Lack of Autonomy of Colleges :

The higher education system in India is based on rigid control of University over colleges. For college teachers, little professional autonomy exists for developing their own curriculum, setting their own examination questions and grading the answers submitted (Rizvi and Gorur, 2011). With a few notable exceptions, the system turns the colleges into narrowly focused tutorial institutions.

Governance :

The university system in India has certain limitations. It is still dominated by the traditional set of rules, regulations and statutes that offer little scope for quick improvement in its present work system and required level of autonomy and flexibility. Universities are often reduced to the level of examination conducting bodies and hardly promote knowledge advancement. The absence of innovation and lack of willingness to overcome rigidity has crippled the growth of Indian higher education system. The present system of funding the universities needs to be changed and universities must ensure financial autonomy.

Further, the globalization of knowledge and consequently of education, is going to pose serious threats before the conventional system of higher education in all developing countries including India. In the emerging international knowledge market, our universities have to compete with the foreign players. The situation leaves no option before our universities excepting improvement of quality of education imparted so as to make it comparable to international standards, failing which, their very survival will be in danger. The universities have to redesign their programmes so as to make them flexible, cost-effective and relevant to the market economy (Paul, 2013, pp 26-27).

Moreover, like most nations of the world, the Government of India financed the higher education almost entirely (90 %) till mid 1980. But with the shift of emphasis from higher to primary and elementary education, this scenario has changed. Also the globalization of market economy has compelled us to analyze investment in higher education in terms of input-output ratio (Gupta, 2004, pp. 16-18). According to the reports of UNESCO and World Bank, social and private returns of higher education are less than those of primary and secondary education. It is estimated that social return of primary education is 25 per cent while that of higher education is only 1 per cent. This has led to the thinking that returns of higher education are largely personal and therefore, the subsidy on this should be reduced. Accordingly, the Government of India started it by reducing the share of allocation for higher education after the 4th five year plan. As a result, a situation has now reached that certain state universities are facing difficulty even in the payment of the salary of its employees. In future, universities and colleges will have to be self-supporting by searching out alternative means of finance and generating funds from internal resources (Saleem, 2013, p.34).

Suggestions for improvement of Higher Education in India:

Resource Mobilisation :

In the wake of decreasing funds for higher education, the existing resources needs to be mobilized. The government needs to evolve a rational and fair policy, whereby it can charge reasonable fees from at least all those students who can afford to pay more fees in such grant-in-aid institutions.

Promotion of Innovation and Creativity :

The higher education should promote innovation in teaching-learning methodology so that traditional educational practices may be reoriented according to contemporary needs. Teachers prefer to receive tutorials on-line, which not only lends itself to faster transmission, but also avoids the difficulty in reading a manuscript.

Enhancing Infrastructure through PPP :

Public Private Partnership (PPP) is one of significant methods for upgrading infrastructure. To achieve excellence, we thus need to create a real partnership between government, educators and industry—Partnerships that can provide our high-tech industries with skilled workers who meet the standards of their industry.

Quality Improvement :

It requires that higher education should be characterized by its international dimensions: 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 quality assurance system must be independent of political and institutional interaction.

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Foreign Universities :

The exchange of ideas between foreign and Indian Universities should be promoted in order to adopt innovative scientific methods from outside. In the area of international collaboration, internet-based learning (e-learning) may assist very widely. E-learning can improve access to education and establish some basic minimum level of standards in pedagogy across the country.

Examination Reform :

The present system of education is based on archaic structure running since decades. There should be a fundamental and radical shift in the examination system, which should be based on in-depth test of student's knowledge, examination of their analytical skill, problem solving attitude, creativity and innovation, concurrent evaluation of one's knowledge rather than one-time evaluation (Narayan, 2005). The coherence between erudite and its job-prospects is significant. The programme must be focused on graduate studies and research and developing strategies and mechanisms for the rapid and efficient transfer of knowledge.

Conclusion:

Indeed, with the advent of the 21st century, the centre of focus of our nation's development is on placing a premium on knowledge and richness of human capital. It is an inevitable conclusion that the future belongs to those countries, which are able to release the infinite potential locked up in their people. Only quality driven institutions of learning can serve as the ideal vehicle to pursue and realize such a grand opportunity for global leadership. In conclusion I would quote former Prime Minister Dr. Man Mohan Singh, who has said, "Don't make education a prisoner of either bureaucracy or ideology. Education must develop on the foundations of professional excellence and intellectual integrity."

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