Socio-Historical Analysis on Higher Education in India: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

The world has realized that the economic success of the states is directly determined by their education systems. Education is a Nation's Strength. A developed nation is inevitably an educated nation. Indian higher education system is the third largest in the world, next to the United States and China. Since independence, India as a developing nation is contentiously progressing in the education field. Although there have been lot of challenges to higher education system of India but equally have lot of opportunities to overcome these challenges and to make higher education system much better. It needs greater transparency and accountability, the role of colleges and universities in the new millennium, and emerging scientific research on how people learn is of utmost important.

India need well skilled and highly educated people who can drive our economy forward. India provides highly skilled people to other countries therefore; it is very easy for India to transfer our country from a developing nation to a developed nation. The current study aims to highlight the challenges and to point out the opportunities in higher education system in India.

Introduction

India's higher education system is the world's third largest in terms of students, next to China and the United States. In future, India will be one of the largest education hubs. India's Higher Education sector has witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of Universities/University level Institutions & Colleges since independence. The 'Right to Education Act' which stipulates compulsory and free education to all children within the age groups of 6-14 years, has brought about a revolution in the education system of the country with statistics revealing a staggering enrolment in schools over the last four years. The involvement of private sector in higher education has seen drastic changes in the field.

Growth of Higher Education Sector in India, as higher education systems grow and diversify society is increasingly concerned about the quality of programmes, public assessments and international rankings of higher education institutions. However, these comparisons tend to overemphasise research, using research performance as a yardstick of institutional value. If these

processes fail to address the quality of teaching, it is in part because measuring teaching quality is challenging (Hernard, 2008) India has been always been a land of scholars and learners.

Challenges in Higher Education in India

It is our 69th year of independence still our education system has not been developed fully. We are not able to list a single university in top 100 universities of the world. Various governments changed during these six decades. They tried to boost the education system and implemented various education policies but they were not sufficient to put an example for the universe. UGC is continuously working and focusing on quality education in higher education sector.

Still we are facing lot of problems and challenges in our education system. Some of the basic challenges in higher education system in India are discussed below: Enrolment: The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of India in higher education is only 15% which is quite low as compared to the developed as well as, other developing countries. With the increase of enrolments at school level, the supply of higher education institutes is insufficient to meet the growing demand in the country. Equity: There is no equity in GER among different sects of the society. According to previous studies the GER in higher education in India among male and female varies to a greater extent. There are regional variations too some states have high GER while as some is quite behind the national GER which reflect a significant imbalance within the higher education system.

Political Interference

Most of the educational Institutions are owned by the political leaders, who are playing key role in governing bodies of the Universities. They are using the innocent students for their selfish means. Students organise campaigns, forget their own objectives and begin to develop their careers in politics.

Faculty: Faculty shortages and the inability of the state educational system to attract and retain well qualified teachers have been posing challenges to quality education for many years. Large numbers of NET / PhD candidates are unemployed even there are lot of vacancies in higher education, these deserving candidates are then applying in other departments which is a biggest blow to the higher education system.

Accreditation: As per the data provided by the NAAC, as of June 2010, "not even 25% of the total higher education institutions in the country were accredited. And among those accredited, only 30% of the universities and 45% of the colleges were found to be of quality to be ranked at 'A' level."

Research and Innovation: there are very nominal scholars in our country whose writing is

cited by famous western authors. There is inadequate focus on research in higher education institutes. There are insufficient resources and facilities, as well as, limited numbers of quality faculty to advice students. Most of the research scholars are without fellowships or not getting their fellowships on time which directly or indirectly affects their research.

Structure of higher education: Management of the Indian education faces challenges of over centralisation, bureaucratic structures and lack of accountability, transparency, and professionalism. As a result of increase in number of affiliated colleges and students, the burden of administrative functions of universities has significantly increased and the core focus on academics and research is diluted.

Opportunities in Higher Education:

India is a large country, with an estimated population of young people aged between 18 to 23 years to be around 150 million. The sheer size of the market offers huge opportunities for development of the higher education sector in India. India now boasts of having more than 33, 000 colleges and 659 universities, which has been quite a remarkable growth during the last six decades. The year 2011 witnessed 21. 4 million enrolments, which makes India the 3rd largest educational system in the world. Unfortunately, the educational infrastructure of India is inadequate to handle such huge volumes. In spite all the government spending in the educational sector, it is just too insufficient to meet the growing requirements. Therefore, higher Education sector has now been identified as one of the promising areas for private and foreign investments.

There are opportunities for India to collaboration at national and international level on areas of systemic reform, including quality assurance, international credit recognition, and unified national qualifications framework. Equality of educational opportunity in higher education is considered essential because higher education is a powerful tool for reducing or eliminating income and wealth disparities. The idea of equalizing educational opportunities also lies in the fact that 'the ability to profit by higher education is spread among all classes of people. There are great reserves of untapped ability in the society; if offered the chance they can rise to the top.

Suggestions: Improving the System of Higher Education:

There is a need to implement innovative and transformational approach form primary to higher education level to make Indian educational system globally more relevant and competitive. Higher educational institutes need to improve quality and reputation. There should be a good infrastructure of colleges and universities which may attract the students. Government must promote collaboration between Indian higher education institutes and top International institutes and also generates linkage between national research laboratories and research canters

of top institutions for better quality and collaborative research.

There is a need to focus on the graduate students by providing them such courses in which they can achieve   excellence, gain deeper knowledge of subject so that they will get jobs after recruitment in the companies which would reduce unnecessary rush to the higher education. Universities and colleges in both public private must be away from the political affiliations, Favoritism; money making process should be out of education system etc. There should be a multidisciplinary approach in higher education so that student's knowledge may not be restricted only up to his own subjects.

After more than 70 years of independence, India's higher education system has still not been developed fully. It is evidenced by its poor performance in institutional rankings (not a single Indian university in top 100 universities of the world), the poor employment status of its students, poor track record in receiving national awards and recognition, poor share in research funding and so on.

Moreover, the status of state public universities that produce over 90% of the graduates in India is more dismal.

Commonly stated reasons for these observations are

Enrollment:

* According to the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) report the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education in India is only 26. 3%, which is quite low as compared to the developed as well as, other developing countries.

* With the increase of enrollments at the school level, the supply of higher education institutes is insufficient to meet the growing demand in the country.

Quality:

* Ensuring quality in higher education is amongst the foremost challenges being faced in India today.

* However, the Government is conti- nuously focusing on quality education. Still, a large number of colleges and universities in India are unable to meet the minimum requirements laid down by the UGC and our universities are not in a position to mark their place among the top universities of the world.

Political Interference:

* Increasing interference of   politicians in the management of higher education jeopardises the autonomy of HEIs.

∗ Also, students organise campaigns, forget their own objectives and begin to develop their careers in politics.

Poor Infrastructure and Facilities:

∗ Poor infrastructure is another challenge to the higher education system of India, particularly the institutes run by the public sector suffer from poor physical facilities and infrastructure.

∗ Faculty shortages and the inability of the state educational system to attract and retain well-qualified teachers have been posing challenges to quality education for many years.

∗ Large numbers of NET/PhD candidates are unemployed even though there are a lot of vacancies in higher education.

Inadequate Research:

∗ There is inadequate focus on research in higher education institutes.

∗ There are insufficient resources and facilities, as well as limited numbers of quality faculty to advice students.

∗ Most of the research scholars are without fellowships or not getting their fellowships on time which directly or indirectly affects their research. Moreover, Indian Higher education institutions are poorly connected to research centres and to industries.

Poor Governance Structure:

∗ Management of Indian education faces challenges of over-centralization, bureaucratic structures and lack of accountability, transparency, and professionalism.

∗ As a result of the increase in the number of affiliated colleges and students, the burden of administrative functions of universities has significantly increased and the core focus on academics and research is diluted.

Reason for a more dismal performance in state-level universities:

∗ The above-stated issues are faced by both central and state's higher education institutions (HEIs), but the state is handicapped at one more front.

∗ Central government HEIs are hardly ever short of funding and patronage has been ensured by the Central government and its arms; national-level parties, industries and businesses; and the national elite and the intelligentsia. This appears to be the key factor for the better performance of Central government HEIs.

However, similar arrangements have never been built between the State universities and State governments, State-level political parties and organisations, industry and businesses; and the elite and the intelligentsia. This may be because:

* The aims, goals, methods and priorities of these institutions are pretty much the same as those of the Central institutions.

* The only real value adds that the State universities are doing for the State and its people seems to be that of enabling a few lakhs to become graduates every year.

Conclusion:

Education is a process by which a person's body, mind and character are formed and strengthened. It is bringing of head, heart and mind together and thus enabling a person to develop an all-round personality identifying the best in him or her. Higher education in India has expanded very rapidly in the last six decades after independence yet it is not equally accessible to all. India is today one of the fastest developing countries of the world with the annual growth rate going above 9%. Still a large section of the population remains illiterate and a large number of children's do not get even primary education.

This is not only excluded a large section of the population from contributing to the development of the country fully but it has also prevented them from utilising the benefits of whatever development have taken place for the benefit of the people. No doubt India is facing various challenges in higher education but to tackle these challenges and to boost higher education is utmost important. India is a country of huge human resource potential, to utilise this potential properly is the issue which needed to discuss. Opportunities are available but how to get benefits from these opportunities and how to make them accessible to others is the matter of concern. In order to sustain that rate of growth, there is need to increase the number of institutes and also the quality of higher education in India. To reach and achieve the future requirements there is an urgent need to relook at the Financial Resources, Access and Equity, Quality Standards, Relevance, infrastructure and at the end the Responsiveness.

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