Higher Education in India – Issues & Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The higher education system in India has grown in a remarkable way, particularly in the post-independence period, to become one of the largest systems of its kind in the world. However, the system has many issues of concern at present, like financing and management including access, equity and relevance, reorientation of programs by laying emphasis on health consciousness, values and ethics and quality of higher education together with the assessment of institutions and their accreditation. These issues are important for the country, as it is now engaged in the use of higher education as a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based information society of the 21st Century. This paper is an attempt to study the Issues and Challenges that are faced in the Higher Education System in India.

Keywords-- Higher Education in India, Issues in Higher Education, Challenges in Higher Education

I. INTRODUCTION

All sectors of developing countries seem to be vibrating with economic buoyancy. It has generated an atmosphere of over optimism of instant economic growth. There is expansion of trade, investment, market & increase economic growth. There is expansion of trade, investment market & increase in GNP productivity, per capita income, profit, efficiency; salary etc. life styles of metro people in developing countries have income more attractive, comfortable and fashionable than ever before. Premature replications of features of the industrially advanced countries are observed in developing countries. It puts over emphasis on economic efficiency and modern urban sector the cost of the larger society. Economic reforms tend to aggregate and exaggerate inequality created by economic growth. Economic growth in many developing countries is partly superficial, based on borrowed money and technology, with no inner dynamism generated by indigenous technological capacity one must always remember one simple thing that the salvation of the developing economy lies only in the transformation and vitalization of its peoples economy, which is possible through human capital formation.

But the developing countries, relegating the state to the background, and heading towards a techno-economic fragile transformation but not towards the prosperity of people or social transformation there is hyper growth of the tertiary sector, in which education constitutes the major component, both first generation & second generation reforms ones look, various social objectives such as education, health social development, gender inequality, regional imbalances etc. it tends to negate and neglect the priorities of the society at large, the free market policy is extended to all sectors including health and education, under the justification of higher efficiency, economic viability and pragmatism of sustain ability.

Higher education is never a luxury for any country. Higher education is very much critical to and in dispensable for the competitive strength of the country education is considered as the most important factor in building human capability in order to enhance the capacity & competitiveness of any country. The economic vulnerability has underlined the urgent need for reforms in the educational system because it is realized that the weak human resources base has been the major factor behind economic showdown in developing countries: - effective mobilization of resources & investment in education, allocation of budget and budget management are essential for the success of educational reform.

The success of the educational reforms lies in higher achievements in terms of access quality & efficiency leading to higher quality of life for people and competitive advantage for the economy present educational system should be reorganized to allow & enable the learners to transfer their learning out comes to the society through all types of education formal, non formal & informal education. There can be a learner-centered approach & a teacher- centered approach. But regardless of the approach, it should not only implore the quality of teaching & learning but also encourage lifelong education for the learners and enhance the relevance of education to the society. It is expected to be the key factor in transforming society in to a knowledge based society.

Educational reform is warranted in older to keep up with the imperatives of new world economic order. It is widely appreciated that educational reforms should become the national agenda with top priority now. All sections of people should have the benefits of globalization, but not a passive role. The objective that higher education should provide necessary skills &
knowledge that prepare & allow all individuals to become productive members of a knowledge-based society should be achieved.

II. HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

The government of India has undertaken a Sevier of reforms along measures after globalization. It has been aiming at curtailing subsidy & downsizing higher education through public funding. The privatization process n education has becomes very strong private educational institutions are growing very rapidly. As direct disinvestment in education is not very easy, Government of India is adopting many indirect measures to transfer education safely to the private sector. It has been promoting autonomous colleges & deemed universities private universities encouraged & introduced new courses having market ability with minor tinkering the courses are revised & credit hours have been increased. In India the following four steps have been boldly adopted under liberalized regime:-

- Complete freeze on recruitment
- Complete ban on creation of new posts
- Abolition of all vacant posts which are vacant for more than one year
- Adhoc reduction of 10 % of total staff strength.

These steps are posed upon the fifth report of expenditures reforms commission, March 2001. In fact the 9th report of expenditure reforms commission emphasizes that “higher education is very important & the government should take appropriate steps to strengthen it.

The educational policy planning of the Government of India has generated a very dismal & appalling situation for India. The Overall Educational Index (OEI) of India has remained very low, having the lank of 141 among the committee of nations, while Sweden has the highest rank in teams of educational index in the world. India seems to be complacent with its euphoric success is producing the large no. of soft skill employees of outsourcing of the western world. The expenditure on higher education in India is only 13 % of total public expenditure as compared to 27 % that of Sweden, which is the national funding agency & regulatory body of higher education, has not only failed to bring qualitative changes to the academic system it has also allowed some of its well – structured initiatives to go to waste due to half-hearted measures. There are huge dispatches in fund disbursals to the universities. The share of developing grants to only 15 central universities has steadily increased to 53.43 % of the total grants and for others it has substantially decreased. All other 212 deemed and state universities received only 46.57 % of the total grants.

III. HIGHER EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Including India the political instability is very high in developing countries too. The index measured by UNDP shows that India has higher PSV (Political Stability & lack of Violence) Index, similarly, the corruption perception index is very low while corruption level is high in developing countries. It is 2.7 & 3.2 for India & Thailand respectively. The effectiveness for the government is also very low in developing countries. It is 0.1 for Thailand & negative (-0.17) for India. The freedom of press in developing countries is also low. Even the terms of trade have not been impressive.

The higher education system can improve all these characteristics. Therefore the role of the Government in the educational sector has to be different & proactive in developing countries due to following reasons-low human development, low education index, low level of enrolment, high female illiteracy, high gender inequality, lesser technological advancement, lesser freedom of press, high degree of political instability, lower government effectiveness low. perception on corruption & adverse terms of trade.

IV. CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Since the launch of the National Education Policy of 1986, the absence of an all embracing policy of higher education or an education commission has been severely felt. Two other crucial reports on revamping the higher education system in India are the Ambani Birla Report of 2000 and the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) Reports (2006-09) and both these reports have invited hard hitting censure & large scale recommendation from the lovers of education & democracy far & wide. If the National Education Policy of 1986 cleared the decks for the globalization in the field of education, the Ambani-Birla report became a well-timed a shot in the arm, because since the private self financing institutions started springing up like mushrooms especially in south India. The NKC report of Mr. Sam Pitroda carried forward with great favour the privatization initiatives in higher education. In a sense, these two reports are the two sides of the same coin. Some of the recommendations of Prof. Yash Pal are similar to the NKC report, for example the proposal to constitute a National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER) in lieu of the highly unacceptable proposal for Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE) by NKC. In effect both NCHER & IRAHE are birds of the same feature. The Proposed National Commission for Higher Education & Research bill 2010, as & follow up to Yash Pal committee report, due to come up in the parliament appears to undermine the federal structure of the nation.

One of the serious charges leveled against the higher education system in India for a long time is the erosion of quality. It is heartening the University Grants Commission has set up a commission to assess the merits.
& demerits of the age old affiliating system. However unbridled affiliation that becomes a burden to the universities has to be stopped.

The decisions and modus operandi of many of the professional regulatory councils such as AICTE & NCTE have very often become controversial. The role of these august bodies at least a few of their honorable members high officials in the indiscriminate flourishing private unaided institutions for engineering / medical/ management studies/ teacher education has also been questionable. The recent arrest by CBI of the former member secretary of ATCTE (All India Council for Technical Education) for accepting bribe & the implication of its former chairman in a similar corruption case do not argue well for the future of these democratic institutions. The rot is deep-rooted.

V. CHIEF DETERMINANTS OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

1) Number of educational institutions-universities & colleges
2) Number of teachers
3) Number of students between the age group of 18 to 23

VI. REMEDIES

Higher education system should be inclusive and innovative, critical thinking, democracy and secularism. The system should have on mechanism that ensures regular revision and updating of curriculum. It should be built to maintain, promote & sustain quality.

The Central Government earmarks only 6% share of GDP for education. It still remains as a cry in the wilderness. The current figure is below 3.08% only if the education is shifted from the concurrent list to the state list can the states interfere more effectively in educational matters & restrain the profit motivated commercialization of education.

a. Selection of teachers

The system of selection of teachers by an independent recruitment agency will go a long way in enhancing the badly needed quality in higher education & eliminating loopholes for corruption. Teacher training should be made mandatory. A severe dearth of talents & best brains has been felt in the field of higher education for some time in the past. To retain the best brains & to suggest appropriate remedial measures there is a need for instituting an official commission.

b. The sixth UGC pay package

All the higher education commissions of the past form Dr. Radhakrishnan to Prof. Chaddha have underlined the need for providing a fully centrally supported attractive pay package to the teachers. But history has it that the centre has never ever fully endorsed the learned observation & proposals of these commissions.

The UGC 6th pay package recommended by Prof. Chaddha has already lost its seen & sanctity due to the Union Govt's reluctance to fully support the state governments in its uniform & simultaneous implementation in total. The innumerable distortions being given to the pay package by different state governments. There was the need for correction of the same. The system of cluster of colleges & schemes such as Erudite Scholar in residence being currently implemented in Kerala can be extended to the national level as is well suited for the effective implementation of interdisciplinary & intra-disciplinary learning & research. The latest initiative by this government for none of its citizens should be deprived of an opportunity for higher education on account of poverty, to garner a corpus fund of Rs 100 Crore to support the higher education of the aspiring youth among the poor & marginalized sections of the society is worth emulation & it could be a model for the whole nation.

c. Deemed to be Universities

One of the challenges in higher education today is the autonomous colleges & the deemed to be universities. It is the dictatorship of profit-driven capitalist entrepreneur that prevails in most of these institutions. Dr. Kothari commission recommends grant of deemed to be status under De Novo Category has to be stopped. This status is to be reserved for use in the rarest of the rare cases. The union govt's ministry of HRD has decided to derecognize the deemed university status of 44 out of 126 such institutions across the country proves that the genuine concerns raised by lovers of the nation & democratic system were true. Only 38 institutions had a narrow escape in the quality test administered by the high committee headed by Shri. P N Tandon. Prof. Yash Pal has also strongly recommended in his report the immediate scrapping of the deemed university status of all institutions.

d. Entry of private & foreign universities

The union Govt. appears to be doing the necessary spadework for the entry of foreign university as a 24 step after granting deemed to be university status. It has been delayed or postponed for many a reason including stiff resistance from a wide spectrum of the society. That the space so far occupied by the deemed universities is going to be occupied by foreign universities is a mere serious threat & greater challenge before the nation.

The aim of the private educational entrepreneurs such as Reliance, Birla Group, Vedanta group, Murugappa group is to turn India into an international educational hub for which the current road blocks are to be removed. They are eagerly waiting for the birth of the holy star, IRAHE (Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education) or NCHER (National Commission for Higher Education and Research) which will facilitate free rein and hassle free functioning without governmental interference. To recall the latest past the Karnataka Government passed the WIPRO & Alliance Private universities bill Sri Kapil Sibal, the minister for HRD has already started setting up committees such as Indo-US committees for this purpose. The foreign providers’ bill is sure to be enacted soon. We are going witness the native & foreign education providers.
e. Faculty improvement
Availability of adequate & qualified faculty is a pre-requisite for quality education. Due to restrictions on recruitment, the universities & colleges have resorted to temporary & Adhoc faculty. The sample data collected by UGC 6th pay review committee indicate that about 1/3 of university faculty is Adhoc temporary & on contract.

The pay review committee after its observations as the short term measures includes 1) increase in the retirement age upto 65 years 2) It also includes removing the restrictions on the recruitment of faculty by the state & filling of the vacant posts

The medium term steps like increase in the no. of research fellowships for M Phil, Ph.D and post doctoral program to create potential faculty for universities and colleges. The Government's decision on pay review emphasized on a) Recognize teachers as a distinct category b) Attract talent by giving higher salary at entry level c) Nurture & reward quality & excellence by giving special finance incentive d) Provide service conditions to give incentive for academic development

f. Physical Infrastructure
The existing policy schemes of improving by substantial physical margin infrastructure. This will includes induce increase a substantial in general development grants on infrastructure. However in view of the insight from the studies the improvement 11th plan has is proposed the physical two important initiatives. These two schemes include a bridging the quality gap between A & C grade universities & colleges under UGC grants.

g. Policy for Assessment & Accreditation
At present assessment and accreditation of universities & colleges are voluntary. The 11th plan has recommended the policy of compulsory assessment and accreditation. In view of this the UGC is developing a procedure to introduce mandatory assessment & accreditation for universities & colleges. Towards that end UGC has also approved a scheme for establishment of Quality Assessment cell in universities & colleges for regular internal self arrangement & self monitoring of quality & excellence. Both steps will help to present an all India quality map of the universities & colleges.

h. Quality & academic Reforms of University & college System
The academic reform necessarily includes change in admission procedures in various courses, modernization in assessment and examination methods, switch over from annual to semester system, acceptance of grade & credit system, teachers assessment & other related reforms.

i. Other Reforms
The other important initiatives include reforms of affiliating system, preparing become works for public private partnerships. Each rationalization of fee structure, regulation of deemed universities, rationalization of admission & fee structure of deemed universities, regulatory frameworks for collaborations by universities & colleges with universities & institutions in other countries with respect to dual degree arrangements, sharing of courses, credit transfers & sharing of teaching etc.

j. Related to Expansion of Enrolment Rate
The 11th plan recognized the dual problem of higher education namely of low enrolment rate & the regional imbalance. It recognized that the 11% enrolment rate is too low compared to 3% of world average or 36.5% for countries is transitions & more than 55% for developed countries.

k. Promotion of Relevant Education
The UGC has undertaken to take a stock of the present curriculum at various level of higher education & set up committee under the chairmanship of Prof. Yash Pal to come with a frame work. In the spheres of vocational & technical education huge initiative has been taken by the Ministry of Human Resources Development through expansion of vocational & technical education. This includes creation of eight new IITs, 20 NITs, 3 IISERs, 7 IIMs, 2 SPAs, new Polytechnics in unserved district 500 new community polytechnics & 210 new Community colleges. This will help to expand the intake capacity of existing vocational & technical institutions in public sectors.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The global perspective is changing so fast it is dangerous to make any kind of projection for the social sector particularly for the education sector. The higher education is very essential and needs to be recognized as vitally important for long run prosperity of the nation. It is not a standalone discrete activity. Therefore, under globalization the higher education system in India should aim at promoting: neo-professionalism & (highly sensitive to the society flexible for holistic development & prosperity) & value-based education in order to achieve both intra & inter generational sustainability. It can be achieved both by private institutions & public institutions. The quality is important not the ownership/ organization, none should be blamed. The goal of sustainability in higher education does not involve the change of ownership but involves the shift in emphasis/approach for genuine quality & social relevance and there by achieve the quality & excellence in higher education.

REFERENCES