

HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

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Higher Education is a very important sector for the growth and development of human resource which can take responsibility for social, economic and scientific development of the country.¹ While, higher education gives India an edge in the world economy as evident from the availability of the skilled manpower, and research scholars working abroad, unemployment, illiteracy and relative poverty continue to be the major deterrents to realize her potential in human resources. The higher education system in India has grown in a remarkable way, particularly in the post-independence period, to become one of the largest system 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 programmes 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.²

Education in India

Education is not knowledge alone, but also the capacity to utilize it. The quality of education depends on the ability it imparts to make proper use of the learning. In other words, acquiring knowledge coupled with the ability for its proper application is the real education. As such, the traits, which impart the skill of applying the acquired knowledge, are of great significance; without the requisite skill of application, the knowledge is a mere treasure trove in a sealed vault. Education includes all that which completes the personality of an aware and cultured citizen.... True education must, therefore, provide also the skill for application and enable development of the traits, which nurture its future growth. The ethical component of education is an element, which caters to this need. It is in the different ethical values of the knowledge makers that we find the cause for the difference in their contribution, even though they are equipped with the same level of knowledge.³

Prof. Yaspal said, "My complaint against the present education system in our country is that it tends to be contextually disconnected. Personal observation and experience do not change what is required to be learnt and the manner in which it is to be learnt. A defined collection of competence and well-listed pieces of information constitute education for everyone, with little or no room for personal variation. Not only the learner but also the teacher is bound by contours, in expanse and in depth. The interconnections with allied areas are normally frowned upon but when allowed they are restricted to examples that might not be relevant any more. The testing methods ensure that diversion from the well-defined path does not take place...

Even the pathways for excursion are defined to the extent that they too form a part of the inorganic contour that contains the syllabus. This works reasonably well for restricted training but not for growing minds that might wander off into unexpected but often exciting new areas. We are not honed for creating new disciplines.”⁴

According to K.C. Pandey, “The higher education constitutes of academic workers, administrative structures, systems, and conventional procedures. Academic workers or educationists include teachers, teacher trainers, academics and policy makers. These all are responsible for the crisis in higher education. The crisis is multi-faceted such as institutional mismanagement and structural rigidity, financial constrains and commercialization of higher education, equity vs. quality debate, political interference, undue emphasis on interdisciplinary and applied study and syllabi’s irrelevance, and integrity of academic workers, and issues about moral basis of education.”⁵

Indian Higher Education

India has successfully created one of the biggest higher education systems in the world. Quality of many top institutions is recognized to be comparable to the best in the world. However, Indian education system faces problems and issues that originate from disparities and developmental models adopted. With all the impressive development in the areas of Information Technology, space science, nuclear technology, oil exploration, industrial production etc., India could not solve its problems of poverty, ignorance and underdevelopment completely and successfully due to various reasons. Nearly 25% people are still below poverty line; one-third are illiterate and disparities amongst rich-poor, urban-rural, educated-uneducated are high, which are creating enormous social tensions. The country has to face challenges of globalization and pressures of liberalization while continuing its fight against poverty, illiteracy and disadvantages. The major problems before the Indian Higher education are ⁶:

- **Comodification of Education:** Higher education is becoming a marketing commodity. It is a multi-billion dollar business. Foreign universities are trying to have a share of Indian educational markets, and have prepared for this during the last decade or more. This shift from education as a social good to marketable commodity is against the Indian culture, and sufferers in these changes will be poor and disadvantaged people of India.
- **Global Competitiveness:** The competition will essentially be for offering quality education recognized at the International level and relevant to the local needs The major issue is how to raise the quality and standards of Indian education and make it globally competitive, locally relevant and enable it to offer marketing paradigm appropriate for developing societies.
- **Concerns of weaker institutions:** High disparities in educational standards and quality of education offered by Indian universities and colleges is of great concern to all.

National and global competition may create problems of survival of weaker universities and colleges.

- Developmental disparities and unsolved Indian problems: Many colleges and universities were started in India for removing regional imbalances and for supporting education of weaker and disadvantaged classes, particularly of women. These institutions and other developmental programs for weaker classes are still facing resource constraints, which are further aggravated by ignorance, poverty and disadvantages of the people they serve. This is resulting in widening divides and in keeping many educated from weaker and disadvantaged sections outside the job and employment markets. The challenge of these marginalized and deprived to the system of education is enormous.
- Weak linkage of education with developmental processes is creating frustration amongst graduates when they find that education is not so useful in employment and in work situations. A challenge is to transform the system from its present model of education to developmental education linking education to developments in society, industry and services sectors.
- High cost of higher education: The unit cost of traditional education, particularly of professional education, is quite high and has gone out of reach of the Indian middle and lower classes. Many private entrepreneurs have started educational institutions for offering creamy courses with marketing approach; and have raised fees not affordable to majority. Subsidy to the education by the state is not the right solution in the present situation, when numbers aspiring for higher education is large and ever increasing. The deprived are already creating pressure on the state to make education accessible; and have raised an issue of socioeconomic equity and justice. The issue has already become extremely volatile in some states like Maharashtra.

More of the same will not offer a way out. The major issue and challenge is to use IT and evolve a new system of education that may enable educational institutions to develop appropriate paradigms of development and education, and to increase coverage by serving larger numbers so as to move towards education for all so essential for knowledge-based society.⁷

Higher Education and the 12th Five Year Plan

Based on the information from the studies conducted by UGC and other material the UGC had put together a report akin to a road-map for higher education in the country. The UGC report had suggested following issues to be addressed under the Eleventh plan:

- Lower enrolment in higher education;

- Inter-state and inter-district disparities and rural-urban differences in the access to higher education;
- Inter-caste, inter-religion, male-female, poor-non-poor disparities in access to higher education;
- Issue of quality in higher education;
- Issue of providing relevant education;
- Academic reforms in Universities and Colleges; and
- Regulation of private educational institutes.

It is gratifying to note that, eventually, the Eleventh Plan has addressed most of these issues, and developed policies and programmes accordingly. Its main focus is on expansion in higher education with inclusiveness, quality, relevance, and with academic reform.⁸

Much greater challenges continue to exist with respect to quality and the provision of relevant education. Curricular reforms leading to regular revision and upgrading of curricula, introduction of semester system, choice-based credit system, examination reforms are yet to take place in all higher educational institutions across the country. Exceptions apart, majority of our higher education institutions perform poorly in the area of quality on a relative global scale. To materialize a "quantum jump" in achieving the triple objectives of access and expansion, equity and inclusion, and quality and excellence, with an emphasis on consolidation and optimal use of infrastructure already created during the 11th FYP, it is proposed to focus on the following strategies during the 12th FYP ⁹:

1. The focus will be towards achieving higher access through expansion by consolidation and better utilization of the existing infrastructure, upgradation of the infrastructure as and where necessary, and creation of new institutions primarily to meet the objective of regional equity.
2. Increasing and enhancing access through a mission mode national programme, "Rashtriya Uchch Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)" aimed to achieve 25% national level GER which will include (a) upgrading of Autonomous Colleges, Colleges with Potential for Excellence, and A grade-accredited Colleges by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), as university-level institutions; (b) promoting evening universities/evening colleges; (c) introduction of undergraduate programmes in the universities as integrated undergraduate/ postgraduate (UG/PG) programmes; (d) enhancing the intake capacity of the existing institutions of higher education; (e) developing the 'College Cluster Universities' regionally; and (f) establishing "Meta University Complexes" in association with public/private sector undertakings as a part of their corporatesocial responsibility, on an industry-academia mode.
3. The strategy for promoting equity at all levels and all branches of higher education, from enrolment to pass-out stage, shall be through new schemes for financial support of

socially deprived groups, minorities and women, along with significant remedial support for such students and faculty.

4. Schemes for reducing regional/disciplinary/gender imbalances will include (a) setting up of large number of Polytechnics (1,000); (b) completing the establishment of 374 Model Colleges in the identified Educationally Backward Areas of low GER districts; (c) establishment of 800 Constituent Colleges in the already existing 40 Central universities; and (d) establishment of 20 exclusive universities for women;
5. The system of financial support to girl students and students from SC/ST, Minorities and Other Backward Category (OBC) category is proposed to be considerably enhanced at all levels of higher education and for all branches, including professional and technical education. Financial support will be expanded in the form of scholarships, transport/rent allowance, book banks, and fee-plus scholarship system for professional students.
6. In order to retain students from deprived social groups in the higher education system, post-doctoral scholarships will be enhanced and a fast-track methodology implemented.
7. There will be strengthening of infrastructure to provide access, and retention of women students, differently-abled students and students from socially deprived backgrounds.
8. A major emphasis will be the strengthening of the remedial system for students from socially deprived backgrounds in order to enable their retention and better performance.
9. Equal Opportunity Cells, which were initiated in the 11th FYP, will be set up in all institutions, including institutions covered under Section 2(f) of the UGC Act. These will monitor and oversee the implementation of policies and programmes for the weaker sections and their progress in their respective institutions in achieving social inclusion.
10. Promotion of quality would be through a greater focus on performance, curricular reforms, better human resource management, schemes to promote high quality research, and technology-assisted monitoring mechanism. National science experimentation facilities, particularly in the cutting edge areas will be set up as Inter-University Centres and University-housed Networking Centres to provide international quality resource support to all the researchers and PG students.
11. Faculty being the single most critical factor responsible for the overall quality and excellence in higher education, it is a matter of grave concern that a large number of faculty positions remain perennially vacant due to either nonavailability of suitably qualified persons or due to procedural restrictions/fund constraints in State universities/colleges. In order to ensure that expansion drive in higher education is sustained, initiatives shall be taken to attract and retain the best talents as faculty resources by creating conducive working ambience and by making teaching and research as a lucrative career destination through continuous central assistance.
12. The capacity building and capability enhancement, keeping in tune with modern-day requirement of the faculty resources through the Faculty Talent Promotion scheme by

upgrading the Academic Staff Colleges (ASCs) as Faculty Development Centres (FDCs) with redefined roles and responsibilities, would be another priority.

13. Equally important shall be the initiative for Leadership Development and Institutional Management programmes at all levels from top to bottom, for those who may be currently holding the leadership, management and administrative positions. For those in the leadership tiers who need to be readied to take over such leadership positions in colleges and universities in future, a separate Leadership Mentoring Programme is envisaged through dedicated/competent centres.
14. Support for curricular and academic reforms to improve student choices, technology assisted participatory teaching-learning processes and increasing the provision of relevant education, with an emphasis on feed-back-based holistic examination/evaluation system. A fine balance between the market oriented professional and liberal higher education shall be the hallmark of such initiatives.
15. Minimizing the affiliating burden of the existing universities by implementing the "Affiliation Reforms Package" developed by the UGC during the 11th FYP in a multipronged approach would be another added dimension of promoting access with quality and relevance.
16. For promoting private sector participation in higher education, newer models based on quality shall be explored, supported and incentivized by well-defined policies, norms, and monitoring mechanisms. The initiative would also include maximizing the potential of Public Private Partnership (PPP) in higher education not only for setting up new universities and colleges but also for creating/sharing quality infrastructure and physical facilities in the existing colleges and universities.
17. For promoting skill-based education and to improve competence, a fresh impetus to vocational education shall be given with due regards to National Vocational Education Qualification Framework (NVEQF) and the initiative is to be supported and incentivized through well-defined policies and monitoring mechanisms.
18. Reforming the financing system of higher educational institutions by the UGC such as to promote the culture of accountability, improved performance and better resource use efficiency and at the same time respecting the academic autonomy. A norm-based funding mechanism based on the justified requirements submitted by the universities and colleges with due approval of their decision making bodies, (Academic Council and Executive Council) and moderated by the availability of resources with the UGC shall replace the existing conventional approach.
19. For better coordination and speedy implementation of the 12th FYP priorities, the UGC, as an organisation, shall have to be restructured and modernised, and rejuvenated as a vibrant academic, administrative and fund providing/monitoring body by the introduction of new management system of good governance which is a layer above e-governance, with transparency and accountability on the one hand and by roping in eminent academics on full-time basis as advisers on the other, besides lateral entry/deputation- mediated administrative talent infusion. This shall enable the UGC to

design the schemes better, execute them effectively and monitor the outcomes/outputs in a time-bound manner.

20. State Councils of Higher Education have so far been established only in a few states as an interface bodies between the state governments, the universities of the State and the national bodies/councils like the UGC/All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), etc. In order to facilitate national level coordination of the higher education schemes/policies and their speedy implementation, all states shall be encouraged and incentivized to establish and activate these Councils. Similarly, the College Development Councils (CDCs) of the universities will be made more effective in channelizing the UGC schemes to Colleges through the CDCs, supported appropriately by the UGC.
21. Universities and Colleges being the end-users of the public funds, provided by either the central or the state governments, shall have to be made accountable for the funds, provided by introducing a New Educational Management System whereby their accountability would be assessed more in terms of their performance and outcomes and less in terms of insistence on adherence to elaborate processes and procedures. Such initiatives shall have to go beyond e-governance, management information system and enterprise-wide resource planning. They must seek to bring about changes in the systems, processes, culture, and structure of the university Act/Statutes.
22. State Universities and Colleges affiliated thereto account for an overwhelmingly large number of enrolments in higher education and it is this sector that has been least attended to in terms of resource support and subjected to external influences and pressures in the name of accountability. Enhanced resource support to this sector based on the commitment of the state governments to provide these institutions greater autonomy and operational flexibility shall be a priority during 12th FYP.
23. A large number of new Central Universities and Model Colleges that were established during the 11th FYP would require continued and accelerated support because during this Plan they are likely to fast pace their development and operational work and any resource constraints at this juncture would be detrimental to their growth and development.

In the 12th FYP document provides the details of the present trends, prevailing issues and challenges, projected goals and the planned strategies for the 12th FYP with schemes and programmes under the three major heads of Access, Equity and Quality with interlaced components of relevance, value-education and creativity. The overall budget requirement projected to achieve the proposed initiatives is \$ 1,84,740 crore.¹⁰

Higher Education and Research in India

Critical appraisal of Indian Higher System reveals that though there is proliferation of higher educational institutions, however, due to the prevailing systemic deficiencies, continues to produce graduates that are unemployable despite emerging shortages of skilled manpower in an increasing number of sectors. Deterioration of standards of education and research,

inadequate infrastructure and facilities, large vacancies in faculty positions, low student enrolment rate etc. are the manifested consequences. The unwieldy affiliating system, inflexible academic structure, uneven capacity across various subjects, eroding autonomy of academic institutions, the accreditation system that has low coverage and no consequences. The following lines bring forward the brief note of the crisis of higher education and research in Indian context.

Excellence and expansion:

Indian higher education, the significant and impressive developments of the past few decades notwithstanding, faces major challenges in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Perhaps the clearest and boldest statement of this issue can be found in the "Report to the Nation 2006" of the National Knowledge Commission which concludes that there is "a quiet crisis in higher education in India that runs deep", and that it has to do with both the quantity and the quality of higher education and research in India.

Regulation and governance:

Besides its quantitative limitations and qualitative deficits, Indian higher education is also considered to be sub-optimally organized and significantly overregulated, limiting initiatives for change. In its assessment of the existing regulatory arrangements, the National Knowledge Commission concludes: "In sum, the existing regulatory framework constrains the supply of good institutions, excessively regulates existing institutions in the wrong places, and is not conducive to innovation or creativity in higher education."

The privatization of higher education:

One of the striking features of the development of higher education in India over the last few decades has been the extent to which private institutions have come into the scene and attempted to respond to the massive demand for education at the post-secondary level. This is particularly true in the fields of engineering, medicine, and management, and much less at the broader level of university education.

Staffing higher education:

Should the ambitious plans of both the public and the private sector for the massive development of higher education in India have a chance to succeed, one of the key prerequisites is a large and highly capable pool of scholars who can provide academic leadership in teaching and research. What is needed is to understand and respond to the growing needs of the society through continuous upgrade of the standards of an internationally competitive system of higher education and research.

Interface between University and other Stake Holders:

With the shortage of adequate funding to meet the demands of various novel innovative programmes has affected in developing a meaningful and purposeful inter-face between the universities, National Research Laboratories, industries, government, NGOs and society, etc. ICT in higher education policy may not be able to completely overcome all these challenges though it may play a role in information and resource sharing.

It is clear from the above that we need to recognize the prevailing crisis in higher education in India which runs deep. The need of the hour is to address this crisis in a systematic, forthright manner. We must emphasize the urgency of the situation, because our future depends on it. We are convinced that it is important to act here and now. At the same time, we believe that there is an opportunity in this crisis. Given the demographic reality of a young India, expansion, inclusion and excellence in higher education can drive economic development and social progress. Indeed, what we do in the sphere of higher education now can transform economy and society in India by 2025.¹³

In view of the above, we are baffled by various questions i.e. Do the educational institutions produce people who can deal with life as a whole? Have the institutions of higher learning been able to meet the increasing needs of the society? Do we teachers prepare our students to play the expected role? What are the factors that adversely affect teaching and research and in turn the quality of higher education? Are the pertinent questions relating to transparency and accountability of higher education institutions is addressed? Do these institutions prepare the students to face the highly competitive world? These are some of the pertinent questions that this seminar will look into and would try to find answers through intellectual deliberations from the diversified group.¹⁴

The higher education needs to be expanded without diluting quality and in fact by raising the standard of education imparted and making higher education more relevant to the needs and opportunities of a knowledge society. The higher education system must provide for accountability to society and create accountability within. An expansion of higher education which provides students with choices and creates competition between institutions is going to be vital in enhancing accountability. The recommendations of the seminar will require action at all levels i.e. reforms within existing systems, changes in policies, and amendments in, or the introduction of, new statutes or legislation.¹⁵

UNESCO on Higher Education

In *Learning: The Treasure Within* (1996) lifelong learning is understood as ‘a continuum of learning, expanded to the whole of society, open in time and space, and which becomes a dimension of life itself.’ In this document a detailed discussion find on higher education.

1. A first point to remember is that, side by side with universities, there are other types of higher education institutions in many countries. Some cream off the most able students while others were set up to provide specifically targeted, high-quality vocational

training, lasting between two and four years. Such diversification undeniably meets the needs of society and the economy as manifested both at the national and at the regional levels.

2. Increasingly stringent selection in order to ease the pressures brought about by mass higher education in the wealthiest countries is neither politically nor socially acceptable. One of the main drawbacks of such an approach is that many young people are shut out from the educational process before they have been able to obtain a recognized diploma; they are therefore in the desperate predicament of having obtained neither a formal qualification nor a training appropriate for the job market.
3. The evolution of enrolments therefore needs to be managed, but it can be kept within limits as a result of secondary education reform, along the broad lines proposed by the Commission.
4. Universities would contribute to this process by diversifying what they offer: (a) as scientific establishments and centres of learning, from where students go on to theoretical or applied research or teaching; (b) as establishments offering occupational qualifications, combining high-level knowledge and skills, with courses and content continually tailored to the needs of the economy; (c) as some of the main meeting-places for learning throughout life, opening their doors to adults who wish either to resume their studies or to adapt and develop their knowledge or to satisfy their taste for learning in all areas of cultural life.
5. Education: as leading partners in international co-operation, facilitating exchanges of teachers and students and ensuring that the best teaching is made widely available through international professorships.

In this way, universities would transcend what is wrongly held to be the conflict between the logic of public service and the logic of the job market. They would also reclaim their intellectual and social vocation as, in a sense, guarantors of universal values and the cultural heritage. The Commission sees these as cogent reasons for urging greater university autonomy.¹⁶

Reorientation of Higher Education

Educational opportunities and traditions that Indian Universities have built up, since independence have been able to produce graduates, capable only of pursuing limited careers, but, in the new globally competitive environment that is emerging in the country, the Indian student is now required to develop a multifaceted personality to cope up with the rapid changes in the world at large. This calls for the development of body, mind and spirit, through the educational processes in the institutions of higher education.

Health consciousness and physical fitness for a healthy body should be an essential part of the University culture. But, a healthy body alone cannot be attained and maintained without a healthy mind. Therefore value education becomes a desirable moral necessity for meeting the challenges of the contemporary World. Professional competence is of little value if professional ethics are forgotten. Similarly, brilliance is of no use if it is employed for anti social activities. In

order to achieve all these ends effectively one has to see that the processes of education are properly regulated in terms of assessment and evaluation of learning. A close interaction between the teachers and the students in the evaluation of the progress of learning is desirable, so that teaching-learning process is not superficial.¹⁷

Professional Ethics and Value Education

The rapid developments in science and technology and the challenges of globalization are posing additional challenges to the education system in the country. This is also the time when parental care to the children is on the wane. The adverse effects of the media on the mental development and moral values of the younger generation are being felt increasingly in all spheres of life. Gross consumerism has distorted the outlook of persons into one of equating possessions with richness. Exploitation of natural resources is proceeding without reference to sustainability. The hiatus between the rich and the poor is getting wider. While the education system needs to keep pace with the scientific and technological developments in terms of building the skills and knowledge, it also needs to address the more fundamental issues of the social and moral consequences of such unregulated activities. In this context, there is now a growing demand to lay greater emphasis on education to inculcate, nurture and develop values, particularly among the youth of the country. Major recommendations of this seminar are given below ¹⁸:

The Social Role & Status of Teachers and other Educators

There is an urgent need to rethink the evolving yet central role of teachers at all levels of education. This not only implies issues relative to teacher training and professional development, but also broader questions related to the evolving social role and status of teachers and other learning professionals.¹⁹ We in India are fond of miracles. We tend to look for extraordinary solutions for routine things. The field of higher education has been no exception. The problem is that the universities have failed to perform signalling functions on account of steep decline in standards; we have delinked our degrees completely from entry into professional and the job market. Our crisis is organically linked to increasing irrelevance of our process of certification leading to alienation of participants within and disenchantment of public outside. What is needed is the restoration of this signalling function of the university linking it to the needs of the community. We need a new engagement with the community. We need to reassure it that our certification is both reliable and relevant, that our pupils have necessary competence for which our degrees stand, that these young men and women can be trusted for different jobs and skills.²⁰

A reaffirmation of the signalling alone will redeem our public image and provide us protection against political and bureaucratic interference. This becomes all the more necessary in the present context of expanding economy. Even graduates of social sciences and humanities will be in much greater demand because service sector is expanding at an enormous pace in our society. This sector will need people with decent degrees, who can write, compose and analyse

in terms of national and international trends. It is only with the restoration of the first rate teaching and learning experience linked to skills required by the market that the universities will acquire a new dignity and find a new place for themselves in the life of the community.²¹

Conclusion:

Education not only makes a man a perfect gentleman, it also arms him to meet all the situations in life. An educated man can always face difficulties in a better way than an uneducated person. He knows how to face the difficulties in a calm and quiet way. Instead of getting worried on the onslaught of difficulties, he will welcome them. This is the only chance in the life of a man to bring to the fore the latent powers which lie hidden in a man, till they are put to use. So long as the man is in a comfortable position, he need not exploit this hidden treasure. However, once he is in straitened circumstance, he is compelled to use every bit of energy to fight out the adverse circumstances. This can be done only by an educated man, who is not frightened at the sight of the difficulties, because he does not allow them to get on to his nerves. It is said that it is not ease but effort, not facility but difficulty that makes a man. Thus, the education helps a man to develop a balanced personality.²²

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