



REFORMS AND CHALLENGES IN HIGH EDUCATION FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

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Abstract

The present system of higher education produced some degree holders with mere knowledge and information in a particular area, but it has failed to develop general employability skills needed for entry level employee. Hence, it is high time for planners, policy makers and practitioners of higher education to ponder over it and make necessary reforms in the course and strategies so that employability skills can be developed among the students. The programme of higher education should be restructured giving more importance the task relating to employability skills. Continuous and comprehensive evaluation should be introduced so that all the basic, higher-order and affective employability skills get due place in both internal and external examination. The classroom should be arranged in such a way that it replicates key features of actual work settings and assigned students tasks similar to those performed by workers in those settings. There should be collaboration between higher education institutions and the employers both public and private so that students get opportunities for active interaction. Now it is the time to bring a qualitative change in the scenario of higher education in India. India has a demographic advantage in the form of a huge number of young people. To make the best, these young minds need to be provided opportunities for accessing quality higher education. Only quality human resource will ensure emergence of a true knowledge society which will ultimately enhance the country's competitiveness in the global economy. This research paper is to be discussed about **“Reforms and Challenges in Higher Education for Civil Society”**.

Key Words: Higher Education, curriculum reforms, modern era, civil society, Good aspirations, policy makers, constitutional provisions.

Statement of the Problem

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela

After the Second world war, there has been an enormous expansion in higher education all over the world. India was not exception from this. The higher education system of India has witnessed many fold increase in its institutional capacity since independence. Now India is the third largest higher education system in the world after US and China. The higher education in India at present comprises 537 universities and university level institutions which include 253 state universities, 42 central universities, 130 deemed universities, 33 institutions of national importance established under various state legislations. In addition there are 35,951 colleges including around 2,565 women colleges, which offers undergraduates, postgraduate and research programmes in almost in all the discipline.

At the commencement of the 11th Five Year Plan, there were 19 central universities, 7 Indian Institutes of Technology, 2 Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research, 6 Indian Institutes of Management and 1 school of planning and Architecture apart from other centrally funded educational institutions. During 11th five year plan a large number of institutions both in higher and technical education have been established. Apart from setting up of 13 new central universities 03 state universities have been converted into central universities. Eight new IITs, Seven new IIMs, three IISERs, two new IIMs and many new polytechnics have also been setup. In addition, ten new National Institutes of Technology have been approved and 374 colleges in those educationally backward districts which have Low Gross Enrolment Ratio as compared to the national average are being considered. The proposals for setting up of 14 world class universities and 20 new IITs are still under formulation stage. Most of the universities in India are central or state Government controlled. Since independence, the education policies of successive governments have built on substantial legacies of the Nehruvian period, targeting the core themes of plurality and secularism, with a focus on excellence in higher



education and inclusiveness at all levels. Soon after the independence, Government initiated a plan for the development of higher education in the country as a result of which University Grants Commission came into existence in 1953. During this period, institutions like IITs and IIMs established and contributed quality higher education to the Indian talents.

Drawing on Nehru's vision and articulating most of his key themes, the Kothari Commission (1964-66) was setup to formulate a coherent education policy for India. According to the commission, the most important and urgent reform needed in education is to transform it, to endeavour to relate it to the life, needs and aspirations of the people and thereby make it the powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of the national goals. For this purpose, education should be developed so as to increase productivity, achieve social and national integration, accelerate the process of modernisation and cultivate social, moral and spiritual values.

After around two decades of National Policy on Education (1968), in 1986, Rajiv Gandhi announced a New Education Policy, the National Policy on Education (NPE), which was intended to prepare India for the 21st century. The policy emphasized the need for change: 'Education in India stands at the cross roads today. Neither linear expansion nor the existing pace and nature of improvement can meet the needs of the situation. The 1986 Policy was reviewed by a Committee Constituted in 1990 under the chairmanship of Acharya Ramamurti. On the basis of the recommendations of this Committee, certain provisions of 1986 Policy were modified in 1992.

Higher Education: Issues and Challenges

In our national development process, education system has a very important role to play, specially the higher education. After independence, we wanted to build a modern, strong dynamic and self - reliant India which could stand abreast with the developed nations. While working towards this end, the country has been facing a number of challenges and there are various issues that stand before the system of Higher education. Some broad issues are like knowledge economy, complexities of Indian Federalism (central-states relations), political and legal inertia, politicisation of policy communication and implementation, funding, privatisation, quality assurance, organisational cultures, internationalisation of higher education.

The role of higher education institutions in this emerging scenario of knowledge economy is very crucial and multifaceted. The agenda of higher education institutions (universities) in this scenario may include opening new vistas of learning, new frontiers of researching, academic restructuring, sharing of expertise, innovation, technology transfer, knowledge management, training, employability, entrepreneurship, media convergence and meeting social, cultural and economic challenges thrown by the forces of globalisation. Issues like access, equity, inclusion, quality and excellence are very complex and intertwined with political, economical, demographic and international dimensions.

Quality in higher education is another burning issue, which can be ensured through regular review of the function of the institutions either through self assessment or through out side agencies and by accrediting the institutions. The expansion of higher education over the years has also resulted in educational malpractices, which exist in the form of capitation fees being charged by private institutions at the time of admissions, in addition to the fees and various other charges imposed upon the students. The entry of large number of private institutions has also resulted in rapid proliferation in litigation involving students, teachers, / employees, management of higher educational institutions and universities and other stake holders. In the absence of a speedy justice delivery system for resolution of disputes, dissatisfaction among stakeholders adversely impacts the quality of education and efficient function of the institutions. Also there has been a spurt in activities of Foreign Educational Institutions (EFIs) operating in India since mid 1990s. While some of them are well know institutions, a number of them are resorting to various mal-practices to allure and attract students, particularly in smaller cities and towns. Many of these institutions have come up since there is yet neither a centralised policy nor the regulatory regime.

Policy Measures

University Education Commission (1948-49) rightly felt the uneasy sense of the inadequacy of the higher education system particularly in terms of quality and standards, Reiterating the importance of quality in



higher education and its sustainability, the Kothari Commission in (J 964-66) remarked that "the situation of higher education was unsatisfactory and even alarming in some ways, that the average standards have been falling and rapid expansion has resulted in lowering quality". We have to therefore, gear up the machinery of higher education to fulfill the aspirations of people and be conscious towards quality maintenance as well as its roles to elevate the country to newer heights. In his sagacious message, Dr. Radhakrishnan communicates, "there is need for change in the perception and attitude of universities realising that their field is wider, task is greater and goal is higher in building a strong and happy India. The universities are not merely places of conferring degrees and distinctions. They, besides being places of learning, are also centers of service and wholesome development of human personality; of men and women, turning them into fine human beings. The universities can't stand isolated; they should be active participants in developmental activities, which are benevolent and beneficial for people. It is unfortunate that the hopes, aspirations and expectations of students are not fulfilled to the extent expected. Therefore, it is time to mend and amend the systems which have a negative effect on the society.

With the establishment of new institutions the access to higher education has increased to certain extent, though a lot more is needed to expand the system further. With the implementation of OBC reservations in central education institutions it is hoped that inclusion will be taken forward. This inclusion will strengthen the process of democratisation not only in higher education sector but in overall economic, political and social process. The twin issues of inclusion and equity need to be given due importance while making policies for expanding access to higher education. Imbalances in system whether related to gender, caste, religion or regional, need to be addressed so as to provide opportunities to students belonging to disadvantaged sections. Some important pulls have been identified in the frame work of higher education as those of quantitative expansion to qualitative improvement, of equity and efficiency of value and utility, of commitment and detachment, of integration and differentiation, of concentration and disposal, of autonomy and accountability and lastly of the 'pure' academic and the involved teacher.

Major Concerns

- Over-centralization; Lack of institutional autonomy and accountability; very slow response to changes
- Variable quality; market mismatch; inflexibility
- Little knowledge creation- little interaction with economy, society and other academic/ research institutions
- Difficulties in recruitment and retention of qualified teachers in critical areas
- Diminishing and skewed public funding; system inefficiencies
- Limited access and regional disparity

The major challenge before the Indian higher education is now to create new strategies, policies and programmes of revolutionary nature that would align the two pulls in the same direction.

Era of Education

The 21st century has been widely acclaimed as 'knowledge century era'. Every nation is finding itself to be performing in an increasingly competitive and globalised international environment where the information infrastructure, research and innovation systems, education and lifelong learning, and regulatory frameworks have become -critical parameters. The beginning of our Journey in the 21st century has made us realise that development taking place and likely to take place would require a knowledge society that will bring a balance between scientific, economic and knowledge development with equity, liberty, freedom of the individual sustainability while ensuring the values, ethics and the great cultural heritage of the country. The explosion in knowledge has impacted society and economy to such an extent that many have begun to measure themselves in terms of knowledge. One is naturally reminded of the words of famous Peter Ducker, the next society will be a knowledge society in which knowledge be the resource and knowledge workers will be the dominant workforce. In future, there will be two workforces made up of the under fifties and the over fifties. It can be easily inferred that 'Knowledge' occupies a prominent role in the development discourse and hardly there is any need to emphasise that the triangle of 'knowledge,' 'information' and 'wisdom' shall become the drivers of tomorrow's connection. In this connection, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam put his view that "civilisation that does not have the knowledge of technology or the technological nations without experience of civilisation, can not innovate newer



economy. Indian has a rich civilisation and post independent India has focused itself as a technology leader in space, defence, agriculture and certain areas of industry. With I.T. and telecom emerging as core competence of the nation transforming India into a knowledge society, see the developed India is not too far". Synthesis of above points signifies that society where knowledge is the primary production resource instead of capital and labour is known as knowledge society and efficient utilisation of this existing knowledge can create comprehensive wealth for the nation. A knowledge society has two very important components driven by societal transformation and wealth generation. The societal transformation has to be through large scale development in education, health care, agriculture and governance. These in turn will lead to employment generation, high productivity and rural prosperity. It has been well recognised that creation of new knowledge primarily depends on strengthen the education system, promoting introduce research, innovation in laboratories and trapping of foreign sources of knowledge through open access. It is envisaged that knowledge and wisdom shall shortly become the drivers of tomorrow's economy. The role of universities in this scenario is multifaceted. [t encompasses opening new vistas of learning, academic restructuring, up gradation of technology, training, employability, entrepreneurship, media convergence, globalisation. Universities entering into partnership with other institutions and universities are found to be usually beneficial rewarding and productive. Whether in the arena of international development, educational reform or development of community, it is generally accepted that long term impact and successful implementation of any scheme required coordinated effort of many people involved in all sectors.

Discussion on Continuation on Education

A Microscopic analysis indicates that the following indicators are responsible for declining the standard of higher education:

- The inability of the system to meet the growing demand
- Considerable evidence of Poor teaching
- Ineffective quality control
- 'Ritualisation' of Distance Education
- Poor graduate outcomes ('unemployability' of most graduates from colleges)
- Declining Research performance and productivity

The Yashpal Committee and also the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) have dealt with various issues affecting the higher education system in the country and both have suggested definite frame work for improvement by way of institutional and policy reforms. One of the main suggestions is establishment of an over arching regulatory body, namely National Commission on Higher Education Research (NCHER), which would subsume the function of existing regulatory institutions like UGC, AICTE, NCTE. In addition, other reforms suggested are vide ranging from accreditation of the higher education institutions to curbing malpractices to entry of forcing education providers.

Based on the recommendations and suggestions of Yashpal Committee report and NKC the central government has initiated the process for (i) establishment of educational tribunals (ii) to provide for prohibition of certain unfair practices in technical, medical education institutions and universities (iii) to provide for mandatory accreditation of higher educational institutions and to create regulatory authority for the purpose and (iv) to provide for regulation of entry and operation of foreign educational institution. In addition, a Task force constituted by the MHRD has developed a frame work for the establishment of NCHER. This framework is in public domain for wider consultation and discussion before the final version takes shape.

What need to be done?

National Knowledge Commission (2005- 2008) Chaired by Sam Pitroda rightly emphasised that:

"To respond to the global challenges more strongly than ever before, India today needs a knowledge oriented paradigm of development to give the country a competitive advantage in all field of knowledge. NKC's overarching aim is to transform India into a vibrant Knowledge economy. This entails a radical improvement in existing systems of knowledge as well as the creation of avenues for generating new forms of knowledge". The institutions of higher education that can accept the V challenges and implement the process of change will lead the system in the 21st century. Once this change is accepted the institutions of learning in the years to come. It



will be a paradigm shift for most of the traditional universities in terms of its functioning and activities -its teaching and research, its service to the society, its financing mechanisms. Thus a concerted effort is needed on the part of higher learning institution to make a transition from the traditions of the past to the challenges of the present, and ensure the entry into the future-success will lie only with such institutions. These institutions will be necessitated to adopt the modern mechanism of change in terms of:

- Making teaching programmes more relevant.
- Programmes to meet the societal needs relevant to present day society.
- Constant updating of its programme and courses.
- Encouraging student mobility and programme diversity.
- Accepting horizontal mobility programme.
- Accepting credit transfer system.
- Developing strategic partnership within universities and with the industry.
- Establishing networks and alliances with private funding institutions.
- Floating foundation to meet the demands of higher education in terms of research needs and infrastructural development.
- Valuing the talent and quality requirements.
- Keeping motivation high on agenda.

The higher education system of the 21st century should accept the challenges of change and motivate their faculty and the society to do the same. The institutions of higher learning preparing to enter the new era will have to accept the fact that the systems of today are demanding, competitive and accountable. The higher education system in the country is now being put to test. University should undertake intensive introspection and reorient them to respond adequately to the emerging challenges to the changed economic scenario in the country. In addition, it has the added responsibility to strengthen the value system in the society. At the same time, one should keep in mind it is important to free the system from unnecessary constraints and political interference and provide the needed academic and administrative -system which is accountable.

Summing up

The present system of higher education produced some degree holders with mere knowledge and information in a particular area, but it has failed to develop general employability skills needed for entry level employee. Hence, it is high time for planners, policy makers and practitioners of higher education to ponder over it and make necessary reforms in the course and strategies so that employability skills can be developed among the students. The programme of higher education should be restructured giving more importance the task relating to employability skills. Continuous and comprehensive evaluation should be introduced so that all the basic, higher-order and affective employability skills get due place in both internal and external examination. The classroom should be arranged in such a way that it replicates key features of actual work settings and assigned students tasks similar to those performed by workers in those settings. There should be collaboration between higher education institutions and the employers both public and private so that students get opportunities for active interaction. Now it is the time to bring a qualitative change in the scenario of higher education in India. India has a demographic advantage in the form of a huge number of young people. To make the best, these young minds need to be provided opportunities for accessing quality higher education. Only quality human resource will ensure emergence of a true knowledge society which will ultimately enhance the country's competitiveness in the global economy.

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