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PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Youth in every country is potentially comparable to any other in the world. In India we are fortunate in having the youth in abundance. Only this readily available youth resource, through careful human engineering, that is, through education, has to result into a youth force which is knowledgeable, productive, healthy, creative and caring. If neglected and allowed to drift the nations economic development would suffer. If properly geared and provided opportunities to the fullest, the youth would contribute significantly to the development of the country.

Serious efforts were made to have the education system critically appraised in 1985, in order to develop a pattern of education from pre-primary to higher education stage, which would take care of the abundant human resource available in the country and convert it into human force. The document of new education policy was unduly debated and the plan of action emerged which claimed to revamp the entire system and make it more accountable and meaningful.

As per the new document general courses had to give way to vocational, technical and professional courses at different levels; interaction with agriculture, industry, trade and commerce had to increase; use of audio-visual and computer-based instructions had to shift emphasis from teaching to learning societies, and non-formal, informal open and distance education techniques were to be evolved for mass education as against formal, classroom teaching. This change would positively make our abundant youth resource into youth force and help in the development and healthy progress of the country. Yet with all these efforts in India, we have not been able to provide free, universal, compulsory primary education, let alone higher education.

The problem to Higher Education in India is that the present structure of Higher Education is not only outdated but is also anachronistic and is therefore inherently weak and unequal to the task

All over the world, higher education is in university institutions. They are big campuses with a critical mass of students and staff strength and can sustain large libraries, modern laboratories and advanced center studies with adequate infrastructure. In India the higher education is fragmented and scattered and takes place in nearly 16000 tiny institutions called affiliated colleges, many of which are a trace better than higher secondary schools.

- i) They do not have libraries worth the name.
- ii) They hardly subscribe for even a modest number of national journals, not to speak of international journals.
- iii) The faculty strength is very low.
- iv) The percent of faculty with doctorate qualification is pitiably low: Nil in many cases.
- v) These instructions of higher learning perform only classroom teaching, preparing students for examinations and they function like tutorial colleges.
- vi) The affiliating system, being given up even in the country of its origin, does not exist anywhere in the world, excepting India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

II Unfortunately the later higher education in India takes place only in the ill equipped understaffed, tiny affiliated colleges as can be seen from the following:

- i) 89% of the undergraduate students are in affiliated colleges
- ii) 66% of postgraduate students are in affiliated colleges.
- iii) 82% of the faculty is in the affiliated colleges.

III

The unhappy situation of PG education 66% in colleges that have no research whatsoever. Only 9% of the research scholars are in the affiliated colleges which are now close to 16000 in number.

Can any one knowledgeable in higher education understand much less accept PG education leading to MSC, M.A, M Phil, Ph.D. in institution which have

- i) No sanction for professor position (affiliated colleges are entitled to have only different grades of lecturer).
- ii) No research scholars.
- iii) No semblance of any research & much less basic research.

But this academic wonder is happening in India, and goes on growing strong multiplying, unchecked and unreported. Consequently, it is not only our U.G. education that is of poor quality, but substantial part of our P.G. Education is also poor in quality.

IV It may be hard to believe but true, that out of the 13,150 colleges in 2001-2002 only a third i.e. 5238 satisfy the minimum requirement specified by UGC and have been recognized by UGC, under section 2(f) of the UGC Act.

Challenges to Higher Education

There are many challenges to higher education in India. Dominant among them are coping with large number of students, restructuring available courses and designing new ones, Resource crunch, Providing education for women equality, Equal opportunities to be provided to all, Examination reforms, Imparting value based education. What is needed is a major re-molding ,it must be reconstructed so as to yield desired result in becoming contemporaneous with the practices in higher education in the rest of the world.

1. Coping with large number of Students.

With the ever increasing population there is a simultaneous increase in entrants to colleges. The colleges are faced with a tremendous pressure of students. In spite of admitting

the maximum possible number of students, at times increasing the division permissible within that space provided. Some colleges yield to pressure and run into two or three shifts, creating further additional facilities of buying land, building structures, furnishing laboratories and libraries and recruiting teachers. Unfortunately higher education is regarded in India as an extension of secondary education. It is available at such a negligible cost that all and sundry desire to rush into it without any educational or vocational plan. Students with as low as 35% pass marks study with students who have obtained 80% and above at the S.S.C. level, and therefore the teaching is also geared to average or below average.

In order to meet this challenge, we must emphasize general education complete at S.S.C. The higher secondary stage or Junior college should not be seen as an extension of secondary school stage. Only those students who desire to pursue higher education course and have the aptitude, inclination and a definite career plan should be permitted to move higher up. Furthermore selectively of students to higher educational institutions on the basis of Scholastic Aptitude specific abilities and vocational interest need to be introduced to weed out the undesirable students who create unwieldy classrooms and indiscipline situations. An orientation programme to face new adjustments to a higher stage of education, lecture notes, participation in social welfare activities, utilization of time at hand independent study is necessary for the new entrants at the higher stage, so that they know the value of time, money and energy spent on them. To make the colleges autonomous so that they are free to introduce whatever courses they desire as prescribed by the Board and the university. There is an urgent need to introduce diversified programmes and extreme vocationalisation of courses in Higher Secondary as well as Degree courses to suit modern job and career specification.

2. The second challenge in higher education is to restructure available course and

design new ones. There has been a consistent effort on the part of the government and educational planners, after independence, to make the higher educational courses relevant, need based less bookish and more job oriented.

The most noted contributions in this respect have been made by different commissions appointed by the government namely Dr. Radhakrishnan's Indian University commission

(1948-49), Secondary Education Commission (1952-53), Indian Education commission (1964-66), New Education Policy and the plan of Action (1984-86). In spite of all the reforms recommended, even at present, we still have stereotyped courses at the Higher secondary, offering Arts, Science and Commerce and general courses of the same variety pursued at the degree level.

The most vital step in restructuring and devising new courses is the man power planning, which is totally absent in India and survey of beginning jobs in and around, the vicinity of the educational institution for the apprenticeship/ internship of the trainees. There is all the need for inviting people from industry, commercial establishment, trade, semi government and government concerns to sit with the academician in drafting new courses, so as to make them tailor made in order to fit the actual job specification A total restructuring to modular pattern of courses in the form of units with a greater bias to technical and vocational courses is the need of the hour. The units prescribed should be more in the form of learning modules, integrated, self supporting and self instructive. In order to achieve this we need to tap.

- i) Human resource in the form of dedicated teachers, ingenious educational planners and benevolent educational management consultants.
- ii) Financial resource in the form of state government grants, grants from other central government bodies; grants from industry, commercial establishments and others, for conducting special courses for training man power, as well as for research purpose, and the like.

3. This takes us to the third challenge in Higher education namely resource crunch.

- i) Human Resource and ii) Financial Resource

Human Resource:

Education has become commercialized and available only at a price. The springing of coaching classes, Lack of initiative to introduce new courses or participate in framing new syllabi or be member of the Board of studies to influence policy decision has resulted

continuation of the same syllabi. The human resource crunch is in the form of dedicated teachers, ingenious educational planners and educational management consultants has been the cause of deterioration of higher education.

Financial Resources:

The government grants and aid system to colleges and universities has remained unchanged in spite of innumerable changes in the educational system. Colleges have very little or no support from other government financial agencies and research establishments. The only possibility to improve their finances is to build strong ties with industries and commercial establishments by conducting short term training programmes especially for women students.

4. The Fourth Challenge in higher education is to provide Education for women's equality.

This is emphasized in part IV of the Document of the new Education policy. The objective of education are well defined, namely to make the women knowledgeable, healthy creative, productive and caring formal, non-formal and informal methods have been devised to reach out to all the womenfolk in the country. The challenge before the educational planners is to re-design the curriculum and rewrite the textbook to bring out the female role as effectively as the male one and describe female characters as co-partners in every human endeavour. The concentration of girl's education should be given equal weightage or perhaps more to help them to actualize their potentialities. They will need to develop inner values in girls and provide counselors and psychologists in educational institutions to participate in such developmental programme for girls with absolutely no discrimination.

4. The fifth challenge in Higher Education and the most formidable of all is the smooth conduct of the examinations. Students are being reduced to 'mere machines of memory' and making education synonymous with 'cramming of large amounts of knowledge'. There is need for the development of a phased pragmatic programme of the examination reform and the feasibility of implementation ought to be the criteria for the reform. **Some of the important suggestions.**

- a) Provisions should be made for clearing examinations in parts, in conformity with modular pattern of courses.

- b) Intensive training programmes to be organized for paper setters. So much research has been undertaken to improve the quality of question paper, but this has not reached the examiners.
- c) Question banks be developed to assist paper-setters and detailed marking scheme to provide and ensure objectivity in scoring answer scripts.
- d) Attempts should be made to move towards a situation in which only those who teach will evaluate their students as this will provide an instant feed back to the teachers, to improve the methods of teaching and learning.

This implementation will bring an objective, reliable and valid system instead of subjective, unreliable and a chance system.

5. The sixth challenge is the perception about the development of higher education which has not been entirely in line with the educational needs of the masses, where as a majority of the Indian population lives in village / rural areas (over 70%), and earn their living from working in agricultural farm, most institutions of higher education are located in urban areas and cater to the educational needs, of the upper income of the group of the societ Higher education system in India has hardly done anything to about 40% of people who live in poverty and are illiterate due to the fact that they have no access to worthwhile education. With the amendment of the constitution, the weaker section would have a right to access to education including higher and technical education. In the process of socio-economic development, every section, especially the deprived groups should be evolved through appropriate policies for their empowerment.

6. The last challenge in Higher Education is to make our students sensitive and caring and develop in them the basic values of life. How many of our students learn about universal eternal values, how many students are bothered about growing fanaticism, violence, injustice and superstition. How many feel the need for unity and national integration.

It is the need of the hour to educate our youth to the appreciation of good life. The aim of true education is to help an individual to be an integrated personality to attain harmony of thought feeling and will, to develop good thoughts, good words and good deeds all the time. We must aim at educating every human being to be the locus of wisdom, of moral concern with the absolute freedom to think, to judge and to act by their own rational choice. Then only one can say that we have truly achieved value based education.

