

Challenges concerning higher education

Higher education is basically concerned with human resource development by enhancing knowledge and skills of the people in a society. In order to make a country developed, there is an urgent need to make people functionally literate and economically efficient and then bring them out as productive citizens of a country. Higher education plays a vital role in bringing multifaceted human resource development. Therefore, for making higher education as accessible as possible to all various educational avenues are being created. Besides, a developing country like ours, which has rich demographic dividend, needs the proper forms of skill-based education. Therefore, adequate number of needful educational institutions should be set up in each state for accelerating knowledge and skills of the people living there. To provide access, equity and quality education to the people in a society forms the three basic objectives that have to be kept in mind by an institution while giving education to the learners. Apart from teaching, both research and extension mark another parameter of an educational institution. Education should be imparted in a practical form so that the learners

are able to apply its effectiveness to real life situations and can use it as a means to employment and as a safeguard against undesirable elements and anti-social activities.

Keeping in perspective the importance of higher education in our country, the National Knowledge Commission recommended the establishment of 1500 university in India by 2015 so that Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) can be increased to 15% by 2015 and 30% by 2020. But there is still a long way to go to reach this target and higher education in India is facing many challenges.

Gross Enrolment Ratio is still a big challenge for India. The current enrolment ratio in India is less than the average of lower middle income countries in the world. Although India has huge potential to improve demographically, it has less than 14% GER which is comparatively poor against the increasing population. While India has set the target to meet 15% GER by 2015, and 30% GER by 2020, the average high income countries have a ratio above 60%. For instance, the corresponding ratio is above 80% in the USA, above 70% in Sweden, Norway, New Zealand, above 60% in the UK and Australia, above 40% in

several European countries, and more than 20% in many developed and developing countries such as Mexico, Malaysia, Thailand, Chile and Brazil. There is, again, an inter-state variation in the development of higher education in India in terms of enrolment ratio. Some Indian States have expanded their higher education system fast, but many are still lagging behind. Even within the north-eastern region, there is a wide range of variation in terms of gross enrolment ratio at higher stage.

In 2008-09, Mizoram has the highest number of GER i.e. 23.8% and Assam has the lowest numbers of GER i.e. 8.3%. What India needs at this stage is to make room for more educational avenues at cheaper cost and with faster access. Therefore, until and unless there is marked reform in the educational system and its various sectors, the uplift of the social and economic conditions of this country will remain an unfulfilled dream. Thus, now in India, there is seen a great demand for well managed educational institutions and infrastructure, so that the dream of building a

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knowledge-based society soon becomes a reality.

Besides, the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population is much less educated and skilled than the non-scheduled population both in rural and urban areas. There are marked inequalities in terms of accessing educational opportunities along the urban-rural as well as gender divide with the female population belonging to SC and ST communities living in rural areas being the most disadvantaged group. The total percentage of population with higher education of scheduled tribes in rural areas is 0.7%, of which the males constitute 1.2% and the females 0.2%. The same in the category of scheduled caste is 0.8%.

Besides, the autonomy status is another challenge in higher education system in India. In an educational institution, autonomy is imperative to promote the academic excellence where each and every member is accountable in performing various functions of that institute. Autonomy and accountability are not contradictory; rather they should be complementary to each other. Autonomy without

a corresponding sense of responsibility may lead to chaos.

Finance plays a crucial role in the function of educational programmes. Asymmetrical financial allocation between general higher education and technical education is another problem besides the big gap in allocation of finance between elementary and higher education as a whole. In both cases higher education gets less fund. The National Knowledge Commission in 2005 recommended private-public partnership as an essential step to stimulate private investment in higher education as a means of extending educational opportunities. This would make institutions of higher education for-profit institutions. There is a difference between the national universities proposed by the Knowledge Commission and the Education Commission's proposal on major universities. The Education Commission had proposed liberally funded high quality public universities, having close links with other universities. The Knowledge Commission's proposed national universities can be public or private, in principle; but the Commission's preference seems to be in favour of private universities. After economic liberalization in 1991 higher education

began to be funded by private companies or funding agencies. Besides, public expenditure in higher education is declining. Decline in per student expenditure means decline in real resources available per student on an average which seriously affects the quality of higher education. There were steep cuts in budget allocations for libraries, laboratories, scholarship, faculty improvement programmes, and even for faculty salaries, along with others. Thus, this situation has posed as a challenge to higher education and as a contributing factor to its declining quality.

One of the major problems is the prevailing mismatch system in Indian higher education. The mismatch basically indicates two things: one, there are surplus graduates passing out from the colleges and universities with less skill to ensure employability and other is that the Government has failed to provide employment opportunities to the graduates, and thus as a result it directly and indirectly encourages the export the brain from the state, the so-called brain drain, creates the problems like youth unrest and ultimately makes the youths indulge in various antisocial activities.