
Higher Education in India Challenges Ahead

S. Mumtaj Begum, Lady Doak College, India
S. Pushparaj, Madurai-Kamaraj University College, India

INTRODUCTION

Education is the best means to development and social change. Higher education is important to both individual and societal aspirations. For individuals, education beyond the secondary level is expected to give greater awareness, better thinking, better knowledge and intellectual stimulation on one hand and social esteem, better paying jobs, improvement of economic conditions and a better way of life on the other. For societies, higher education is considered to be essential for technology, productivity and economic growth and to face international competition. Higher education should result in value building, social justice, equal opportunity and democracy. In general education should act as a catalyst for social upliftment, enhancing the returns on investments made in almost every aspect of development effort, be it population control or empowerment of women and weaker sections of society.

The role of higher education in national development is well established. Higher education in India has expanded very rapidly in the last five decades after independence. Thereafter, unlike most developing countries, India can be proud of having developed a system which is capable of meeting most of the human resource needs of the country in all disciplines and professions. However, the issues, which are of paramount concern today, for all of us, are the quality and the relevance of education with specific reference to the changing socio-economic milieu.

The road to the development of a nation is through the education system and if education is compromised at any level, the socio-economic development of the country is jeopardised. There is no denying the fact that tremendous increase in scientific and technical manpower has provided India an adequate substratum to enter the field of globalisation and to become self-sufficient. But, if high moral standards and ethical values is to be maintained in public life, in the professions, in business and in the development of India's rural economy, as well as if students are to be prepared to enter the world of work as productive and responsible citizens, the parents rearing future generations, societal elders and the regional and national policy makers of the present generation need to put in considerable rethinking in respect of the education system and its relevance to the rapidly changing socio-economic environment. Education should be instrumental in developing not only an economically prosperous society, but also one that can flourish in the context of pluralism and democracy. The major problem which we are faced with today, therefore, is to increase the relevance of education to the developmental needs of our country as it enters a very competitive global environment, a country of largely the poor in an agrarian economy, facing a more prosperous global industrial community.

HISTORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

The history of Indian higher education system can be traced back to 1761, when the post secondary institutions were established by the British rulers in the name of Calcutta Madarasa. Mr. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a social reformer and a visionary of the time, formed an association of like-minded people to found The Hindu College, again in Calcutta in 1817, as a private initiative. The period

1817-1852 saw the establishment of a few more colleges at different parts of the country including colleges in Engineering and Medicine both by the then rulers and by various religious groups, mostly Christian missionaries. In 1835, the British Parliament for the first time instituted an enquiry into the state of Indian Education. This resulted in the famous Woods' Despatch in July 1854, proposing the establishment of universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. This proposal to set up 'affiliating universities', affiliating the colleges functioning at that time in the region, on the model of London University was accepted and these three universities were established in 1857. The primary functions of the affiliating universities were prescribing courses and syllabi, holding examinations and conferring degrees on the successful candidates trained at the colleges. Between 1857 and 1900 a few more universities were established by law. This tradition of establishing universities by law-making bodies continues even today. It means the institutions empowered to award degrees – Universities – could be established only by the governments through appropriate legislations and no private universities could be established legally. In 1882 the Government of India appointed another Commission (known as the Education Commission of 1882), which advocated among other things, the gradual withdrawal of the State from the direct support and management of institutions of higher education. That was the first indication of the government's resolve to leave higher education to private initiatives. Based on the Education Policy of 1913 some more universities were established both under public and private support through appropriate legislations.

However, after India became independent from the British rule in 1947, there was a change in the perception. The majority of the large Indian population had no way of supporting their own education. There was a dearth of educated human resource to man the nation-building activities. The political leaders, therefore, decided that providing education at all levels was the state responsibility. Accordingly, the then national government virtually "nationalized" all the existent universities and the colleges and commenced funding them directly. Those institutions that were originally established and maintained by the private philanthropies were taken over by the government and came to be known as the grant-in-aid institutions run with state support apart from the government colleges and public universities.

The number of universities grew from 20 at the time of Independence to more than 200 by late 1980s and the number of colleges increased from 500 to about 5000 during that period. By then, the resources of the government reached its limit and most of the state governments stopped establishing or funding new colleges. The students' preferences had also shifted from academic disciplines to professional programmes of study, particularly areas related to engineering, medicine, management studies and computer application etc. The combined effect of these two factors resulted in the emergence of a new category of private institutions (run by private individuals/organizations, charging exorbitant fees). The establishment of these private institutions was encouraged by the government, which monitored their functioning through academic regulations imposed by the affiliating universities.

This new crop of private initiatives locally called as 'self financing' institutions now outnumber the public ones in most of the states, more so in the southern states of India. Apart from this phenomenon, another offshoot has been the growing number of self-financed courses offered in the aided colleges.

In recent years, with the withdrawal of government aid for fresh ventures in higher education and with the opening up of the economy in terms of globalization, foreign universities are increasingly advertising their courses in India and the allure of the 'Study Abroad' programmes are catching up with prospective students. With banks and other financial institutions offering educational loans for higher studies, it appears as if the subsidized form of higher education is a relic of the past.

As of now the mission of private higher education in India is to capitalize on the demand for higher education in some selected areas for profit. Corporate groups and others (local or foreign) who have so far invested in the 'business' of higher education are largely motivated by the pecuniary returns.

DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITIES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Higher education consists of teaching, training, and research in natural and physical science, social science, humanities, medicine and engineering. The main players in the higher education system in the country are:

- **University Grants Commission (UGC)** is responsible for coordination, determination and maintenance of standards, release of grants.
- **Professional Councils** like Medical Council of India, All India Council of Technical Education, Dental Council of India, etc. are responsible for recognition of courses, promotion of professional institutions and providing grants to undergraduate programmes and various awards.
- **Central Government** is responsible for the major policy relating to higher education in the country. It provides grants to the UGC and establishes central universities in the country. The Central Government is also responsible for declaration of Educational Institutions as 'Deemed to be University' on the recommendation of the UGC.
- **State Governments** are responsible for the establishment of State Universities and colleges, and provide 'plan grants' for their development and 'non-plan grants' for their maintenance. The coordination and cooperation between the Union and the States is brought about in the field of education through the Central Advisory Board of Education.
- **Special Constitutional responsibility of the Central Government:** Education is on the 'Concurrent list' subject to Entry 66 in the Union List of the Constitution. This gives exclusive Legislative Power to the Central Government for co-ordination and determination of standards in institutions of higher education or research and scientific and technical institutions.

GROWTH, DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY

The higher education system in India is one of the largest in the world in terms of the number of students involved. There has been a remarkable increase in the number of higher educational institutions in the last 50 years in India.

Trends in the Indian Higher Education Sector

- The phenomenal quantitative expansion of colleges and universities in the past 50 years clearly shows the increasing demand for higher education in India.
- The all India rise in enrolment in the last twenty years shows that the number of students enrolled in institutions of higher education increased from about 0.1 million in 1947 to 7.7 millions in 1999-2000. The percentage growth of enrolment shows a rising trend in the pre-reform period (prior to 1991) while the trend is declining in the post-reform period.
- The growth of enrolment in higher educational institutions is faster than the growth in number of higher educational institutions.
- The growth rates are doubled among the students enrolled in post-graduate and research, while the number of institutions for post-graduate and research studies has grown at a slower rate in 1990s than in 1980s.
- Though the enrolment has been increasing in absolute terms, only 7% of the population in the age group 17 to 24 attends higher educational institutions in India, as against 92% of the eligible age-group population attending higher educational institutions in USA, 52% in UK and 45% in Japan.
- The stream-wise enrolment of all students in higher education reveals that about 62% take up liberal arts, science and commerce.
- At the time of independence in 1947, about 80% of the students in higher education were enrolled in general education while about 20% were enrolled in professional or special education. In the next two decades an increasingly larger number of students opted for professional or

specialized higher education. In 1967, about one-third of students were enrolled in professional education. This trend got reversed thereafter. In 1996 less than 10% students opted for professional education and over 90% students were enrolled in general higher education. One of the important reasons for decreased enrolment in professional education is the very high fee charged.

- About 88% of all students in higher education are enrolled at the undergraduate level. Less than 10% of these students are enrolled at the postgraduate level and less than 1% is doing M.Phil. or Ph.D. It is interesting to note that over 83% of all higher education students are enrolled in colleges and not in universities. The universities in India are mainly those funded by the government whereas colleges are increasingly self-financing. Yet the intake capacity of students is much higher in colleges, the universities mainly catering to only research and doctoral programmes. Over 88% of undergraduate students, about 55% of postgraduates students, over 9% of research students and about 41% of diploma/certificate students are enrolled in colleges. Thus, government funds reach fewer students in higher education.
- The male/female ratio of all students in general higher education declined from 8.29:1 in 1947 to 1.69:1 in 1996. The percentage of girl students in this category grew from 10.77 in 1947 to 37.19 in 1996. The male/female ratio in professional or special higher education declined from 9.98:1 in 1957 to 3.12:1 in 1996. The percentage of girl students in this category grew from 9.11 in 1957 to 24.3 in 1996. The growth rate is higher in general education.
- The number of girl students has been growing both in general, as well as in professional higher education. The percentage of girl students in general higher education grew from 10.77 in 1947 to over 37 in 1996. Sex-wise analysis of enrolment data shows that women students prefer higher education in the Arts, revealing a strong presence of gender stereotypes even in education. Only a smaller percentage goes in for professional courses.
- Before Independence the enrolment of girl students as a percentage of total enrolment was less than 10%. It rose from 14 % in 1950-51 to 34.7% in 1998-99. In the last ten years, leaving aside research, the enrolment of girl students witnessed only a marginal rise. The increasing cost of higher education serves as a dampening effect on the spread of higher education among girls.
- The student-teacher ratio has increased from 12.6:1 in 1965-66 to 21.7: 1 in 1998-99. In the two decades of the seventies and eighties, the average of this ratio was about 15.2:1. In the mid-nineties, it jumped to 20.7:1 and rising ever since. This steady rise may also be largely due, among other things, to the establishment of self-financing colleges where generally guest teachers do most of the teaching.

With the growth in the number of universities, colleges, enrolment of students and teachers, it might appear that the higher education system in the country has grown considerably. Actually it has to be seen in terms of proportion of the whole population. According to government sources, the percentage of students in the age group of 17 to 23 years enrolling in higher education is just about 6 percent. Ninety four percent of the youth in this age group has no access to higher education.

It is being increasingly realised that public budgets cannot adequately fund higher education, particularly when sectors of mass education are starved of even bare needs. As a consequence, several policy directions on new ways of diversifying resources, resulting from a variety of pressures and opportunities are continually emerging with several alternatives, including hike in student fees, student loans and privatisation. The most serious casualty of all these is undermining equity of access to higher education. Equity and social justice demand that newly emerging beneficiaries from the secondary education sector, who increasingly represent vulnerable groups are able to afford an access to higher education and eventually for an upward mobility (Punnayya Committee, 1993, p.18).

With the advent of globalization, the norms laid down by the World Bank and the IMF have to be complied with in the framing of national economic policies. The Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) of the IMF (as assisted by WTO) require countries to cut down budgetary allocation on education and all other social sectors to minimum levels so that government spending is reduced and debt can be

serviced. Governments in third world countries including India have decreased control over their economies and a great majority of their people is enduring increased poverty and decreased access to basic services (education, health care, sanitation, etc.). In order to reduce the burden, the government has given freedom to the private sector to open colleges/institutions, thus creating a market price for education, which reduces education to the level of a business racket. Apart from this, the inability to shoulder the burden of education and the shifting of the burden has resulted in the creation of a breeding ground for infestations in the educational sector that eventually affect the HRD of the entire nation.

REDUCED FUNDING OF HIGHER EDUCATION

India has the second largest system of higher education and its per capita income is one of the lowest in the world. Government has been the major source of funding higher education and the funding from the other sources like student fees and endowments has been low. From 1968, the target of the government has been to keep aside 6% of National Income for education as a whole of which 10% may be the share for higher education. Though, India plans to spend as much as 6% of the GNP for education as announced, it could not reach that level because of competing priorities.

As far as the financial allocation to higher education during the plan periods is concerned, the downward trend in resource allocation shows that the plan expenditures on higher education have been on the decline since Fifth Five-year Plan (1974) onwards. At present, the share in the Tenth Plan is only 10.5%. It is disheartening to note that while the enrolment has increased by 2½ times, the plan expenditure on higher education has been reduced by more than 50% in the last two decades. The Educational Expenditure as percentage of GDP also shows a downward trend after 1990-91. The relative priority accorded to higher education can be measured in terms of the share of higher education in GNP. Starting from a very low figure of 0.19 percent of GNP invested in higher education in 1950-51, the share of higher education increased five-fold by 1980-81; but it came down to nearly one percent of GNP after three decades of development. But ever since, allocation of resources has been steadily coming down: it tended to decline to 0.4 percent of GNP by mid 1990s.

The decrease in expenditure on higher education is obviously, due to the World Bank dictated policies implemented by the Government since 1986 when the National Policy on education was adopted. The economic reforms policies introduced in the beginning of the 1990s further accentuated the problem of funding higher education in India.

This constraint of the public resources had made the government to change its policy of State funding the higher education and look for alternate and non-conventional sources to sustain the higher education system. Privatisation of higher education is the major option and hence the governments at both national and state levels promote them both directly and indirectly, which advocates shifting the funding of universities to a system of student funding.

It is assumed that the private initiative would contribute the basic infrastructure, lands and buildings and the recurring expenditures like the salary of the employees would be met by the income generated by the tuition and other fees as well as from the contributions of the society as donations and endowments. However, in practice, the private providers were looking for the resources even for the basic infrastructure. For much sought after professional programmes, there are one time capitation fee, running into hundreds of thousands, development fee, library and computer fees, and above all the tuition fees that the students have to pay. Though the private providers could get loans from the institutional finance systems, they have to be repaid and serviced. All the cost should be met out of the funds collected one way or other from the students. In a third world country like India, there are not many philanthropies who could contribute substantial donations like one sees in the western world. By and large, most of the private institutions are dependent on the parents/guardians of the students for their contributions and there appears to be no other resources forthcoming from any sector. Thus, higher education in India is facing a financial

crunch due to the twin problems of increasing needs and increasing costs on the one side and decreasing public budgetary resources on the other side.

- A mass education in a rapidly urbanising society has increased the total expenditure on higher education by the state more than 200 times between the years 1950-51 and 1995-96 whereas the budgetary allocation is dwindling from 6.79% in 1950-51 to 2.8% in 1999-2000 and 2.2% in 2001-2002. This conflict between growing individual demand for education and the economic inability of the society to satisfy has paved the way for privatization, commercialization and commodification of education.
- The government's cutting outlays to educational institutions results in lack of infrastructure, outdated resources, loss of staff, erosion of salaries, poor working conditions, increase in fees because of which there is increase in loans and debt levels in society.
- The access to education is being threatened or reduced for the economically weaker sections of the society.
- This widens the gap between the rich and the poor resulting in evolving a situation where there are opportunities for the rich to have formal education and the weaker sections to have non-formal education causing a societal imbalance with all its repercussions (violence, terrorism, communal strife, etc). It will again impose more of a financial burden on the government and increase the financial crisis.
- The policy of reservation for the weaker section of the society that ensures social justice is given a go by.
- Financial crisis has resulted in the creation of an open-global market where educational services can be traded to the highest bidder. As a result there has been a quantitative expansion of self-financing academic institutions (esp. technical educational institutions) with deteriorating qualities.
- The expansion of higher education in India has been poorly planned and highly erratic. There exist a number of sub-viable institutions and almost 40% of the affiliated colleges are not eligible for assistance from the University Grants Commission as they do not fulfill the minimum conditions that have been provided for infrastructure facilities and teachers.
- Expenditure per student indicates quality and efficiency of education. AICTE's estimate of expenditure is Rs.16,800 per student per annum whereas the self-financing institutes spend as low as Rs.6000 per student per annum. This result in overcrowded classrooms, poorly equipped institutions, underpaid/ discriminatorily paid teachers, heavy workload with no job security and frequent change of teachers dampening the quality of teaching and learning.
- More than 20,000 graduates are passing out every year. The cream goes abroad for better employment opportunities and the mediocre stays back. The consequence will be a reduction in the number of intellects and technicians. This will force a developing country like India to become intellectually dependant upon developed countries.
- Less priority is given to research, which is the prime area in higher education for any country. It is very important for not only technological advancement but also to find solutions to all socio-economic problems, thereby making the country independent both technically and intellectually. The plan expenditure declined by 11% and 60% on research in general and technical education respectively.
- Enrolment of students has grown at exponential rate against a marginal increase in the strength of teachers. The obvious consequences have been general decline in the academic standards, serious reflection on the quality of teaching and the breakdown of teacher-student relationship.

The students are not getting the quality of learning they need to prepare them for research oriented studies, successful living and to make meaningful contribution to society. A national 'learning' deficit will result in a national 'earning' deficit.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION

To promote and maintain the standards of higher education, the institutions had the traditional methods of inspection, regulation and statutory obligations of internal academic audit. Very recently, based on the recommendations of the New Educational Policy (1992), External Quality Assurance mechanisms were conceived and established for higher education at the national level. At present, there are two such national accrediting agencies functioning viz., National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), which assesses and accredits the entire higher education system except the technical education and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA), which accredits the technical education. NAAC assesses and grades all the post-secondary system of education at the Institutional level, while the NBA does it at the program level of the technical educational offerings. It has now become mandatory for both the general and technical education institutions to get accredited whether it is public or private. The private institutions consider the accreditation status as a sure way of attracting students. Both public and private higher education institutions are mandated to go through the accreditation process once in five years. The eligibility criteria formulated by these National External Quality assurance agencies stipulate that any institution that seek accreditation should have been functioning for five years and should have sent out two batches of students for graduation.

The educational institutions that are not able to fulfil the stipulations of the NAAC and NBA, go in for ISO 9001 certification which they badly need to market their products. Under the market economy, the demand and supply factor themselves will bring about the equilibrium by rejecting those institutions of low quality. But, in a country where the education infrastructure is not sufficient to meet the demand for education services, this kind of accreditation is superfluous, as even those institutions without accreditation will continue to mushroom all over the country. The quality of an institution can be clearly judged by the local public who are aware of what is going on locally (as has been the case so far). Inspection-time shows and performances are well known to the Indian public who has gone through that stage during their schooling.

The rush during admissions can be considered as the best measuring rod for quality service. There is also wastage of the very scarce and precious resources, as money has to be shelled out for getting accredited. Some government and private institutions that are crying out for more buildings have to divert its resources towards getting accredited. The government is trying to minimize its responsibility by giving only accreditation and not starting institutions of its own. This kind of policy will only favor the wealthy at the cost of the poor. Tax cuts favouring the rich and such education reforms that punish the poor will take us back to the robber baron era.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND GENDER ISSUES RELATED TO HIGHER EDUCATION

The Indian constitution places a special responsibility on the Government for the educational advancement of all its citizens. In the history of independent India, the Central and State Governments invested heavily on education, especially on the education of the backward communities and the socially suppressed, because the architects of independent India felt that education is an effective mechanism for achieving upward mobility in modern society. Equality of educational opportunities thus becomes one of the cherished goals of the Government. The National Policy of Education of 1986, updated in 1992, proposed a dual track approach, designed to promote simultaneously adult literacy and primary education, with the focus on girls. The Government has identified the following priorities:

- Access to and improved quality of education for girls and women
- Removal of obstacles like high tuition fees
- Location of schools nearer to their place of living
- Elimination of gender stereotyping in education.

Indian Constitution should guarantee not only the right to education to all the Indian citizens irrespective of their caste, religion and creed but also economic status, which will definitely reduce the gender inequality. India needs to follow the example of countries such as South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore that invested vast amount of resources on education and advanced rapidly thereafter and have never looked back. India needs to develop these far-sighted approaches for the rapid development of the country. Thus the Indian Government should shoulder the responsibility of providing education by increasing the budgetary allocation for higher education. Care must be taken to allocate these resources on the kind of education that will impart knowledge to the students, especially women students, by their scientific and logical approach but also mould the precious character of the students by making them think and work individually and independently. The history of the movement for improving women's status all over the world and especially in India emphasises from the beginning that education is the most significant instrument for enhancing the status of women from a subjugated position in society. Increase of educational facilities and opportunities and the removal of traditional barriers on entry of women to particular branches and levels of education, came to be supported by champions of women's emancipation from the 19th century onwards.

Social reformers in India emphasized the crucial importance of education of women to improve their status in society. According to the early reformers, the main purpose for educating women was not to make them more efficient and active units in the process of socio-economic or political development, but to make them more capable of fulfilling their traditional roles in society as wives and mothers. Education for women was regarded as a means to improve their status within the family and not to equip them to play any economic role in the wider social context. According to R.C. Majumdar, the absence of any economic compulsion was the main reason for the slow progress of women's education in the country. The post-independence era saw a new dimension added to women's education. The constitution had accepted equality of women and their need to play multiple roles in society. It was for the first time accepted that the general purpose and objective of women's education was in no way different from the purpose and objective of men's education. It was decided that at the secondary and even at the university stage women's education should have a vocational/occupational bias. The attitudinal change in the society coupled with the government's policy during in favour of women students have paved the way for increase in their level of education - both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Realizing the importance of the role of education to uplift the weaker section of the nation and the majority of the population being economically poor, the state took the major responsibility for funding the essential maintenance and development requirements of the schools, colleges and the universities. Main aim of such a policy is to bring about adequate access, equity and quality of education. With the aim of increasing the literacy rate in the country, steps were taken to introduce and popularize the non-formal education. But the situation in the country has totally changed in the post reform period. While examining the finances of universities in India in the post reform period, Tilak and Rani (2002) found that in the decade 1990, in a sample of around 40 universities, there have been modest to steep increases in students' fees of various types such as, tuition fees, examination fees, admission fees, registration fees, entrance examination, hostel and miscellaneous services, like application forms, brochures, and so on. Government grants to the universities have declined or remained stagnant in real prices, and some times even in current prices. Cost recovery measures, particularly hike in fees, are increasingly resorted to in several universities. Majority of the universities (as many as 20 universities) have already increased their fee, which covered more than 20 per cent of their recurring income. The share of fee income in recurring expenditures of the universities was on the rise and reached up to 22 per cent of recurring cost in the year. This definitely suggests that fees have already been increased. It should be borne in mind that resources that can be raised through fees can be at a maximum level of 15 to 25 per cent on an average of the recurring expenditure over a period of next ten years (UGC, 1993; 2000). The recommendations of the Birla–Ambani Report (A Policy Framework for Reforms in Education, April 24, 2000) will lead to

the neglect of the study of humanities in colleges and universities. The crass commercialization of education will pay way for creating elitist trend in higher education. The poor will be forced to do courses on humanities while science education will become the prerogative of the rich leading to the neglect of humanities in the institutions of higher learning.

It is unambiguous that Policy of the Government of India now encourages augmentation of resources by each institution for covering a larger portion of cost of education. The recent policy directions in India exacerbate full cost recovery ('user pays' principle) from students even in public higher education institutions through hike in fees and introduction of self-financing courses and seats in tune with liberalisation policies. Under the deep waves of globalisation and competition, important economic rationale for government funding for higher education is neglected. With economic reforms and other pressures of the government, higher education has been shifted to the list of non-merit good from the list of merit good. It has ignored expenditure on education as a social investment and the complementary nature of public and household expenditure on education. It is to be realised that the funding of higher education requires both public and private resources under economic austerity. However, the role of the state and public support to higher education remains essential to ensure its educational, social and institutional missions.

Thus, instead of trying to provide good education to all children, or at least to all the able children from every stratum of society, it is available to a small minority, which is usually selected not on the basis of talent but on the basis of paying capacity. This position is thus undemocratic and inconsistent with the ideal of an egalitarian society. The introduction of self-financing colleges has nullified the policy of reservation followed by the Government and the country has gone back to the old system of educating only a group – the so-called elite society. Traditional casteism is replaced by an economic classification of castes – THE HAVES AND HAVE-NOTS. If this system of education continues, it will widen the gender gaps in educational attainments because choices will have to be made on who will be educated. In a society like India, preference will be given to the boy child as education of the girl child is considered to be a bad investment as she is bound to marry and leave home one day, to live with her husband's family. Therefore, the state should protect people, especially women from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

CHALLENGES

Today, with more than 250 universities, 10,700 colleges, and 8 million students India has one of the world's largest higher education systems. In the era of globalisation drastic changes have to be made in the field of education so that India can compete with the developed countries.

Communalisation of education

In the 1990's higher education in India was intensely communalised. Since independence, Indian universities have been imparting secular scientific education to youth of this country. The communal forces that came to power in the late 90's try to polarize people using the media of education. This dangerous trend of toxification has to be checked forth with.

Adverse Selection of faculty

The teaching shops employ unqualified, under paid unsuited persons as faculty in the educational institutions. Quality of education can be ensured only by proper selection of faculty. In order to retain the talent in an educational institution, the status and service conditions of the faculty should be up to the mark. Poor pay structure and working conditions will lead to 'Adverse Selection' and 'Moral Hazards'.

Non-affordability

Higher education in India at present is becoming costlier, especially in respect of engineering and other specialised courses. Research reveals that dropout is also influenced to some extent among the

school going students that they cannot afford higher education even after successful completion of school education. About one-third is dropping out before completing primary school and only an estimated 20% is completing high school. Dropout problems will remain high as long as higher education is costly. The solution suggested is that they can avail themselves of bank loans. Loans require collateral security, which will be beyond the reach of many. Therefore higher education must be subsidised by the Government to make it affordable to all deserving Indian students.

Lack of sufficient funds

The Central and the State governments have not increased the allotment of funds to provide better infrastructure facilities for higher education. The gap between the rural and urban areas continues to widen because institutions placed in urban areas improve their facilities by collecting supplementary fees. To overcome this dichotomy, the allocation of funds should be 'need based' rather than 'performance based'.

Socially irrelevance of courses

In the name of innovation in the curriculum, new courses in the place of conventional courses are given in response to labour market demands. These courses are multidisciplinary and short term in nature. This Cafeteria type of education given at present by the private institutions is neither innovative nor socially relevant. As a result the very purpose of introduction of such innovative courses (employability) gets defeated. Therefore care must be taken while revamping the curriculum.

Poor Student-Faculty Ratio

Indian universities have a significantly large student-faculty ratio, which makes it difficult for the teachers to have individual attention. The practice of the institutions so far has been to increase the student strength in response to increased demand without a consequent increase in faculty strength. Such an approach has corroded the quality of teaching.

Lack of transparency in higher education

Research studies highlight the need to develop transparency, which can ensure accountability in the entire system of education. Transparency in admission of students and appointment of faculty procedure will remove the corrupt practices, which will improve the quality of education and will help the Indian education system to compete in the global level.

Poor infrastructure

Most of the higher educational institutions do not have the minimum required infrastructure. The basic physical infrastructure- lecture halls, well equipped laboratories, adequate library resources, facilities for sports, recreation and special living facilities with good environment and information infrastructure that provide students with high speed terminals will motivate not only the Indian students to concentrate on learning but also attract foreign students to India.

CONCLUSION

The basic principles governing education should be affordability and accessibility and by treating it as a commercial service, citizens of developing countries will be deprived of their fundamental rights. Education is not a saleable commodity, it is the fundamental right of every human being and each country has to formulate its own education policies as per the local culture and situation. It is not something where the same yardstick can be applied across the globe. Therefore, a strong and stable Government with accountability, freedom from corruption, efficiency and transparency should shoulder the greatest responsibility of providing education to all the citizens of the country to preserve the values of democracy and social justice so as to achieve a human centred sustainable economic development in India.

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