LET US TALK REFORMS

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of India as a service-based, knowledge driven economy has put the spotlight on human capital. Higher education is essential to build a workforce capable of underpinning a modern, competitive economy. For a vast populated and socially diverse emerging country like India higher education becomes all more important to supplant physical capital with social capital to achieve faster economic growth along with social cohesion, cultural ‘development’ and ethical uprightness in all fields. While there is a growing demand for access to higher education, the challenges in providing quality higher education are by no means small – lack of wherewithal being primary. While size seems to be the focus by planners and entrepreneurs in the field, quality has suffered due to massification, commoditization, and poor demonstration. This paper seeks to explore the problems of the current system of higher education and key features of several pending Bills on Higher education in India.

Keywords: Higher Education system, Policy, Bills

INTRODUCTION

Problems of Higher education system in India

While the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in the higher education in India has seen close to a seventy fold increase in the past six decades, the number of teachers has seen slightly over a twenty fold increase. This has resulted in a pupil to teacher ratio of 40, which is double the global average. However, despite the increase in enrolment, the GER at 11% (Eleventh Five Year Plan) is pegged at half the average for Asian countries at 22% and the world average at 23.2%. The daunting task ahead of India is rather apparent when compared to countries such as USA at 83%, Sweden at 82% and Norway at 80%. India has as low as 10% access to higher education. Since the early 1990s, China's post-secondary enrolments grew from 5 million to 27 million, while India's expanded from 5 million to just 13 million. In the age group 22-35 years, over 15% in the northern region and 13% in the southern region have access to higher education. In the north-central region, the number is just 10% for men and 6% for women whereas in the northeast, only 8% men and 4% women have access to higher education. Similarly, just 2% of the rural population is educated beyond higher secondary level, compared to 12% of the urban population and just 3% of women got a college education compared to 6% of men. To meet this colossal demand, higher education in particular has been allocated a historic five times increase in the total planned outlay for education in the Eleventh Five Year plan. Currently, the Government spends around 3.8% of its GDP on education. India is faced with the challenge of not only creating infrastructure to meet this demand, but at the same time ensure quality.

Who will solve the problems?

Option 1

No country in this world has that much of resources that the govt. single handedly can cater the demand of higher education system in India. We need three types of institutions
1. Pure Govt.
2. Privately owned but regulated by the Govt.
3. PPP Model (Public Private Partnership model)
4. And a regulator whose job is to control the quality of education.

**Option 2**

Another option is that we can make primary and secondary education can be made state responsibility while higher education can be left to the privately owned but govt. regulated institutions. If the 65% youths of India who are below 35 years of age are not properly trained and educated, there can be unrest in the society.

**Policy Vacuum**

Several bills were introduced during the Plan period to improve the quality and transparency in higher education but it is kept pending for deliberations in the parliament.

1. **Higher Education and Research Bill, 2011**—The Bill aims to consolidate multiple regulations and improve transparency by the creation of a single super regulator, the National Commission for Higher Education and Research, in the place of existing regulators such as the UGC and AICTE.

Key features:
- Specifying norms and standards, and requirements for academic quality
- Authorizing institutions to confer awards
- Advising Central/state governments

Expected outcome:
- Simplification of regulatory environment and enablement of stability of policy
- Promotion of autonomy and innovation in higher education

2. **The National Academic Depository Bill, 2011**—The Bill seeks to establish a national database of academic awards in electronic format through an identified and registered depository.

Key features:
- Mandatory for every academic institution to lodge academic awards with the depository
- Academic institutions, students and employers to have online access to national database

Expected outcome:
- Would ensure confidentiality, authenticity, online verification and easy retrieval of information

3. **The National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010**—The National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill aims to make accreditation and rating of all higher education institutions mandatory in India.

Key features:
- Establishment of National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for accrediting and rating all higher education institutes in the country.
- Central and state universities, deemed universities, colleges and polytechnics to come under the purview of the Bill.
Expected outcome:

- The Compulsory accreditation would establish uniform standards and norms across institutions and thereby enhance the quality of higher education in the country.

4. The Educational Tribunal Bill, 2010- The Educational Tribunal Bill aims to expedite and enable more effective litigation involving students, teachers, employees and the management of institutions.

Key features:

- Establishment of education tribunals (ETs) at the national (National Education Tribunal, NET) and state levels (State Education Tribunal, SET)
- Establishment of ETs with jurisdiction over matters of affiliation with universities, in relation to unfair practices, the service matters of teachers or employees and disputes of institutions with regulators.

Expected outcome:

- Ease for settlement of disputes in a sector that suffers from complex and multiple laws.

5. Foreign Educational Institutions Bill, 2010- The Foreign Education Institutions Bill aims to regulate the entry and operation of foreign institutes in India. The Bill is a key legislation to encourage private sector participation in India, given the absence of any regulatory framework for FEIs.

Key features:

- Regulation of campuses as well as collaborations of FEIs with Indian institutes.
- Prior track record of 20 years in home country required with a minimum corpus of INR500 million.

Expected outcome:

- Mechanism to ensure that only reputed institutes operate in India.
- Significant quality improvement due to increase in competition as well as partnerships and collaborations.

CONCLUSION

India cannot build internationally recognized research-oriented universities overnight, but the country has the key elements in place to begin and sustain the process. India will need to create a dozen or more universities that can compete internationally to fully participate in the new world economy. Without these universities, India is destined to remain a scientific backwater. A positive step has begun with the start of the nation wide consultation for the formulation of New Education Policy. At present the govt. is following the Education Policy of 1986 with some amendment which has lost its relevance in the present globalised era.

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