INDIAN SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CONSTRAINTS IMPAIRING THE QUALITATIVE GROWTH OF THE SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Education plays an important role in the economic development of a country. Higher education refers to education imparted by higher secondary institutions, colleges and universities. Its main task is to equip the students with advanced knowledge which forms the basis of a country’s economic development.

Education in India has a rich tradition and has been given a lot of importance right from the days of the freedom fighters. The opening of the Indian economy in 1991 re-emphasized the role of education. Basically Indian Universities are of two types: Unitary Universities; and Affiliating Universities. In addition there are two types of University Institutions: Deemed-to-be Universities; and Institutions of National Importance.

Colleges in turn can be classified as: Government Colleges; Privately Managed Colleges; University Colleges; and Professional Colleges. The two important players in the system are the UGC and Professional Council.

While there has a quantitative expansion of Indian higher education, with India ranking third in the world in terms of enrolment, the same cannot be said about the quality imparted. A number of problems are plaguing our system. They include financial paucity, inadequate infrastructure, rampant corruption, faulty exam system, dualism, faculty crunch, obsession with ITC, neglect of research and absence of practical training.

India does have a few positives. The need of the hour is for educational reforms. We have to work on our weaknesses and with proper regulation and supervision India can use her renowned Brain Power to be a ‘Knowledge Global Leader’ in the future.

Keywords: Structure of Indian Higher Education; Constraints, Knowledge Commission; Knowledge Global Leader.

INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that, education occupies an important place in the current globalized economy. With the universal recognition of the significance of investment in human capital, economies all over the world are increasingly becoming knowledge driven, resulting in education emerging as one of the most important determinants of the social and economic progress of a nation.

Higher Education in India refers to education imparted by post higher secondary institutions, colleges and universities. It is generally called Higher Education because it forms the top most stage of formal education. Therefore, it follows that the most important responsibility of higher education is to equip
the students with advanced knowledge, which forms the ultimate basis of a country’s economic development.

In this Paper an attempt has been made to look into the origin of education in India, discuss the structure and growth of Indian higher education and most importantly deal with the constraints confronting our system and conclude by making recommendations which would promote India’s standing in the intellectual global arena.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study is based on the following objectives:

1. India has had a rich tradition of higher education and the paper attempts to look into the origin and structure of higher education in India;
2. It aims at examining the various constraints impairing India’s intellectual growth;
3. India has all the potential to be an intellectual leader in the near future and the study looks into the factors that can accentuate India’s growth process

Origin of Education in India

Education has always been given a very important place in Indian society. Our Freedom Fighters have throughout their struggle for freedom, laid stress on the fundamental role of education in the context of national development.

Our system has a long and rich tradition. In the past Takashila (6th century BC), Vikramsila (5th century BC) and Nalanda (4th century BC) were renowned centers of learning. The three main universities namely university of Madras (now Chennai), University of Calcutta (now Kolkata) and University of Bombay (now Mumbai) were established in 1857 with English as the medium of instruction.

After being liberated from the colonial rule in 1947, the initial period witnessed a swing towards socialist learning, under the possible influence of the erstwhile Soviet Union. The seeds were sown for expanding the built in capacity of higher education institutes like the IITs, so as to generate specialized workforce.

The 70s and 80s saw a policy of protection being followed and consequently not much of state investments in the said period, were in higher education. It was only after liberalization that the importance of education was re-emphasized. An important step, in the direction of education policy was the setting up of a Committee, with Mr. Mukesh Ambani as the convener and Mr. Kumarmangalam Birla as the member to make recommendations as regards educational reforms in India. The Report was submitted in April 2000.

According to them the challenge before our system of education was to upgrade our education content and process and to initiate and foster a competitive knowledge economy. At present, the Report believed that there was too much of government control and education should best be left to the private players.

In 2005 the then Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh optimistically forecasted, that the 21st century would be a ‘knowledge century’. This implied that there would be a socio-economic transformation through the medium of education.

A Knowledge Commission was appointed in June 2005 under the Chairmanship of Mr. Sam Pitroda and it submitted its Report to the Prime Minister in 2006. It believed that the destiny of India rested in the hands of the youth. Bearing in mind the importance of universities, they were of the view that the latter has to be flexible, innovative and creative, while simultaneously being accountable to the society. They also advocated greater resource allocation to higher education.
Structure of Indian Economy

Basically Indian Universities are of two types:

1) Unitary Universities and
2) Affiliating Universities

**Unitary Universities:**

They are confined to a single campus and offer both Post Graduation and Under Graduation instructions.

Among the Central Universities is the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). It was established by an Act of Parliament in 1985. It aims at providing access to higher education. Distance which falls under IGNOU, has as its major objective providing wider access to higher education. Another form of the Unitary University is the City University which has constituent Colleges.

**Affiliating Universities:**

These universities which are the most common are characterized by a central campus and have within their domain departments/schools imparting Post Graduate teachings and Research. Under their jurisdiction they have a number of colleges, offering both Undergraduate and Post Graduate courses.

In addition there are two types of University Institutions:

1) Deemed-to-be Universities: They have been conferred the status of a University by the University Grants Commission (UGC) with the approval of the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, on the basis of their rich tradition of teaching specialization and excellence in a particular field.

2) Institutions of National Importance: They are designated or established through acts of Parliament. They have been given the right to grant their own degrees, which generally is a monopoly of Universities.

There is a third category of Universities where Technical and Professional Courses are taught at the Undergraduate Level.

Colleges can be classified as four types:

1) Government Colleges: These colleges are managed by the State Governments. The Universities under which these colleges are affiliated have the privilege of laying down the courses, conducting the examinations and granting degrees.

2) Privately Managed Colleges: These colleges are run by private managements in accordance with the statutes laid down by the concerned universities.

3) University Colleges: These are called constituent colleges and are run/managed by the university itself.

4) Professional Colleges: Their field is mainly related to engineering, medicine and management.

The two important players in Indian Higher Education are:

1) University Grants Commission (UGC): The University Education Commission which was established in 1948 recommended the formation of a University Grants Commission, on the lines of a similar body in United Kingdom Higher Education System. Consequently the Commission came into existence in December 1953.

It was constituted as statutory body in 1956 under an Act of Parliament. While serving as a link between the Governments (both central and state) and higher educational institutions; it is entrusted with the task of promoting and coordinating higher education and maintaining educational standards.
The Commission monitors the developments in the fields of both college and university education and is responsible for the allocation and disbursement of Grants to colleges and universities.

And

2) Professional Council: They are responsible for the recognition of courses of professional institutions and also for sanctioning and allotment of Grants to various undergraduate programs. The Statutory Professional Councils include; All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Indian Council for Agricultural Research, Bar Council of India etc.

The AICTE, which is the most prominent among all was set up in 1948 and was established as a statutory body by an act of Parliament in 1988. It is entrusted with the responsibility of planning and developing the technical system and overlooking the maintenance of norms and standards in the system.

Indian Higher educational institutions can be classified as follows:

1) Self-financing institutions: While their functioning style is similar to that of public institutions; they are financed from the fees of the students. Generally, they are affiliated to public universities in their region and therefore under the surveillance of the universities.

2) Institutions supported by a few corporate bodies: They have a national spread of supporting institutions and teaching centers. While they can offer diplomas and certificates, they cannot offer degrees and therefore do not come under the purview of public universities.

Autonomy has been granted to some departments/colleges on the basis of fulfillment of certain conditions.

As regards academic qualifications there are main levels of qualifications within the higher education system in the country namely:

1) Bachelor’s / Undergraduate level: This generally implies a three year course after twelve years of school education;

2) Master’s / Post Graduation level: This is by and large of two years. The admission to specialized fields like engineering, medicine and management is done on the basis of Common Entrance Test;

3) Doctoral/ Postdoctoral level. Very often a Pre Doctoral Program is carried on after Post Graduation.

**Growth of Higher Education in India**

The system of Indian higher education is both enormous and complex. India has a vast infrastructure of higher education, as also technical, medical and management education to support India’s advancement towards becoming a Knowledge Super Power. Several universities of national importance including the IITs and the IIMs have emerged as global brands in the world of education and research.

**Table 1. Number of Universities, Colleges and Enrolment of students from 1970 to 2011-12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>UNIVERSITIES</th>
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Constraints Impairing Growth of Indian System of Higher Education

As seen earlier, even though there has been a substantial quantitative expansion of higher education, it has unfortunately not been accompanied by similar changes in the quality of higher education. The various committees appointed by the UGC (University Grants Commission) have pointed that the lacunae lies, in shortcomings in quality of our education imparted. India undoubtedly has one of the best Brain Powers in the world, yet there are several obstacles which have impaired its qualitative growth. Let us discuss them.

Firstly, the curricula is outdated, promoting exam and mark approach to learning. The emphasis on Rote learning severely hampers the creativity and thinking capacity of students. Evaluation is more a test of memory rather than that of assimilation of knowledge. The traditional chalk and duster method is still been followed in most colleges and universities. With the stress being laid on theoretical aspects, students sadly lack any practical exposure. The end result being that even though we pride ourselves in producing graduates/engineers and other Professionals, year after year, the big question that remains is that in the absence of field experience how employable are these new pass outs. There has only been commodification of education without really paying attention to honing their job oriented skills.

Secondly the most impending element is lack of adequate finance. Education is essentially a state supported public good in India. The liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991 and the accompaniment of structural reforms have imposed severe strains on the budget. This together with, laying of greater emphasis on providing free universal primary education, has encouraged the government to search for other avenues of augmenting financial resources. Various Committees which have been set up for this purpose have recommended hike in fees and greater privatization. This has led to the growth of private education providers. Adequate measures have to be taken, to regulate them, so as to make most of their advantages. In the current globalized economy characterized by competition it is extremely important that India discover effective sources of finance, so as to make a lasting impact in the Global education market.

Thirdly, dualistic nature of Indian higher education, where there are wide differences in quality provided by institutions not only within the country but also within the cities and towns. Just one fourth of the total populationare the beneficiaries of good quality education. The remaining three
fourth of our children are at the mercy of poor quality educational programmes. In addition the quality of education in most educational institutions, except a few select ones, is ordinary.

Fourthly, absence of adequate infrastructure, with most of the institutions lacking well-equipped laboratories, ill stocked libraries, absence of necessary furniture in the form of benches and tables, frequent power shortage and absence of basic facilities like drinking water and poor sanitation. Many of the books and equipments available are outdated and absence of funds makes it difficult to buy new books/journals and update equipments.

Fifthly, there is unnecessary commercialization of education. Many of the institutions are run by corrupt politicians, ‘uneducated educationists’ and criminals. On account of demand and supply gap, there has been wide-spread privatization resulting in payment of heavy capitation fees and ‘buying’ of degrees. It is the money power which is given preference over merit, giving rise to the question whether educational institutions that mint money and glorify mediocrity be capable of becoming a top class institutes? The point to be noted here is that importance should be given to merit, capability and right attitude rather than earning degree just for the sake of it.

Sixthly there is absence of qualified and dedicated faculty. The shortage of fully qualified faculty has been drawing the headlines and has been the center of debates at various forums and symposiums. The problem is worse in case of technical and vocational education.

This can be attributed to various reasons such as poor status of teachers in Indian society; unattractiveness of the teaching profession; the existence of political interventions and bureaucratic control. Despite the appointment of several Committees to tackle the issue the problems continue. In addition the long drawn out procedures in the appointment of staff deprives our system of good faculty who opt for better career options.

Seventhly, there has been neglect of the Research aspect of higher education. Research plays a vital role in the development of a country by instilling the human mind and generating a sense of creativity. Innovations and evolution of new concepts are almost absent in India. Of late research is a criterion laid down for the promotion of staff. The end result being that a number of Professors registering for PhD and undertake projects, not account of passion for research but more because of career advancement. Therefore, research is often below par leading to highly qualified but highly unproductive academics.

Eighthly, problem of Brain Drain characterizes our system of higher education even today. Many of the alumni of the top premiere institutions, go abroad to pursue higher studies and a majority of them do not return to India immediately after completion of their studies.

Ninthly there is obsession with the IT industry. Even those who have specialized in biotechnology, aeronautical engineering or mechanical engineering find placements in the IT sector. Yes this is one of the better performing sectors, but the point is whether the students placed in this sector will be able to excel in their field not chosen by interest but more by popular craze.

CONCLUSION

The picture thus far is very clear. Our country has been surviving with a mediocre education system for decade. If we have to make our mark in the global competitive market we have to improve the quality of our system. No doubt we have a large education base, few institutions of international standing, and moderately trained graduates. However, the competition is fierce particular from her Asian country China, who has been heavily investing in higher education.

India no doubt has certain competitive advantages in terms of universal use of English as a medium of instruction, long history of higher education, political stability on account of her being the largest democracy, prowess in the software sector etc. However, she still has not been successful in gaining 100% literacy, eradicating poverty and controlling the growth of population. This together with the existence of rural-urban, male-female, regional disparities have affected her growth process.
The beginning has to be made at the grass root level. The first necessity is that of better schools to meet the needs of the world’s largest young population. This calls for increased spending by the government on primary and secondary schooling. There exists a dichotomy in our education sector. On one hand, we have some of the best institutions inviting the cream of talent, while on the other there are majority of students who are deprived of basic facilities. India has to work on this snag if she has to make her mark in the global education scene which is increasingly getting competitive.

India is attempting to upgrade her education system. However, at present it is too small to meet the demands of her teeming millions and consequently continues to lag behind. It is hoped that soon India’s expansion of top universities will produce skilled man power to meet the needs of her explosive economy. Infrastructure which is sadly lacking has to be revamped so as to reach our teeming millions.

Educational reforms could include modification by relating evaluation to completion of assigned projects with emphasis on creativity, originality and other innate talents. India can broaden her horizon by combining formal education with practical application and field work.

The biggest hurdle is lack of adequate finance and the allocation of funds should increase to at least 3% of GDP. The government should encourage other sources of finance such as privatization, while also maintaining supervision and regulation in order to ensure quality.

This a long drawn out process which has to be implemented to the fullest if we wish to make our country a knowledge hub in the near future.

REFERENCE