



CURRENT SCENARIO OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: REFLECTIONS ON SOME CRITICAL ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

India, even after 69 years of its independence, is far away from the goal of universal literacy. There are number of schools in the country, but they don't have proper basic infrastructure. However on a positive note, India is engaged in the use of higher education as a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based information society of the 21st Century. There has been considerable improvement in the 'Higher Education' scenario in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Indian professionals are considered among the best in the world are in great demand. This signifies the inherent strength of Indian education system. The present paper is an attempt, to identify and discuss a number of critical issues, of quantity and quality of 'Higher Education' in India and studying abroad - form its core. It is meant to be a modest contribution to assessing 'Higher Education' against the background of the current scenario and the possibilities of meeting the challenges. India has to rise to the occasion urgently and reorient its higher education system to be vibrant, competitive, meaningful and purposeful; besides, there is absolutely no substitute to quality of higher education, although the country has been faced for a long time with the serious problem of meeting the quantity needs of our society. The paper is an outcome of a review of a substantial number of secondary sources on the current scenario and challenges of higher education in India. The following are the three major areas, for instance: *The Quality of Education* in terms of infrastructure, teachers, and accreditation. The *Affordability of Education*, ensuring poor and deserving students are not denied of education and the *Ethics in Education* avoiding over-commercialization of education system, are to be focused to ensure that Indian Higher Education system is sustainable and meets global standards.

KEYWORDS: Indian higher education, quantitative, qualitative, reorient, global standards.

INTRODUCTION

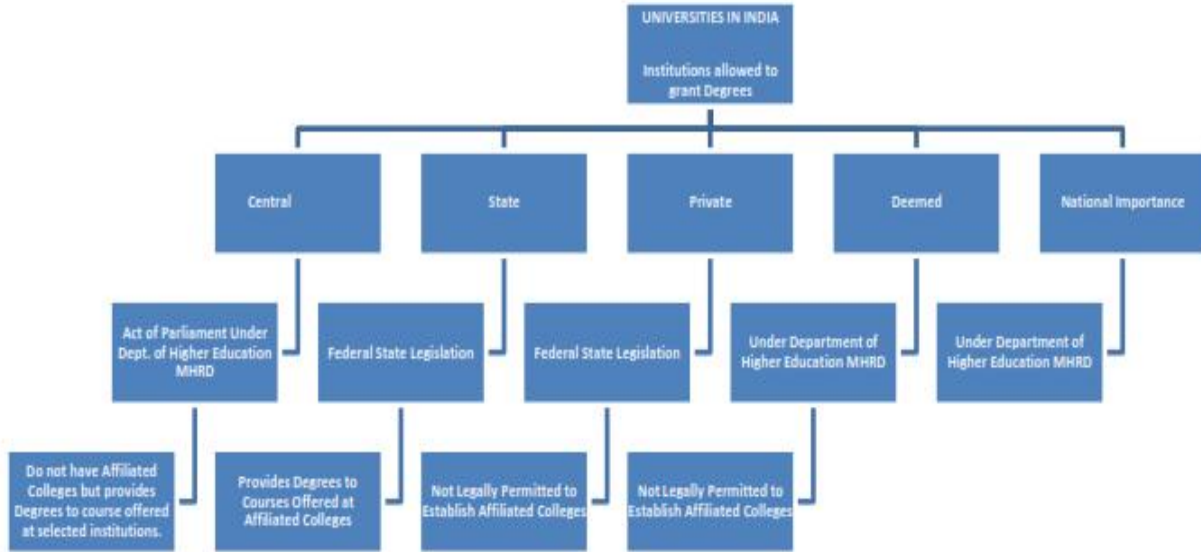
The 'Higher Education' (HE) system in India has grown in a remarkable way, mainly in the post-independence period, to become one of the largest organisation of its kind in the world. There has been considerable improvement in the 'Higher Education' scenario of India in both quantitative and qualitative terms. 'Higher Education' in India is seen as one of the ways to upward social mobility. However, the system has many issues of concern at present, like financing and management including access, equity and relevance, re-orientation of programmes by laying importance on health consciousness, values and ethics and quality of higher education together with the assessment of institutions and their accreditation. These issues are significant for the country, as it is now engaged in the use of higher education as a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based information society of the 21st Century.

Carl Dahlman and Anuja Utz in their article "*India and the Knowledge Economy: Leveraging Strengths and*

Opportunities", state that, "*Higher Education in India suffers from several systemic deficiencies. As a result, it continues to provide graduates that are unemployable despite emerging shortages of skilled manpower in an increasing number of sectors. The standards of academic research are low and declining. Some of the problems of the Indian higher education, such as – the unwieldy affiliating system, inflexible academic structure, uneven capacity across various subjects, eroding autonomy of academic institutions, and the low level of public funding are well known. Many other concerns relating to the dysfunctional regulatory environment, the accreditation system that has low coverage and no consequences, absence of incentives for performing well, and the unjust public funding policies are not well recognized*".

There is, indeed, a multitude of interconnected issues that India faces in its higher education system; in a summary and particularly perceptive diagnostic, one of the more thorough recent analyses of the situation describes both the scope and the seriousness of the challenge.

Universe of higher educational institutions in India



The Higher Educational Infrastructure in India Figure 1 shows the field of ‘Higher Educational Institutions’ in India. ‘HE’ in India is provided by five groups of institutions: Central, State, Private, Deemed Universities and Institutions of National Importance. ii There are 52 such institutions. They predominantly consist of the

Indian Institutes of Technology, National Institutes of Technology and prominent Medical Colleges, including the All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMSc). The following table shows the total number of universities in the country:

Total No. 1 of Universities in India (As on 25-05-2016)

Universities	Total Number
State Universities	347
Deemed to be Universities	123
Central Universities	47
Private Universities	237
TOTAL	754

Source: <http://www.ugc.ac.in/oldpdf/alluniversity.pdf>

There are 47 central universities, 347 state universities, 237 private universities and 123 deemed universities in India as listed by the ‘*University Grants Commission*’ (UGC), the apex regulatory body for higher education. All the above university groups are legally entitled to grant degrees. State universities are the only institutions that are allowed to affiliate private as well as public colleges under them. However, these colleges are allowed to operate only within the individual federal state borders. Private colleges offering professional courses, which match specific needs of a sector or industry, are often affiliated to state universities. Affiliated colleges are called 2f and 12b colleges according to the latest figures, there are approximately 9,195 such affiliated colleges in India supported by the UGC. The federal states of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra have the maximum number of affiliated colleges of 1,677 and 1,185 respectively. Karnataka (766), Chattisgarh (488), Gujarat (486), Tamil Nadu (468), and West Bengal (433) too have large number of affiliated colleges under their federal state universities. While private universities do not have affiliated colleges, these universities also offer professional as well as regular courses in it.

Even after 69 years after Indian independence, we are far away from the goal of universal literacy. There are number of schools in the country, but they don't have proper basic infrastructure. But on a positive note, Indian professionals are considered among the best in the world are in great demand. This signifies the inherent strength of Indian education system. In technical education, the IIT’s, and in management, the IIM’s have already marked their names among the top higher educational institutions of the world. Moreover the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi; Delhi University (DU), Delhi and South Asian University (SAU), New Delhi, are also regarded as good higher educational institutions for doing postgraduate courses and research in science, humanities and social sciences. As a result, students from various parts of the world are coming today for higher education in India.

Objectives of the study

The present paper is an effort, to identify and discuss a number of critical issues, of quantity and quality of Higher Education in India and studying abroad - form its core. It is meant to be a modest contribution to assessing

'Higher Education' against the background of the current scenario and the possibilities of meeting the challenges.

Methodology of the study

The paper is an outcome of a review of a substantial number of secondary sources and personal experiences and observations on the current scenario and challenges of higher education in India.

Current indian higher education scenario

While many reasons can be cited for the current scenario, these all boil down to decades of feudally managed, colonially modelled institutions run with inadequate funding and excessive political and bureaucratic interference. India should try to become "knowledge economy" to promote inclusive growth. The three major areas to be focused to ensure that Indian Higher Education system is sustainable and meets global standards are:

- ⇒ **Quality of Education** - in terms of infrastructure, teachers, accreditation, etc.
- ⇒ **Affordability of Education** - ensuring poor and deserving students are not denied of education.
- ⇒ **Ethics in Education** - avoiding over-commercialization of education system.

Academic Standards and Need of World-Class Quality Higher Education - Quantity and Quality (Q n Q)

Most observers agree that Indian higher education, the significant and impressive developments of the past few decades⁵ notwithstanding, faces major challenges in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Perhaps the clearest and boldest statement of this issue can be found in the 'Report to the Nation 2006' of the **National Knowledge Commission (NKC)** which concludes that, '*there is a quiet crisis in higher education in India that runs deep⁶, and that it has to do with both the quantity and the quality of higher education in India*'.

In any nation education is the basic necessity for the socio-economic development of the individuals and the society. In reality about 25 percent of the universities are having world class education. So, improved standard of education as first priority should be offered to the majority by the government authorities with sincere political will. Also, privatisation of higher education is absolutely necessary in a vast country like India as government alone is helpless to do so. Indian government is not giving priority to the development of standard higher education. It should aspire for the international form of higher education system. To achieve that goal, it should adopt uniform international syllabus in its educational institutions. Many national universities in USA, UK, Australia, etc. allow studies in higher education for foreign students in their countries and through correspondence courses as well. In the same way Indian universities of world class education can also offer courses of studies to foreign students taking advantage of the globalisation process.

In the way to compete globally in the 21st century, Indian 'Higher Education' system should adopt certain benchmarking techniques for improving instruction models and administrative procedures in universities/colleges to move forward. India needs a thorough study

and evaluation of models implemented elsewhere and work out strategies to adopt such models in education system. India is yet to establish world class research facilities, recruiting profound academicians in universities/ colleges/ research institutions, etc. to sustain and forge lead in economic development. It is important to understand that countries like China, Singapore, South Korea, etc. are moving fast in investing in education system. Therefore, it is imperative that our educational institutions are equipped with the desired quality and standards which are essentials for transforming the younger workforce into productive ones. Needless to reiterate that in the higher education system focus on use of technology for effective learning by students also need to be encouraged to have cutting edge over the competitors in the globalised world.

Making Higher Education Affordable

In India, 'Higher Education' should be made affordable to all deserving students. The fee structure in Government owned/ sponsored institutions are economical. However, in some private sector institutions, which have the freedom to prescribe fee structure and despite broad guidelines from certain state governments, the fees are beyond the capacity of poor and deserving students. Although, the fees charged by some private colleges includes the infrastructural facilities, modern amenities, and so forth, there are still provisions of scholarships schemes, tuition-fee waiver schemes etc. by various govt. regulatory agencies like UGC, AICTE, DDE etc. All such schemes are introduced keeping in mind about the growing need of education and in parlance to the concept of "education for all".

The University Grant Commission (UGC) of India is not only the lone grant giving agency in the country, but also responsible for coordinating, determining and maintaining the standards in institutions of higher education. Other professional councils those are responsible for recognizing courses, promoting professional institutes and providing grants to undergraduate / postgraduate programmes are: All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Distance Education Council (DEC), Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR), Bar Council of India (BCI), National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), Medical Council of India (MCI), Pharmacy Council of India (PCI), Indian Nursing Council (INC), Dentist Council of India (DCI), Central Council of Homeopathy (CCH) and the Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM).

Higher Education today, belongs to the Highest Bidder

Today in India the ambition of middle class and poor students to undergo higher and technical education is becoming a dream due to the huge amount of fees charged by the money minded private colleges. Every year the tuition fees depend upon the state and reputation of the college; besides the huge hostel fees and this is not in reach of a middle class/ lower middle class. Even for prospectus of MBA and MCA courses the private colleges are charging about Rs.500/- to Rs.1000/- depending upon the institute. If a middle class student has to apply for

more than one course means he has to face financial problems. In a country where majority of people are groaning under the weight of poverty, hunger and increasing prices, the middle class Indians face difficulties in pursuing their HE. For surprise the project reports for various Post Graduate courses, M.Phil. and Ph.D. programmes are easily available for sale. This clearly shows how the HE system is commercialized. There is, indeed, a multitude of interrelated problems that India faces in its higher education system; it suffers from several systemic deficiencies, such as – the unwieldy affiliating system, inflexible academic structure, uneven capacity across various subjects, eroding autonomy of academic institutions, and the low level of public funding are well known.

At the same time, the gains to be derived from overcoming these problems and from seizing the opportunities of economic and technological development are shown by a recent ‘World Bank’ study to be tremendous. The time is very opportune for India to make its transition to the knowledge economy – an economy that creates, disseminates, and uses knowledge to enhance its growth and development. Measures are also needed to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education so that the education system is more demand driven quality conscious, and forward looking, especially to retain highly qualified people and meet the new and emerging needs of the economy. In one view, India's science and technology leadership, if India plays its cards right, it can become by 2020 the world's number one knowledge production centre, creating not only valuable private goods but also much needed public goods to help the growing global success.

Abroad Higher Education

Studying abroad, primarily in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) has played and continues to play a major role in expanding and enhancing the pool of qualified Indians. More than about 30,000 Indian students are pursuing higher education in the UK. In the US, the number of Indian students are about two lakh and in 2004/05 exceeded 80,000 and was twice what it was ten years earlier, having become the largest group of foreign students in the United States. Altogether, about three lakh Indian students study abroad, and it is likely that especially European efforts to attract larger numbers of talented students from abroad (as in the “Erasmus Mundus” programme) are likely to make these numbers grow further. These are impressive indicators of educational mobility, especially when one considers the educational and professional success of many of these students. Many Indian graduates of US universities have gone on to become major figures in the development of modern technology and entrepreneurs in their own right in areas like Silicon Valley.

At the same time, this large migration of young talent has a serious drawback. A significant portion of these students remain abroad after graduation, and while they often become interesting commercial partners for Indian firms (as in the case of many Indian-led companies in Silicon Valley), their academic talents and experience is largely lost to the task of advancing HE and research in India.

Furthermore, it is estimated that about 3 lakh Indians studying abroad are spending roughly \$5 to 10 Billion each year outside of India, and while some of this is covered by scholarships and assistantships of their host institutions, the overall financial drain on India's resources is considerable, and has to be added to the intellectual drain. It is not surprising that an important part of India's strategy for developing its system of HE is making at least some universities sufficiently attractive to persuade talented young Indians to remain at home, or to return. A related, but also controversial issue is the interest of a growing number of foreign universities, notably from the US, to set up programmes in India to tap into the growing demand for quality higher education. Programmes of this kind might prevent the inclination of some young Indians to study abroad; at the same time, there is a good deal of controversy over the financial and regulatory terms under which these programmes would be permitted. A pending piece of legislation, the “Foreign Education Providers Bill”, is designed to regulate these programmes, but a bitter debate has emerged over the effect they would have on access to higher education for less fortunate members of Indian society.

12th five year plan (2012–2017) and beyond

The Twelfth Five Year Plan's recommendation on ‘Higher Education’ from a private sector perspective and suggests strategies for quality improvement in higher education. With the objectives and proposals of the plan as the basis, the report cites that the private sector has played an active role in the growth of the sector. Private institutions now account for 64% of the total number of institutions and 59% of enrollment in the country, as compared to 43% and 33%, respectively, a decade ago. The Indian Government has also given the required thrust to the sector in its Five Year Plans. During the Eleventh Plan period (2007–2012), India achieved a Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of 17.9%, up from 12.3% at the beginning of the plan period.

India's Higher Education System faces Challenges on Three Fronts:

1. Expansion:

- India's GER of 16% was much below the world average of 27%, as well as that of other emerging countries such as China (26%) and Brazil (36%) in 2010.

2. Excellence:

- **Faculty Shortage:** There is 40% and 35% shortage of faculty in state and central universities, respectively.
- **Accredited Institutions:** 62% of universities and 90% of colleges were average or below average in 2010, on the basis of their NAAC accreditation.
- **Low Citation Impact:** India's relative citation impact is half the world average.

3. Equity:

- There is wide disparity in the GER of Higher Education across states and the Gross Attendance Ratio (GAR) in urban and rural areas, and gender- and community-wise.
- **Inter-State Disparity:** 47.9% in Delhi v/s. 9% in Assam.

- **Urban-Rural Divide:** 30% in urban areas v/s. 11.1% in rural areas.
- **Differences across Communities:** 14.8% for OBCs, 11.6% for SCs, 7.7% for STs and 9.6% for Muslims.
- **Gender Disparity:** 15.2% for females v/s. 19% for males.

Indian higher education - Road ahead

India's HE system can be projected to be more transparent and inclusive by the end of Twelfth Plan period, provided the Government is able to create an enabling regulatory environment and put in place healthy implementation, monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms. The *Ernst & Young LLP* is a Limited Liability Partnership, registered under the Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008 in India suggests the following strategies to be adopted:

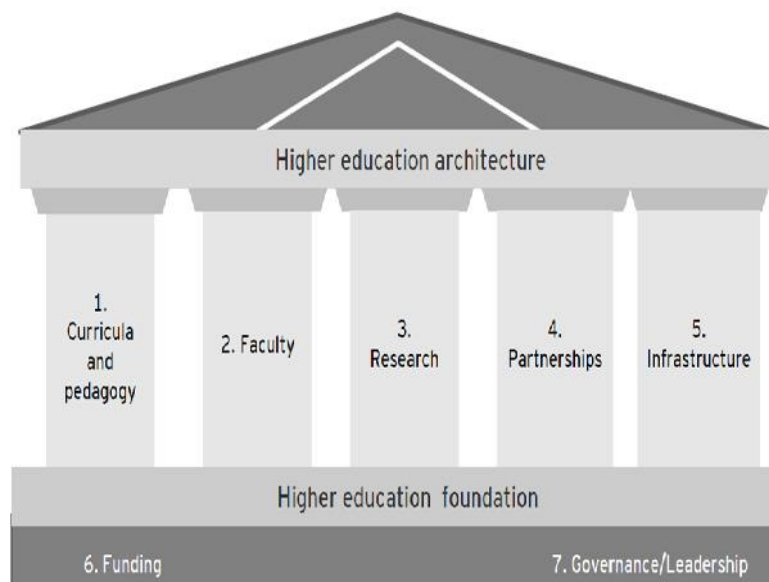
- **Merit-based Student Financing:** This should ensure admissions to meritorious students independent of financial background
- **Internationalisation of Education:** This would entail aligning different aspects of education (curriculum, faculty, etc) to international standards
- **Enabling a Research Environment:** This would involve creating adequate means of research funding and practical application of research
- **High Quality Faculty:** The need of the hour is to create a conducive environment and provide incentives to attract and retain high quality faculty

- **Improved Technology for Education Delivery:** Leveraging technology for enhancing the teaching-learning experience will ensure better outcomes
- **Employability:** Making education-industry relevant and practical would be the right way to ensure a highly employable talent pool.

Vision 2030: where will Indian higher education stand?

It will be a *'Tough Road Ahead'*. Academically and institutionally, India has moved beyond traditional reticence and leaders are no longer discomfited by risky experimentations. Against such a backdrop there is more room to grow with equity and excellence. By 2030, India will have the largest population in the world, in the higher education age bracket. Increasing urbanisation and income levels will drive demand for higher education. India's economy is expected to grow at a fast pace; rapid industrialisation would require a gross incremental workforce of about 250 million by 2030. India could potentially emerge as a global supplier of skilled manpower. Given the expected socio-economic scenario in 2030, India would need a robust higher education system that can deliver on multiple imperatives. A differentiated system of institutions with differing objectives and focus areas would be critical for achieving the proposed goals.

To achieve the envisioned state in 2030, transformational and innovative interventions would be required across all levers of the Higher Education System



TO SUM UP

The new challenge before the country at the beginning of the twenty first century is to become a developed society by the year 2020, which requires that not only a vibrant economy driven by knowledge has to be ushered in soon, but also a new society where justice and human values prevail has to be created. Moreover, challenges in higher education are no longer only nation centric. They have

already attained global dimensions, particularly after trade in services has been brought under the purview of the WTO regime, with the explosive growth of knowledge in the past century and with the development of handy tools of information and communication technologies as well as of other scientific innovations, competition has become a hallmark of growth all over the World. As a result, knowledge is not only going to be the driver of Indian economy, but also, it is going to permeate into all the

strata of Indian society for a better quality of life and living conditions. Therefore, India has to rise to the occasion urgently and reorient its higher education system to be vibrant, competitive, meaningful and purposeful; besides, there is absolutely no substitute to quality of higher education, although the country has been faced for a long time with the serious problem of meeting the quantity needs of our society. It is, therefore, essential that a careful balancing of the two is given priority to meet the twin requirements of the society in the foreseeable future.

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