

# **Restructuring Higher Education in India**

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## **1. Introduction**

India is one of the countries in the world that have a large higher education system. The colleges and universities have been expanded considerably since independence. However, the growth has been in terms of numbers. The system inherited has remained almost unchanged. In a rapidly changing world, any system must undergo mini-revolutions to keep pace with the developments; otherwise it must be prepared for a major revolution. Indian Higher Education System, having failed to effect mini-revolutions has to face a major revolution. A brief account of the developments in the field of knowledge, the challenges to be met by university education, and the preparation needed in the higher education system are given. The subject is discussed under the following sub-heads:

- I. The Emergence of knowledge Era.
- II. Higher Education as Non-merit Service and Government Subsidy.
- III. Private Participation in Higher Education.
- IV. Promotion of Equity and Equality of Opportunities.
- V. Major structural change

## **2. Knowledge Era**

The members are aware of the fact that after the second world war and especially towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the advanced countries have entered what we call the Knowledge Era. It means that in place of physical capital knowledge has become an important determinant of development, more than ever before. In a country like the U.S.A. human capital is estimated to be atleast three times more important than physical capital. High quality human capital is developed in high quality education systems. The quality of knowledge generated within higher education

institutions and its availability have become crucial for national development and national competitiveness. We may take a look at the higher education scene in India.

### **3. Non-merit Service**

India has assigned sufficient importance to higher education after independence and it has been developing at a reasonably fast rate. However a change of approach appeared on the scene in the eighties and nineties of the last century. During the seventies some economists made an analysis of social benefits accruing from education and concluded that while returns for the investment in primary and secondary education to the society for the investment made are appreciable, the benefits of higher education go only to the individuals receiving higher education. It is, a faulty analysis. They did not study the effect of higher education on development of leadership and research capabilities.

Unfortunately, the World Bank and other International Funding Agencies started advocating a low priority for higher education in developing countries and concentration of attention on primary education. They also failed to take into account the fact that research, innovation and leadership depend on higher education. **In any society, the highest of education at least for a few is as important as basic education for all.** Unfortunately, the bureaucrats in the Ministry of Finance, GOI were influenced by the thinking of the World Bank.

In 1997, the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Government of India prepared a discussion paper on Government subsidies in India. Suggestions were made in the paper for reducing or withdrawing subsidies to certain areas of activities. In that paper higher education was classified as **Non-merit Service** and a gradual subsidy reduction of 40% in the first 3 years and 25% in the next two years was recommended. I do not

want go into a discussion of the merits and demerits of this suggestion on this occasion. I do not remember any policy decision having been announced by the Government of India on this issue. No national level debate has taken place on this approach. But suggestions were made off and on to the effect that higher education is an industry and subsidy might be withdrawn. Some state Governments, without any announcement to that effect, have been gradually withdrawing from the domain of higher education. **A complex issue which has great social implications has been simplified by people who do not seem to have a comprehensive understanding of the dimensions of higher education.** It may be that certain aspects and areas of higher education have the attributes of industry; but higher education itself is not an industry; cannot be considered or treated as industry. If education becomes fully an industry, human beings will become robots.

However the Government of India started gradually reducing the plan allocation for higher education as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1: Plan outlay for Higher Education as Percent of Allocation for Education**

<b>Plans</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>	<b>IV</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>VI</b>	<b>VII</b>	<b>VIII</b>	<b>IX</b>
Sector Higher Education Allocation	0.09	18	15	25	22	22	16	8	12

The world scene is as follows:

World average	-	21%
Developing countries	-	18%
Advanced countries	-	22%

#### **4. Mass Higher Education**

We have to consider the role of higher education in the context of our developmental goals. By and large we have decided that we should endeavour to become a developed nation by 2020. We may look at the implications of this goal in terms of Higher Education. The advanced countries have:

- i. Universal Primary Education
- ii. Universal Secondary Education in most cases
- iii. Mass Higher Education

Countries like the USA and Finland have over 70% of the age group in higher education. In general, the figure is over 50% for advanced countries. In our case, even in 2001 our literacy level was 65%. As of today not more than 10% of our population may have a level of education equivalent to or more than 10<sup>th</sup> standard. Coming to higher education, even though we have 265 universities (2000-01) and 13150 Colleges, we have only about 7% of the age group in the university system.

It is our ambition to become a developed nation by 2020. The developed nations have moved to mass higher education. A few examples are given below for the age group entering higher education [2001]

U.S.A.	80%
UK	52%
Canada	88%
Australia	80%
Finland	74%
France	51%
Thailand	22%
Turkey	21%
Brazil	15%

The High Income Countries, according to the World Development Report, 2001, had a participation ratio of 62% in 1997; the Middle Income Countries, a mere 12% though the Upper Middle Income Group had 22%; the figure for Low Income Countries was a mere 8%. If we are to become a developed nation we must touch at least 25% by 2020.

## **5. Private Participation**

It is obvious from past experience that the Government alone will not be able to meet the demand: private participation in higher education is an inescapable necessity. I may say without any reservation that the Management of Private Colleges are satisfying a felt, social requirement and are making a vital contribution at a crucial stage in the development of the nation. We must accept this fact without reservation. The members of the management of private colleges have reason to be happy over their role and the society has the obligation to acknowledge their initiative with appreciation.

Private participation is welcome; it is to be encouraged, facilitated and promoted; but at the same time converting the entire operation into business and making profit out of educational efforts is undesirable, unacceptable and must be checked. However much we may wish to ensure freedom of operation for the management, every game has to be played according to rules and an umpire is necessary. We need provide for monitoring and measures to prevent abuse. In achieving this objective, I do feel, rather strongly that the Governments must be kept out of direct intervention as far as possible and only autonomous bodies like the Universities, UGC, AICTE, ICAR, IMC and similar academic institutions must be empowered to play a role that must be positive, constructive and promotional. We must consciously and strictly refrain from the custom of framing regulations that would be mechanically applied, harassing the well run institutions. We often

make rules that would require the admission of the entire family into the hospital when one member is sick.

The recent judgement of the Supreme Court gives enormous freedom to private providers of education but the freedom given in one place is made subject to provision for reasonable restrictions in another place. Every requirement that is qualitative in nature gives room for different interpretation and creates a fertile field for the legal profession. It is necessary to make detailed analysis of the rulings in the judgement. We may possibly have to thoroughly reorganize and partly dismantle the existing machinery and change the rules and regulations now in operation.

New Development in India is the emergence of private universities. It is learnt that three states have brought about necessary legislation to permit private universities. We already have '**Deemed to be universities**' many of which are private universities only. Private participation in higher education is a widely prevalent world phenomenon. Of the 684 universities in Japan 512 are private. Among 2364 universities that offer four year degree programme in the USA, 1752 are private universities. It is said that more than 80% of the universities in Philippines are in the private sector. Considering that higher education is becoming mass based as the countries advance and the demands for access to higher education and equity in availing one self of opportunities steeply increase among the members of the public, seeking private help or allowing private entry appears inevitable.

The Government of India have long been contemplating the enactment of an Act to provide for the establishment of private universities. The draft Act was referred to the Parliamentary Committee on Education. The Committee had one or two sittings. I myself gave evidence before the Committee. It has not been pursued further. In the meanwhile, three states have enacted legislation permitting private universities. It is my considered

view that taking into account the Supreme Court judgement and the national trend, as well as the international developments in education, the Government of India may bring about an Act providing a FRAME WORK within which the universities, the UGC, similar academic bodies and the State Governments may play a constructive role in the field of higher education. I may quote Germany as an example. In Germany education is a state subject; but the Federal Government has enacted what it calls the **Grund Gesetz** [Basic Law] which provides a broad frame work to provide guidelines for the State Governments in dealing with the universities. I only want to stress the fact that vast changes have taken place in the field of higher education at the national level and far- reaching developments are taking place at the international level. These developments have their impact on us. It is necessary that we take a critical look at the existing legal instruments that are a century old and bring them to be in conformity with the new developments and changed circumstances. It is necessary to emphasize here that the Governments must desist from making provisions for direct intervention from the Secretariat in the affairs of academic institutions. They must use the instrument of autonomous academic bodies like the U.G.C., A.I.C.T.E., etc., established through Acts of Legislature.

## **6. Equity and Access**

It may be emphasized that our advocating the entry of private participation, does not mean any support for the withdrawal of the Government from the scene. At a time when we are contemplating measures to reduce the gap, promote equity and guarantee to the disadvantaged, accessibility to opportunities for development, the withdrawal of Government subsidy for higher education will make higher education become unreachable to those who remained unreached for long.

Suggestions are made about provision of scholarships and bank loans to the students to meet the increased cost of education. I do feel that we

may consider means of paying the subsidy directly to meritorious and deserving students rather than to the institutions. We have to keep in mind the fact that the Government machinery is inefficient: the men are corrupt: the procedures are always cumbersome: the poor students are ill informed. Consequently the help will not reach in time to the disadvantaged. They will feel that educational opportunities are available; but are not accessible. Our effort now is to reduce inequalities in opportunities: promote equity and access. We can support only those measures which will help the achievement of these objectives.

At the international level there is great variation in perception regarding tuition fees. At one end of the spectrum we have the USA where fees charged are substantial: at the other end are countries like France and Germany where higher education is free for all who deserve it. Even in the USA the fees constitute only about 15% of the unit cost.

The US President, Bill Clinton in his second inaugural address called for **“a new land (in which) education will be every citizen’s most prized possession . . . . and the doors of higher education will be open for all.”**

I may state on this occasion that in the field of education, cost sharing between Government and beneficiaries is a relatively new development. Let not amateurs and the uninformed rush to make decisions which will have far reaching social consequences. We shall welcome, support and encourage self-financing colleges and private participation in higher education; but the Governments cannot abdicate their responsibility for funding higher education and research through the establishment of appropriate autonomous institutions. The Government must also make liberal provisions for avenues of loans and scholarships.



## 7. Competition in Higher Education

Higher Education in general faces to-day a world of competition. There was hardly any competition in the past when we had only Government institutions and Government aided institutions. Life was very comfortable for the academics and universities. The number seeking admission was always more than the number of seats available and we were not obliged to attract students. During the last two decades of the last century, three major developments have taken place :

1. Education has become an economic good and a vehicle for upward movement of individuals in the society.
2. Education has become the most dominant and decisive tool for national development – social, political and economic.
3. Private enterprise has entered education in a big way and a world market has developed for educational offerings.

This change is somewhat abrupt and not too gradual. Private enterprise will bring in competition, initiative, innovation and incentives.

Remaining competitive in what will be an increasingly dynamic environment requires the capacity to comprehend the global trend and the developing demand. The prerequisites for competing in the world market in education are:

- i. Quality
- ii. Flexibility.

The importance of quality cannot be over emphasized. It is a basic requirement. We do have to indicate measures to improve quality. I do not propose to go into the issue in this address. I may make a few observations on **Flexibility**.

## 8. Flexibility

We have a higher education system that is extremely and suffocatingly rigid and singularity incapable of accommodating the demands of globalisation. A Higher education system in this country follows practices as old as the higher education in India itself. Certain practices, namely the affiliating system came into India from London University with the inception of the university system itself; it has long disappeared in the country of its origin. As early as 1903, Lord Curzon expressed his impatience that this system which he termed as a slavish imitation of the London University system, still persists and was unhappy over the prospect that it might continue for some more time. But it has lived long; survives, flourishes and exerts a stifling influence on the system.

Autonomy has been recommended long back and reiterated many times to introduce some measure of academic freedom. Some express apprehension even now that it may adversely affect standards. Tamilnadu has more than 50 autonomous colleges, the highest number for a state. The state also has also more than 60 accredited colleges; the highest in the country and many of them are autonomous colleges. It can be seen therefore that autonomy has done no harm; it is really welcome by the public; by the faculty and the students.

I have a few observations to make regarding the procedure for autonomy - The UGC prescribed a procedure for granting autonomy. It was done long back when the accrediting procedure did not exist. The procedure has recently been reexamined and some welcome changes have been made. My contention is that the requirements for autonomy must be academic in nature. The '**No objection certificate**' from the Government is an unacademic, unwanted requirement. Any institution with a high ranking accreditation that applies for autonomy and is recommended by the concerned University must be granted autonomy. When we want to promote

autonomy, we should not make it difficult for deserving institutions to gain autonomy.

The rigidity of our system is hard to believe. A student from India who has completed two years of a bachelor's degree programme in India, can go to the USA and continue his education and claim credit for what he has studied back home; but within the same state in India, mobility of a student from one university to the other in the middle of the programme is either formidable or impossible. The entire world has gone in for credit system; but most of our universities persist in a system of grouping subjects that is outmoded, anachronistic. We can hardly think of any preparation for entry into international competition unless we do away with some of our rigid practices. **The very first step will be autonomy for the colleges and adoption of credit system.**

The academic year system must yield place to semester system and we must introduce periodic tests and internal evaluation. In order to monitor the quality of internal evaluation, we may introduce a system of '**Academic Audit**'.

## **9. Text Books**

It is complained that our students are passive listeners and there is no discussion in the class room. As long as there is the need for the students to take down detailed notes, there will be no discussion. We must introduce the system of prescribing text books and a student must possess them. Then, he will have time to listen, understand and ask questions. We must promote a programme of publication of text books at affordable cost. Improvement in standards and discussion in class rooms will not happen as long as students depend on notes.

## 10. Systemic Change

The affiliating system, as pointed out earlier, is a real curse on our higher education system. All over the world higher education is in university campuses. The universities are large: they can afford to have big libraries; advanced computing centre; modern laboratories. In advanced countries, Universities in general have large campuses with student strength in the range of 20 to 80 thousands and faculty strength from 1000 to 5,000. For example, M.I.T., Boston has around 30,000 students and 3000 faculty members. Karlsruhe University, Germany has around 25000 students and over 1000 faculty members. There are a few universities in India, that are big and subscribe for more than 1000 journals and spend about 2.0 crores of rupees per year on library. They have big departments and a number of academics in each department. But they are very few. We need have many such institutions to meet our higher education and research needs.

The colleges are small; almost tiny in terms of facilities for advanced studies. Infrastructure facilities are necessarily limited. In Tamil Nadu, we have, unfortunately about 85% of the P.G. Students on the college campus, while the national average is about 66%. We have in India 89 % of the U.G. students in affiliated Colleges. About 82% of the faculty members are in affiliated colleges with a mere 18% in Universities and constituent colleges. On the other hand, about 91% of the research scholars are in Universities. **Moreover we have the unacceptable state of P.G. Departments in colleges without provision for professor positions. While a research atmosphere is a prerequisite for P.G. Education, many of the colleges have no worthwhile research activity. Only 9% of the research scholars are in the colleges which have 66% of the P.G. students.** In general, P.G. education in India, is not what it should be. Within the given facilities, the colleges, many of them, are doing their best. But this is not good enough to face international competition.

We are living in a world of globalization and face an economy of open competition. Creation of wealth and economic prosperity depend on our ability to make effective use of modern technology. Advanced countries will neither lend nor sell us new technologies developed in their laboratories. We have to substantially build our own strength for invention, innovation and dissemination. University research has to become increasingly the backbone of our developmental efforts. At present our competitiveness is poor. Among 53 countries, we are 45 in overall global competitiveness; 38 in I.T.; but 50, i.e., almost last, in the use of professional managers. In global competitiveness China occupies the 33<sup>rd</sup> place; Taiwan is 3; Singapore 4 and Australia 7. Failure to understand and value the importance of professional talent and enthroning bureaucracy is the major weakness in Indian scene.

- The inherent weakness in our H.E. is the structure itself.
- We must promote the development of an adequate number of University level institutions with a critical mass of students, faculty and infrastructure facilities.
- Higher Education must be substantially in university campuses.
- We must decisively put an end to the affiliating system. We should systematically promote the grant of autonomy to deserving institutions.
- We should increase the P.G. student strength in our universities substantially and also develop a significant number of centers of excellence in all important disciplines.
- Provision of P.G. Education and research leading to M.Phil., and Ph.D., must be permitted only in institutions that have senior academic positions like Professor and Reader.
- We must devise means of pooling the resources of a cluster of institutions and share the library and laboratory facilities.
- We must go in for the benefit of '**Commons**' for as many infrastructure facilities as possible.
- We must exploit fully the knowledge resources available through internet.

**I may emphasize the fact that higher education in India stands fragmented in the form of over 15,000 tiny institutions.** We have only about 300 universities [2003-2004]. Even among these universities, a large number are burdened with affiliated colleges, and function mainly as examining bodies. A small country like Japan with a population of 12.7 Crores has 684 Universities--172 national and public and 512 private. The U.S. with a population of 27.6 Crores has 2364 universities--612 public and 1752 private universities that offer 4 year degree courses. The U.K. with a population of 5.98 Crores has nearly 104 Universities and 231 Colleges that are autonomous and offer degree programmes and confer degrees. Germany with a population of 8.2 crores has more than 330 university level institutions. India must increase the number of big campuses and university institutions to promote excellence in higher education. India must develop before 2020 at least 2000 university level institutions. We cannot build 2000 new universities. We must develop a programme for:

- 1. Establishing new universities by the Central and State Governments.**
- 2. Developing as many of the good colleges as possible to the status of Deemed to be University.**
- 3. Granting autonomous status to a number of deserving colleges.**
- 4. Allowing the establishment of Private Universities in a selective way.**

It will be necessary to draw up a well defined plan of remoulding; establish a time bound programme of action, and implement it with determination. Our weakness has mostly been, not in policy formulation, not in plan preparation, but in implementation.

It is desirable that before the State Governments go about in a haphazard way to allow private universities, as in Chattisgarh, the Govt. of India provides by an Act, **a national frame work** as mentioned earlier for the guidance of the States for establishing private universities

- The private Universities Bill pending long before the parliament may be enacted early.
- The proposal of UGC to develop a certain number of N.I.S. and also a few Universities and Colleges to be centers of excellence is welcome. It requires appropriate development approach.
- Autonomy, Flexibility and Modular Approach, wherever possible must be the philosophy of the management of the institutions.
- The management system must be so devised that each faculty member has the opportunity to play a role in the development of the institution.
- The faculty must be fully aware of the development programmes of the state concerned and the nation and deliberate effort must be made continuously to mould the academic and research programmes appropriately.
- We must consciously develop **academic leadership**. The country lacks in academic leaders.

The State Council for Higher Education has been recommended to be established in each State with a view to developing academic leaders in the State. Unfortunately this institution has not been developed on proper lines in many of the States. The State Council for Higher Education must be developed and maintained as an important unit of H.E. in each State.

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