



HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA – ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUGGESTIONS

Dr. Rajinder Singh,

Assistant Professor in Political Science,
University College, Moonak-148033, Distt. Sangrur, Punjab

India's higher education system is the world's third largest education system in terms of students, next to China and the United States. Unlike China, however, India has the advantage of English being the primary language of higher education and research. India educates approximately 11 per cent of its youth in higher education as compared to 20 per cent in China. The main governing body at the tertiary level is the University Grants Commission (India), which enforces its standards, advises the government, and helps coordinate between the centre and the state. Universities and its constituent colleges are the main institutes of higher education in India.

RIGHT TO EDUCATION ACT, 2009

The 86th Amendment Act, 2002 of the constitution, made elementary education a fundamental right and its consequential legislation (Right to Education) Right of Children to free and compulsory education Act, 2009 passed in the parliament on 4th Aug, 2009, made education a fundamental right for every child in the country.

According to this legislation, it was emphasized that Central and State governments must provide free and compulsory education to every child between the age of six and fourteen. Further, it is imperative to maintain the quality education while providing education to all. Failure to provide the quality education means denial of right to education to the children. The legislation laid emphasis on curriculum based on learning through exploration and discovery. The RTE Act makes education for every child compulsory. It was expected that compulsory education for every child through RTE Act will eliminate child labour from the country.

The Right to Education (RTE), Act 2009 was based on new perspective on inclusiveness, encompassing gender and social inclusion and ensured these become integral and cross-cutting concerns in forming different aspects like training, curriculum and

classroom transaction. It can amplify the voice of the disadvantaged and weaker sections of society. This can improve programme outcomes by contributing local knowledge and technical expertise and bringing innovative ideas and solutions to the challenges ahead.

YASHPAL COMMITTEE

The Higher Education and Research Bill 2011, an important bill related to transformation of higher education and research regulation in institutes of higher learning was introduced by Human Resource Development Minister Mr. Kapil Sibal on 28 December 2011. The bill is based on the Yashpal Committee report and recommendations. Based on the recommendations and suggestions given by the Yashpal Committee and National Knowledge Commission, the Central government has taken the following initiatives.

1. Establishment of education tribunals.
2. To prohibit certain malpractices in technical and medical education institutions and universities.
3. Regulation of entry and operation of foreign educational institutions.
4. Accreditation of higher educational institutions mandatory.
5. To improve the standard of research course and PhD degree, entrance test for the students for entry to this course was made mandatory by UGC in 2009. Stringent regulations were introduced to maintain transparency and quality research in this course.
6. Special Taskforce was constituted by Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to design the structure for the establishment of National Commission for higher education and research.

At present , there are more than 700 universities, institutions of higher learning and deemed universities, out of which 129 deemed to be universities, 67 institutions of national importance, 44 central universities, 306 state universities (public), 154 state universities (private), 5 institutions established under state legislation act. Most of these universities in India have affiliating colleges where undergraduate courses are being taught. According to the Department of Higher Education Government of India, 35539 colleges including 203 Autonomous colleges and 1800 exclusive women's colleges functioning under these universities and institutions in India. Apart from these higher education institutes there are several private institutes in India that offer various professional courses in India. Distance learning is also a feature of the Indian higher education system. The Indian Institutes of technology (IITs), have been globally acclaimed for their standard of education. The IITs enroll about 8000 students annually and the alumni have contributed to both the growth of the

private sector and the public sectors of India. However, India has failed to produce world class universities like Harvard and Cambridge.

A recent evaluation of universities and research institutes all over the world, conducted by a Shanghai university, has not a single Indian university in the world's top 300 while China has six. The Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, comes in somewhere in the top 400 and IIT, Kharagpur, makes an appearance after that. Yet this decisive edge also has its shortcomings. Besides top rated universities which provide highly competitive world class education to their pupil, India is also home to many universities which have been founded with the sole objective of making easy money. UGC and other Regulatory authorities have been trying very hard to extirpate the menace of private universities which are running courses without any affiliation or recognition. Students from rural and semi urban background often fall prey to these institutes and colleges. Today, Knowledge is power. The more knowledge one has, the more empowered one is. According to the University Grants Commission (UGC), India needs 1500 more universities with adequate research facilities by the end of the year 2015 in order to compete in the global market.

The overall scenario of higher education in India does not match with the global Quality standards. Hence, there is enough justification for an increased assessment of the Quality of the country's educational institutions.

Critical appraisals undertaken by the governmental committees and independent academicians have highlighted the crisis confronting the system: 'increasing educated unemployment; weakening of student motivation; increasing unrest and indiscipline on the campuses; frequent collapse of administration; deterioration of standards; and above all, the demoralizing effect of the irrelevance and purposelessness of most of what is being done.' While the politicians and policy makers have often spoken about the need for radical reconstruction of the system, what has been achieved in reality is only moderate reformism.

At present, the world-class institutions in India are mainly limited. Most of the Indian colleges and universities lack in high-end research facilities. Under-investment in libraries, information technology, laboratories and classrooms makes it very difficult to provide top quality instruction or engage in cutting-edge research. This gap has to be bridged if we want to speed up our path to development. It is time for all those who are concerned with policymaking, planning, administration and implementation of Higher Education to revitalize the very thinking on the subject and put it on the right track.

After recording growth rate of around 9 percent for the three consecutive years, India is now considered to be one of the most promising economies of the world. While, higher

education gives India an edge in the world economy as evident from the availability of the skilled manpower, and research scholars working abroad, unemployment, illiteracy and relative poverty continue to be the major deterrents to realize her potential in human resources. The taskforce constituted by World Bank and UNESCO during 2000 has also observed that higher education helps increase wages and productivity that directly enrich individuals and society. The prospects and development in the higher education sector in India needs a critical examination in a rapidly globalizing world.

CRITICAL ISSUES IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION:

The role of higher education in the emerging scenario of knowledge economy is very crucial and multifaceted for any country in general and India in particular. There are many basic problems faced by higher education system in India. These include Lower level of teaching quality, Financing of higher education, More concentrated on theories and rather than practical knowledge, Traditional methods of teaching, Privatization, Inadequate facilities and infrastructure Quota system.

- 1) **Lower level of teaching quality:** Our education system is torture by issues of quality in many of its institutions and universities. Many of the issues like lack of faculty, poor quality teaching, Traditional teaching methods, outdated and rigid curricula and pedagogy, lack of accountability and quality assurance and separation of research and teaching are raise questions on Indian education system.
- 2) **Financing of higher education:** One of the most important things that have to be noticed is the issue of financial constraints regarding higher education before the government. Expenditure on education in common and on higher education in particular by the government, is one of the parameters to judge the quality in education for at all nation. The State Government have already been spending 20-30 per cent of its revenue budget on education. It cannot afford to spend more. In India, higher education has received less attention in terms of public spending than other levels. It is not feasible for India to make massive state investments in research and development that produced research led universities in the west such as MIT, University of California, Berkeley in the US or University of Cambridge in Britain. More concentrated on theories and rather than practical knowledge: Indian education system is more focused on theoretical knowledge rather than practical knowledge. In many jobs there is also a minimum requirement of percentage which is high.
- 3) **Traditional methods of teaching:** Professors still stick to those older methods of teaching like board, marker. They don't like to make use of audio visual aids in

teaching. Also they are not up to date with the information available and what global industry demands.

- 4) **Privatization:** In the present scenario, privatization of higher education is apparently a fledgling but welcome trend and is essential to maintain creativity, adaptability and quality. The economic trail of liberalization and globalization demands it. In India both public and private institutions operate simultaneously. Approximately 50 per cent of the higher education in India is imparted through private institutions, mainly unaided involving high cost. However, the situation is not so simple. Private providers, in the interest of maximizing profit, have every incentive to 'minimize costs' by compromising on the quality of education provided in their institutions. Last but not least, quality of teaching staff is one of the considerable issues for higher education sector to sustain in the future. Earlier, they were committed to their students to their subjects and to their profession. Today, high salaries are available but the commitment is less. Thus, it is the need of the hour to free the higher education system from unnecessary constraints and political interference.
- 5) **Inadequate facilities and infrastructure:** In India, many of the universities don't have adequate infrastructure or facilities to teach students. Even many private universities are running courses without classrooms. Internet and Wi-Fi facility is still out of reach of many students.
- 6) **Quota system:** Bringing the reservation and quota system for different categories in education lost its quality. Even deserving candidates of general categories are ignored and on quota we have to select other person from reserved category even though he is not suitable.

EMERGING CHALLENGES OF PRESENT HIGHER EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN INDIA:

The system of Indian Higher education is the second largest in the world which fulfills the educational requirements of millions of students who come from different sections of the society since it is the student community that can help to generate healthy academic atmosphere in institutions of higher learning. No doubt that India faces today a number of problems pertaining to poverty unemployment disappearance of moral and spiritual values. But in the last few decades a countrywide problems/challenges have emerged in Higher Education system in India they are discussed as under.

- 1) **Our heterogeneous education system:** Based on geographical, rural-urban, rich-poor set up has posed in great challenge for the educational institutions. Varieties of

colleges, universities, technical institutions have produced and different types and quality of Education. Some of them are really imparting qualitative education although a few others are doing the dirtiest job. Thanks to UGC, for publishing the list of such a fake Universities and Institutions indulging in educational malpractices.

- 2) **Interference of political factors:** Most of the Institutions, imparting education (Aided-non-aided) are owned by the dominant political leaders, now playing key role in governing bodies of the Universities. They have established their own youth cells and encourage students' organization on political basis. They exploit the students' energy for their political purposes. The students forget their own objectives and begin to develop their career in politics.
- 3) **Economic Difficulties:** Is one of the most troublesome changes that the present higher education system has imposed on the communities? The numbers of students are coming from the ordinary classes; many of them are unable to provide the minimum necessities of life for themselves. Economic miseries have grown due to the increasing prizes, habits of wasting money on luxuries, increasing population, scarcity of food supply, corruption, selfish etc. students hold part time jobs in order to pay for the their educational expenses and should divide their attention between a job and College/University education. Near about seventy five percent of the total students community today, have been facing the financial problems. Earn while learn scheme cannot adequately support student to face economic challenges.
- 4) **Lack of Moral values:** Rapid growth of science and technology and subsequent industrialization has caused a great and danger to our old moral and values. The younger generation's dissatisfaction and revolt is the outcome of a decaying system of values.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION:

There are some suggestions and expectations from Government, Industry, Educational Institutions, Parents and Students for improving quality of higher education:

- 1) **Towards a Learning Society-** As we move towards a learning society, every human activity will require contributions from experts, and this will place the entire sector of higher education in sharp focus. Although the priorities, which are being assigned today to the task of Education for All, will continue to be preponderant, the country will have to prepare itself to invest more and more on higher education and, simultaneously, measures will have to be taken to refine, diversify and upgrade higher education and research programmes.

- 2) **Industry and Academia Connection-** Industry and Academia connect necessary to ensure curriculum and skills in line with requirements. Skill building is really very crucial to ensure employability of academia to understand and make sure good jobs (keeping in view knowledge + skills+ global professional skills = good jobs).
- 3) **Incentives to Teachers and Researchers-** Industry and students are expecting specialized courses to be offered so that they get the latest and best in education and they are also industry ready and employable. Vocational and Diploma courses need to be made more attractive to facilitate specialized programs being offered to students. Incentives should be provided to teachers and researchers to make these professions more attractive for the younger generation.
- 4) **Innovative Practices-** The new technologies offer vast opportunities for progress in all walks of life. It offers opportunities for economic growth, improved health, better service delivery, improved learning and socio-cultural advances. Though efforts are required to improve the country's innovative capacity, yet the efforts should be to build on the existing strengths in light of new understanding of the research innovation- growth linkage.
- 5) **To mobilize resources-** The decline in public funding in the last two plan periods has resulted in serious effects on standards due to increasing costs on non-salary items and emoluments of staff, on the one hand, and declining resources, on the other. Effective measures will have to be adopted to mobilize resources for higher education. There is also a need to relate the fee structure to the student's capacity to pay for the cost. So that, students at lower economic levels can be given highly subsidised and fully subsidised education.
- 6) **Coming of Information Age-** The world is entering into an Information Age and developments in communication, information and technology will open up new and cost-effective approaches for providing the reach of higher education to the youth as well as to those who need continuing education for meeting the demands of explosion of information, fast-changing nature of occupations, and lifelong education. Knowledge, which is at the heart of higher education, is a crucial resource in the development of political democracy, the struggle for social justice and progress towards individual enlightenment.
- 7) **Student-Centered Education and Dynamic Methods-** Methods of higher education also have to be appropriate to the needs of learning to learn, learning to do, learning to be and learning to become. Student-centered education and employment of dynamic

methods of education will require from teachers new attitudes and new skills. Methods of teaching through lectures will have to subordinate to the methods that will lay stress on self-study, personal consultation between teachers and pupils, and dynamic sessions of seminars and workshops. Methods of distance education will have to be employed on a vast scale.

- 8) **Public Private Partnership-** PPP is most essential to bring in quality in the higher education system. Governments can ensure PPP through an appropriate policy. University Grants Commission and Ministry of HRD should play a major role in developing a purposeful interface between the Universities, Industries and National Research Laboratories (NRLs) as a step towards PPP. There has been some effort both by the government and the private education institutions to develop the teaching staff at various levels. However, this needs to be intensified with appropriate attention to all the aspects related in order to prepare quality and sufficient number of educational staff. Such efforts need a very serious structuring for the research base institutions. We have to be optimistic that private-public partnership and the Industry interface will take place in the field of education at all levels, and particularly in the backward regions, which is the need of the hour. To achieve excellence, we thus need to create a real partnership between government, educators and industry– Partnerships that can provide our high-tech industries with skilled workers who meet the standards of their industry.
- 9) **To Provide Need Based Job-Oriented Courses-** All round development of personality is the purpose of education. But the present day education is neither imparting true knowledge of life and nor improving the talent of a student by which one can achieve laurels in the field one is interested. So, combination of arts subjects and computer science and science and humanities or literature should be introduced so that such courses could be useful for the students to do jobs after recruitment in some companies which would reduce unnecessary rush to higher education.
- 10) **International Cooperation-** Universities in India have been a primary medium for the advancement and transmission of knowledge through traditional functions such as research, innovation, teaching, human resource development, and continuing education. International cooperation is gaining importance as yet another function.
- 11) **Cross Culture Programmes-** After education, tour to all the places in India and world as far as possible with the cooperation of government is necessary so that one

can understand about people, culture, arts, literature, religions, technological developments and progress of human society in the world.

- 12) **Action Plan for Improving Quality-** Academic and administrative audit should be conducted once in three years in colleges by external experts for ensuring quality in all aspects of academic activities.
- 13) **Quality development-** The level of education and knowledge being imparted by many colleges is not up to the mark. Instead of concentrating on quantity, these institutions should concentrate on quality. The approach of doctoral research in social sciences needs to be more analytical and comparative and be related to society, policy and economy.
- 14) **World Class Education-** Indian government is not giving priority to the development of Standard in education. India should aspire for the international standard in education. Many national universities like in the 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 India Universities of world class education can also offer courses of studies to foreign students taking advantage of the globalization process. To achieve that goal it should adopt uniform international syllabus in its educational institutions.
- 15) **Personality Development-** Finally, education should be for the flowering of personality but not for the suppression of creativity or natural skill. In the globalized world opportunities for the educated people are naturally ample in scope. As a result business process outsourcing (BPO) activities have increased competition in the world trade leading towards the production of quality goods and their easy availability everywhere in the world market. That is the way the world can be developed for peace, prosperity and progress by able and skilful men.
- 16) **Status of Academic Research Studies-** If we see the number of researchers engaged in Research and Development activities as compared to other countries we find that we have merely 119 researchers, whereas Japan has 5287 and US has 4484 researchers per million of population. Even in absolute terms, number of researchers in India is much smaller compared to US, China, Japan, Russia, and Germany.
- 17) **Stipends to Research Fellows-** The number of Ph.Ds from Indian Universities should increase with proper standards. This should be seen in the context of extremely low fraction of Ph.Ds in India in relation to M.Sc./B.Tech., as compared to what it is in USA, UK, Germany, Japan etc. Meritorious doctoral students should be recognized

through teaching assistantships with stipends over and above the research fellowships. Identifying talented, meritorious students and encouraging them through recognition is very important to attract students into research and teaching.

18) **Fair Quality Assurance System-** Colleges and Private institutes should set up Internal Quality Assurance Cell and must follow a minimum standard to give degrees. The quality assurance system must be independent of political and institutional interaction and it must have a basis in the legislation. There should be operational, financial and academic autonomy coupled with accountability. There is a need of an independent accreditation agency with a conglomerate of government, industry, academia and society.

19) **To increase Quantity of Universities-** We need more universities because we are more in number and present number of universities is too less. National Knowledge Commission has recommended setting up of 1500 universities so that gross enrollment ratio increases to 15 percent. It has also called for establishing an Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE) to monitor the quality of overall higher education in India.

20) **Examination Reforms-** Examination reforms, gradually shifting from the terminal, annual and semester examinations to regular and continuous assessment of student's performance in learning should be implemented

21) **High-tech Libraries-** Our university libraries have a very good collection of books, but they are all in mess. A library must be online and conducive for serious study.

In the end I can say that after independence, there has been tremendous increase in institutions of higher learning in all disciplines. But with the quantitative growth has it been able to attend to the core issue of quality. India is today one of the fastest developing countries of the world with the annual growth rate going above 9%. In order to sustain that rate of growth, there is need to increase the number of institutes and also the quality of higher education in India. To reach and achieve the future requirements there is an urgent need to relook at the Financial Resources, Access and Equity, Quality Standards, Relevance and at the end the Responsiveness.

To quote our former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh '*The time has come to create a second wave of institution building and of excellence in the fields of education, research and capability building*'. We need an educational system that is modern, liberal and can adapt to the changing needs of a changing society, a changing economy and a changing world.

REFERENCES:

1. Agarwal R et al. Higher Education and Quality Improvement: A challenge for India. Indian Journal of Applied Research 2014; 4(10).
2. Mishra Sharda, (2006). UGC and Higher Education System in India. Book Enclare, Jaipur.302006.
3. Arunachalam P. Higher Education Sector in India: Issues and Imperatives. Journal of Global Econom 2010; 6(4).
4. Padhi, S.K. (2011), 'Issues, Challenges and Reforms in Higher Education for a Knowledge Society'.
5. Higher Education in India: Issues, Concerns and New Directions <http://www.ugc.ac.in/pub/heindia.pdf>.
6. Ramesh G. Indian Higher Education and the Challenges of Sustainability: An Analytical Note. International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research 2013; 2(9).
7. Chronicle of Higher Education, various issues (cited as CHE) (<http://chronicle.com/>).
8. British council report. Understanding India: The future of higher education and opportunities for international cooperation, 2014.
9. Bhatia K, Dash MK. National Knowledge Commission-A Step towards India's higher Education Reforms on India's Higher Education. International Research Journal of Finance and Economic 2010.
10. Sudhanshu Bhushan, economic & Political Weekly EPW January 26, 2013 vol xlviII no 4.
11. Vrat, Prem (2006), "Indian Institutes of Technology", *Encyclopaedia of India (vol. 2)* edited by Stanley Wolpert, 229–231, Thomson Gale.
12. University Grants Commission (UGC) released a report "Higher education in India at a glance".
13. Joshi K, Vijay K. Indian Higher Education: Some Reflections. Journal of Intellectual Economics 2013.