



## **EVOLUTION PROCESS AND REFORMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Education is of critical importance for development. It has intrinsic and instrumental value and considered a human right in modern parlance with potential of empowering the underprivileged. India with its ancient heritage of imparting education through Gurukul system (students staying at Guru's or teacher's home to complete education) created institutions of higher learning which were of international repute. In recent times, Indian Supreme Court raised the bar high when in a landmark judgment in 1993 it construed the right to education being inherent in right to life enshrined in Indian Constitution. There is, however, a serious and deep crisis that afflicts education sector in India today. India which is emerging as an important member of 21st century global order, has realized the magnitude and seriousness of this crisis. It has taken first steps in articulating the issues and problems in education, including higher education, by setting up a National Knowledge Commission to initiate reforms for expansion in higher education consistent with standards of excellence and inclusive of vast deprived sections of its population. This paper is an attempt to evaluate India's efforts at reforming higher education sector including the controversy on the future shape of regulatory authority for higher education.*

**Keywords:** curriculum, National Knowledge Commission, Vedic education, employability, Educational Tribunals

## **Introduction**

Ancient Indian Initiatives Education is the fulcrum of life, for peace, progress and development. It provides seedlings for culture and civilisation. It is a passport for freedom and liberty and a higher calling in life. The South Asian sub-continent is inheritor of an ancient, rich civilisation and also a victim of western imperialism which ravaged the sub-continent in not so distant past. South Asian or more specifically Indian perspective on education is, therefore, rife with the possibility of complete human development. The achievements of Indian education in ancient times were fascinating – the sages and scholars orally imparting education in the Gurukul system (students staying at Guru's or teacher's home to complete education). While the original Vedic education was confined to upper strata of society in a complicated stratified social order, later spread of Buddhism and Jainism enriched education and was available to everyone in society. The problems of lack of inclusiveness though, in some measure, persist till present day. All of us who have been concerned with the developments in higher education in India have come across a great deal of comments and criticisms about things that have gone wrong. Besides the diagnosis of the ills of our higher educations, many commissions, committees and individuals have also suggested possible approaches to deal with these ills. However in reality one gets the feeling that no one is really in charge of higher education. The casual views of those wielding political or administrative power tend to be taken as the guiding policy. In spite of having statutory bodies for higher education at the central and state levels one fails to obtain a coherent set of meaningful policy guidelines.

## **Literature Review**

### **Characteristics of Postmodern Curriculum**

Doll's (1993) extensive study of postmodern curriculum provides some insight into higher education curriculum. Since it is ever-changing and evolving, postmodern curriculum could be referred to as curriculum-in-action (Barnett & Coate, 2005, p. 3). Curriculum development is not seen as permanent but as creative and fluid. Postmodern curriculum development does not focus on specific steps in curriculum development but instead on the relationships of people involved in the process of creating curriculum (Tierney, 1989). This means that emerging curriculum is a nonlinear process with no master plan or rationale for curriculum. Postmodernism accepts the

chaotic, the “emergent currents of change” (Hunkins&Hammill, 1994, p. 41). Slattery’s (2006) postmodern view for curriculum and his interest in religion, spirituality, and culture also speak to the field of higher education. He identified three main elements of postmodern curriculum: (a) a focus on community cooperation rather than corporate competition, (b) a holistic process perspective rather than separate parts, and (c) a multilayered, interdisciplinary curriculum, which includes the integration of theology (pp. 108-109).

## **Historical Development**

The reform process has been in vogue since ages. The ancient universities in India were leading centres of learning in the contemporary world and attracted scholars and students from other countries. So did some famous centres of Islamic learning in the mediaeval period. But unfortunately these traditions did not survive. The modern universities were established, more than a hundred years ago, as exotic institutions created in imitation of the London University as it then was. The earliest of these were the Universities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, all founded in 1857, and the University of Allahabad, founded in 1887. They all began as purely examining bodies and continued to be so till the beginning of the twentieth century when the Indian Universities Commission was appointed (1902) and the Indian Universities Act was passed (1904).

As Lord Curzon observed then: “Here the university has no corporate existence in the same sense of the term (i.e. as in Oxford or Cambridge); and it is not a collection of buildings, it is scarcely even a site. It is a body that controls courses of study and sets examination papers to the pupils of affiliated colleges. They are not part of it. They are frequently not in the same city, sometimes not in the same province”.

The Government Resolution on Educational Policy (1913) accepted the need for establishing more universities. It said: “The day is probably far distant when India will be able to dispense altogether with the affiliating universities. But it is necessary to restrict the area over which the affiliating universities have control by securing, in the first instance, a separate university for each of the leading provinces in India and secondly to create new local teaching and residential universities within each of the provinces in harmony with the best modern opinion as to the right road to educational efficiency.”

As a result of this policy, six new universities came into existence between 1913 and 1921. A teaching, unitary and largely residential university was established at Lucknow (1920). Recognition was also given to the efforts made by eminent Indians to break new ground in creating teaching universities. For instance, the Banaras Hindu University, founded by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, was incorporated in 1916 and the Aligarh Muslim University, founded by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, was incorporated in 1920. In the meanwhile, two princely States also established universities for their areas, Mysore in 1916 and Osmania in 1918, the latter making history by the adoption of Urdu as the medium of education. Maharishi Annasahib Karve founded the S.N.D.T. Indian Women's University in 1916 and it used Marathi and Gujarati as the media of education. It was, however, incorporated much later in 1949. After 1921, when education was transferred to Indian control, the development of universities was much faster and during the next 26 years, nine more universities were established. After the attainment of independence, there has been a much more rapid expansion in the field of higher education. The number of university level institutions has increased from 19 to 480. But even this expansion has not fulfilled the needs of the country.

### **Concept of Higher Education**

The definition of higher education includes a hierarchy of institutions and programmes. Many different kinds of university level institutions such as central universities, state universities, private universities, IITs, NITs, IIITs, IIMs, IISERs, occupy the upper end of the higher education spectrum. The various colleges offering general or specialized education, professional education, provide higher education to

nearly eighty percent of students. Then, there are several other post secondary institutions such as community colleges and technical training institutions. In a sense the polytechnics and vocational institutions, which are not strictly post-secondary, are also considered as higher education.

In general our higher education system has divided these institutions and programmes into two broad categories: one for scholarly pursuits and achievements and the other for work-force requirements. It is now increasingly recognized that this dichotomy should be erased and shift away from undue emphasis on "manpower oriented" planning (annual out-turn of graduates, growth rate, Gross Enrollment Ratio, employability etc) and adopt a more holistic approach to higher education at every level, not just at the university or college level only.

In the rapidly changing contemporary world, higher education system is undergoing profound changes in their scope, functions and organization and is in a process of rapid evolution. Their tasks are no longer confined to the two traditional functions of teaching and advancement of knowledge. They are assuming new functions with increasing range, depth and complexity. In broad terms, the functions of the higher education system in the modern world may be said to be: to seek and cultivate new knowledge; to interpret old knowledge and beliefs in the light of new needs and discoveries; to provide the right kind of leadership in all walks of life; to include the youth from all sections of the society to develop their full potential; to help to cultivate right interests, attitudes and moral and intellectual values; and to strive to promote equality and social justice and to reduce social and cultural differences through diffusion of education.

### **NCHER Bill**

An important measure awaiting political clearance of the Cabinet for introduction in the Parliament is the Bill for the Creation of the National Commission on Higher Education and Research (NCHER) (conforming to the recommendations of the Yashpal Committee Report on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education In India). This Bill addresses certain fundamental concerns in the reports of National Knowledge Commission and Yashpal Committee. These two reports draw critical attention to the fundamental academic weaknesses such as compartmentalization and fragmentation of knowledge systems, absence of innovation in learning methods, disconnect with the society and too much emphasis on multiplicity of harmful entrance and qualifying tests. They reflect concerns on the growing trend in loss of university autonomy damaging the prospect of healthy growth of spirits of enquiry, creativity, and innovation.

An important feature of the NCHER Bill is a provision to review by a committee on eminent persons the performance of the Commission itself about the extent of fulfillment of its goals and objectives and recommend suitable actions. This is somewhat exceptional in the sense that the institutions or organizations created by acts and statutes seldom get reviewed and this is one of the major reasons for their deterioration. Hopefully, the various consultative processes that are envisaged between now and its enactment will further enhance the distinctive role assigned to the commission for renovation and rejuvenation of higher education in India.

Four other bills approved by the Cabinet and undergoing the legislative scrutiny relate to Entry and Operation of the Foreign Institutions in India; Establishment of a National Accreditation Authority; Prevention of Malpractices; and Establishment of Educational Tribunals.

## **Conclusion**

The four bills that have been introduced in the Parliament in the middle of April and the NCHER Bill on the anvil, if enacted with whatever changes the Parliament deems fit, can provide a strong foundation to overcome the present aberrations and elevate the credibility of Indian higher educational qualifications among the community of nations. Hopefully, if the proposed legal instruments emerge through the legislative process, and perhaps go through the judicial scrutiny, and if implemented in their true letter and spirit, there will be some light at the end of the tunnel. In the meantime those who are concerned about the future of higher education in India should seek to understand the basic rationale behind these measures and help to address them in their own domains of involvement in whatever way possible. Since the nation's economic future and global stature are intricately associated with the credibility of higher education system, one can only hope that there is sufficient wisdom in the society not to let the present state of entropy to persist.

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