

Higher Education : New Challenges and Emerging Roles

H.P. Misra

Education is a process by which a person's body, mind and character are formed and strengthened. It is bringing of head, heart and mind together and thus enabling a person to develop an all round personality identifying the best in him or her. It is a humanizing process. Education is for transformation, to be able to think by oneself, to be able to relate to others meaningfully and to understand the world and society clearly. A nation advances in proportion to education and intelligence spread among masses. Development of any country depends 20% on natural resources, 16% on infrastructure and 64% on human resources and social factors. This calls for a high quality and well trained human resources from our education systems.

Without education one cannot discern what is **good or bad** ? What is **right or wrong** ? What is **true or false** ? What is **lovely or ugly** ? The purpose of education is, therefore, to make human beings capable, competent and wise to meet the challenges of life. Jawaharlal Nehru declared that if all were well with our educational institutions, all would be well with the nation. Educational institutions are intimately linked with society at large. They are the **temples of knowledge**. They are the agents of social change and transformation. Therefore, the general condition of our schools, colleges and universities is a matter of great concern to the nation. The Kothari Commission has beautifully said: "The

destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms. This we believe is no mere rhetoric. In a world based on science and technology it is education that determines the level of prosperity, welfare and security of people. On the quality and number of persons coming out of our schools and colleges will depend our success in the great enterprise of national construction whose principal objective is to raise the standard of living of our people".

The Drawbacks in our Educational System:

1. The educational system has acquired a dualist character. It operates with a strong class bias. There is a wide disparity in quality. While 75 per cent of our Indian children go through an educational programme of poor even rock-bottom quality provided mostly by government schools and colleges, 25 per cent benefit from a small number of quality institutions run by private organizations. The former hail from the lower strata of society while the latter come from the elite class.
2. The resources are inadequate. So the facilities offered in our schools and colleges are below the level of qualitative viability. In the 1st Plan the Government of India allocated Rs 153 crores for education (0.7 per cent of GDP). In the 9th Plan, the allocation was to the tune of 20,381.6 crores (3.7 per cent of GDP). The proportion is much less in comparison with many countries.

3. Academic and administrative problems faced by our educational institutions are further compounded by government control and council or university regulations.

4. One of the greatest difficulties is that teachers and students feel a tremendous academic pressure on them. Our school councils and universities produce curriculum as bundles of good or package of values. It has been the practice of the educationists to burden the students with heavy load of study materials. The workload is still heavier in professional courses.

5. Government policies and programmes are not effectively implemented. There are administrative, operational and financial problems. Reforms within the system or structure are slow.

6. Political interference especially in government schools and colleges is rampant. Politicized teacher and student unions interfere with the normal functioning of the institutions. They use the institutions to gain credibility with their political bosses and to climb the political ladder.

7. The syllabi of many universities reveal the extent of academic backwardness. They spell out subjects which are neither job-oriented nor life oriented. When students enter the world, they are surprised that there is hardly any job for the course they have studied. For a young ambitious man hailing from a middle class family, it is sheer waste of time, energy and money to have spent three or five years in a college. It is not uncommon to see swarms of students finding no job eventually through the abode of unemployed.

8. The authoritarian system and the rigid and undemocratic structure in many of our schools, colleges and universities still continue without much change. People who are active participants namely teachers and students do not have a proper say.

9. Our educational institutions in general and those imparting higher education in particular have

become “**knowledge industries**” manufacturing graduates and postgraduates unfit for our society. Education, of late has become a commodity, which is being sold and bought in our schools and colleges. It is a fact that higher education has become costly like other commodities because of a steep increase in demand.

10. The traditional “banking” method of education, which sees people as adaptable, manageable beings, still continues in many institutions. Concentrating on accumulating deposits of knowledge, students do not develop the critical consciousness that would lead them to involve with the social process and change it.

11. The frustration of parents to admit their wards in particular institutions so that they can gain some social status. It has been the routine business of the parents and their wards to make a beeline for the offices of schools and colleges for admissions.

12. India lives in villages. Majority of the villagers belong to SC/STs. They are, by and large illiterate. The SC and ST literacy rates are 20% and 33%, respectively. Women literacy rate is poor, just 50 per cent. They lack employment opportunities and are often discriminated against. Provisions for educational opportunities for SCs/STs and women have not been effectively implemented in our country.

What Mr. M.S. Adishesia, an educationist, observed some thirty years ago still holds true. “The real ills of the present educational system are its elitist nature, its heavy push out and dropout rate, its scandalously poor school environment, growing unemployed and unemployable product outcome, its indifference to the illiterates, its minimal learning and evaluation system, and its widening gap between the overt (prescribed) curriculum and the hidden (real) curriculum”.

Since we have got independence we are facing challenges to establish a great and strong

education system. Various governments came and gone. Off course they tried to establish new education policies in the system but, this is very sad to dictate that they were not sufficient for our country. Still we are facing lot of problems and challenges in our Education System.

If we look in the past history since our independence we have taken the concept of British to develop our education system. At that time this is good to implement that we have no other choice and started contributing to our education system at three major presidencies developed in Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai. Indian National Congress tried to moderate the pace of education in India and laid emphasis on technical and vocational training programmes which are still running. After that, Nehru came to emphasize with his schemes like “**Education for All**” and for industrial development plotted a significant step to develop the education system. There were needed lots of changes in that education system led by Nehru and now the turn was of Rajiv Gandhi who has contributed a lot to establish a good education system. Rajiv came with a new policy as “**National policy on Education**” which emphasizes on “**Rural Education**” and tried to provide schools within the area reachable to students easily. The policy has given priority to develop students which are strong in Science and Mathematics. This policy was found to be stronger and raised our education standards and increased the access to education.

The existing higher education system in India needs thorough information to deliver goods facing new challenges in today’s competitive world. Several commissions have been constituted by the Government of India like the **Radhakrishnan Commission** (1945), the **Kothari Commission** (1966) and the most recent, the **National Knowledge Commission** (2007). Several of the recommendations have been implemented. But, the fact remains that positive outcomes are yet to come.

New Challenges:

India is the largest democracy with remarkable diversity among its population of around 1.2 billion which makes up about 17% of the world’s population. Almost 70% of Indian population is rural. The adult literacy rate stands at about 60% and this is significantly lower in women and minorities. Education in India comprises of government, government aided and private institutions of which nearly 40% are government. With the population growth rate of around 1.5%, there is tremendous pressure on the education system to provide quality education at affordable price and improve the literacy rate.

There were major changes done in the education scheme with the help of UNESCO and they developed non formal education system which contributed a lot in the education of women. Time to time the education system was influenced with new challenges and government has taken a major role to build the system. But, higher education in India always faces certain primary challenges such as:

1. Improving access and quality of education at all levels

Having infrastructural constraints and social issues, it becomes harder to make education accessible to all segments of the society (women, minorities, poor). Maintaining standard of education in more than a million schools nationwide, offering training programmes to teachers, and keeping good balance with education system worldwide are big challenges. Schools vary in size and resources and are forced to compromise in the all round development opportunities they must provide to students.

2. Increasing Funding for higher level of education

According to our Constitution it is the responsibility of Central and State governments to build good education system. For that we need

to have funds. But, despite a large expenditure of funds every year on Education, our system remains in tact. The cost of education is very high even for the people and places where it is accessible. The competitive pressure on students and parents forces them to opt for private tuitions and trainings to supplement the school education.

3. Increasing the Literacy rate

Education in India is a joint responsibility of the State Governments and the Central Government. Many educational programmes have been launched. But, it is an embarrassing situation to note that only 62 per cent of the population are literate (male 73% and female 50%). About 480 million people are illiterates even now. The standard education facilities are higher in the states which are much rich and in poor states the literacy rate is very low. Government has to rethink its plan on those states which has less literacy rate. In today's generation there is need of IT education. But, we have IT more in IT cities and have great facilities in different private Colleges which provide better education than a government College. There are few colleges led by government which serve the IT education and only deal in just their old subject and course.

4. Removing secularism from education

The ethnic diversity in India poses challenges to implement consistent education nationwide. There are more than 300 languages spoken in the country which makes it difficult to offer education tailored to specific social segment. Educating women in some societies is a big issue. Children of poor families are forced to work and miss out the learning opportunities. Illiterate adults have very limited opportunities to get educated at later age in their lives.

5. Modernization of Education System

The time now is to modernize our education system so that our country can get much more technically graduated people which can help

our country to become a developed state. Today's youth always try to go abroad for their higher education, as they have much better facilities and quality of educational system. Can't we get that quality here itself? We have to stop this brain drainage so as to avoid students to run away from our country. Our government is trying for various challenges faced, but no one is doing well for that. Many Governments came but system remains in tact.

Emerging Roles:

If we really want to compete globally, then both the Central Government and State Governments should come up with novel programmes, the teachers and student should wholeheartedly work for the best of nation's improvement and the parents and public should co-operate in the implementation of such programmes. At present united focus should be on two aspects such as 'Quality Assessment' and 'Quality Assurance', which are like two sides of a coin. In response to quality aspects, the institutions have adopted various quality management system initiatives like ISO 9001 Certification, Six Sigma, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), National Board of Accreditation (NBA) and more importantly have started applying Total Quality Management (TQM) concept in education. The objective of TQM is to build an institution that produces products or services, which fulfill customer's requirements and thereby delighting them.

As a matter of fact, education should be focused on the learner and in real sense emphasis should be laid on 'Student-Centre Learning' as it aims at all round development of the student's total personality. The following suggestions are offered for qualitative up-gradation of higher education system.

1. To develop world class higher education, feeder stages of education are required to be developed.

2. Central government should allocate substantially higher funds to state Universities and colleges in order to achieve GRE rate of 15% in higher education by the end of 11th Plan. The Universities and Colleges situated in backward areas should get more annual grants to attract more students for quality education at their doorstep which will check brain drain.
 3. There is need of judicious mix of accountability and autonomy in institutions.
 4. Institutions should have proper missions, resources and purposes.
 5. Introduction of effective administration and managerial reforms are a prerequisite for better command and control.
 6. Only merit should be the basis of all selections and transparent promotion policies for the academic staff and similar merit based selection of students should be enforced.
 7. Teaching of skill development courses by practicing professionals and continuous up-gradation of curricula with latest development in technologies are required.
 8. Teaching-learning should be learner-centre and institution must recognize sovereignty of learners. Teaching-learning resources are to be networked for collaborative development of the teachers.
 9. There should be extensive and optimal use of audio visuals, information technology and Internet networks. The courses should be so designed that the use of these technologies is made an integral part of the teaching programmes and classroom activities.
 10. Internship should be made compulsory in all professional courses.
 11. Curricula must contribute towards development of soft skills together with logical and analytical mind.
 12. Education has to be tailor-made to the requirements of the private sector which is the major employer today.
 13. Both private and Government, institutions be brought under the umbrella of an Apex Regulatory Authority as far as quality assurance is concerned.
 14. The primary focus should be on making education affordable either through making available scholarships or soft loans to economically weaker students or every needy student in accredited institutions.
 15. Curricula must contribute towards development of character and overall development of student's personality.
 16. New market driven professional courses should be developed.
 17. To attract proficient faculty, liberal salary / perks should be introduced.
 18. In order to enrich higher education a substantial number of potentially great academicians and scientists might be invited from abroad to work with our students and teachers instead of importing mediocre foreign Universities to set up shops in the country. The Universities should rethink over the reason behind a negligible percentage of their students qualifying the UGC NET and SLET examinations.
- These reforms will not only bring in desired change in the quality of our passouts who would man various positions in teaching, research and extension in public sectors as well as in private sectors in future but are also necessary for other sectors in bringing about required change in quality of education.

H.P.Misra, Professor, Department of Entomology, College of Agriculture, Odisha University of Agriculture & Technology, Bhubaneswar – 751 003.