

Changing Perspective of Higher Education in the 21st Century

Ramchandra Pramanik*

Abstract

“Real education is that which enables one to stand on his own legs”. This maxim pronounced by Swami Vivekananda still manifests the undoubted goals of education even in the present age. The goals of education in the present context are somewhat different as these were contemplated in earlier days. As a result there is a paradigm shift in the teaching and learning process. The students are no longer considered to be learners; rather they are the consumers whom the teachers must satisfy so that they can become successful clients in the market. Education is, therefore, intimately linked with consumerism. Still, education must not lose its inclusive character as long as disability among certain sections exists. Hence, the goals of education and sustainable economic growth go hand in hand.

Introduction

The 20th century was the education century. For the first time in human history, a majority of the world's population learned to read and write (Cohen and Bloom, 2005). Education as an essential ingredient of prosperity is at once obvious and contentious. Obvious because any person able to read this text knows what a difference it makes in their lives to have gone to school, to have learned to read, write and calculate. Contentious because when social scientists try to “prove” that education is a cause of economic growth, it turns out to be quite difficult to decide which came first, the chicken or the egg. What is more, even the basic terms such as “what is education” and “what is prosperity” become vast and cloudy terrains for the technical experts like economists, sociologists, education specialists and policy analysts. The relationship between economic growth and education has been one of the central threads of economic analysis. Both Adam Smith in the 18th century and Alfred Marshall in the 19th century, two important figures for the economics profession, addressed the question of how individual investments in “education” influence the wealth of nations. Investing in education and skills have long been considered key drivers of economic growth. The research indicates that literacy scores, as a direct measure of human capital perform better

in growth regressions than indicators of schooling. A country able to attain literacy scores 1 percent higher than the international average will achieve levels of productivity and GDP per capita that are 2.5 and 1.5 percent higher respectively, than those of other countries (OECD, 2006). The 21st century is the age of knowledge-based economy and the center-stage of change. Higher education has not escaped the impact and is in the process of challenge, thereby challenging the traditional system of education. The disparity in wealth and quality of life between the developed and developing world has been attracting the attention of the world. The exponential growth of population in the developing countries is matched by the exponential growth of knowledge in the developed world (Dhar, 2008). Promotion of higher education has, thus, become the important goal of all developing countries.

Changing Goals of Education:

The first decade of 21st century has played a major role in promoting borderless education in the globalised world. The notion of students as consumers has emerged as an important feature of the 20th Century University. As a result, the quality of teaching learning process was mainly attached to the satisfaction of their clients i.e., students and business organizations. Now the students' opinion is being considered as an important indicator of the institutional performance, at the same time the major emphasis of the employment market is on information technology skills as the combination of information technology with skilled academic governance and universal role of the university has made possible the reach to the new situation (Lowe, 2002, Sadlak, 2000). The development of university strategy, areas of potential strengths and weaknesses and a style of developing a strategic analysis, organisational issues, human resource issues, issues of infrastructure, matters related to quality assurance and revolution in teaching and learning paradigm demand a shift in the concept of university (Davies, 2001). In 21st century global awareness has emerged as a dire need of every society (Runter, 2001). During the last couple of years, the global trade organizations have become one of the major funding agencies of the

*Assistant Professor in Political Science, Jhargram Raj College (Govt), Jhargram, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal

universities. In return the universities have to do research work for the funding agencies. So the survival of the today's institutions of higher learning is mainly associated with the international repute earned through research rather than their status at home for the quality of teaching. The principal driving force for this transformation of universities is the development of knowledge societies and economies, all the pervasiveness of information technologies, globalization and the debate on the public private nature of higher education. At the same time, their role in the development of nations cannot be denied. So these institutions simultaneously have to operate in local regional, national and international contexts and need to acknowledge political realities, community expectations and their own espoused values. They are expected to serve as engines for local and regional development and form elites, usually local elites (Kuklinski, 2001). The current wave of learning is going to transform university education through communicative action open discourse, by concentrating on values, feelings, fears and hopes, enabling a trusting base for critical problem solution discussions. This communicative action through open discourse between universities, governments and business could lead to increasing transnational openness. These challenges demand to devise a system of higher education whose outcomes will be social inclusion and social cohesion rather than exclusivity and competitiveness (Lowe, 2002).

Higher Education in India: Issues and Challenges:

Higher education in India is still out of the reach of majority of population, if the Gross

Enrolment Ratio is taken into consideration. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is a statistical measure used by the United Nations to measure education index of a nation. Relating to higher education, it measures the total population of all ages enrolled in different education programmes to the total population of the country in the age group of 18-23 years. The current level of GER in India stands at a figure of need updating it is 18% which is very low in comparison with world average of 23.2%, 36.5% for developing countries and 45% for developed countries. The role of government in this regard is, thus, enormous and challenging. To improve the GER to bring it closer to a possible extent to other developing countries, otherwise the country would continue to face unequal distribution of education, health and wealth. The benefits of growth that Indian economy is achieving at a formidable rate will not percolate to wider level of the society. India has evolved a plan to raise the GER from current level to 30 percent by the Year 2020 (*Ibid*, 2009). This is definitely a herculean task and involves a greater degree of capacity building measures including development of infrastructure, recruiting teaching staff, making higher education more accessible, allocating adequate funds, providing technological support for gathering worldwide knowledge information, and the last but not the least, addressing the issue of quality education. Since independence, the number of educational institutions has been increased to a significant extent. The following table shows that spectacular growth over the periods:

Table-1
Growth of Higher Education institutions in India (Dec.2011)

Year	No. of Universities	No. of Colleges
1950-51	30	695
1960-60	55	1542
1970-71	103	3604
1980-81	133	4722
1990-91	190	7346
2000-01	256	12806
2010-11	564	33023

Source: University Grants Commission, New Delhi, (2012)

With the growth of educational institutions, the budgetary allocations on education have been

increased over the periods. Table-2 indicates the governmental expenditure on education:

Table-2
Budgetary allocation on education

Year	Budget % of GDP
2006-07	1.14
2007-08	1.09
2008-09	1.23
2009-10	1.25

Source: University Grants Commission, New Delhi (2012).

Recruitment of teaching staff is a crucial issue in a developing country like India simply because it creates an apparent load on exchequer. But institutions that impart knowledge require teachers for creation of knowledge and its dissemination. As of today, around 35 percent posts are vacant in Central Universities, 33.33 percent in National Institute of technology and 35.1 percent in other Central Educational Institutions. There is an overall shortage of 25-30 percent faculty in Higher education. The Human Development Index for the year 2009 ranked India at 134, one of the lowest among the nations, 120 and 128 in adult literacy rate and GDP per capita respectively. It indicates that we require more institutions to address the issues of accessibility to education and to provide higher education at an affordable cost for sustaining the goal of inclusive education.

Concluding Observations

Education is one of the crucial areas that caters to the need for long term development of the entire country. As Amartya Sen has aptly put it, *education (along with health), especially basic is not an instrument but a very constituent of development and its instrumental value is secondary*. The spectrum is large, extending from *KG to PG* and from Liberal Arts to Pure Sciences and from Technology to Professional streams. The following measures are important that need to be kept in mind while discussing any policy issues in order to reach the goals of higher education in the New Millennium. First, *the role of the state needs to be redefined* so that rather than spreading resources thinly on everything, we can do a few essential things properly and ensure effective delivery. The numbers of reputed social science institutions like

Indian School of Economics or privately run Tata Institute of Social Sciences are so negligible that they cannot cater to the needs of the entire country. Secondly, vocationalisation of education needs to be redesigned, that means vocational courses should be introduced within the departments of the state universities. This will generate skilled human capital that is required by the market place. Thirdly, mentoring activity is extremely crucial, but often neglected by the state, in the context of holistic goals of inclusive education. That practice has been started in some management schools, but state sponsored educational institutions are far away from these desired goals. Fourthly, in today's knowledge economy where India has a perceived advantage, the felt need is for greater coverage and access. The short term or intermediate remedy lies in strengthening open or distance learning through the process e-learning. Fifthly, for higher (University and Professional) level learning, we need to set up *institutions of excellence* if we want to cater to the kind of economy that can effectively compete with the global economy. The *huge infrastructural needs* mean that the state has to provide the requisite resources. Also the human resources required will have to be of a very high quality. The government sector will have to identify and focus on *nurturing few such institutions and back these with requisite resources*. Sixthly, *the private sector will have to play a role in this context in a big way*. This has already started happening in some metropolis. However, goals of education of any kind will remain unfulfilled if adequate budgetary provisions on education are made with an ideal target of 6 percent of GDP.

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Life is like photography we develop from negatives.
In wisdom gathered over time I have faced that every
experience is a form of exploration.

Asel Adams

