



INDIA: HIGHER EDUCATION IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY VISION AND ACTION

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Abstract

Higher Education provides people with an opportunity to reflect in the critical social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity. It contributes to national development through discrimination of specialized knowledge and skills. It is therefore a crucial factor for survival. Being at the apex of the educational pyramid, it has also a key role in producing teachers for the Education System. In the context of the unprecedented explosion of knowledge in the last few centuries, higher education has to become dynamic as never before, constantly entering uncharted areas.

Keywords: Higher Education, RUSA, RMSA, NPE.

Higher Education in India has a longer tradition than Europe and North America. It is in Bologna in Italy that the oldest university in the world was created in 1088. Paris followed three years later, in 1091. Other citadels of higher learning soon emerged in different countries in Europe, including Oxford University in 1167 and Cambridge University in 1209. There is a tendency across the world- reflected in India as well- to assume that higher Education is somehow a quintessentially Western contribution to the world. The history of the last millennium tends to confirm that understanding, and yet it is important in this context to remember and be inspired by the fact that India has, in some ways, an even longer heritage of higher education.

Nalanda University, which served as a pan-Asian university, which drew students from all over Asia, seen by a Buddhist foundation to which others, including Hindu Kings, contributed support. When the oldest European university, Bologna, was founded in 1088, Nalanda was already more than six hundred years old, attracting students from many countries in the world, for example China, Korea, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the rest of Asia, but as far as the West as Turkey. At its peak, Nalanda, a residential university, had ten thousand students in its dormitories.

The curriculum at Nalanda was comprehensive and catholic. Though the establishment belonged to the Mahayana School of Buddhism, the work of the rival school, the Hinayana one, were also taught. Subjects like grammar, logic, literature, Vedas, Vedanta, Samkhya philosophy, Dharmasatras (sacred law), Puranas, astronomy, astrology including medicine Chikitsasatras were also taught. The subjects that were taught in Nalanda are still being investigated, as the old university is being re-established under a joint initiative of the East Asia Summit; it is not an easy search, since the documents in Nalanda were discriminately burnt by Bakhtiyar Khilji and his conquering army at the end of the twelfth century. Contemporary accounts tell us that Nalanda's large and distinguished library- apparently housed in a nine-story building burnt for three days in the flames of destruction. From "Tabakat-i-Nasiri", we learnt that not only the building was burnt or destroyed but also the whole of the monk population was put to the sword.

While Nalanda lingered on for some time more after it had regrouped and recognized itself following the devastation, it would never regain the former size, quality or reputation. But putting together all the accounts we have, especially the memories of former students of Nalanda (particularly from China) we do know that the subjects taught and researched

there included religion, history, law, linguistics, medicine, public health, architecture and sculpture, as well as astronomy. There is circumstantial evidence that mathematics must have been taught too. Closely linked as it is to astronomy, and this would have been natural given the proximity of Nalanda to the old haunt of Indian mathematicians in Kusumpur at Pataliputra- what is now Patna. Inspired by Nalanda, Vikramshila, also in what is now Bihar and which was also a Buddhist foundation came to compete with Nalanda in terms of educational offerings and reputation for excellence.

But all this was a long ago, and while all Indian universities to-day, including the newly re-established Nalanda University, can be inspired by the long history of higher education in India, the fact remains that the achievements of contemporary Indian universities are rather limited. The quality of higher education is hard to judge, but if we go by the list of 200 top-ranking universities prepared by the "The Times Higher Education Supplement in October, 2011" an overwhelming proportion of the leading institutions of higher education in the world are based in the United States. Indeed, the top five are all in America: Harvard, Caltech, MIT, Stanford and Princeton, in that order. The British followed just behind, and in the top ten we also find Cambridge, Oxford and Imperial College, London. There are none from Asia in the top 20 and while some elite universities in Asia do get below that, including Hong Kong, Tokyo, Pohang, Singapore, Peking, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Kyoto, Tsinghua and a few others, together they form only a small minority of the top universities on the globe. It is particularly striking that there is not a single university in India in this list of top 200 in the world. But given India's academic potential and its long history in higher education, it would be natural to expect a much better performance from the Indian university sector than we actually see today.

The ranking presented by 'The Times Higher Educational Supplement' which could be, it has been alleged that it is culturally biased. There is plenty of other evidence pointing to the same conclusions. Even the assessment by students themselves, in particular which universities they try to get into tend to confirm an important problem of quality deficiency. Indian students do spectacularly well once they enter any of the leading universities in the world, in a way that is hard for them to achieve within the confines of Indian universities. The situation can certainly be changed, and may, to some extent, already be changing. Many of the leading Indian universities have excellent areas of instruction

and training in particular subjects, even when the overall achievement of the particular universities is pulled down by the low or indifferent quality of other departments. The quality of higher education offered in specialist institutions, such as the Indian Statistical Institute, or the Indian Institute of Technology, or some Institutes of Management has, by and large, been very high, and there is maintenance of quality in them that the Indian universities in general do not have.

The problems of Indian Universities, including academic arrangements and facilities, recruitments and emoluments, can be critically assessed. The limitation of intake is, however, a major drag on the reach and performance of Indian higher education and to improve this it is critically important to reform, indeed to make, the entire system of school education in the country.

On the eve of 21st century, two major developments in school education took place as Universalization of elementary education and Universalization of Secondary Education in India. The success of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan (RMSA) has laid a strong foundation for primary and secondary education in India. In recent decades, higher education in India has gone through a phase of unprecedented expansion, marked by a huge increase in the volume of students, an exponential increase in the number of institutions and quantum jumps in the level of public funding. The increase however has not been commensurate with the growth of the population and its diverse needs.

Today, higher education system as a whole faced with many challenges such as financing and management, access, equity, relevance and reorientation of policies and programs for laying emphasis on values, ethics and quality of higher education together with the assessment of institutions and their accreditation. These issues are of vital importance for the country, since higher education is the most powerful tool to build knowledge based society for the future. The enormity of the challenges for providing equal opportunities for quality higher education to an ever growing number of students is also historic opportunity for correcting sectoral and social imbalances, reinvigorating institutions, crossing international benchmarks of excellence and extending the frontier of knowledge.

The institution of higher learning have to perform multiple roles like creating new knowledge, acquiring new capabilities, producing an intelligent human resource pool, at the same time Indian higher education system has to brace itself to address global challenges by channelizing teaching, research and extension activities and maintaining the right balance between need and demand.

Higher Education needs to be viewed as a long term social investment for the promotion of economic growth, cultural development, social cohesion, equity and justice. To fulfill the aim of inclusive growth and ensure genuine endogenous and sustainable development along with the social justice and equity, the higher education sector has to play a pivotal role especially in generating research-based knowledge and development of critical mass of skilled and educated personnel.

The globalized era has necessitated inculcation of competitive spirit at all levels. This can be achieved only by bringing

quality of higher standard to every sphere of work. Therefore the quality of higher education has become a major concern today. Needs and expectation of society are changing very fast and the quality of higher education needs to be sustained at the desired level. The quality of higher education rests on the quality of all its facets, be it the faculty, staff, students or infrastructure. As such, all policies, systems and processes should be clearly directed towards attaining improvements in all the relevant facets for an overall rise in the quality of education.

The policy for the development of higher education has been mainly governed by the "National Policy on Education" of 1968 (as modified in 1986 and 1992) and its Programme of Action adopted in 1992. The 1986 policy and its Programme of Action of 1992 were based on two landmark reports namely the "University Education Commission Report" of 1948-49 (Popularly known as the Radhakrishnan Commission Report), and the "Education Commission Report" of 1964-66, (Popularly known as the Kothari Commission Report). These two Reports, in fact, laid down the basic framework for the National Policy of 1968 for higher education in the country.

The National Policy on Higher Education (1986) translated the vision of Radhakrishnan Commission and Kothari Commission into an actionable policy by setting five main goals for higher education-

Access: Greater Access requires an enhancement of the education institutional capacity of the higher education sector to provide opportunities to all who deserve and desire higher education.

Equity: Equity involves fair access of the poor and socially disadvantaged groups to higher education.

Quality and Excellence: Involves provision of education in accordance with accepted standard so that students receive available knowledge of the higher standards that helps them to enhance their human resource capability.

Relevance: Involves promotion of education so as to develop human resources keeping pace with the changing economic, social and cultural development of the country and

Value Based Education: Involves inculcating basic moral and spiritual values among the youth.

The Action Plan of 1992 included schemes and programs that were directed towards the expansion of intake capacity in general, and with respect to the disadvantaged groups such as the poor, SCs, STs, minorities, girls, physically challenged persons, and those in the educationally backward regions in particular. The scheme/Programs were designed to improve quality by strengthening academic and physical infrastructure in order to promote excellence in those institutions which have exhibited potential for excellence, and develop curriculum to inculcate right value among the youth.

Rastriya Uchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (National Higher Education Mission, 2013)-

Keeping in view the recommendation of Planning Commission XIIth Plan the need for reform in state higher education sector, using central funds in a strategic manner to ensure holistic planning at the state level and enhancement of allocations for the state institution a new centrally



sponsored scheme called RUSA is proposed. The scheme would spread over the two plan periods (XII and XIII) and would be an over arching scheme for funding the state universities and colleges to achieve the aims of equity, access and excellence.

It is an umbrella mission mode project scheme that would subsume other existing schemes in the sector.; The central funding would flow from HRD/DGC to institutions through State Councils of Higher Education.; The funding of states would be made on the basis of critical appraisal of state plans of higher education. The plan would address each state's strategy to address issues of equity, access and excellence in higher education.; All funding under RUSA would be norm based and future grants would be outcome dependent. Certain academic, administrative and governance reforms will be a precondition for receiving funding under RUSA.

Centre State funding will be in the ratio of 90:10 for North Eastern States & J&k, &5:25 for other special category States (Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand) and 65:35 for other States and UTs,. Funding will be available to even private-aided institutions, subject to their antiquity, for permitted activities (not all) based on certain norms and parameters, in a ratio of 50:50.

Objectives: The Objective of RUSA would be to achieve the target of GER (age group 18-23) of 30%, which the central Government has set for itself by the year 2020 (2010= 18.8%) against would GER of 29%) GOI aim to improve the quality of state university and colleges and enhance existing capacities of the institutions to become dynamic demand-driven, quality education, efficient and toward looking, responsive to rapid economic and technological development occurring at the local, state, national and international levels.

The salient objectives of the scheme are as under: Improve the overall quality of existing state institutions by ensuring that all institutions conform to prescribed norms and standards and adopt accreditation as mandatory quality assurance framework. Usher transformative reform in the state higher education system by creating a facilitating institutional structure for planning and monitoring at state level, promoting autonomy in state universities and improving governance in institutions. Ensure academic and examination reforms in the higher education institutions. Enable conversion of some of the universities into-institutions of excellence at par with the best in the world. Create opportunities for state to undertake reforms in the affiliating system in order to ensure that the reforms and resonance requirements of affiliating colleges are adequately met. Ensure adequate availability of quality faculty in all higher education institution and ensure capacity building at all levels of employment. Create and enabling atmosphere in the higher educational institution to devote themselves to research and innovations. Expand the institutions base by creating additional capacity in the existing institutions and establishing new institutions to achieve enrolment targets. Correct required imbalances in access in higher education by facilitating access to higher quality institutions in urban & semi-urban areas, creating opportunities for students from rural areas to get access to better quality

institutions and setting up institutions in unserved of underserved areas. Improve equity in higher education by providing adequate opportunities of higher education to socially deprived communities; pro-mote inclusion of women, minorities, SC/ST and differently able persons.

Scope: Project will support all state universities and colleges both 12B and 2F and non 12B and non 2f universities. It will cover 316 state universities and 13,024 colleges.

India would Need More Research Universities to Compete successfully

India has one of the lowest of researchers per million as compared to developed economies. A matter of greater concern is the poor performance of the university sector in fostering research. To compete successfully in the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century, India needs enough universities with high end research facilities that would not only produce bright graduates but also support sophisticated research in various scientific and scholarly fields and invent knowledge and technology needed for an expanding economy. India shows very poor status in Research and Development like researcher per million is just 119 which is very low compared to other countries, Table- A depicts the details about the other countries. India's share has of the total Global R&D spending is just 3.7%, a percentage which

Table A - Researcher per million in different countries

Sl. No.	Country	Researcher per million
1.	Japan	5287
2.	USA	4484
3.	Russia	3319
4.	China	663
5.	Brazil	344
6.	India	119

(Source: KPMG, "Future of education: Education, skills development & employability" Pan IIT Conclave 2010)

has remained constant from 2005 till 2008 in contrast China's share increased from 13.5% to almost 18%. India spends approximately 1% of its GDP on R7D, compared to 2.47% by the US and 3.3% by Japan.

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