



## CHALLENGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

**Subhash Singh, D. Phil.**

*Associate Professor, Department of Teacher Education, Ranvir Rananjay Post Graduate College, Amethi, 'A' Grade Institution Accredited by NAAC*

### Abstract

*India is next only to China and USA in student enrollment in the higher education sector. The higher education system in India has grown in a remarkable way, particularly in the post-independence period, to become one of the largest system of its kind in the world. However, the system has many issues of concern at present, like Issues of Governance, Access and Equity, Professional Ethics and Value Education, Evaluation and Assessment Systems, Sustaining Quality, ICT initiatives, Promoting Research, Convergence, Skill Development, Enhancing Employability, and others. These issues are important for the country, as it is now engaged in the use of higher education as a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based information society of the 21st Century. Recognizing the above and the basic fact, which the Universities have to perform multiple roles, like creating new knowledge, acquiring new capabilities and producing an intelligent human resource pool, through challenging teaching, research and extension activities so as to balance both the need and the demand. Higher education is no longer a luxury. Higher education is essential for any nation for its social and economic development.*

**Keyword:** *Issues of Governance, Access and Equity, Professional Ethics and Value Education, Evaluation and Assessment Systems.*



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### Introduction:

Education is the most important single instrument for social and economic transformation. A well educated population, adequately equipped with knowledge and skill is not only essential to support economic growth, but is also a precondition for growth to be inclusive since it is the educated and skilled person who can stand to benefit most from the employment opportunities which growth will provide. Education is prerequisite condition for faster, sustainable and more inclusive growth (**Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17)**). India is next only to China and USA in student enrollment in the higher education sector. The higher education system in India has grown in a remarkable way, particularly in the post-independence period, to become one of the largest system of its kind in the world. However, the system has many issues of concern at present, like **Issues of Governance, Access and Equity, Professional Ethics and Value Education, Evaluation and Assessment Systems, Sustaining Quality, ICT initiatives, Promoting Research, Convergence, Skill Development, Enhancing Employability, and others.** These issues are important for the

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country, as it is now engaged in the use of higher education as a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based information society of the 21st Century. Recognizing the above and the basic fact, which the Universities have to perform multiple roles, like creating new knowledge, acquiring new capabilities and producing an intelligent human resource pool, through challenging teaching, research and extension activities so as to balance both the need and the demand. Higher education is no longer a luxury. Higher education is essential for any nation for its social and economic development.

### **1. Issues of Governance :**

There is immense need to review the governance issues for all aspects of higher education system prevalent in India. Models of institutional governance and administration with particular reference to autonomy and accountability are the most important issues of governance which need much pondering. Besides the above, governance issues of higher education in the current scenario of establishment of Institutions under Public Private Partnership (PPP) model; establishment of Foreign Institutions in India jointly with Indian education providers or otherwise; and issues concerning the role and responsibility of statutory bodies interacting and dealing with the university system vis-à-vis the State and Central Governments also needs discussion.

#### **1.1 Issues of External and Internal Governance**

We may divide issues of governance of institutions into two major groups:

1. Issues of external governance of higher education.
2. Issues of internal governance of higher education.

Issues concerning interaction with the Governments, statutory bodies etc. are issues of external governance of higher education system/institutions. Likewise, the issues of academic and administrative matters of the institution; and matters of its own vision and mission are considered as issues of internal governance within. Several reforms in the regulatory framework are currently underway such as, a proper accreditation structure, quick redressal of disputes through educational tribunals and prevention of malpractices and establishment of a national level apex body, that is, National Commission on Higher Education and Research (**NCHER**) to ensure autonomy of institutions and enhancement of standards and provision for entry of foreign education providers. These reforms would have to be coached within the emerging architecture of global higher education, carefully blending external policy feedback with the country's own endogenous policy traditions. Once these reforms are

in place, it is expected that some of the endemic problems of this sector would be resolved. However, the crucial issue of making large investments required in higher education would have to be addressed squarely by mobilizing resources from Government and also from private sources. In addition, specific actions in several key areas are required on priority basis through a comprehensive plan as outlined below.

### **1.2 Issues of Autonomy and Accountability:**

Time and again in academic debates, matters concerning autonomy are discussed. Mostly, such discussion panels include issues namely, financial autonomy with provision of block grants, appointment of members on the respective Boards, hiring of faculty with pay beyond minimum prescribed by the Governments, mechanisms of revenue generation and retaining revenue in the Institution over and above usual block grant from the Government. However, issues regarding accountability remain still unanswered. There is unfulfilled accountability both to internal and external agenda.

### **1.3 e-Governance:**

e-Governance has the potential to simplify many different points at which stakeholders interact with the governing body. It can ensure speedy delivery, productivity and efficiency of services making them client centric and ensuring that the right person get the benefits. Some of the benefits of e-Governance include:

- Reducing the cost and improving the reach and quality of public services.
- Reducing transaction costs and transaction times.
- Empowering stakeholders/clients and increasing transparency
- Re-engineering of processes for greater efficiency and productivity.
- National Knowledge Commission (NKC) recommendations on distance education focus on creating a national ICT infrastructure, improving regulatory structures, developing web based common open resources, establishing a credit bank and providing a national testing service. To supplement this, NKC also recommends that the production of quality content and leveraging global open educational resources, needs to be focused on in a comprehensive manner. We need to encourage open access for all material research papers, books, periodicals etc.

### **1.3 Public-Private Partnership:**

To meet the democratic goal of our nation like access, inclusion, equity, and excellence in education PPP model is required to be operated. Indian higher education system has

undergone massive expansion in post-independent India with a national resolve to establish several Universities, Technical Institutes, Research Institutions and Professional / Non-professional Colleges all over the country to generate and disseminate knowledge coupled with the noble intention of providing easy access to higher education to the common Indian.

**Recommendations:**

1. It is the primary responsibility of the State to provide the eligible and good quality higher education at reasonable cost.
2. A huge dedicated fund say, **National Human Resource Development Fund**, to the tune of at least one- percent of the GDP, may be created to tackle the equity problems. It should be the accepted principle that *‘no talented person shall be denied access to higher education opportunities on the grounds of economic and social backwardness’*.
3. Industries may be encouraged to be partners with educational institutions directly for the development of human resources dedicated to their interests. The industries belonging to a specific discipline or related disciplines should be encouraged to establish state of the art Research and Training centres to develop the necessary specialized man power.
4. Industries and individuals may be encouraged to channel a percentage of their profits to the higher education sector, with no strings attached to such contributions. A Strategy Planning Body and an Institution to design and develop futuristic courses for transferring them to the Universities and Colleges may be created.
5. Good Faculty is a must for any higher education institution aspiring for Quality. It is high time that an **Indian Higher Educational Service**, along the lines of the IAS, is formed.
6. Private Universities are a reality now and, as such, strong regulatory mechanisms are to be put in place immediately to monitor and control their activities with the objective of ensuring quality and social accountability. Higher education is a Public Good and cannot be left to the market forces to control. Those who venture investment in this area should be properly scrutinized. Those with commercial interests dominating over the interests and ethics of higher education should be eliminated.
7. The present archaic administrative practices need a thorough reform. A healthy Public/Private partnership can do much in this regard by way of exchanging good practices.

**2.0 Access and Equity:**

It is true that enhancing social access to higher education is still important in the country. But, the major challenge before the Indian higher education system is to bring equity

in quality of education across the length and breadth of the country. This is more close to the heart of students in rural, semi urban and urban areas, because they also wish to be able to participate in the new economic revolution. Several social, economic and political reasons seem to act as constraints to access and equity in higher education in India. Poverty leads to high drop- out rates even at primary, middle and secondary school levels. Lower status of women, lack of easy access, lack of implementation of existing programmes, inadequate utilization of resources, absence of political will and inadequacies in coordinated actions across all equity fronts within institutions seem to be the other reason. Financial constrains also often form a significant factor in advancing equity.

**Recommendations:**

1. Strategies for higher education should be set within an educational chain extending from early childhood to post- graduate education to career advancement. Improving the interrelationship of all stages and levels of education should be a long - term policy goal.
2. Rural, urban and gender disparities must be kept in mind by policy makers in planning and implementing the higher education system.

**3.0 Professional Ethics and Value Education:**

The rapid developments in science and technology and the challenges of globalization are posing additional challenges to the education system in the country. Gross consumerism has distorted the outlook of persons into one of equating possessions with richness. Exploitation of natural resources is proceeding without reference to sustainability. The digital divide between the rich and the poor is getting wider. While the education system needs to keep pace with the scientific and technological developments in terms of building the skills and knowledge, it also needs to address the more fundamental issues of the social and moral consequences of such unregulated activities. In this context, there is now a growing demand to lay greater emphasis on education to inculcate, nurture and develop values, particularly among the youth of the country.

**Recommendations:**

1. The need of the hour is to inculcate human values in the University students.
2. It is entirely feasible to inculcate ‘values’ in the students at the tertiary level and there are several institutions in the country where such value-based education is imparted with impressive results.

3. It is desirable that human values should permeate and form part of the teaching in all disciplines and subjects. The UGC can play an important role in spreading this message in the University system in the country.

#### **4.0 Evaluation and Assessment Systems:**

It is well known that one of the important components of higher education is the manner in which students' academic performance is evaluated. A concerted debate has been going on to determine the best system of assessment to be followed by the Universities in the twenty first century. A great degree of diversity has been observed in terms of assessment and grading of the students in the University system at present. It is desirable that a certain optimum degree of standardization in the examination system and in the assessment of students is put in place before grades are awarded to them.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. The Semester System should be preferred to the annual system in teaching and evaluation at the Indian Universities.
2. Continuous Internal Assessment should be given due attention; it merits in the students' academic programmes at the Universities.
3. The Grading System with a linear 10-point scale and its equivalence in terms of percentage of marks should be followed uniformly across Universities and disciplines.
4. Appropriate and effective feedback mechanism (e.g. returning corrected answer books to students, responding to students' queries on the evaluation procedure, etc.) should be established at all institutions.
5. In the continuous evaluation, based on objective-type questions, measuring the higher mental ability of students should be adopted and ICT may be effectively used to set and evaluate such papers.
6. All the examination processes should be computerized and recent advances in ICT should be exploited to make the process automated and efficient.

#### **5.0 Sustaining Quality:**

Quality dimensions seem to have two implications, i.e., functionality of the output and meeting the basic standards. Hence, the quality of a higher education system may be seen from the point of view of norms and standards, which may evolve depending on the need of the hour. In the 21st century, it is crucial to identify the relative norms for different components of a higher education system. The alternative dynamics for teacher preparation

and the sustaining quality in teacher input, like: Curriculum design and development; Curricular practices vis-à-vis emerging principles of pedagogy; Evaluation of learners performance and progress vis-à-vis curriculum evaluation; and, Quality management practices become crucial.

**Recommendations:**

1. Curriculum Planning and Management should be studied in the perspective of knowledge management.
2. Integrated approach by involving experts from different fields with major focus on sharing of experiences in a holistic framework and having dialogues at different levels such as: at core committee level and at sub-committee level. Multidisciplinary curriculum must be developed with a view to cater to the needs and fulfillment of expectations of learners, teachers- parents, employers and society in general.
3. Decentralization must be encouraged with a broad frame work of University system.
4. Every University must have its own curriculum. Context, specificity and inquiry oriented experience must be reflected in the curriculum. Learners' participation in the generation of knowledge must be the focus of constructivist curriculum. Problem solving abilities must be developed through experimentation life-like situations.
5. Augmentation of Cognitive capital through the University curriculum will be the indicator of quality education.
6. Indigenous knowledge system must be kept in mind while adopting scientific and technological developments as core components of University curriculum. Context specificity and global developments must be visualized with a holistic perspective.
7. Curriculum construction should transact in an authentic and real environment.
8. Curriculum transaction should involve social negotiation and mediation. It should encourage group activities and make optimum use of peer as resources of higher learning.

**6.0 ICT initiatives:**

The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to improve the reach and enhance the quality of education in India is gaining critical attention. It is heartening to know that governmental commitment to using Internet, computers and satellite in 'bridging the digital divide' and 'transforming the educational scenario' is shaping up in several States. However, in the absence of systematic planning, implementation and evaluation mechanism,

these laudable goals could turn into empty slogans that elude any effort at measuring their success or failure.

### **6.1 Reaching and teaching:**

Satellites can increase our reach but they cannot teach. In fact, when the lectures are 'beamed' they only amount to replicating the undesirable effects of passive 'learning.' It is a tricky situation: teachers should be convinced that they will not be replaced by 'lessons from the sky' and students should be told that these additional lessons add value to their conventional classroom learning. Teachers do not become redundant but their role becomes more challenging and demanding as they are expected to make more and more use of the media to enrich their lessons. Cognitive sciences prove that TV alone can engage and sustain the interest of learners if the content is interactive, relevant and practical. Consider for instance lessons on team building, critical thinking, analytical skills, effective communication, etc., that can equip the students to cope with their professional lives.

### **6.2 Interactivity and collaboration:**

One of the useful ways to integrate ICT into school/college curriculum is to instill life and fun in otherwise 'dry' subjects. If history lessons can be supplemented with video footage, engineering topics can be enlivened with multimedia simulations. Games and role plays too add interactivity to monotonous delivery of content.

### **6.3 Assessment and accountability:**

Content that is culturally sensitive, emotionally engaging and socially relevant can ensure active participation of learners. Nevertheless it is important to conduct timely assessments and evaluate the programme with the help of parameters such as relevance of learning, its application in practical life, and comfort in using the medium and so on.

### **6.4 Knowledge Networking through ICT initiatives:**

Knowledge Network, extensive educational infrastructure and resources are required to meet the challenge of producing quality trained personnel in sufficient numbers in the country. While the requirement of having sufficient numbers of quality educational institutions with adequate research facilities cannot be compromised, it is understood that one way of meeting this challenge is to share the existing educational material, equipment and facilities available in the limited number of centres of excellence, with a large number of universities and technical, agricultural and medical institutions throughout the country. In addition, Research and Development activity world-over in various fields, is increasingly



being carried out through inter institution even trans-country collaborative approach. This has become necessary owing to the increased activity in computationally intensive and data intensive research problems. The key ingredients in this approach are consultations, data sharing, and resource sharing. It is therefore necessary to create the facilities to enable Indian researchers to undertake such collaborative efforts albeit at reasonable costs. In this context the National Knowledge Commission has undertaken a project to explore the possibility of establishing an efficient and cost effective network design to interconnect all Universities, R&D institutions, S&T institutions; Health service facilities, Agriculture research and extension institutions and Libraries in the country (possibly several thousand nodes) with an access speed of at least 100 Mbps.

### **7.0 Promoting Research:**

Emphasizing Quality research work, especially on basic research, should be the focus area of the higher education and it must be promoted. The National Knowledge Commission, 2005 also recognizes the importance of research activities in the country. There is an acute shortage of people engaged in quality research. We cannot hope to grow and develop further without a continuous engagement of intellect. We need to create an ecosystem that encourages research and innovation in a self-sustaining manner. We must bring back the 'lost' research culture of Indian Universities so as to create new knowledge and improve teaching standards. Collaborative research, setting up industry incubation parks in Universities and institutions providing more research fellowships, promoting innovation through interdisciplinary research in new and emerging fields, strengthening Inter-University centers etc., need to be emphasized in the Twelfth Plan. This would require more funding for university-based research and funding policies that create right incentives for quality research and promote collaboration among institutions. Related to this is the issue of faculty shortages which can be tackled through innovative ways such as technology-enabled learning and collaborative information and communication technologies (ICT).

### **8.0 Convergence:**

Education is a matter of convergence. Convergence is having great concern with regard to Indian Higher Education system. The conventional as well as ODL system of higher education need to be converged with the cohesive force of ICT. It refers to the convergence of voice, data, and video networks and the deployment of *converged services*. "Disjointed forms of personal communications will rapidly converge into a unified application that

combines voice, Instant Messaging (IM), video, collaboration, and presence. The result will improve organizational efficiency, allowing individuals or groups to communicate directly with each other through a common system, regardless of device or application. Convergence is less a technical exercise than a social one. It promises technology-mediated collaboration and community. The nature of documents is increasingly trending to compound documents that incorporate image, data, text, and voice annotation. E-mail is likely to shrink as a way of sharing documents, giving way to the increased use of collaborative working environments for document development analysis, editing, and even drafting. Video conferencing particularly that on the high end associated with technologies such as access grids is showing exponential growth. Increasingly, virtual communities will be built upon networks as the glue to provide social cohesiveness. Managing the deployment and then integration of converged technologies into a cohesive, converged service environment—and ultimately into the kind of rich collaborative environment is the need of the time.

#### **9.0 Skill Development:**

Improved training and skill development is critical for providing decent employment opportunities to the growing youth population and necessary to sustain the high growth momentum. Although institutional structure has been put in place, there is still a long way to go. While skill formation has to be mainstreamed in the formal education system right from class X onwards, skill creation outside the formal education needs coordinated action and innovative approach. There is a need for concerted action in several key areas in order to ensure that skill formation takes place in a demand driven manner. Curriculum for skill development has to be reoriented on a continuing basis to meet the demands of the employers/industry and align it with the available self-employment opportunities. Finally vocational education at the school level and vocational training through Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and Industrial Training Centers (ITCs) need significant expansion and overhaul. There is an urgent need to revisit the scheme for up-gradation of governments ITIs as Centers of Excellence through the PPP to implement it more effectively during the Twelfth Plan.

#### **10.0 Enhancing Employability:**

The economic development and progress of any nation depends on its higher education system. There is a need for a clear focus on improving the employability of graduates. Indian higher education is organized into ‘General’ and ‘Professional’ streams. For

both 'General' and 'Professional' education streams, integrated curriculum with greater flexibility in choice of subjects and innovative pedagogic practices are needed to improve the quality and hence employability. Graduates now require the skills beyond the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic (the '3Rs'). Skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity (the '4Cs') are now important in more and more jobs. Accordingly, there is need to focus on the '4Cs'. Special emphasis on verbal and written communication skills, especially in English would go a long way in improving the employability of the large and growing mass of disempowered youth.

#### **11.0 Other Landmarks to be made:**

Several other measures or landmarks are needed to improve quality and promote excellence in higher education.

- ✓ Accreditation should be at the core of regulatory arrangements and must have clear incentives and consequences.
- ✓ Full implementation of examination reforms, choice-based credit and semester system must be ensured to enhance flexibility and provide greater choice.
- ✓ The affiliated college system should be improved by deploying advanced technology and restructured so that a reasonable number of colleges are affiliated to each university and a 'hub and spoke model' established to foster curricular and pedagogic reforms.
- ✓ Universities and colleges should be encouraged to engage more intensively than before with wider society and contribute to the local and regional development and provide intellectual leadership to society.
- ✓ Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) should be harnessed to enrich teaching learning experience, to extend and diversify delivery, improve research quality and collaboration by making knowledge and information widely available, and ensure effective governance both at the institutional and systemic level. Student services needs to be significantly improved and admissions should be streamlined.
- ✓ A few new Innovation Universities could be established urgently, and several universities and institutions could be converted or upgraded by creating centers of excellence within the University, building on their existing strength. At the core of achieving excellence, is the ability of institutions to attract and retain high quality faculty from across the world. This not only requires providing them with

competitive salaries but also ensuring a challenging work environment and a lot of flexibility.

- ✓ In addition, the idea of creating large education hubs on fallow lands at four or five locations in the country, anchored by large public sector enterprises (possibly with participation by the private sector) and funded through their allocations for corporate social responsibility needs to be explored. These could be models for industry-institute interface and would ensure local and regional development of areas where these are located.
- ✓ Higher education is an increasingly global enterprise; hence Indian institutions should embrace internationalization that could provide them with new opportunities. Given the historical advantage in higher education (particularly among emerging market economies) the wide spread use of English language and low cost living, India can potentially become a global hub for higher education. We need to provide greater autonomy to our Centers of excellence to enter into collaborative partnership with the best universities abroad.

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