HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUGGESTIONS

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Abstract:
In past, there have been challenges to higher education, these most recent calls for reform may provoke a fundamental change in higher education. This change may not occur as a direct response to calls for greater transparency and accountability, but rather because of the opportunity to reflect on the purpose of higher education, the role of colleges and universities in the new millennium, and emerging scientific research on how people learn. These disparate literatures have not been tied together in a way that would examine the impact of fundamental change from the policy level to the institutional level and to the everyday lives of college and university administrators, faculty and students. Now the time has come to create a second wave of institution building and of excellence in the fields of education, research and capability building. When India can provide skilled people to the outside world then we can transfer our country from a developing nation to a developed nation very easily and quickly.

Index Terms: Equity, Quality & Challenges of Higher Education

1. Introduction:

Today, more than ever before in human history, the wealth—or poverty—of nations depends on the quality of higher education. Those with a larger repertoire of skills and a greater capacity for learning can look forward to lifetimes of unprecedented economic fulfillment. But in the coming decades the poorly educated face little better than the dreary prospects of lives of quiet desperation.

Malcolm Gillis, **President of Rice University, 12 February 1999**

Our university system is, in many parts, in a state of disrepair...In almost half the districts in the country, higher education enrollments are abysmally low, almost two-third of our universities and 90 per cent of our colleges are rated as below average on quality parameters... I am concerned that in many states university appointments, including that of vice-chancellors, have been politicised and have become subject to caste and communal considerations, there are complaints of favouritism and corruption.

– Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2007

Education is the process of development of an individual. It is a lifelong process. Education tries to develop the innate potentialities of the individual in a harmonious manner. Education is harmonious development of all the powers of the human being i.e. physical, social, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual. Thus, education is intimately connected with the life and experience of an individual. Hence education, life and philosophy are closely interrelated. There are no antitheses between philosophy of life and philosophy of education. They practically sail in the same boat.

Meaning of Education:

Generally speaking, 'Education' is utilized in three senses: Knowledge, Subject and a Process. When a person achieves degree up to certain level we do not call it education .As for example if a person has secured Masters degree then we utilize education it a very narrower sense and call that the person has achieved education up to Masters Level. In the second sense, education is utilized in a sense of discipline. As for example if a person had taken education as a paper or as a discipline during his study in any institution then we utilize education as a subject. In the third sense, education is utilized as a process. In fact when we talk of education, we talk in the third sense i.e. education as a process. Thus, we talk what is education as a process? What are their importance etc.? By going through the text you will be able to know the process of education

  ✓ To know the meaning and concept of education
  ✓ To define the narrower and wider meaning of education
  ✓ To explain the analytical meaning of education
  ✓ To know the aims and scope of education

2. Etymological Meaning of Education:

In English the term "Education" has been derived from two Latin words Educare (Educere) and Educatum. "Educare" means to train or mould. It again means to bring up or to lead out or to draw out, propulsion from inward to outward. The term "Educatum" denotes the act of teaching. It throws light on the principles and practice of teaching. The term Educare or Educere mainly indicates development of the latent faculties of the child. But child does not know these possibilities. It is the educator or the teacher who can know these and take appropriate methods to develop those powers.

In Hindi, the term "Siksha" has come from the Sanskrit word "Shash". "Shash" means to discipline, to control, to order, to direct, to rule etc. Education in the traditional sense means controlling or disciplining the behaviour of an individual. In Sanskrit "Shiksha" is a particular branchof the Sutra literature, which has six branches –Shiksh, Chhanda, Byakarana, Nirukta, Jyotishaand Kalpa. The Sutra literature was designed to learn the Vedas. Siksha denotes rules of pronunciation.

There is another term in Sanskrit, which throws light on the nature of education. It is "Vidya" which means knowledge. The term "Vidya" has originated from "Bid" meaning knowledge. If we mention certain definitions of education of great educators of the East and the West, we may have a clear picture of the nature and meaning of the term education.

"Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man. Like fire in a piece of flint, knowledge exists in the mind. Suggestion is the friction; which brings it out."

Swami Vivekananda

3. Aims of Education in Ancient India:

The aim of education in ancient India was the ultimate outcome of the Indian theory of knowledge and the corresponding scheme of life and values. People in ancient India were greatly impressed and affected by the fact of death as the central fact of life. Their one aim of life was to solve the problem of death by achieving knowledge of the whole truth of which life and death are arts and phases. The aim was not simply abstract and theoretical. There were practical and concrete aims too. The first was the acquisition of knowledge. This was evident in the Vedic period. Inculcation of social and civic duties in the minds of the students was also regarded as an important aim of education in those days. Education for occupation was another important aim. Character training and moral education was regarded as very important aim of ancient Indian education.

4. Aims of Education in Medieval India:

During medieval age religion was the main guiding force in life and society. Medieval civilization centered round religion. The Muslim rulers of India generally took a keen interest in education, and many of them founded schools, colleges and libraries in various places in their kingdoms. The mosque was a center of instruction and of literary activity. Muslim education included those eternal teachings and values of the Quran and Haditha, which would promote moral and spiritual knowledge. Islamic education aimed at both physical and mental development of the students. Thus, it aimed at total development of personality of individual.

5. Aims of Education in British India:

The British uprooted the indigenous system of education in India with definite intentions. The educational system established by the British was colonial in character. It was designed to prepare Indians only for taking certain subordinate positions in Government offices. It was not intended to develop among the people capacities to take leadership and initiative in different walks of life. The main educational objective can better be understood from the following declaration in the educational policy or Lord Bentinck (1835): "We want a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes in opinion, in morals and intellect." The Wood's Despatch declared almost the same policy. The aim of British education was to inculcate European knowledge in the minds of the Indians.

6. Aims of Education in Independent India:

After independence the Indian leaders realized the inherent defects in the system of education introduced by the British. Universalisation of education was the need of the hour. Education must be linked with national development in all directions. With these national goals in view the Government in independent India set up different committees and commissions for educational reforms in the desired lines. These committees and commissions have formulated educational aims and objectives.

There are no great ideological battles or debates that are confronting the world anymore. The doctrine of liberal democracy has emerged as the most suitable and acceptable form of governance. 20th century broadly redefined the role of the state to provide education, healthcare, rule of law, and infrastructure development to enable every citizen to fulfill their potential, irrespective of their social position.

In today's knowledge economy, it is an indisputable fact that quality education is mandatory to fulfilling one's potential and is the key for vertical mobility and economic growth, and an educated population is the precondition for economic prosperity of any nation. The main function of a higher education system is to add real value to human resources, and produce wealth creators and leaders in all fields – business, professions, politics, administration, and creative pursuits.

Over the past six decades, India made impressive strides in the field of higher education. Enrollment in higher education has been growing at a faster rate than population growth in the 18-23 age groups. A few elite institutions such as IITs and IIMs are recognized for their excellence, and we have a huge pool of technologically trained English speaking manpower. Yet, there is much that is wrong and the higher education system is in deep crisis.

The quality of the bulk of our graduates is appalling. The students are doing their best – they are studious and disciplined, they cram, clear entrance tests, pass examinations, and obtain degrees. Yet, many university graduates do not have even rudimentary knowledge, or conceptual understanding, or problem-solving

skills in their own discipline. A culture of rote learning, lack of application of knowledge, and a poor examination system have undermined our higher education. Most graduates lack basic communication skills, and have no problem solving capacity. Educated unemployment is on the rise, largely because most graduates cannot promote wealth creation and are therefore unemployable.

This paper tries to debunk some of the myths surrounding higher education, and define what quality education means. This paper also outlines the nature of crisis afflicting higher education, points out the key challenges, opportunities and highlights a few reform proposals to address the current morass.

7. Crisis in Higher Education:

The crisis that is afflicting higher education in India has many facets. Some of the major shortcomings are discussed in this section.

8. Hourglass Human Resources Structure:

In any society, the human resource structure can be represented by a pyramid. At the base of the pyramid will be the unskilled work force. The semi-skilled (to suit a given society's requirements), comprising vocational trades such as electricians, plumbers, public health workers, etc. occupy the middle layer. The apex of the pyramid, usually consists of well-trained and qualified professionals such as engineers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, managers etc.

Unfortunately in India, the structure of our human resources is in the form of an hourglass. There are a huge number of mid and top level professionals such as doctors, engineers and lawyers of an in different quality that the society cannot accommodate or put to productive use. Yet there aren't enough number of professionally trained semi-skilled people such as electricians, plumbers and mechanics to fulfill the society's requirements. At the bottom are the millions of unskilled, illiterate workers eking out a precarious livelihood through back-breaking drudgery. There are more electrical engineers than electricians, more civil engineers than masons, more super specialist doctors than general physicians. There are more mechanical engineers than mechanics.

There are more lawyers than teachers! There is a complete mismatch between the society's requirements and the kind of graduates that our higher education system is producing. A WHO report indicated in late1970's itself that India had more doctors than it could accommodate, given its socio economic status and yet, we continued to establish more medical colleges and produce physicians and surgeons of indifferent quality, who cannot be gainfully employed!

The past two decades witnessed a phenomenal growth in the number of so-called professional institutions offering courses in engineering, management, pharmacy, medicine, law etc. These institutions are producing hundreds of thousands of graduates every year, who don't have skills that can be gainfully employed for producing the kind of goods and services that India needs. In spite of the impressive economic growth over the past decade or so, educated unemployment is on the rise, as these graduates are not equipped to become wealth creators. In the southern states, institutions which offer professional courses such as engineering etc. are not able to fill their quota of seats, and yet new colleges are being allowed to be set up! On the other hand, there is a requirement for hundreds of thousands of new teachers, which is not being met. There is also a need for large numbers of public health professionals and general physicians, which is unmet.

9. Archaic Examination System:

The examination system for higher education is archaic and disgraceful. The stress is often on testing the student's memory and rote learning. A careful memorizing of answers to questions posed in the three previous years (excluding the immediate past year) will guarantee high grades! Analytical skills, application of knowledge, problem-solving capacity and innovation are rarely tested. There is no stress on continuous appraisal and the student is only judged by his/her performance in a single final examination. There is an absolute disconnect between what is taught in the class and what is tested. One would imagine that the teacher who teaches the course is best suited to evaluate a student's performance in that course. But in the current system, a completely disconnected evaluator sitting somewhere else grades the student's exam! In most western universities, the professor who teaches the course evaluates the students throughout the duration of the course, administers tests or exams and grades the test papers! Very often, the student's final grade for the course is published within a week after the finals and there is a transparent mechanism for addressing any issues the student may have with the way his/her work is evaluated or graded. The tragedy is that Indian students are smart, ambitious, hard working and are just responding to what the system is demanding. The entire education infrastructure with the myriad coaching institutes is feeding this demand. If only the nature of demand is altered, the students and the associated infrastructure will respond to adapt to the new conditions, and improve supply. There are many models of examinations for evaluating the students skillfully, and creating demand for better education by redefining success.

10. Rigid Curriculum Without Electives:

The higher education curriculum is extremely rigid, centrally defined and doesn't leave any room for individual choice or experimentation. This resulted in creating a rigid and stultifying academic atmosphere, with artificial divisions of various disciplines, and pre-determined combinations of courses on offer. As a result more and more students are ignoring humanities education and consequently lack broad perception, depth and

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communication skills. There is an artificial differentiation and packaging of majors into various streams such as commerce, sciences etc. or into professional and nonprofessional courses. Once a stream of study (major) is taken up, the courses that one has to take are pre-defined. One can neither change the course of study in mid-stream, nor take any courses which are not predefined and packaged for that major. That means, if a student starts with an intent to major in sciences and for whatever reason, wants to change track and wishes to major in humanities or commerce, the system doesn't allow for it. Nor does an Indian student have the opportunity to combine humanities with science and technology in today's world, despite the fact that most knowledge is inter-disciplinary, and barriers between various branches of learning are shrinking by the day. Many youngsters in fact take up a specific stream of study more due to peer pressure, without understanding what they are getting into and the system unfortunately locks them into it. Contrast this with the western education system with its system of core curriculum and electives.

11. Universities exit from Undergraduate Education:

One of the worst anomalies that crept into Indian higher education system is that universities are completely removed from undergraduate education. Nothing could be worse than this. A high quality undergraduate education is the very essence of higher education and yet most public universities restrict themselves to graduate education and research as if they are separate entities! Without exception, all great western universities which have a world class reputation for research and graduate programs are also well-known for their rigorous undergraduate programs. It is mandatory for the finest researchers and world renowned faculty to teach undergraduate courses in most western universities.

12. Poor Quality Teaching, Inbreeding, and Lack of Appraisal:

The quality of teachers in most colleges and universities across India is appallingly low. There is enormous in-breeding, with alumni being recruited to teach in the same institution where they graduated from. Many a time you can find someone pursue all his education in a university, get recruited to teach there, promoted in due course and end up as the Vice-Chancellor of the same university. All these without ever getting exposed to any other centers of higher learning! This incestuous practice has created a stultifying atmosphere in most Indian universities and has stifled academic freedom. There is no cross fertilization of ideas whatsoever, depriving the universities of new blood and rigorous intellectual discourse that accompanies it.

Due to the explosive growth in so-called professional colleges offering courses in Engineering, Sciences and even Medicine, the shortage of qualified faculty is acute. In fact many of these colleges straightaway appoint a graduating student as a teaching assistant/lecturer in the same institute! Many medical colleges are resorting to the unscrupulous practice of renting faculty for a day or two to pass the MCI (Medical Council of India) inspection.

There is no provision for appraising the quality of teaching or the performance of the teachers themselves, which means that there is no incentive for the teacher or faculty to perform well. Sometimes academic appointments are made on the basis of caste, political patronage or other corrupt considerations, without regard to either academic accomplishment or excellence. In most western universities, the students themselves rate their teachers/faculty at the end of the course, which are used by the respective academic departments to evaluate the course as well as the faculty member who taught the course. In fact there are numerous instances where either a course is dropped, or a faculty member is denied tenure because of poor rating by the students. The input from students is considered very seriously both for appraising the course and faculty, and also to redesign or restructure the course to meet their expectations.

13. Vested Interests:

Many vested interests are responsible for this situation. Among the most powerful of these are the vested interests of politicians. Having discovered that the establishment of a college brings prestige, power and popularity, and is one of the surest means of securing the support of an electorate, they push for expansion. Together, a University and the State Government carry authority to grant final permission for the establishment of - a new college. Thus in principle both are in a position to resist the establishment of new colleges if they are convinced that expansion is likely to be counterproductive. But in practice, they have almost invariably been unable to withstand pressure exercised by determined politicians.

The second major vested interest in the expansion of higher education is that of those who invest in colleges as commercial propositions. In the pre-independence era, investment in the ownership and management of institutions for higher education in India was made by missionaries who considered this activity to be an instrument for the promotion of their religious philosophy and values, by caste and community organizations interested in providing their youth opportunities for advance, or by socially committed citizens and idealists who served higher education because they considered it their social responsibility to-do so. The new investors in education are an altogether different category. Most of them start colleges because they are a lucrative business.

There are many ways in which this category of college managers, who have now come to be known as education barons, push growth, such as, the number of students a college is allowed to admit is set by the university to which the college is affiliated. Arrangements for the examinations to be conducted by the university are designed on the basis of numbers thus set. However, colleges frequently admit students in excess

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of the assigned number and inform the university about excess numbers only at the point at which the students are required to be presented for examinations. In a three year degree course this is as late as three years from the point of admission of the student. Technically; such admissions are irregular and therefore invalid. The university has the right to refuse to accept these students for examinations because they are in excess of the number allocated to the college. But the management of the colleges use political pressure to force the university to accept them. Students protest, and go on strike. And eventually, if and when the matter goes to a court of law, the court almost invariably asks the university to accept the students for examinations on the ground that students should not be made to suffer for a wrong that the management of the college has done.

14. Absence of Regulatory Framework:

While the state opened the doors for private providers of education services, it didn't create a regulatory framework for ensuring standards, quality and accountability. Much of the privatization in higher education remained hostage to the discretionary powers of the state. In other words, the state controlled where and what kind of private institution willbe established. This is mostly done through political patronage and rent seeking behaviour by the quasi-regulatory agencies such as AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education) and MCI (Medical Council of India). This resulted in an utterly chaotic scenario, and the higher education system is suspended between over-regulation by the state on one hand and discretionary privatization on the other hand.

Much of the education that is provided in the private sector is of an indifferent and poor quality and the students, for no mistake of theirs are paying a steep price. The students are ambitious, hard working and smart; their parents are incurring significant expenditure (a few lakhs of rupees for a 4-yr course) and yet when they graduate, they don't have a solid skill set that they can be put to productive use. There is no independent mechanism for either evaluating the quality of education or the quality of output from both public and private educational institutions.

15. Lack of Leadership:

In the early decades of 20th century and also during the initial years after independence, many Indian universities and centers of higher learning were fortunate to have visionary leaders, widely recognized for their professional accomplishment, integrity and commitment to excellence in higher education. Illustrious names such as Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, the founder of Benares Hindu University (BHU), Sri Ramaswamy Mudaliar (BHU), Sir CR Reddy (Andhra University), Sri S. Radhakrishnan (Andhra University), Prof. Zakir Hussain (Zamia Milia Islamia), Prof CV Raman (IISc.), Prof Kelkar (founder director of IITKanpur) stand out in the annals of higher education in India. These leaders had a vision of higher education and they not only shaped the institutions they led into centers of excellence but have also influenced generations of students and faculty. The governments of the day gave them complete freedom and rarely intervened in the functioning of these institutions. More importantly these leaders were recognized public intellectuals who played a key role in shaping public policy in various spheres.

But, during last three decades in India, one will have to really strain to name a major public figure who led any institution of higher learning in the past few decades! Most public universities and institutes of higher learning are reduced to personal fiefdoms of leading politicians. Caste, regional origin, and political affiliation or plain ability to satisfy rent seekers emerged as the major considerations for academic appointments rather than competence and excellence. Once these individuals are appointed, they have to satisfy their patrons by obliging their requests in appointments, promotions etc. This led to a natural decline of these institutions of higher learning.

16. The Gap between What the System Provides and What the Country Needs:

Within the limited time available to us, it is not possible to amplify this statement, to explain how and why there is a gap between what the system of higher education provides and what the economy needs. But basically, this gap is a consequence of the fact, that the expansion of higher education in our country has been closely modeled after higher education in developed societies. It almost exclusively focuses on providing technical, technological and professional education appropriate to a fairly sophisticated level of industrialization and technological advance. To an extent, the decision to provide the country with higher education suited to a high level of technology and industrialization has paid off.

Today, the country is not only self-sufficient for its needs for technologically trained personnel but the products of our universities -particularly of the new apex institutions, such as Institutes of Technology and Management - are able to compete successfully for jobs in the international market. However, even as we celebrate this success we are beginning to realize that we have made a mistake in not taking cognizance of the fact that the mass of people in our country continue to live by traditional occupations and use traditional knowledge, skills and technologies handed down through generations and that their needs, which are distinctive and different, must also be met.

17. Challenges:

The challenges confronting India are manifold. In its quest for modernization and pursuit of economic growth, aimed at lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, providing high quality education and

healthcare to its population are the greatest challenges that India has to address. The policy makers and the political executive in India should address the following challenges in reforming the higher education system:

- ✓ How to create an equitable and accessible higher education system of high quality?
- ✓ How to foster competition in providing education services and offer choice to the students?
- ✓ How to promote the importance of a true liberal education?
- ✓ How to enhance public financial provision for higher education?
- ✓ How to establish an independent regulatory framework to ensure standards and quality?

18. Opportunities:

While the challenges are manifold, there are quite a few opportunities and strengths that India should take advantage of, some of which are outlined below:

- ✓ Young demographic profile, (% of 18-24 age group)
- ✓ Hard working, ambitious, motivated youngsters
- ✓ Huge demand for quality education
- ✓ Culture and society that values education and treasures scholarship
- ✓ Parents willing to spend significant resources (110,000students studying abroad spend approx $ 1 billion/year)
- ✓ Graduates no longer seek a cushy government job and are willing to compete in the market
- ✓ Impressive infrastructure that can be redeployed
- ✓ Non-monetary inputs that can make a difference24 Reforming Higher Education in India

19. Possible Measures and Reforms:

It would be presumptuous to try to offer solutions to this situation, particularly in view of the fact that the efforts that have been made so far have not been rewarded with much success. However, some steps could be taken. First and foremost there should be a concerted and massive move to delink jobs from degrees in situations where the content of the degree is not really relevant to the job for which the degree is required. Second the system should be freed from the dead wood and weight of constraining service conditions, administrative practices, procedures, rules and regulations and allowed space to creatively respond to the needs of society. As mentioned earlier, Government controls on higher education, including well-intentioned supervision and monitoring by bodies such as the University Grants' Commission have become counterproductive. They tend to drive away people with sound values and commitments to education and leave the field open for those who do not mind sacrificing quality and relevance as long as their vested interests are served. To an extent, higher education can be liberated from government controls without any radical changes in the existing framework. But ultimately it is necessary to carefully examine the relationship between the State and higher education, so as to make way for alternate, more independent structures. Even the basic requirement that universities must be established by statute needs to be reviewed and revised. Some of the key reform proposals that are as under:-

20. Non-Monetary Inputs:

While enhanced funding to suit the demographic realities of India and increased investment to create better infrastructure are absolutely essential, the real issue in reforming higher education in India is not money. There are several non-monetary inputs that can make a vital difference, some of which are discussed below.

21. Encourage Liberal Education and Humanities:

Any society needs a mix of specialists and generalists to fulfill its unique requirements. While the need for science and technology, and vocational and other specialized forms of skill-based education is well-recognized and appreciated, especially in a developing economy, the importance of broad, liberal education is much less appreciated. A true liberal education will go a long way in producing the kind of leaders and enlightened citizens who will take up a career in business, organizational management, government, politics and academia that are badly needed by the developing world. It is a testimony to the maturity of a highly industrialized and developed nation such as the US, that the bulk of its university graduates major in liberal arts and humanities.

22. Creative Examination System, Continuous Evaluation:

The current examination system leaves little for imagination. The standard pattern is to test the student's breadth of knowledge and the emphasis is on one final all encompassing examination. There should be a fundamental and radical shift in the examination system, which should achieve the following:

- ✓ Test the depth of student's knowledge, not breadth
- ✓ Test analytical skills, application of knowledge and problem solving capacity
- ✓ Test should challenge the student's ability to be creative and Innovative
- ✓ Stress on continuous evaluation and not one final test
- ✓ Evaluation should be done by the faculty who teaches the course

23. Faculty Recruitment and Appraisal:

The quality of teachers and teaching in most Indian universities and centers of higher learning is appallingly low. Most western universities go out of their way to recruit and retain top faculty. Even in India, in

yesteryears students used to select a university or college based on the quality of instruction and reputation of faculty. The recruitment and appraisal of faculty in Indian universities and colleges should be changed, based on the following principles:

- ✓ No inbreeding at any cost, i.e. no recruitment of alumnus
- ✓ Continuous appraisal and rating by students
- ✓ Mandatory undergraduate teaching by all faculty
- ✓ Effort to recruit innovative thinkers and promote of new ideas
- ✓ Encourage rigorous intellectual discourse
- ✓ Constant new blood

24. Problem – Solving Research:

Most Indian universities are particularly deficient in meaningful research of any kind. What passes off for research is often a rehash of existing material, and lacks in intellectual incisiveness, insights, painstaking and thorough data gathering, rigorous analysis, and logical consistency. The writing and communication skills of many academics are inadequate. As a result of this absence of academic rigor, poor communications, and lack of relevance, academia have become increasingly marginalized in shaping public discourse and solving real problems in the societal, scientific and technological domains. Innovative funding mechanisms, and other incentives to promote high quality, problem-solving research in both technology related fields and humanities need to be evolved. Emphasis on reasoning and analysis and good writing skills at school level are obviously vital to make productive research possible at university level.

25. Monetary Inputs:

Good, quality education demands significant resources. It will be naive and short-sighted to think that providing top notch education infrastructure and attracting talented faculty will be possible without substantial resources. Some of the key issues related to provision and funding of higher education are discussed in this section.

26. Structural Reforms Differentiation of Higher Education Institutions:

The current system of higher education in India consists of 3 yr college offering courses in humanities, commerce and pure sciences, 4 yr colleges offering courses in engineering and related technical fields. In addition there are Medical colleges (5 yr), Law Schools (3yr and 5 yr) and Universities which offer graduate (Master's and Doctoral) programs in various disciplines. There are many research institutes which offer doctoral programmes. This structure presumes that everyone in the higher education system need a 3 or 4 yr college degree. There is no room for the majority of youngsters, who might be on the lookout for acquiring a skill that is readily marketable and which will get them gainful employment. This structure puts most of the students in a straight jacket and doesn't leave much room for flexibility, choice or experimentation of any kind. The need of the hour is bring about a qualitative differentiation in the structure of higher education, with the following objectives:

- ✓ Offer flexibility and choice for students
- ✓ Offer strong vocational and skill based courses (diploma) of shorter duration (2 yrs on average)
- ✓ Facilitate vertical mobility, i.e. people who with a 2-yr diploma can use that credit to earn a 3 or 4 yr college degree at a time of their choice.
- ✓ Couple the vocational courses with internships in partnership with industry.

27. Public, Private, Non-profit Providers:

We need to recognize that higher education cannot be the state monopoly. Equally important, excessive state regulation has only weakened our educational edifice, and stifled innovation and excellence. Therefore, the key policy decision the Indian state should take is that there should be minimal entry barriers in creation of private universities. Suitable tax incentives should be offered for all educational investments, and full tax benefits for all endowments in education. A nation-wide examination on the pattern of SAT or ACT in the US, or 'A' levels in the UK should be conducted in a creative way to assess the caliber of students seeking university admission, in order to provide uniform basis for appraisal of the candidates' scholastic level. Competition and choice should dictate admissions, and demand and supply should dictate the fee structure. The state can cater primarily to the economically weaker sections, and offer admission at subsidized fees. Non-state institutions can be encouraged to adopt a differentiated fee structure, charging higher fee from those who can afford, and cross-subsidizing the education of those who need support. Such strategic and selective intervention, freedom of entry, autonomy in operation, complete transparency, competition, choice, cross subsidization, and credible rating will together constitute the necessary conditions to create a first rate higher education system to meet the challenges of the future.

28. Politics, Governance and Education:

Limited government and political and economic freedom to citizens are vital for individual growth and national advancement. But liberty cannot be construed in a very narrow and negative sense of State not abridging individual freedoms. While State's role in business is now universally opposed, there are no realistic substitutes to State in school education, primary health care and the like. Equally important, the state has to

create conditions for imparting good quality higher education and promotion of excellence to meet the challenges of a growing, modern economy and vibrant society. It does not mean that State alone should pay for these services. Private and voluntary sectors have a significant role, and nowhere in market economies is that role more pronounced than in India. Nor does it mean that State should necessarily deliver these services. We cannot isolate reforms in education from reforms in governance and administration. Freedom is not a liability; it is a glorious asset for growth. Sound politics is about making democracy and growth compatible, not finding alibis for non-performance.

None of the problems of governance is intractable. All these crises are amenable to simple, practical, effective, acceptable solutions. And our society has the resilience and strength; just as our economy is robust and can make the transition smooth. We need far reaching reforms of the great institutions of state to make our politics work for our people, to ensure decentralization of power and citizen-centered governance, to provide speedy, efficient and accessible justice to all, and to hold our public servants – elected or appointed – to account by a variety of self-correcting mechanisms. Only when we accomplish these goals will our children fulfill their true potential, and India will be free from the great sin of avoidable suffering. In a fundamental sense, the future of India, and indeed that of much of the world depends on what this generation of Indians will do. Through collective, informed assertion we can, and will, make a difference, and transform our governance. No challenge is greater, and no task is nobler.

Yes, India has the potential to be a great source of technological manpower. Our youngsters have the ambition and our tradition worships knowledge. But as always a lot of hard work and common sense are needed to bridge the gulf between promise and fulfillment. Education is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for high growth. Infrastructure, free enterprise and rule of law are the other conditions, which guarantee prosperity. But first, we must set our education right. The people are ready and willing. Are governments and 'educationists' prepared to accept the challenge?

29. Privatization:

Privatization will inevitably figure prominently in any consideration of more independent structures. But the concepts of privatization and of sharing the burden need to advance far ahead of where they stand at present. Currently, privatization and sharing are basically conceived in terms of sharing costs or the financial burden. Privatization in the sense of freedom from control over academic programmes, modes of organizing teaching and research, and liberalization in several other ways has not yet been accepted.

On the contrary, wherever privatization has been allowed or even encouraged, it has been pinned down by rules and regulations that restrict creative advance and pin private bodies down to sharing the obligations of the State. For instance, private ventures in higher education are required to share in the obligation to provide low cost higher education "affordable to all", or the obligation to honour and serve the policy of reservations. Moves to free and full privatization are haunted by fear of commercialization. The possibility that privatization may in fact help to fight the corrupt commercialization that is rampant today is not given adequate consideration. The time has come to take the risks involved and to liberalise higher education. And, if liberalization is to be given an honest chance, it must not be implemented half heartedly. It is necessary to allow market forces free play with the conviction that this will restore quality and excellence.

30. Extending and Legitimizing the Contribution of Non-Formal Educators:

Finally, it would be advisable to encourage NGOs who are already engaged in development related research and education to extend their activities. Wherever appropriate it would be useful to give full recognition to their research and to the courses they offer by according them parity with what the formal system provides. Of course, this recognition will have to be very carefully administered. For, although it is well-intentioned in that it is meant to protect quality and standards, the process of "recognition", in our system of higher education has deteriorated into unhealthy licensing.

Simultaneously universities could be firmly encouraged to draw upon the work that NGO's have done to develop courses. Here there are two challenging tasks. First to develop courses that can be offered by the universities to their own students for graduate and post-graduate degrees and second to get their different departments to develop courses that can be offered by schools as well as by non-formal education programmes at the primary school, middle school, high school and higher secondary school levels. This will give a fresh lift and much needed substance to the country's efforts to vocationalize education at these levels. It will at the same time energize universities.

31. Difficult but Not Impossible:

The moves suggested are difficult, but not impossible. Under colonial rule we, as a people, moved firmly and determinedly to get the British to establish universities in India and to provide us with European education. To a large extent, we were successful in our effort. Few other colonies British, American, Belgian or French were able to achieve the advances in higher education that India did as a British colony. We need to put in the same kind of determined effort on behalf of higher education now that we did then. The resolution of the crisis in higher education in our country depends on how soon and how effectively we move.

32. References:

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