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## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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India has a long and venerable history in the field of higher education. In ancient times, the country was known to have been home to the oldest formal universities in the world. The more striking of these ancient universities were Takshila (now in Pakistan), Nalanda (in the modern state of Bihar) and Ujjaini (in modern Madhya Pradesh). Unfortunately, Takshila University was destroyed by the White Huns (Ephthalites) around 460 A.D. In 1193, Nalanda University was sacked and totally destroyed by Bakhtiyar Khilji. This event not only ended the university, but was also followed by a rapid decline in the practise of Buddhism in India. In 1235, Sultan Iltutmish completely destroyed Ujjaini, a major centre for mathematics, literature, philosophy and astronomy. History of higher education in India had thus begun its journey quite with a bang, which had to face temporary hindrance in the form of outside invasion. It is significant that at exactly the same time, half-way across the world, Oxford University was being established.

India possesses a highly developed higher education system which offers facility of education and training in almost all aspects of human creative and intellectual endeavors: arts and humanities; natural, mathematical and social sciences, engineering; medicine; dentistry; agriculture; education; law; commerce and management; music and performing arts; national and foreign languages; culture; communications etc. The institutional framework consists of Universities established by an Act of Parliament (Central Universities) or of a State Legislature (State Universities), Deemed Universities (institutions which have been accorded the status of a university with authority to award their own degrees through central government notification), Institutes of National Importance (prestigious institutions awarded the said status by Parliament), Institutions established under State Legislative Act and colleges affiliated to the University (both government-aided and -unaided) As on 31.3.2006, there were 367 University level institutions including 20 Central Universities, 217 State Universities, 104 Deemed Universities and 5 institutions established under State Legislation, 13 Institutes of National Importance established under Central legislation and 6 Private Universities. There were 18,064 degree and post-graduate colleges (including around 1902 women's colleges), of which 14,400 came under the purview of the University Grant Commission, the rest were professional colleges under the purview of the Central Government or other statutory bodies like the AICTE, ICAR, MCI etc. Of the Colleges under UGC purview 6109 have been recognized by the University Grants Commission (UGC) under Section 2(f) and 5525 under Section 12(B) of the UGC Act, these recognition permits them to receive grants from the UGC.

Higher education has received a lot of attention in India over the past few years. There are four reasons for this recent focus. First, country's weak higher education system is being blamed for skill shortages in several sectors of economy. Second, reservation quotas in higher education institutions, particularly the more reputed ones that provide access to high status and best-paid jobs became a highly divisive issue, central to the policy of inclusive growth and distributive justice, and hence politically very important. Third, in the backdrop of the first two developments, it began to be argued that the country would not be able to sustain its growth momentum and maintain competitiveness unless problems with higher education are fixed. Last, demand for higher education continues to outpace the supply due to growing population of young people, gains in school education, the growing middle class and their rising aspirations.

It is widely believed that technological advances and a shift in demographic profile of India with a window of opportunity to productively engage its huge pool of human resources, is because of ever expanding sphere of higher education leading to becoming a leader in both the rapidly expanding sectors of services and highly skilled manufacturing. For consistent growth, this would, however, require revamping the higher education sector. Hence many steps have been taken to augment supply, improve quality and fix many of the

problems faced by higher education. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) that was set up to examine the higher education sector (amongst other things) made several useful and important recommendations. The Government of India has increased funding significantly during the Eleventh Five Year Plan. Many new institutions have been planned and some of them are already operational. There are many good ideas in the plan document. All these efforts, however, appear to be somewhat disconnected. Some even appear to be at cross-purposes with each other. Several suggestions appear to be merely impressionistic views of individuals, rather than being supported by data and research. Overall, these efforts do not give a sense of an integrated reform agenda for Indian higher education. And in absence of credible data and good analysis, the media continues to perpetuate and exacerbate certain fallacies and inconsistencies.

With ambiguity in defining its purpose and vagueness about its quality, debate on higher education is usually full of rhetoric. As pointed out by Kapur and Crowley, for the higher education 'sector whose main purpose is to train people with strong analytical skills, it is ironical that its own self-analysis is replete with homilies and platitudes, rather than strong evidence' (Kapur and Crowley, 2008). Institutions of higher education today are an integral organ of the state and economy. They are embedded in the history and culture of a nation and are shaped by its contemporary realities, ideologies and vested interests. India's large size, long history and diverse culture and the complicated nature of Indian polity and policy process make Indian higher education a very complex enterprise.

To support the Indian Economy, the higher education scenario in India is going through a drastic transformation, wherein a new accreditation body with the name of IBA (Indian Board of Accreditation) is being finalized to regulate the higher education in India. But what should be the future prospective of higher education, is a multi dollar question by all and everyone. We, being the premier torch bearers, of higher education, feel that education should be practical, logical/rational and innovative.

Practical in sense means an automobile engineer must know how to service or repair at least his own vehicle; electrical engineer must know how to replace the electric fuse in circuit. This kind of higher education is only possible when the emphasis will be laid more on doing practicals with scientific aptitude. Students have to be encouraged to spend more & more time on learning by doing rather than just studying for marks. Another aspect of the higher education should be that it should be logical or rational, that means based on the present requirement i.e. higher education should be as per the social needs, time needs and more so the country needs e.g. we require the nuclear scientist for our energy needs and space scientists for our growth & development in the space industries. We require more & more agricultural scientists to feed the ever increasing population.

The Higher Education must produce more & more inventors so that ever increasing challenges & problems of societies could be solved. The higher education must produce the basic innovations such as the automobile engine which can run 100 kilometers in 1 liter petrol or hybrid seeds which can give 5 kg produce per plant.

But all the leanings must be enveloped within the framework of national values, ethics, culture, moral and human values.

To strengthen the future prospective of Higher Education, the approaches & technologies of the higher education needs to undergo the drastic changes with technology. New forms of teaching and learning can be grouped as follows:

– on an elementary, technical level, these are first and foremost new teaching and learning aids, such as the use of media (transparencies, posters, flipcharts) to visualize interrelations, and beamers including related software applications, electronic media for large-scale projections and videoconferencing, digital libraries for further learning in «classical» media such as books or magazines, without the need for media conversion;

– exemplary learning by experience, i.e. forms of knowledge transmission which consist of effective guidance towards a self-reliant acquisition of knowledge and exercise studies in lectures, project work and project-oriented learning (POL) to replace structured ex-cathedra lecturing;

– study programmes which integrate different places of learning, e.g. dual study programmes or integrated study programmes for students with a professional background which combine three places of learning: the university, professional practice, and self-study in a private setting;

– mobile learning («ubiquitous» learning), i.e. exploiting mobile technologies which enable learning at any place, such as CD ROM etc;

– web-based teaching and learning.

Web-based learning and project-oriented forms of learning hold the greatest promise:

– web-based learning refers to the fusion of training and the internet, such as online meetings, and fully online study courses; the increasing number of blended-learning arrangements is a response to the experience meanwhile gathered in higher education didactics;

– problem-oriented learning (POL), wants to lead students to study specific issues independently in selected steps that are characteristic of a profession. Typical of POL, an exemplary learning process with a specific link to practice that is geared to interaction and self-reliance, is triggered in small groups, and prompts different forms of student cooperation. By exemplary learning from experience, students are empowered to cope with tasks during their studies in a problem-oriented and interdisciplinary approach;

– need to double capacity – not just in terms of seat count but «quality» seats count;

– deregulate education in India;

– remove the «not for profit» requirement to facilitate the investment from private sector;

– industry and Academia connect necessary to ensure curriculum and skills in line with requirements;

– skill building is really very crucial to ensure employability – Academia to understand and make sure – knowledge + skills + global professional skills = good jobs;

– industry and students are expecting specialized courses to be offered so that they get the latest and best in education and they are also industry ready and employable;

– power vested in AICTE need to disintegrate to perform specific key functioning e.g. policy, licensing, funding, curriculum etc;

– some industry-academic connection programs not working out as expected – e.g. Summer training for MBA students – most of them given dummy projects and are avoided while on board. Industry needs to get involved to support institutions;

– attractive Vocational and Diploma courses to be offered to students.

As per the present scenario of the higher education in India we recommend following in order to further meet the challenges:

– Government should offer tax concessions/fiscal incentives for setting up campuses of higher education by private/corporate sectors;

– open Universities need to be encouraged to offer quality programmes at the least cost;

– Government should encourage foreign universities to come to India to set up independent operations or collaborate with existing Indian Institutions;

– a regulatory set up is required to ensure that there is no cheating or hoax and fixation of fees should not be in state control;

– there is great need for providing broad band connectivity to all students along with low priced computer accessibility;

– good salary packages and benefits to the faculty so that good brains can be attracted to this profession;

– private sector should run universities not for profit through charitable trusts/societies but as a part of a corporate social responsibility (CSR);

– possibilities for foreign collaboration and participation as 100 % foreign direct investment (FDI).

The government can encourage this initiative to improve the quality of formal education, particularly, in government run institutions.

Thus, the term quality, which encompasses economic, social, cognitive and cultural aspects of higher education, is perceived as an integral feature of the educational process and its results. By providing high quality educational services, educational institutions play an important role in the development of the national economy, of the society as a whole and of its individual members. Total quality can only be achieved by establishing an innovative organization, one that is flexible, which can adjust quickly to changes in its environment and is capable of learning. To improve higher education quality, an essential factor of economic and social development in the 21st century, it is crucial to reduce the huge amount of Knowledge, students are supposed to master, focusing their attention to a system of basic knowledge, on creativity, problem-solving and lifelong learning. This paper also identifies the key initiatives from the government, which include the establishment of NCHER, independent regulatory authority for accreditation and national database of academic qualification, increase in number of universities including IITs, IIMs, NITs during 11th five year plan and increase in the number of seats in existing institutions, and passing of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Higher Education.

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