Higher Education in India

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Introduction

Etymologically the word 'Education' is derived from the Latin word 'Educare' means 'to nourish', 'to bring up', 'to raise', 'to pour', 'to rear'. 'Educare' means 'to lead out', 'to draw out'. Greek word 'Educatum' means 'to train' or act of teaching or training. Morphologically the word 'education' is derived from two words 'e' and 'duco'. 'e' means from inside and 'duco' means to develop. The two words combined together give the meaning - to make something grow or develop from within. The word education is defined in many different ways. The concept of education as a whole cannot be given by any one particular definition. The concept and breadth of education is very diverse. Educationists, philosophers, scientists, political thinkers, idealists have expressed their own views regarding education based on their experience, understanding and situations. Education is a process of development from birth to death. It includes each and every experience of life. Experience based on culture is also education. Thus all experiences are educative in nature. Talent is something which preexists in a child. Education has to discover and provide suitable experiences to it and that talent has to be bloomed. From this, child's behavior, knowledge, language, character etc. are refined and education is responsible for an all-round development of the child. Education is a lifelong process. A child when educated is influenced by different media directly or indirectly that shapes the personality

Pre Independence Developments

The Report of the University Education Commission, 1949 offers a brief account of higher education in ancient India. It says that India had a long tradition of learning and scholarship dating back to the dawn of civilization. The Vedas and the Upanishads that constituted the core of ancient Indian thought and philosophy were orally transmitted, but were carefully preserved as a body of knowledge. Later, there grew up well organized centres of learning of which the most famous were Taksasila and Nalanda.

The curriculum at Taksasila that flourished as an educational center till the 5 th century A.D. appears to have included the Vedas and Vedangas as also the eighteen arts which comprised of medicine and surgery, astronomy and astrology, agriculture and accountancy. Nalanda was a Buddhist center where students often spent as many as twelve years studying the Vedas and the Upanishads, the works of Mahayana Buddhism and Jainism as well as the systems of philosophy and logic. Nalanda was destroyed towards the close of the twelfth century. These centers were known for scholars visiting from various parts of the world and were known for the close relationship that existed between students and teachers. Similar centers existed in the southern parts of India too where law and grammar were also studied. The Report goes on to say that during the medieval period, while some of the Hindu centers of learning in the East and the South continued their work, the Muslim rulers who occupied large parts of Northern India encouraged the establishment of colleges (Madrasahs) across Northern India from Lahore to Allahabad and in parts of Rajasthan. The curriculum of these colleges included grammar, rhetoric, logic and law, geometry and astronomy, natural philosophy, metaphysics and theology while poetry was a source of pleasure to all.

The Government's Role after Independence

India became free in 1947. It became a democratic Republic with its own constitution in 1950. The post independence phase marked the transition of Indian higher education from an elitist pursuit to a potentially powerful instrument for change and development. The first commission on higher education in the post independence phase, popularly known as Radhakrishnan Commission (we made a reference to this Commission in the earlier section of this Unit) made recommendations covering all aspects of higher education ranging from the aims of university education in independent India to the standard of teaching, courses of study, post graduate training and research, professional education, rural education, women's education, examination and finance. It provided a definite direction amidst uncertainties (the Constitution of India was not adopted when the report was published). One of the most significant recommendations of the Commission was to establish the University Grants Commission by converting the University Grants Committee created in 1945 to deal with the Central Universities initially and later extended to cover all universities. The proposed UGC, according to the Commission, should be an expert body that can assess the financial needs of the universities, and allocate adequate resources rather than just determine how much public money can be spent on them. The proposed UGC would also be responsible for setting the standards of higher education. This recommendation was implemented with the passing of the UGC Act in 1956, and establishing the University Grants Commission (UGC). Since then, the development of higher education in India has been guided by the UGC through numerous initiatives. The major responsibilities of the UGC were: promotion, coordination, determination and maintenance of standards in universities; assessment of the financial needs of universities and allocation and disbursement of grants to them; advising universities as well as the Central and State Governments on measures necessary for improvement of standards in universities.

The Growth of Higher Education in India

The expansion of higher education facilities in India during the last half a century has been phenomenal. In terms of the number of universities and colleges, the number of students enrolled, the range and variety of programs and courses offered, the higher education system in India today presents a

picture of bewildering complexity of light and shade, success and failure, as well as hope and despair. The numbers are large, but there are huge unmet social demands; there are sizable regional imbalances; there are large sections of the society that are still not adequately serviced by the system; and not the least, there are questions also about the quality and relevance of what the system offers in large measure. We shall now look at some of these issues in the following paragraphs.

As western education caught up, major industrial houses entered the field of education mainly through their own philanthropic initiatives. New institutions focusing on science and technology education were set up. Religious charities also did set up more institutions. As we mentioned earlier, with the enactment of the UGC Act in 1956, a university with the power to award degrees could be established only through legislation; this left no scope for a private university in India. However, private sector could establish colleges that required affiliation with universities to teach degree level courses and to present students for university examinations for award of degrees. What this system did was to secure private resources to create infrastructure, while the content and processes of education as well as the award of qualifications remained the exclusive responsibility of the universities in the public sector. For the private sector, it was participation in social development, with no returns on their investments, and hence, a form of charity or philanthropy

The Indian higher education system is famously status quoist. It is not known to be too anxious about change. The universities are known to take very long to review and revise their curricula; they are not too enthusiastic about such reforms as introduction of the semester system; they prefer the course-end single examination to continuous student evaluation; and not the least, there is resistance to productive interaction with the environment that could influence the curricular structure, content and the processes of education. It is no surprise, therefore, that the industry and other employing sectors often complain that the ordinary graduates are not equipped with the skills and competence that the employers look for, and that most of them fail the test of 'fitness for purpose' in the job market.

Technologies and their Impact on Education

India is a complex mixture of light and shade. It is one of the fastest growing economies in the world; it is also home to the largest number of the poor in the world. People living below the poverty line are estimated to be about 38% of the population; in absolute terms, about 380 million. About a third of India's population (300 million) is illiterate. And yet, modern technologies have penetrated deep in to India. Apart from its role as an Information Technology superpower (Indian IT products worth billions of dollars are exported to the developed world every year), it has also one of the fastest growing domestic information and communications technology networks. Cellular phone connections are said to have crossed 600 million; over 80% of the population have access to satellite/cable TV; India has its own communication satellites including a dedicated education satellite that beams educational broadcasts over different channels; and not the least, a growing internet-based education delivery system. Internet access and broadband connectivity are still in their early days, but most higher education institutions have wired campuses that promise connectivity and easy access to Internet and library networks. As you learn more about India's fast growing open university and distance learning system, you will get a more complete picture about the ways in which ICTs have impacted education in India. Conventional universities are using these technologies not just for improving their

efficiency in governance (processes relating to admission, student record maintenance, examinations, administration and accounts), but in teaching learning transactions as well. e-Learning is fast emerging as an education tool, and many institutions use Internet-based interactive sessions for the delivery of their teaching services.

Conclusion

Universities in India are set up either through state legislation or through the acquisition of a 'Deemed University' status through UGC. While a number of universities have Deemed University status, institutions offering traditional undergraduate degrees do not have this option open to them. In a Supreme Court judgement in the Chattisgarh case, the Court had decreed that each University set up should not only conform to the UGC norms but also be created through a legislation. This makes setting up of universities not only a long and tedious process but also a costly one. In a similar way, AICTE used to collect a deposit per course of up to Rs 50 lakh, which was held in a joint account for 10 years. Such measures increase the cost of setting up institutions. Regulation, therefore, needs to be well structured and thoroughly researched to take full account of relevance, requirements, practical constraints and market realities. The objective of encouraging growth of educational institutions rather than restricting them should not be lost sight of. The Honourable Supreme Court has once again been restrictive in its judgement in Tamil Nadu vs Adhiyaman Educational & Research Institute in which it has further defused the powers of the UGC. With this judgement, it has gone in for harmonization of education to remove disparities of standards and also for future occurrence of such disparities. With this judgement, the concept of distinct quality of each institution gets a blow and should not be accepted. *f* Education is no longer a uniform harmonized affair. Higher education offers a wide variety of subjects and with continuing education it needs to be demand driven. In this context, while we need to reduce regulation at entry point, we do not need to bring in the concept of accreditation.

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