

Educational Reforms in India

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Introduction

The role of education in development, social change and social mobility has been recognized as a vital component in every developmental effort in a modern society. The National Policy on Education (1986) concurred with the view that education is vital for shaping the future of the society and signified it as the mainstay of all national endeavors particularly in societies, which have chosen a democratic path of development.

India has paid considerable attention on education at all levels since independence. Improvement in literacy rates and enrolments at different levels of education reveals that these efforts have been rewarded to some extent. The infrastructure for the development of education has been expanded greatly. However, the issues and problems of access, equity, quality, relevance and inclusiveness in education, especially higher and professional education that confronted the education system of the country right from the beginning continue to haunt it even today.

While increasing access is clearly important, but access has to be with equity and inclusiveness. It is equally important that the issue of significantly improving the quality of what is taught and learnt in our schools and colleges should receive far more attention.

India's Education Scenario

India's education system has expanded exponentially over the past five decades and there has been a considerable increase in the spread of educational institutions along with enrolment at every stage during the period **1950-51 and 2006-07**.

During this period the number of Primary **schools increased** by three times, while the Upper Primary Schools and Secondary/Hr. Secondary schools increased by more than 19 times each. The total enrolment at the Primary, Upper Primary, Secondary and Sr. Secondary stage increased by 11, 43 and 72 times respectively.

The number of **universities has increased** from 20 in 1947 to about 376 in 2006-7 indicating a thirteen-fold increase. There are now 20 Central, 218 State, 109 Deemed Universities, 5 Institutions established under State Legislation, 13 Institutes of National

Importance and 11 Private Universities¹. The number of **colleges increased** from 500 in 1947 to 18064 in 2006, indicating thirty-six-fold increase.

In the spheres of **technical education** the number of engineering colleges and polytechnics (including pharmacy and architecture institutions) at the dawn of independence in 1947 was 38 and 53 with an intake capacity of 2940 and 3960 respectively. At present (AICTE approved) we have about 1617 undergraduate degree level engineering institutions, 1403 diploma level institutions, 1150 Management level institutions, 999 MCA level institutions, 80 HMCT (hotel mgmt & catering) degree level institutions, 736 Pharmacy degree level institutions, 116 Architecture institutions and 9 Fine Arts institutions making a grand total of 8,42,068 intake in 4707 technical institutions. For the academic year 2007-2008, about 456 new institutions have been approved by the Council providing additional intake capacity of about 96,551 students.² In spite of all we are yet to achieve universal elementary education. The figures below shows that we still have to go a long way to achieve the envisaged goal of education.

The Gross Enrolment rate at

- *Elementary level - 93.54 %,*
- *Secondary level - 51.65% and*
- *Higher Secondary - 27.82%.*
- *Higher Education (relevant age group) 9.97 %, in relative terms compares rather poorly with 60% in USA & Canada, over 40% in several European countries and more than 20% in many developed and developing countries. The average enrolment in Indian Higher Education Institutes is anywhere between one-fifth and one-twentieth of that in many other countries.*

As far as school education is concerned the figures show that even though we start with 90 -100% students enrolled at the entry level the **dropout rates** is as high as 73% by class eleven. So in class eleven only 27% of the students actually remain within the system out of which further we are talking about 9-10% participation rate to the higher education level.

¹ UGC. List of recognized universities as on 30th march, 2007

² AICTE . As on 31st July 2007

This means that we are having almost **twenty-one million children every year who are out of the education system and there is no vocational education to take care of that**, because currently formal ***vocational education system*** has only 5% capacity of admitting children. It is an equally critical area that needs to be addressed in order to make these dropouts employable. However, it is certainly important that the dropouts that take place after Class XII, who do not necessarily go to higher education which is academic in nature, certainly should be given access to a higher education which is purely skill- based. This is especially important in light of the fact that we have only 5 percent rate of participation in vocational education in India as compared to 28 per cent in Mexico, 60 - 80 per cent in most industrialized nations and as much as 96 per cent in Korea. Thus, efforts need to be made in increasing access, reducing the dropouts and provide them with relevant education to make them employable.

India's knowledge strategy must develop innovative approaches to enhance knowledge acquisition among the large community of school drop-outs. Unless something is done to drastically reduce drop-out rates, by the year 2016 there will be approximately 500 million people in the country with less than five years of schooling, and another 300 million that will not have completed high school. In other words, about two-thirds of the population will lack the minimum level of education needed to keep pace with and take advantage of the social changes occurring within the country and worldwide.

On the other hand India has 376 universities and 18064 colleges. Just take the total population in the relevant age group (18-24) i.e. 12.21 crore and divide this by the number of colleges/universities, and we get a horrendous figure for the number of students each college/university is supposed to cater for. ***At present the total enrolment in Higher Education is only 1.86 crore³. Hence the Gap is alarming.***

Since no country can become economically advanced without a minimum enrolment ratio of 20% in higher education, the foremost priority at this juncture

³ . Selected Educational Statistics, MHRD, Govt. of India, 2004-2005

must therefore, be to enhance access to higher education such that the Gross Enrolment Ratio is raised to a minimum threshold level of about 20%. And therefore this is merely the minimum threshold; this is not what our aspirations should be. And in order to achieve this we have to make progressive package. Planning commission has mentioned 15% by 2012. **I feel at least by 2020 we should be looking between 20 to 25% at the very least, while ensuring improvement in quality and enhancement of equity.**

Considering the fast changing structure of economy and people's preference, it is but obvious that much of this increase in enrolment will have to come from the technical education.

However, the expansion in higher and technical education has not taken place in such a manner that it offers equitable access to all. This will call for conscious efforts to ensure that opportunities are made available to all and that system does not suffer on account of disparities, hence education has to be inclusive

The constitutional and other legal instruments have created adequate legal environment for equalizing educational opportunity yet still it continues to be an elusive goal. It's true that growth has taken place, but growth has taken place with regional disparities, inter-state variations, Gender disparities, social disparities (including the issues related to for example - physically challenged, which form also a large part of our population), Inter-religious groups, inter-caste, and disparities across Income and occupation groups. If any thing is common to this and that is the Disparities appears to be at every level. And therefore quite obviously as has been emphasized that their need to be a re-look as how these needs to be done equitable access to all. There are some cases where for example the physically challenged, the rural parts of the country and women has certainly not much been looked at, at all. I am glad that government is now engaged in the process of seeing as how to mainstream the women in our higher education.

Besides, the quality of higher education has shown deterioration over the years. Relevance of education with respect to individual's needs and the needs of the society continues to be a thorny issue.

The post-liberalization scenario has added a few new challenges for the education system to address. The pressures of the emerging economic order to reduce subsidies of all kind have resulted in increasing the cost recovery rates. Diminishing role of the State in social and educational sector has led to the emergence of a private sector in higher education also. The social responsibility of the State to ensure equity therefore has sharply declined. The economic affordability thus has become the gateway to quality education.

This is an important reflection of the great focus that is coming to play on education in general and higher education in particular, especially in the areas of skill development and professional growth, and from the point of view of fulfilling the aspirations of large sections of the society, who would like to see themselves equipped with higher skills and education, so that their earning capacity as well as their academic curiosity as applicable is satisfied. It is also becoming critical in today's knowledge era, where the only constant is change, since higher education, particularly the kind of higher education that not only builds skills, but an ability to learn for life and adapt and analyze according to the situation, lays the foundation for the individual to adapt to this new world.

This becomes even more critical when we realize that today, industry all over the world, including India, is crying out for trained manpower. In spite of the fact that there exists swathes of population put together around the world, despite there being whole amounts of unemployment and underemployment, there is still a shortage of these kinds of skills.

To quote Amartya Sen, though this is a fact which should be known and accepted in any case all over, the two main pillars of economic growth are education and health. Health, not only because it is necessary to fulfill the aspirations - the minimum level of aspirations of our people - but also because it has an impact on productivity and

economic growth. And education of course is the underlining foundation for a nation's growth.

Hence we need reform at every stage. ***Thus, a long-term integrated policy on education, which encompasses standards from the school to the tertiary level, which can deliver the required proficiency, is to be put into place on emergent basis.*** To reach and achieve the future requirements there is an urgent need to revamp the educational system.

Educational Reform

As far as school education is concerned, there are three main issues of

- (i) ***increasing Supply;***
- (ii) ***improving quality;*** and
- (iii) ***Restricting drop outs*** so that more and more students pass out class 12th, or even if they pass out class 10th they go into a viable vocational education system.

It is even more important to ensure that up to class 10th they have access to some amount of skill training, so that even if there were to drop out they are able to put some livelihood together. This is especially important for rural and marginalized areas. In order to achieve and ensure it we need to look at some of the following things.

- (i) ***Having girl friendly infrastructure*** available in schools especially in rural areas;
- (ii) ***Motivating minorities*** to attend schools; and
- (iii) ***Improving quality of teachers*** - quality of teachers being the most important underlying force.

To improve the quality of teachers it can be recommended the institution of **Indian Education Services** on the line of Indian Administrative Services. For this purpose it may not be necessary for government to have new recruitments because there are surplus people in different services who could be pulled out and motivated to go into the Indian Education services. In addition to this untapped potential with housewives

particularly in the rural areas can be used as a supplementary teaching course which will become particularly important for the rural areas. Many of these housewives are already more educated and by doing this we would be ensuring three things. i.e. (i) we are empowering women; (ii) we are tapping the unutilized workforce for productive means; and (iii) we are ensuring supply of teachers in those remote areas particularly where others may not wish to be located. So at least they may have access to some kind of teaching which further can be reinforced by EDUSAT and other distance education modes which can go a long way in transforming the school education scenario particularly in the rural and remote areas.

As far as involving more girls in the school education is concerned again three prompt approaches are needed.

- (i) ***Separate infrastructure for girls***, so that if they do not in case wish to or their parents do not wish to send them to co-educational schools, they are not deprived of education;
- (ii) That they can have ***access to lady teachers***; and
- (iii) Provisions for a ***separate girl's toilet in co-educational schools***.

This may look like small things but would go a long way. Apart from that the Girl child may also be incentivised as an encouragement to make them come to schools. Although government has taken several steps in this direction, it needs to be implemented effectively.

Similarly the ***minorities*** as well as some of the ***backward disadvantaged*** groups may have been kept out of the main schools in the villages have to be brought in the mainstream system through special efforts.

As far as ***physically challenged/handicapped*** children are concerned we have to provide them friendly infrastructure i.e. builds ramps etc. Private sector and industry will be quite happy in coming forth and fund some of the schools of the government, in individual areas. Some of them are also doing that, or in provision of materials where they can have one to one relationship with the schools, so "***adopt a school***" schemes could be floated

Vocational Education

Vocational education has to be totally ***freed from the clutches*** of the normal educational authorities, normal regulatory frame work, and central body setup for the purposes of the granting certificates and diplomas etc where they are short but over and apart from that any body would be able to setup and or obtain vocational education which could be certified by chambers of commerce, by industry etc.

Currently there are ***too many ministries involved in this process***, there are too many windows involved in this process and strangely currently no bank loans are available for any type of vocational education. Not only that, there are neither enough trained trainers nor necessary workshops. The best advice that can be given in this context is to have the vocational education setup work in conjunction closely with industry wherever possible. This is the right time because industry badly needs skilled manpower and if properly approached it can be a win-win solutions far all. In this connection various schemes in some of the developed countries i.e. Germany, Austria, Korea etc may be studied, looked at and followed. In the mean universities also should be able to offer short term certificate, diploma etc courses and people should be able to come in at any time in their lives and acquire skills at these courses. I would further recommend that universities should affiliate vocational colleges and people with degrees from vocational colleges should be able to, if they wish later on peruse further studies and get proper degree.

Higher and technical Education

As already mentioned that **growth has taken place, but growth has taken place with regional disparities, inter-state variations, Gender disparities, social disparities (including the issues related to for example - physically challenged, which form also a large part of our population), Inter-religious groups, inter-caste, and disparities across Income and occupation groups.** If any thing is common to this and that is the **Disparities appears to be at every level.** And therefore quite obviously as has been emphasized that their need to be a re-look as how these needs to be done for equitable access to all. There are

some cases where for example the physically challenged, the rural parts of the country and women has certainly not much been looked at, at all. I am glad that government is now engaged in the process of seeing as how to mainstream the women in our higher education.

Now the real problem of course is of **Access to all those who aspire for higher education**. There is also another group which is perhaps reasonably educated in schools and would have usefully benefited not from the higher education of the academic type but at least from vocational education and skill development. So this is another group which needs to be looked at.

If I where to place the problem, I would put it in three things – If we are looking at increasing access with inclusiveness and equity, then we have to:

- (i) **Increase the supply;**
- (ii) **Mainstream all the disadvantaged groups in order to bring about higher enrolment in higher education;** and
- (iii) **Financing of their education.**

As far as the supply is concerned, various steps have been taken in very heartening way, both at the planning commission level and by the government in order to bring in more institutions, upgrade existing institutions in to higher quality, but at the same time, this is certainly not going to be enough. Because the issue is not just of financial resources, but issue is of overall resources. You are talking about faculty resources; you are talking the ability to manage to put together those resources in a way to deliver what is needed.

In this effort, what I mean, ***we need to look at both the short term as well as the long term interventions.***

When we are talking about **short term**, we need to look at, particularly more efficient utilization of existing resources that we have, I don't need to dwell upon it, but I think we are definitely engaged in wasting a lot of our resources.

Similarly when it comes to **long term investment**, I would subscribe to the view that **private sector** has contributed to education in this country, and just because there are some few unscrupulous players there, who take advantage of the system. This is true anywhere. The time has come to recognize the contribution of those players and also to incentivise higher participation of private education in this country.

I entirely agree with that **some of the people will definitely be working for education as a social cause**. But even as private education is looking for its social return, as long as we make sure that right people have come in, as long as we make sure that we have strengthened our accreditation mechanism and academic mechanisms there is no reason not to invite them as the sheer giagementum of the task is involved can not be done by one sector alone.

As far as industry involvement is concerned, in today's scenario as never before industry is more than willing to collaborate, co-operate, and work with the educational systems to have access to skilled manpower. As I have already mentioned that they are already crying for the shortage, it is not only out of altruism but they need to work closely with the academic institutions and this is the time to take advantage of this. Because it is in the self interest of the industry to do so.

Many in the industry are running their own training programmes, either they are retraining some of the graduates out of the technical system and or because the system does not in view the concerned graduated with the kinds of skill that are needed by the industry, does not in view the kind of updated knowledge that the industry finds necessary. But given the current high attrition rate and given the fact that this is not their area of core competency for industry, Industry would be very happy in tying up with either individual institutions or through the aegis of AICTE in moderating the curriculum of the established courses as well as help in giving inputs as what they really want as an output.

Curriculum also if we are looking from the point of view of the industry, not only ***needs to be revamped*** very fast because of the changing knowledge that is taking place as today I think the only constant is change, that there will be change. So therefore it has become essential that the curriculum that we teach to our students is flexible which focuses more on the analytical skills, on application skills, on ability to update and upgrade their knowledge and rather than having pure information alone.

Another area where industry can contribute is whether it is a manpower issue or a faculty issue or issue related to increasing access and supply of education, or the shortage of faculty.

There is a ***huge plethora of retired manpower from industry***, people who have been engaged at very high level in industry itself who can also become tremendous resources for the academic institutions who would like to go and teach what we need to find the right way to involve them and bring them back to the teaching system. Similarly equally important is two way ***exchanges between industry and academia*** as far as teaching is concerned.

Faculty abroad in some of the best institutions has been known to find there place in the Board of directors of some of the most eminent and respected organizations/ corporate organizations of this world. And they have all the respect and more that has to be given to them. And similarly Industry is very happy and I know personally that there are many people for example who would love to go and teach one class or spend some time with the faculty of any institution and share their knowledge. We need to tap this resource which will be very-very useful.

Another area is research. Industry again today more than ever before is willing to utilize the human resources (the infrastructure available in the universities, for problem solving, testing, certification and is looking for resources such as research scholars, Ph.D's to engage in research on their behalf.

As India is advancing in the BPO's and KPO's sectors - I am very confident that very soon this country will be **see outsourcing as** not just of mundane routine programmes and accounts but also of high level intellectual work which will require (it has already started happening in fact) but which will require a much higher numbers of Ph.D's and research graduates.

As far as concerns of quality are concerned because while we are expanding we certainly need to keep the issues of quality and excellence in mind. Certainly it would be ensured by **effective accreditation** mechanisms by the industry and other independent bodies in addition to NAAC and NBA, because I think again the sheer giagentum of task is such, and one of the reason why NAAC & NBA has not been able to accredit all the institutions, is not because the institutions not wish to be accredited, but it is because sheer paucity of time.

Hence there is need for **multiple Independent Accreditation** Bodies having conglomerate of government, industry, academia, society etc. (all stakeholders of the education) that proves the credentials of the agency. So provide enabling provisions for the establishment of Independent Accreditation Agencies which is expanded to have regional centres with defined benchmark of quality and performance to sustain the demand and reach, which are also accepted by industry.

So this needs to be urgently looked at and I think that time has come where accreditation should focus much more on placement and other parameters of measurement of the graduates who come out of these colleges then merely looking at physical infrastructure and other infrastructure alone.

Keeping in view all the concerns of quality, I would go so far as to say that **“SUBSTANDARD EDUCATION IS BETTER THAN NO EDUCATION”**

Coming to interventions. We need to have as we have already discussed vocational education *system for catchments of students from class VIII onwards*

and particularly post class Xth and these needs to become as part of *Higher Education system with lateral entries into traditional degree systems.*

The large chunk who are left out don't even come to the level of aspiring or being able to attend higher education and I quote "the strata dependable to access is never ever thinking about going to university, therefore interventions needs to start early. And any talk of making Higher education and technical education growth inclusive without focusing on what is happening at school education and how do we bridge this gap in bringing them up to the first year level degree is futile.

Hence we will have to take a ***broad based definition of higher education and technical education if we want to make effective steps towards inclusion.***

Therefore the efforts need to be made in increasing access, reducing the dropouts and providing the drop outs with relevant education to make them employable and able to move up to the higher education degree system.

Affirmative actions

RESERVATIONS HAS FAILED TO YIELD THE DESIRED RESULTS, SO *the need of the hour is POSITIVE AFFIRMATION RATHER THAN RESERVATION IN ITS CURRENT FORM.*

I still think that it's a great pity that we have not gone ahead with an in-depth study not only to identify the extent of failure of the reservation as a policy (policy in its current form) but also to see that what are the measures that need to be taken as a result of the learning from these measures that were attempted. Because had it completely succeeded we would not have been debating upon it today.

Even the beneficiaries who are there are again the beneficiaries from the higher end within the SC's and ST's classes. So even within those classes many of the people have not benefited because they have never reached them.

Some quick statistics in this regard are:

Delhi University, between 1995 and 2000, just half the seats for under-graduates at the Scheduled Castes level and just one-third of the seats for under-graduates at the Scheduled Tribes level were filled. All the others went empty, unfilled (NSSO statistics).

The official statistics for seats of SC / ST lying vacant in educational institutes- 41543 in Rajasthan, 11500 in MP, 12549 in TN, 6000 in Himachal Pradesh, 1000 in Haryana etc and at least 8,000 engineering seats remained vacant this year in Karnataka.

And then of course on how the students are surviving: A survey conducted by IIT shows that half the reserved seats go empty. And of those who do get in, 25 per cent fail to complete their course.

- Therefore there is a need for the **development of a meaningful and comprehensive framework that would account for the multi-dimensionality of differences** that still persist. Of course today they are not even coming to minimum standards, so they have to be brought up to the **minimum level so that they can come in the mainstream system.**
 - **A deprivation index** could be used to **provide weighted scores** to students and the cumulative score could be used to supplement a student's school examination score.
 - **Lowering the cutoff marks to a realistic level** for the disadvantaged section in order to maintain the merit and also provide access can be desirable. (but hold them to a minimum standard)
 - **Special Coaching, remedial classes, evening classes, extra classes, bridge courses** to be provided to those disadvantaged students to enable them to reach a certain level where they can compete with other general students.

- **Special preparatory classes** of one extra year to SCs/STs/OBCs and students from backward areas to bring them to a minimum desirable level.
- **Not all want traditional Higher Education. May need some kind of vocational Education to make himself gainfully employed. So what provisions are we making for them?**
 - **Provide skill based education** with lateral entry provisions. On the contrary, if they are given access to a higher education which is more skill based and industry relevant, they can perform wonders
 - **Improve Communication Skills, soft skills**

A Hub and a Spoke approach

I think it is very important to mention something that I have been recommending – A Hub and a Spoke approach, where you have your key institutions where the government is investing in some of the key cities and towns of all the states of India. That should be the scope of focus. Those institutions should act at the centre from where further distance education can be imparted, from where technology can be harnessed to impart education in the rural areas by using videos and other methodologies. But the whole point is that it needs to be decentralized, because as they have come to learn that higher education Institutions can no longer be completely centrally planned. For these reasons the number of students have become far higher, the number of courses and type of curriculum is far to much, the number of universities and colleges that are needed are again far to much to be controlled by a central planned mechanism. So they have started decentralizing. Let these institutions of excellence come up in all these areas and let there be involvement of various stake holders and decide what is the kind of curriculum and other things that need to have been done.

So in this context I think UGC's and AICTE's role would be in terms of looking at emerging courses and at looking at those disciplines where there may not be sufficient wisdom at the local levels to give thrust to it

Financing

I personally very strongly believe and this is not at my personal level but is what has been happening at UK and many other countries in Europe which has gone for providing higher education for free to all students. They had come to the conclusion that it is very-very important that if you want to make the right effort in being able to bring about inclusive growth you need to go for what is called a variable fee system first of all.

Those who can afford to pay must pay; those who cannot afford to pay may be part of the student financing programme which can be repayable when they become a graduate.

There is a very interesting model on this that can be customized and used very effectively. But the issue is- this is not a capitalistic thought, this is actually a socialistic thought , because the point is, look at income tax – if you charge income tax at a flat rate you are actually been inequitable, but when you are charging at a progressive rate or a variable rate you are bringing about equity. Similarly when we are looking at the kind of courses that we want to promote we again need to –you can use funding as an instrument for doing so.

Students' loan and funding – I would like to say that this is relevant to government institutions as well as private institutions. And the government is well aware at what it costs to educate a student and therefore it is very easy to find the cap at which the student's loan should be given, and the private education providers could be involved in this process by giving them some areas where they can fix fees as per the need of the institution, and another area of could be

50% or some percentage where the students funding is taking place as other level.

There are other **Students welfare schemes**

- Merit based Scholarships;
- Industry to sponsor individual students;
- Bank Loans;
- Loans through special bank which may be formed for this very purpose (i.e. Educational Development Bank of India);
- Loans to be extended at Polytechnic and ITI's also;
- Partial subsidy/scholarship along with loan;
- '**Earn while you learn**' schemes to financially help students, especially from disadvantaged sections;
- provision of '**Earn, where you learn**' the concept of 'jobs on campus'

Rural Integration

And most important I would like to talk about is the **Rural Integration through Education hence more and more institutions and** educational facilities in the rural areas are required to minimize the regional disparities. It's also important to effectively utilize the technology in education and that can be very effectively utilized to deliver this through the Hub system also in the rural areas.

I would also like to say that it is very important to Assist quality universities by strengthening competition and competition at all levels when it comes to freedom to affiliate across boundaries, as well as to be able to formulate their own rules and systems.

So these are some quick suggestions and thoughts on this whole thing. I would just like to end this by saying that it is in the world's interest to build the capacity

of the whirlpool of working age population into the talented pool of knowledge workers at different skill based levels right up to research levels. Knowledge has no boundaries and certainly the talent pools will also have no boundaries. I would really wish to say that the time for debate is over; we know what has to be done; now it is the time to act. Those who will seek today will survive tomorrow. It's a humongous task, it can be done. Let's start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly we may find we are doing the impossible.

In the word of an Urdu couplet

*Raheen talab me zajabai Tamil ho jiske sath !(2)
Khud dundh lete hai manzil usee kabhee kabhee.*

If your intensity of desire is combined with the intensity of dedication then the desired goal itself will seek you out.

Thank You