Higher Education in India: Emerging Scenario

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Abstract

Higher Education in India will be governed more by neo-liberalism, neo-capitalism and neo-colonialism. The increase in the demand of higher education be it liberal or technical will be unmanageably large, rapid and pressing. India will need significantly greater number of universities to attain gross enrollment ratio of at least 12-15%. Public and private dichotomy will continue to be there in the higher education. The governance & administration of Higher Education will have to be based on Scientific, Democratic, Humanistic principals. CBCS will be largely implemented in higher education. There will be a significant shift from F2F to e-mode to distance mode. Apex agencies will be still lost in the dual mode of granting & monitoring. Higher Education will continue to be governed by bureaucratic, conservative, hierarchical, traditional model. The problems of sharing of resources, inter-disciplines and trans-disciplines will have to be resolved. Higher Education will need more of de-centralization, innovation, creation and construction. Academic Performance Indicators will have to be worked out more scientifically and comprehensively. Learning from the profiles of Nalanda & Takshila the culture of Higher Education will have to be revived. We will have to do away with ritual convocations which are without real invocations. The top academic administrators of Higher Education will have to be inter-disciplinary experts having rich profiles and balanced personalities. The Professors will profess to the levels to shake any unconstitutional, unlawful, unethical and wrong administration. The support staff will be real extension of scholarship to Guard Higher Education. Higher Education rather than stretching hands for grants will generate corpus of funds through its own production and patents. Higher Education will have to revive its identity. Art without perspective, Commerce without substance, Science without ethics and Administration without sensibilities and sensitivities are meaningless. Erecting tall buildings, with the foundation stones laid down by the tall, and pumping in huge public exchequer do not ensure Higher Education. The tertiary Education has to be innovative, creative & constructive to sustain its identity as higher every moment, be it liberal or technical. With all ifs and buts, the Indian Higher Education will continue to be higher and keep serving the universe with all dedication, addressing innumerous problems. New Age Institutions will be created and old age renewed for continuous updating of knowledge and skills. There will be phantom use of resources. Symbiosis, peace & harmony, health & hygiene, production & Marketing, Scholarship & Exchange, indigenous creation & trans-creation, research & construction will be the salient features of Higher Education.

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Philosophies Governing Higher Education

Indian higher education is being governed by neo-liberalism, neo-capitalism, and neo-colonialism and vice-versa. Those who have power to purchase higher education of any kind, from anywhere, at any time can purchase it. These producers and consumers have liberal, borderless, global markets. But, do we get what we want from higher education? We are used to food of our choice, our taste, our suitability, anywhere, anytime, any condition. Now, why are we trying to bring in fast food, fast information, cafes, expecting the consumers to change their tastes as per the tastes of the producers. Fast food, though, provides us more of choice and a variety of strange taste, but, it bewitches neither the body, nor the mind, forget about the spirit. Higher Education, which perceptually is the regime of these neo-isms is the regime of none of these. We need to revive our values and ethos. It is only inculcation of values and sensitivity to the basic culture, which can help us.

Increasing Demand and Dilution

The increase in the demand for Higher Education, be it liberal or technical has been unmanageably large, rapid and pressing. Particularly, Law, Commerce, Engineering and Education Faculties are over loaded. Higher Education is at the cost of the innocent public, which is investing with high hopes, but, little returns. There are problems of transition from +2 stage to higher education institutions. We have blind floods in higher education, neither knowing their origin nor destination. There are gaps between the academic attitude and academic aptitude of sizeable students enrolled in higher education. There are gaps between the teaching attitude and teaching aptitude of sizeable teachers employed for higher education. There are imbalances in student & teacher strength in various streams and programs. We have market oriented higher education be it admission, instruction or placement. There is competition, fair or foul.

Higher Education Identity

At present there are 342 universities and university-level institutions in India including 18 Central Universities, 211 State Universities, 95 Deemed Universities, 5 institutions established under State Act and 13 institutes of national importance apart from around 17,000 colleges including 1800 women colleges in India. Of these, 40 universities/Institutions provide higher education in agriculture (including forestry, dairy, fisheries and veterinary science), 25 in medicine (including Ayurveda, Homoeopathy, Pharmacy, Dental, etc.), 49 in engineering and technology, 07 in Information and Communication Technology and 08 in law. The number of Open Universities is 11 and that of Women Universities is 06. The total enrolment of students in universities and colleges is 99.54 lakh while the number of teachers is 4.5 lakh. Only seven percent of the population in the 18-24 age group has access to higher education. India will need 1, 500 universities to attain gross enrolment ratio of at least 15 per cent by 2015. This is a key observation made by the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) in its note to the Prime Minister on higher education.

Stating that opportunities for higher education “are simply not enough in relation to our needs,” the NKC has called for a massive expansion of opportunities.
Higher Education: Maintenance & Expansion

There is a problem of maintenance and expansion of higher education. A large number of institutes of higher education have constituted a variety of committees, such as, Admission Committee, Work Load Committee, Fee Committee, Selection Committee, Salary Committee. Inspite of all efforts by the institutes of higher education, there are innumerous problems, such as, follows:

- A large number of State Universities are under staffed.
- The teaching staff positions are sanctioned by the Central Government, but very often there is no State concurrence.
- There is abrupt cut on the teaching and non-teaching staff positions by the States.
- Staff salary on Paper is different and in actuality is different, more so, in case of a sizeable institutions run by a large number of private trusts.
- There is degeneration of a sizeable number of higher education institutions in terms of various parameters- input, process, throughput, and output.
- There are demand and supply in-equations.

There are problems of all levels of maintenance-preventive, corrective, adaptive and perfective. We have significantly lesser number of higher education institutions than what we need. Establish six more IIT. Open ‘n’ more IIM. Establish 1000 more universities. All excellent recommendations by the Committees and Commissions. But, how to? Professors cannot be produced over overnight. Merely pumping money, bestowing grants and laying foundation stones do not ensure suitable infrastructure. Expansion of higher Education is beyond the limited data bases and faculties of Committees and Commissions, it demands a countrywide debate and discussion.

Higher Education: Public & Private

The public and private dichotomy is a continuous phenomenon in higher education. A large number of existing institutions have inadequate infrastructure and educational competence to bear Higher Education. Neither we have been in a position to sustain liberal arts nor develop science and technology. The product which gets the license from the institutes of Higher Education is rarely their product. This is largely the product of off-campus sector which operates in many varied ways. Higher Education day by day is being governed by the private sector, which has more of commercial motive than educational. Higher Education has been made commodity and commerce. How to realize excellence, equity and equality at the same time?

Higher Education: General & Honours

Honours at Bachelor’s level is an anti-thesis to inter-disciplinarity. Graduates without sound knowledge base at a tender age try to be micro-specialists having little understanding of the whole. As a result, they are neither fit for self nor field. It is high time that the nation does away with honours at under-graduate level. Specialization should emerge from the field even at Post-Graduate level. The Generalist & Micro-Specialist dichotomy is very difficult to resolve.
Choice Based Credit System

In syllabus, on paper, we offer a large number of optional areas, whereas, in practice, a few. It is a countrywide phenomenon. In fact, there is little choice or no choice. Where is the option? What is wrong with our educational system? It is attributed to limited faculty, diverse courses, and scarcity of resources. But, more than the question of resources it is a question of resourcefulness. If the institutes of higher education do not modernize themselves, then there is every possibility of their going defunct. Choice Based Credit System at the face of it increases the work load of the teaching faculty significantly, particularly, classical F2F faculty. Wider the choice more are the demands on the education system. CBCS demands multiple modes of instruction through expert sources and systems, namely, modular mode, e-mode, synchronous, as well as, asynchronous modes, educational sourcing in addition to traditional formal instruction. Similarly, the evaluation is through electronic evaluation rubrics, continuous, internal, on line, on demand, in addition to paper-pen, activity based and practicum based.

Staff & Student attendance an alarming issue

Observation of process norms ensures quantum and quality yield. Surprisingly, though, the teaching faculty and students are present on campus, but, some of them do not class. What to label this phenomenon? Present Absent. On the contrary, in some of the faculties, there is very little presence. There are off campus classes by the private sector. The question is, when 80-85% attendance is compulsory, then, without completion of attendance how these students are permitted to appear at end examination? How about their continuous, comprehensive internal evaluation? Still serious issue is professional ethics. More serious are the problems with distance education & open education programs.

Apex Agencies lost in the dual Roles

A large number of apex agencies, namely, UGC, AICTE, NCTE, NAAC, BCI, MCI, ICAR have come up during the past. Of all these agencies, the NCTE has been questioned most, to the extent, that at one point of time the nation thought of dissolving it. But, that too, perhaps was not found to be the resolve. UGC, being, both, the Grants Commission & Higher Education Monitoring Agency has been trying its level best. NAAC has taken up the task of observing quality and relevance of higher education. It is functioning relatively better. But, the higher education institutions try to show off what they are not. In between recognition and accreditation, the process of higher education is lost somewhere. In this context the efforts of the NAAC are appreciable in working out the Key Areas, Quality Aspects, & Quality Indicators, particularly, for Assessment and Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs. Engineering, Law, Medicine, almost, all the disciplines need to be regulated. What should these agencies do, so that, the respective institutions and their products have professional feel and appeal? How to excel, exhilarate and enthuse higher educators & institutions?

In breeding in Higher Education

There is lot of inbreeding, that is, regionalism and provincialism in higher education. Some of the States insist on State domicile for admissions into the programs. In addition to this the services rendered by the teaching staff in the other States do not count towards the service
benefits. As a result the higher education is administered by a mono-culture, largely, by mediocre.

**Reservation not Remediation**
We have sizeable reservation (>50%) in higher education. In this age of equity, equality and democracy, it is highly desirable. But, along with this, what is absent is, thorough remediation.

**Inadequate Autonomy, Flexibility & Transparency**
Higher Education institutions have only a little autonomy, flexibility and transparency, which is too meek to nurture higher education. Higher Education is being governed by bureaucratic, conservative, hierarchical, traditional model rather than by human relations model.

**Higher Education: Input, Process & Output**
We have little control on the Inputs and Processes of higher education. So, the relevance and quality of the product of higher education cannot be forecasted and achieved deterministically. Process norms are grossly neglected. There is more focus on exposition and instruction, rather than creation and construction. Higher Education has become more theoretical than practical. There are wide gaps between vision and mission. There are wide gaps amongst educational objectives, curricula, modes of transaction, and evaluation. There is progressive dilution from objectives to evaluation.

**Problems of Sharing of Resources, Inter-disciplines & Trans-Disciplines**
There is a little networking amongst the agencies and institutions of higher education. Exchange and sharing of resources is very rare. A few consortiums here and there are more for demonstrations, than fully functional. There are rare repositories of learning resources. There are boundaries and seasoned gate keepers amongst disciplines. People from various disciplines rarely sit around the table.

There is a need to share credits intra-university and inter-university. Also, there should be provision for Credit Transfer, Student Mobility and Mutual Recognition. Most of the Higher Education Institutions are working more or less in isolation. There is a need of sharing resources and courses within institutions, between conventional and conventional universities, Open and open universities, and conventional and open universities.

**Centralized Higher Education**
Most of the Universities in India are affiliating universities. The affiliated colleges go by the curricula, modes of transaction and evaluation designed by the Universities. They have little autonomy, because a large majority of them are not properly equipped for offering Post-Graduate Programs. Being economically affluent and politically powerful does not ensure the higher education credibility of a private trust. The Post-Graduate product of a large number of these trusts has little insight into the national problems and developmental challenges. Research has
become a ritual. As a whole the quality of higher education suffers. Should the PG programs be delimitied to Universities and autonomous institutions, only? Or else could each and every institute of higher education be resourceful, powerful, and autonomous?

**In-innovative Higher Education**

Inspite of the repeated focus on semester based credit system, still annual and marking system is prevalent in most of the institutions of higher education. Choice Based Credit System is offered by the rare institutions. Continuous internal evaluation is the feature of rare institutions. Still there is a primitive culture of flying Squads in Higher Education Examination. Even in this age of Technology in Education, Electronic Distribution of Examination Papers is done by only a few institutions. Very often the Innovative Programs proposed by the efforts of some Institutions are declared to be not under the purview of the apex agencies in the respective areas, because, the so called expert committees fail to appreciate these programs. The apex agencies need to be additionally careful while constituting the Expert Committees for the Innovative Programs.

**Research at Higher Education**

Research at higher education level has been carrying out more of analytical, descriptive and evaluative functions than advisory and inventive. We are more in the realm of description rather than prediction and control. Massive Action Research, Applied Research, Operational Research seem to be mere slogans. Even the Basic Research is not through sound theoretical framework. Research Studies have largely lost their research rigor. A large number of doctoral degrees in various disciplines are conferred every year. The credibility of research of a large number of Institutions of Higher Education is lost. Who is accountable? A large number of projects are approved and financed by the apex bodies without adequate monitoring. As a result there are meager returns. Even with fair intentions how is it that we have not been in a position to realize the enunciated objectives. To begin with, it is because our objectives though highly sounding are questionable. We need to have a thorough vision of the reality and enunciate the objectives objectively. Otherwise we are likely to keep failing our predicaments. Whether it is logical positivism or naturalistic enquiry, we have not done much. There is very often only a little correspondence amongst the research problems identified, objectives enunciated, methodologies adopted and the emerging theses. Neither we have been in a position to solve immediate problems nor have we been in a position to generalize. Even if we claim to have formulated cognitive and meta-cognition theories, what use are these theories without application or expression.

**Invalid Evaluation in Higher Education**

Evaluation in higher education is largely invalid right from input through process to output to placement. Our admission criteria in most of the faculties are faulty, because we do not have the research base with respect to the predictors of performance in various programs. Still, the classical Norm Reference Testing continues in most of the institutes of higher education, promoting competition. Rarely we go by Criterion Referenced Testing and Item Response Theory. In the interview boards, rather than trying to know what the candidates know, we try to
make them feel stupid by making them conscious of what they do not know. A large number of interview boards fail to discriminate finely between candidates. The problem becomes, still severe, when we need to discriminate between 98th and 99th percentiles. Internal evaluation, revaluation, double valuation, centralized evaluation, all have question marks. A person with B+ passes the life situations, whereas, A+ fails. What do the degrees of a degree represent, if not the helplessness of the Higher Education System? Rather than grading our product on an n point scale could we have pass and not-pass in Higher Education realizing mastery learning.

Low Return on Investment in Higher Education
Only 5-6% of the persons who are conferred degrees are graduates in the real sense. Ritual convocations without real invocation are meaningless. How to observe the Higher Education wear the scarf with distinction, decency, decorum & discipline and glittering medals with resonating pride? For realizing that, we need to revive the culture of higher education. Rather than formally constituted knowledge commissions, each and every entity of higher education should realize and demonstrate its identity as a Knowledge & Action Commission.

Self Killing Complacency of Micro-Specialists
Self-killing complacency of micro-specialists of Higher Education is a matter of great concern. How much each one of we Professors professes even our own discipline? Higher Education has made us more fragmented than wholistic.

Placement, Promotion and Administration in Higher Education
Where are the alumnus of Higher Education? Most of the institutions of Higher Education do not have record of alumnus. What would be more shameful than the institutions of higher education refusing to recognize their own products. Academic administration of the institution must by thinking, speech and action portray their commitment to high ethical standards. A sizeable number of educational institutions do not observe healthy constellation and ethical climate. Many a academic administrators are not in a position to observe the laid down acts, rules, resolutions and ordinances. The true test of administration is when the rules and acts are silent. At times the conditions demand administrators to be over and above the system at the same time not against the system.

State of Arts, Commerce, Science & Administration in Higher Education
Art without perspective, commerce without substance, science without ethics, and administration without sensibilities & sensitivities are meaningless. This seems to be the greatest problem of higher education. Who should be the top academic administrators of higher education? These have to be essentially inter-disciplinary experts having rich profiles & balanced personalities. An analysis of the top administration of higher education, nationwide, reveals, that civil servants,
industrialists, pure academic professionals, and Statesmen all are misfits in the administration of higher education. There are rare personalities with integrated profiles. The Universities and Institutes of Higher Education have to bear with the best possible available. It is disgracing higher education to plant in-compatible administrators.

**Stereotyped Higher Education**

A large number of refresher courses which are meant for staff development and capacity building are not serving the envisaged purpose. Rather than designing means for staff development we have more of staff rating scales. These tools are more for describing the field than constructing. Same age old practical are repeated in the science laboratories. Same age old theories are practiced inspite of the changing conditions. Arbitrary criteria are superimposed on the reality promoting fundamentalism. Neither we have been in a position to sustain liberal sciences, nor, scientific realism.

**Micro-Specialization, Narrow Breadth and Shallow Depth**

Though the various disciplines are doing a lot of service to the society, yet there are many emerging issues and problems. How to stop deforestation? Can Botany contribute to the reduction of pollution? How to mass educate the development of the seasonal plants? How to save endangered species of plants? Can Zoology contribute to the regulation of population? How to correct the imbalances in male-female ratio? How to control diffusible diseases? How to save endangered species, for example, lion, tiger, black- buck? How to realize mass production of compatible medicine? How can Chemistry contribute to the control of pollution? How to produce degradable polymers? How can Physics realize the conservation of energy using conventional sources? There is a lot left to be discovered/ constructed in the areas of laser technology enhancement, transportation and space research. Rather than abstract and empty, mathematics needs to be more real and meaningful. Languages should be register specific and functional. Commerce should be more with service motive. Technology is sweeping the globe. But, there is more of media crowd than culture. Educational Instructional Software are rarely user compatible right from KG to University and continuing education levels. Still there are gender discriminating stereotypes in science and technology and more so at the higher education level.

Though information in Science and Technology is multiplying at exponential rates but still there is a wide gap between the expected rate of evolution of scientific knowledge and what it actually obtains. There are easily perceptible Science and Technology divides in the society. Philosophy and Psychology which are the strongest foundations for society are loosing their identities? How top level administrators very often are found to have low level affect attributes? Our degrees of a Degree are representative of the extent of course completion than developed competencies.

**Inclusive Education: A mere Slogan**

The expression inclusive education is recurring most frequently these days. What is its origin? What is its structure and function? We talk of multi-lingual models and go on superimposing
mono-lingual model. We talk of multi-style teaching, but go on throwing mono-style. We talk of inclusive education but fail to provide differentiated differential inputs. Inclusive education demands highly resourceful dedicated systems.

**Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) in Higher Education**

CAS in higher education is highly desirable in this age of humanization and democratization, but, it has significantly lost its purpose. The Career Advancement rather than a function of merit is the discretion of whims and fancies of administration and it is loosing credibility due to malpractices prevailing in the institutes of higher education, for example, referees not sending the reports in time, faculty having sound profile being not promoted.

**Professional Ethics in Higher Education**

We are largely proud of the Indians for their roles & professional ethics. Inspite of all adverse conditions they perform their duties with all dedication. For parenting Indian parents are models for the globe, for software industry Indian Engineers, for patients Indian Doctors, for learners Indian Teachers. We have harmonious culture and healthy constellation amongst all entities. However, some deviants, here & there spoil the professional excellence, peace & harmony. How? Needs no illustrations. Every one needs to rear the baby. We should not leave it to others. The very presence of doctors relieves the patients of disease and discomfort. All doctors need to observe punctuality & presence. Software engineers should produce vaccines to remedy than viruses to replicate. We teachers need to renew ourselves to remain alive and innovative rather than becoming stale to delete even the already running programs & courses. Rather than neo-liberalism, neo-capitalism, neo-colonialism, let humanism flowing through all professions govern higher education in India.

**PROGNOSIS**

**Philosophies to Govern Higher Education**

There is a need to de-colonize minds. Who will do that? It is Education and Education only. Globalization with equity and equality and sensitivities to the basic culture, liberalization with civilization, Privatization with Service motive, and State with Public Spirit should govern the higher education. The States should not shun away from the responsibility of higher education. With a tendency of doing so, we have already done the greatest harm to the nation. The economy should not try to overarch State and Schools of Higher Education. The economy should realize that it is the return of education. Traditional, conservative, bureaucratic, hierarchical model being a big failure and impeding power, we need to recourse to human relations model. Autonomy, transparency and de-centralization ought to be the salient features of higher education.

**Sustaining genuine demand of higher education**

Approval for the new Higher Education institutions through NOC should be provided on the basis of up-to-date data, need and demand in public interest. In no case it should be a function of vested interests and malpractices. The norms for recognition of the institutions need to be
developed and objectively observed, irrespective of who constitutes the inspection teams. There should be valid criteria for admission into the Higher Education Programs.

**Correspondence among Objectives, Curricula, Transaction and Evaluation in Higher Education**

We are relatively creative in enunciating the objectives of any program. First dilution takes place at designing of curricula, next in transaction of curricula and highest in evaluation. Every higher education institution should observe an inventory of correspondence amongst various elements of educational instruction design. We need to have clear vision and mission. Gaps between these are lowering the higher education. Particularly, mission functional procedures need to be worked out more meaningfully.

**Consortiums in and networking of higher education**

There should be networking of higher education institutions. More of disciplinary and inter-disciplinary consortia need to be created for sharing of resources. Also, there is a need to establish Consortiums of Research in Education.

**Inter-disciplinary & Trans-disciplinary Higher Education**

More and more inter-disciplinary programs should be designed and implemented in higher education. It should be mandatory for every student of higher education to opt for a course from other faculties to facilitate trans-discipline, and it should be credited.

**Integration of various skills in Higher Education**

Various skills, namely, techno-savvy skills, net-savvy skills, Life skills should be integrated in higher education. In addition to cognition there should be adequate focus on affect attributes and psycho-motor skills. Higher Education ought to be wholistic rather than fragmented.

**Choice Based Credit system**

There should be choice based credit system in higher education. It is possible only when we have innumerable approaches to learning resources, such as, e-contents through open source, learning modules, sharing of credits intra-faculty, and inter-faculties, intra-university and inter-university. Induction of choice based credit system is very challenging, but, highly desirable.

**Focus on process norms**

If inputs and processes are well taken care of then the output yield and quality are almost ascertained. We do not have adequate mastery on the processes. Some of the institutions have the problem of capacity and burnout, whereas, a sizeable number of them have the problem of throughput and rust-out. Over years we have laid relatively more emphasis on examination reform. We need to reform the processes. There is a need of evolving process norms in almost all areas of Higher Education.

**Evaluation in Higher Education**

There should be semester based credit system and continuous comprehensive internal evaluation in higher education. various modes of evaluation need to be practiced, such as, activities, assignments, projects, seminars, field work, tests having variety of items, such as, essay,
objective and notes. Evaluation should be inclusive of subject specific knowledge, relationship with other subjects, development of psycho-motor skills, life skills and affect attributes. Electronic Distribution of Examination Papers needs to be inducted.

**Research in Higher Education**

Research in higher education should be revealing and suggestive. Along with scientific realism, there should be added focus on phenomenology and construction.

**Need to observe Intelligentsia & Ethics in Board of Studies, Faculty Boards, Academic Councils & Executive Bodies**

The Board of Studies of various Departments & Faculty Boards should abstain from arbitrary decisions. Not only such decisions are harmful for the particular departments & faculties, but also, these have implications for the wider field. All these Boards, Councils, and Bodies should observe their identities and function as per the acts specified in the constitution observing code of ethics.

**Innovations in Higher Education**

To sustain its identity as Higher, the Higher Education has to be innovative, creative & constructive. The Higher Education ought to be self sustaining through its innovations, production & patents. We feel proud of our Engineers & Doctors who have produced highly valuable products with patents. Our Software Experts are Domain Leaders Globe over.

**Concluding Remarks**

With all ifs and buts, the Indian Higher Education has its own strength. The struggle of the average middle class families for higher education of their young ones is remarkable. Higher Education is the highest priority for them. In fact, these are the people who are helping higher education to sustain and develop its identity. Neither the international institutes of higher education, nor the virtual foreign universities can nurture the Indian youth, but it is the indigenous education which can evolve and actualize the self. A thorough analysis of the product of higher education can reveal a lot. We feel proud that we, the innocent public of India have constituted a sovereign, socialistic, secular, democratic, republic India. No economy, howsoever developed, no state howsoever advanced, no judiciary howsoever knowledgeable should commit the mistake of superimposing education, and more so higher education. There is a need to realize inter-disciplinary, trans-disciplinary, inter-domain, wholistic higher education for harmonious living.