



Editorial

Higher Education in India at Crossroads

Higher-Education Reform Panel in India Says Institutions of Higher Education in India needs more Autonomy. *High-level committee set up to reform the regulation of India's heavily bureaucratic higher-education system said in its final report that universities should be self-regulatory bodies, The Times of India reported.*

The report, presented to the ministry in charge of higher education by the 27-member committee, also said that undergraduate programs should be restructured to allow mobility between universities. In addition, the committee recommended that a single accreditation process replace the current plethora of regulatory agencies.

The higher education in India since its inception in 1857 has been following the same road. The road has therefore reached dead-end from several perspectives. As the nature of occupations has been constantly changing with rapid developments in science and technology but curricula have practically remained unchanged, therefore, students no longer have confidence in higher education institutions for preparing them for entering the world of work. For a long time the principal employer of the educated youth in the country was the State. State as an employer generally did not look beyond academic certifications such as graduate, post-graduate, and occasionally at the level at which the degrees were obtained. It is only in the recent past requirement such as National Eligibility Test coupled with the level of pass at the post-graduate level were introduced as essential criteria for appointment of lecturers in colleges and universities.

The hard reality is that majority of employment opportunities now are in the private sector and this sector is very choosy, to say the least. The private sector employs only those who possess skills and competencies required by it. Its requirements are continually changing because this sector has to keep pace with its global competitors. Education now has to be tailor-made to the requirements of the private sector. Also, foreign institutions are making inroads in the higher education sector by providing alternative learning opportunities leading to award of degrees of their universities. They claim that their certification will be preferred by multinationals to the degrees awarded by our universities.

To add to the complexity of issues of higher education in India, its demand and asymptotic saturation of state investment in higher education have been exploited by the private sector in a big way in setting up institutions with the hidden agenda of making money. In the period since 1990 the number of universities has nearly doubled; there has been manifold increase in the student numbers. Many states passed acts for setting up of Private Universities. Private universities emerged like mushrooms under the provisions of Private University Acts, and institutions including those which were newly created obtained deemed to be university status.

At the same time, the traditional structure of higher education in the state funded institutions has continued to remain around teacher-student contact, and finds that it is no longer adequate in meeting its demand and relevance. There are not enough lecturers, library books or rooms, and there is not enough time. New organizational structures are therefore required to support new learning processes.

In such a scenario, an obvious conclusion is that the road of higher education seems to have reached dead-end, or in other words it is at crossroads. The need of the hour is to give a fresh look to the higher education

and introduce such changes as will restore confidence in the ability of the state universities and colleges for providing, cost effectively, education relevant to the present context of the world of work. If 'traditional' working practices are no longer efficient in the modern context of higher education, then we must determine effective ways of successfully achieving change. We have no choice but to do things differently. New organizational structures are required to support new learning processes.

Student satisfaction may have to be used as an effective instrument for raising the quality of programmes of study. This will require acceptance of the sovereignty of learners by the higher education system. New courses and course combinations may have to be offered for meeting varying learning needs of students. The other driving force for raising quality will be the commitment of teachers to their students and to the pursuit of excellence. The main task of teachers will be bringing out the inner potential of their students and chiselling of their mental faculties. Yet, another perspective that brings out the need for bringing in change in the content and process of education is the recognition that unlike in the industrial age when production of goods was the accepted means for generating wealth, in the information age it is the knowledge-based work that generates wealth. Instead of large capital investment of funds that was required for starting an industry for production of goods at a competitive cost, a knowledge-based enterprise requires human capital of knowledge workers only. Already the information age is transforming the way we work.

We know from hard experience that unequal education hardens into unequal prospects. We know the Information Age may perhaps accelerate this trend. The fastest growing career presently is in computer related fields, offering far more than average pay scales of other professions. History teaches us that even as new technologies create growth and new opportunity, they can heighten economic inequalities and sharpen social divisions. As we move into the Information Age, we have it within our power to avoid these developments. We can reap the growth that comes from revolutionary technologies and use them to eliminate, not to widen, the disparities that exist. But until every student has a computer in the classroom and a teacher well-trained to help, until every student has the skills to tap the enormous resources of the Internet, until every high-tech company can find skilled workers to fill its high-wage jobs, India will miss the full promise of the Information Age. We cannot allow this age of opportunity to be missed. Everyday, we wake up and know that we have a challenge; now we must decide how to meet it. Every student deserves the chance to participate in the information revolution.

Therefore, time has come for redesigning curricular concerns in higher education. The challenge is to introduce innovative interdisciplinary programmes of study appropriate to the concerns of the 21st century. If teachers continue to work in isolation and curriculum concerns are tackled by each institution individually without drawing benefit of each others experience it may become a race in which goal post is receding at a pace faster than the speed of approach. The end result will be that reaching the target may forever remain illusive.

Thank you all for your continued support.



(Dr. Arup K Hazarika)

Editor-in Chief

The Clarion

Guwahati, India

Email : chiefeditorclarion@gmail.com