

Towards Higher Equity and Excellence: Challenges before Higher Education in India

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Abstract

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education has witnessed a significant fillip from 10% (2000) to 16.7% (2013) thanks to private sector initiatives in the field of technical education. Despite constitutional guarantees for positive discrimination in favour of disadvantaged section there is a huge asymmetry in terms of access for different sections of the society. Overall quality and research and development on a global scale remain a matter of serious concerns. The paper brings out initiatives required to improve quality quotient in higher education: particularly in terms of public private partnership, higher allocation to education and research, FDI inflow so that the goal for achieving GER of 20% by 2020 is in sync with global standards. A unique experiment in KISS Odisha demonstrating convergence of equity and excellence in respect of tribal students has also been brought out.

Keywords: Gross Enrolment Ratio, Positive Discrimination, Convergence of Equity and Excellence

1. Introduction

India ranks 135th out of 187 countries in terms of Human Development Index (HDI) with a score of 0.582 as per the latest Human Development Report (HDR) 2014. In Mean Years of Schooling (MYS) India has score of only 4.4 (2012) as against around 11-12 years for most of the developed countries and Emerging Market Economies like Korea. What is further disconcerting is that the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education is around 17% as against 35% in China, 75% in Russia and around 95% in USA. The 12th plan aims at GER of 25% by 2017 while buttonholing Equity, Access and Excellence as the three leitmotifs for achieving Higher Inclusive Growth. The constitution explicitly provides for positive discrimination and affirmative action to ensure better access to educational opportunities, employment and promotion to disadvantaged section like SC/ST. Despite such initiatives access to higher education remains asymmetrical amongst different sections of society and quality of higher education an area of major concern.

The paper tries to analyze (a) Impact of various initiatives on ensuring equitable access to various sections of society and quality (b) Possible convergence between equity and excellence and (c) A road map for fostering excellence in higher education

2. Impact on Equity

It would be interesting to analyze how increase in access to higher education and improvement in GER from 10% (2000) to 16.7% (2013) has impacted different sections of the society & promoted our march towards an egalitarian society.

It would thus be seen from Table-1 that while there has been considerable improvement in access to education; the SC, ST & Muslims do not have access to higher education commensurate with their population share. The OBCs are likely to improve their share with 27% reservation for them; thanks to the Mandal Commission. However, the Muslims, seem to be significantly lagging behind in terms of their representation in higher education despite implementation of Maulana Azad Fellowship Scheme and increase of the MAEF corpus to Rs.910 Crore during 13-14 as a follow-up to the Sachhar Committee Report (2006).

Interestingly different regions of India present a different picture in terms of access to higher education. Southern States lead the pack; while apathy rules the roost in Central and North-Central India as the Table-2 would reveal.

2.1. Positive Discrimination:

“A constitution may indicate the direction in which we are to move; but the social structure will decide how far we are able to move and at what pace” said *Andre Beitelte*. As would be seen from the foregoing, the pace at which different disadvantaged section are having access to higher education leave a lot to be desired. This is despite the myriad affirmative action and positive discrimination towards SC/ST & OBCs.

Incidentally a study of social inclusion of African American students reveal that the US constitution does not provide for positive discrimination for disadvantaged sections. The Judges also shown upon such initiatives. The impact analysis shows the following picture in Table-3.

The findings in US have considerable resonance in case of India. Studies have shown that only the

creamy layers amongst the SC & ST have benefitted disproportionately from the positive discrimination policy of the government.

3. Impact on Quality

Knowledge is the driving force in the rapidly changing globalized economy and society. The emergence of India as a knowledge-based service driven economy has made its human capital its major strength and opportunity for growth. According to a report by ICRIER, New Delhi, India is home to the world's largest pool of scientific and knowledge workers and produces 400,000 engineers per year while the US produces 60,000. According to the same report, in August 2006 India filed 1312 patent applications second only to the United States. This indicates that on the science and technology side, India has built up the largest stock of scientists, engineers and technician. In order to sustain these positive trends and an economic growth rate of 7%, a venture Intelligence calculates that India's higher education gross enrollment ratio (GER) would need to increase from 12 to 20 percent by 2014.

According to a recent government report 2/3rd of India's college and universities are below standards. Further the previous HRD Minister had assessed that we will need 800 new universities and 40000 new colleges to meet the aim of 30% GER by 2030. Such a massive expansion would need to have significant private sector initiatives. Besides to ensure quality foreign universities of repute would need to be invited to either set independent operations or collaborate with existing Indian universities. The initiative taken by the present government to set up 5 more IITs and IIMs is therefore eminently welcome.

The share of services in India's GDP has increased for 33% in (1950-1951) to 56.5% (2012-2013). Innovation and quality play an important role in ensuring significant global imprint. However, India ranks 64th in Global Innovation Index. India's capacity for innovation has been lower than that of other BRICS countries as scores in Table-4 would show.

In particular, what's disconcerting is the number of patents granted per million (1.2) in India against around 140/161 in USA and South Korea. While in terms of availability of no. of engineers and scientists India is well placed, the lack of quality in higher education and low percolation of research for commercial usage remains a major challenge. One related issue is the policy approach of the government; whether to foster only the elite academic institutions like IITs, IIMs and IISc or to broad base allocation to state universities in a massive way. China and Russia have adopted the elitist route, i.e. to promote a few select universities to improve their position in the Global Pecking Order.

4. Major Areas for Policy Re-orientation

4.1. FDI in Higher Education

Suhag and Rani (2013) have brought out that FDI in higher education will bring in quality programmes from foreign universities of repute and will improve market orientation. Given the fact that only around Rs.2051 crores came of India since 2001 as FDI with 75% from Mauritius to Manipal University, there is a need to encourage inflow of FDI and setting up viable Joint Venture enterprises & MoU with these companies. The position of FDI inflow over the years is shown as Figure-1.

4.2. Public Private Partnership (PPP)

Sectors like telecom, airports, national highways and power have witnessed significant progress through Public Private Partnership models and have brought in significant FDI inflow into the country. During the 12th plan an investment of one trillion dollar is proposed through a PPP route within the ratio of 50:50. While economic infrastructure is very high on government agenda the social infrastructure like education which is a vital complement to overall economic growth has been given a short shrift.

It would be worthwhile to draw experience of other countries like Sweden, Germany, Singapore & China where the PPP model has worked wonders. The key success factors have been agreement on shared objectives from the beginning of the partnership and political will for participation of the private sector, transparency and accountability within the PPP. Sweden has regarded higher education as a 'merit good' and has a long tradition of substantial public spending. It has substantive relationship with the private sector which includes sharing of roles, responsibility, risks and rewards. In Germany, public commitment to take most risks has encouraged many small private enterprises to participate in the PPP model. Such models have important lessons for India.

4.3. Regulatory Mechanism

The Yashpal Committee and Knowledge Commission have strongly recommended for establishment of an autonomous overarching National Commission for Higher Education and Research for prescribing standards of academic quality and defining policies for advancement of knowledge in higher educational institutions. Besides accreditation in higher education should be done through an Independent regulatory authority.

There is a near unanimity in view that existing regulatory control by UGC, created under Act of 1956 is not lending itself to quality improvement flexibility in charging fees, offering reasonable remuneration to teachers & finalization of curriculum of either public or private universities. UGC's primordial concern is with

central and elite universities like DU, JNU etc. This has to be abdicated in favour of a regulatory mechanism which is academically less asphyxiating. Arvind Panagariya (2012) makes a powerful plea against such frustrating control mechanism of UGC and recommends privatization to bring quality improvement.

In this context it must be mentioned that there is a dissonance in the approach of the UGC and Knowledge Commission under Mr. Pitroda. While the UGC is pitching for greater inclusivity and improving GER in small places which name less than the national average, the Knowledge Commission is aiming at exclusivity, augmenting framework for encouraging private players and foreign collaboration and maximal cost recovery through tuition fees. An independent regulatory body with the thrust to improve research and collaboration should be seriously looked at.

4.4. Allocation

It may be recalled that Dr. Kothari (1964) had recommended that the government should spend atleast 6% of its Gross Domestic Product on education. However in over 45 years we have been able to achieve around half its target. The Knowledge Commission under Sam Pitroda (2009) additionally recommended an increase of atleast 1.5% of GDP for higher education. It would, therefore, be useful to look at the comparative position shown in Table-5 in respect of allocation by developed countries and BRIC countries and the success they have achieved in terms of HDI, GER & MSY.

Colclough and Lewin (1993) in a seminal study have worked out a methodology for calculating investment requirement to finance universal primary education in India. Their study shows that around 3.1% of GDP needs to be allocated to universalize primary education as against around 1.5% earmarked by government.

4.5. Research and Development

Research and higher education are complementary to each other. According to HDR 2014 the expenditure on R&D in the field of Science & Technology as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) was 0.8% in the year 2012-2013 in India. However developed countries like Korea (3.7%), Japan (3.4%), USA (2.9%) and Germany (2.8%) spend substantially higher amount compared to India. India's higher education institutions are poorly connected to research centres and there is no synergy between research initiatives and industry requirement.

5. Unique Experiment in KISS Odisha towards Convergences between Equity and Excellence

It would be interesting to study how a unique experiment in social inclusion through education of tribals in Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) has fostered not only educational excellence but also extracurricular activities of the tribal students. Odisha has the largest number of tribes amongst all the states of India, constituting 24% of the total population of the state. Despite several initiatives of the Government of Odisha, the tribal population continues to be alienated from the mainstream society. The GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) of STs in Higher Education in the State is 6% against as State's GER of 16.1%. The position of STs in access to Higher Education in India and Odisha is at Table-6.



It would thus be seen that the scenario is quite dismal and the tribal belt has been the breeding ground for insurgency & communal violence. Realizing the problem behind the sluggish pace of transformation into mainstream society, Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) was founded by Dr. Achyuta Samanta in the year 1993; with the philosophy that empowerment through education is the only way for concrete emancipation of the tribal population of the state. What started as a fledgling institute with only 125 tribal students in 1993, KISS has grown in all dimensions to become World's only institution providing free education from Kindergarten to Post-Graduation to around 20000 students.

There are nearly 4657 students having the benefit of higher education with almost 50:50 participation of boys and girls. Some of the significant academic achievements have been 97% result in +2 Science, Arts and Commerce & 100% result in Post-Graduation. Ganeswar Miniaka, a B.Com. Graduate student of Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) clears CAT and received call from 6 IIMs. Joins IIM Tiruchirappalli, thirteen Post Graduate students of KISS have qualified for the Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship for 2012- 13, four Students recruited by Odisha Grameen Bank, four Students recruited by Railway recruitment Board, twenty Four Students have been recruited as teachers under the Sarba Siksha Abhiyaan Scheme of Government of Odisha and eight students were selected by TCS in Campus recruitment Drive. In terms of extracurricular activities Shri B. Barik was selected for Women Rugby World Cup and Shri L. Hembram: UN Youth Assembly at Malala.

It would thus be seen that a uniquely innovative project for mainstreaming the tribal students through education is not only ensuring not only 100% success at 10+ level, but also ensuring that some of them compete

successfully in converted jobs in Banks, Railway, IT sectors and Civil Services Examination.

6. The Way Forward for Bolstering Equity, Quality & Global Connect

India has made tremendous strides in terms of enrollment in higher education since independence cutting across gender, caste and religion. The private sector has contributed handsomely to improved access to higher education. However in terms of equal access and excellence, India still has considerable distance to traverse. Though the Constitution guarantees positive discrimination to disadvantaged sections, the ground reality stultify the process of equal access and academic excellence. This is not unsurprising given the historic nature of such deprivation in respect of SC/ST & Women; alienation in case of tribals, segregation in case of scheduled castes and in grained bias towards women and the sub-optimal secular orientation towards the Muslims.

A few concrete measures will go a long way to bridge such dissonance. The delivery mechanism by government agencies is leaky and often patently inept. It would be better to outsource the delivery mechanism of major programs to responsible NGOs. To foster increased access to deprived segments, financial aid and scholarships must be universalized and the overall allocation be substantially augmented. India is caught-up in the cusp of a meaningless debate on Private vs. Public Education; and whether higher education is to be treated as merit or non-merit good. It must be mentioned that in US where most universities are private, their management is out of government control; though most of them receive significant government grants in different ways.

The whole education system in India, primary, secondary, vocational and higher education must be revamped and looked at in a holistic manner. As Prof. Amartya Sen observes “to improve performance Indian Higher Education it is crucially important to reform, indeed to remake the entire system of school education in the country”.

Global economy has shifted from 'manufacturing centric' to a knowledge driven one, prompting economist Clark Kerr to observe that “on a global scale wealth and prosperity have become more dependent on access to knowledge than access to natural resources”. Therefore the challenge is not merely to increase Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) to 25% by 2017 but to rev-up the quality and reorient our major policy initiatives. The best entrepreneurial energy have to be harnessed towards the cause of education. As John Maynard Keynes had observed “Difficulty lies not so much in introducing new ideas but in replacing old ones”. The new government should take a leaf out of this while formulating a New Education Policy for fostering both Equity & Excellence in higher education.

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Table-1: Impact of Access to Education on Different Sections of Society

Grouping	1999-2000	2007-2008	Population Share
SC	5.1	11.6	16
ST	6.4	7.7	7
MUSLIM	-	9.6	13
OBC	7.1	14.8	27
National Average	10.1	17.2	100

Source – National Sample Survey Organization Data: 2006

Table-2: Access to higher education: inter region

Region	SC/STs	Muslims	Hindus OBC	Hindus Upper Level
South	7	8	12	26
North	7	7	11	26
North-Central	4	3	6	20
Central	3	5	6	25
Western	5	7	9	25
North-Eastern	3	3	6	13

Source – National Sample Survey Organization Data: 2006

Table-3: Social inclusion in higher education: USA

- African American students, though admitted with lower quantitative entry are able to complete higher education satisfactorily.
- Greater racial diversity does not improve learning process but improves quality and quantity of interracial interactions.
- However, a few African students of selective colleges do well in higher education.

Source: on Consequences of Affirmative Action in US Higher Education - A Review of Recent Empirical Studies by Thomas E Weisskopf in Economic and Political Weekly December 22, 2001

Table-4: Trends of Research & Patents Globally

Country	Quality of Research Institutions	Industry Collaboration	PCT Patents Granted/(Million)
USA	5.8	5.6	137.9
Brazil	4.1	4.1	2.8
South Korea	4.9	4.7	161.1
China	4.2	4.4	6.5
India	4.4	3.8	1.2

Table-5: GER, HDI & public expenditure % on education

Country	GNI	HDI	GER	Mean Year of Schooling	Public Expenditure as % of GDP
USA	52308	0.914	95%	12.6	5.6
UK	35002	0.892	61%	12.3	5.6
Germany	43409	0.91	57%	12.9	5.1
Japan	36747	0.89	60%	11.3	5.6
France	36629	0.88	51%	11.1	3.8
Russia	22617	0.778	75%	11.7	5.9
Korea	30345	0.89	100%	11.8	4.1
China	4477	0.79	35%	7.5	3.7
India	5150	0.586	23%	4.4	3.3

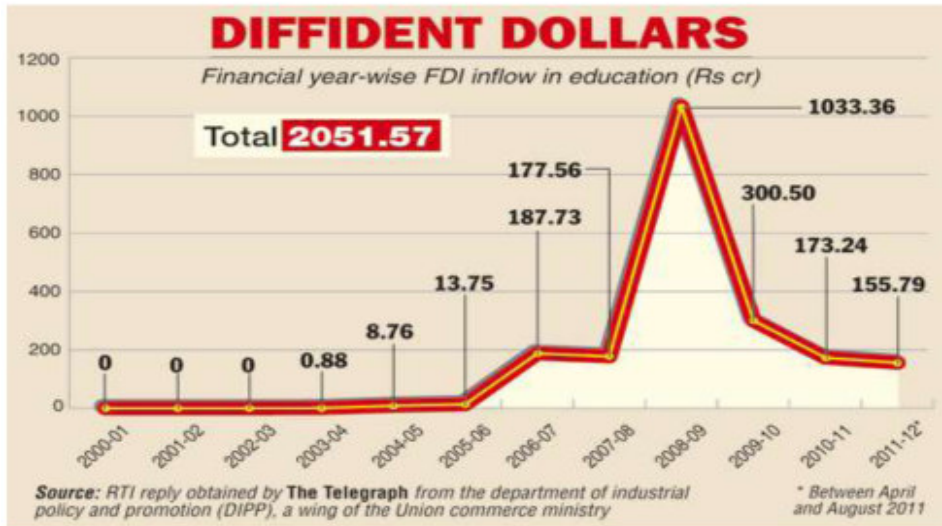
Source: Human Development Report -2014

Table-6: Gross Enrolment Ratio of Tribals : All India & Odisha

	Percentage of Population	GER
All India	7%	4.4%
Odisha	24%	6%

Source: ASHE 2013 Annual Status of Higher Education of States and UTs in India November 2013 Deloitte

Figure-1: FDI Inflow & Higher Education Sector



Source-RTI reply obtained by The Telegraph from the department of industrial policy and promotion (DIPP), a wing of the Union Commerce Ministry-April-Aug-11

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