

EDITORIAL

OPEN ACCESS

A Simple Stroke on Education in IndiaDr Dibyajyoti Mahanta [†]

Education is a formidable issue that plays a vital role in the development of human resources, which is directly linked to the prosperity and development of a nation. It plays a major role in the lives of all individuals in a society by enabling them to participate in the process of national development, both socially and economically and in the spheres of common culture and human values. No nation can meet the challenges of the present time unless there is a sound education system. In fact, all the nations of this world are doing their best for a robust constructive framework of the prevailing educational system with the support of latest concept and technology. It is in a sense striving for promotion of excellence with a motive of competitiveness among the pioneering nations. In this global perspective, it is a matter of serious concern for all of us that at present (till mid-2015) not a single Higher Educational Institution (HEI) of India could establish its existence among the top 200 universities of the world (see also, Bhattacharyya and Sarma, 2012) though India's rank is second in the world in terms of human population. Of late, a little ray of hope is emanating from the news that in the latest assessment by QS World University Ranking 2015, two of India's HEI could figure between 100 and 200. These are Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore and IIT Delhi, occupying respectively the 147th and 179th ranks. However, the feeling of complacency will not work if we fail to develop a need-based academic environment in most of the educational institutions presently functioning on our soil.

There was a time when some Indian Universities could attract foreign scholars and

learners to the value-based educational fold of high standard, which in course of time diminished for matters to be explored critically for nurturing the present system with those experiences. There have been many writings by the scholars of yore of this land, describing the benefits and status of education. We shall here cite only a couple of *slokas* as examples.

Vidyā nāma narasya rūpamadhikm
Pracchana guptaṁ dhanam

Vidyā bhogakarī yaśah sukhakarī Vidyā
guruṇam guruḥ

Vidyā bandhujano videśagamane Vidyā
param daivatam

Vidyā rājasu pūjyate nāhi dhanam
Vidyāvihīnah pašūh

The meaning is that “[e]ducation is a unique quality of man and also a secret wealth. Education is a source of gratification, fame and happiness. It is friendly to a man going abroad and supremely divine. Kings adore knowledge, not wealth. One who is void of education is as stupid as a beast.”

Again, many subjects like mathematics were prominent in those days. In ancient Sanskrit, literature there is a *sloka* that glorifies mathematics as follows.

Yathā sikhā mayūrānām

Nāgānām manāyo yathā

Tadvadvedaṅga sāstrānām

Ganitaṁ mūrdhani sthitam
(Vedāṅgajyotisah)

The meaning is “[l]ike the crowning crest of a peacock and the shining gem in the cobra's hood, mathematics is the supreme Vedanga Sastra”

Therefore, it is considered to be a very serious issue for discussion in the academic circles as to what ails the education system in India for which it seems to be a complex job for fulfilling its need for serving the society by means of

[†] Dean (Study Centres), Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Housefed Complex, Last Gate, Dispur, Guwahati- 781006, Assam, India Email: mahanta.dibyajyoti@yahoo.in

academic activities of high standard and competing with the global standard in harnessing the robust human resources of our country. The contemporary advancement in science and technology has been rapidly enhanced largely by education, as individuals are able to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in real life leading to services and innovations. In the UNESCO Education Strategy 2014-2021 report, it has reference in this regard which states that “[w]e live in a rapidly changing and increasingly interdependent world where knowledge and innovation are major drivers of development. This means, good quality education and learning are becoming even more important determinants of the well-being of individuals, the progress of countries and the quality of humanity’s common future.” Under this backdrop, it seems important for us to explore the different issues pertaining to higher education in India.

India’s position is second among the nations of the world in terms of number of higher educational institutions. There are over 712 universities and about 36,671 colleges in the country with about 12,09,211 teachers and more than 2,96,29,000 students (about 1,63,29,000 boys and 1,33,01,000 girls) in these institutions in 2013-14 (AISHE portal). However, allocation of fund for general expenditure in HE sector in India is not at all satisfactory even for running the usual activities as compared to the world-class universities (Bhattacharyya and Sarma, 2012). But it is found that “[p]residents and kings in France, Saudi Arabia, Russia and a number of other countries have suddenly expressed readiness to spend billions to help universities in their countries advance up the rankings” (Siwinski, 2015). At present, it sounds nice that the financial allocation in education sector has gone up from 2.9 percent of the GDP in 2008-09 to about 3.4 percent in 2014-15. But the Indian Education Commission (1964-66), popularly known as Kothari Commission and the New Education Policy 1986 (revised in 1992) recommended an allocation of 6 percent of the GDP towards expenditure in education sector. Thus, it is strategically important to

hover over the issue of financial allocation in matters of educational expenditure considering the population growth of the country and the less Gross enrolment ratio (GER). In this context, it is also equally pertinent to note that the scholarships and fee reduction measures for students in relevant matters in educational institutions should be more as compared to the present position for providing access and equity to all those who deserve and desire higher education.

Here, is another aspect for us to look into the affairs of setting up of educational institutions in society. Apart from a few big houses, entering the educational sector through setting up of educational institutions in private sector, in many a cases private venture for setting up educational institutions by commoners is detrimental to the health of education in matters of quality education, infrastructure and appointment of quality teachers. Even for want of adequate funding for education, many institutions are facing shortage of qualified teachers for the existing branches of study, not to speak of for posts for teachers to be created to absorb a huge population in the age group of 18-23 that remain away from receiving education and the matter of introduction of new and time effective courses is a far cry. It is a fact that quality teacher is an important requirement for the growth of higher education. However, it is seen that the growth of faculty strength is not at par with that of the number of colleges. In 1950-51, the number of colleges was 695 and the faculty strength was 23,549, which have gone up respectively to 35,539 and 9, 33,761 in 2011-12 (Higher Education at a Glance, UGC, and June 2013). It reveals that the number of teachers in higher education is not proportionate to the growth of the higher educational institutions. In its study, National Skill Development Corporation recommended that for qualitative development of education, it is essential to maintain the teacher student ratio at 1:20 in the country. For maintaining this ratio, it is found that there is a shortage of nearly 3.2-million of qualified teachers in HEI in the entire country. Simultaneously, it is also a closely linked affair

that the present GER of India is about 21.1 per cent (AISHE 2012-13, provisional report) is far behind some countries like USA, UK, Russia, etc. Government of India has fixed a target of 30 percent GER by 2020. Therefore, if it is to be achieved then it is obvious that the present teacher strength, number of institutions and other related issues are to be elevated from the present position, which require a huge monetary allocation and an effective planning and mechanism of implementation.

Along with these factors mentioned above, we need to remember at this point the observation of the UGC that “[a]ll the universities and colleges should develop close relationship of mutual services and support with their local communities and all the students and the teachers must be involved in such programmes as an integral part of their education.” Therefore, it is time to have a serious introspection in the affairs of our higher education institutions to develop a fruitful and time bound strategy befitting the national need for enhancing quality education and research as there is a feeling in different circles that “the very obvious challenge for Indian Universities is lack of quality human and material resources and the result of giving inferior quality of education and research” (Rathnaiah, 2014).

It is needless to reiterate again that education is a strong determinant that has bold impetus in the development of a dynamic society. As we have the experience of a vast and diversified population in India, it should be the primary concern of the policy makers and educationists at large for organising all educational issues in a very scientific and systematic way that can provide meaningful education which can ultimately ponder about and solve the problems faced by the nation. We need such education that can build a strong and prosperous nation and at the same time, can empower each and every individual for living in peace and harmony as well as can induce the required skill to face the hardships and challenges of life. Though, it was made by one of the most eminent sons of our soil several decades ago, yet we find it very relevant today

that “the most and urgent reform needed in education is to transform it to endeavour to relate it to the life, needs and aspirations of the people and thereby, make it the powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of the national goals. For this purpose, education should be developed so as to increase productivity, achieve social and natural integration, accelerate the process of modernization and cultivate moral and spiritual values” (Radhakrishnan Commission Report 1948-49).

References

- All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2012-13, provisional report*, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, available at: www.aishe.gov.in (accessed 31 October 2015)
- Bhattacharyya, R. and J.B. Sarma (2012). Building Research Capacity in Resource Limited Countries, *The Clarion: International Multidisciplinary Journal*, 1(2), 168-181.
- Higher Education at a Glance (2013). *University Grants Commission (UGC)*, New Delhi, available at: http://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/6805988_HEGlance2013.pdf (accessed 5 November 2015).
- Radhakrishnan Commission Report 1948-49*, University Education Commission, 1948, Ministry of Education, Government of India.
- Rathnaiah, K. (2014). The Challenges Facing Indian Universities, *University News*, 52, (30).
- QS World University Rankings® 2015/16, *QS Top Universities*, [http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2015#sorting=rank+region="+country=96+faculty="+stars=false+search=](http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2015#sorting=rank+region=) (accessed 15 October 2015).
- Siwinski, Waldemar (2015, 17 October). The Renaissance of National Rankings, *University World News*, Issue No. 386, available at: <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20151015173737446>.

UNESCO Education Strategy 2014-2021 report (2014). *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, available at:

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002312/231288e.pdf> (accessed 31 October 2015).