

PRIATIZATION OF INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The progress and development of any country depends to a large extent on the quality and number of trained manpower available in different areas. Education contributes its vital input in the growth and prosperity of a nation. In fact it is the backbone of all national endeavours. It has the power to transform human beings into human resources. Higher education has an omnipotent role of preparing leaders in different walks of life. Taking quality higher education throughout the country to bridge the gap in grabbing job opportunity and worthiness of candidates hailing from a small town to that of a metro is only possible when more and more Private institutes are allowed to operate.

Higher education day by day is being governed by the private sector. Indeed, entry of private sector does not mean privatization of the public sector. Nor does it mean that it should happen in the absence of any quality standards and benchmarks. A huge gap in the supply of higher education and demand for it has encouraged private sector participation, but a rigorous regulatory mechanism has to ensure high standards and affordability.

It is high time now to wear the thinking cap and to think rationally about the institute as a whole irrespective of its affiliation whether it is public or private. In this paper an attempt is made to analyse the present state of higher education and the role of privatization in rejuvenating higher education in India. It also tries to study some issues and problems of privatization of higher education in India. The study being purely descriptive, no complicated models and tools are used. It is based on secondary statistical information collected from various published and unpublished sources.

Introduction

The progress and development of any country depends to a large extent on the quality and number of trained manpower available in different areas. Education contributes its vital input in the growth and prosperity of a nation. In fact it is the backbone of all national endeavours. It has the power to transform human beings into human resources. Higher education has an omnipotent role of preparing leaders in different walks of life. According to a survey of 120 countries, the World Bank has reported that human capital accounts for 64 percent of total wealth whereas physical and natural resources account for only 16 percent and 20 percent of total wealth respectively. Hence economic prosperity and human capital have direct relationship with each other. The Task Force constituted by the World Bank observed that the

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higher education helps increase in wages and productivity thereby enriching individual and society as a whole.

State of Higher Education in India

India has the third largest higher education system in the world, behind only the U.S.A and China producing almost 2.5 million graduates every year. This is about 10 percent of India's youth. Hence there are enormous opportunities for professionals trained in Indian Universities and to pursue their career in teaching and research also, in addition to opportunities available in industries and business. At present there are 425 universities and university level institutions in India apart from around 20000 colleges including 1800 women colleges in India. The total enrolment of students in universities and colleges is approximately 12 million while the number of teachers is around 4.5 lakhs. A comparative analysis of population, number of universities and accessibility (the proportion of population in the relevant age group 18-24 years that enter the graduate education) is presented in the Table-1.

Table-1

Country	Population in Million	No. of Universities	Accessibility
India	1130	350	8%
USA	303	711	89%
Australia	21	37	80%
France	64	84	50%
UK	60	126	63%
Singapore	4	5	21%

Source: University News, Sept,2008.

Public Vs Private Debate

The public and private dichotomy is a continuous phenomenon in higher education. Large numbers of existing institutions have inadequate infrastructure and educational competence to bear higher education. Higher education day by day is being governed by the private sector. Moreover a huge gap in the supply of higher education and demand for it has encouraged private sector participation. The numbers of private higher institutions are astonishing- there are 100 private universities and 129 deemed universities (mostly private) in India as of December 2011. This is a massive 36 percent of the total number of university level institutions of the country. The number of private professional institutes is equally startling- there are more than 4000 private institutions imparting professional education.

Clearly, the higher education space in India is becoming more and more privatised. The reason is obvious-a huge gap in the supply of higher education and demand for it. The number of seats available in government run institutions is much smaller than the number of people wanting them. Globally private universities are

expanding at a more rapid rate than public institutions and they are serving a larger segment of the total population. In countries like South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Philippines, private universities educate a large majority of those going on to post secondary education i.e. 80 percent overall. In Latin America also more than 50 percent total enrolments are in private universities. Private universities are developing rapidly in Central and Eastern Europe and in former Soviet Union with rapid growth at levels of the academic system. Although 80 percent of the American students study in public universities, most of the prestigious universities like Harvard, Stanford and Chicago are private. Entry of private sector does not mean privatization of the public sector. Nor does it mean that it should happen in the absence of any quality standards and benchmarks. Privatisation has become the need of the hour because public institutions fail to cater the aspiration of all people. More alarming problem that public system faces now is the shortage of faculty in institutions of higher learning, unequal access to the institutions, the non-availability of textbooks in Indian languages especially in the sciences and most importantly the problem of capacity building.

The really crucial issue in higher education is not about private versus state universities. It is about access - access defined in a very broad way of real opportunities for everyone to avail themselves of high quality, meaningful education at affordable rates. Defining access in this broad way, it is evident that the situation is grim. The first and the most obvious fact is that there are not enough seats in colleges for all interested school graduates. Our gross enrolment ratio at around 13 percent is pathetic when compared to what it ought to be given the size of our economy. The world average is almost twice this number. And this number masks the massively uneven quality of education-from degree colleges in small towns run in a few rooms to IITs with world-class infrastructure and facility.

Role of Privatisation in Higher Education

Of course many private higher learning institutions are busy in profit making by providing short-cut degrees, diplomas, certificates and awards to students. They are known as degree-granting shops. Many charges can be levelled against them like-huge under-the-table capitation fees, over-invoicing of salaries of genuine employees, fake, non-existent employees on the rolls, over invoicing of capital expenditure mostly to associated companies of the promoters, consultancy and perks to the promoters, and so on. One should hasten to add that there are some excellent private institutions of higher learning that maintain standards and provide high quality education, especially in the professional sphere. Many of them run courses which are non-existent or rarely found in state-run universities. A diploma in apparel design or export management is not something that would necessarily be available to a student in a so-called state run university. Instead of thousands of students doing a plain vanilla undergraduate degree in humanities or commerce, if a few hundred or thousand end up with diplomas in leather technology, apparel design, interior design and the like, it cannot really be bad especially for an economy as varied as ours does need a variety of skills.

There are many private universities that have achieved success in all spheres like- maintaining quality education, good infrastructure, placement of students etc in less than 10 years what most of the public funded universities have not achieved in even 50 years. There are many private universities like ICFAI, AMITY, BITS, VIT etc are popularising Brand India by their contribution to Business and technical case studies to reputed bodies like European Case Clearing House(ECCH), which are even referred by the students of leading B-Schools like Harvard, Stanford etc. Such universities are publishing Text books, Workbooks, Derivatives, Journals and Magazines on various subjects customised for Indian students, scholars and experts with Indian and international illustrations. This has helped the students to increase the basic understanding of various subjects and also helping in enhancing their level of knowledge. Again scholarship for merit holders is improving the competitive spirit among the students. So taking quality higher education throughout the country to bridge the gap in grabbing job opportunity and worthiness of candidates hailing from a small town to that of a metro is only possible when more and more private institutes are allowed to operate by opening colleges even at District level. However, the private institutes must be sensitive towards student's interest, the employment market of graduates and pattern of pricing. The government should ensure rigorous regulation of standards and fees pattern of private institutions. As long as reasonable regulatory requirements are enforced, and enforced well, on these institutions, there is no reason why their growth should be curtailed.

Conclusion

Globalisation has created ample avenues for the integration of our views and knowledge in different spheres and providing greater opportunities for services, goods and exchange of ideas. So this may be achieved with strategic planning like-raising the standard of higher education, liberalising the rules for formation of private universities and encouraging open learning.

It is high time now to wear the thinking cap and to think rationally about the institute as a whole irrespective of its affiliation whether it is public or private. So it should be case to case basis instead of "One size fits all" attitude. Privatization of higher education is the pavement towards national development. It will enhance the mobility of highly talented and competent personnel. It will create new job opportunities in private sector which is very imperative. It will facilitate the transfer of knowledge. The management of institutions (private or public) providing higher education should function with the true spirit of disseminating knowledge, transforming society and bringing peace and harmony to the nation. Hence higher education should be quality based, marching towards the pursuit of truth through knowledge and enlightenment to open up new vistas of development and humanism. Such an education will ignite the minds of young citizens which in turn will contribute towards building of a healthy nation. Let private sector play the role as allowed in the developed countries. Regulation is needed but not the controls.

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