



## Changing Perspective of Higher Education in the 21 St Century

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### Abstract

*This paper is a short review article that seeks to interrogate the goals of education in the present context with reference to Indian examples. Real education is that which enables one to stand on his own leg. This maxim pronounced by Swami Vivekananda is still manifests the undoubted goals of education even in the present age. The goals of education in the present context are somewhat different as it was contemplated in earlier days. Nowadays, there is a paradigm shift in the teaching and learning process. The students are no longer considered to be learners; rather they are the consumers whom the teachers must satisfy so that they can become successful clients in the market. Education is, therefore, intimately linked with consumerism. Still, education must not lose its inclusive character as long as disability among certain sections exists. Hence, the goals of education and sustainable economic growth are complementary with each other and thus go hand in hand.*

**Keywords:** Consumerism, inclusive education, sustainable economic growth.

### Introduction

Education is a process for achieving perfection that already exists in the mankind. The 20<sup>th</sup> century is significantly a milestone in the discourse of education as majority of the world's population, for the first time, learned to read and write<sup>1</sup>. Education is an important instrument for development and social change as it was visualized by the first education commission on higher education in India, the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49) that emphasized the welfare and betterment of humanity as the ultimate goal of higher education. That education is essentially linked with development, progress, growth etc. is universally recognised and at the same time a highly contesting premise. It is universally true and a perceived fact that a man capable of reading and writing, calculating or having communicative vocabularies make him characteristically different from others who do not have these skills. But when education is considered as a means to an end that strives to reach the goal of economic development, it becomes a contesting inference. Contesting because social scientists when trying to project education as a means of economic growth are overwhelmed with ambiguity as to decide which should come first. What is more, even on the basic premises "what is education" and "what is prosperity" varied interpretations, sometimes contradictory, are offered by technical experts like economists, sociologists, education experts and policy analysts. Notwithstanding that the prevailing perception is that it is the relations between economic growth and education that pin points the basic traits of economic analysis. Adam Smith in the 18th century and Alfred Marshall in the 19th century, two eminent economists of the world, successfully framed the discourse how human investment in education influences the

wealth of nations. Investment in education and skill is virtually an investment for economic growth. Hawkes and Ugur in their studies have observed that there has been a correlation between investment in education and acceleration of economic growth. The research indicates that literacy rate is directly linked with better indicators of human capital performance that results in better growth regression than indicators of schooling. A study conducted by a Paris based organization aptly reveals that a country able to attain literacy scores 1% higher than the international average will achieve levels of productivity and GDP per capita that are 2.5 and 1.5% higher respectively, than those of other countries<sup>2</sup>. The 21st century is the century of new international economic order where knowledge and market as well has changed the character of national economy of every country. Widespread economic inequality is the reality of the present day economy. According to a newspaper report only 20% people possess the wealth of half of the world's population. Higher education has not escaped this impact and is in the process of challenge, thereby challenging the traditional goals of education. The disparity in wealth and quality of life between the developed and developing world has been attracting the attention of the world. The exponential growth of population in the developing countries is matched by the exponential growth of knowledge in the developed world<sup>3</sup>. Promotion of higher education has, thus, become the important goal of all developing countries. This is not a mere utterance. The report of the Education Commission (Kothari Commission-1964-66) has been entitled as 'Education and Development'. Higher education, thus, has ample potentiality for bringing about change in the social, cultural, economic, political as well as technological spheres of life.

## Changing Goals of Education

Education has no boundary of its own. Globalization has made education transnational and transdisciplinary. The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as Davis has rightly pointed out, has initiated the pace of borderless education. Nowadays, the so-called class room teaching with chalks and talks is being gradually replaced with virtual classroom where technology is taking the role of a teacher. The relationship between students and teachers has undergone a change. Consumerism is now the essence of education, particularly the higher education. Students are now considered as consumers of market skills which the university promises to provide. As a result, the teaching learning process has become essentially market oriented. The universities are now very much concerned with the satisfaction of their students. Student's feedback about institutional excellence is being sought. Today, service sector has come out as an important sector of nation's economy and major emphasis of the employment market is on information technology skills. The generation of knowledge-based information technology combined with skilled academic governance has become the universal role of the present day university to meet the challenges of the newly emerging situation<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the reorientation of educational policy, identification of areas of potential strength and weakness, organizational issues, human capital, issues of infrastructure and matters relating to quality control and improvement of teaching and learning method are the demand of the new situation that university education must take into consideration<sup>5</sup>. In the 21st century state intervention in the educational field has come down. Commercialization of education is now a global trend. Global awareness has emerged as a dire need of every society. During the last couple of years the business organizations have become the major funding agencies. In turn, the universities are carrying out research in order to satisfy the needs of these funding agencies. Thus, the universities are now facing the challenges from within and outside. Advanced research rather than quality of their teaching is the need of the changing circumstances and every institute of higher learning must expedite its research foundation for its survival<sup>6</sup>. The principal forces behind this transformation of university education are the development of knowledge based economy, explosion of information technology, globalization leading to market oriented society and the debate on public private nature of higher education. But global education in a globalised economy can never cater to the needs of global trade organizations only. The role of the institute of higher learning in the development of nations cannot be denied. Universities have to operate in local, regional perspectives as good as national and international context and need to address political realities, community expectations and their own cherished values. They are expected to serve as engines for local and regional development and form elites, usually local elites<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the present day higher education has remarkably been transformed. Education is now job oriented. Communicative

skills based values, feelings, fears and hopes can generate a trusting basis for critical problem solution. These communicative vocabularies can initiate an open discourse between universities, government and business organization leading to an increasing local, national and international forum creating a room for interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary discourse. These challenges necessitate to restructure the system of higher education in order to achieve the holistic goal of social cohesion and social inclusion rather than exclusion and mere competition.

## Higher Education in India: Issues and Challenges

This article is an attempt to interrogate this new perspective of education, especially higher education in India with the help of secondary resources. India, being one of the largest populous countries in the world has an estimated 55% population below the age of 20. People of this group are considered to be the most productive class of human resources. So, empowering these people with productive knowledge and skills is an imperative task of higher education for attaining sustainability in the development process of the country<sup>8</sup>. Higher education in India is still out of reach of majority of population if the Gross Enrolment Ratio is taken into consideration. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is a statistical measure used by the United Nations to measure education index of a nation. Relating to higher education, it measures the total population of all ages enrolled in different education programmes to the total population of the country in the age group of 18-23 years. The available statistics show that the current level of GER in India stands at a figure of 12.4% which is very low in comparison with world average of 23.2%, 36.5% for developing countries and 45% for developed countries. The role of government in this regard is, thus, enormous and challenging. To improve the GER to bring it closer to a possible extent to other developing countries, otherwise the country would continue to face unequal distribution of education, health and wealth. The benefits of growth that Indian economy is achieving at a formidable rate will not percolate to wider level of the society. India has evolved a plan to raise the GER from current level to 30% by the Year 2020. This is definitely a herculean task and involves a greater degree of capacity building measures including development of infrastructure, recruiting teaching staff, making higher education more accessible, allocating adequate funds, providing technological support for gathering worldwide knowledge information, and the last but not the least, addressing the issue of quality education. Since independence, the number of educational institutions has been increased to a significant extent. The following table shows that spectacular growth over the periods.

With the growth of educational institutions, the budgetary allocations on educations have been increased over the periods. The table-2 indicates the governmental expenditure on education.

**Table-1**  
**Increase of Educational Institutions in India**

Growth of Higher Education institutions in India(Dec.2011)	No. of Universities	No. of Colleges
1950-51	30	695
1960-60	55	1542
1970-71	103	3604
1980-81	133	4722
1990-91	190	7346
2000-01	256	12806
2010-11	564	33023

Source: University Grants Commission, New Delhi, (2012)

**Table-2**  
**Budgetary allocation on education**

Expenditure on Higher Education (Year)	Expenditure % of GDP
2006-07	1.14
2007-08	1.09
2008-09	1.23
2009-10	1.25

Source: University Grants Commission, New Delhi (2012)

Recruitment of teaching staff is a crucial issue in a developing country like India simply because it creates an apparent load on exchequer. But institutions that impart knowledge require teacher for creation of knowledge and its disseminations. As of today, available statistics show that around 35% posts are vacant in Central Universities, 33.33% in National Institute of technology and 35.1% in other Central Educational Institutions. There is an overall shortage of 25-30% faculty in Higher education. The Human Development Index for the year 2009 ranked India at 134, one of the lowest among the nations, 120 and 128 in adult literacy rate and GDP per capita respectively. It indicates that we require more institutions to address the issues of accessibility to education and to provide higher education at an affordable cost for sustaining the goal of inclusive education.

## Conclusion

Education is one of the crucial areas that cater to the need for long term development of a country. There is no doubt that since independence, Indian education system has been expanded remarkably. But this is not enough to cater to the needs of Indian youth. The whole spectrum is broad enough that extends from *KG to PG* and from Arts to Pure Sciences and from Technology to Professional streams. The following measures are important that need to be kept in mind while discussing any policy issues in order to reach the goals of higher education in the New Millennium. First, the state intervention in the field education is the urgent need of the time. Budgetary allocations on education need to be enhanced to an optimum level. The practice of appropriating resources sporadically should be

abandoned and formulation of long term policy in order to ensure proper and effective delivery system is an imperative task of the state. The numbers of reputed social science institutions like Indian School of Economics or privately run Tata Institute of Social Sciences are so negligible that they cannot cater to the needs of the entire country. Secondly, vocationalisation of education needs to be redesigned, that means vocational courses should be introduced within the departments of the state universities. This will generate skilled human capital that is required by the market place. Thirdly, mentoring activity is extremely crucial, but often neglected by the state, in the context of holistic goals of inclusive education. That practice has been started in some management school, but state sponsored educational institutions are far away from these desired goals. Fourthly, in today's knowledge economy where India has a perceived advantage, the felt need is for greater coverage and access. Many institutes of higher learning in the country are very much excellent in terms of their infrastructure, resources, programme of teaching, and research facilities which are as good as many institutes of higher learning of many advanced countries. But their number is so poor that it cannot come any way near the level of average institutions of higher learning in the advanced countries. This gap in quality and quantity of higher education has always been a cause of grave concern to policy makers of higher education in the country. Huge number of institutes of higher learning in India have no adequate learning resources that often act as a barrier in providing inclusive education to the age group of 18 to 20<sup>9</sup>. In terms of GER, accessibility to higher education is frustrating even in comparison to certain developing countries. Five years planning in India placed greater emphasis to make education affordable and accessible to all sections of the society<sup>10</sup>. This issue has not been successfully addressed even after 60 years of independence of the country. Any education policy needs to be formulated in the light of growing economic disparity and social, cultural and linguistic diversity. The short term or intermediate remedy lies in strengthening open or distance learning through the process of e-learning. Fifthly, for higher level of learning, institutions having excellence of international standard are to be set up to cater the needs of the new economy that can effectively compete with the global economy. The huge infrastructural up gradation of the educational institutions in turn has undoubtedly addressed the issue of welfare state in question because the reputation of educational institutions run on the model of Public- Private Partnership is not an encouraging one. Thus, the state has to provide the requisite resources. At the same time, human resources of high quality for these new initiatives have to be carefully employed. Sixthly, the private sector has an important role to play in these changing and newly emerging context. This has already started happening in some metropolis. However, goals of education of any kind will remain unfulfilled if adequate budgetary provisions on education are made with an ideal target of 6% of GDP. Universities, thus, must be reoriented with the vital role of bringing about qualitative change with competitive spirit. Appropriate curriculum, scientific skill based pedagogical

methods and evaluation system motivates student's participation in the learning process<sup>11</sup>. The last but not the least is that research and education, especially higher education, are essentially interlinked today. The most controversial intellectual property rights mechanism highly demands huge research work with adequate financial support that most of the developing countries like India, cannot undertake due to financial hardship. But the issue is serious and needs proper attention as research and economic development of any country go hand in hand and both are interdependent on each other<sup>12</sup>.

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