

Empowering Rural Women – the Higher Education Way



Education

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ABSTRACT

The dynamics of the future call for knowledge leadership. India today can boast of a large educated manpower, which is crucial for the socio-economic growth of any nation. Rural education will prepare India for a letter tomorrow. Quality, relevance and inclusiveness of education is cause of concern at the national level but it is more serious in rural India. Government need to ensure productive corporate sector participation. Education is able to empower women especially rural women. It ultimately leads to gender equality. Against this background, a modest attempt has been made to discuss some related issues in Indian perspective.

Introduction

India today can boast of a large educated manpower, which is crucial for the socio - economic growth of any nation. Despite serious handicap of means and resources, the Country during the last 66 years has built up a very large system of education and also a vast pool of men and women equipped with a high order of scientific and technological capabilities, robust humanism, philosophical thought and creativity. In 1950, we had 25 Universities and 700 colleges with an enrolment of just one lakh students. We have moved away from elitism to access to all in higher education. Today, we have 20 million students studying in about 600 Universities and over 34,000 colleges.

India, however, does not compare favourably with its global competitors in terms of the overall educational attainments of its people. Even countries like Vietnam and Bangladesh which have lower per capita incomes than India have higher Gross Enrolment Rates (GER) in education. India's GER in secondary sector school is 40%, compared to 70% in East Asia and 82% in Latin America.. GER in higher education is about 18.08%, which is lesser than even the Asian average of 23%. The world average GER in 29%. We have set upon ourselves an ambitious goal of making it to 30% by 2020. That calls for a huge investment, in terms of resources and manpower.

India is now the largest education system in terms of number of institutions and second largest in terms of enrolment after China. Managing such a large educational system effectively and efficiently is indeed the biggest challenge facing the Indian education system today. The expansion, coupled with demands of globalization and privatization, has necessitated revisiting the institutional structure that was created after independence. The Ministry of HRD has embarked upon an ambition agenda of undertaking momentous institutional reforms in order to transform the country into truly global 'knowledge economy'.

Building a Knowledge – based Society

Today the higher education system as a whole is faced with many challenges such as financing and management, access, equity, relevance and reorientation of policies and programmes for laying emphasis on values, ethics, and quality of higher education together with the assessment of institutions and their accreditation. These issues are of vital importance for the country. Since higher education is the most powerful tool to build a knowledge – based society for the future. The enormity of the challenge of providing equal opportunities for quality higher education to an ever – growing number of students is also a historic opportunity for correcting sectoral and social imbalances, reinvigorating institutions, crossing international benchmarks of excellence and extending the frontiers of knowledge. Recognising the requirement, as well as the basic fact that institutions of higher learning have to perform multiple roles like

- creating new knowledge
- acquiring new capabilities and
- producing an intelligent human resource pool.

The Indian higher education system has to brace itself to address global challenges by channelizing teaching, research and extension activities, and maintaining the right balance between need and demand.

Lange(2002) identified five steps required to transform the past Higher Education system into a more appropriate society focus institutions when she mentioned:

- We need to take into account the local, regional and national needs.
- We need to mobilize local talent through lifelong learning
- We must help to lay the foundation of a critical civil society
- We need to train the necessary labour force for the country
- We need to integrate research and training with the needs of industry and social reconstruction.

Unfortunately, the higher education has not fully achieved the targeted goals, objectives and ideas. Hence, there is no justification to make much claim of success in the higher education arena. On the other hand, the higher education has made the people to look for lucrative and white collared jobs. The products of higher education are not willing to take up productive jobs. The higher education of India has not found the solutions of many of the economic, social and political problems which are alarming very much.

National Knowledge Commission has diagnosed ten ailments of higher education:

- i. Out-dated curricula have not kept pace with the time;
- ii. Learning places premium on memory rather than understanding;
- iii. The milieu is not conducive to anything beyond class;
- iv. Academic calendar is no longer sacrosanct for classes or examinations;
- v. The infrastructure is on the verge of collapse;
- vi. The boundaries between disciplines have become 'dividing walls';
- vii. The importance of research has eroded;
- viii. Decline in volume of research (frequency of publication) and quality of research;
- ix. Little accountability — no rewards for performance and no penalties for non — performance;
- x. Governance structure not responsive to changing times and circumstances that the system is readily subverted by vested interests.

Empowering Rural Women

According to 2011 census, India's population is around 121 crore. Three fourth of this population can become the nation's strength, helping the economy to grow. More the rural India learns and sharpens its skills, the better it would help the economy. With literate and educated rural Indians, our country might emerge as a developed nation. Mahatma Gandhi had also said that India cannot progress unless the villages progress which is very much applicable. Rural education will prepare India for

a better tomorrow. Education enables an individual to look at society and its aspects with a wider perspective. Without education, people are unable to develop the basic sense required. People residing in villages represent the true image of 'real India'.

India is a nation of more than 6 lakh villages where the soul of India lives. According to provisional results of Census 2011 proportion of rural population is 68.84 per cent of total population. Thus sustainable development cannot be achieved without engaging this, two third population in the development process. Literacy rate in rural and urban areas are 68.9 % and 84.98% respectively. Literacy rates of male and female in India are 82.14% and 65.46% respectively whereas in rural India male and female literacy rates are 78.57% and 58.75% respectively. We can see the gap in rural and urban education is very high and there is a significant gap in rural male and female literacy. Thus if India envisage to faster inclusive growth this large chunk of population should be prominently engaged in development process otherwise that exercise will not bear the desired fruit, In this regard education is most relevant way for engagement of rural population to take them to development process. Quality, relevance and inclusiveness of education is cause of concern at the national level but it is more serious in rural India.

Despite getting appreciation from United Nations and having achieved little bit to bring change in the status of the women, there still exists a wide gap in many respects when compared to men. Especially rural women are being denied of their rights in the family, access to better health and sanitation, say in the family matters, and above all the ownership issues and as a result they always feel ignored in the family. We should not forget that when women are economically and socially empowered they become the potent force to bring change not only in their own family but in the whole society. But the agony of the time is that the inequality which resides in our minds makes it difficult for women to fulfil their potential and as a result women have rarely access to the resources that would make their work more productive and ease their work load.

Women are lacking behind in education field and education can be an effective tool for women's empowerment to acquire knowledge to perform better. It is suggested that there should be some centre in each village which can provide literacy training to not only young women but senior citizens too. Educationally empowered rural women can contribute more not only to her own economic development but in the overall development of the country. Sustainable development depends on an equitable distribution of resources for today and for the future. It cannot be achieved without gender equality. Women's empowerment is a key factor for achieving sustainable economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability.

Governmental Initiatives

Establishment of community colleges, National Vocational Education Qualification Framework, establishment of National Skill Development Corporation are the ambitious initiatives of the Government of India. Implementation of these initiatives will help in vocationalisation of education system in the country. It will empower and build capacity of huge Indian manpower especially in rural areas to achieve the aim of sustainable development.

Major Initiatives the Government of India as Taken in the XIth Plan

- 30 Central Universities—including one in each of the 16 States so far uncovered;
- Strengthening of 6000 colleges and 150 Universities not receiving UGC grant;
- Establishment of 373 New Degree Colleges;
- Expansion and up gradation of 200 State Technical Institutions;
- Up gradation of Technical Institutions/Department of 7 Universities;
- 8 New IITs; 7 new IIMs; 5 IISERS, 2 SPAs;
- 20 new IITs - as far as possible in the PPP mode;
- 10 new NITs;
- 50 centres for training and research in frontier areas;

- Increasing capacity of existing IITs & IIMs by 200%.
- Strengthening of existing Polytechnics,
- 1000 new Polytechnics - 300 by State govt., 300 in PPP mode, 300 by Pvt. Sector;
- 50,000 Skill Development Centres;
- National Education Mission through ICT;
- Incentivising State Govt. for expansion/up gradation of existing and new universities/professional institutions;
- Greater public and the private sector interface in Higher and Technical education;
- Foreign collaborations, bilateral agreements & opening doors for quality foreign education providers.

Further to support its various initiatives and plans for higher education, Government of India has laid out multiple initiatives in the 12th plan i.e. raising Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education to 30% by 2020 and amongst others factors has put a thrust on operationalizing PPP models.

Ensuring Corporate Sector Participation

The corporate sector as key stakeholder in higher education can play a pivotal role in improving our current higher education system as well as meeting future aspirations. Corporations can collaborate with the academia in several ways, with varying funding commitment:

- Direct ownership and management of institutions
- Collaborating with the higher education institutions in research, faculty development, infrastructure creation, student scholarships, and governance.

While the government can endeavour to transform a select group of Indian higher education institutions into world class institutions and attract investments for new institutions by easing current norms, overcoming systemic challenges, creating a conducive environment for higher education to thrive in and focusing on quality of the institutions and the outcomes (students, research output), some issues need to be addressed to ensure productive participation from the corporate sector. The government needs to transform itself from a provider of higher education to play key roles in enabling and establishing an appropriate regulatory framework to set quality standards for higher education:

- Create enabling conditions to make the higher education system robust and
- useful to attract investments.
- Improve the quality of higher education by focusing on research and faculty development, with corporate sector participation.
- Engage the corporate sector to invest in existing institutions, set up new institutions, and develop new knowledge clusters.

Conclusion

Education is a powerful instrument for socio-economic growth and development of a country. A nation's development is dependent in a large scale on its educational system. We have adopted a strategy of high economic growth to mitigate poverty and ensure development touching the lives of all citizens. Our economic progress will rely increasingly on our knowledge bases. Distributive justice, as a higher goal of democratic polity, can be achieved only through a sound education system. India's demographic structure is changing, and by 2025, over two-third Indians is expected to be in the working category. To gain from this transition, our youth must be prepared through quality higher education and vocational training. Education is the only answer to empower women especially rural women not only in Indian context but at global level too.

This is the global scenario in which we live. In this scenario, in the ultimate analysis, we as a nation have to move forward. This cannot happen unless we invest in knowledge. Education is the only way forward. It is high time that we benchmark our education system to the best in the world. We need to learn from the new paradigms and practices sweeping the world.

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