

Higher Education in India: Quality, Relevance, and Institutional Responsibility

Dr. B. C. Rai

Superannuated Prof and formerly Head, Department of Physics, College of Commerce, Arts & Science, Patna, Bihar (India)

Abstract: *Higher Education in India comprises tertiary education in three tier education system and includes academics in UG, PG, vocational, and technical education and scholarship. Its status in world is third, the second being China and first USA. Higher education plays a decisive role in shaping research capacity, employability, and societal progress. In the Indian context, despite a strong global standing in terms of scale, concerns continue to surface regarding quality, relevance of curricula, employability outcomes, and the weakening link between education and meaningful skills. This article reflects on the structure and scope of higher education in India, situating it within global perspectives while examining systemic challenges such as outdated syllabi, poor sequencing of learning, limited access to resources, declining emphasis on laboratory demonstration, and fragile research ecosystems. Drawing attention to lived academic realities, the discussion highlights the need for curriculum restructuring, strengthened institutional resources, research exposure for teachers, better alignment with employment pathways, and a healthier work culture. Particular emphasis is placed on emerging universities, using Patliputra University as a developing case, to illustrate both limitations and potential. The article argues for a shift from individual-driven excellence to institutional responsibility, where coordinated policy support, inter-institutional collaboration, and targeted funding can enable a genuine renaissance in higher education and restore its role as a driver of competence, innovation, and ethical growth.*

Keywords: higher-education system, quality of education, curriculum reform, research infrastructure, employability

1. Introduction

One may be remembering two famous quotations giving the whole structure of education:

1. 'Deed [is that which] does not bind,
'Education [is that which] liberates';
All other deeds are mere tedious,
All other education is only skill.'

--Vedas [1]

2. 'If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.'
--Derek Bok, Former President of Harvard University

'Education is that which liberates. Liberates from what? It liberates from binding of ignorance of self. All other education is skill'. This is a unified, universal view, of India's *para vidya* (skill of mental health) and *apara vidya* (skill of physical world), which combine to balance one's life. Today's turmoil is due to imbalanced life arising from ignorance of all kinds. Derek Bok weighs education and ignorance. Education is necessary at all costs.

The entire education system today is split into parts as per need of modern world. In view of World Bank, imparted by universities and trade schools/colleges comprise higher education [HE]. Trade or vocational courses are also termed as Further education [FE], which one can opt after class 12. There are regulations for candidates who desire to move to HE after completion of FE. In USA, FE is called Continuing Education [CE]. UNESCO considers learning endeavor in specialized fields as main part of HE. It includes academic and vocational courses. In Australia, it is university plus TAFE. In short, it is an education system that anyone can fit in.

Indian education system, like many other countries, is a three-tier system: 1. Primary, 2. Secondary, and 3. Tertiary. The tertiary education includes academics in UG, PG and vocational, technical education and scholarship, and is known as Higher Education in India. It produces scholars and research outputs; it all culminates in delivering certificates, diplomas and academic degrees. Status of India in world class HE is third, the first being USA and China the second [2].

Market today, however, needs innovation and government needs citizens to build social values. Recent observations show that patents filed by India is less than 5% of those filed by China, and social values are degrading even in educated people. Our gross enrollment ratio (GER) is about 25.8 % which lies low enough in comparison to world's ones such as 81.8% in USSR, 50.5% in Brazil and 50.5% in China [3]. These indicate something not up to mark in our educating process. We consider issues of higher education in this context.

Health of Centers of Higher Education

Worldwide we find the higher education imparted in universities and technical institutes. Universities and trade schools and colleges in UK, public and private, decentralized, independent from federal government in USA, universities and TAFE in Australia, etc are centers of HE. In our country, both private and public centers are imparting tertiary education under norms set by centre and states. Department of Secondary education and Learning of Government of India is meant for primary, secondary and adult literacy. Department of Higher Education covers universities, technical education and scholarship. A Deemed university status is granted on advertisement by UGC to an institution under section 3 of UGC Act 1956. Finance is covered by Centre, state and self-financed systems. Funding is central, state and local.

Aim: World class opportunities could be availed to stakeholders.

Where do we stand? In the world educational level we stand in the third position, yet our employability has undergone a downfall and we are much concerned about quality education these days. National GER is 29-30%, State's is about 17% [4]. Universities and institutes have become more or less just the distributors of certificates that are often barren; person's qualification is not reflected in quality. Quality education has, thus, become an important question in HE in particular, and education in general.

NIRF: National Institutional Ranking Framework was launched in 2016 as an attempt to provide motivation for quality by linking funds to quality. It was proposed that an institution's performance in the national ranking would fix its government funding, yet not implemented though. Recently government granted greater autonomy to a handful of universities on the basis of their accreditation score. It invited few to criticize the approach. Cutting funds on bad performance often cut necessary part of fund, not the luxury. Institutions should be funded on the basis of qualitative assessment of their needs and plans. The NIRF ranking methodology for 2025 is structured around five key parameters: Teaching, Learning & Resources (TLR); Research and Professional Practice (RP); Graduation Outcomes (GO); Outreach and Inclusivity (OI); and Perception (PR). Each parameter carries a defined weight in the overall score, with TLR and RP weighted at 30 % each, Graduation Outcomes at 20 %, and Outreach & Inclusivity and Perception at 10 % each. The scores under these parameters are aggregated to compute the final ranking [5].

Possibility of Renaissance

The purpose of universities goes beyond preparing one for employment only. It strengthens one to face challenges of life. The nature of challenges changing faster, universities have to change their training and teaching schemes accordingly to make people think, innovate and solve problems.

Looking at the expansion of needs of education for expanding young population, the number of universities, faculties, programmers, research, infrastructure, etc. has expanded too. And, in the environment of less autonomy, fund and leadership, there were surely less maintenance of quality. It is easy to point that university is bad but difficult to pin point the reasons. We wonder how Oxford, Cambridge, Bologna and Cracow are yet standing but India's universities are, in general, facing challenges! People cite example of sir C V Raman, who got Nobel Prize for our country. It was his personal effort that brought him the crown. We can say, he achieved it! Now we should make it institutional responsibility. We cannot do research without instrumentation these days. Generally, there is no scholarship except for NET /GATE. If one allows and compels universities to do research by pre-admission tests, a residential room in hostels and a seed money of 2 lakh is of order to start. The scholar should be permitted to deliver paid guest lectures in leisure. That will make scholar mobile for research work. Scholars are at the age getting married, one fact people do not consider. Get married even if research is incomplete; tense life is not a lotus.

Technical institutes have got self-centered. IIT and NIT nearby have almost no time for university scholars. That is bad, and there should be responsibility of such institutes to nominate universities in the state whom they give laboratory support and use of their machines. 'Patliputra University' in Bihar has recently come into being (18 March 2018), with colleges that were part of Magadh University, Bodhgaya, Gayaji. It runs UG and PG courses and several vocational courses. It has limited infrastructural strength, and, in this respect, it is a developing university. Much has to come here from state and central governments. We hope it excel in HE with quality and transformations.

There is possibility of resurgence; many educationists have started re-vitalizations. Following suggestions may be considered at university level education.

- 1) Restructuring syllabi according to present day challenges, and systematic style of learning.
- 2) Sufficient study resources mobilization and access of students to world class internet libraries.
- 3) Demonstration and laboratory updating for current science teaching
- 4) Research grants and exposure to be made part of regular business, like courses, publication in journals, and social responsibilities of general education
- 5) Development of Work culture, which is a multi-medicine, but found short, little or nil. We can develop it by glorifying, without politics and bias, the dutifulness and honesty.
- 6) Faculty improvement and recharging schemes be designed at all ranks
- 7) Sensitization of all the stakeholders in respect of discriminations

To provide for the above points, university administration must have some special features.

- 1) Governance needs clarity in leadership and decision making. Wisdom of people should not be judged by chairs held and yes-man-ship. Powers should be decentralized among able persons upon recommendation of local search committee of competence.
- 2) Organizational status should be given to university. It should have vision, courage and ability to meet goals.
- 3) Accountability of university head should be to an 'independent body' comprising of top educationist and experts in the organization. It is these days to UGC which is under HRD Ministry and political pressure is likely.
- 4) Functional autonomy to improve and ease processes and inertia of official systems should be granted to universities.
- 5) Fund raising under Corporate Sector Responsibility Act should be exploited by universities. This act requires companies with turnover of Rs 1000 crore or more to support social causes by giving 2% of their net profit. University is a social organization because it has the task of preparing nation's future. Also most of donors are in search of credible, transparent and accountable acceptors.
- 6) Autonomy mixed standardization is need of time. A high standard should be divided into sets of workable elements with simplifications of rules, local models, own choices and accountability for them.

Yet the aim of HE is to develop strong student competence, skill of research and analysis, employable education with world-class quality, solid foundation for career in academia and industries. Much has to come here from stakeholders, state and central governments. We hope become an excellent centre of higher education with quality and transformation.

Academic challenges

- 1) **Faculty-student ratio:** Many top universities, e.g., Harvard, MIT, Oxford, Stanford, have the ratio of 15 students per teacher, or even lower. We stand far away. We have lack of number of teaching faculties. While the existing reservation policy ensures seat allocation for SC/ST/OBC/EWS in faculty posts, the **actual filled proportions often fall short**, currently close to 80%, mainly due to persistent vacancies and slower recruitment in higher education institutions. This **representation deficit** is a key challenge in achieving equitable academic participation across categories.
- 2) **Loss of Faith:** lack of standard education, non-completion of courses, malpractices of discrimination on caste, gender, religion and region, have led to loss of faith in institutions. This leads to poor enrollment and poor employment representation of all sections of society in government and private sector services.
- 3) **Infrastructural deficiencies:** Sufficiently seated class rooms, hostels for all desirous students and faculties, auditorium, play-ground, laboratories, bath rooms, libraries, outreach activity centers, examination halls and preparation rooms for faculties are essential part of an institution.
- 4) **Scholarships:** A minimum monetary and instrumental scholarships should be provided to poor students of all categories, in addition to the inclusion-based scholarships. Instrumental scholarship may include laptop, calculator, costly books, free data for e-learning, etc.
- 5) **FDP for all:** Not only freshers need faculty development programs for their orientation and refreshing knowledge, but also associates and professors, only the content would be different.
- 6) **Lecture recording:** Teacher's lectures should be recorded for his own use like publishing books, video lectures and use of institutions.
- 7) **Research activities:** This keeps a teacher update in the subject concerned. A minimum standard should be fixed according to nature of institution and facilities. It should not hamper the class teaching.
- 8) **Ethical sensitization:** There are several societal and cultural practices even in educated people (degree holders) that are harmful to dignity, morality and the constitutional spirit. It is not a permanent disease, and can be rectified by consistent training. All the stakeholders should be sensitized by meetings, posters and other means, to this effect against bribes, intellectual properties, life-costing discrimination based on caste, gender, religion, region and language. These need strict laws.

We have not to be satisfied that NEP-2020 is the final medicine. Though it is conceptually ambitious, is bound to be operationally weak because it prioritizes structure over substance, access over equity, and governance over

academics. Without funding, faculty hiring, and social justice enforcement, NEP is just a managerial reform, not an educational transformation. Education is basically transformed by scholars, not just by schemes. If India wants global-standard higher education, the core reform is academic labour reform, not only policy design, branding, or structural reshuffling.

2. Conclusion

The current state of higher education in India in general and Bihar in particular, is presented, highlighting challenges and proposing reforms for improvement. Lack of representation in services is connected to low GER and discrimination and malpractices. Faith needs be established by course completion and ethical sensitization against caste, religion, region, gender and language, and by strict laws. Research facilities are inadequate, and there is a disconnect between education and job readiness. Universities should focus on employability skills and provide better counselling for students regarding career paths. Enhanced cooperation between universities and technical institutes is essential for resource sharing and research support. Institutional responsibility for research should be emphasized, with support for scholars in terms of funding and resources. Overall, the document advocates for minor reforms to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education in India, aiming for a transformative impact on students and the workforce.

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