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Vocationalisation Of Higher Education : Key Issues, Options And Strategies

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Abstract:

This comprehensive paper critically analyses the supply of competent human resource which is vital for our Indian economic restructuring and achieving global competitiveness, and suggests that if all the available human resources are to be discovered and developed, a system of education based on sound principle of social justice is very essential. This paper argues that Educational process is to be linked with production and employment. This paper further argues that Human development is the end economic growth a means and hence, the purpose of growth should be to enrich people's lives, however, far too often it does not, and on the said backdrop, this paper takes stock of the recent trends, development in the recent decades which clearly show that there is no automatic link between growth and human development, and even when links are established, they may gradually be eroded unless regularly fortified by skilful and intelligent policy management.

This paper illustratively outlines that the empirical studies, surveys, reports of various commissions and committees unequivocally pinpoint that there is ill-planned restructuring and sudden introduction of Vocational Courses at first degree stage. Basic problems emanating from economic growth prevent of technology and the effect of globalization cannot be countered by restructuring and vocational education alone. In a democracy the worth and dignity of every individual is to be recognized.

This paper suggests that the endowed potentialities of every individual must be discovered and developed to the fullest extent to enable him or her to become a potential worker and a creative citizen contributing to the all round progress of the society of which he is a member. No country can achieve full economic growth if it fails to make the most of all the talents of its citizens. The progress of a country largely depends on the fullest utilization of its manpower.

This paper concludes and stresses the need to restructure and reorient the entire higher educational system, however, in a planned manner. Re-orientation of the educational programme should be undertaken in such a manner that it helps to produce self-reliant and self-dependent citizens. India has recognized the need for fundamental educational reforms & restructuring of various courses.

1. Conceptual Framework

1.1. Introduction

“The real wealth of a nation is its people. And the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives. This simple but powerful truth is too often forgotten in the pursuit of material and financial wealth.” These are the opening lines of the first Human Development Report, published in 1990, (UNDP, Oxford).

It is now universally acknowledged that the goal of Plan efforts is human development. Human Development Reports 1990 to 2010 explore in detail the complex relationship between economic growth and human development. It provides both a mirror, reflecting present patterns of global imbalance, and a telescope, showing the more positive futures possible. The central message of the Human Development Report is clear that there is no automatic link between economic growth and human development, but when these links are forged with the policy and determination, they can be mutually reinforcing and economic growth will effectively and rapidly improve human development.

1.2. Role And Dimension Of Higher Education

Higher education occupies an important place in the educational process of a country. In independent India higher education is considered as the important tool for national development. Education is the process of the perfection of the mankind.

Education is for the comprehension of life, enlightenment of the people. Higher education is the main instrument for development and change. It has the important task of preparing leaders in different walks of life-social, intellectual, political, cultural, scientific and technological, etc. The intellectual dynamism, resourceful and economic prosperity of a country are reflected in the quality of higher education.

The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49) observed: "Welfare and betterment of humanity is the ultimate goal of higher education". It is not without significance that the report of the Education Commission (Kothari Commission) 1964-66 has been titled as 'Education and National Development.' The Commission observed, "If the pace of national development is to be accelerated, there is need for a well-defined, bold and imaginative educational policy and for determined and vigorous action to vitalize, improve and expand education." The Commission further observed "education could not be considered in isolation or planned in a vacuum. It has to be used as a powerful instrument of social, economic and political change and will, therefore, have to be related to the long-term national aspirations, the programmes of national development on which the country is engaged and the difficult short-term problems it is called upon to face."

Higher Education has potentials to contribute to social development, which is well comprehended by the planners and policy makers. History of educational reforms including the underlying debates is a testimony to this knowledge. Looking back into our immediate past, there is a legacy of 1968 National Policy of Education. That marks a significant step forward in the history of education. The 1968 policy document aimed, "to promote national progress, a sense of common citizenship and culture, and to strengthen national integration. It laid stress on the need for a national reconstruction of the education system, to improve its quality at all stages, and gave much greater attention to science and technology, the cultivation of moral values and a closer relation between education and the life of the people".

The National Policy on Education (NEP) (1986) characterizes higher education as a "crucial factor for survival" providing the Indian people with an "opportunity to reflect on the critical social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues". It is envisaged in the NEP 1986 and POA 1992 that education will be used as an agent of basic change in socioeconomic status of people.

UNESCO's policy paper titled 'Strategies for Change and Development in Higher Education' has four themes: (i) Views on Trends and Challenges: Interpretations of Context and Setting; (ii) Responses Relevance of Higher Education; (iii) Quality in Higher Education; and (iv) Internationalization of Higher Education.

Higher education in India is being put to a test at the moment. In the changed environment of the day, the system of higher education faces two major imperatives. These are: (a) need to cope with inadequacy of resources, and (b) need to respond to the demand for providing competent manpower and high quality R & D support. In this backdrop, the system of Higher Education should be prepared to respond adequately to the emerging challenges. Over the last five decades there has been a phenomenal expansion of the higher education system. Yet in the fast changing socio-economic context, the higher education system will be exposed to still greater pressure for expansion.

1.3. The Social Impact Of Higher Education In India

The Constitution of a country is the basic document, which may be regarded as the source of legislation. The Preamble of the Constitution of India contains aims and objectives of our national policy. It is a guideline and a solemn pledge given to the nation. The Constitution has set forth the goals of our educational institutions. Its Preamble has reflected the national ethos, values and aspirations and enjoined the objectives of national policy. It has given the directions in which the nation would go ahead and achieve its aims.

The national goals as envisaged in the preamble to the Constitution indicate the vision of the nation and every citizen owes his allegiance to it. Democracy, socialism and secularism emerge and guide the national activities. The imperial system of education intended to prepare an army of ministerial assistants is to be modified and reoriented to reflect the national ethos and aspirations. This re-organized and re-orientated educational system is operative for preparing the future citizens of the country.

All Human beings are primarily motivated by the desire to satisfy their needs. These needs may be selfish, altruistic, physical, mental, emotional or spiritual. When the social forces demand the satisfaction of their needs in some form or another, government or authorities have to fulfil their demands. In the process of satisfying the needs, social or cultural change takes place. Consequent on such changes, new needs are met, new techniques arise, value changes and thus a cycle of continuous interaction and feedback is at work.

Educational change tends to follow social change. As the nature of society changes through the interplay of social needs, techniques and values, education have to change in response to this social condition, mores, milieus etc., which are reflected in education. Thus education is geared to the social needs, influenced by social changes and coloured by social conditions and values.

The higher educational institution as an agency of higher education is immensely influenced by the social force around it. It works as a micro-society and its contributions to the society are determined not only by relevance of its curriculum to social problems, but also by realization of social objectives in its programmes and practices. Any kind of social change innovation brings about corresponding changes in higher education.

The social impact on education during the post-Independence period, when several committees and commissions were appointed to suggest measures for making higher education relevant and meaningful to the social conditions and requirements.

During these recent years it has been realized throughout the world that higher education in order to be effective as well as efficient, has to utilize all the modern means, methods and media. Thus higher educational technology is expected to bring about qualitative and quantitative improvement of higher education at all levels.

There has been rapid expansion of higher education system in terms of enrolment, number of institutions, growth rate, etc. since Independence. The system has undergone a unique transformation from an elitist to an egalitarian one. Therefore, all sections of the population have gained as a result of the enlargement of the system. However, the disparities between the disadvantaged groups and non-disadvantaged groups have continued. Therefore, there is the need to provide special care and opportunities to the traditional disadvantaged population in a democratic society such as ours, which stresses egalitarianism, social justice and economic development for all sections of society. It is with this in view that the Indian Constitution provides an ideal of "Equality of opportunities".

Social justice in education is another name for "equality of educational opportunities". A nation can strengthen its economy only by generously investing in the education of its children and youth. Right education given to right pupils by right teachers through right methods will bring a return to the individual and to the nation many times greater than the money spent on it.

2. Restructuring & Vocationalization

2.1. *Unplanned Expansion And Implications Thereof*

The Sphere of higher education has been marked by a phenomenal expansion during the five decades, after Independence. Today, Higher education in India is imparted through 611 Universities and equivalent institutions. Total number of Colleges in the country are about 35,000. The unplanned expansion of higher education has taken place mainly due to following reasons:

- The government's attempt to expand facilities for higher education, partly for meeting the manpower requirements of a growing and diversifying economy and partly for promoting equity and social justice;
- The need felt by the students to seek higher education in order to have a competitive edge in the organized job market, which in the light of relatively slow growth in the labour requirements, has used university degrees as screening devices for selecting work force;
- The genuine desire to seek higher education to seek higher education.

Human development reports of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for 1991 to 2011 have been showing (i) The trend of jobless growth affecting developed and developing countries alike, and (ii) The changing pattern of employment and unemployment. There are three factors to be highlighted in this regard:

- Firstly, it shows how the growth of GNP and consequent national enrichment runs along with an absolute fall in the level of employment. This, among others is the result of new trend of technological improvement, which is mainly aimed at replacing labour by capital.
- Secondly, the reports indicate how among the employed the proportion of (a) People employed in the informed sector and (b) self-employed people has been rising progressively. Even in some of the developed countries more than 50 percent of the employed people belong to the above two categories. It should be understood that often employment of these categories is an euphemism for under employment and at times unemployment. Simultaneously, proportion of working people employed in the public sector and organized private sector has been declining.
- Thirdly, it is pointed out (particularly for the developing countries) that General education does not lead to employment and even does not facilitate employment. In many developing countries percentage of people recorded as unemployment increases with enhancement of the level of education.

It also seems difficult to substantially control the entry of un-motivated students in the higher educational system, unless alternative and functional avenues of employment and career orientation are provided to them. Growth of the population will assert its own logic. The availability of adequate funds to cope up with this future expansion is likely to be much more difficult than what it is today, unless something revolutionary and unconventional is done about it.

2.2. *Restructuring And Vocationalization*

The last three decades have witnessed cataclysmic changes in the socioeconomic and cultural scenario everywhere. Globalization of the Indian economy and the enthusiastically acclaimed entry of multinationals has opened up new vistas of economic development in India. In the new syndrome of industrial liberalization and globalization, issues of utilitarian value of education, restriction of public funds, employment prospect of graduates and private contributions towards education have insistently conditioned the concepts, thoughts and views on Word of Studies (WoS) and Word of Work (WoW). It is well accepted that these two worlds (WoS and WoW) are self-contained and their functions differ in the details of social need, educational objectives, economics, valuation, etc.

So as to keep pace with the increased national responsibilities in a competitive technological world, progressive educationists, economists and policy makers have been emphasizing vocationalisation of education. Of late there has been a perceptible change even in the outlook of the public towards this subject. It was suggested that vocational education should be established at the core of the curriculum as a means of changing the direction of our vast education system without attempting to duplicate the technical education system. With the increase in youth unemployment rate and the lower employability content of our graduate courses, our courses require structural changes despite the reluctance of sections of students and teachers who continue to swear by antiquated curriculum without any plans to cope up with the required manpower needs.

Despite the enormous difficulties involved in forecasting the quality of manpower needs for effective planning there is no doubt that the role of education has to change from the purely intellectual to the skill oriented option and application. Some even advocate the combination of vocational inputs with general education benefits. If there could be an ideal mix of the two it would be like literacy training with vocational emphasis for better employability. The instructional functions could go with on the job training for optimum use of talent.

The need of the hour is to re-orient education in new emergent fields or areas so as to channelize the manpower into the right direction. In the reports of the various commissions and committees, the need and the importance of the re-orientation of education had been emphasized more so, to make it job oriented, and vocational. Re-orientation or restructuring of the educational programmes in higher education system is essential for providing manpower for economic growth. Educational process is to be linked with products and employment. Re-orientation of the education programmes should be undertaken in such a manner that it helps to produce self-reliant and self-dependent citizens. The global economy is experiencing unprecedented change. New revolution in science and technology, competition, media revolution and internationalization are revolutionizing the education sector. They make new demands and pose fresh challenges to our established educational system and practices.

In India, many universities restructured their courses in accordance with the NEP & POA, but at the instance of the UGC. The UGC introduced a scheme of Vocationalisation at the First degree level, (viz., B.A., B. Com. & B.Sc.), and started financing and monitoring since 1994. This scheme is an effort for tackling the aforesaid problems. In the aforesaid dismal situation vocational education at the first degree level promises to be an effective remedy in as much as it would impart that type of education to our graduate as would render them more employable than they would otherwise be. Thus viewed, the UGC's scheme becomes quite laudable. The colleges now should understand the importance of vocationalization of higher education and the college Principals can play pivotal role in this regard.

Growing unemployment of our educated youth and unplanned and unmotivated growth of colleges are no doubt, serious problems. But they are unlikely to be solved by such ill-planned sudden introduction of vocational courses at the first-degree stage. Basic problems emanating from low economic growth prevent growth of technology, and the effect of globalization cannot be countered by education alone.

Thus, it can be seen that the introduction of vocational courses is a very large and complex proposition. It is career education and has to have a working approach with inculcation of marketable skills and preparation for further advanced career training. But does the nature and status of UGC package envisage this? It has the approach of integrating the WoS and WoW as a part of its instructional programme. It offers extensive career guidance with curriculum linked to occupational requirements. It offers a great diversity of programmes and is a scheme of career education. But, despite all its theoretical contents and ancillary advantages it has a very restricted area of introduction and operation, practical on the job training and introductory base. Perhaps it is being introduced with too many reservations about its outcome. So it is only the time, which will determine its impact on our otherwise docile and inane post secondary system in the colleges where expansion is the democratic law with the least concern for quality and relevance.

2.3.Suggestions And Recommendations

Following is comprehensive list, which is the outcome of compilations of observations, shortcomings, suggestions and recommendations made by several conferences, Commissions and Committees to reorientation of higher education:-

- The reasons of the present situation were/are :-
 - the faculty, in general, have no industrial experience or exposure;
 - There is not much provision for continuing education in the universities and institutions for practicing engineers to update their technology competence;
 - State of art in the industry prevents flow between organized research in the universities and institutions and the evolution of industrial R & D;
 - There is no suitable mechanism available for interaction in most of the department of the universities and institutions;
 - Some of the universities and institutions feel constrained to accept contracts with time bound results;
 - There is chronic dependence of our industry on foreign collaborators;
- Interaction between academia and industry has been rather restricted in India, in the past, possibly because of differences in values and attitudes, lack of appreciation of each other's abilities, skills and needs, and the absence of economic compulsions. There is a great need for University-Industry partnership. It was so in the past and will be felt in future also. The students of Higher Education are not getting desired practical benefits of education. This is equally applicable to the students of technical education also.
- Vocationalisation should not necessarily imply a lower standard when compared to the traditional academic degree;
- There is a need for real engagement with society. The need of the country is not to separate Vocational from Non-Vocational Programmes.
- Unpopular courses are to be phased out. Need based courses are to be introduced and programmes for women and rural areas are to be given due consideration. Packages of ongoing programmes are to be reviewed and made relevant, interrelated and need – based.

- Faculty on programme base is to be developed. Visiting Faculty from the University, other Academic Institutions, Industry, R & D Organizations, Public and Private undertakings is to be involved appropriately for the conduct of the restructured courses. Appointment of full time faculty for a programme be allowed to some extent.
- Effective linkages are to be established between the industry and institutions participating in the programme of re-structured courses. Placements and training facilities for the students are to be provided in the industry.
- Honorarium paid per period to these outside experts should be suitably enhanced by the College/Universities in order to make this scheme functional and successful.
- Common facilities like computer labs, or other types of special labs, could be created in clusters for use on sharing basis by a number of colleges/institutions in the vicinity.
- The university should play a leadership role in curriculum, material, training of teachers and for monitoring the programmes, etc.
- While fullest use be made of the existing facilities the scheme should not suffer for want of funds.
- Colleges may introduce specific programmes on self-financing basis with prior approval of the University.
- Programmes which are post-B. A. /B. Com. /B. Sc. Etc. should also be introduced for promoting the cause of employment and self-employment. They may be of different duration.
- Excellence, modernization, interaction and self reliance are the four crucial elements in the development of Higher Education in general and Technical Education in particular. These factors should not be viewed in isolation but in relation to each other with the ultimate objective of attaining excellence. Higher Education is directly concerned with providing leadership in various vocational, industrial, social and economic areas, determining the policies and modernization.
- The universities and colleges should come out of their ivory towers and interact with the outside world. Similarly, the industries should build confidence in the capabilities of the universities and the institutions and interact with them for mutual benefit.
- It should be recognized that the academic world, industries and R & D organizations together hold the key to the technology development in many of the core sectors of our country aims insight into the problems of industry and it provides a base for research and education. Survival of industry largely depends on the improved, innovative and new technologies and for this purpose it needs the support of the academic institutions. Unfortunately, in our country universities including technological institutions and the industry have been run on parallel lines without interaction.
- During the last three decades there have been conscious efforts in India to promote cooperation between Academia and Industry. However, only marginal success has been achieved, possibly because the universities and the industrial units have not been under any pressure to interact. In India, Industry-University partnership has been keeping low ebb over the decades. As a result of liberalization of Indian economy during current decade, we have focussed our attention on this problem. University Grants Commission and the All India Council for Technical Education have adopted a concrete strategy and taken positive steps towards establishing Industry-University partnership. As per requirements of NEP 1986, POA 1992, a long lasting relationship should be established between Industry and University.

3. Summing Up

Since time immemorial education has been considered a very powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural development. If education is to achieve this supreme end, it should be so planned and designed as to enable every individual in a society to develop his or her capacity and aptitude to the maximum extent. All our developmental programmes and schemes would be doomed to frustration if our human resources are not fully developed and utilized. India is steadily shifting to a fast tract of economic and industrial development, which leads to mounting demands on education and calls for a highly diversified human resource.

India has been witnessing several paradigm shifts in the social, business and industrial environment. The shift from low tech to high tech, national to global, production to a service economy, state to the private sector, and the changing occupational patterns create demand for a new workforce with a different skills profile than was demanded in the yesteryears. The onus of making available this resource lies in our system of higher education. This supply of competent human resource is vital for our economic restructuring and achieving global competitiveness.

If all the available human resources are to be discovered and developed, a system of education based on sound principle of social justice is very essential. Human development is the end economic growth a means. So, the purpose of growth should be to enrich people's lives. But far too often it does not. The recent decades show all too clearly that there is no automatic link between growth and human development. And even when links are established, they may gradually be eroded unless regularly fortified by skilful and intelligent policy management.

Educational process is to be linked with production and employment. Reorientation of the educational programme should be undertaken in such a manner that it helps to produce self-reliant and self-dependent citizens. India has recognized the need for fundamental educational reforms & restructuring of various courses. However, there is ill-planned restructuring and sudden introduction of Vocational Courses at first degree stage. Basic problems emanating from economic growth prevent of technology and the effect of globalization cannot be countered by restructuring and vocational education alone.

In a democracy the worth and dignity of every individual is to be recognized. The endowed potentialities of every individual must be discovered and developed to the fullest extent to enable him or her to become a potential worker and a creative citizen contributing to the all round progress of the society of which he is a member. No country can achieve full economic growth if it fails to make the

most of all the talents of its citizens. The progress of a country largely depends on the fullest utilization of its manpower. Hence, it is high time to restructure and reorient the entire higher educational system, however, in a planned manner.

4. Reference Material And Acknowledgement

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