

Privatization of Higher Education: *Its Challenges and Oppurtunities in India*

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Abstract

Privatization of Higher Education is a worldwide phenomenon, growing in its extent, impact, importance and acceptability each day. In recent times, despite the increased levels of public investment, education has been increasingly funded by the private sector, often by citizens themselves. Along with its acceptability and universality of this concept of Privatization of Higher Education, the challenges and opportunities which encompasses the concept needs to be studied. This paper is an attempt to focus the opportunities brought about by Private Higher Educational Institutions in India.

Keywords: Privatization, Higher Education, Challenges, Opportunities, Job-oriented courses.

Intoduction

“Privatization of Higher Education” for many, it simply means increasing the role of parents/students in the financing of education; for others it involves withdrawal of the state from financing and control of the system of education. This movement has both positive and negative connotations; it is alleged to be associated with increased inequalities in access, commercialization of education, interplay of market forces, inclusion of ‘profit motive’ in a social welfare activity and a shift from education in knowledge to education in skills only. In a positive sense, Privatization implies garnering of more resources for education sector, efficient use of resources, accountability, flexibility in delivery and adaptation to the needs of the economy (Angom, Sangeeta 2014). Scholars have given various definitions of Privatization in Higher Education. D. Bruce Johnstone, a semantic scholar (1999) defines the term Privatization in Higher Education as “a process of educational institutions taking on the characteristics of operational norms associated with private enterprises”. Although the term cannot be understood precisely, Privatization connotes a greater orientation to the students as “consumers”, education as “product”, competitor institutions as “market niches”. Privatization also adopts practices associated with private business such as “outsourcing”, aggressive labour relations, minimization of pay-roll expenditures, decisive decision –making, top down management, use of audits and accountability measures, and insistence upon each unit contributing to profitability. Based on Johnstone’s (1999) concept of Privatization in and of Higher Education in the U.S., one can understand that Privatization entails any or all of the following:

1. More autonomy from government in financial matters.
2. Enhancing resources through tuition fees.
3. Paying attention towards marketing.
4. Management of student enrolment and considering fee –discounts to select group.
5. Serving students client.

6. Fund raising and outsourcing the ancillary functions.

7. Introducing study areas following contemporary market –demands and scrapping non-sought –after subjects

Privatization of Higher Education, now a worldwide phenomenon, is growing in its extent and impact. It is taking place in more than seventy countries around the world, a number that expands every year (Young, Peter 1987) Developing nations throughout the world have been cutting public expenditures and giving importance to market driven courses of study. As stated by Peter Young, this is a worldwide phenomenon. In most of the developing countries, the Governments have been gradually withdrawing grants and incentives to Higher Education and have been fully encouraging market driven policies for the advancement of Higher Education. During the last few decades, a rapidly growing economy has definitely led to a huge demand for an educated and skilled labour force throughout the world.

In India's perspective, during the first four decades after independence in 1947, Higher Education was fully state funded and was highly subsidized. The pressures for change emanating from globalization came when Higher Education was unable to meet the rising social demand for professional education. The self-funded private institutions met this demand for subjects which began to become relevant for the changing domain of the job market of the present day times. The changes spearheaded by economic liberalization and globalization are impacting on Higher Education worldwide. In India, this is largely a post 1980 phenomenon. The expansion of private institutions of higher learning has occurred because the growing segments of the population demand it. The middle class seeing that academic qualification is necessary for success, demand access to higher education. Governments generally respond by increasing enrolment. When Governments do not move quickly enough, private initiatives frequently establish academic institutions in order to meet the demand.

The concept of private initiative in Higher Education is not altogether new to India. Some of the leading universities of India like the Banaras Hindu University and the Aligarh Muslim University came up with the efforts of certain individuals and financial support of the community at large. Post 1990's in India, due to the liberalization policies of the Government, Privatization of Higher Education has already taken deep roots into our education system and it has now reached a stage where it cannot be undone. But one important fact which is quite discernible is that the Central Governments throughout have not taken the policy of Privatization seriously and so allowed the state Governments to open Private Institutions of Higher Learning by passing legislations in their respective legislatures. At present there are 262 Private Universities in India. The subsequent Governments at the Centre always gave less importance to Higher Education and always questioned the return from education which is definitely an economic term and cannot at all be related to human resource development. This tendency of the Central Governments throughout the years has brought about a deterioration of education in the public sector.

Privatization and job-oriented courses

Privatization has brought about a sea-change with regards to courses and curricula in Higher Education. Most of the Private Institutions have adopted the latest syllabus, courses of study which are job-oriented and relevant to the needs of the time and the Institutions are very fast in upgrading them. Probably this is one of the major reasons why these institutions have become much sought after nowadays. Whereas in the public funded Higher Educational Institutions, introduction of new courses and curricula, up gradation of the syllabus which is relevant to the times is still a far cry. Official red-tapism is the order of the day in these Institutions and so innovations with regards to courses and curricula always takes a lot of time. The Private universities mostly offer courses which are job-oriented in diverse sectors of our economy and students after getting their degrees get immediate engagement. Even a cursory look at the courses and curricula in the Public funded Institutions reveals a very disturbing picture of the present state of affairs. It is really a matter of great concern that at the dawn of the 21st

century, these institutions of Higher Learning are not aware of the vast number and variety of subjects which are being offered by the private Institutions. To cite an example, in Engineering course there are around three hundred course names including sixteen course names in Civil Engineering. There is no point in spending time, money and energy in pursuing knowledge which is not at all relevant to the times. In this regard, it is highly imperative to quote here Patricia Mukhim's words who is the present editor of Shillong Times---"Higher Education or University Education is going through some tough challenges requiring upheavals and major changes in the way things are done. These institutions must meet these challenges to stay relevant. Their research must anticipate social needs ; the products of their research must be shared effectively with society through appropriate knowledge – transfer mechanisms .If Universities don't lead the change, then who will? And perhaps it is because our Universities are stuck in the mud that we don't see the social, political and economic changes that should take our country on its growth trajectory".

By 2012, Higher Education system in the country had changed considerably by Privatization of the education sector and it has collaborated to different foreign countries. This system has strongly made its impact in India. Challenges of education system need to be critically examined in today's perspective. Only the good quality education system will be able to survive in the long run. The then chief secretary of Assam, Rajkhowa (2010) states, "In the tough competition that is to follow, it is the fittest that will survive and the rest will simply perish, unless the authorities in colleges and universities and the teaching community prepare themselves from now onward to face challenges"(The Sentinel, 04 July 2010). Quality perspective holds true for both private and public institutions. The progress in professional education in India has received international recognition."Doctors trained in India have registered a strong presence in the British Medical Service, thousands of IIT products who are presently working in the U.S. are credited in creating many more thousand jobs and billions in market capitalization" (Sanat kaul,2006). The country is also experiencing considerable growth of healthcare tourism. Indian hospitals are already catering to lakhs of foreign patients (Ibid.,p.17)

With regards to quality maintenance and upto-date knowledge in their areas of specialization, the faculties in the private institutions have an edge over their counterparts in the public funded institutions of higher learning. This is because the former ones have to struggle in order to thrive. There is intense competition in the private sector while this is not so in the public funded higher educational institutions The faculty members have to be well informed and experts in their fields since they are accountable to their institutions or else they have to leave their jobs. "Perform or Perish" is the catch line in these institutions. In contrast, the public funded higher educational institutions have no accountability factor. Once you get a job you remain there till your retirement No one can remove you, it's your bastion! Without accountability factor, quality enhancement is not at all possible anywhere, be it in the private or the public institutions. In this knowledge driven society, students are very sharp and quick to adjust where everything is available on the click of a mouse. But are we adjusting to this, being on the other side of the table. If we are, it is well and good and if not , we will just remain as relics of the past.

Privatization of Higher Education and Job Opportunities

The growing disenchantment amongst the student community with regards to job –oriented courses and curricula in the public funded higher educational institutions indicates a greater involvement of the private sector in extending educational services. Investment in education will definitely lead to the creation of human capital which is an important input into the socio-economic development of a nation. In India, development of the Higher Education sector has not been encouraging at all and it needs to be reformed and revamped. Although there are a large number of graduates, post graduates, ph.D s coming out each year, the quality perspective of these degree holders are questionable. This is all due to the shortcomings of the Higher Education system. It is a universally accepted truth that neglect of higher education will definitely lead to neglect of growth of the nation as a whole. If we want to transform our demography, we have to look at our higher education system in a big way since the

scenario is very grim and depressing. In comparison to China, India's investment in the education sector is very grim. "Only four percent of GDP has been spent by India on overall education, while China is spending around 565 billion dollars, out of which 145 billion dollars is spent on Higher Education. However, India spent only 12.5 billion dollars in overall education out of which 4.5 billion dollars were spent on higher education. This is the ratio in which we are working vis-à-vis China," according to a report by a government official. According to the report prepared by the Vivekananda International Foundation(VIF) and several professors across the country India has got to highlight on issues in STEM (Science, technology, education and mathematics) education. These people made several recommendations to reform the system. It also suggested that the GDP on education should be increased 1.5 per cent from 1 percent and economics (analysis of cost and benefit) of higher education needs to be discussed in more detail. This important report was released by Saravat and Arvind Gupta, Director, VIF and members of the task force, New Delhi. This is indeed very discouraging. India stands at a very dismal position with regards to percent of people opting for higher education which is only 6 percent according to Government statistics whereas in the developed countries, access to higher education is to the tune of 40% or above. In meeting the challenge of equity and improving the quality of education plus creating job opportunities for the youths of the country, Higher Education system has to seek participation of the Private sector as well. Some amount of private funding therefore appears inevitable for making up the deficit caused by inadequate state funding. Here it needs to be specially mentioned that the private institutions are providing the required courses and curricula for international requirement One major outcome of the setting up of private institutions of Higher Learning is that they have already created the best academic and administrative support structures in order to produce graduates employable in any sector, an initiative which deserves appreciation..In today's world of Liberalization, Globalization and Privatization, the need of the hour is to develop our human resource fully so that they become employable in all sectors.

Conclusion

According to latest statistics, U.G.C. has approved 822 universities and out of these there are 282 private universities. These universities are playing a great role in providing quality higher education and also providing employment opportunities to a large number of youths both educated and uneducated, skilled and unskilled. These institutions have also carved a niche in the society by outsourcing their services whereby innumerable people are getting employment benefits and earning their livelihood. This is one of the major advantage of the private sector institutions of higher learning They are providing excellent service to the society by creating job opportunities at all levels.

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