

Book Review

Higher Education and Global Challenges Systems and Opportunities by P.P. Arya, New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications 2006, Pp. 317, Rs. 880

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To achieve sustainable human development of India in the present economic scenario, there is an urgent need of understanding the associated problems including higher education. The higher education system in India is facing a number of hurdles despite its very impressive expansion. The demand for higher education continued to outstrip the supply in India. In my humble opinion, two major factors responsible for the poor performance of the Indian education system are the commercialization of education and spiritual bankruptcy of all the stakeholders.

The edited book under review is an outcome of thirty five articles contributed in a National Seminar on “ Quality of Higher Education in India: The Challenge of Change” held at Panjab University, Chandigarh on November 18-19,2003. P.P. Arya, the editor of the book, has succeeded in making the case for change in perception, attitude and attention of all the stake holders on higher education which is otherwise deteriorating.

In preface, the editor has tried to express his concerns for grave problem of economics of higher education. In chapter I, S. L. Sharma has complimented UGC and NAAC for institutional inputs of quality education with well-conceived and devised parameters. He has made seven observations for improvement in respect of higher education. He has suggested to add steps for supplementing ‘Self Study Report’ of an institution with more rigorous ‘reality check’ for enhancing the credibility of NAAC.

In chapter 2, Satya Prakash Singh has listed explanatory variables of quality of education including quality of students, quality of teachers, method of teaching and evaluation, infrastructure and overall environment of individual institutions, financial resources, quality of developmental efforts, guidance support and control by government. All these variables need focus if the challenges of change are to be faced with collaborative mindset by all the stakeholders. In chapter 3, S.P.Singh made a case for expansion and participation of India in the fast transforming global society, which needs to keep entity, social values and norms intact. We need to make serious efforts for becoming knowledge super power with new and innovative ways. S .C. Gakhar in chapter 4 discusses the teacher education programme in higher education for including competencies in content and curricula, management and evaluation and above all willingness to perform.

Asha Maudgil in her review article in chapter 5 has made a case for re-evaluation of the goals of education in the light of cultural crisis between traditional and modernity modes.

Asha Mohan Sethi in chapter 6 perceived change and future developments in curriculum, methods of teaching, evaluation, organizational structure of education, quality of higher education, assessment and accreditation, the role of a teacher and management of quality in higher education. In chapter 7, Nirmala Chaudhary has identified potential opportunities and challenges in higher education due to globalization. Vibha Sinha in chapter 8 looked into the factors that explained the problems in institutions of higher learning with special emphasis on system of affiliation, appointments and standards and gradual withdrawal of State and made a case for setting up new standards for higher education in India. Sukhwant Bajwa and Shifali in chapter 9 believe that the challenges of change call for building up of information highways. B.D.Budhiraja in chapter 10 believes that higher education should promote humanism, reasoning, tolerance, critical thinking and search for truth. In chapter 11 R.K.Gupta makes a case for revamping higher educational institutions in India which deserve policy initiatives. According to Karamjit Singh in Chapter 12, the quality of management education needs to be monitored continuously on the basis of feedback.

In chapter 13, the editor of the book has made a strong case for integrating management education with corporate sector and it should be based on values flowing from Indian ethos. Ashwani Bhalla in chapter 14 calls for practical implementation of reforms in higher education. To ensure quality and quantity of education, Abhilash Nayak in Chapter 15 justifies the need for flexible and realistic education system by judicious combination of different modes and styles of learning. In chapter 16 of the book Dharmendra Goel expresses his understanding of the realities of Indian higher education system in the first decade of 21st century and spells out the objective of higher education for contemporary Indians to be achieved with articulated means agreed upon democratically. M.Rajivlochan in chapter 17 has given facts for examination centered education system in India copied from London. Cultural component in higher education is essential for qualitative change in the institutions of higher education is the domain of chapter 18 contributed by Anjala Maharishi.

In chapter 19, Madhu Gupta and Akshaya Kumar suggest approaches to decolonization of higher education on the basis of location, gender, nationality and racial coordinates of one's identity. To Nandita in chapter 20, value based education appears to be a tool and means of peace, freedom and social justice and is the panacea for ills like poverty. To provide excellent professionals with universal human face and spiritual backbone for the whole world, Indiansing the education system is the need of the day as advocated by Laxminarain Sharma in chapter 21.

The Indian perspective of decolonizing education in the form of indigenous systems of social knowledge is the subject of discussion by Rishi Raj Sharma and Avneet Maan in Chapter 22. The third dimension of straightening the tripod stand for higher education inclusive of teaching, research and extension is the subject of discussion by Latika Sharma in Chapter 23 with no scope of experimentation with theorization unless extension is integrated.

B.S.Ghuman expresses his concerns on alternative financing of higher education with a policy mix between hundred per cent recovery of costs and subsidies in chapter 24. He has cautioned that the fee hike needs to be handled with care to avoid agitation by students through participatory approach. Redefining parameters for quality higher education are the subject of study by Sarawati Ghosh (Sarkar) in Chapter 25. She makes a case for ethical revolution by strengthening values in education.

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In chapter 26 of the book Sumeera Gill argues for effective educational governance in management schools. R.H. Taxak in chapter 27 has tried to assess the role of privatization in higher education by orienting education towards entrepreneurial development based on values. P.K. Vasudeva justifies the need to review Mode 3 model of the GATS while making comments on ministry of commerce paper on GATS in Chapter 28 of the book. The same author in chapter 29 has studied implications of GATS on education including weakening of public education system in India.

In chapter 30 of the book, Upasna Joshi has justified the need to rejuvenate management education in India with international orientation to meet the requirements of the competitive world of today. R.S. Brar justified the need for autonomy in the Indian centres of higher education particularly colleges in chapter 31. To enhance quality of higher education, Raj Kumari Gupta in Chapter 32 has made a case for continuous assessment with autonomy for a teacher who should be innovative and sincere in all the endeavors.

In chapter 33, H.S. Rawat identifies communication tools for the teacher of new generation for communicating effectively with the students.

Victor S. Gambhir and his three co-authors in chapter 34 have made a case for benchmarking through networking for purposes of continuous improvement in higher education in India which must be introduced if the global challenges of the present era are to be faced effectively.

In the last chapter of the book, M.R. Khurana has expressed his concern for higher education in India by observing its rapid expansion in post-independence era with multiple and complicated problems. To keep the higher education within the reach of the poor aspirants, Khurana has made a case for effective monitoring and regulation of the private sector through appropriate policy measures – a judicious mix of policies, which ensure efficient use of the available educational resources. To plug the loopholes in non-performance, he has rightly pointed out the need for accountability.

To make India a global human resource development (HRD) hub, in my humble opinion, is a utopian idea but we need to be humble in slow and steady progress in all HRD activities including higher education. There should be necessary and sufficient resources - physical, human and financial for undertaking the activities, which may help remove regional imbalances. The expenditure on such activities should no more be treated under social services sector and deserves to be treated as investment.

To my mind, there is need of recognizing the concept of 'Enlightenment Within' to cope up with the new technological challenges as well as to shed the archaic baggage. There is need of integrating new ideas, world views, skills, traditional belief, systems and values leading to human resource development which is sustainable for all times to come.

In totality, the book is an in-depth analysis providing opportunity to understand the problems of higher education and suggest policy implications to be understood, analyzed and implemented by the authorities concerned in all times to come for bringing efficiency, sufficiency and equity in higher education in India.