

Higher Education and Globalization- The Challenges Ahead with Special Reference to State of Kerala

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Abstract:

Education is an important index of human development. Along with economic growth and empowerment, it forms the core of every social and human development doctrines. Among various levels of education, higher education has a pervasive and influential impact on development. Higher education empowers the individual with necessary skills and competence for achieving important personal and social goals and thereby contributing to the social development. It is widely believed that the state of higher education in a country is an index of its future well-being. Education scenario in India is fast changing. In developing countries like ours, government is finding itself incapable to bear the responsibility of higher education as it is already facing acute dearth of resources. Universities and colleges are starved of funds as the support of Govt. is being reduced and grants are not being provided in time causing hardship to them. One of the easier options to overcome the financial crisis in the educational sector is to start self-financing courses. But this alternative is possible only for courses with high demand. Secondly, these courses further strengthen the numerous entry barriers to higher education existing already. Thirdly, the scope for self-financing educational institutions in Kerala is much more limited than for the country as a whole. Fourthly, these institutions cannot evolve as centers of excellence. But, however privatization of higher-level education especially in the field of professional and technical education like Medical, Engineering, Information Technology, Computer, Management, Teacher Education etc. has already commenced.

Keywords: Higher education, private participation, self-financing, knowledge economy, quality education, Kerala State Higher Education Council etc.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, higher education in Kerala has been subject to significant policy shifts, which hold long-term implications for the general arts and science segment. At least three sets of policy moves in the recent past have altered or hold the potential to alter significantly the context of general arts and science education in the state. First, the opening of the doors to self-financing colleges, somewhat ambiguously in the 1990s but with full force since 2000, initiated full fledged private participation in the sector where as previously private participation had been publicly funded through the private aided colleges, which receive public funds but are managed by private establishments mostly of the nature of voluntary or charitable trusts. Second, from 1998 onwards the pre degree courses were delinked in a phased manner from arts and science colleges and brought under the higher secondary schools as plus two courses, a process that was completed in 2001. Third, very recently the Kerala State Higher Education Council (KSHEC) has initiated reforms in undergraduate arts and science education, which envisages a radical overhauling of the existing structure and practices.

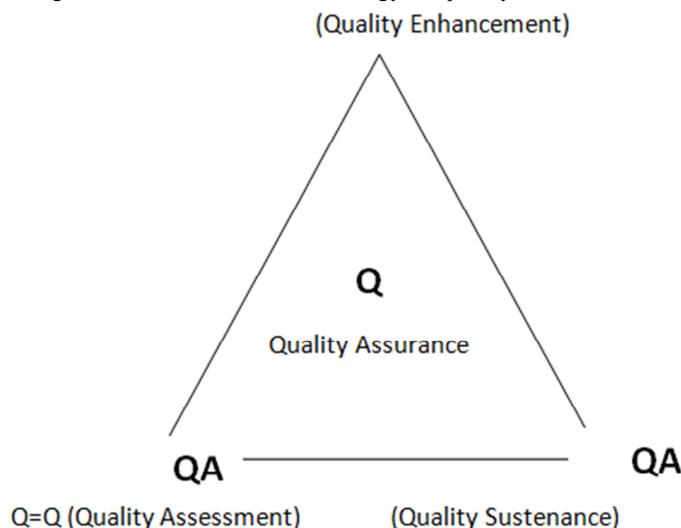
In a fast-growing knowledge economy, higher education is not only a means of seeking better economic opportunity but also an effective instrument for social liberation. Hence as societies grow richer, there emerges a rapidly growing demand for educational opportunities. In India even after several decades of rapid educational growth, the competition for educational success appears to operate in favour of the privileged sections of society. In a country where only 2.5 percent of the population in the relevant age group enters colleges and universities, it is quite natural that most of these seats are appropriated by the well-to-do. Further 10 percent of the best-educated received 61 percent of the resources for higher education in India against 36 percent across Asia (World Bank, 1998). In this country, state support for higher education has remained grossly inadequate, the quality education fast becoming the preserve of the socially and economically privileged.

Three-dimensional strategy of quality assurance

The level of institutional quality depends not only on an institution's educational processes and resources, but also on the institution's successful use of these process and resources to achieve the established goals. An institution must engage in continuous study, analysis and appraisal of its purposes, policies, procedures, and

programmes, since it has an obligation to all constituents to assure effectiveness in management. In this context, the NAAC has a mandate not only to assess and accredit universities and colleges, but also to involve in a three-dimensional strategy of Quality Assurance-Quality Assessment (QA), Quality Sustenance (QS), and Quality enhancement (QE).

Fig. 1.1 Three dimensional strategy of quality assurance



Added to this is the problems created by the tendency for withdrawal of government from its commitment to development of higher education. The government has begun reduction of educational subsidies to higher education. A large number of self-financing institutions and courses in both the government and private sectors have emerged. The governmental excuse for this turn of events is severe financial crisis it has been facing for the past several years. If these policies are want only pursued, the situation, which is highly loaded in favour of the rich and the powerful, might deteriorate further, and would turn the exclusive pressure of the dominant minority.

Undergraduate Arts and Science Education in Kerala

Salim (1992) has mentioned that in the early sixties, the State took steps to start a large number of Junior Colleges. The stated objective of starting those colleges was to provide a terminal Course for young people to enter the field of gainful employment, two years after the school leaving certificate examination. They were also intended to offer employment-oriented courses. But what happened, unfortunately, was that every one of them in a few years became regular Arts and Science Colleges of the conventional type, a development which was never intended or envisaged by the policy makers.

Ramachandran (1987) has argued that there was no attempt to modernize these conventional courses with a view to making the products coming out of these institutions better suited to available employment opportunities. Every attempt to reform the system has met with stiff resistance. There is an organized vested interest entrenched within the institutions, especially the organized teachers' groups and to a lesser extent non-teaching employees to see that no reform is made Possible in the existing system.

The Challenges ahead

George and Ajith (1999) in their research work opined that the new challenges and concerns in the field of higher education may be examined on the eve of the changing economic scenario all over the world especially in India after 1990s liberalization and globalization thereafter. The challenges include the relevance of higher education as the basis of new employment opportunities in an economy that was fast opening up to global forces. In the specific context of Kerala, there were the demands of the rapidly growing service sector, the inability relative to other south Indian states and cities to tap opportunities in ICT and the need to retain migrant jobs, whose social-skill profile was changing implicating the need for greater investment in higher education. As against this, Kerala's well publicized achievements in education pertained largely to primary and secondary school education. It has been pointed out that on higher education; Kerala fell behind several Indian states on several dimensions of access but especially on the availability of educational opportunities within the state relative to population and the number of students enrolled in these institutions. Now let us discuss the important challenges and concern about higher education in Kerala.

The missing links with industry and community

George and Ajith (1999) identified that Kerala is well known as a consumer State. Consumer services are channelized through a large number of outlets and trading institutions. Among them are over a lakh of

trading institutions which may be categorized as large and medium. The point that is relevant here is, to what extent our higher educational institutions have established contacts and relationships which bring the students in touch with industry and trade. The fact is that even the technical education institutions have very little regular interaction with them. Lack of interface between industry and trade on the one hand and higher educational institutions on the other, make the world of study and the world of work two worlds altogether unrelated. Students in the colleges and universities are largely ignorant of what happens in the industrial and trade world. The Colleges and other higher educational Institutions are also not concerned with the problems of Panchayat and Municipalities in the State. There is no effort to make them aware or interested during their course of study; in the development challenges of the local self-governing institutions. The present college education infact does not prepare a student for any task in life. It is in this context that the introduction of job-oriented courses assumes great importance; to make the younger generation aware of the immense potentialities of preparing themselves for new jobs as well as the creation of new jobs.

Regional bias

Many studies found that professional education is heavily biased against the rural population and backward and depressed communities. The share of the rural areas in professional education (5 percent) is much smaller than their share in the State population (73.6 percent). Students from urban and semi-urban areas appropriate most of the regular low-fee-paying seats in professional education. Opportunities for professional education are mostly limited to the students of well-educated parents holding high-level occupations and high economic background. Although a few SC/ST students do benefit from professional education, they represent the cream of the community and not the masses. The children of the poor, low educated and lowly occupied parents are only marginally represented in professional education. The majority of the students who appeared for entrance examination belong to well-off.

Incompetent professional education.

Tilak (2001) has opined that professional education in Kerala also lags very behind in creating competent and quality human resources. The rate of growth of unemployed engineering diploma holders is also high – six per cent per annum between 1990 and 1997 (and nine per cent between 1980 and 1997). Though small in absolute numbers, the rate of growth of unemployed agricultural graduates is the highest. The rate of growth of unemployment among the engineering graduates is the highest among electronics engineers, though they are also small in absolute number. Paradoxically, the demand for electronics engineering degree courses is also increasing rapidly.

Proliferation of Self-financing Institutions

As seen earlier, a major trend from the nineties aggravating exclusionary trends is the proliferation of unaided schools and the growth of self-financing courses and institutions in the higher education and technical education sectors. These institutions try to recover the entire capital and recurring costs from the students as they are considered to be the sole beneficiaries of education. Many of the new breed of educational entrepreneurs is guided largely by commercial or other extraneous considerations. Even the religious and the caste groups which used to finance education partly out of their own resources, are now choosing the easier option of student-financing for promoting education. The universities and some of the government agencies and cooperatives floated at the initiative of the government are now starting only self-financing colleges. Most of the job oriented courses like nursing, medical, engineering, management are now in the self-financing sector. More than 80 per cent of the engineering colleges, nursing colleges, and pharmacy colleges are in the self-financing stream. The private aided colleges, which dominated the arts and science college sector contributing to more than three-fourths of the number of colleges in 1991, have now a share of only 48 per cent. Their expansion is now mostly in the self financing mode. In 2008-09, the self financing arts and science colleges formed 40 percent of the total number of arts and science colleges in the state. As seen earlier, most of the newly started 'job oriented' courses in arts and science colleges are now conducted on self financing basis, either in the newly started unaided institutions or in the existing aided colleges themselves.

Under Investment of State in Education

Prakash and Abraham (2004) in their research article mentioned that the government expenditure on education in Kerala continued to increase up to the reform period. But the revenue expenditure on education in relation to the gross state domestic product (GSDP) of Kerala shows a steadily declining trend from 1990-91 onwards.

In 1960-61, the state spent 3.7 per cent of its gross state domestic Product on Education. The ratio of expenditure on education to GSDP went up to 4.8 per cent in 1970-71 and then to 6.1 per cent in 1980-81. It reached the peak levels in 85-86 and 86-87 (7.1 per cent) (Kerala Education Commission, 1999). In many years

of the seventies and the eighties, the outlay on education exceeded the Kothari Commission's norm of 6 per cent of the GDP (Kothari Commission, 1966).

The steady decline in the share of education in the budgeted expenditure is seen not only in the revenue expenditure but also in capital expenditure and plan expenditure. The share of education in capital expenditure fell from 1.7 per cent during the fifth five year plan to 1.5 per cent in the sixth plan and to 1.2 per cent in the seventh plan (George 1999). As may be seen from Table eighteen, the share of education in the capital expenditure went up to 5.7 percent during the eighth plan but came down to 3.3 per cent during the ninth plan. During the tenth plan, the share of education went up marginally to 3.6 percent. During the eleventh plan it went down to 2.1 percent.

The drastic reduction in plan expenditure as well as capital expenditure prevented the government from expanding capacity of government owned and government aided institutions in the higher education and technical education sectors when the demand for enrolment and funds was growing. This vacuum was filled initially by the self-financing institutions in other states to which there was a massive exodus of students from Kerala. Later on, the newly established self-financing institutions within the state met this demand. The government considered the starting of large number of such institutions as a softer option. The under investment by the government inter alia led to erosion in quality of institutions owned by it, thus increasing the private costs for the students of the institutions, a trend noted earlier.

Increasing cost

Gnanam and Stella (1999) identified that there has been virtually no expansion in the facilities in the publicly funded segment of higher education, particularly in the arts and science segment since the 1990s, whereas the self-financing institutions in the professional and arts and science segments have expanded exponentially. It remains that the failure of the publicly funded segments to grow will impede access to those sections of the population who are unable to afford the higher costs of education in the self-financing segment, particularly in the absence of adequate facilities to avail scholarships or loans. It is found that the lower income groups (with annual income of less than Rs 50,000) representing 95 percent of the households in Kerala could secure only 14 percent of the seats in professional education. The rest 86 percent seats are appropriated by the better-off sections of the society. The average family income and family expenditure of the crossed students of professional education are found higher than those of students who did not get entry into professional education.

Suggestions

Education is a powerful tool of social change in a society in which the majority of the population is in poverty and socially stagnant. Here no doubt government itself plays an important role in developing such an environment. Hence education could not be viewed as a commodity supplied on profit loss basis but it is the fundamental rights of the citizens of a country. In this context what the State has to do is a thorough revamping of its educational system, both in quality and quantity. Some specific suggestions towards this direction are detailed below:

- **Unified University System**

The Government's proposal to have a single integrated legislation to deal with all the affiliating universities in the State is a welcome move. This will help the restructuring and reforming of the university bodies with a view to removing party politics from university bodies. The U.G.C has given specific guidelines in this respect and the proposed legislation should conform to those guidelines. Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have already passed such legislation years ago. We are far behind them in this respect. The Unified Universities Bill must be circulated among the public for eliciting public opinion. It should ensure the protection of the rights of the minorities and the managements. There should be uniformity of the syllabi, admissions, conduct of examinations and publication of results of different universities so that mutual transfer of students is made possible. Distance education and private registration should be under a different Board or set up.

- **No more Arts and Science Colleges**

The State has already an adequate number of Arts and Science Colleges. Hence no new Arts and Science Colleges are established for at least next one decade unless they are required in remote areas such as the high ranges.

- **Autonomous Colleges**

The affiliating system has become irrelevant and counterproductive. Its evil effects can be minimized only by establishing autonomous colleges. Such colleges are functioning very effectively in Tamil Nadu. Karnataka has proposed to launch them in a big way. Kerala should have started autonomous colleges at least two decades back. With many colleges accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, it is appropriate that autonomous status conferred on them. The UGC gives special grants to them and encourages and supports them in a special manner.

- **Party Politics in Campuses**

One of the most undesirable developments in our university system in recent years, irrespective of the Central or the State Universities, is the widespread party politicization of the university bodies and the cancerous infection of party politics in the campuses. The question is often asked, whether a university is organised to facilitate the pursuit of learning or that of power. Private college staff - both teaching and non-teaching - should not be allowed to contest in general elections. Selection of the members of the University bodies like Academic Council, Syndicate etc should not be made on political basis. They must consist only of academically competent and politically non-biased persons. Active political work of the teaching and supporting staff must be prohibited. The problem has to be solved on a national basis by working out a consensus among all political parties or most of them. Once such a consensus is evolved, a code of conduct be formulated and implemented. As a part of this code, students' unions of the present type should be abolished, present type of elections discontinued and students' participation in the curricular, co-curricular and other activities should be constructively channelised.

- **Appointment of teachers**

The appointment should be on merit and merit alone. If we compare our selection method of teachers in our colleges and even university departments to that in well known universities abroad, it would become clear that our system is very poor.. And a poor quality faculty can never raise the standards of higher education whatever else we may do; our system is secretive and closed as opposed to the generally open system of selection that prevails in advanced countries. We have the system of outside experts who interview candidates for ten or fifteen minutes and take decisions, either for or against. Often it is a farce or a ritual. Our system of one-year probation period is too inadequate to determine whether a teacher is fit or not to get a permanent appointment. He must be judged not by the head of his department alone, but also by his peers and even his students. Student-reaction survey is a method employed by some well-known universities in the West. Opinions of senior faculty members and publications, both research and popular, are given due weight. Often, initial appointments are on a contract basis, for three to five years, and confirmation at the end of the period or earlier is on proved merit..

- **New Universities and Colleges**

While there is a strong case for rapid expansion of higher education in Kerala, it is important to see that new universities or colleges are set up after careful consideration of the needs on the one hand, and on the other hand and more importantly after ensuring adequate resource support. The expansion should help in improving the quality of higher education, than in leading to deterioration in quality. Secondly, financing policies in higher education have to help in (a) quantitative expansion, (b) safe guarding of equity consideration and (c) promotion of quality of education. The State has an important role in financing higher education and any sizeable degree of reliance on private sector for finances may be counterproductive. On the whole, the role of the private sector in the development of higher education cannot be expected to be significant.

- **Failure of the system**

Now we have to create a time bound system for the time, money and life is very precious. Notably, among those who argue that it is the system that ails the arts and science education in Kerala is K.N. Panikkar, the former Chairman of the Kerala State Higher Educational Council, which is spearheading the current reforms. There is of course no denying the problems presented by the system and all colleges irrespective of sector, management or nature of politics are affected by it. Failure of the system is experienced in delays at virtually all the crucial nodes in the process of higher education. The admissions schedule is invariably prolonged by about two months affecting classes because some of the teachers are held up. Some of the urban colleges are used as general purpose examination centres by the university and have to cancel class; the university also uses the teachers of the colleges for evaluation and other responsibilities depriving them of time for their teaching and other responsibilities in the college. Delays in conducting examinations mean that students have to do the previous years exams when the current years classes are going on distracting them from classes. Delay in the announcement of results is a huge inconvenience to students who may end up wasting time.

Conclusion

Education is an important tool through which a country can utilize maximum its material and non material resources. It should be considered as a sector with strategic importance to a nation. Hence the state has unavoidable responsibility to work to ensure quality and competent educational system and thus to safeguard the fundamental right of her citizens.

Adequate facilities, availability of regular teachers and the quality of teaching are key factors in the provision of quality higher education. However, the problems faced by colleges are underpinned by the broader regulatory environment and by an unwieldy system. The problems in the current regulatory environment are linked to the external socio-economic and political factors, which shape the nature of the stakes that political parties or religious or caste associations have in the management or functioning of higher education. Thus, if the nature of politics on a campus is influenced by the stakes of political parties, lower stakes provide greater opportunities for the administration to foster an environment that is conducive to learning and to the production

of knowledge. Thus, though remotely located Government colleges suffer on account of poor basic facilities and unavailability of teachers they are still able to maintain greater discipline within the college and greater motivation among students and teachers. In the case of religious or caste associations, then nature of the management differs according to the nature of the stakes it has in higher education. Thus, caste associations tend to be disinterested in the higher education process but are interested in the social and political clout it allows them to wield. Further, the vested interests of the political parties render it difficult for governments to shape and enforce regulation that would for instance make recruitment and admission procedures transparent. Instead, rival political groups focus on problems selectively in a way that is motivated to weaken one or other sector. The casualty in the process is a policy environment that would provide incentives to deliver quality higher education while also ensuring regulations that prevent profiteering or the use of education to dispense patronage. In this context, the current reforms are marred by the suspicion it has generated among the reputed private aided colleges that they are yet another effort to enable political interference in their affairs.

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