Fracas over Privatisation, Quality Assurance and Corruption in Indian higher education

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Abstract

It is well recognised that for a bright future country needs to strengthen its higher education roots first. If India wants to be a major player in the emerging knowledge-based economies, then it will have to go in for a major overhaul of its higher education system. Government of India needs to come out with policies and regulations that can bring effective and timely changes in this sector and enhance its reputation on the global platform. There is the need for a clear vision. Policy makers have to introspect the state of affairs of higher education critically. The maladies and deficiencies in India's higher education system need urgently to be addressed by making it more professional and creative and less bureaucratic and political. To realize where we have gone wrong we need honesty of purpose and sincere articulation of the issue. Let the politicians see it as a legitimate aspiration of people that those in policy making will respond to it. It is to be realised that higher education is no longer a luxury and a corruption free education system is essential to national, social and economic development.

Keywords: Higher education administration, assessment, quality issues, quality assurance

1. Introduction

Knowledge is the driving force in the rapidly changing globalised economy and society. Quantity and quality of highly specialised human resources determine their competence in the global market. Emergence of knowledge as driving factor results in both challenges and opportunities. It is now well recognised that the growth of the global economy has increased opportunities for those countries with good levels of education and vice versa (Carnoy, 1999; Tilak, 2001; Stewart, 1996; lon, 1994). India has a billion-plus population and a high proportion of the young and hence it has a large formal education system. The demand for education in developing countries like India has also skyrocketed as education is regarded as an important bridge of social, economic and political mobility (Amutabi and Oketch, 2003).

Education System in India currently represents a great paradox. On one hand we have Indian Institute of Management and Indian Institute of Technology that rank among the best institutes in the world and on the other hand most of the private schools in the country don't even have the minimum basic infrastructure. There also exists socio-economic, cultural, time and geographical barriers for people who wish to pursue higher education (Bhattacharya and Sharma, 2007).

1.1 Privatisation of higher education in India

India has one of the largest higher education systems in the world with around 430 universities and 22,000 institutions of higher education. Education is the driving force of economic and social development in any country (Cholin, 2005; Mehta and Kalra, 2006). Considering this, it is necessary to find ways to make education of good quality, accessible and affordable to all, using the latest technology available. However, research findings have shown that the overall state of higher education is dismal in the country.

Privatisation of higher education has emerged in several forms and types in the recent decade in India. One, privatisation within government higher education institutions take place in the form of introducing self-financing courses within government institutions; two, converting government-aided private institutions into private self financing institutions; three, allowing to expand self-financing private institutions with recognition and also without recognition, which may be termed as commercial private higher education institutions.

Though the higher education system and the pattern of financing higher education vary a great deal across countries in terms of their size and strength and degree of diversification of higher education institutions, yet they all face a severe financial crisis in the public finances available for higher education. In India, over the years, there have been private initiatives in education initially for philanthropic reasons and eventually in professional and higher education mainly to realize the huge and quick profits potential.

Since 1993 with the Supreme Court judgement, growth of commercial higher education in the name of capitation fee or self-financing colleges is mushrooming in India. The private institutions include colleges, training centers, etc. Neither the Department of Education nor the University Grants Commission (UGC) collect, compile and publish the information on the size and growth of institutions and enrolments on this rapidly growing private higher education (Geetha, 2002). Student is the power while academic staff is weak in these private institutions. Indeed, the faculty lacks the position, power and autonomy as they traditionally enjoy at universities. Basically they serve to students and their practical orientations in commercial private institutions. When employing full-time academic staff, they pay meager salary.

1.2 Administrative structure of Indian higher education

The Minister of Human Resource Development chairs the Ministry of Human Resource Development and receives support from the Minister of State. It is the Minister who makes policies and guides the entire Ministry. As far as the executive level is concerned, a secretary is appointed to head the department of higher education, and he or she receives assistance from additional secretary (Higher Education). Ministry of Human Resource and Development, Department of Higher Education, at Center is responsible for synchronisation and formation of policies that can elevate the standards of higher education or research, and technical and scientific centers. In order to implement the devised policies, central government has set up certain statutory agencies, such as Universities Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), and Distance Education Council (DEC) (Education in India, 2011).

As far as the discharge of responsibilities is concerned, Universities Grants Commission (UGC) is in charge of looking after the quality of higher education in India through the process of coordination, maintenance and decision-making. All India Council for Technical Education has assumed the planning and coordination roles for the technical education sphere in the country. When it comes to the development and growth of Open University and distance mode of learning, Distance Education Council takes the charge. The statutory body scrutinises the teaching, research and examination system of these higher education centers.

Aside from this, there are several other statutory or autonomous education bodies also which have been vested with significant power and authority to ensure betterment of the higher education system in India. Some of these are: Medical Council of India, Dental Council of India, Indian Council for Agricultural Research, National Council for Teacher Education, Pharmacy Council of India, Indian Nursing Council, Bar Council of India, Central Council of Homeopathy, Central Council for Indian Medicine, Council of Architecture, Rehabilitation Council and State Councils of Higher Education.

Further, as per the role of state governments is concerned in this sector, the state governments enjoy the power of setting up universities and colleges in their respective states. They have to build plan and non-plan grants to ensure the development and maintenance of the institutions. The Central Government is entrusted with the exclusive legislative rights in the field of higher education. But, when it comes to effective implementation of policies and discharge of responsibilities, both central and state governments have to cooperate and coordinate with each other; for this purpose, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) has been formed.

2. Gross enrolment ratio – Rural/ Urban distribution, Gender and Religious disparities

India's education sector is the world's third largest in terms of students, next to China and the United States. Unlike China, however, India has the advantage of English being the primary language of higher

education and research. In the 2009 Times Higher Education-Quacquarelli Symonds World University rankings, no Indian university features among the first 100 (World Bank and UNESCO, 2000).

The country lacks the critical mass in higher education. Its gross enrolment ratio (GER) is a mere 11 per cent compared to China's 20 per cent, United States 83 per cent and South Korea's 91 per cent. This means that in comparison to India, China has double the number of students pursuing higher education. While the growth of higher education in India over past six decades has been sizeable, it has hardly been uniform or equitable. This assertion draws support from several perspectives. For instance, there are observed significant disparities between rural and urban areas. GER-Gross enrolment ratio, NER -Net enrolment ratio and EER-eligibility enrolment ratio. Census 2001 estimated GER for rural areas as 8.99 percent, and for urban areas as 24.52 percent - almost a threefold difference. This kind of rural-urban hiatus is even larger if one goes by (National Sample Survey Estimates) NSSO estimates. That the growth of higher education in the country has been uneven is further reinforced when one goes through the NSSO estimates of NER and EER. Apparently 57.10 percent of the urban boys and girls, after undergoing senior secondary, enter into the portals of higher education, while only 47.49 percent of the rural boys and girls do so. Apparently, post-senior secondary enrolment in rural areas demands priority attention. (UGC, 2011)

In respect of higher education, there are observed inter-state variations that are difficult to ignore. Inter-state variations are marked and disquieting. GER is observed to range from 1.0 percent (Dadar and Nagar Haveli) to 33.7 percent (Chandigarh). If focus on the age-group of 18-23 years and only on the courses or programmes leading to graduate or higher degree, the national average is found to be 10.84 percent. (UGC, 2011)

Spanning the issue of inclusion, there is yet another consideration, namely, disparities between different religious groups. While Muslims rate lowest (GER, 6.84 percent), Christians appear to be comparatively better off (16.60 percent). For several socio-cultural reasons Muslims have lagged behind in education including in higher education. On the other hand, lower enrolment ratios among Hindus could be traced to depressed caste-groups within their fold. These inter-group differences further stand out when examined for gender parity. In all the four religious groups, women are found trailing behind men. Except among Christians, male-female differences are highly pronounced. Perhaps in the households, education or schooling of girl-children is given a second priority. This kind of lower female representation is likely to be a big drag on the growth of higher education in the country. For Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, both GER and NER in graduation and higher degree programmes are markedly lower than for 'Other Backward Classes' (OBC). And GER and NER among OBCs are, in turn, lower than that of others. Disparities or exclusion is palpable. For Scheduled Tribes, estimated EER is somewhat high (61.50 percent), much of which could be attributed to incentives offered to them for enrolment or studies. Still, trends seen in EER do show a ray of hope that the enrolment rates in respect of these disadvantaged social groups would pick up in the years to come. The evidence is thus recurrent that the share of the social groups occupying lower rungs of the caste hierarchy is also lower in higher education, in spite of much-publicized policies and programmes meant to educationally bring them up. In this connection, yet another question raises its head: What is the position of women and girls coming from these social groups? As would be expected, gender differences in terms of enrolment ratios persist across these caste-groups, also that the benevolent impact of higher education has been iniquitous across occupational groups becomes apparent when we take a look at various occupational groups, focalizing in particular marginalised occupational groups both in rural urban areas. For non-farm wage-labourers, GER is found to be less than 3 percent; and, for farm wage-labourers, it is still lower, that is, 1.41 percent. Similarly, casual labourers in urban areas are better off, but only relatively so: For them GER is estimated to be 3.26 percent. (UGC, 2011)

A study by NASSCOM-McKinsey has pointed out that only one out of ten Indian students with degrees in humanities and one out of four engineering graduates are employable despite the boast that India has one of the largest technical and scientific human resources in the world. National Assessment and Accreditation Council reveals that 90 per cent of the colleges and 70 per cent of the universities graded by the council are or middling or poor quality. It is not mandatory for educational institutions to seek accreditation, and that explains why there is no ranking. Despite such entities as the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, the National Board of Accreditation and the

Accreditation Body, only 30 per cent of the universities, 16 per cent of the colleges and 10 per cent of the management institutes are accredited. Too many students run after a handful of institutions. This has also led to the emergence of sub-standard institutions. An overwhelming majority of them have to make do with mediocre faculty and poor infrastructure, such as laboratories or libraries. The system lacks incentives to perform; there is no reward for the meritorious and no way to ease out the non-performers. The quality of teaching and research cannot be evaluated because there is no accountability. Stakeholders of the Higher Education sector in unison call for a corruption free administration and ecosystem facilitating investment and growth of the sector. Sector is facing challenges to increase gross enrollment ratio to 30 per cent by 2020 from the present 11 per cent (Mediacom PR, 2011).

3. Private universities establishment and regulation bill (1995)

Government of India introduced the Private Universities Establishment and Regulation Bill in 1995. The bill is still pending in the Parliament because the private sector was not interested in several clauses in the bill – primarily on the clause on the provision of scholarship for the economically and socially backward sections of the population (Geetha, 2000). Though, there have been deliberations on the private sector initiatives in higher education in different forums, there is no clear perspective on the issue. Yet another important factor is the deteriorating quality of the higher education over the years has indirectly made the students to look for alternatives. To sum up, even though, private institutions offer course on any discipline, the viability and sustainability depends upon their demand. However, it is to be noted that private institutions in developing countries like India are not efficient, competitive and complement as found in developed countries. The absence of a coherent long-term policy perspective on higher education is reflected on the government's ambiguity to regulate private institutions. The unfettered growth of private higher education (especially in engineering, medical, dental, nursing and management disciplines) combined with the international economic and political events created a surplus in the labor market in the recent years. Most of the private schools in India neither have a fair examination or evaluation system in place and professional degrees are made into a commodity and are being sold.

4. Central advisory board of education (CABE) - Autonomy of higher education institutions (2005)

The CABE Committee is of the view that autonomy of higher education institutions is a pre-requisite for enabling them to achieve their goals and objectives. An honest exercise of autonomy - academic, administrative and financial – will lead to making these institutions as centres of innovation, excellence and development. With this in view the Universities need to be insulated from internal and external pressures of all kinds, may be bureaucratic, political and other groups. Towards this end, University Grants Commission, Government of India and State Governments will have to evolve strategies to realize the intended objective. Since, autonomy of higher education institution goes hand-in-hand with its accountability, the delegation and devolution of power and authority concomitant with responsibility should flow not only from the external environment to the higher education institution but should be given at different levels within the higher education institution itself. There should be a charter of responsibility and devolution and delegation of authority defined for different levels within the university system and both should be monitored together.

The committee recommends that acts, statutes and ordinances of the universities should be reviewed for their better management as also for granting autonomous status to affiliating colleges. There is a need to reduce number of levels in decision making and greater empowerment at different levels to allow the system to become more dynamic and result oriented. Higher education institutions are to be driven by forces such as managerial efficiency, cost effectiveness, leadership and strategic control. The new form of management in the university should encourage best practices of governance, speedy decision making, networking, team effort and collective responsibility to meet the challenges of the new millennium. Institutions of higher education should prepare plans of futuristic development of each faculty discipline. This exercise should essentially be undertaken with a view to developing advanced teaching and research in frontier areas of knowledge and to strive towards national and international recognition. All bodies and authorities in the universities and colleges should have representatives, with an appropriate mix of elected and nominated representatives from various social

sectors but mostly from academic community and keeping in view the specific requirements of the states, if any. The size of such bodies should neither be too large as to make them cumbersome nor too small as to render them ineffective because of lack of representation of key stakeholders.

The committee also recommends a Central Higher Education Tribunal be set up for expeditious disposal of litigations on service matters relating to both academic and non-academic staff in the higher education system. There is also a need to encourage the States to set up similar State Higher Education Tribunals for the same purpose. All autonomous institutions may set up grievance redressal mechanism to ensure that grievances of the students and teachers both academic and non-academic are addressed in an expeditious manner. (Central advisory board of education, 2005)

5. Foreign educational institution: Regulation of entry and operation bill, 2010

The Foreign Educational Institution (Regulation of Entry and Operation) Bill, 2010, if passed in its current form without removing the existing anomalies in the higher education system, will lead to deterioration in quality and increased corruption in higher education. The bill unfortunately is not attractive enough to get in enough foreign universities to help India improve higher education and achieve a gross enrolment ratio (GER) of 21 per cent. This is a milestone which will enhance choices, increase competition and benchmark quality.

Malpractices like capitation fee exist because of the not-for-profit concept in higher education. Increasing private investments in higher education can produce greater benefits, including enhanced access to higher education and improvement in quality, with the increased competition in a leveled playing field. But there is hardly any incentive in this Bill for genuine foreign universities to set up campuses in India. The big question is why a foreign university should use its own resources and capabilities to solve India's problem of higher education. What will they get in return? In order to enter, universities need to invest in at least 51 per cent of the total capital expenditure needed to establish the campus. Getting a suitable, accredited Indian partner who is really not interested in profit for remaining 49 per cent investment will be difficult for an accredited foreign university.

The university has to go through an elaborate three-level registration process and will be granted deemed university status under Section 3 of the Universities Grants Commission Act, 1956. According to the proposed bill universities will not be able to appoint vice-chancellors (VCs) on their own. It will be the prerogative of the National council of higher education and research to appoint VCs of all universities in India. Therefore, despite having a majority stake, foreign universities will not be able to appoint VCs on their own. Higher education in India has always been over-regulated and under-governed. Moreover, well-established accredited foreign universities/institutions may not like the status of a deemed university in India and may consider off-shore campus in India as a dilution of quality and something that can lower their brand image. Hence, most foreign universities will continue to explore collaborations/ partnerships with Indian educational institutions rather than setting up campuses in India.

6. Comparison between United States and India

The finances of these private enterprises seem to be free to raise and deploy resources to meet their own norms. Private universities elsewhere, for instance in United States mobilise the resources of about 30 to 40 per cent of the recurring cost of education from students. Remaining 60 to 70 per cent of the recurring costs are generated from endowments, alumni and other sources (Ziderman and Albatch, 1995). On the contrary, fee in these private enterprises in India are exorbitant as they fully depend upon student payments. Indeed, these institutions make huge profits; sometimes recover more than their recurring costs (full of recurring cost plus part of the capital cost). Such institutions survive as long as there is a demand for their services and the students are willing to pay for such job directed training.

It is important to note that in the United States drive for efficiency and profits are categorically powerful among the private higher education providers. In developing countries like India, it is only the profit, which thrives these institutions and efficiency is jeopardised. Further, the important dimensions of complementarity and competition found in the private higher education sector in United States boosts the growth and survival of both the public and private higher institutions, which is conspicuously absent in India.

7. Corruption in higher education

Taking dentistry as an example, India is having around 300 dental schools, which makes approximately about one third of the dental school present worldwide. Annually around 20,000 dentists are graduating every year in India. Also roughly 5000 specialists pass out each year (Singh, 2010). Mushrooming of dental schools has led to a flood of dental graduates with poor job prospects. Dental graduates are exploited and average salary of a dentist in private sector is around Rs 4000 pm, (approx. $100). Government salaries in comparison are better but the job opportunities are few. Many fresh dental graduates are hanging up their white coats and opting for better-paying jobs. Even those are not easy to come by. When they do, it is to work as tutors, medical transcriptionists and in health insurance agencies (Singh, 2011).

Numerous dental colleges are running in India, lacking the basic requirements. Colleges are in such a bad condition that patients are being referred to dental clinics from dental schools due to lack of basic equipments and materials. Many schools have acute shortage of both teaching and non teaching staff. There are many such schools running throughout the country (Singh and Purohit, 2010). This is one of the many examples of mess up in higher education due to corruption in India. A minimum criterion has been set for by the various councils for the consent to start schools and colleges. Colleges not fulfilling the minimum criteria are given permission along with a compliance letter, which rarely gets rectified. The point is if even the minimum criteria is not met then why a compliance? If in some cases the compliances are met, even then, is it a virtue to run centers of higher education on a minimal requirement or do we need to amend such policies in order to prop up the fallen standard of higher education.

Similar mushrooming and practices have been noted in engineering, medical, nursing and management disciplines. Faculties in many private institutions during inspections are compelled to sign on an affidavit that they are being paid as per UGC scale; although they are not even paid half of what is recommended by the government. Why did the government give permission to so many schools at first instance? Under what influence does the government grant permission to such schools is contentious. There has to be a personal intent with motives other than to impart quality higher education. Health care professionals are working in call centers, working in private institutions for measly salaries of less than 100 dollars a month. Who is answerable to those professionals; to the parents who have spent a life time's saving for their children's higher education? Does the government have intent to accommodate these many professionals? If not then surely the government of the country has many difficult questions to answer. The foremost being why the government allowed these students to be exploited by private institutions. What was the Ministry of Human Resource and Development doing? Did they plan for such sad, feeble and pitiable standard of higher education for Indian students and do they plan to achieve the 30 per cent gross enrollment ratio by 2020 in a similar fashion?

8. Yashpal Committee report on Indian higher education (2009)

The committee in their report to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, suggested the scrapping of all higher education regulatory/monitoring bodies and creation of a super regulator: a seven-member Commission for Higher Education and Research (CHER). The committee in its final report, submitted to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) recommended that the deemed university status be abandoned and that all deserving deemed varsities be either converted full-fledged universities or scrapped and a GRE like test be evolved for university education. The committee said a plethora of regulatory bodies like UGC, AICTE, NCTE et al be replaced by a seven-member Commission for Higher Education and Research (CHER) under an Act of Parliament. It has also recommended, to buffer the new regulator against political pressures, that the position of chairperson of the proposed commission be analogous to that of election commissioners.

It said that the jurisdiction of other regulators like Medical and Dental Council of India, Bar Council of India and others be confined to administrative matters, with universities taking up their academic responsibilities. Expressing concern on the mushrooming of engineering and management colleges, that had "largely become business entities dispensing very poor quality education", Yashpal committee lamented the growth of deemed universities and called for a complete ban on further grant of such status. Existing ones, the committee said, should be given three years to develop as a university and fulfill the prescribed accreditation norms.

Raising doubts about the source of funding of private education providers, the committee said

mostly it was either "unaccounted wealth from business and political enterprises or from capitation fees". It said the system of conferring academic designations as chancellors and vice-chancellors to members of the promoter's family should be done away with. They should submit to a national accreditation system. However, the committee underlined the need for private investment in higher education.

9. Quality assurance in higher education

In an environment of global competitiveness it is important that Indian products of the higher education institutions are as competent as graduates of any other country, not only in their scholastic attainments, but also in terms of the value system and richness of their personality. Unless the quality and standard of Indian higher education institutions is enhanced zealously and sustained at a high level through innovation, creativity and regular monitoring, it seems to be difficult for the Indian academics/professionals to compete in the World scene (University Grants Commission, 2003). This calls for suitable corruption free assessment and accreditation mechanisms to be available in the country to ensure the quality and standard of the academic/training programmes at higher educational institutions. The assessment has to be continuous and the process has to be transparent to gain the acceptance of the society at large.

9.1. Sustaining quality

Quality has both absolute and relative connotations. The concept of absoluteness in quality props up the morale of the higher education system both at the delivery end i.e. institutional, and at the receiving end i.e. students. Quality dimensions seem to have two implications, i.e., functionality of the output and meeting the basic standards. Hence, the quality of a higher education system may be seen from the point of view of norms and standards, which may evolve depending on the need of the hour. In the 21st century, it is crucial to identify the relative norms for different components of a higher education system. Sharing of the experiences among institutions on quality issues may generate ideas for evolving norms and strategies for their quality assurance of management processes, curricular inputs and practices and the evaluation system as well. Of late, various developments have been witnessed relating to quality assurance mainly through the intervention of information and communications technologies (ICT) in education, like networking of the open learning system with traditional Universities, interdisciplinary interactions at intra-institutional and inter-institutional levels, networking of institutions globally, data based management of higher education, changing the orientation of institutions by incorporating self financing in their financial management, assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and creation of different statutory and regulatory bodies at the national level (University Grants Commission, 2003).

The experience of World Bank (1994) suggest that if public institutions are to achieve higher quality and greater efficiency, governments will need to implement sweeping reforms in higher education financing in mobilising private financing for public higher education and fostering efficiency in allocating and utilising resources among and within public institutions. Good faculty is a must for any higher education institution aspiring for quality. It is high time that an Indian Higher Educational Service, along the lines of the Indian Administrative Services (IAS), is formed. This will have the advantage of quality control of the teaching faculty for higher education. A new human resource development policy shall be evolved to facilitate this.

9.2. Assessment and accreditation

The government for its own personal reasons blame the Indian elite and middle classes for not having cared for making education, what to say of higher education, accessible to the other sections of society. The government argues that beneficiaries of privileged access to institutions of higher learning are ever ready to persuade others to believe that the Indian education system has expanded beyond reasonable limits. Government maintains that the system needs to be expanded to a much greater scale to serve the needs of the Indian youth. Majority of these students with higher education from private colleges have no job or get salaries below $100 a month; they feel cheated by the management of colleges and the government. The government is further inclined towards deteriorating even more the already bad conditions. For various reasons the government is acting as beneficiaries towards the management running those schools.

Few institutions of higher education in the country are excellent in the sense that their infrastructure, resources, faculty, programmes of teaching and research are almost as good as the best in the advanced countries. But, the same cannot be said for majority of the institutions of higher education in the country. They do not come anywhere near the level of average institutions of higher education in the advanced countries. This vast gap in standards and facilities has been a cause of constant anxiety and concern to the policy planners of higher education in India.

The issue of accessibility to quality higher education needs to be addressed in the light of the vast economic and social disparities, cultural and linguistic diversities, and the most important being the job opportunity after higher education together with the aspirations and capacities of the potential students. Therefore, the question of access to higher education needs to be addressed at the local, regional, national and international levels from trans-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary and discipline-specific perspectives. The issue of accessibility of quality higher education arises in the context of the transition in the country from elitist to mass education in the post-independence period. The government first needs to assure that students who take higher education get jobs with respectable salaries. What is the use of professionals with higher education working in call centers or changing profession? The issue has significant implications in the sense that it demands a redefinition of the aims of higher education. Accessibility and quality up gradation are inseparable dimensions of higher education. Over-emphasis on one at the cost of the other would be counterproductive. India being a country of the sub-continental size with a population above 1 billion, the quantitative expansion of education (i.e. accessibility dimension) is of paramount importance to mitigate disparities across regions, gender and social strata in the field of education. This should be given due consideration.

Along with the necessary and inevitable quantitative expansion of higher education, it is equally important to improve the quality of higher education. Institutions of higher education would find it difficult to meet the challenges of globalization of higher education if one fails on this front. Emphasis on quality parameters becomes all the more necessary in the light of mushrooming of private institutions with the opening up of the Indian economy. Setting up of National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has sent the right and positive signals for generating and promoting awareness of the urgent need of quality up gradation of colleges and universities. The need is to identify effective ways and strategies to expedite the completion of assessment and accreditation in a corruption free environment within a stipulated time frame. The government also needs to establish a team to ascertain the salaries of professionals in private institutions; also to make it a point that they get paid at University Grants Commission Scale and are not exploited due to abundance in the labour market.

Quality upgradation is not a onetime phenomenon. Quest for excellence is a continuous and perennial pursuit. In view of this, post- accreditation complacency must be arrested by evolving quality assurance mechanism for self-regulation. The setting up of an Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC), is one such mechanism. The IQAC comprising the Chief Executive, senior academics and officers of the institution should work as a steering group. The Cell may constitute two quality groups, one for academic excellence and another for administrative efficiency. These groups may design strategies for quality enhancement for consideration and implementation by IQAC (UGC ,2003).

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) could also inform the institutions as to where they stand in terms of the standards of excellence from a global perspective. At present National Assessment and Accreditation Council is assessing and accrediting universities and colleges. This may not truly reflect the programmes/activities at the departmental level. With a view to encourage this, National Assessment and Accreditation Council could move a step further by starting the practice of assessing and accrediting teaching and research departments within universities/colleges. Multiple bodies have been undertaking assessment and accreditation of universities and colleges. It is recommended that an institutional effort should be made to coordinate the activities of these bodies so that in togetherness they can address the issues of higher education in a broader societal perspective. Quality of higher education can also be improved by inducting quality oriented objectivity in merit promotions of teaching faculty. Specification of weightages for teaching and research publications would help in making this transparent and credible. The shifting from traditional incremental budgeting to performance based one is now necessary to arrest the erosion in

quality inspite of the resource crunch.

10. Conclusion

It is well recognized that for a bright future country needs to strengthen its higher education roots first. The central and state governments of India need to try to come out with policies and regulations that can bring effective and timely changes in this sector and enhance its reputation on the global platform. There is the need for a clear vision. Policy makers have to introspect the state of affairs of higher education critically. Proponents of privatisation overlook the fact that even in the United States, the mainstay of the educational system is the state universities. The maladies and deficiencies in India's higher education system need urgently to be addressed by making it more professional and creative and less bureaucratic and political. The level of corruption in higher education in India has assumed a demonic size and needs to be checked; else we will have the world largest number of unskilled, untrained and unpaid professionals. A team to ascertain the salaries of professionals in private institutions needs to be established; also to make it a point that they get paid at a scale set by University Grants Commission. If India wants to be a major player in the emerging knowledge-based economies, then it will have to go in for a major overhaul of its higher education system. It is to be realized that higher education is no longer a luxury and a corruption free education system it is essential to national, social and economic development. As Plato had said, if the state ignores education it does not matter what else it does.

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