

## Chapter- II

### STRATEGIC VISION AND NEEDED POLICY INITIATIVES

Never before in the post-Independence development history of India, the crucial role of education in general, and higher education in particular, was so well recognized, and so widely accepted, by policy makers, public analysts and development administrators, as during the past decade or so. A near-consensus now operates that India has to take a quantum jump in the field of higher and technical education if it has indeed to emerge, and stay on, as a countable entity in the world social, political and economic circuits. The domestic compulsions for expanding and improving the higher education sector are no less formidable. Having learnt of its huge human capital deficits, with all their ramifications of inter-regional, rural-urban and male-female differentials, accumulated through the long-chain of lop-sided policy dispensations spread over the preceding four-five decades, the Indian society is now highly awakened to the limited play that primary or secondary education can lend to its populace in general, and economic functionaries in particular. The heightened emphasis on higher education is, therefore, both essential and timely.

The strategic vision envisages a mingle of quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement. Undoubtedly, among the developing economies, India's record of expansion of higher education, during the post-war decades, is a matter of pride for all of us. For example, at the time of independence, the number of universities was no more than 20, of colleges around 500, the number of university and college teachers was only 15000, and the total enrolment was less than 1.0 lakh. By the end of the Tenth Plan, the Indian higher education system had grown into one of the largest in the world with no fewer than 378 universities, 18064 colleges, a faculty strength of 4.92 lakh, and an estimated enrolment of as many as 140 lakh students (Govt. of India, 2008b: 21-22).

Despite the impressive expansion of the number of institutions, faculty and students, access to higher education, measured in terms of gross enrolment ratio (GER), could not go beyond 11.00 per cent, as late as 2004-05. India's ratio is very low compared with the world average of 23.2 per cent, 36.5 per cent for countries in transition, 54.6 per cent for the developed countries, and 22.0 per cent for Asian countries (*ibid*: 22). The disappointingly low average level of GER looks all the more depressing if we take cognizance of rural-urban, male-female, and social-group differentials, besides the inter-regional digital divides. For example, in 2004-05, the GER was a mere 6.70 in rural against 19.90 for urban India; it was 9.10 for females against 12.40 for males; it was only 6.57 for Scheduled Castes, 6.52 for Scheduled Tribes and 8.77 for Other Backward Classes, and so on ( *ibid*: 22). The rural females are the most disadvantaged category. As regards inter-regional disparities, in 2002-03, Nagaland and Jammu-Kashmir languished at the tail-end with a GER of around 5.0, Tripura

and Arunchal Pradesh with a GER of 6.0, and Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh with a GER of 7.0-8.0 (Anandakrishnan, 2008:7).

It is indeed despairing to see that a preponderant majority of the **eligible** Indian youth (most markedly, those in age-group 18-23 years) do not go to a college or a university. Thanks to the demographic transition that India has witnessed in recent decades, India has the potential of a demographic dividend with about 70.0 per cent of its population being below the age of 35 years. But a mere counting of heads will not lend an effective, *de facto* demographic advantage unless the Indian youth gains, on a massive scale, access to higher, technical and professional education; in plain terms, it is not the numbers but the human-capital endowment of the youth that makes the core of demographic dividend in today's context of globalization, competition and free economic dispensations. It is, therefore, in tune with the requirements of the changing domestic and international economic scenarios that massive expansion and substantial improvement of higher and technical education form the strategic core of India's future development policy. Happily, by enhancing public spending, encouraging private initiatives, and initiating the long overdue major institutional and policy reforms, the Eleventh Plan is summarily a plan for higher education expansion. "Our long-term goal is to set India as a nation in which all those who aspire good quality higher education can access it, irrespective of their paying capacity" is what the Eleventh Plan promises ( Govt. of India, 2008b:22).

India aims to increase the GER to 21.0 per cent by the end of the Twelfth Plan, with an interim target of 15.0 per cent by the end of the Eleventh Plan. To achieve this, the enrolments in universities and colleges need to be substantially raised, say, at an annual rate of 9.0 per cent to reach 21 million by 2011-12. This requires an additional enrolment of 8.7 lakh students in universities and 61.3 lakh in colleges. The envisaged quantitative expansion in enrolment is proposed to be achieved through: expansion of existing institutions, both government and private; creation of new government funded universities and colleges; facilitating/removing barriers in creation of new universities and colleges; special programmes for targeted expansion of central universities; enhanced support to state universities and colleges, and so on ( Govt. of India, 2008b: 26). In numerical terms, the Eleventh Plan sets a gigantic task for the nation, namely, to:

- (i) set up 30 new central universities, 16 in uncovered states and 14 world class universities;
- (ii) set up 8 new IITs, 20 NITs, 20 IIITs, 3 IISERs, 7 IIMs and 2 SPAs;
- (iii) create new state funded universities and colleges, notably 370 colleges in districts with less than average GER, so as to have at least one college in each district;

- (iv) capacity expansion in the existing institutions, both government and private (Bhushan, 2008: 28).

In terms of the Central Government's commitment on the funding side, the Eleventh Plan marks a decisive break from the past. For example, the central allocation for education marks a more than four-fold increase, from Rs. 62461 crores in the Tenth Plan to 274228 crores during the Eleventh Plan. As a percentage of total central plan allocation, education's share would increase from 7.68 per cent during the Tenth to 19.29 per cent during the Eleventh Plan. Such a quantum jump is not at all discernible for any other sector. Even the priority sector of rural development and panchayati raj, so inextricably linked with rural poverty alleviation and other Millennium Development Goals would witness a meek increase in its share of plan funds from 10.70 per cent to 13.39 per cent (Govt. of India, 2008a: 45).

In plain terms, India now seems to be pledging to itself a super-high priority for education expansion and improvement, possibly because this is the only way to convert the *de jure* demographic dividend into its *de facto* counterpart, and possibly because the relative neglect that education has suffered in recent years, most ostensibly in terms of priority visioning and resource allocation, needs to be rectified, without loss of time. It is plainly disturbing to see a decline of nearly 21.0 per cent in per student real (1993-94 prices) public expenditure, on higher and technical education, from Rs. 8961 in 1993-94 to Rs. 7117 in 2003-04 (UGC, 2008: 24). It let loose into the Indian society, and economy, many disturbing trends which could not be overlooked from the point of view of India's own economic, social and political standing in the changing world order. It seems, the present team of policy makers have a clear vision of these human deficiencies and are aware of the future human capital needs of our economy. Accordingly, the heightened emphasis on education in general, and higher education in particular, during the Eleventh Plan, is, therefore, a laudable step to ensure India's noticeable presence in world's 'qualified' workforce, technological breakthroughs and productivity gains.

An essential off-shoot of the Eleventh Plan's heightened emphasis on higher education is that the number of colleges and universities would increase, besides expanding the intake capacity in the existing institutions. Responding to the changing needs of our growing economy, especially the education-intensive and globally-linked segments of the Indian labour market, many new and specialized institutions, as also a number of new courses and areas of studies, would have to be instituted. Linked with all these on-going and anticipated developments is the tremendous increase in the number of college and university-level teachers, and other associated personnel, that would be needed to support these initiatives. It is here that the Indian society faces a real dilemma. The dilemma needs to be unfolded a bit.

Ever since the Indian economy opened its door to the world outside, since the beginning of the 1990s, the weaknesses of the Indian educational system, on the one hand, and distorted reward pattern of the Indian labour market, on the other, started revealing themselves in a rather blatant manner. On a broad plain, the dichotomy in the Indian labour market became apparent, and got intensified as we moved deeper into the post-reform more-intensive market-led phase of our development history. A sizeable chunk of highly educated and professionally job-seekers, hailing very largely from the urban areas, started progressively becoming a part of the corporate sector, whether as recruits of the international labour market or the highly lucrative segment of the domestic market. It is this segment of the educated youth who was best qualified to man the faculty positions in universities and colleges, but, under the expanding influence of global market milieu, the jingle of the corporate sector was too enticing for those brilliant and qualified young men and women to think of making teaching as a career. The corporate sector could simply 'buy them' away, primarily because the monetary rewards, the service conditions, and the career prospects, offered by the higher education sector, most ostensibly by a number of states and institutions, looked 'too meagre' or 'too unappealing'. Faculty shortages, in universities and colleges, became a routine. In some disciplines, qualified people are just not available because the alternatives in the corporate sector, or public sector administrative jobs, are too appealing to them, from the point of view of both short as well as long-run career prospects.

These developments worked as a two-edged weapon. The number of qualified persons opting for teaching jobs went on declining, on year to year basis, and the institutions had somehow to make do with the second-best persons, or second-best methods of organizing teaching and instructions (Overdorf, 2008: 48). According to a survey of the universities and colleges, conducted, during April-July 2008, by the Pay Review Committee itself, 44.63 per cent of the sanctioned positions of lecturers at the university-level, 41.0 per cent of those at the college-level, were found to be vacant ( see Chapter 2 of this Report). The institution of part-time, ad hoc or contract teachers started proliferating and this added further to the damage. The quality of teaching undoubtedly suffered. Who is to blame for this on-going crushing faculty shortage can be a matter of public debate which has to wait for another occasion!

The Pay Review Committee is pretty sure that faculty shortage should not become the Achilles' Heel of the Indian educational system (hopefully, it has not already become so!). In our view, the situation can be improved, if not completely remedied in the short-run, by doing what we failed to do in the recent past. The most urgent pre-requisite is to restore the place that is due to education, and, perhaps more importantly, to show respect to those who are, or those who could be persuaded to become, the vanguard of the sector. Many initiatives, in varying form and content, need to be launched at many ends, to ensure that the vastly increased allocation of funds for the higher education sector, during the Eleventh Plan, serves its intended purpose. To put it most bluntly, more money for

education would not make such a difference if the people who have to administer the educational plans and programmes are not the right choices, or they do not put their heart into the 'lofty national plans'.

First, intensive efforts need to be made to attract more and more of bright and qualified young men and women to college and university jobs. The entry point incentives must be substantially improved. Perhaps, it would be presumptuous to say that the pay packet for a prospective college or university lecture should be at par with that available to young business executives, yet, the minimum that the society should do is make them feel assured that a career in teaching is 'not that bad' after all. Surely, it is in the interest of the economy, and the society, that the education sector is rid of the barrenness that it has got enmeshed into, in the recent past.

Second, improvement in service conditions must become immediately discernible to a new job entrant. Better working and living conditions, career advancement prospects, post-retirement view of life, etc., must become a hallmark of our faculty recruitment policy.

Third, for a number of reasons set out elsewhere in the report, the span of working career has to increase sizably. It reflects poorly on India's federal democratic polity that the age of retirement differs starkly among the states, among the type of institutions, and between the public and private institutions. Since the highly ambitious expansion plans would need many-fold expansion of faculty positions which the Indian educational system is not able to meet in the immediate future, we must retain 'mature teachers' who are close to the end of their working career just as fierce persuasions and 'more appealing' packages are to be offered to prospective teachers at the entry point.

Fourth, all concerned parties have to play their role in a self-persuasive and self-disciplining mode. The Central government must provide for more funds for education in general, and higher education in particular, which, it seems, is on the cards. The state governments must play their role most decisively and most comprehensively. A careful perusal of state finances projects a cheering view on the carrying capacity of the states for pay revision. It shows that the states are now in a much better position to carry out the pay revision than a decade ago, most ostensibly, because their finances are in a much better health and are in the upward phase of the cycle when generating additional revenues is much easier than when they are in a trough. Our plea is that there must be a corresponding realization on the part of states that, in this age and time, perhaps more so for the coming times, a lackadaisical approach to the development of higher education sector would keep them away from their dreams of growth acceleration, economic modernization, higher earnings and mitigation of inter-state disparities. Perhaps, the time has arrived for states to compete with one another for strengthening their higher education base and not miss the remarkable socio-economic opportunities that an expanding higher education sector, especially in qualitative terms, can bring forth to their populace. In our

view, no state can afford to miss such opportunities, and inflict upon itself a backseat in digital accomplishments and knowledge economy? The democratic compulsions would simply not permit it even to think so despairingly!

The institutions, whether a university or a college, have to play their cards equally well. The recruitment drive must proceed apace; the needed flexibilities for hunting more, and more qualified, hands must be exercised in the interest of the institution. Finally, the teacher must also play her/his role with full commitment, responsibility and transparency. If strong arguments are forthcoming to 'bestow' social respect and monetary incentives/rewards on teachers in a university or a college, equally convincing are the arguments for them to fulfill their social responsibility or vindicate the trust put on them. The teachers are also under obligation to deliver more, and better, firstly to justify what the PRC believes must go to them, in the form of better pay packages and other incentives, and secondly to take India's higher education to high standards.

So far, we have not touched upon the **qualitative aspects of higher education** in India, and how are the teachers in universities and colleges to improve the situation. This, indeed, opens the Pandora's box. And, without doubt, for a number of reasons, this is believed to be our Achilles' Heel. There are numerous ways to count the quality gaps at the university and college levels which we cannot do in this report. Nevertheless, some sketchy evidences are available to show that the house of higher education is not in good shape, at the moment. For example, in 2006, not more than 10.0 per cent of the colleges accredited by the NAAC were characterized as A-grade institutions; as many as 66.0 per cent of them were B-grade and no fewer than 24.0 per cent were C-grade colleges. Likewise, only 32.0 per cent of the accredited universities earned an A-grade, 52.0 per cent fell in B-grade category and 16.0 per cent were characterized as C-grade institutions (UGC, 2008: 8). Further, substantial gaps, notably in terms of the number of departments per university, number of faculty members with Ph.D., number of books in the library, proportion of the sanctioned faculty positions duly filled up, were discovered for universities. Similarly, at the college level, student:teacher ratio, total number of teachers per college, proportion of teachers without M.Phil/Ph.D., number of books per college, number of students per computer, etc., showed varying degree of quality gaps. Outdated courses, inadequacies of teaching and research facilities, most markedly the crumbling infrastructure, lack of interaction with industry and the 'outside society', absenteeism among teachers, obsolete teaching and examination methods, etc., are other operational infirmities. To cap all other lacunae comes the fly-by-night proliferation of colleges, and in some cases, universities as well. The most festering outcome of all these weaknesses is that we are producing more and more of unemployable graduates. How seriously does it impair the supply side of the university or college faculty market needs hardly to be emphasized. Faculty shortage is what we have ourselves built into our educational policies and unappreciative educational system.

The Pay Review Committee feels that some hope deserves to be pinned on the existing lot of, as also the would-be, teachers to pull higher education out of the rut that is proverbially associated with the resource crunch, on the one hand, and the lackadaisical functioning of the system, on the other. Going by the on-going appreciative and enlightened approach of the top policy makers in India, ostensibly reflected by the steep hike in plan resources earmarked for education during the Eleventh Plan, we are tempted to believe that resource crunch should not be a serious problem. But then, more money does not necessarily mean more and better quality education. For improving the quality of our education, especially the college and university level education, many corrective measures have to be undertaken, again, at all levels, beginning with the central government at one extreme end, and individual teachers, at the other end.

Quality of teaching must improve. Quality of teaching is inextricably linked with the quality of teachers, which, in turn, depends on the physical, economic and social environment under which our teachers have to work. The PRC is well informed about infrastructural deficiencies, especially for the teaching of science courses, for a vast majority of our higher educational institutions, most notoriously the colleges located in the rural areas, and those being owned and managed by profit-led private institutions. The proliferation of shoddy fly-by-night colleges is a proverbial fetter on our educational map. Outdated courses and archaic teaching methods are still in vogue, in a large segment of higher educational institutions. The crushing faculty shortage, at least partially due to the questionable policy of keeping faculty positions unfilled, adds its own share to the quality of teaching.

There is pretty much to be done to improve the quality of research in universities and colleges, essentially because the quality of teaching is inextricably linked with the intensity and quality of research. The PRC is aware of the general state of neglect of research, particularly in colleges, more particularly in rural colleges, most ostensibly because of shortage of resources, research infrastructure, and most importantly, the shortage of faculty qualified to do and guide research, leaving aside the heavy workload that many teachers in colleges (and universities) have to bear due to faculty shortage. Nonetheless, it needs also to be borne in mind that the potential research capabilities must be brought to the point of fruition by providing adequate support, incentives and recognition. The PRC ventures to give some suggestions in this regard.

The quality of teaching, and of teachers, depends on many other factors as well. Financial support and enabling rules to facilitate faculty participation in seminars, both national and international, and faculty exchange programmes, launching of joint academic endeavours, encouragement for course restructuring and improved teaching methods, creating inter-departmental or inter-discipline interactions, student-faculty exchanges and rapports, etc., are some of the steps that need to be fostered at the institutional level. Exposure of teachers to fresh

literature, venturing into more and deeper research fields, new and more effective teaching methods, research guidance in a more interactive fashion, undertaking of research projects, writing of books and papers on topical issues, collaborating with fellow researchers in other institutions, etc. are the steps which can be thought of at the level of individual teacher-researchers.

One of the glaring weaknesses that came to our notice was the negligible incidence of teachers' mobility. Apart from numerous other advantages that accrue to teachers who move from, say, a college to a university, or, from a private un-aided college to a government college, or, from a state university to a central university, is that their teaching and research capabilities get more meaningfully utilized. But then, this is an area in which the initiative of the prospective transferee needs to be adequately buttressed by supportive institutional rules and procedure. At present, inter-institutional mobility, *albeit* on an extremely limited scale, is largely confined to young Lecturers, and to a lesser degree, Readers. Professors generally do not move out. This deadlock needs to be broken.

To conclude, higher education in India holds tremendous promise for the future growth of our society, democratic polity and economy, just as it poses formidable challenges to increase access of the populace to this crucial input of socio-economic development. In our federal democratic system, where higher education is on the concurrent list, both the centre and the state governments have their respective domain of responsibilities. At this crucial juncture of our socio-economic development, and the ever-increasing future demand of educated and qualified manpower, the state governments have a more binding role set for themselves. Time is certainly on their side if they take the stakes seriously; education in general, and higher education in particular, deserve more of their commitment, attention, and resources. We believe, they have to care for their civil servants but our pleading is that they must care more for the producers of civil servants. Undoubtedly, the payoffs for investing more in teachers are much higher. We also plead with academic institutions, as much with colleges as with universities, that a more humane, insightful, appreciative and supportive working atmosphere should be developed, under open, transparent and democratic functioning environment. Everything does not necessarily come through government rules or official circulars. The vision and discretion of the institutional heads also matter, often substantially. Lastly, we plead with our college and university teachers that they must play their role in a way that brings them support and respect of the society. They need no more to operate in a one-sided fashion. Let them offer themselves to a healthy social scrutiny. Let them learn to question themselves, criticize themselves, and improve themselves. In the open society, and competitive global economy, that we have to live with in the future, performance of teachers would matter far more heavily than ever before. And, performance evaluation on a continuing basis should be happily accepted as a part of their work and work culture.

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