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Participation of Private Universities in India in Promoting Higher Education in the Liberalized Era

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Abstract – The aspect of the private universities is that they are generally prone to be compared with good government universities, while many of them are unfortunately functioning at low standards. Recently, some private educational institutions in India have been investing significant amount of funds in courses which are of contemporary significance. Many of those managing such educational institutions are retired teachers from government institutions, who are making sincere efforts in building up these institutions.

Keyword: Private Universities, Higher Education, College, Quality Education

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INTRODUCTION

Private universities in India are often treated with suspicion for providing poor quality education and being most focused on making money. While this may be true in some cases, they are playing a significant role in fulfilling our country's growing demand for quality higher education. Sixty per cent of college-going students in the country today are enrolled in private institutions.

Rapidly increasing demand for higher education in India is part of a global trend with worldwide enrolment expected to rise from 100 million in 2000 to 260 million in 2025. Many countries are encouraging private institutions as a viable way to ensure that students are offered this opportunity. For example, Brazil recognized that the public sector cannot meet its youth's demand and therefore encouraged and supported private education.

Currently, over 75% of Brazilian students go to private institutions and the largest higher education firm, Kroton, has over a million students.

Similarly, developed countries such as Japan and Korea have over 70% students enrolled in private universities, while developing countries such as Malaysia have over 50%. China invested in top private universities through Project 985 to build a few world-class universities, but is struggling to provide education for students at the base of the pyramid. Recognizing this gap, China has also enacted a Law for Facilitation of Private Education in 2002. This led to the number of higher education institutions doubling and enrolment increasing five-fold over the past decade.

REVIEW OF LITERATURES:

India has a long history of private institutions subsequently getting attached to the state17. Reliance on state for resources has almost doubled, i.e., from 49 percent in the beginning of the fifth decade to about 84 percent in the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century. On the other hand, the contribution of non-state funding resources has declined drastically.

The structural adjustment policies, which envisaged macroeconomic stabilization and adjustment, led to a reduction in public expenditures and the introduction of cost recovery measures, accompanied by policy measures toward the ‘direct privatization of higher education’. The new economic reforms and the policy of government is currently encouraging augmentation of resources, exacerbating cost recovery on a larger scale. The fear expressed by many economists/educationalists is that with privatization, the justification for government funding would be hit hard but this statement can be considered too early.

Powar (2002) emphasizes that ‘in a WTO controlled regime, there is a real danger of the universities in the developing world being swamped by overseas institutions intent on earning a profit but not concerned about contributing to national development’. The supposed ‘flexibility’ and

concessions provided by the WTO to developing countries are reduced in impact by creating a context in which 'more powerful economies persuade weaker countries to adopt particular trade agendas that are less development friendly'. These reconfigured neoliberal underpinnings show the traditional effects of the ideology by assessing the moral worth of individuals, programs, countries, and education by a particular definition of economic success.

Baruch (2004) has described the academic profession as the key profession of the twenty first century. The challenging roles of academics, in teaching, research and administration work are concerns that the academics need to take into serious consideration. The management in the IHLs is confronted with a variety of challenges. This is supported by Altbach (2005) who argues that academic challenges are very complex. The challenges include changes in the environment, manpower and expertise need, new policy development, technology creation, and research and development emphasis, establishment of new IHLs including the private ones. Therefore those changes and challenges have certainly impacted the academics' career advancement in the private IHLs.

Scherrer, C. (2005) highlights the concern that the ethos of progressive liberalization will steer education toward ends that are not yet foreseeable. Organizations like the OECD, the World Bank, and the WTO are forcefully espousing a neoliberal constitutionalist agenda to liberalize education. Altbach (2001) argues that 'the overriding goal of GATS and the WTO is to guarantee market access to educational products and institutions of all kinds'. While there is no evidence concerning how countries who refuse to commit education as a service will be impacted, the WTO is explicit about liberalizing trade. Countries that have and will commit their education services to GATS are subject to legally binding regulations and complex arrangements.

Bloom et al. (2005) confirm the findings of Tilak (2003) that one possible channel through which higher education can enhance economic development in poor/developing countries is through technological catch-up. In knowledge economy, tertiary education can help economies gain ground on more technologically advanced societies, as graduates are likely to be more aware of and better able to use new technologies.

Wood's (2006) study was on middle managers' career advancement in Australia. Subsequent studies include perception on the teaching profession by Leatherman (2000), academic women's career advancement, academic freedom, strategic career development for R & D staffs, personal, role and organizational variables and promotion to managerial positions in the Israeli education system, intention to leave the profession as academic, career aspiration of R&D professionals in Malaysia, and faculty career strategies preferred by university administrators and faculty. Despite the vastly available literature on academics, there is precious little explanation on factors influencing the career advancement of academics, especially those in private IHLs.

Private sector key to growth of Indian higher education:

The role of the private sector in Indian higher education has increased significantly over the last decade, with majority students currently enrolled in private institutions. This role will only increase considering the substantial investments required in the sector.

The Indian higher education system has emerged as one of the largest in the world, with 14.6 million students enrolled in more than 31,000 institutions. Over the past decade, the number of universities in the country has increased at a CAGR of 7.5% (from 272 to 556) while the number of colleges has grown at a CAGR of 11% (from 11,146 to 31,324).

However, Indian higher education continues to suffer from three fundamental challenges: access, equity and quality. We explore them briefly:

Access: While India's higher education system is the world's third largest in terms of enrollment, next only to China and the USA, its GER-currently at 13.8%-significantly lags the world average at 26%.

Equity: There is wide disparity in GERs across states, urban and rural areas, gender, and communities:

- **Inter-state disparity**: 31.9% in Delhi vs. 8.3% in Assam
- **Urban-rural divide**: 23.8% in urban areas vs. 7.5% in rural areas
- **Gender disparity**: 10.6% for female vs.14.4% for male
- **Differences across communities**: 6.6% for SCs, 6.5% for STs, 8.7% for OBCs, and 17.2% for others

Quality:

- **Faculty shortage**: 45% of the positions for professors, 51% positions for readers, and 53% positions for lecturers were vacant in Indian universities in 2007-08.
- **Deficient physical infrastructure**: 48% of universities and 69% of colleges have infrastructure deficiencies.
- **Poor academic standards**: The system is plagued with outdated curricula and ill-equipped libraries (average 9 books per student vs. 53 in IIT Bombay).

- **Unaccredited institutions**: As of March 2011, only 161 universities and 4,371 colleges had been accredited by the NAAC.

The government has also shown its commitment to improve quality and transparency in the Indian higher education system by introducing various bills:

- National Council for Higher Education and Research Bill, 2010
- The National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010
- Prohibition of Unfair Practices in Technical, Medical Educational Institutions and Universities Bill, 2010
- Foreign Educational Institutions Bill, 2010
- The Educational Tribunal Bill, 2010

CONCLUSION:

The government should move beyond being the primary service provider in education and play a catalyzing role in improving quality of higher education in India. It can do so by tightening licensing standards and improving quality assurance, without impinging on the autonomy of private institutes. The government must invest in a regulatory architecture that can improve the standards of all institutions, public and private, dramatically. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council should be strengthened and the rating framework of institutes should shift focus from infrastructure and inputs to student learning outcomes.

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