

Privatization of Higher Education in India and Social Justice:A Critical Analysis

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I. Introduction

Structure of Higher Education in India:

Over the last 68 Years, the Government of India has provided full policy support and substantial public funds to create one of the world's largest systems of higher education. These institutions with the exception of some notable ones, have however, not been able to maintain the high standards of education or keep pace with developments of the time. In the fields of science and technology, India has however built-up the largest stock of scientists, engineers and technicians. In India both public and private institutions operate simultaneously. Since grant-in-aid to private colleges is becoming difficult many government/universities have granted recognition / affiliation to unaided colleges and many universities have authorized new 'self-financing' courses even in government and aided colleges. More than 50 percent of the higher education in India is imparted through private institutions, mostly unaided.

Higher education is imparted in India at various levels and types of formal education institutions, which can be classified are as follows:

- a) institutions recognised as "deemed to be universities" that specialise in one major area, rather than being multi- faculty unversities of general types;
- b) Institutions recognised as of national importance, such as the Indian Institutes of Tecnology, and All India Institute of Medical Sciences;
- c) universities;
- d) Research Institutions; and
- e) Institutions (Colleges) for Higher Education, that can be further classified into
 - i. Institutions of degree standard and above, i.e., degree and post graduate colleges (refferred to here for brevity as degree colleges),necessarily affiliated to universities,
 - ii. Institutions below degree level (offering courses equivalent to diploma and certificate courses),and
 - iii. Intermediate / pre-degree / junior colleges (referred to here as intermediate colleges), affiliated to either boards of intermediate education or universities.

While all these institutions can also be classified into professional and general higher educational institutions, only e-i and e-ii are in practice classified into general, professional and 'other 'types of colleges.

In terms of numbers, category e dominates the whole higher education scene.

Main Players in Indian Higher Education:

- UGC (University Grants Commission) set up under UGC Act 1956 is responsible for co-ordination, determination and maintenance of standards and release of grants to Universities and research organizations.
- Professional councils that are responsible for recognition of courses, promotion of professional institutions and provision of grants to undergraduate programmes.
- Research Councils; A number of them have been setup under the Central (federal) government UGC (1956) and AICTE(1987) (All India Council for Technical Education) are basically two agencies in India regulating Higher Education.

Quality assurance in Higher Education is one of their main tasks but making recognition and accreditation a tedious process is surely not the only way to ensure quality.

Government on Private Sector:

It is the declared objective of Union govt. that the lion's share of funding for higher education must come from sources other than the government (Anand, C.L. 1999)

The Issue of private Sector initiative in education sector has been a matter of great controversy and debate in India.

The Government of India in its Prime Minister's Council on Trade & Industry, appointed a committee to suggest required reforms in the education sector, along with other Sectors (headed by M.Ambani and K. Birla). It strongly suggested for full cost recovery (user pays principle) from students even in public higher education institutions through hike in fees and introduction of self-financing courses and seats.

II. The Private sector in Higher education

In a mixed economy where the private sector has contributed significantly to industrial and agricultural development, the role of the private sector in the field of higher education needs analysis, particularly when higher education is suffering due to paucity of resources.

In the present situation the share of the government in total spending on higher education has reached a stage beyond which it is difficult, for the government to sustain the present level of funding.

Because of financial constraints the government is not in a position to maintain the present level of public subsidies to higher education significantly (Tilak 1991) Chandra Pramod(2007); in his article 'Privatization of higher education:A blow to public sector educational institutions.'expressed that globalization and internationalization seem to be distinct but linked concept. Globalization is the cause and internationalization is effect in response.According to him,since Independence,India has endeavored to expand access to higher education, but it does not appear to have improvement on quality. In public sector the qualified and excellent teachers are appointed for teaching and research.The administration and supervision side is totally neglected. India's current system of higher education is centralized and politicized,offering limited access to higher education. The higher education system should remain free from corruption.The craze of public or masses towards the private institutions should be minimized by the government efforts.

Sundari,Surekha Swain(2007),in her article 'Privatization of higher education'mentioned that privatization refers to 'liberalization'where agents are freed from government regulations or as 'marketisation'where new markets are created as alternatives to government services or state allocation system. She has mentioned policy recommendations towards privatization like,CABE committee report(1992),UNESCO declaration, NPE(1986), Justice Punnayya committee(1992-93),Ambani Birla committee report.Besides all this she has discussed the merits and demerits of privatization and also reactions against privatization.She concludes that in this era of LPG,it is not appropriate to check privatization. But the regulatory bodies like UGC,AICTE,NCTE and the government should have some control over the standards of these institutions.

According to Tilak & Varghese (1991) a case exists for reduction of public subsidies to higher education and a clear shift from public subsidies to private financing and cost recovery. Since private benefits of higher education are high and they accrue to the individuals more than to the society there is a strong case for recovery of costs from the students in the form of fees and / or in the form of students loans. As higher education in India benefits not only society at large, but also the individuals specifically and as higher education attracts relatively more privileged sections of the society, there is a rationale for shifting the financial burden partly to the individual domain from the social domain.

Given the socioeconomic and political realities, the government has to continue to bear a large responsibility for funding higher education.

The government has to strictly watch that privatization does not lead to commercialization. Also the privatization should not adversely affect interests of the poor and other backward sections of the society. Because with the privatization of education, the so called 'mushroom growth' of the colleges has begun.

The Punnayya committee set up by the UGC and the Swaminathan panel of the AICTE have made some broad recommendations in this regard. The important avenues include donations from alumni, philanthropists and others, consultancy, university-industry interaction etc.

Views for and against privatization of higher education in India.

Keeping in view many aspects of privatization of higher education and social justice in India like.

- a) Commercialisation of education.
- b) Social justice to students' admissions in private institutions.
- c) Deterioration in academic standards.
- d) Service conditions of teachers.
- e) Inequality of educational opportunities.
- f) Mushrooming of professional/technical colleges in India and social justice to students.
- g) Less importance to value education.

A survey was conducted in Lucknow city in which opinion of 150 teachers from Lucknow was collected on privatization of higher education and social justice in India from aided as well as self financing colleges. Incident sampling method was followed to select the teachers for the purpose of filling the opinionnaires. 75 teachers from aided colleges and 75 from self financing colleges of Lucknow city.

They were asked questions as follows.

If higher education is privatized then.

- 1- Policy of nationalisation of education will gradually fade.
- 2- It will lead to equality of educational opportunities.
- 3- It will reduce burden over the government as large number of students from all sections of the society will move towards private institutions.
- 4- The poor students will not be able to achieve it because of high fees.
- 5- It will lead to commercialization.
- 6- Students of SC, ST,OBC communities and other economically weak students will also be benefitted by private institutions.
- 7- It will lead to deterioration in a academic standards.
- 8- There will be mushrooming of sub-standard professional / technical colleges in India.
- 9- Service conditions of teachers will be deteriorated.
- 10- Value education will not be given attention.
- 11- Private institutions will provide better vocational and moral education than government institutions.
- 12- New inventions and discoveries will be made in the country which will provide benefit to all sections of the society especially down trodden community.
- 13- Education will reach those, to whom it has unreached as yet.

They had to answer the above questions on a five point scale like SA- Strongly Agree, A- Agree, U- Undecided, D-Disagree, SD- Strongly Disagree Chi-square (x^2) test was used to find the opinion of aided as well as self-financing college teachers about the privatization of higher education and social justice in India.

Table 1 shows the results of chi-square test for aided college teachers and Table 2 shows the results of chi-square test for self financing college teachers.

Chi-Square test for Aided College Teachers.

Table 1

Item no.	Frequency of response					X ² Value	Significance Level
	S.D	D	U	A	SA		
1	14	47	05	67	17	1.462	Insignificant
2	09	123	---	14	04	28.98	Significant
3	05	43	18	68	16	4.378	Insignificant
4	09	18	09	101	13	7.958	Insignificant
5	02	11	---	123	14	18.266	Significant
6	18	53	06	61	12	1.752	Insignificant
7	10	77	04	56	03	3.944	Insignificant
8	03	04	0	136	07	25.07	Significant
9	02	07	---	128	13	21.156	Significant
10	03	42	06	83	16	2.56	Insignificant
11	03	76	00	64	07	4.572	Insignificant
12	---	42	05	70	33	11.71	Significant
13	13	107	02	28	---	21.426	Significant

Chi-Square test for Self-Financing College Teachers.

Table 2

Item no.	Frequency of response					X ² Value	Significance Level.
	S.D	D	U	A	SA		
1	05	98	03	37	07	5.714	Insignificant
2	06	117	06	18	03	14.75	Significant
3	04	15	03	124	04	22.432	Significant
4	07	10	06	121	06	21.694	Significant
5	03	04	02	134	07	30.806	significant
6	06	103	07	30	04	7.864	Insignificant
7	07	64	14	62	03	2.34	Insignificant
8	01	04	---	137	08	33.546	Significant
9	06	45	---	84	15	4.684	Insignificant
10	05	24	07	93	21	48.35	Significant
11	19	54	06	61	10	3.018	Insignificant
12	06	47	16	74	07	4.476	Insignificant
13	22	86	04	31	07	8.514	Insignificant

The Findings Are As Follows:

1. Teachers of both Aided & Self-Financing colleges irrespective of faculty differences could not express any specific opinion towards the statement, 'Policy of nationalization of education will gradually fade.' This is indicated by their insignificant x^2 values.
2. Aided college as well as self financing college teachers disagreed upon the statement 'It will lead to equality of educational opportunities.' irrespective of their faculty differences.

3. Teachers of aided colleges could not express any significant opinion towards the statement 'It will reduce burden over the government as large number of students will move towards private institutions.' But self financing college teachers agreed towards the above statement. Here also Social Science teachers agreed more strongly towards the above statement than natural science teachers.
4. Teachers of Self-Financing colleges irrespective of faculty differences agreed towards the statement 'The deserving economically backward students will not be able to achieve it because of high fees.' But Aided college teachers could not express any specific opinion towards the above statement as indicated by their insignificant x^2 value.
5. Teachers of aided as well as self financing colleges agreed upon the statement 'It will lead to commercialization.' Social science teachers in aided colleges agreed to the above statement more strongly than the Natural Science teachers there.
6. Both the teachers of aided colleges as well as self financing colleges could not express any specific response towards the statement 'Students of SC, ST,OBC communities and other economically weak students will also be benefitted by the private institutions' as indicated by their insignificant x^2 values.
7. Aided colleges as well as self financing college teachers could not express any specific response towards the statement 'It will lead to deterioration in academic standards.' This is shown by their insignificant x^2 values.
8. Teachers of aided as well as self financing colleges agreed to the statement 'It will lead to mushrooming of the professional/ technical colleges in India.' Natural science teachers of aided colleges reached more strongly than their counterparts i.e. social science teachers there.
9. Aided college teachers agreed towards the statement 'Teaching and non-teaching staff will be exploited by the management forcing them to do more work for less salary.' Here also Natural Science teachers agreed more strongly than Social Science teachers. But self financing college teachers failed to express any specific opinion regarding the above statement as indicated by their insignificant x^2 value.
10. Teacher of aided colleges could not express any specific opinion towards the statement 'Value education will not be given attention.' But self financing college teachers agreed towards the above statement irrespective of the faculty differences.
11. Here also the teachers of aided as well as self financing colleges could not express any specific response towards the statement 'Private institutions will provide better vocational education than government institutions.'
12. Aided college teachers irrespective of faculty differences agreed upon the statement 'New inventions and discoveries will be made in the country which will be beneficial for all sections of the society especially the down trodden.'But self financing college teachers showed no specific response towards the above statement.
13. Aided college teachers disagreed on the statement 'Education will reach to those, whom it has unreached as yet.' Here Natural Science teachers disagreed more than the Social Science teachers for the same. But self financing college teachers could not express any specific response towards the above statement.

Suggestions to maintain quality of education in private institutions:

- Special vigilance cell should be established in every university to monitor working of private colleges so that commercialization of education is stopped and social justice to students is ensured.
- Teachers' service conditions should be monitored.
- Evaluation of institutes should be done after every three years to maintain quality and social justice in higher education.
- The need for financing higher education to students, especially those coming from low income households needs special attention.
- The government resources for higher education of students belonging to economically weaker sections are simply not enough. Recourse to quality private higher education, both at university and non university level is essential.
- Broad band services and provisions of computers is an essential requirement of higher education. A committee for this purpose needs to be constituted to look into providing broad band connectivity to all students along with low priced computer accessibility.
- Open Universities need to be encouraged to offer quality programmes at the least cost. This becomes the most cost effective way of providing quality higher education, including technical and vocational education to students of low socio-economic status.
- An association of non aided private colleges be organized, which could see the needs and demands of such institutions and could counter the tendency of the bureaucracy to dominate its workings.
- It should be ensured that there is no cheating with the students. Fixation of fees should be under government's control.

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