

Privatisation of higher education and job avenues

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Privatisation of higher education is a worldwide phenomenon, growing in its extent, impact, importance and acceptability each day. In recent times, despite the increased levels of public investment, education has been increasingly funded by the private sector, often by citizens themselves. Along with the acceptability and universality of this concept of privatisation of higher education, the challenges and opportunities which encompass the concept also need to be studied.

Privatisation of higher education is taking place in more than seventy countries around the world, a number that expands every year.

Developing nations throughout the world have been cutting public expenditures and giving importance to market-driven courses of study. In most of the developing countries the governments have been gradually withdrawing grants and incentives to higher education and have been fully encouraging market-driven policies for advancement of higher education. During the last few decades, a rapidly growing economy has definitely led to a huge demand for an educated and skilled labour force throughout the world.

In India's perspective, during the first four decades after Independence, higher education was fully state funded and highly subsidised.

The pressures for change emanating from globalisation came when higher education was unable to meet the rising demand for professional education. The self-funded private institutions met this demand for subjects which began to become relevant for the changing domain of the job market of the present-day times. In India, this is largely a post-1980 phenomenon. The expansion of private institutions of higher learning has occurred because the growing segments of the population demand it. The middle-class, seeing that academic qualification is necessary for success, demand access to higher education. Governments generally respond by increasing enrolment. But when governments do not move quickly enough, private players establish academic institutions in order to meet the demand.

Post 1990's in India, due to the liberalisation policies of the government, privatisation of higher education has already taken deep roots in our education system and it has now reached a stage where it cannot be undone. But one important fact which is quite discernible is that successive governments at the Centre have not taken the policy of privatisation seriously and so, allowed the state governments to open private institutions of higher learning by

passing legislations in their respective legislatures. The successive governments at the Centre always gave less importance to higher education and always questioned the 'return' from education which is definitely an economic term and cannot at all be related to human resource development. This tendency of the Centre throughout the years has brought about a deterioration of education in the public sector.

Privatisation has brought about a sea change with regard to courses and curricula in higher education. Most of the private institutions have adopted the latest syllabi and courses of study which are job-oriented and relevant to the needs of the time and the institutions are very fast in upgrading them. Probably this is one of the major reasons why these institutions have become much sought-after nowadays. Whereas in the public-funded higher educational institutions, introduction of new courses and curricula and upgradation of the syllabus always take a lot of time. The private universities mostly offer courses which are job-oriented in diverse sectors of our economy and students after getting their degrees, get immediate engagement.

The growing disenchantment amongst the student community with regard to job-oriented courses and curricula in the public-fund-

ed higher educational institutions, has brought about a greater involvement of the private sector in extending educational services. In India, development of the higher education sector has not been encouraging at all and it needs to be reformed and revamped. If we want to transform our demography, we have to look at our higher education system in a big way since the scenario is very grim and depressing. In comparison to China, India's investment in the education sector is dismal. This is indeed very discouraging. India stands at a very dismal position in respect of the number of people opting for higher education which is only 6 per cent according to government statistics, whereas in the developed countries access to higher education is to the tune of 40 per cent or above. In meeting the challenge of equity and improving the quality of education plus creating job opportunities for the youths of the country, higher education has to seek participation of the private sector as well. Some amount of private funding therefore appears inevitable for making up for the deficit caused by inadequate state funding. Herein it needs to be specially mentioned that the private institutions are providing the requisite courses and curricula to meet international requirements. One major outcome of the setting up of private institutions of higher learning

is that they have already created the best academic and administrative support structures in order to produce graduates employable in any sector, an initiative which deserves appreciation. In today's world of liberalisation, globalisation and privatisation, the need of the hour is to develop our human resources fully so that they become employable in all sectors.

According to the latest statistics, the UGC has approved 822 universities and out of these 282 are private universities. These universities are playing a great role in providing quality higher education and also providing employment opportunities to a large number of youths, educated and uneducated, skilled and unskilled. These institutions have also carved a niche in society by outsourcing their services whereby innumerable people are getting employment benefits and earning their livelihood. This is one of the major advantages of private sector institutions of higher learning. They are providing excellent service to society by creating job opportunities at all levels. Another thing which needs to be mentioned here is the regular campus placements held at these private institutions of higher learning whereby students get the opportunity to land jobs in various sectors. Finally, it can be deduced that private higher educational institutions are doing a great job indeed.