

## Quality Enhancement in Higher Education : Achievements & Failure; with Special Reference to the Rural Colleges

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Education is a vital process for personality development and social change. During the last sixty years after independence, higher education has expanded in India somewhat remarkably. The number of universities and colleges has increased, there is an explosion in student numbers, the enrolments in higher education has swelled. Today we have number of technological, management, medical science institutions, besides a large number of engineering colleges and agricultural colleges. India is regarded as having the third largest reservoir of scientific and technical manpower in the world of nations with an estimated stock of about seven million.

India has made significant achievements in the development of education. The Indian education system was thrown open after independence to all at all levels rich, poor, middle income classes, men and women, rural and urban population, backward and non-backward segments of the population. Social and cultural diversity has also become an important strength of higher education; as a consequence, there has been a veritable explosion in number of students, institution and teachers. There has been the development of institutions of excellence, producing highly specialized human capital. Lastly it could produce the second largest stock of educated and skilled manpower in the world; and the third largest reservoir of scientific and technical manpower. The best practices are those which improve the entire operations of the institutions and decide the standard of quality. The identifications of the best practices depends on many variables, all these variables must be considered while identifying the best practices.

However, the most important problem that the higher education system in India is the inequalities in the quality of the institutions in rural and urban areas. The quantitative expansion is not adequate. The inequalities among the institution located in rural area and urban area are quite remarkable. The institutions of higher education located in rural and socio-economic backward areas are lacking in the implementation of best practices in higher education and quality. There are number of colleges located in a remote, rural, backward and hilly areas, striving to achieve excellence. In these colleges the student's enrolment is from

the socio-economic backward families. Most of the students are the first generation learners of higher education. More than 70% of the students are scholarship holders as they are belonging to socio-economic backward families. There are no criteria for admission in the college, any students seeking higher education; who has passed the last qualifying examination, can enroll his name. In such cases more than 30% students enrolled has qualified the last examination in more than one attempt. The colleges are bound to enroll them, because they were established for these students. They were established with the objectives to provide education to these economically, socially and educationally weaker section of the society. In the last assessment and accreditation by NAAC, such colleges have got poor grades only because of the high dropout rates. The high dropout rate of the students in such colleges is a most important problem, which is to be solved. There is remarkable diversity in the grasping powers of students, and it is a challenge before a teacher to deal with a student who passed his last qualifying examination in more than one attempt and a student who passed in distinction occupying the same desk in the classroom.

The colleges located in rural areas have their own specific patterns of student's attendance in the classroom. Specially in rural areas more than 50% of the students use to remain absent in the classroom during the sowing season in the fields as they are from the farmers families and the land-less labors families; and again in the season of harvesting the classrooms use to be vacant. The annual teaching plans prepared by the teachers are not much helpful to carry out the process of teaching and evaluation in practice. The formal teaching plans need a midterm correction.

The massive expansion of higher education contributed to the phenomenon of democratization of higher education. Presently a large number of students from lower socio-economic strata constitute a large proportion of the total enrolment in higher education. More than 40% of the enrolment in higher education belongs to lower socio-economic strata. These are no mean achievements for a developing country like India. The emerging open learning systems, distance education significantly contributed to 'massification' of higher

education. But the fact is that there is a higher degree of inequality in quality of higher education between the institutions of higher education in the rural areas and the institutions of higher education in the urban areas, the institutions of higher education made for the elite's and institution of higher education for the lower socio-economic strata.

To reduce the inequalities of quality of higher education and the implementation of best practices in higher education in the rural and urban areas equally is a challenging task. The institution of higher education located in remote, rural, socio-economic backward ar-

reas, though striving hard to achieve excellence, their efforts are turning fruitless. It may pose a question whether the best practices in higher education are not for the masses but only of the classes? The mere massification of higher education will not solve the problem; these institutions in rural, backward areas are facing. While the strength and achievements of higher education are significant, equally if not more, significant are the problems and weaknesses it is associated with. These inequalities among different institutions of higher education in quality of higher education are alarmingly striking.

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