

Understanding the Changing Perspectives of Higher Education in India



The Future of Higher Education in India. Edited by Sudhanshu Bhushan. Springer Nature, Singapore, 2019, 328 pages, Hardback, ISBN: 9789813290600.

The higher education in India is at the crossroads since the release of the National Education Policy 2020 by the Indian Ministry of Human Resource Development in July 2020 amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic. The book “The Future of Higher Education in India” was published a few months after releasing of the draft National Education Policy (NEP) by the Committee for Draft National Education Policy in May 2019, chaired by eminent space scientist and technocrat Dr. K. Kasturirangan. The book thus relates to some of the recommendations of the draft NEP on the governance and transformation of higher education institutions in the country. The country has about 900 universities. They fall into the categories of central, state, private and deemed universities. These include many of the centrally funded technical institutions (CFTIs), recognized as the technical and research universities and placed in the global ranking of world universities.

The book is organized into three parts, namely (i) Structure, (ii) Finances and (iii) Capabilities and Others. The book began with an introductory chapter titled “Contesting the Present in the Evolution of Public Higher Education”, written by Sudhanshu Bhushan. Here the author recounts the socio-economic perspectives and public nature of higher education in a country. He then finds out the contradictions in approaches of draft NEP. He observes, “The government has been relying more on promoting privatization and market-friendly principles such as competition and ranking, funding through self-financing and market loans and governance being guided through measures of accountability. The draft national policy contradicts it by recommending the most ideal ecosystem of higher education to be financed by the government” (p. 3).

The part I ‘Structure’ began with a chapter titled “The Emergence and Expansion of Indian Universities Before Independence: A Historical Perspective” by Mona Sedwal. Here the author narrates the background of the establishment

of the first three universities in the country in 1857 by the British Raj, namely, University of Calcutta, University of Bombay and University of Madras. In this chapter, she presents a Table on Universities before Independence (p. 32), where 22 Universities are identified. Visva-Bharati University, established by Rabindranath Tagore in 1921, is not included in this Table that became a Central University in 1951. The British Government also established the University Grants Committee in 1946, a predecessor of present University Grants Commission, for expansion of university education in the country. Sedwal further observes that the genesis of university education in India was interrelated to the demand of skilled Indians to serve in the administrative jobs. Similarly, we can observe that the emergence of the self-finance courses, private universities and private colleges in the country are interrelated to the demand of skilled personnel in the industries and services sector since 1990s that is marked as the post-liberalization period in India.

In Chapter 3, titled “Teachers’ University Revisit to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar”, Bhushan revisits the philosophical foundations of the social reformer and educationist Ambedkar. Here, “the conception of Teachers’ University shows his emphasis on the centrality of teachers, their authoritative control over academic decisions, recruiting teachers in a Teachers’ University by the teachers themselves and ensuring their worthiness” (p. 47). However, these practices become a rarity in Indian public universities, even in the universities named after Ambedkar.

In Chapter 4, titled “World Ranking of Universities: What Does It Entail for the Future”, Saumen Chattopadhyay narrates the methodological approaches to measure university performance by the world ranking agencies. He also interprets the performance indicators being used by the three specific ranking agencies, namely, the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings, the QS World Ranking and Shanghai’s Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU). Chattopadhyay feels that university social responsibility is rarely measured in these world rankings. He also briefly discusses the possible unethical practices undertaken by some universities to achieve higher scores in world rankings. These include widespread practices of plagiarism, data falsification, ghost authorships and other malpractices.

In Chapter 6, titled “The World-Class University Discourse: Disentangling the Conflict Between Efficiency and World Class-Ness,” Aishna Sharma recounts the recent UGC regulations and their impact on higher education in the country, namely, the ‘UGC (Institutions of Eminence Deemed to be Universities) Regulations, 2017’ for private institutions and the ‘UGC (Declaration of Government Educational Institutions as Institutions of Eminence) Guidelines, 2017’ for public institutions. As Sharma indicates, “these universities are

expected to be featured in the national ranking and eventually in the global rankings too” (p. 95). In July 2018, six higher educational institutions (HEIs) were recommended as the institutions of eminence (IoE); three are public universities and three are private universities. In 2019, seven more public universities and seven more private universities were recommended for declaring as IoE. One of the criteria for considering as a potential IoE, the said institution, should have a respectable position in India’s National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF). NIRF ranking of Indian HEIs began in 2016 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). The 2020 edition of NIRF found 1667 applicants from Indian HEIs.

Part II of this book, which includes Chapters 8–12, deals with the changing perspectives of higher education financing in India. In Chapter 8, titled “Future of Higher Education Financing and Governance”, Sudhanshu Bhushan narrates the new provisions in the higher education financing, such as Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA), Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), Uchchar Avishkar Yojana (UAY) and Prime Minister’s Fellowship Scheme for Doctoral Research (PMRF). Bhushan observes a structural shift in financing higher education, from subsidy to loan given to public HEIs. Newly conceived schemes were introduced during India’s Twelfth Five-Year Plan period (2012–17). The centrally sponsored HEFA was introduced in 2016 and presently the central universities and CFTIs are eligible to receive debt-linked HEFA grants. The centrally sponsored RUSA scheme was introduced in 2013, while state public universities and colleges are eligible to receive RUSA grants. The author forecasts that in the future, the academic and financial autonomy will be given to the public universities and HEIs will be more self-governing. However, they will have to be competitive and have to generate more resources for self-sustaining.

In Chapter 9, titled “Shifts in the Financing of Higher Education”, P. Geetha Rani explores different sources of financing higher education, both for the HEIs and the household expenditure. She observes that the expansion in private higher education is pronounced in the market-oriented courses. The same trend is getting reflected in the course choice of students who took educational loans.

Part II of this book further discusses pertinent issues in higher education, such as pattern and determinants of household expenditure on higher education, the impact of public education expenditure on access to higher education and factors influencing household expenditure on private tutoring in higher education.

Part III of this book, which includes Chapters 13–19, explores the changing perspectives of higher education capabilities

and policymaking in India. This Part of the book elaborates pertinent policy issues in higher education, such as accountability versus capabilities, capabilities of students and their implications, experiences of a teacher as a professional, accessibility, inclusion and performance of students with disabilities, new managerialism in higher education, faculty development in higher education and pathways to internationalization in Indian higher education. These chapters reflect the current practices of career advancement of faculty members, teachers' training, international mobility of students and researchers, international collaborations

and equity-based accessibility of higher education for the disadvantaged communities.

The book brings together much-admired literature to understand the dynamics and new perspectives of the higher education system in India. The book will also help readers realize present contexts before the newly introduced NEP2020 makes a complete overhaul of the higher education system in the country. This book is recommended to the scholars and policy analysts, who are engaged in research on tertiary education, STS and R&D management.

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