Chapter - 3

CHANGING INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL SCENARIO AND ITS IMPACT ON COLLEGE LIBRARIES

3.1 Changing Indian Higher Educational Scenario: An Overview

Education is regarded as key investment in the promotion of economic growth as well as a means of promoting social justice. In its final report (1990) UNDP observes, “the real wealth of a nation is its people.”\(^1\) Rightly education becomes a useful device for developing human resource. For economic prosperity and social justice opportunities of higher education is becoming wider from one plan-period to the other. In the complex and rapidly changing contemporary Indian society, the higher education scenario has been changing. Over the last few decades the most striking feature of Indian higher education has been the emphasis given on the expansion of open learning and vocationalism. Economic utility or the cost-effectiveness of higher education is a matter of great concern for the educational planners.

The electronic revolution has remarkably enhanced communication, making an enormous store of information open to all. UNESCO meeting in Paris (2003) observed that, “the potential of new information and communication technologies for the renewal of higher education by extending and diversifying delivery, and by making knowledge and information available to a wider public should be fully utilized.”\(^2\) Globalisation has given
higher education a competitive character. Marketable higher education today is set on making “skilled” individuals directly related to the requirement of modern trades and professions. New courses of study, changes in curriculum have emerged to meet the challenge of the contemporary society. The significant characteristics of the present higher education scenario are:

1. Changing demographics – longer lives, longer working days, larger urban areas, diverse population etc are affecting higher education.

2. Restructuring employment – life long learning is becoming a necessity for individuals to meet the changing demands of the society. Hence every individual is expected to upgrade his knowledge and skills to see better employment opportunities.

3. Technological Changes – These have an impact on higher education. The new technologies are entering the business and forcing the delivery of education to be more flexible with learner centric options.

4. Demand for accountability – Educational institutions are under pressure and will continue to feel this pressure so long as the demand for greater productivity in higher education continues.

5. Consumerism – Today consumers have become much more sophisticated. They not only look for accountability but also see quality. They prefer the satisfaction of their needs, to traditional measures of quality used in higher education. Thus they look to increased competition among higher education providers so that it works to their advantage.
6. Expectation by employers and business world – There is increased interest in partnerships between the business world and the academic sector and also among the education entities. Thus higher educational institutions are called upon to clearly define their roles in training as well as in education and learning.

7. Rate of knowledge growth – The response to the growth in knowledge has been to expand institutions by starting more courses, more departments, faculty specializations, etc. Despite these facilities, higher education is not able to adapt to this condition.

8. New ideas about teaching and learning – Higher education programmes should incorporate and utilize new ways of learning and modify the curriculum from time to time. It should have flexibility and give scope for new avenues to be absorbed so that the students become active learners.

“The demands of 21st century is forcing higher education sector to modify its strategies with the help of information technologies that strengthen educational activities towards a sustainable and mutually supportive human development”

The UGC (India) is aware about the phenomenal changes in education. As a result India is now trying to acquire an identity of a knowledge based society. Following steps have been taken by the UGC to meet the needs of the day.

Firstly, there has been an exponential increase in the number of higher education centres. Since independence “the number of universities has recorded a seventeen fold increase
and the number of colleges a thirty times increase, while the student enrollment has gone up by nearly thirty-eight times until 2005. Still in comparison to many developed countries the access to higher education in India is very limited. Plans have been undertaken to increase the opportunity for higher education from 6 per cent to 10 per cent during the 10th Five Year Plan period. During the 11th Five-Year Plan period the UGC wants to accommodate more students in the higher education sector.

Secondly, the learner centric education policy is getting priority in the context of educational planning. Many higher education centres offer open learning/distance education opportunities for providing more and more accessibility. In near future it is expected that the general degree colleges will come forward to impart education through distance mode. To meet the social demand multidimensional subjects are being offered even in the undergraduate curricula. Presently there has been a trend to develop a connection between the higher education sector and the industrial sector.

Thirdly, Indian higher education is being planned in keeping with the vital issue of the increasing demand for opportunity. The situation demands a quantitative growth in higher education. As a result there is an enormous increase in the number of postgraduate general colleges. For example, in West Bengal “the number of post graduate general degree colleges was 27 in 2004-2005.” In 2005-2006 the number has gone up by nearly two times (46). It seems that the number of general post-graduate colleges in West Bengal will be raised further. A serious resource crunch has already been felt and the problem is getting acute day by day. As a result the infrastructural facilities have
shrunk in the college libraries. Naturally quality has not gone up with the growth in quantity. In this context it is to be noted that in a study entitled “Indian youths unemployable” it has been observed that “failure in quality education, skills and policy blunders make it imperative that our system needs a structural change”\(^9\). The lack of resources in the higher educational field has often led to quality and excellence taking a back seat. To deal with the situation the UGC decides to “encourage institutions to mobilize resources”\(^10\) because the need of the hour is the improvement of the quality of resources, if India really wants to compete globally.

Fourthly, due to the advent of information technology information resources are currently available in diversified forms in the realm of higher education.

The report of the National Knowledge Commission published in 2006, lays emphasis on the phenomenon of sustainable human development. If this is to be maintained and strengthened, it has to work simultaneously on two fronts - to provide access for more and more people to higher education and to ensure quality and excellence.

### 3.2 Situational Impact on College Library Sector

The higher education scenario in India is in a process of change. Hence, for facing the college situation, college libraries need to be equipped by all means. Administrators/planners of higher education should keep in mind the needs of the libraries meeting the demands of the present users.
The present college library system appears to be partially handicapped in the following ways:

Firstly, college libraries have traditionally acquired books and periodicals for their self-sufficient local collections. The changing nature and rising quantity of information resources force a library to acquire new kinds of materials. The traditional system of library operation falls short of the present demand.

Secondly, it has been difficult for the college libraries to address and anticipate the demands of the users when new interdisciplinary subjects are introduced in the course curricula. An isolated college library is often found not in a position to provide satisfactory service to its users.

Thirdly, information technology is gradually widening its wings and affecting traditional LIS activities, leaving a profound impact on college library’s organizational structure, procedures, and products.

Finally, higher education, more precisely college education is becoming more pragmatic and cost-conscious. Obviously, college libraries will have to adjust to all the trends of the day for their survival.
References


3. ICFAI UNIVERSITY. Perspective of higher education. 2007. ICFAI University, Hydrabad. p 29.


8. ibid. p 11.
