

## 20. BOOK REVIEW - “RECONSTRUCTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA”

(By: Dr. V.C. Kulandaiswamy)

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*Reviewed by Prof. V.V.Athani\**

The author Dr. V.C. Kulandaiswamy is an eminent academician, who has been the Vice Chancellor of three distinguished universities. He has come out with this highly thought provoking book based on his experience and contemplation.

The author starts with identifying three basic limitations of Higher Education (HE) in India:

1. **The affiliating system** of Indian universities (us), which has not only resisted all attempts at change but has grown from strength to strength inspite of having been condemned by Lord Curzon as early as 1902, the Viceroy of British India, by the Education Commission headed by Dr. Kothari (1966) and the National Education Policy (1986). The author has expressed the view of many educationists in India, by pronouncing this system, as a curse.

Where the trend in the world over is for HE to be done in university campuses, having a critical mass of students around 6000-10000 and faculty of 600-1000, good library and infrastructure facilities. HE in India takes place in over 17000 affiliated colleges that are ill equipped, understanding and poorly funded.

Even more damaging result of this system has been that it has distracted attention of Indian universities from their function

of teaching and R&D work to conducting university exams and declaring results. The universities have thus been downgraded into boards of exams, and the affiliated colleges converted into tutorial institutions preparing students for university exams.

2. **Rigidity of HE System in India:** The author points out that a student can get credit for a course done at M. Sc. level in a recognized university in India, when he goes for PG education in a university in USA, but not in another university in India itself.

Universities in India still follow mainly the yearly system so that the result depends upon a single year-end exam. A student who fails even in one subject is denied award of Class or Distinction, unless he appears for all the subjects in one sitting.

3. **HE System is Unequal to its Task:** Higher education system in India caters at present to barely 8% of the student population in the eligible age group. This is woefully low compared to not only advanced countries (with more than 65%) but also many developing countries. HE system has to be able to increase enrolment in the near future to at least 20-25 percent of students in the eligible group, in order that India is able to make its mark in the knowledge age.

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The author then present a 'well thought of plan' for reconstruction of HE in India consisting of minor, medium and major reforms to be carried out during the next 15 years by which time India aspires to become a developed country in the world.

**Minor Reforms :** consist of (i) introduction of the semester system, (ii) adoption of continuous internal evaluation, and (iii) adoption of the credit system, all to be carried out under well defined academic accountability and auditing. These reforms will necessitate large scale retraining of faculty.

**Medium Reforms:** For reforming the system, HE institutions may be divided into three categories: affiliated colleges, autonomous colleges, and deemed universities, besides regular universities.

**Deemed Universities:** may be encouraged to develop into full-fledged teaching and research universities with campuses having a critical mass of students and faculty, good library as well as infrastructure facilities. They may be encouraged to start M Phil and PH .D. degree programs if they satisfy the relevant norms and promote research . They must aim at becoming centers Excellence.

**Autonomous colleges:** All deserving colleges may be granted autonomy. Depending on their competence, autonomous colleges may be divided into two categories: Category I: colleges that may be allowed to conduct exams, and submit the results to the university for scrutiny and declaration of results. Category II: colleges that may be permitted not only to conduct exams but also to declare result and to award degrees jointly with the university.

**Affiliated colleges** may be given time till 2015 to upgrade themselves to claim autonomous status. Those that fail to make the grade, may be transformed to junior colleges, which can run diploma, certificated, or vocational courses. It is known that about 90% of the work force in India has no vocational training at all. They need to be given such training as may enable them to increase their productivity. This can be done in junior colleges.

**Major Reforms :** These include increase in the number of universities from 342 at present to about 2000-2500 by 2020. The examples of Singapore and China are worth emulating. China is reported to have attracted over 500 private universities and established on its own 2000 universities in the past five years. Singapore, on the other hand developed itself into an international educational hub by inviting reputed foreign universities to establish their campuses in conjunction with local universities. We may embark on a large scale development of universities and Centres of Excellence in India. We may allow the participation of foreign universities on appropriate terms.

It is quite obvious that Govt. alone cannot make the required massive investments. Participation of private providers, including foreign universities, is inevitable. Parents of university going students must eschew the tendency to decrying private providers of HE. The situation can be mitigated by instituting fee waivers, scholarships, and by providing educational loans at low interest rates.

**Coordinating Bodies:** at both national and state levels are essential in order to set HE policies and streamlining their implementation. The author has proposed a National Board of HE (NBHE) as the apex body, and State Council for HE (SCHE) at state levels as recommended in the National Education Policy 1986. These are to be very influential bodies, headed by the Prime Minister at the national level and a senior academic at the state level for formulating national and state level policies in HE and coordinating implementation of these policies.

**Comment:** *this book presents a comprehensive review of the system of HE in India, including a critical review of its shortcomings. It presents a thought provoking proposal for reconstruction of HE system in India. His suggestions are worth serious study and implementation. The reviewer recommends strongly that every stake holder in HE in India must get a copy for reference.*

