

Editorial

Private Higher Education System: India and the World

In this globalised world after 1990s, there has been tremendous growth in private higher education which is unprecedented. The growth of self financing colleges has been phenomenal; the number of private colleges in several states grew from a few in the late 1980s to several hundreds, particularly in case of engineering colleges, in management and medical institutions and it grew to such a level that in relative size, the public sector became infinitesimally small. It even spread to arts and science colleges and even to intermediate colleges and polytechnics. If such trend continues to occur on a large scale, we will soon end up with no public institutions of higher education.

Compared to the more developed capitalist countries having role in global market like the US, the UK, Canada and Australia, India is more privatized. Currently we have more than 100 private deemed universities, a large number of private aided colleges and even large number of self financing colleges in addition to many unrecognized private institutions, which do not necessarily offer recognized degree programmes and are basically Coaching Centers of different kinds and all these make the private sector in India as one of the largest in the world.

According to one study by Altbach (2009), one fifth to one fourth of the total number of students in higher education and about 30% of the global enrollment in higher education, are in private institutions; the remaining students go to public universities. On average, only 15% of the enrollment in tertiary education system in Organization for Economic Co operation and Development Countries, and a meager 8% in the countries of the European Union 21group, are enrolled in independent Private institutes, with a vast majority everywhere studying in public sector. In contrast, in India, 66% of the students in general education and 75% -80% in the technical education are enrolled in private self financing institutions (Planning Commission,2013).It is also very interesting to find that contrary to the general impression that Western countries have large private higher education systems, they actually strongly advocate privatization of higher education not for themselves, but for the developing countries and they have strong public higher education system, while we are being encouraged to resort to private institutions.

The massive private higher education system in India has been detrimental to the character of education as a public good. Private education essentially views education as a private good, yielding benefits to individual students and is not concerned with social values or national concern. The social responsibility of higher education needs to be valued, protected and nurtured and this is not possible in a system dominated by profit motivated private higher education system. Here the argument that education is a right not a commodity is to emphasize and guarded.

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