CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA DURING AND AFTER CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID19)

SWATI RAJAN,
Associate Professor,
Dept. of History,
Tikaram Jagannath Arts, Commerce and Science College,
Khadki, Pune-411003.

ABSTRACT:

Across the globe, the spread of novel corona virus COVID-19 has led to profound changes in social interaction and organization, and the education sector has not been immune. The novel corona virus and the disease it causes, COVID-19 is currently impacting every aspect of daily life around the world. The novel corona virus and the disease it causes, COVID-19 is one of the most unpredictable global public health crises in recent times. In academia, those in leadership positions at schools, colleges, and universities throughout the India have responded to the crisis by closing campuses and residences of the students. It is difficult to predict what the educational landscape will look like after COVID-19 passes, in part because of the magnitude of the community transmission threat posed by campus interactions. In India, the means of earning money for many parents studying in colleges and universities have been affected. For example, handcart drivers, workers in factories and malls, small to large shopkeepers, workers in small scale Industries, displaced, and so on. Their homes are more likely to have a serious impact on their children's higher education. India has the third largest higher education system in the world (after America & China). I argue here that, if the covid-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities of India's healthcare system, it has also exposed the inadequacy of India's university system. At a time when the world's universities have been at the forefront in the battle against the novel corona virus, Indian universities are still not on the frontlines yet.

Keywords: Higher Education, Disparity, India, COVID-19, Coronavirus, Lacking Facilities

1. Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic quickly led to the closure of universities and colleges around the world, in hopes that public health officials' advice of physical distancing could help to flatten the infection curve and reduce total fatalities from the disease. Since middle of March, all colleges and universities have been shut down in India to prevent spread of infection of corona virus. Between March and May, higher education system in the country

has a very busy schedule every year. Examinations for current students and admissions for new ones are conducted in this period. Many graduating students are appearing for job interviews, and some lucky ones have got offers of employment. But they need certificates and mark-sheets of graduation before they can join take up employment. Understandably, students and their parents are anxious due to sudden and almost un-ending disruptions to their schedule due to covid-19.

India has 367 universities, of which about 100 are private institutions. Of the 17,700 colleges, only 4,300 are government-run. Of the rest, 7,650 are under unaided private managements and 5,750 under aided private managements. Significantly, private professional colleges account for the majority of the students who have entered the portals of higher learning in the last 10 years.[1] A substantial number of these private institutions bother very little about the quality of education they offer at exorbitant prices. This crass commercialisation makes higher education the preserve of the rich, creates an imbalance in the courses offered and leads to a fall in standards.

2. Scenario and circumstances of Higher Education disposition:

If the covid-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities of India's healthcare system, it has also exposed the inadequacy of India's university system. At a time when the world's universities have been at the forefront in the battle against the novel corona virus, Indian universities are still not on the frontlines yet. The apathy towards institutes of higher learning has inevitably resulted in lower research output compared to China or Western countries. Most of the Western countries and China's success is due to its high priority on education and effective reforms in education funding.

In contrast, university finances in India remain badly managed and even top public universities find it difficult to access funds. Subscriptions to several basic databases and journals are not available in Delhi University, among the premier universities in the country. The University doesn't have enough funds to appoint teachers and is largely dependent on a vast army of temporary staff to run its sought-after undergraduate courses. The gap in public funding of college universities has been compensated to some extent by the rise of private colleges and universities. But most of them charge fees which are unaffordable for a large section of Indians even as the quality of teaching remains poor.

"Although private higher education institutions are de jure non-profit, they are de facto commercial and profit maximizing," wrote the political scientists Devesh Kapur and Elizabeth Perry in a 2015 Harvard University working paper. "Federal higher education institutions (so called central universities) continue to attract better students due to their better funding, greater autonomy from politics, selection criteria (competitive national exams), relatively modest fees (and generous scholarships and easy loans for needy students), and some commitment to research. However, most students in public universities are in state universities… and virtually all of them are poorly governed."[2]

Special Issue   **472**   **June 2020**

Website: *www.langlit.org*   Contact No.:+919890290602

One Day International Web-Conference on '*Post-Pandemic Rejuvenation Of Higher Education: A Global Perspective* ' organized by PDEA's Baburaoji Gholap College, Sangvi, Pune in collaboration with Cluster of English Language and Literature (CELL)

Indexed: ICI, Google Scholar, Research Gate, Academia.edu, IBI, IIFC, DRJI, The CiteFactor, COSMOS

Around 46% of students pursuing higher education continue to be enrolled in government institutions and in rural areas they cater to almost half the students enrolled, NSS data for 2017-18 showed. Both central and state universities have faced fund crunch in recent years and have struggled to fill up vacancies, data shows. Around 34% of faculty positions in higher education institutions under central government and 27% under state governments were vacant last year, according to data presented on the floor of the parliament in Dec 2019 . Overall, more than a hundred thousand teaching posts remain vacant across the country. [3] The vast majority of Indian college students are enrolled in private and state institutions of "poor quality, with no research facilities and a dearth of qualified faculty", noted Kapoor and Perry.[4]

"India does not create high quality PhD programmes that could provide the pipeline for top quality teachers and researchers," said Pratap Bhanu Mehta, former Vice Chancellor of Ashoka University. "Nor do we attract enough faculties from abroad due to a general lack of trust in Indian institutions and a conducive to research environment."[5]

3. The Impact of COVID-19 (Novel Corona virus) on Higher Education System in India:

The novel corona virus and the disease it causes, COVID-19 is currently impacting every aspect of daily life around the world. It is one of the most significant disproportionally affecting the elderly and those with chronic underlying disease (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). In the United States, the number of individuals infected with and dying from novel corona virus infection is increasing rapidly, even as significant measures are taken to slow the nationwide spread of the pandemic. In academia, those in leadership positions at schools, colleges, and universities throughout the United States have responded to the crisis by closing campuses and residences of the students. There have been no comparable breakthroughs from Indian universities, and to the extent that studies on India have been done, most have been carried out by scholars based in foreign universities rather than those working in Indian universities."Forget science, as far as I know, not a single person is trying to create a model in India of the spread of the disease,"[6] said Dinesh Singh, former vice-chancellor of the University of Delhi. "No statistician, no mathematician, nobody! All our models are coming from abroad". The frailty of India's university system is also apparent when one takes a cursory look at global rankings of universities. Consider the widely tracked Quacquarelli Symonds (QS)[7]

The conventional Indian education system follows face-to-face or physical teaching, even though the trend of audio-visual aids in classrooms was introduced a decade ago. Renowned universities in India such as the University of Delhi are offering online classes to its students already. But many higher education institutes in India are not equipped with such facilities. In the event of such a gap, some students might face the brunt brutally; this might affect their entire academic year. Unless we adopt from countries where the standard of education is far more advanced & flexible compared to ours. In a survey by Times Higher Education in 2018, the leaders of well-known global universities were of the opinion that online teaching could never match with physical room teaching. When we talk about how

equipped Indian Higher Education System to handle the change, we need to keep in mind that the digital shift in India is relatively new. Not only in India, but in Asia as well. You will be amazed to know that the first Asian Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) was developed by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology in the year 2012 only.[8]

The "substantial" financial impacts on colleges and universities will ripple through local communities, the group said, given the wide economic role higher education plays in much of the country." Similarly, in India, unless contingency measures are undertaken, students looking for admissions in 2020 could face hard times.

4. Figuring up the process of admissions into the atmosphere of Covid 19

A large part of India's admission system is fractured and most of the students in India rely on the offline process for admissions. It is a known fact that most people in the country do not have access to high-speed Wi-Fi and most of the students in small cities/towns/ villages prefer the offline admission process. Low cost education facilities will be provided in universities and colleges in advanced countries. For this, education-related reconsideration and curriculum in undergraduate colleges will be reconstituted. Students will also be provided with effective facilities of digital media access. To implement the same in India might be a time-taking process merely because of a weak education system. Given that the traditional focus has been on offline centres of education, we believe a mix of online and offline is what will work in the coming months, which can hopefully be converted to a permanent module. COVID-19 will impact higher education in India but what it has taught us is to build resilience to face such threats in the future. The outbreak of Corona virus has reminded us that change is inevitable.

5. The new worldwide landscape of higher education of the COVID-19 and need of global collaboration:

The upcoming economic recession triggered by corona virus shutdowns around the world, together with tighter budgets for institutions and research and in some countries the loss of fee-paying students, "may challenge Europe's competitive edge over China in an unbalanced relationship," said Marijk van der Wende, professor of higher education at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, during an online panel discussion on 14 May.[9]

The panel members agreed that collaboration was important in the post-pandemic world, not least to tackle other global challenges such as poverty, climate change and other health issues. "Apart from how political and ideological winds blow, we can build on decades of successful academic cooperation between universities in China and the West," Van der Wende said. Before COVID-19 struck, around five million students were undertaking degrees outside their home country. Travel restrictions and social isolation measures have and will continue to reduce these numbers dramatically. Families are already questioning whether it is worth paying to send their children to university if the courses are only online, Marmolejo told a webinar on "International Higher Education and COVID-19, the

Special Issue   **474**   **June 2020**

Website: *www.langlit.org*   Contact No.:+919890290602

One Day International Web-Conference on '*Post-Pandemic Rejuvenation Of Higher Education: A Global Perspective* ' organized by PDEA's Baburaoji Gholap College, Sangvi, Pune in collaboration with Cluster of English Language and Literature (CELL)

Indexed: ICI, Google Scholar, Research Gate, Academia.edu, IBI, IIFC, DRJI, The CiteFactor, COSMOS

Implications for India",[10] above cited as, organised by India's Jio Institute on 14 May, adding that this was disrupting the business model of universities.

6. Online teaching in the midst of COVID-19:

'Online education must supplement, not replace, physical sites of learning' (explains that, 'But it [education] is as a social rather than physical space that the college or university campus plays a critical role. We have long ignored the vital role public educational institutions play as exemplary sites of social inclusion and relative equality. In Indian conditions, this role is arguably even more important than the scholastic role.'[11] While institutions transitioned to online teaching, not everywhere in the India and not in all cases has it been possible for students to access it. In terms of effectively using online resources for teaching and learning, the most deprived are higher education institutions have poor overall infrastructure, rudimentary IT facilities, almost non-existent technical support and the intent of the institutional administration in facilitating teaching and learning is questionable. It is important to note that a large number of students enrolled at these higher education institutions come from economically and socially marginalised households. Many of these students, and their poorly paid contractual or guest teachers, cannot afford to have large data subscriptions, making it nearly impossible for them to access available online contents with bigger file sizes. The impact of Smartphone capabilities and stability of net connectivity on OE pedagogy also needs to be examined.

"It is anticipated that about 60% of the teaching delivery has been transferred to remote online but that means that 40% of the students globally, both domestic and international, are not experiencing the same opportunity for teaching and learning and consequently are facing a significant learning deficit," Marmolejo said. For online learning, this is a moment to ask "in which ways it is possible to measure the real value-added that students are having from online learning and to compare that to the regular value-added [from campus teaching]", he said. "This is a great opportunity, to gather information, to obtain evidence and to really measure what happens and what works and what doesn't work," Marmolejo said.[12]

7. Conclusion:

Coming back to Indian scenario, the number of students enrolled in a class in colleges in India is around 60 to 120 students. The facility of electronic appliances is insufficient for them. Very few colleges in urban areas have the capacity to provide such facilities. Colleges in and out of cities do not have the financial capacity to provide such facilities. Neither the state nor the central government can provide such a large number of facilities. Another issue is that students enrolled in colleges do not have access to electronic and online education facilities at home or on personal level. If education is truly life-affirming, it must awaken these young minds, touch the deeper layers of their consciousness, and give them the psychic/spiritual strength to deal with the crisis that Covid-19 has led to. And teachers must establish the spirit of rhythmic communication with them, understand their worries and

Special Issue   **475**   **June 2020**

Website: *www.langlit.org*   Contact No.:+919890290602

One Day International Web-Conference on '*Post-Pandemic Rejuvenation Of Higher Education: A Global Perspective*' organized by PDEA's Baburaoji Gholap College, Sangvi, Pune in collaboration with Cluster of English Language and Literature (CELL)

Indexed: ICI, Google Scholar, Research Gate, Academia.edu, IBI, IIFC, DRJI, The CiteFactor, COSMOS

doubts, and work together to redefine the relationship between the self and the world at a time when fear is normal, victims are stigmatized, and 'distancing' is the new discourse.[13]

While academic experts are pushing for online models of education - be it classroom teaching or tutorials, we are yet to see how effectively a nation that primarily relies on an offline mode of teaching can seamlessly transgress to an online medium of teaching and education. So, the question is will the Corona virus Pandemic result in a new solution for education and innovation? Given the digital gap in India, how successful will the digital education model be in a country like ours? Will India be able to embrace learning anywhere, anytime? Will it lead to innovation in the field of education? Or will it fall flat on the face for the lack of a more agile infrastructural setup?

The conventional Indian education system follows face-to-face or physical teaching, even though the trend of audio-visual aids in classrooms was introduced a decade ago. Renowned universities in India such as the University of Delhi are offering online classes to its students already. But many higher education institutes in India are not equipped with such facilities. In the event of such a gap, some students might face the brunt brutally; this might affect their entire academic year.

REFERENCES:

1. https://frontline.thehindu.com/the-nation/education/article30190881.ece

2. Devesh Kapur, Elizabeth J. Perry, 'Higher Education Reform in China and India: The Role of the State', 2015, pp. 7-8 (Digital Access DASH. HARVARD. EDU)
http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:14005052

3. Ibid, pp10-11

4. Ibid, p. 13

5. Sneha Alexander, Nikita Kwatra, 'livemint',06 Apr 2020,
https://www.livemint.com/education/news/in-fight-against-coronavirus-india-s-universities-have-lagged-far-behind-china-s-11586088831865.html

6. Dinesh Singh's elucidation in the interview in Jitendra Pratap Singh, Indian Universities are lagging behind with no comparable breakthroughs amid global pandemic, April 16, 2020
https://www.campusvarta.com/campus-updates/indian-universities-are-lagging-behind-with-no-comparable-breakthroughs-amid-global-pandemic/

7. Note 1: The world's largest international higher education network, connecting universities, business schools & students | HE sector news and marketing solutions. Ref.-https://www.qs.com/]

Note 2: Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) is a British company specialising in the analysis of higher education institutions around the world.[1] The company was founded in 1990 by Nunzio Quacquarelli. Citation: "Malaysia's R&D Investment Paying off with Higher Research Productivity and Improved University Ranking". Bloomberg. 5 November 2019.

8.*https://uniandes.edu.co/internacionalizacion/sites/default/files/asset/document/THE-Rankings 2019.pdf

9. Marijk van der Wende, in online panel discussions The New Silk Road in time of global pandemic: changing views on academic cooperation between China and the West? Online panel discussions with: 14 May, 2020 Organised by Jio Institute.

Special Issue   **476**   **June 2020**

Website: *www.langlit.org*   Contact No.:+919890290602

One Day International Web-Conference on '*Post-Pandemic Rejuvenation Of Higher Education: A Global Perspective* ' organized by PDEA's Baburaoji Gholap College, Sangvi, Pune in collaboration with Cluster of English Language and Literature (CELL)

Indexed: ICI, Google Scholar, Research Gate, Academia.edu, IBI, IIFC, DRJI, The CiteFactor, COSMOS

Marijk van der Wende (Utrecht University), William Kirby (Harvard University), Simon Marginson (University of Oxford), and Dominic Sachsenmaier (University of Göttingen) Marmolejo Nian Cai Liu (Shanghai Jiao Tong University), Gerry Postiglione (The University of Hong Kong) and Anthony Welch (University of Sydney)

10. Marmolejo, online panel discussions, Ibid.

11. Satish Deshpande, The Indian Express, Saturday, May 30, 2020**12.** Marmolejo, 'The New Silk Road in time of global pandemic: changing views on academic cooperation between China and the West?' Online panel discussions with: 14 May, 2020

12. Marmolejo, Online panel discussions, op.cit.

13. Avijit Pathak, The Pandemic and the Absurdity of 'Online Teaching', Mainstream Weekly, Vol. LVIII No 23, New Delhi, May 23, 2020
http://mainstreamweekly.net/article9405.html