

Challenges of higher Education in Assam for Development of Human Resources

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ABSTRACT: *Achievement of sustained and equitable human development is an urgent need and a challenge before the present Indian society. Though there have been considerable progresses in all walks of life over the last few decades, large section of people in India still live below the line of poverty. These people have inadequate access to education, health care facilities and other economic resources. Any amend to such conditions necessitate urgent development of human resources in our country. The role of higher education in the development of human resources can never be disputed. However, Higher Education in India in general and in Assam in particular, has not been able to perform its optimum role in the direction of Human Resource Development. This paper aims to highlight the perceptible challenges of higher education in Assam in the way of developing human resource in the State.*

KEYWORDS: Higher Education, Human Resource Development

I. INTRODUCTION:

Human Resource Development (HRD) is the process of helping people to achieve their individual and social goals by realizing their potential. It is the process that aims at developing competency among people and creating such conditions as favourable Govt. policies, programmes or interventions etc. where people can apply these competencies for the benefit of all. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the process of HRD includes the Policies and programmes that support and sustain equitable opportunities for continuing acquisition and application of skills, knowledge and competencies which promote individual autonomy and are mutually beneficial to individuals, the community and the larger environment of which they are a part (UNDP, Bureau for Programme Policy and Evaluation -BPPE, 1991, p.19). Thus, the concept of HRD includes the process of development of people including their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral, political, economic, spiritual, and all other forms of development. The focus of HRD initiative is not only on the development of individuals but also on developing the group or the society. It aims at developing the group to function better and acquire new competencies of socio-economic activities. As an integrated approach, HRD aims at developing all people and is not limited to a particular group or section of the society. Although the development of human resource is important for all sections of people, it is particularly important for the uneducated, unemployed, underprivileged and socio-economically backward sections of the society.

II. IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT:

Achievement of sustained and equitable human development is an urgent need as well as an enormous challenge before the present Indian society. Though there have been considerable progresses in all walks of life over the last few decades, large section of people in India still live below the line of poverty (37.20 for India and 34.40 for Assam as per sources of Planning Commission of India). These people have inadequate access to education, health care facilities and other economic resources that are essential for proper development and improvement in the condition of their life. Any amend to such conditions necessitate urgent development of human resources in our country. Developed nations of the world have demonstrated how investments made in developing human resources meet such challenges and improve the quality of life of the people. The challenges of poverty and underdevelopment of our country must be addressed by developing human capabilities for socio-economic development. At the same time, it also requires to be seen that the fruits of development reach all through an equitable distribution of resources, opportunities and benefits.

III. ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION:

The role of higher education in the development of human resources for national development can never be disputed. Higher education can produce high level professionals, technical and managerial personnel, generate new knowledge through research and impart such knowledge leading to development of human resources. In a world economy characterized by incredible technological advancements and cutting edge knowledge development, only higher education institutions can provide high level of competency for problem

identification and solution for competitive development of manpower of a country. Recognizing the crucial role of higher education in the development of human resources, way back in 1966 the Kothari Commission (1964-66) noted that, "One of the major programmes in reconstruction is the development of our human resources and in this there can be no limit to the education to be provided." In the view of Kothari Commission all educational efforts should be directed towards the development of human resources. On a similar note the National Policy on Education (NPE-1986) also stated that, "Education develops manpower for different levels of the economy. It is also the substrate on which research and development flourish, being the ultimate guarantee of national self-reliance. In sum, Education is a unique investment in the present and the future. This cardinal principle is the key to the National Policy on Education". The policy further stated that, "Higher education provides people with an opportunity to reflect on the critical social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity. It contributes to national development through dissemination of specialized knowledge and skills. It is therefore a crucial factor for survival". Movement of our economy from industrial to service and then to knowledge one and the recent international developments like opening up of markets for global players, market orientated of economies, increased competition between nations require that developing countries develop their human resources infusing in them qualities like innovation, productivity, collaboration, teamwork, reflection, adjustment to change, multiplicity of reactions and readiness to face the challenges of a globally competitive market oriented and knowledge society. Development of such skills is required by one and all of the members of the present society belonging to all walks of life to shoulder their responsibilities properly. Higher education plays key role in this regard. However, higher education institutions in India in general and in Assam in particular, have not been able to perform its optimum role in the direction of Human Resource Development.

IV. STATUS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN ASSAM:

According to the India Human Development Report (2011) prepared by Planning Commission of India, Assam is one of the more economically backward States in India and has recorded low Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) and per capita NSDP growth rates in the last decade, that were below the corresponding growth rates for the country. The Human Development Index (HDI) for Assam was 0.444 against all India index of 0.467 in 2007-08 placing Assam at 16th position among all the States of India. In terms of literacy rates, Assam stands at 19th position in India with a literacy rate of 73.2% which is below the national literacy rate of 74.04% and against 93.9% in Kerala and 91.6% in Mizoram as per the Census of 2011. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education in Assam is 8.8% which is below the national rate of 10.8% (against world average of 26% and USA at the top with 83%) and Nagaland topping the national list with a GER of 19% and Kerala closely following with a GER of 18.5% (UGC Report on Higher Education in India, 2008).

V. THE CHALLENGES BEFORE HIGHER EDUCATION IN ASSAM:

Although Higher Education has gradually expanded in Assam since independence, issues involving access, equity and quality still continue to present challenges that need to be addressed. Important among the challenges are:

- **The problem of Access to higher education:** As per UGC Report on Higher Education in India- 2008, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education in Assam is 8.8% which is below the national rate of 10.8%. The report also reveals that the availability of colleges (which is measured by college population index, C-PI, i.e. number of colleges per lakh population in the age-group of 18-23) of general education in Assam is 9.5 against national average of 8.1. However, in case of professional colleges it is 1.9; for agricultural and veterinary colleges it is 0.2; for Technical colleges it is 0.1; for Medical colleges it is 0.2; for women colleges it is 2 and for other colleges it is 0.1. As a whole the C-PI index in Assam is 10.8 against the national average of 12.4. These figures indicate the great challenge of widening the access of higher education in general and technical and professional education in particular in Assam.
- **The problem of Inequality:** Besides the low GER for overall population of Assam, large variations exist among the various categories of population like male-female, rural-urban and SC/STs and the General categories. Due to urban centric and uneven distribution of institutions of higher education, it is not equally available to all in the State.
- **The problem of Standard:** The incidence of many students from Assam moving to different places like Delhi and Bangalore in search of general higher and technical institutions raises questions on the quality of higher education in Assam. As per the sources with the Directorate of Employment and Craftsmen Training of Govt. of Assam, the size of educated job seekers has been quite high in Assam which point to the quality of higher education besides other factors. Educated job seekers constitute about 75 percent of the total job seekers in Assam as per the live register of Employment Exchanges in 2010. Out of a total 1,43,3218

educated unemployed 28, 3471 (20 percent of the total educated unemployed) were Graduates, 21352 were Post Graduates, 2839 were Engineering Graduates. Another indicator of quality in higher education in Assam is the status of Assessment and Accreditation of universities and colleges by NAAC in Assam. As per the list of NAAC Assessment in Assam (up to 15th September 2012), all the four State and Central universities were awarded “B” grade. Out of all the 189 colleges in Assam, only 46 colleges have got themselves assessed or re-assessed by NAAC. Non-submission of the majority of the colleges to NAAC assessment in Assam raises serious doubt about their quality. Moreover, out of the 46 accredited colleges only eight colleges have got “A” grade in NAAC assessment. The student-teacher ratio has posed another hurdle in the way of quality higher education in Assam. As per latest record with the Directorate of Higher Education, Govt. of Assam, the total student enrolment stands at 5, 16,651 against the total number of 7,258 teachers. Another concern relating to the standard of education in Assam is the large scale presence of private players in the field of higher education. These private institutions are playing a major role in providing education in the market oriented courses owing to the insufficiency and/or traditional nature of education given by Govt. institutions, the standard of education in most of these institutions is questionable, though the claim global standard and charge high fees on students.

- **Falling standard of research:** Though research is basically aimed at developing knowledge and understanding for solution of vital problems faced by man and for developing theories and generalizations, current practice in the field can hardly claim to fulfill its basic purposes. Though there has been considerable increase in the number of academic research during the recent times, these cannot be considered as attempts to satisfy the inquisitive and scientific thirst for knowledge. The reason behind this assumption lies in the fact of increased interest in research among teachers and prospective teachers to meet the University Grant Commission (UGC) of India’s directive making research eligibility to enter teaching at higher level, a criterion of promotion, incremental benefit and so on. This supposition finds testimony from the fact of increased number of Ph.D. registration with private universities, some of which are facing criminal procedures due to widespread violation of norms.
- **The problem of Reservation in higher education:** Caste based reservations in educational institutions in India are a constitutional obligation having its own logic of equalizing social and educational inequality. However, caste based reservation amounting up to 49% of the total seats in the Govt. institutions of higher education, including the institutions of excellence, prevents better talent coming in from un-reserved categories besides causing social unrest at times.
- **High cost of education:** Govt. funding on higher education and research in India and in Assam has always been meager. To make up for this and to make higher education globally competitive, presence of private players in the field have been allowed along with the self financing courses in aided universities resulting in very high cost of higher education. Owing to the insufficient number of Govt. institutions of higher education in Assam, there has been a mushroom growth of private institutions providing higher and technical education on courses having high employability. These private institutions levy high fees on students and thereby restrict the largest section of students that come from poor socio-economic backgrounds.
- **Shortage of qualified teachers:** Shortage of qualified teachers in the field of higher and technical education institutions has been a constant issue of concern. Privatization and Lack of adequate financial support from the Govt. has made it difficult for many institutions to attract qualified and talented teachers and have to run the courses with sub-qualified teachers on ad hoc basis, which is a serious threat to quality of education for developing human resource. The shortage is even higher in the institutions of professional nature like B.Ed. colleges, Law colleges, Medical and Engineering colleges besides the institutions of general education. This shortage of qualified teachers results in de-recognition of some of the institutions by concerned bodies at times. It is also not out place to mention here is that some institutions hire teachers only for the period of inspection to avoid de-recognition.
- **Neglect of Traditional fields of knowledge:** Growing popularity of professional courses with prospects of quicker and better employability has negatively affected the enrolment of students in traditional fields of knowledge like basic sciences, classical language and literature, art etc. The enrolment registers of colleges and universities in Assam stand testimony to this fact. Most of the talented students move out of the State after completing Senior Secondary course in search of good professional and technical colleges like

medical, engineering, management etc. leaving only a few for pure and basic fields of knowledge. Diminishing enrolment in B.Sc. /M.Sc. courses verify this fact.

- **Problem of infrastructure in State run institutions:** The provincialized colleges and the State universities in Assam suffer from the problem of lack of basic amenities and state-of-the-art infrastructure, which stand in stark contrast to the private colleges and universities. Even the Central universities are endowed with better infrastructure and facilities for the student and the teachers. However, it is the provincial colleges and the State universities that cater to the largest number of students in Assam including the poorer section who cannot afford to pay for education in private institutions. These institutions find it hard and disadvantageous to compete with the private universities and colleges that are better equipped to prepare students for the global employment market and overall development of human resource in the State.

- **Financial problems:** Financial problems have always handicapped the desirable progress of quantitative and qualitative higher education in Assam. Assam is primarily an agrarian economy and nearly 70% of the total population in the State is dependent on agriculture and allied sectors. Adult literacy rate is only at sixty five percent and gross enrolment ratio in higher education stands at 8.8%. With 34.40 % of people living below the poverty line and with a per capita income of Rs. 30569/-(Economic survey of Assam, 2011-12), Govt. can hardly afford to make massive investments that are required for proper growth of higher education. Though the Govt. talks of high standard of higher education, it has never been able to make the required budgetary provisions for the same. Owing to the inadequate development of human resources in Assam, it was expected that Govt. would allocate more money for higher and technical education in its 2010-11 budget. However, the Govt. allocated only 6% of total budget outlay in education, out of which only 11.63 % and 1.63 % allocated for higher and technical education respectively.

VI. CONCLUSION

Higher Education In Assam Is Facing Big Challenge Having Them To Compete With The Global Players, Especially After Education Became A Marketable Product And After India Opened Its Market For Global Competitors. However, Institutions Of Higher Education In Assam, With Crying Needs For Basic Amenities And Infrastructure, Are Hardly Ready For This Global Competition. The Annual Exodus Of Bright Students From The State In Search Of Better Education Partially Indicates The Defeat Of The Institutions Of Higher Education In Assam. If The Human Resource In Assam Is To Be Saved From Becoming Bane On Economy Of The State, Then A Well Thought Policy Of Higher Education Combined With Adequate Govt. Funding And Proper Monitoring And Control Over Standard Of Higher Education Only Can Bring Much Needed Change In The Area.

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