

It's time to act, not do more research

The resources spent in drafting educational policies should instead be spent in implementing solutions



PHILIP G. ALTBACH
& ELDHO MATHEWS

In its first 100 days, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's second government has begun yet another rethink of higher education policies through the draft NEP (National Education Policy) and EQUIP (Education Quality Upgradation and Inclusion Programme). This is the latest, and seemingly among the most elaborate, in an endless series of official reports and programmes aimed at improving higher education in independent India. The Radhakrishnan Commission of 1949, the National Education Policies of 1968 and 1986, the Yashpal Committee of 2009, the National Knowledge Commission in 2007, and the draft NEP of 2019 have all basically said the same thing.

While it is always valuable for various government committees to point to the importance of higher education for economy and society, it is not necessary to convene many experts through initiatives such as EQUIP to tell the government and the academic community what they already know. Perhaps the time, energy and resources that EQUIP will require can be better spent implementing the obvious. Everyone agrees that higher education needs significant improvement, especially as India seeks to join the ranks of the world's premier economies.

Inadequate allocation of funds

However, central to both quality improvement and increased access is money. Higher education in India has been chronically underfunded – it spends less than most other BRICS countries on higher education. The last Budget allocated only ₹37,461 crore for the higher education sector. Other related ministries and departments such as Space, Scientific and Industrial Research, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Science and Technology, Health Research and Agricultural Research have been allocated only modest support. Inadequate funding is evident at all le-



"The challenge is not only to enrol students and improve graduation rates but also to ensure that they are provided with a reasonable standard of quality." Students fill admission forms in New Delhi in June. • PTI

vels. All State governments, which provide the bulk of higher education money, also fail to adequately support students and institutions.

The Central government, responsible mostly for the top of the academic system, does not provide sufficient resources. Even the Institutions of Eminence scheme falls short of requirements and is dramatically behind similar programmes in China and several European countries. Funding for basic research, which is largely a Central government responsibility, lags behind peer countries. Apart from Tata Trusts, Infosys Foundation, and Pratiksha Trust, industry provides little support. Thus, India requires substantial additional resources for higher education to improve quality and build a small but important "world class" sector. Massive effort is needed at both State and Central levels – and the private sector must contribute as well.

A key goal of EQUIP and the NEP is that India must expand the percentage of young people enrolled in post-secondary education significantly. It is interesting to note that while the draft NEP aims at increasing the gross enrolment ratio to at least 50% by 2035, EQUIP targets doubling the gross enrolment ratio to 52% by 2024. At present, India's gross enrolment ratio is 25.8%, significantly behind China's 51% or much of Europe and North America, where 80% or more young people enrol in higher education. India's challenge is even greater because half of the pop-

ulation is under 25 years of age. The challenge is not only to enrol students, but to ensure that they can graduate. Non-completion is a serious problem in the sector.

And of course, the challenge is not only to enrol students and improve graduation rates but also to ensure that they are provided with a reasonable standard of quality. It is universally recognised that much of Indian higher education is of relatively poor quality. Employers often complain that they cannot hire graduates without additional training. The fact that many engineering colleges even today have to offer "finishing programmes" to their graduates underlines the pathetic state of quality imparted by these institutions.

India needs a differentiated academic system – institutions with different missions to serve a range of individual and societal needs. Some "world class" research-intensive universities are needed. Colleges and universities that focus on quality teaching and serve large numbers of students are crucial. Distance education enters the mix as well. The draft NEP's recommendations for a differentiated system of research universities, teaching universities, and colleges are in tune with this. However, the ways suggested to achieve these objectives are impractical.

The private sector is a key part of the equation. India has the largest number of students in private higher education in the world. But much of private higher education is of poor

quality and commercially oriented. Robust quality assurance is needed for all of post-secondary education, but especially for private institutions.

The structure and governance of the higher education system needs major reform. There is too much bureaucracy at all levels, and in some places, political and other pressures are immense. Professors have little authority and the hand of government and managements is too heavy. At the same time, accountability for performance is generally lacking.

Recommendations

India needs: (a) dramatically increased funding from diverse sources, and the NEP's recommendation for a new National Research Foundation is a welcome step in this direction; (b) significantly increased access to post-secondary education, but with careful attention to both quality and affordability, and with better rates of degree completion; (c) longitudinal studies on student outcomes; (d) to develop "world class" research-intensive universities, so that it can compete for the best brains, produce top research, and be fully engaged in the global knowledge economy; (e) to ensure that the private higher education sector works for the public good; (f) to develop a differentiated and integrated higher education system, with institutions serving manifold societal and academic needs; (g) reforms in the governance of college and universities to permit autonomy and innovation at the institutional level; and (h) better coordination between the University Grants Commission and ministries and departments involved in higher education, skill development, and research.

The latest draft NEP and EQUIP have reiterated the importance of some of these points. There is really no need to spend money and attention on a new review. The needs are clear and have been articulated by earlier commissions and committees. The solutions are largely obvious as well. What is needed is not more research, but rather long-neglected action.

Philip G. Altbach is research professor and founding director, Centre for International Higher Education at Boston College, U.S. Eldho Mathew is an independent higher education researcher based in New Delhi

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Fair reporting demands appropriate words

Why the media uses the term Dalit



A.S. PANNEERSELVAM

Some issues tend to keep surfacing, no matter how many times you address them. On August 20, 2018, I wrote a column, "Why context matters", to explain why news reports use the term 'Dalit'. When the Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry issued an absurd advisory to the media in 2018 on the use of the term Dalit, this newspaper carried an informed editorial, "What's in a name?" (September 6), which once again explained not only the rationale but also the ethical imperatives for using the term.

Yet, recently, a reader, Tarun Pal, wrote an angry letter to us asking why *The Hindu*, an English language newspaper, uses the term Dalit, a Hindi word, and not Scheduled Caste. Mr. Pal argued that if the idea is to describe the daily ordeals of a section of people, it would be prudent to name the specific community rather than use the general term Dalit. Another reader, Mahesh P. Padukone, wondered about the efficacy of using the term. He wrote: "Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal stating that 'Fifty two per cent of Dalit respondents feared their caste would be 'outed' and 67% said they faced discrimination at the workplace' in the U.S. is far-fetched because I seriously doubt an American even knows or cares about 'Brahmins', 'Dalits', 'Adivasis'... For them, it's an 'Indian' without the ramifications of caste."

This brings us back to the question, is the word Dalit used without any application of mind? Is it discriminatory? How did the change happen from Mahatma Gandhi's Harijan to Dalit? And where does the official term Scheduled Caste fit into this narrative?

Historical context

Eminent economist and former chairman of the University Grants Commission, Sukhdeo Thorat, in his book, *Dalits in India: Search for a Common Destiny*, explained the significance of the term Dalit. He said that this term was invoked in a conscious manner in 1932 when B.R. Ambedkar worked out the Poona Pact with Congress leaders to secure reserved seats for the depressed classes to the provincial legislatures and the Central

Legislature. Mr. Thorat argued that the term Scheduled Caste is a legally defined category, but that the media and academics can use other words to capture the context and problems faced by communities. He also made it clear that Dalit is a Marathi word, and means the oppressed and resourceless.

Scholars have also consistently argued that the term Scheduled Caste remains neutral, while the term Dalit provides the cultural and political context to the struggles of a people. In this newspaper, the academic Ananya Vajpeyi wrote an article, "A modern-day enlightenment" (April 17, 2014), explaining some of these contentious issues. She cited D.R. Nagaraj's influential essay, "Self-Purification v/s Self-Respect: On the Roots of the Dalit Movement" to make several points: "First, that it was Gandhi who initially grasped untouchability as a political problem (albeit his own concerns were spiritual and not material); second, that Gandhi and Ambedkar debated their divergent approaches to the problem of untouchability in a vigorous manner both before and after the Poona Pact of 1932; and third, that by the end of their long encounter with one another, Gandhi and Ambedkar had internalised one another's ideas." She examined how Nagaraj explained the difference between Harijan and Dalit as the "difference between the caste Hindu's struggle for self-purification and the outcaste's struggle for self-respect" because the "self" in the two situations is not the same.

Pregnant with meaning

History apart, the Press Council of India, the statutory body that regulates the print media, has ruled that there cannot be a ban on the use of the word Dalit in the media. When the I&B Ministry advisory, which was based on an order of the Bombay High Court, was issued, the regulatory body said: "Our reading of the Bombay High Court order is that it did not seek a ban on the word 'Dalit'. We deliberated on the order and have come to the conclusion that it is advisable not to issue directions/orders prohibiting the use of word Dalit."

This newspaper is alive to the fact that the term Dalit is "pregnant with meaning, reflecting the struggle of a community to reassert its identity and lay claim to the rights that were denied to them for centuries". Hence, it becomes the duty of the media to use it.

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

Start with preventive care

Doctors must encourage the continuum-of-care approach among patients

PRATHAP C. REDDY

The medical profession is a calling. It requires sacrifice and grit to become a healer, a clinician, and from then on, it is a responsibility and commitment to a lifetime of service and learning. Beyond the initial years of studying medicine, doctors have to work very hard every single day to upgrade their knowledge and skills.

What makes the process more challenging is the dynamic nature of the world we live in today. Knowledge and the nature of knowledge are evolving, driven by technological developments. Healthcare challenges have also constantly evolved. Doctors have reduced many feared ailments to stories of the past. But ailments have also remodelled and resurfaced and are posing different tests to doctors today.

Challenges are not new to doctors; in fact, they are doctors' companions right from the time he or she decides to enter the medical profession. I would urge every doctor to bear this in mind. No medical professional should be disheartened by the recent incidents of violence against members of the fraternity. I was pleased to see the support of fellow professionals, citizens and the government towards the fraternity's call for stronger laws to ensure its safety.

Developments in healthcare

There are fabulous developments taking place in healthcare today. Health is on the national agenda for the first time after Independence. Ayushman Bharat is a game-changer. It will cover the cost of medical care for almost 40% of India's population, while the 1,50,000 Health and Wellness Centres being developed will strengthen the national focus on preventive healthcare.

There is a willingness amongst our administrators to hear the perspectives of the sector. Innovative plans are on the anvil to boost medical education and hospital infrastructure. Skilling for healthcare is gaining momentum, and will undoubtedly be a key engine for job creation. Millions

of medical value travellers from over a hundred countries are choosing India for medical and surgical treatment. Huge investments are being made to build hospitals, contemporary medical centres and remote healthcare models. As a clinician with over six decades of experience, I am confident that we have all the elements in place for a healthier and happier India. There is no better time to be a doctor than today.

The big challenge today

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are a big challenge today and need serious tackling. The World Health Organization has been ringing the warning bells for the last few years on the challenges that NCDs pose. NCDs have been rapidly growing. Cancer, stroke, obesity and diabetes are some of the ailments growing at an alarming pace. They affect people across ages and threaten the younger population

a lot more than the older population. But there are only finite manpower and resources to manage the problem. The limited pool of medical professionals, technicians and nurses, equipment and hospital beds will make it very difficult to tackle the onslaught of patients and diseases in the coming decade. The entire medical fraternity must come together to tackle this threat with a disruptive and innovative approach of creating a continuum of care. This will enable healthcare to start from preventive care instead of limiting medical excellence to curative care. Doctors must encourage an attitude of care continuum among patients.

On the occasion of National Doctors Day, doctors need to pledge again the medical oath. They have to be the harbingers of change in the attitudes and approaches towards healthcare. They need to become role models for their patients to lead healthier lives. They must educate patients about NCDs, and promote preventive care.

Prathap C. Reddy is Chairman, Apollo Hospitals Group



DATA POINT

How women travel to work in big cities

More women use public transport to travel for work than men in big cities. Women become more dependant on buses and metro trains as the distance to work increases. With the Delhi government proposing free bus and metro rides for women in the city, we look at the extent of public transport use.

By Vignesh Radhakrishnan and Siddarth Rao T.

Use of public transport

Close to 37% of women who travel to work use public transport in Delhi. That figure is significantly higher than the % of men who do the same: 28. This trend is true for most big cities. The table below shows the % of working men & women who use public transport

City	Men	Women
Mumbai	49	53
Chennai	25	39
Kolkata	35	38
Delhi	28	37
Bengaluru	29	33
Hyderabad	21	29
Ahmedabad	11	17

Data source

The data are sourced from Census 2011. By that year, Delhi's metro network was fairly advanced. The network, which started in 2002, extended to 96 km by 2009 and 184 km by 2010-11 before the Commonwealth Games. Thus, the data will be fairly indicative of how women travel today in Delhi

More women travel smaller distances compared to men

In Delhi, compared to 64% men who travel more than 5 km for work, only close to 53% women do so. The trend is fairly common in all big cities. The table shows the proportion of men and women who travel 0-1 km and 0-5 km for work

City	Distance travelled : 0-1 km		Distance travelled : 0-5 km	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Hyderabad	12	21	51	58
Ahmedabad	15	23	44	57
Mumbai	23	23	56	56
Kolkata	27	29	45	55
Chennai	15	23	47	51
Bengaluru	18	26	47	49
Delhi	19	22	36	47

Distance factor

The preference for public transport increases as the distance to work increases. The table shows the proportion of women who take public transport across distances. Women who travel 11-20 km rely more on public transport than those who travel smaller distances

City	Distance travelled for work		
	2-5 km	6-10 km	11-20 km
Delhi	33	52	59
Ahmedabad	54	60	88
Mumbai	43	44	75
Kolkata	29	27	51
Chennai	39	48	63
Bengaluru	33	42	57
Delhi	13	20	37

THIS IS THE FIRST OF A TWO-PART SERIES ON WOMEN AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 1, 1969

'Desai calls for export of minerals'

Deputy Prime Minister Morarji Desai to-day [June 30] said increased export of minerals could "play a large part" in making up the deficit balance of trade. He told the third annual convention of the Federation of Indian Mineral Industries here [New Delhi] that the Government came in the field of mineral exploration and export to compete in world markets. Full co-operation and co-ordination between the Government and the private mineral industries could help India capture foreign markets. "I hope we will do so," he added. He said people should give up the habit of collaborating with other countries for everything. "We have to develop minerals on our own and have to compete with others." Mr. A.K. Rungta, President of the Federation, in his address, suggested the formation of a "mining finance corporation" to meet the financial requirements of the minerals industry in the country. In his address at the third annual general meeting of the Federation, Mr. Rungta said the minerals industry was faced with numerous problems, creation and availability of adequate financial resources for the growth of the industry being one among them.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 1, 1919.

The Straits Riots. Mob Shot At.

The Penang riots bear slight comparison with similar happenings in Singapore, where the cause was anti Japanese feeling culminating on Thursday 19th June in attacks on shops and individuals. The police had to fire on the mobs and several Chinese and Tamilians were killed and wounded. Captain Chancellor, Inspector General of Police, was struck on the head with a heavy stick, but though dazed by the blow he remained on duty. Placards inciting the Chinese to attack Japanese were posted but were speedily removed. The anti Japanese feeling in Singapore is bitter and the Manchester regiment stationed there had to be called out to assist the police and the movement spread to Penang where it developed into food riots owing to high prices. Shops of prominent Chinese who had been fined for profiteering were attacked and had to be defended by police. Rice shops were looted. All work was suspended at the docks. Obstructions were placed by the rioters on streets, such as trees, blocks of stone, beams and poles, and when these were removed and volunteers proceeded to another spot the obstructions were replaced.