

BOOK REVIEWS

Social Relevance of Higher Learning Institutions, by Prof. G. Palanithurai, Concept Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, Price ₹ 550.

The author, a self-proclaimed watcher of the higher education scenario in the country, has done well to compile his articles on higher learning institutions in India which have reflected on his varied experiences gained from various assignments he took in India and briefly in Germany and Canada.

Most would agree that not only the higher education, but education itself is in great mess today. The crass commercialisation of education has been the major, but not the sole, reason for taking it to such low depths.

The author dwells on the opportunities provided by globalisation in economy which calls for creating large competent manpower. With the increase in the number of institutions of higher learning, the number of passed out students has been increasing, but in this race, quality is the worst sufferer.

India has been, through ages, known for its superior education system which was emulated widely. However, in view of our belief that whatever is done in West is superior and must be copied here. So, instead of bringing out superior manpower, our universities are churning out graduates and post-graduates whose quality, to say the least, is questionable. They are definitely literate, but are they educated? While our graduates should be worthy of market requirement, many of them should also become thinkers, poets, artists, scientists, technologists and above all outstanding teachers. But, is it happening? The answer would be a big NO!

There could not be any argument against the entry of private sector in education. But it

should not be seen as a mere business opportunity for making huge profits through huge capitation fee (especially in medical colleges) and high tuition fee right from Nursery classes. The argument that the quality comes at a cost is taken but should this so-called quality manifest in terms of showing buildings and infrastructure alone but also in helping the student to grow up the knowledge ladder smoothly. Further, it should also not happen that their doors should be shut on the resource poor children. It has also been observed that many medical colleges who charge unimaginable capitation and tuition fees, often lack the required learning infrastructure in terms of faculty and labs/operation theatres etc. The author argues in favour of education being either in Central or State level but not in concurrent list. This needs to be debated.

In Chapter 3, the author describes about the system and stakeholders in higher education. There is a plethora of stakeholders which obviously gives birth to plethora of problems. There is a need to put in place an effective and responsive system which would not only remove the anomalies but will also take the higher education system forward.

Like any other sector, education sector is becoming very important in rural socio-economic scenario. But for the sector to be effective and responsive, the people have to develop strong stake rather than simply being bystanders. If the rural life has to be rescued from present misery, education, especially higher education, has to play an important role. For this to succeed, the academics and scholars have to pay more attention to the knowledge generation, application and transmission with specific aim of changing rural society. Further, the role of Panchayati Raj

institutions and NGOs also is highlighted to join the force. In this effort, supreme care has to be taken to maintain high standards, second to none.

The government often loudly expresses its intent to create World Class institutions of higher learning. But more serious efforts will be needed to realise the dream of every Indian (rich or poor) to be educated and possibly obtain graduation. The youth, especially rural youth, who should become the nuclei of rural development and empowerment process, should be prepared for the important job of rural transformation and governance. A lot of important tasks like education, health, infrastructure, food and nutritional security are waiting for the competent youth to manage. Our institutions of higher learning should be prepared to create this critical mass.

The author is a prolific writer of books, articles etc., and has genuine interest in curing the ills of higher education. His critique on the ongoing system is quite incisive. The book is good reading and should be of interest to all those whose heart is in this area and who dream to clear the augean stables with the fastest pace.

– Dr. S.M. Ilyas

Economic Liberalisation and Indian Agriculture : A District Level Study, by Bhalla, G.S. and Gurmail Singh, 2012, Published by SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd., B1/I-1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area, Mathura Road, New Delhi - 110 044, (India), pp. 360, ₹ 795 (Hardback).

The book under review is an outcome of a research study conducted by the authors on 'Growth of Indian Agriculture : A District Level Study' to update the district-wise data from 1990-93 to 2003-06 with a view to comparing the performance of agriculture during the post-liberalisation period from 1990-93 to 2003-06, with the pre-liberalisation period from 1980-83 to 1990-93 and from 1962-65

to 1980-83. Adopting a comparative analysis, the book brings out the spasmodic transition of Indian agriculture from pre to post-green revolution and the deceleration from pre - to post-liberalisation period of over five decades consolidated in six chapters. The study was carried out in 17 states covering 281 districts on 35 crops for a comprehensive discussion of the cropping patterns and levels of agricultural output at the state and all India levels during the reference period.

After a brief introductory chapter, about the methodology adopted in conducting the massive study, second chapter is confined to the growth and productivity performance of agriculture which have been meticulously analysed and compared with those of the green revolution period. The author explains that the long-term (1962-2008) growth rate of crop production at 2.46 per cent per annum was achieved mainly due to cropped area and irrigation expansion in the pre-green revolution period. The authors have indicated that the pace of growth rate achieved in crop production during the green revolution period could not be sustained in the post-reform period. The decline was on account of a slowdown in the expansion of irrigation due to the decline in public investment and the failure to have fresh breakthrough in technology.

Chapter 3 is devoted to analysis of yield levels of all the crops taken together at the disaggregated district level. During 1962-65, the yield levels in most of the districts in India were abysmally low. An analysis of data on regional variations at the district level during 1962-2008 brings out the impact that the introduction of new technology has made in raising yield levels in various districts. Breakthrough in oilseeds technology under aegis of the Technology Mission on Oilseeds, leading to notable rise in productivity levels of oilseeds was noticed during 1980-93. The success of the new technology in raising yields is intimately related with the use of modern