



International Students in India: NEP-2020 Perspectives

Srinibas Pathi^{*}

Madhusmita Mishra[†]

Abstract

India has been a global hub for students, researchers, and teachers from the ancient period. Indian way of education, pedagogy and the world view pertaining to religions, spirituality, philosophy, oriental science and Mathematics, Traditional medicinal systems, History and ethnography, architecture, trade and commerce, agriculture and environmental preservation etc. as propounded by the most popular centres of learning. While, we still continue to revamp, reform and reformulate different facets of our education system, in the era of the globalised world, our share of foreign or international students has continued to be negligible in proportion to the vast possibilities of collaborative efforts in education, research, extension, skill development, and innovation.

Keywords: Education, Pedagogy, Education System, Reforms, International Students.

Introduction

India has been a global hub for students, researchers, and teachers from the ancient period. Indian way of education, pedagogy and the world view pertaining to religions, spirituality, philosophy, oriental science and Mathematics, Traditional medicinal systems, History and ethnography, architecture, trade and commerce, agriculture and environmental preservation etc. as propounded by the most popular centres of learning. Taxila¹ is regarded as the first International University established in the tenth Century BCE which continued for five hundred years. Some of other institutions of higher education in India in ancient times include, among others Nalanda, Valavi, Pushpagiri Vihar, Odantapuri, Somapura, Vikramashila, Kashi, Mithila, Ujjayini, Puri, and Jagaddala Viharas. The students from other countries visited India to study Sanskrit, Vedas, Upanishads, Dharmasutras, literature, and the contributions of great Indian scholars like Panini, Patanjali, Aryabhatta, Charaka, Susruta,

^{*}Senior Professor of Public Administration & Former Dean, School of Social Sciences, Mizoram University, Aizawl – 796004, Mizoram, India. Email: srinibaspathi@gmail.com

[†]Former Professor of Management & Director, PantheonHR, Bhubaneswar - 751002, Odisha, India. Email: madhu1691@gmail.com

Katyaayaana et al. In this context, the gurukul ashramas and the Buddhists monastery systems need a special mention that propagated holistic and interactive pedagogy.

Centuries of external aggressions and foreign domination culminating in colonization of India not only caused extreme disruption of the socio economic and political fabric of our country but also directly impacted the negative growth and under development of our education system to a great extent. However, during the nineteenth century, introduction of English, education system as part of lord Thomas Babington Macaulay's² initiation opened the doors to Western System of education. Even though this step has its share of controversies and complications, it became the foundation of Indian Education System in the post-independent era. One significant casualty is the steady decline of foreign students in India during last millennium. While, we still continue to revamp, reform and reformulate different facets of our education system, in the era of the globalised world, our share of foreign or international students has continued to be negligible in proportion to the vast possibilities of collaborative efforts in education, research, extension, skill development, innovation and host of other academic endeavours. In an improved scenario, more and more international students would come to higher education institutions in India.

AISHE Report and International Students Data

The All - India Survey on Higher Education³ (AISHE) Report for 2020-21, released by the Ministry of Education, Government of India has indicated that even after quantitative upward trend during the preceding decade, the ratio of international students who are admitted in the higher education institutions in India is 0.15 p.c. of the total number of students. The report defines a foreign student as that person who has got admission in India but also continues to hold the citizenship of another country. So far as the intake of foreign students of India is concerned, about seventy- three p.c. of such students come from fifteen countries during the academic year 2010-11. However, during 2020-21, students from more than one hundred and sixty-three countries got admission in higher education institutions in India. Top ten countries contribute about sixty seven p.c. of international students in India according to 2020-21 Report. Some of the countries that contribute the maximum number of international students include, among others Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Canada, Ethiopia, Iran, Malaysia, Nepal, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, the United States and Yemen.

The International students coming to India are spread over the higher education institutions (HEIs) in different parts of the country. But about ninety-three p.c. of them have taken admission in fourteen states. These states have more than one thousand international students in each of them. Karnataka has the highest number of international students; the state that attracts more than ten thousand international students every academic year. The bulk of the international students that is more than sixty three percent were enrolled the HEIs of five states, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Telangana. This tally has dropped to thirty-nine p.c. in the academic year 2020-21 mainly because the international students have also got admission in Delhi- National Capital Region, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.

India has started the journey of higher education in the post- independence era with a view to fulfilling the vision and mission of socio-economic development, sustainability and meaningful contribution of the educated workforce in various walks of our national life. The Covid-19 Pandemic has crippled the global educational sector to a large extent. India, having the second largest educational network in the world, could not remain immune from the severe negative impact of the pandemic. The All-India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) suffered during this critical period for which the data provided by AISHE Report of 2020-21 continue to be the latest available credible source of information. According to this report, there are 1113 universities, 43796 colleges and 11296 stand- alone institutions that are operational in the country today. There are more than forty-one million students and 1.5 million members of faculty in these institutions as a whole. So far as the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in the HEIs is concerned, it stands at little over twenty- seven p.c. The GER in HEIs needs to improve in order to match the global standards and it should include more and more international students who need to come to India for their higher education requirements. It is also assumed that the current data of international students as admitted in HEIs, India could be much higher considering the opening of HEIs in the post-Pandemic scenario. In this context, an ambitious programme started by the Govt. of India in 2018, namely, Study in India under the Ministry of Education needs a special mention. This portal is a user- friendly mechanism that provides five easy steps to study in India. The first step is registration that opens the road to more than one hundred and sixty premier HEIs in India. Second, it facilitates the international students to plan their budget and gives information on fees, concessions, awards, scholarships, affordability issues and pointers towards the economical cost of living, etc. in India. Thirdly, the portal helps the prospective international students to make informed decisions while feeling the application form by providing relevant information on different disciplines, courses of studies and the infrastructural facilities available in HEIs in India. Forth, by using the portal the prospective international students get to know the outcome of their applications, the counselling process and their selection in the HEIs in India. Finally, the portal guides the selected international students to comply with the visa formalities and procedures for booking flights to India.

Study in India and PRAGATII

Under the ‘Study in India’⁴ Initiative, a new programme titled ‘Performance Rating of Applicants through Global Aptitude Test for Indian Institutes’ (PRAGATII) has been initiated. This programme has replaced the Indian Scholastic Assessment (Ind-SAT). This programme provides a scholarship of USD 3200; and any amount in excess of that may be paid by the international students. The medium of test is English and it is conducted on line. The syllabus includes verbal reasoning, quantitative aptitude and logical reasoning. This is an online proctored examination. Both UG and PG students from other countries can appear in the test by following relevant rules and regulations. Another significant aspect of the study in India programme is that the persons of Indian origin and non-resident Indians are also eligible to apply for the study in India programme. But they cannot claim scholarship facility as provided to other eligible international students. The higher Education Institutions in India that offer different academic programmes and courses to the international students display

their respective requirements and admission criteria that have to be followed by the prospective applicants.

Role of ICCR

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)⁵, an autonomous organization under the Ministry of External Affairs, Govt. of India that operates to strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding with other countries plays a significant role in attracting international students to HEIs in India. The ICCR was established in the year 1950 and it continues to foster these objectives in letter and spirit. It has instituted scholarships for international students who receive quality higher education in India and return to their countries of origin as friendship ambassadors. It offers about three thousand and five hundred scholarships under twenty-three schemes to international students from around one hundred eighty countries. The Ministry of AYUSH, Govt. of India sponsors some of the scholarships. The ICCR scholarship programmes for international students are facilitated by eighteen regional offices to which international students can contact during the time of necessity.

Some of the universities and institutes in India that admit significant number of international students are located in Bengaluru, NewDelhi, Gurgaon, Jalandhar, Dehradun, Vadodara, Coimbatore, Chandigarh, Bhubaneswar and Vellore. The reasons for choosing the particular HEIs by the international students could be many; including global standard infrastructure, qualified faculty, up to date and innovative course structure, peaceful academic environment, congenial behaviour of Indian people, technology enabled pedagogy, simplified and user-friendly rules and procedures, liberal scholarship facilities and post-education counselling for career progression and placement.

NEP 2020 and UGC Guidelines

In accordance with the mandate of the National Education Policy-2020 and the road map for its implementation, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has suggested that the universities and colleges in India may create about twenty-five p.c. supernumerary seats for international students. It has also been suggested that the entry level eligibility criteria of the HEIs concerned may be accepted as admission criteria for such students. In this context, all the HEIs have been instructed by the UGC to establish Office for International Students to coordinate the admission process and the other necessary requirements of the international students. The web page of the HEIs may function as all- inclusive information data base for the stakeholders. According to AISHE Report, there are about 3.85 cr. students in HEIs in India. At the current calculation, twenty-five p.c. of supernumerary seats can add about ninety- six lakh international students. It is an ambitious and gigantic task that can revolutionise the academic scenario in HEIs as and when accomplished.

India aspires to be a global destination for international students in near future. The specific mandate of NEP 2020 concerning internationalisation of higher education requires academic and research collaborations, student and faculty mobility among collaborating institutions and signing of MoUs with other countries, credit exchange mechanism and promotion of courses like languages of India, Indian culture, Indology, Yoga and Indian

Medicinal Systems etc. to attract international students. Another component of the guideline of UGC suggests establishing Alumni Connect Cells in the HEIs that could host international students. The top ranking HEIs in India are encouraged to establish off-shore campuses or international branch campuses in other countries to facilitate admission of students in the courses of their choice nearer home. Prof. Jagadesh Kumar, Chairman, UGC is of the view that internationalisation of higher education is an essential part of NEP 2020 that would integrate international and inter- cultural dimensions in higher education.

Some Pragmatic Issues and Challenges

Theoretically speaking, we have gone a long way in achieving substantial enrolment of international students to comply with the mandate of NEP2020. However, there are some real time issues and challenges that need to be addressed in ground or at the level of individual higher education institutions that admit international students. Some of them are as follows:

- a) Gradual but steady augmentation of basic infrastructural facilities including that of hostels, class rooms, laboratories, libraries etc. in HEIs.
- b) Restructuring of academic programmes and courses including class room teaching, online, and blended mode of pedagogy as per the mandate of NEP 2020 with a view to attracting international students.
- c) Innovative, skill based, state of the art, technology-enabled and socially useful programmes with global orientation and outlook.
- d) Integrating student and faculty mobility in HEIs to make the international students feel at home and to provide international exposure to Indian students and faculties of HEIs.
- e) Introduction of communicative English language crash courses for the bulk of international students who find language barrier as a practical stumbling block in many HEIs in India.
- f) Emotional boosting and psychological counselling for international students to deal with cultural integration challenges in HEIs, and
- g) Encouraging joint research projects or field projects involving both Indian and international students in HEIs and publication of quality research papers and articles covering shared expertise and exposure.

To conclude, internalisation of higher education as per the mandate of NEP 2020 can be achieved by admitting sizable number of international students in HEIs in India that in turn can contribute to development of higher education in multiple dimensions. The participation of all the stakeholders in accomplishing this national task can be the first giant step in right direction.

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Endnote

¹Taxila is regarded as the oldest Centre of Learning in ancient India, see for details mysteryofindia.com

²Lord Macaulay introduced English Education in India

³AISHE was initiated by Department of Higher Education, Government of India in 2011 to portray the status of higher education

⁴Study in India is a flagship programme of the Ministry of Education, Government of India which was started in the year 2018

⁵ICCR, an autonomous organisation attached to the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India contributes to facilitating admission of international students in higher education institutions in India