
Book Review

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Devesh Kapur and Pratap Bhanu Mehta (Eds.), *Navigating the Labyrinth: Perspectives on India's Higher Education*, Orient BlackSwan Pvt. Ltd., pp. 273, ISBN: 9789352872763.

The book describes the range of challenges that Indian higher education is currently facing.

The brilliant introductory chapter provides a brief historical review of higher education in India and the emerging trends in the massification of higher education. The editors have identified the key challenges of higher education as quality, access, financing and internationalization. Among other things, it attempts to provide a political economy framework to understand the governance weaknesses plaguing the Indian higher education. They try to narrate through a historical review the weak record in human development and warn that the absence of a broad egalitarian primary education base would be detrimental to both base (primary education) and apex (higher education).

In Chapter I, Apoorvanand brings out the challenges in phasing higher education through the story of the decline of a college in north Bihar. Part memoir, part institutional history, the chapter helps us see the struggles and triumphs of universities.

Sachi Hatakenaka details the Indian experience in university research and graduate education within an International context. The core argument is for the establishment of multidisciplinary research universities as against the expansion of narrowly specialized research institutes. This argument is worth examining, given the declining quality of research especially in state universities.

Manish Sabharwal and Srinivasan Kannan highlight the need for expansion of education in rural areas to impart appropriate skills to the vast majority of Indian rural population. They examine the role of community colleges in supporting micro, small and medium enterprises and as a supporting mechanism for work-related learning.

The paradox of unemployment and shortage of skilled workers is the theme of the chapter by Megha Agarwal. A strong system for skill development and vocational education and training is important given that the vast majority of labour force operates in the unorganized sector.

Jeemol Unni and Sudipa Sarkar explain the linkages between higher education and labour markets. They examine education inflation and the mismatch between degree and job requirement.

K. P. Krishnan addresses the financing of higher education. Higher education loans by the banking sector increased by more than 200-fold in less than 15 years. He explores the need for interventions in higher education policy, given the limitation on public budgets and increasing student's fees or loan schemes.

The chapter on Supreme Court and private higher education by Devesh Kapoor and Madhav Khosla examines the role of an institution whose increasing presence in governance extends far beyond higher education, namely the courts. They analyse empirical patterns in both litigation and adjudication in higher education cases.

The final chapter by Pankaj Chandra addresses issues related to governance in higher education. He argues that governance-related issues play an important role in determining the quality of higher education and in shaping a learning environment. He opines that the existing forms of governance threaten the provision of quality education and precipitate tensions that institutions are unable to resolve.

The book analyses multiple and complex issues in higher education including research, vocationalization, financing, governance and community colleges in India. The book will be highly useful to researchers, policymakers and activists in higher education.

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