

RUSA –

**As Quality Intervention in
the Higher Education Sector**



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BOOK REVIEW

Far Beyond RUSA

Ananya Samajdar*

Dalip Kumar Ed. (2016). *RUSA – As Quality Intervention in the Higher Education Sector*. Chandigarh, Post Graduate Govt. College for Girls & Unistar Books Pvt Ltd. 170 p., Un-priced.

In recent years, there has been a lot of discussion on the issue of quality of India's Higher Educational institutions. The media has time and again drawn attention to the near absence of India's Higher Educational Institutions in lists of the top 200 universities of the world such as the Times Higher Education and QS World University Rankings. More importantly, quality issues in India's Higher Educational institutions impact deeply on the educational and career prospects of our youth. Thus, there is great interest in, and also, a great need to, explore quality-related issues related to Higher Education.

The adoption of Rastriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) in 2013 as India's National Higher Education Mission to transform India's Higher Education system by focusing on state universities where more than 90% of students are enrolled, will undoubtedly be written as a landmark in India's history of Higher Education. Given that more than two years have elapsed since RUSA's adoption, it is a good time to record RUSA's quality potential and initial performance. Given such a context, this book is timely, topical and relevant.

While RUSA is mentioned very prominently in the title of the book, it must be noted that the treatment of this book goes far beyond RUSA to include a gamut of quality-related issues that affect Higher Education in India.

The book has not been divided into thematic sections, but an analysis of the chapters shows that the chapters fit into the following themes:

- i) RUSA and its main features, innovativeness and quality potential

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- ii) Specific Quality Related Issues in Higher Education: Research and Innovation, E-learning, the issues related to teachers, and value-based education
- iii) CSR and its role in Higher Education
- iv) Vocationalization of Higher Education and significance of RUSA with respect to the same
- v) Privatization of Higher Education
- vi) Gender/women related issues in Higher Education

A description of the context and main arguments and insights presented under each of these themes is detailed below:

RUSA, its main features, innovativeness and quality potential: This book has repeatedly drawn attention to and hailed RUSA's focus on data-based and systematic planning in Higher Education, strategic and performance-based funding, reform agenda and norm-based decision making. The book has also pointed to RUSA's transformative potential in addressing the access, equity and quality-related issues of India's Higher education system.

The access-quality debate is the great debate in Higher Education. Philip Altbach has very powerfully and provocatively argued that quality and massification of Higher Education cannot go together. While it is impossible to increase mass access and at the same time maintain the highest and uniform standards of quality in the mass of institutions, RUSA's insistence on quality parameters such as NAAC accreditation in granting institutional funds and its incentive-based approach are critical in attempting to reconcile the priorities of access and quality and in providing for at least a minimum standard of institutional quality while increasing access. In this context, the chapter by Nemi Chand Goliaya rightly argues that funding of Higher Education should incentivize quality and performance.

The book also highlights that RUSA is different

from the earlier more piecemeal approaches related to funding of Higher Education by virtue of embodying an integrated approach to access, equity and quality, and also because of its insistence on state-level planning of Higher Education to prevent ad-hoc institutional growth.

The chapter by Nidhi Goyal and Neeraj Sharma argues that RUSA, because of the 'interesting' results seen in the first year of its implementation, creates the hope of addressing the problems of India's 'challenged' Higher Education system such as low GER, social and geographical inequalities, poor infrastructure and poor research performance. Ideally, the chapter should have referred to RUSA outputs rather than to India's overall institutional growth in evaluating RUSA's performance. The chapter rightly points to the wholesome impact of RUSA's insistence on NAAC accreditation in the form of spurt in LoI applications to NAAC, which shows that institutions are at least giving importance to the hitherto neglected quality dimension of assessment and accreditation.

The need for proper implementation and monitoring of RUSA has also been raised in the book. Dalip Kumar, in his chapter, cautions that RUSA's objectives "can be crippled if dilution of the SHEC (State Higher Education Council)' is done to any extent by the state government;" (pg. 13) Dalip Kumar also stresses the need for timely utilization of RUSA funds. Umesh Bharti, in her chapter, argues that "strict monitoring and appropriate follow up at each level of administration" (pg. 31) are needed, along with accountability at each level.

Specific Quality-related Issues in Higher Education

Under this broad theme, specific sub-themes such as Research and Innovation, e-learning, teacher-related issues, and value-based education have been covered in six chapters, which are detailed below:

Research and Innovation: The chapter by Vivek Nagpal stresses the importance of Research in Higher Education Institutions in catering to "national and international expectations in the domain of knowledge generation" and also because "good teaching evolves out of good research". This chapter points to the obstacles that are responsible for the poor state of research in India's state universities, such as unavailability of quality manpower, poor funding etc. The chapter also makes several convincing suggestions

for improving the state of Research and Innovation in India's state universities (apart from increasing funding) such as incentivizing faculty towards research by allowing them to take up consultancy work, increasing the numbers and amount for student fellowships, leveraging ICT, protection of IPRs and development of thrust research areas and at least one centre of Research Excellence in each state university. To add to the insights stated in this chapter, incorporation of Research Methodology Courses with lecture and seminar components in undergraduate and graduate courses may also be a possible way of improving the research performance of India's state universities. Vikas Sharma, in his chapter on the BTIS-Net in the field of bio-informatics argues about the need to foster similar inter-institutional and inter-disciplinary networks of researchers and scientists to improve teaching and research in the sciences.

E-learning: The chapter by Punam Agarwal, Vandana Lama and Sudhir Kumar Sharma argues that universities should adopt innovative e-learning techniques. The chapter by Deepika Kansal interestingly argues that "E-learning is learner-centric and ICT has the potential to change the face of Higher education in India". This chapter elaborates that e-learning with capacity-building of teachers in the domain of ICT would help bridge the gap between urban and rural areas and help improve the reach and spread of Higher Education.

Teacher-related Issues: In addition to the shortage of teachers, the heavy reliance on contract teachers is a major problem in India's Higher Education system. The very relevant chapter by Jagjeet Kaur elaborates this specific problem in Higher Education. The chapter argues that the reliance on contract teachers is leading to 'downfall' in the quality of Higher Education, due to lower qualifications of contract teachers, dismal job security and remuneration, and poor opportunities for professional enhancement which are also responsible for poor job satisfaction and consequently poor motivation of teachers. This chapter interestingly points out that it is difficult to experimentally measure the difference in performance between contract and regular teachers, because the variable contract/regular status is itself correlated with variables such as gender, age and experience.

Value-based Education: This chapter (in Hindi) by Shagandeep Kaur and Lakhvir Singh emphasized the need for education in values such truthfulness,

devotion to duty and right conduct etc., by exploring the differences between the solemn, didactic, simple and purposeful 'Samavartan' ceremonies of Ancient Hindu tradition with the convocation ceremonies of today.

CSR and Higher Education

As per the Companies Act 2013, qualifying companies are required to spend at least 2% of their average net profits for the three preceding financial years on CSR. Data from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (presented in a reply, dated 15th March 2016, by Minister Mr Arun Jaitley in response to a Rajya Sabha Question) shows that education and vocational skill development is the area of spending most preferred by companies. Given the magnitude of access, equity and quality challenges that face Higher Education in India, Government funding is not sufficient to meet the challenges, and funds from other quarters such as Corporate funding (in the form of CSR spending) is required to fill the quality, access and equity gaps (a point that is repeatedly stressed in this book). Give such a context, it is pertinent to look at the specific insights and arguments presented in the chapters of this book on the theme of CSR and Higher Education.

Five out of the 27 chapters of this book deal with CSR and Higher Education. The chapters highlight the specific areas where CSR funding can contribute to Higher Education, namely filling infrastructure gaps, improve Research and Innovation and the spread of ICT, meet equity gaps through scholarships etc. An important recurring argument presented in the chapters is that CSR contributions to Higher Education must go beyond fund provision; for instance corporates can contribute (in the form of curricular inputs and/or resource persons) to make programs of vocational education/skill development more responsive to industry needs and thus improved student employability. Companies can also contribute their managerial expertise to improve the implementation of educational projects. Some of the chapters also pinpoint the challenges faced in carrying out CSR projects in the domain of Higher Education such as lack of enough credible NGOs (especially in remote areas) for implementing CSR projects and the challenging of integrating CSR activities with the core business areas of Companies.

One insight that can be added to what has been contributed by the book chapters on CSR and Higher Education is that the prevalent CSR projects in the domain of education often take the form of one-off

interventions. There is a need for more sustainable, innovative, programme-mode and impact-oriented CSR projects in the domain of Higher Education, going beyond activities such as scholarships and infrastructure provision.

Vocationalization of Higher Education and Role of RUSA

The three chapters dealing with the theme of vocationalization of Higher Education stress the importance of vocational education in the context of India's demographic dividend, which urgently needs to be capitalized on, given the prevalent skill gap and low levels of employability of graduates. Importantly, the chapters also highlight the successes of countries such as Germany and South Korea that have highly developed skill development architectures and very high percentages of skilled populations, from which India has a lot to learn. The chapter by Shweta Bali interestingly reveals that vocational education in India has its roots in Mahatma Gandhi's Wardha Scheme, but has sadly been neglected since then.

The need for proper regulation and quality control and a common framework in the field of vocational education, and mechanisms of mobility between the Higher and Vocational Educational sector are stressed, so as to make vocational courses more effective in serving the needs of students; RUSA's vocationalization component is stated to be a "right step" (chapter by Shweta Bali, pg. 143) by this book in this context. Vocationalization of Higher Education is one of the 18 RUSA components, and activities taken up by states in this area require NSQF compliance, as per RUSA norms. This measure, to some extent, addresses the issue of mobility between the Vocational Education and mainstream Higher Education sectors.

The book also contains an interesting chapter on vocationalization of Higher Education in Music (in Hindi) by Binu Dogra. The chapter reveals that there are plenty of career opportunities in the field of music today, because of which education in music can be rewarding. This chapter reveals that the UT of Chandigarh has interestingly instituted a new initiative of campus placements for students of BA, MA, MPhil and PhD in Music in order to make music education more livelihood-oriented.

Privatization in Higher Education

The RUSA policy document (pg. 157) states that RUSA is committed to encourage private participation

in Higher Education, while guarding against the profit motive and commercialization. Like the RUSA policy document, the authors of the four chapters dealing with privatization in this volume also argue that Government funding is not sufficient to deal with the massive scale of access, equity and quality challenges in Higher Education in India.

Chapters by Seema Gupta and Monika Agarwal delve into debate on the pros and cons of privatization. The pros are stated as being less political interference, financial self-reliance, and also the achievements of some private institutions such as international presence, industry collaboration, emphasis on vocational courses, and multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary orientation. The pitfalls of privatization are also highlighted, such as profit-seeking nature, accentuation of inequalities, catering to short term market needs and also quality concerns in many private institutions. Importantly, the chapter by Monika Agarwal highlights that State domination of Higher Education is a fact in the most developed countries of the world, in terms of funding and enrolment of students in public institutions; this observation substantiates the argument that there is a critical role for the State in Higher Education and for schemes of strategic State funding such as RUSA. Like the RUSA policy document, this book also argues that there is an important role for privatization, but there should be safeguards against the ills of privatization such as commercialization of Higher Education.

Gender/Women Related Issues in Higher Education

The two chapters on this theme point to the increasing enrolment of women in Higher Education, and also the persistence of the gap in GER between males and females.

While deep-seated societal biases make the presence of women in Higher Education such a complicated issue, the book points to factors such as infrastructure availability and equity mechanisms such as monetary aids (scholarships) and non-monetary aids as important in improving the enrolment and educational experience of women in Higher Education. However, as this book argues, there is also a need to implement impact-oriented and holistic, integrated strategies for improving women's presence in Higher Education. The book also rightly points to the need to make campuses safe, secure and accessible for women, the need for gender inclusive and progressive curriculum² and most

significantly the need for 'developing institutional culture which is not hostile to women' (chapter by Jyoti Seth, pg. 156).

This book would be beneficial for general readers and also for students and researchers studying Higher Education, since it furnishes, in a single volume, a snapshot and introduction to a wide variety of issues facing Higher Education in India and on Higher Education Policies, including RUSA. Specific insights on the experiences and performance of states and UTs (such as Chandigarh) in implementing RUSA/ formulating State Higher Education Plans would have lent more concreteness and originality to the volume.

Notes

¹ SHEC is the institutional mechanism in states that is supposed to perform pivotal RUSA-related functions such as preparation of State Higher Education Plans and monitoring of RUSA implementation. SHECs, as per RUSA, are recommended to be led by Academics as chairpersons and to be at arms-length from the bureaucratic and political machinery of state governments.

² One of the projects launched in the recent Digital Launch of Projects under RUSA by the then HRM Ms Smriti Irani (on 3rd June 2016) also included the release of the Gender Sensitization Course and Digital Gender Atlas for advancing women's education from the state of Telangana. □

TO OUR READERS

Knowledgeable and perceptive as they are, our contributors must not necessarily be allowed to have the last word. It is for you, the readers, to join issues with them. Our columns are as much open to you as to our contributors. Your communications should, however, be brief and to the point.

Operating Environment

The Management Information System(MIS) is going to work in Client/Server Environment this means that client computers(computers forming part of the network) contact a server, generally a very powerful computer in terms of input/output, which provides services to the client computers. These services are programs which provide data such as the time, files, a connection, etc.

The services are used by programs client programs which run on client computers. This is why the term "client" is applied (FTP client, email client, etc.), where a program is designed to run on a client computer, capable of processing data received from a server (in the case of the FTP client we are dealing with files whereas for the email client we deal with email email).



*Adopted from RUSA Document



MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

(Multiagent System for Cooperative Decision making in Academic Environment)

For

Academic Institutions of Union Territory, Chandigarh



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Insight about Management Information System

Purpose

Rashtriya Uchcharat Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a scheme launched by Government of India to provide funds to higher educational institutes of States and Union Territories. One of the mandatory requirement on part of states is to develop and maintain Management Information System(MIS) which integrates all the information from all the institutes of state.

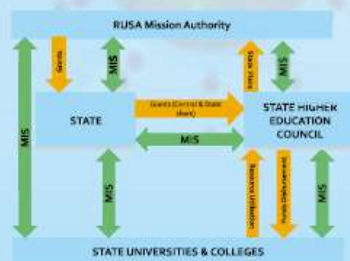
Scope

Management Information System (MIS) fulfills the need of integrating all higher education institutions by means of single platform for information exchange. MIS aims to provide necessary aid to decision making authorities in state as well as encouraging cooperative decision making.

Perspective

Management Information System (MIS) is system for monitoring and reporting Rashtriya Uchcharat Shiksha Abhiyan(RUSA) activities in the Union Territory, Chandigarh.

MIS is a system which along with monitoring and reporting, will help in collaboration and information exchange amongst various stakeholders in higher education of state.



*Adopted from RUSA Document

Features

- System can be accessed from URL: www.mirusachd.in.
- MIS is built by using Multiple agents which collaborate with each other to achieve objectives of the system. Agents are software entities which run in the background of the system.
- MIS a web based system i.e. users need to be on internet in order to access or use this system.
- MIS can be accessed on mobile as well as desktop in form of website as it is built with mobile first approach.
- MIS can be accessed with proper authentication.
- MIS provide different interface to different types of users.
- The system maintains full logs of all user activities on the system.
- It is highly scalable system.

User Classes and Characteristics

At present following are the user classes though in future the classes will increase with the evolution of system.

- System Administrator: System Administrator is responsible for providing privileges to all other users of system. Whereas System Administrator has all the possible privileges. However, System Administrator cannot see or change password of any other user thus providing proper access control.
- Council Member: State has State Higher Education Council(SHEC) which consisting of various members from diverse fields. This council is responsible for approving or rejecting various proposals submitted by various institutes. Once approved, Council needs to monitor various projects as well. Thus every council member belongs to this user class.
- RUSA Coordinator: Every higher education institute of state has one designated RUSA Coordinator who is responsible for entering all the information in MIS. Thus RUSA Coordinator collaborates on behalf of individual institute with other authorities of state. Coordinator is also responsible for uploading various proposals for consideration by State Higher Education Council(SHEC).