

**INDIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY  
– A GROWING MARKET, AND THE NEED FOR GREATER  
INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT<sup>1</sup>**

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The continuing growth of the middle class in India (approximately 200 million people) has led to increased demand for higher education that cannot be met by the Indian Higher Education system. The tertiary education participation rate in India is 11 %, and the government aims to increase this by 15% in 2015 (National Knowledge Commission 2007). The population is increasing but there has not been a corresponding growth in provision of education. Although the Indian government is planning to establish new universities and colleges in the near future, these will not be enough to provide places for all students who seek higher education. Consequently increasing numbers of Indian students are seeking higher education opportunities internationally. Historically there was a strong preference in India for studying in the US & UK, but gradually more Indian students are becoming interested in Australia. This paper argues that Australian education institutions need to consider engaging more closely with India, both to promote and raise the profile of Australian education in the short term, and also to position them for the future when the regulatory framework for foreign education providers in India is clarified.

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India is a huge country with a population of over one billion people, and numerous links with Australia (according to Indiatat.com, the population of India was 1,132,893,211 and growing daily, in May 2008). It shares with Australia a history of British colonisation, and the many consequences of that colonial experience, including English language use, systems of government, education, law and public transport modelled on the English systems, and an enthusiasm for cricket. Australia and India share numerous academic, cultural, media, scientific, government, NGO and commercial links, and the connections are increasing (Hardgrave 1970; Broinowski 2000; Stoddart 2000; Vicziany 2000; Weigold 2000; Viruru 2001; Feith 2004). The introduction to a directory of the Australia – India links, published in 1995, stated ‘the accelerated liberalisation of the Indian economy since July 1991 has been a major factor behind the strengthening bilateral ties’ between the two countries (Vicziany and Paligaru 1995).

Christopher Kremmer, who worked in India as the South Asia correspondent for the ABC, and lived there for 10 years from 1990, has written and spoken about outsiders’ perceptions of India. He spoke at the Australian International Education Conference in Melbourne in 2007 about the unrecognised changes that occurred in India through the nineties. He said that most of the foreign journalists he knew in India only spoke and wrote about the negative things in India – the terrorist attacks, the hijackings, the communal riots, the assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, etc. However, he said that the longer he lived in India, and became part of an Indian family through marrying an Indian woman, his perceptions changed. ‘Where colleagues saw only doom and gloom I started to see tremendous resilience’ (Kremmer 2007). While the violence attracted all the media attention, a slow reform process was going on throughout India, and the foreign journalists missed the story. Kremmer emphasised that there have been great and far-reaching changes in India since the early nineties, and India is misunderstood by many people outside it (Kremmer 2006; Kremmer 2007). One of these changes that has occurred in recent decades has been the growth of the economy and the growth of the middle class (Patnaik 2000; Wadhva 2000). There are many visible signs of this growing Middle Class – the modern shopping malls in cities, the satellite TVs in

villages, and the proliferation, in urban and rural India, of mobile phones. As the middle class grows, so does the demand for higher education.

In India there are traditions in which education and learning are highly valued. In traditional Indian culture, people were categorised into hereditary caste groups which were hierarchically valued. Traditionally, the most important caste groups were the brahmans, and the main occupation of brahmans was as priests. As priests, brahmans were the educated people in the society. Like medieval monks in Europe, brahmans were the holders of religious teaching and knowledge, and passed this teaching and knowledge down over generations. In traditional Indian culture a highly respected figure was the guru, or teacher; often a Brahman, and traditionally a religious or spiritual teacher (De Bary 1958; Dumont 1972; Lannoy 1975). In the Indian Islamic traditions education was also valued, and many Muslim rulers were patrons of learning (for arguments as to why Muslims should have taken up British education in the colonial period, see Syed Ahmad Khan in (De Bary 1958).

During the period of English colonial rule in India, the languages and systems of learning and knowledge that had been passed down in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and other languages were undervalued, and English was prioritised. ‘No single act of British policy has had a more lasting influence on the evolution of modern Indian thought than the decision in 1835 to use governmental funds to support education in the English language and to adopt the curriculum prevalent in English schools’ (De Bary 1958). During the British colonial period in India, because brahmans had a history and traditions of learning, many of them took up opportunities to learn English language and English education. Consequently a large number of educated Indians were brahmans, and many joined the Indian Civil Service and Indian universities.

After independence in 1947 opposition to the caste system was a significant concern for some Indian leaders, notably Ambedkar, and successive governments attempted to improve the position of people in lower castes. Reforms included implementing a reservation system in Higher Education, in which a number of places at universities are

reserved for students from lower castes. “By law, a certain portion of seats were reserved for the Scheduled Castes. By policy, different state governments endowed scholarships for children from disadvantaged homes. Where they could they took advantage, spawning an entire generation of first-generation learners.... There were also many more Scheduled Caste students at university than ever before” (Guha 2007). These reforms have led to greater participation in higher education, and greater competition for university positions.

Since the early 1990s the Indian economy has opened and grown, to the extent that a recent report predicted that “India would become the world’s fourth most powerful country by 2012; as measured by a combination of economic, military and technological strength” (Luce 2006). However, despite education being valued generally in Indian society, access to higher education is limited. There are not enough universities or other higher education institutions to meet the demands of the huge, growing population. The population is increasing, the economy is growing, the middle class is expanding, and the IT industry in particular is thriving, but there has not been a corresponding growth in provision of education. As Philip Altbach, the professor of higher education and director of the Center for International Higher Education in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College writes “India has significant advantages in the twenty-first century knowledge race. It has a large higher education sector – the third largest in the world in student numbers, after China and the United States. It uses English as a primary language of higher education and research. It has a long academic tradition. Academic freedom is respected.... Yet, the weaknesses far outweigh the strengths. India educates approximately 10 percent of its young people in higher education, still a rather low number by international standards” (Altbach 2005). Altbach also points out that there are relatively few high quality higher education institutions in India – “the world-class institutions are mainly limited to the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) and perhaps a few others such as the All India Institute of Medical Sciences and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. These institutions, combined, enrol well under 1 percent of the student population” (Altbach 2005). There is clearly a need for an increase in the provision of high quality higher education in India.

In India, as well as an increasing demand for higher education generally, there is a growing demand for foreign degrees and an increase in the provision of private higher education (Bhushan 2005). As the public higher education system has been unable to provide enough places for the demand, there has been a growth in a range of private higher education providers. “A significant number of ‘reputed’ private institutions were accorded the status of ‘deemed universities’, thereby permitting them to confer degrees, and private providers became important actors in widening access to higher learning and training in India” (Bhushan 2006).

Professor Sudhanshu Bhushan, Senior Fellow and Head of the Higher Education Unit at the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, India, has outlined in a report a number of rationales for allowing foreign education institutions to be established in India. These are: to improve human resource development; to upgrade the quality of Indian higher education by internationalising some specialised research areas; to minimise brain drain; to promote competitiveness; and to attract foreign investment in education (Bhushan 2006). It has been suggested that if there were more foreign educational institutions in India this might help to “curb the flow of students and graduates to the West” (Bhushan 2006).

Though Bhushan presents numerous reasons for allowing the establishment of foreign educational institutions in India, he observes that there is no clear regulatory framework. Although regulations exist for entry and operation of foreign higher education providers in India, there is no legislation to oversee the implementation of these regulations. Consequently “private higher education in India has grown outside of a clear legislative framework, and foreign education providers have had to fit within this unregulated context” (Bhushan 2006). Despite this, a number of foreign higher education providers have established operations in India. These have been mainly institutions from the US, the UK and Canada, but also include France. Some examples of the kinds of collaboration are: Entrepreneurship and Management Processes International (EMPI), Delhi, offers foreign degree programs in collaboration with France’s Ecole Supérieure du

Management et Commerce, the US Fordham and Wharton School of Business, and the UK University of Brighton. The Dina Institute of Hotel Management, Pune, offers degrees in co-operation with the UK University of Middlesex. The Institute of International Management and Technology in Kolkata offers degrees in partnership with the UK Oxford Brookes University; and the Rizvi College of Hotel Management, Mumbai offers degrees in partnership with the American Hotel Lodging Association (Bhushan 2006). The majority of the courses offered by foreign higher education providers are in management, with approximately 80% in business and hotel management. Bhushan notes that there are a range of collaborative and partnership arrangements between foreign and Indian educational institutions, but no foreign institutions have so far opened a branch campus in India. He suggests that this is because the absence of the regulatory framework makes the environment legally ambiguous (Bhushan 2006).

Several papers delivered at the Australian International Education Conference 2007 provided information about India as a market for International Education. One presented detailed information about the Indian market and projections for the future, drawing on IDP's recent research. This paper presented projected calculations of numbers of international students, globally and in Australia, and predicted strong growth in the markets in South Asia, the Middle East and South America, in the period up to 2025. The growth in the South Asia market for international education is projected as 4.7%. According to these projected figures, in 2025 there will be a total of 428,000 international students from South Asia, and based on market share figures for the last 7 years, Australia will receive 77,000 of these. In Australia in 2025, according to these projections, there will be 86,000 students from China, 55,900 students from India, 18,000 from Indonesia and 15,000 students from Malaysia – these will be the 4 main countries from which international students will come to Australia (Banks, Olsen et al. 2007).

According to the IDP authors, the India market will continue to grow – India will surpass China in total population, and the number of 15 – 19 year olds in India will continue to grow. The tertiary education participation rate in India is 11 %, and the government aims

to increase this by 15% in 2015. There is a growing demand for higher education in India, and ‘domestic provision cannot keep up with the demand’ (Banks, Olsen et al. 2007).

The Indian government is planning to establish new universities and colleges, but these will not be enough to meet the demand. The Indian 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year plan requires an additional seven million new places in higher education by 2012 and a total of 16 million additional places in higher education by 2020. (Kemp 2007). There are already many private higher education providers in India, such as Manipal University, NIIT, Birla, the Jaypee Institute, the Vedanta University, and many wealthy business groups in India are investing in education – some with a background in education, others with business backgrounds in other sectors (such as Birla) (Kemp 2007). The higher education sector in India had 9.84 million enrolments in 2006, and with a burgeoning middle class of approximately 200 million people, there is a strong demand for higher education places which the public education system cannot meet (Stinson 2007).

Since changes in government legislation in the mid 1980s there has been an enormous increase in Australia’s international education ‘industry’ (Harris and Jarrett 1990; Knight and de Wit 1995; Considine, Marginson et al. 2001). There has been a significant increase in international students coming to Australia, and Australian educational institutions establishing international locations. Despite the history of links between Australia and India, the numbers of Indian students studying in Australia, while growing, is not as large as the number from China. A comparison of international students in the US and Australia in 2002-03 showed that in the US, students from India were the largest number (74,603), followed by students from China, Korea, Japan, and others; whereas in Australia the largest number of students was from Singapore (29,956), followed by Hong Kong, Malaysia, China, Indonesia, and India (8,390) (Tremblay 2002; Marginson 2003). However by 2006 the number of Indian students in Australia had increased significantly; the largest number was from China (90,287), and the second largest group was from India (39,166) (AEI 2007).

A significant proportion of Indian students in Australia are studying at post-graduate level – approximately 60%. Many of them do a first degree in India, then enrol in a post – graduate course in Australia. In the past there was a strong preference for studying in the US & UK, but gradually more Indian students are becoming interested in Australia, and some students have heard of the Group of Eight universities. Since the attack on the US on September 11, 2001 it has been more difficult for Indian students to get visas to the US, and Australia is cheaper, so more Indian students are choosing to study in Australia (Marginson 2003; Baas 2006; Pakiam 2007).

The small number of studies of Indian students in Australia is not necessarily conclusive or consistent. A study by Sameena Ahmad, at the University of Melbourne, found that the most influential factors for students in choosing a university in Australia were the ranking and reputation of the university, the university's research interest, and course content and suitability. Other factors were recommendation by family or friends, interaction with the university's marketing personnel, cost and location (Ahmad 2006).

Another study by Michiel Baas, a post graduate international student from the University of Amsterdam who was based at the Monash Asia Institute in Monash University as a research fellow in 2005, has a different perspective. Baas suggests that many Indian students are more focussed on gaining permanent residence (PR) in Australia than in their studies. Baas refers to a study by Bob Birrell, of Monash University, that looked at the numbers of international students who, after they completed their studies, gained permanent residence in Australia. Birrell found that of the international students who completed courses in Australia in 2003, 71 % of the Indian students obtained a permanent residence visa. Baas reports that this was consistent with his research among Indian students in Melbourne, and suggests that the most important reason why many Indian students come to Australia is because they are attracted by the option of applying for PR after graduation (Baas 2005; Baas 2006; Baas 2007).

This suggestion that many Indian students are motivated by a desire to gain permanent residence in Australia was confirmed by a number of presenters at the Australian

International Education Conference (AIEC) in 2007. Racquel Shroff, who works for IDP, now in Australia but for many years in India, presented a paper that focussed on the implications of the changes in regulations governing the General Skilled Migration (GSM) program. She pointed out that prior to 2001, international students who wanted to apply for PR had to leave Australia and apply from overseas; in 2001 the rules of the GSM program changed to allow international students to stay in Australia and apply for PR. Another change in 2001 was that the requirement for work experience in Australia was waived (Shroff 2007). With those changes in regulations the Australian government effectively began encouraging international students to apply for PR, particularly those who had skills in demand – those listed on the Migration Occupation Demand List (MODL). Another presenter at the AIEC, Eleanor Berry, who works as a Careers counsellor at the University of South Australia, also stated that Indian students are coming to Australia for PR (Berry 2007).

It is clear that there are links between international students and migration, and it seems that Australian government policy is to encourage international students with skills in demand to apply for permanent residence (Speldewinde 2007). However the studies referred to above are not consistent: Ahmad's study does not mention PR as a priority for Indian students, whereas the study by Baas suggests it is an important consideration for many Indian students. This indicates that Indian students are not a homogenous group, and while some might be focussed on PR, and therefore will not necessarily be focussed on a high quality education, others are concerned with the ranking, reputation and therefore quality of the university they attend (Ahmad 2006; Baas 2006). It also seems clear that the numbers of students from India studying in Australia will increase in future (Banks, Olsen et al. 2007; Pakiam 2007). What remains uncertain is where they will choose to study within Australia, and this will depend on a range of factors, including the profile and marketing of Australian educational institutions in India.

An IDP study noted that in 2000 over a third of the international students in Australian universities were studying off-shore (Davis, Olsen et al. 2000). Many of these were enrolled in distance education programs, but a significant number were also enrolled in

campuses overseas. Setting up a campus off shore involves risks, but several have done so. Monash University has campuses in Malaysia and South Africa; RMIT University has a campus in Vietnam; Wollongong University has a campus in Dubai; and Curtin University has campuses in Singapore and Sarawak. Establishing an overseas campus is an expensive exercise, but one which Monash Vice-Chancellor Richard Larkins is committed to. He was quoted recently as saying, in response to a question about Monash's Malaysia campus, that 'Asia is central to Australia's future, and unless local universities tap in, they risk falling behind new and improving universities across the region. "It allows us to build collaborations with local universities, industry and government in a way that you just can't do by remote control," he says' (Tomazin and Morton 2007).

How should Australian educational institutions raise their profile and become more engaged in India? There are several models of collaboration between Indian and foreign higher educational institutions that Bhushan identifies. These include joint course design; credit transfer; twinning arrangements; collaboration through distance learning; student and faculty exchanges; and academic fusion. Credit transfer is where part of a program is completed in India and credited to a foreign institution where the rest of the program is undertaken. Twinning arrangements vary, but generally involve a student studying part of a degree at an Indian institution, and then transferring and completing the degree at a university in another country. For example, Ansal Institute of Technology at Gurgaon, Haryana offers degrees in association with three different universities in the US; and Daly College, Indore and Loyola College, Chennai offer degrees in partnership with a university in the UK (Bhushan 2006).

One model which is slightly different from those listed by Bhushan is that which Deakin University has pioneered in India; setting up an office in India which can facilitate a range of activities. Deakin University established an office in New Delhi in 1996, and began managing recruitment from India from that office in 2000. Australian universities generally recruit in India through education agents, and the Deakin New Delhi office was involved in providing support for these agents, as well as marketing and market intelligence. Gradually it began to also work in building a media presence for Deakin in

India, developing strategic business and institutional collaboration. The demands on the office grew, and there are now additional staff in the New Delhi office from various different Deakin faculties (Stinson 2007).

Australia's profile was raised positively in India with the Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket matches from April – June 2008. A number of Australian cricket players played with Indian teams, and reports indicate that the Australians related well to their Indian team mates (<http://www.indianexpress.com/story/317804.html>). Australia's image generally in India was also lifted by the fact that Australian cricket player Shane Warne was the captain and coach of the Rajasthan Royals, the team that won the IPL trophy (<http://www.indianexpress.com/story/317802.html>). If Australian educational institutions were able to associate themselves with cricket or cricket players they might be able to build on the good will established towards Australia through the IPL cricket series. Australian cricket players are widely known and admired in India, and Brett Lee in particular is popular not only because of his cricket talent but because of his hit song collaboration with the famous Indian playback singer Asha Bhosle (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pZuGJW08Uw>).

In the longer term, if Australian educational institutions have established offices in India they will be in a much better position to monitor the developments of the regulatory framework for foreign education providers in India (Bhushan 2006). This is an issue that the Indian government wants to address – an Indian newspaper article in 2006 stated “The ministry of commerce has issued a consultation paper titled ‘Higher Education in India and GATS: An Opportunity for comments from stakeholders’. The paper seeks to explore the opening up of higher education to foreign players for tapping the trade potential in education services under the WTO regime. It attempts to initiate a debate on how the country should allow foreign education providers in the sector” (Goswami 2006). Sometime in future the regulatory framework will be clarified, and if Australian educational institutions already have a base in India they will be in an advantageous position to then consider further options. Future options could include twinning

arrangements and other forms of collaboration, and could include the establishment of campuses in India.

The growth in the Indian economy and the Indian middle class, and the increased demand for higher education with not enough higher education places within India provides opportunities for Australian higher education. It is both in Australia's and India's interests, to further develop the provision of higher education to Indian students by Australian educational institutions.

In conclusion, there is a large and growing demand in India for higher education, and projections suggest that in future Indian students will be the second largest group of international students in Australia. The Indian government is committed to increasing the number of higher education places available, but cannot meet the demand; and in particular there is a shortage of high quality education institutions. It is considering options for allowing foreign higher education institutions to establish campuses in India. Australian educational institutions should develop opportunities for higher education collaboration by opening offices in India, to raise the profile of Australian higher education, and position themselves for future transnational education opportunities.

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