Transforming higher education

Context:

- The article evaluates the condition of higher education in India and suggests possible reforms for the higher educational sector in India.

- The requirement for social distancing during the pandemic has led to educational institutes remaining closed despite the phased unlocking in India. There has been a sense of heightened anxiousness and urgency to find solutions to tide over the pandemic-induced crisis in the education sector.

- Much of the discourse on resuming higher education during the pandemic revolves around home-based learning.

- The article argues that apart from finding solutions to provide an inclusive and affordable home-based education, there is also the need to overhaul the educational system.

Ideal learning outcomes:

There are three ideal learning outcomes of higher education.

1. Providing knowledge in the relevant discipline to the students.

2. The education imparted to the students will need to be supplemented with the skills needed for their jobs/enterprises.

3. The teaching-learning process is expected to mould their character in such a way that they would be able to play a constructive role in shaping the society and the world at large using the values and ideals of a modern, progressive society.

Concerns:

- Apart from a handful of institutions and a small number of extremely self-motivated students, a vast majority of other students are unable to fulfil the ideal learning outcomes as discussed earlier.

- There seems to be a huge gulf between the curriculum taught in the colleges and actual job requirements.

- Although India is uniquely positioned in the world to benefit from its demographic dividend, this dividend can actually turn into a liability since those in the population bracket that are ready to join the workforce have practically no skills or knowledge
that add to their employability.

- There seems to be disproportionate importance being bestowed on completion of the vast syllabus within a prescribed time. There is also the undue emphasis on examinations to evaluate students’ knowledge.

**Way forward:**

The article suggests the following reforms in higher education.

1. Need to completely re-evaluate the syllabus every now and then to ensure that the syllabus is in line with the industrial requirements.

2. There should be an emphasis on substantive industrial internships as part of the course work in colleges. This could help bridge the gulf between the university curriculum and actual job requirements.

3. The evaluation of the learning outcomes of the students can be a mix of regular assignments, performance in the internship as rated both by the industry and the college, and a light, home-based proctored exam.

4. The syllabus should involve only a very basic outline of essential concepts. The time saved in attending regular classes in the institutions can be compensated for by spending time on the development of skills and prosocial attitudes and values.