

# Higher Education in India: Issues and Challenges – A sociological Study

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## Abstract

India needs more efficient and educated people to drive our economy forward. There are many Indian around the corner who known for their capabilities and skills. To develop India as an education hub or to become a prosperous partner in global economy, India has to qualitatively strengthen education in general and higher education with research and development in particular. This paper is mainly focused on the overall performance of higher education system in India. We try to find out the initiatives taken by the government to raise level of education system. This paper aims to identify emerging issues and challenges in the field of Higher Education in India. Finally the paper concludes here is need of plans requires solutions that combine, employers and youth need . Expectations of from various stakeholders Students, Industry, Educational Institutions, Parents and Government. The vision of higher education in India is to realize the country's human resources potential to its fullest with equity and inclusion. The higher education sector, in recent decades, has witnessed a tremendous growth in many aspects such as its institutional capacity, enrolment, teacher-student ratio, etc. The rapid expansion of the higher education system at the same time has brought several pertinent issues related to equity, efficiency, excellence and access to higher education in the country. The present paper holds an immediate significance of creating awareness of many issues of concern to be taken care of by the stakeholders in the national as well as the global levels. The study is also unique in the sense that it brings about better understanding of the present scenario in the higher education system in the country and its pattern of growth given the opportunities and challenges to the system under consideration.

The present study throws a gainful insight on financing schemes and enrolment aspects of higher education in India. We need an educational system that is modern/advanced, liberal and can adapt to the changing demands of a changing society, a changing economy and a changing global world. Indian higher education system and regulatory bodies must identify the key issues and quickly make policies to remove those hurdles. Only one or two universities can't make much difference. If the government welcomes such initiatives which drive our education system forward, then future will be ours. We will be able to match and compete with other countries and the dream to be the world's greatest economy won't be difficult to achieve

*Keywords—Higher education, Opportunities and challenges, Enrolment, Privatization, India, education system.*

## Introduction

After independence, there has been tremendous increase in higher education institutions of learning in all disciplines. But still India is way behind in providing world class education. Today, India is one of the fastest growing countries of the world with the annual growth rate going above 9%. In order to sustain that rate of growth, there is need to increase the number of institutes with quality education. To achieve and reach the future requirements there is an urgent need to relook at the Financial Resources, Education Policies, Access and Equity, Quality Standards, Relevance and at the end the Responsiveness. To attain and sustain international quality, certain components are particularly relevant. There must be careful selection of staff and continuous staff development, in particular through the promotion of appropriate programs

for academic development, including learning methodology or teaching. We must focus on mobility between countries, between higher education institutions and the world of work, as well as student mobility within and between countries. So that they can learn about working environment. Internal self-evaluation and external review must be conducted openly and periodically by independent specialists, if possible with international experts. If we are talk about India, we are providing skilled and educated people to world. Why we are unable to utilize their potential to covert our country from developing to developed country. We must create some parameters, to indulge educated people for driving our economy forward. We are moving towards an era which would be defined by the parameters of knowledge.

### **Objective:**

This paper seeks to explore scenario of higher Education in India, also the main issues in the education system sociological context.

### **HIGHER EDUCATION VS PRIMARY EDUCATION**

Before we debate about issues and challenges related to higher education we need to understand primary education is more important than higher education. India's number one challenge is poverty, we have to lift millions of people out of poverty and we can't do it unless we focus on primary education. Primary education starts from Class 1st when child is 5years old. Primary education does not only mean a classroom, books and a teacher (that isbare minimum) but nutrition, clothes and creating an environment where a child can learnnew things every day, an environment that can help in bringing out best within a child. Infrastructure like chair, table, books, stationery, a classroom and teachers is bare minimum that any government could provide. They need to do more than that like teaching childrenhow they can imagine and bring out their inner talent that they can use later in their life. If wehave to bring people out of poverty then we need social mobility and social mobility can't beachieved unless we focus on primary education and health.

However on the other hand higher education does not solve this problem. Higher educationstarts when you come out of high school or 10+2.So if child is 5 years old and live in a familywhich is below poverty line then the child needs primary education not higher education. Therefore if government is spending only on higher education that is not going to change thestatus of child because higher education is all about colleges. And by the time the child living in a family below poverty line reaches the age of 16 his or her mind has already been shaped. So it is of no use if the government is spending on higher education. That is the difference between higher and primary education.

### **STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: SOCIOLOGICAL CONTEXT**

State of Higher education in India is in between good and bad. I mean in a nutshell to say neither it is good nor it is that bad. So in this paragraph we shall talk about number of universities, colleges, number of teachers & professors and students enrolled. In the year2014 India has over 670 universities, at least 38,000 colleges, 817000 professors and teachers and over 28000,000 students enrolled. There is growth in numbers of colleges, universities, students and teachers year after year. Different students apply for different courses.

Like there are over 14,000,000 students applied for graduate courses all over the country. For postgraduate there are over 20,490,000 students enrolled. For research around 13,700,000 and for diploma over 17,100,000 students enrolled in the year 2014. Now we should also look at the budget issue. How much government of India is allocating for education. In the year 2014 the government of India spent over Rs 65,000 Crore. This amount is 17% more than the last in 2013. The department of Higher education has allocated Over Rs 16,000 crore which is 20% hike from last year. Similarly government has allocated Rs 24,00 Crore for IITs, Rs 1300 for NIT's, and Rs 350 Crore to IIM's this year. So this sums up the state of higher education in

## CHALLENGES & ISSUES

Since independence we are facing challenges to establish a good and strong education system. Various governments tried to establish new and effective education policies in the system but they were not sufficient for our country. Still Indians are facing a lot of problems in our Education System. Indian government recognizes that the new global scenario poses unrivalled challenges for the higher education system. The UGC stated that a whole range of skills will be demanded from the graduates of commerce, humanities, natural sciences and social science, as well as from the various professional disciplines such as hospitality, tourism, agriculture, law, management, medicine or engineering. There are many basic problems faced by higher education system in India. These include inadequate infrastructure and facilities, vacant seats in academic field and poor faculty thereof, low student enrolment rate, out dated and old teaching methods, declining research standards, unmotivated students, overcrowded and small classrooms and widespread geographic, income, gender, and ethnic imbalances. Apart from these concerns relating to deteriorating standards and lack of facilities, there is reported exploitation of rural area students by many private education providers.

□ The demand-supply gap: India has a very low rate of enrolment in higher education (18%) as compared China (26%) and 36% in Brazil. There is huge demand-supply gap. By 2020, the Indian government aims to achieve 30% gross enrolment in higher education, which means providing 40 million university places with an increase of 14 million in six years.

□ Inadequate facilities and infrastructure: In India, many of the universities don't have adequate infrastructure or facilities to teach students. Even many private universities are running courses without classrooms. Internet and Wi-Fi facility is still out of reach of many students.

□ Lower level of teaching quality: Our education system is tortured by issues of quality in many of its institutions and universities. Many of the issues like shortage of faculty, poor quality teaching, Traditional teaching methods, outdated and rigid curricula and pedagogy, lack of accountability and quality assurance and separation of research and teaching are raising questions on Indian education system.

□ Research constraints: India has a very low level of PhD enrolment. India does not have enough high quality researchers. In Indian education system there is a lack of early stage research experience; a weak ecosystem for creativity and innovation, and low levels of industry engagement.

□ Uneven growth and access to opportunity: In India, access to higher education is uneven in enrolment across population groups and geographies. This uneven growth of higher education is a major challenge for India. India has

the largest number of out-of-school students in the world, more than the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, and also 69% of India's population still lives on less than 2 dollars per day. The World Bank categorises India as "an extreme dual economy".

□ More concentrated on theories and rather than practical knowledge: Indian education system is more focused on theoretical knowledge rather than practical knowledge. In many jobs there is also a minimum requirement of percentage which is high.

□ Lack of involvement in and control of educational matters by Professors: Most of the professors or higher authorities do not like to take part in education related activities.

They stick to their own growth.

□ Traditional methods of teaching: Professors still stick to those old methods of teaching like board, marker. They don't like to use audio visual aids in teaching. Also they are not up to date with the information available and what global industry demands.

□ Abroad settlement after education: Many students after doing IITs and IIMs try to search opportunities in foreign countries like Australia, USA, and Canada etc. They look forward for MNCs and get settled abroad. There must be a fixed criteria that students after higher education have to serve his country first.

□ Security and Confidentiality : Colleges have to increase security and confidentiality with role-based permissions to users . there will be proper record of time and attendance system of students and as well as teachers.

□ Quota system: Bringing the reservation and quota system for different categories in education lost its quality. Even deserving candidates of general categories are ignored and on quota we have to select other person from reserved category even though he is not suitable.

□ Quality - Reflecting on: National Assessment and Accreditation Council gave a report in which the concern was over the fact that two thirds (68%) of the country's universities and 90% of its colleges are "of middling or poor quality" and that well over half of the teaching faculty in India's colleges does not have the appropriate degree qualifications.

□ Enrolment: The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of India in higher education is only 15% which is quite low as compared to the developed as well as, other developing countries. With the increase of enrolments at school level, the supply of higher education institutes is insufficient to meet the growing demand in the country.

□ Equity: There is no equity in GER among different sects of the society. According to previous studies the GER in higher education in India among male and female varies to a greater extent. There are regional variations too some states have high GER while as some is quite behind the national average reflect a significant imbalance within the higher education system.

□ Quality: Quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multilevel, and a dynamic concept. Ensuring quality in higher education is amongst the foremost challenges being faced in India today. However, Government is continuously focusing on the quality education. Still Large number of colleges and universities in India are unable to meet the minimum requirements laid down by the UGC and our universities are not in a position to mark its place among the top universities of the world.

□ Infrastructure: Poor infrastructure is another challenge to the higher education system of India particularly the institutes run by the public sector suffer from poor physical facilities and infrastructure. There are large number of colleges which

are functioning on second or third floor of the building on ground or first floor there exists readymade hosiery or photocopy shops.

### **Opportunities for Central Government in education**

Issues of access and equity are interlinked. Again, quantitative expansion of higher education has not taken care of inclusion of the underprivileged and vulnerable sections of the society. The representation of SC, ST, OBC, women and minority community in colleges and universities remains low vis-a-vis their population size. It is no longer desirable to ignore the demands of these sections pertaining to access, to higher education which besides providing tangible economic gains also offers social mobility and recognition.

Central Government is moving in this direction; it has doubled the intake capacity in central universities and institutions of national importance such as IIT's and IIM's to allow for inclusion of reserved category learners. This move assumes importance when seen in another perspective. It has been observed that students from these groups generally tend to take up 'softer' disciplines for study. They need to be encouraged and facilitated to pursue studies in 'harder' disciplines so that social equity is achieved at all levels. Lower educational attainments are attributable to certain social groups and communities; they are also related to other factors such as income, gender, region and place of residence.

The last school attended also has an impact on the availability of avenues for further education. Students from rural schools are often in a position of disadvantage when it comes to seeking admissions in good urban colleges. Deprivation of educational opportunities, therefore, a multi dimensional problem and comprehensive and holistic solutions need to be found. A deprivation index with weighted scores to students needs to be devised so that admissions are not decided solely on the school examination scores. Besides ensuring equity, this will also safeguard merit and encourage disadvantaged groups to compete and come up to the levels of others. One of the major challenges in higher education across the globe is the escalation in its cost. Besides the tuition, students have to incur expenditure on hostel and mess (living costs), books, e resources and other incidental expenses. Trow (1973) classified education systems on the basis of gross enrolments.

He referred to 'elite' class where the enrolments were less than 15%; 'mass' where the enrolments were between 15% and 50% and 'universal' in cases where enrolments were above 50% (Trow, 1973). This classification throws some light on the outcomes of the higher education systems in any nation. Brennan (2004) analysed the characteristics of elite, mass and universal higher education. He opined that the elite higher education prepares a small ruling class for broad roles in government and society; mass higher education undertakes transmission of knowledge and prepares students for both technical and economic roles; and universal system involves adaptation of whole population to rapid social and technological changes. Overall, according to Trow's classification, India may exhibit features of elite system. But it is important to note that there is wide disparity in enrolments in urban and rural areas, gender variations and amongst the deprived sections of the society. If one were to look at the aggregate numbers of those enrolled in higher education in India, then it certainly is quite large and assumes the character of mass system.

Traditionally almost the entire cost of higher education was borne by the State, practically all over the world. However, with increasing pressures on Government finances, the budgetary allocations to education have been cut, in some countries, drastically. As a result, there is a shift from exclusive dependence on government or tax payers to some reliance on students and/or parents. The UNESCO WCHE declaration emphasized the funding of higher education by both public and private sources. In the west, a significant amount of higher education cost is shared by donations from philanthropists and alumni.

The later donate large sums to their alma maters. Barring a few exceptional elite institutes such as HT's, this is not a sizeable chunk in India and other developing countries. In India, spending on higher education is mainly by governments-State and the Central- and households. Whereas data is available on budgetary allocations made by governments, there is no reliable information on private funding of higher education. The per unit cost, too, varies from course to course and in between regions. A group of Vice Chancellors had estimated the unit cost of higher education at Rs. 1,00,000. It is reasonable to take a unit cost of Rs.60,000 per student per annum. There is at least one more study by Tilak (2004) which is indicative of under spending in higher education". He found that with numbers of enrolments increasing in recent years, the per student expenditure is declining. According to his estimate the decline is of the order of 28% in a 12 year period from 1990-91 to 2002-03. As a part of the exercise to recover higher percentage of costs from students' fees, the same have been hiked by almost every University and college, in some cases, quite steeply. Traditionally, tuition was almost free; subsequently 85 it was the major component in total fees. Now, it is one of the charges in a plethora of fees levied by institutions.

Exam fees, convocation, registration, library, migration, statement of marks, welfare, gymkhana and others are only some in the long list. High fees in both 'aided' and 'unaided' courses affects equity; the poorer sections simply cannot afford high fees. It also impacts the GER adversely as poor students withdraw even from liberal arts education programmes. Broadly, student fees have to be kept low so that equity and access are not hit. UNESCO and other expert bodies have set a norm of 20% of the recurring cost to be recovered by fees. In fact, in most of the developed countries, fees do not cross this threshold. But in India and several other developing nations, Universities and colleges have started generating high percentage of revenues from various student fees. In case, self-financed courses, fees cover 100% of the cost and sometimes even more. Even in public funded Universities and colleges in India, fees have been hiked; in addition, more and more self-financed courses are being offered to generate revenues. Even liberal arts and Humanities courses such as Commerce, Political Science, English, Journalism and pure science subjects such as Botany, Zoology, are being offered as self-financed courses. Annexure 5 gives an idea of average tuition fees charged by engineering colleges across states in India for their under graduate programs.

### **Road ahead for the education sector in India**

By 2003 Gujarat had two recognized private universities and other states to join the bandwagon were Orissa, Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh, and Sikkim. Powar and Bhalla (2008) give a case-study of private growth in Maharashtra, India's most developed and second largest state, with over 650 higher education institutions, over four-fifths private 15 . In Andhra Pradesh, where all 50 institutions were public fifty years ago, by 2001 641 of 989 were self financing, and 93 of the state's engineering colleges were private. Private (self-financing) institutions out-number public ones in most states 14 . And most of India's states have allowed private higher education.

A major part of India's surge has come with proliferation of professional colleges; by 2002 reportedly into the thousands in Maharashtra alone, with 70 percent of them private<sup>15</sup> . In contrast to broader and mostly public liberal arts colleges and institutions with a presence in science, these are pointedly commercial institutions. They blossomed first in engineering, then medicine and health, as well as management, teacher education and Pharmacy. As a matter of fact, the private share of these professional institutions, 83 percent of the total in Maharashtra, varies little across these fields. All are part of the global growth of job-oriented and market driven higher education, particularly championed by private higher education. Nearly 85% of the engineering colleges are private self financed institutions <sup>17</sup> . In a sense, the system of Indian higher

education is more privatized than most advanced countries. Though this has brought some relief to Government's finances, it is at a huge social and human cost. Not only is the issue of equity sidetracked, but the quality has also suffered. Some of our top public Universities, colleges and institutions in the areas of technology and engineering, medicine and management are capable of emerging as world class institutions; but of the several problems that they are facing, the crucial one is acute shortage of funding. Unlike private institutions, they can grow and prosper with out trading off equity.

## Conclusion

Higher education is very important for a developing country like India and it is encouraging to increasing human development. Higher education in India has experienced phenomenal expansion since independence. India has produced scientists, engineers, technologists, doctors, teachers and managers who are in great demand all over the world. Now it is one of the top ten countries in our industrial and technological capacity, because of the significant contribution of manpower and tools provided by higher education, especially, technical education. India has already entered into the era of knowledge explosion. It has proved its tremendous potential by its performance in nuclear and space domains. In the coming few decades will be heralded by space craft, satellites, internets and others offshoots of scientific enquires. Higher Education provides opportunities to the people to reflect on the critical social, cultural, moral, economic and spiritual issues facing humanity.

Higher education provides specialized knowledge and skilled persons for national development. In next few decades, India will have world's largest set of young people. While the correlation between people and higher education is not up to the mark. The increasing youth population can be a great asset if potential employability is brought to fruition. Conversely, if we fail to provide education and employment then it will open a downside gate for Indian economy. Education an essential tool for achieving sustainability. The Education Commission 1964-66 described the role of education in social and economic transformation through a statement-the density of a nation is shaped in its class rooms. Education creates human capital which is the core of economic progress and assumes that the externalities generated by human capital are the source of self sustaining economic process.

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