

# PROBLEM OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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The present society is considered a knowledge-based society. A knowledge based society has an inbuilt requirement for the production of human capital. Education-vehicle of knowledge can supply skilled manpower for generating development in a nation. Education develops the human being in the true sense of term, developing all potentialities and capabilities through which a nation can benefit socially, economically culturally, educationally and so on. The higher education is the platform where knowledge and information are disseminated to the learners for developing their functional skills and to make them efficient for their future living.

India's huge pool of young people might be considered its biggest strength unfortunately India is far from having a proper management of its young human resource in terms of quality education and capacity to absorb in higher education. Our nation suffers from both a crippling quantity as well as quality challenge when it comes to higher education. The higher education sector has expanded rapidly in the country. Yet there is inequality in growth, access and distribution. Although India is demographically rich with its vibrant workforce it has one of the poorest Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) i.e. 23% for higher education in the world which is comparatively poor against the developmental requirements of the population, more so in comparison with other growing economies. In this context, India has been lagging far behind in generating the capacity of manpower as well as human Resources and human capital and also fails to provide equal opportunities of accessing higher education to the people of the state. India requires more educational avenues and incentives which could be strategically met by making higher education as accessible as possible to all in order for the nation to become a knowledge based economy that may bring in economic mobility and development in the state. Thus, India as a whole has a great demand to create the necessary educational institutions so that the vision of creating a knowledge based society becomes an achievable goal and the potential of this young expanding population is not wasted.

In view of the above, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) initiated an All

India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) in the year 2010-11 to build a robust database and to assess the correct picture of higher Education in the country. The report on all India survey on higher education (AISHE) provides extensive data on current scenario of higher education in India. It also provides useful information upon which the central and state governments would be able to plan future investments in the field of higher education. The report sheds valuable light on different aspects of all the institutions of higher education in India. Survey covers entire Higher Education Institutions in the country. Institutions are categorized in 3 broad Categories; University, College and Stand-Alone Institutions. There are 723 Universities, 36634 colleges and 11664 Stand Alone Institutions. Only 248 Universities are affiliating i.e. having Colleges, 219 Universities are privately managed, 274 Universities are located in rural area, 11 Universities are exclusively for women, 3 in Rajasthan, 2 in Tamil Nadu and 1 each in Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra & Uttrakhand. In addition to 1 Central, 13 State Open Universities and 1 State Private Open University there are 116 Dual mode Universities, which offer education through distance mode. Out of 116 Dual mode Universities, the most (20) are in Tamil Nadu. There are 398 General, 90 Technical, 61 Agriculture & Allied, 43 Medical, 20 Law, 11 Sanskrit, Language 7 and 56 other Universities. College density, i.e. the number of colleges per lakh eligible population (population in the age-group 18-23 years) varies from 7 in Bihar to 60 in Puducherry as compared to All India average of 26. Moreover 56% Colleges are located in Rural Area, 10% Colleges are exclusively for Girls. Only 2.2% Colleges run Ph.D. and 35% Colleges run Post Graduate Level programmes. 20% of the Colleges are having enrolment less than 100 only 4% Colleges have enrolment more than 3000. Total enrolment in higher education has been estimated to be 32.3 million with 17.5 million boys and 14.8 million girls. Girls constitute 46% of the total enrolment. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education in India is 23.0, which is calculated for 18-23 years of age group. GER for male population is 23.9 and for females it is 22.0. For Scheduled Castes, it is 17.1 and for Scheduled Tribes, it is 11.3 as compared to the national GER of 23.0. Distance enrolment constitutes only 12.15% of the total enrolment in higher education, of which 45.39% are female students.

Another centrally sponsored for the expansion of higher education in India Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), launched in 2013 aims at providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions. The central funding (in the ratio of 60:40 for general category States, 90:10 for special category states and 100% for union territories) would be norm based and outcome dependent. RUSA aims to provide equal development to all higher institutions and rectify weaknesses in the higher education system. Its target achievement is to raise the gross enrolment ratio to 32% by the end of XII Plan in 2017. The

success of this scheme and the positive difference will be seen only if its programmes and policies are implemented effectively with proper monitoring.

Although the ministry of human resource development had set a target of a 30% GER for India by 2020, but the target is unlikely to be met. Every year an increasing number of students pass their higher secondary examination but we don't have the capacity to absorb such a big number in our colleges. Access to higher education has remained poor despite the massive expansion of the sector in the country.

Almost each and every college of India is facing the problem of overcrowded classes when sometimes the pupil teacher ratio becomes 1:50 to 1:100. One cannot think of quality education with such pupil-teacher ratio and over crowdedness. Similarly every year thousands of students pass their college examination but our universities are not able to accommodate such a big number either through regular or distance mode. So many young people of India are still unskilled and so is the dropout rate because of lack of wider access in higher education. Not only through regular modes but even the distance education departments and open universities in the country are unable to provide universal and wider access. The primary objective of the Open and Distance Learning is to provide knowledge and skills to those who do not have access to learning. The basic purpose of the Open University is to provide instruction to the learners at their doorsteps through various media and technology (UNESCO 2002). Therefore, the basic motto of distance education is to establish equity in education system through the various modes of education (both the correspondence and on-line learning). This system provides great opportunity to those learners who are denied access to education from traditional institutions due to various factors (like poor economic condition, Illiteracy of parents, working outside for income, etc.) and also giving the chance to those who require updating their knowledge and skills through education. The mode of Open and Distance Learning is also called as 'Independent Learning', 'Flexible Learning' as well as 'Self-Learning'. It can help empower the learners by enabling them to take charge of their own learning facilitating them in having greater control and ownership in their learning at a minimal cost. In fact, this system promotes the capacity of the learners to organize and to structure their own learning as a result of which learners will be able to develop the key skills like self-motivation, self discipline and self-management that are now required in so many work context. Therefore, this system of learning can be called as 'feed by own' not 'fed by others'. Open and Distance Learning has greater scope to innovate and infuse flexibility into the system in order to cater to the needs of heterogeneous learners. In the context of flexibility, the Open University has the autonomy to adapt different approaches for the development of course materials as well as learner's support

services. The utilization of on-line learning in distance and open learning makes it in a true sense open or global learning.

Budget is another important aspect in the functioning of education system. An asymmetry in the allocation of funds within the various stages of education can be observed. For example, in primary or elementary education the Government has given more focus whereas in the higher stage of education the fund allocation is proportionately rather low. Making of higher education, at times, a very costly affair for those economically underprivileged has gone on to situate some of the meritorious but economically poor learners relatively deprived. Keeping out this section of meritorious students, infect, cuts on the resource creation prospects within higher education and the society. Thus, it affects the socio- cultural, economic and intellectual development of a country and society. Therefore, equity in financing is another big issue of concern in the education system of India as a whole.

Although a number of measures have been taken from time to time for wider access, equalization of opportunities and quality but still we are far behind. Thus there is a massive mismatch in demand and supply. Despite of growth in terms of number of colleges and enrolment the numbers are not sufficient enough to cater to the education needs of increasing young population of this country.

For many years it has been researched and found that one of the key causes of fewer enrolments in higher education is a shortcoming of financial strength across under represented masses. To overcome this overwhelming challenge the government has enabled several financial schemes through easy student loans, scholarships and financial schemes. A few states have embarked on fees reimbursement schemes at certain lower income levels. Over the last decade these schemes have vastly helped in improving enrolments significantly. Though the government has been responsible for an impressive growth in the number of institutes and enrolment, several challenges such as low and inequitable access, dearth of quality faculty, inadequate infrastructure and low quality research, need to be addressed. Today, India's prime concern is the creation of an employable workforce to harness its demographic dividend to the maximum extent. To attain this objective the country needs an education system which can deliver quality in terms of skilled and employment ready workforce, while focusing on world-class research and innovation.

### **Conclusion**

There are no shortcuts to fix our higher education problems related to access and quality. But the demand of the situation is that a number of serious and collaborative steps are

required to be taken both at state and central level. One of the best, possible, effective and quick solutions to the problem is that private universities and colleges should be encouraged and foreign investment should be allowed to solve the financial and infrastructural problems. Further For promoting the practice of democratization in education, there is an urgent need to reduce these disparities from the education system and make education accessible for all irrespective of caste, creed, sex, religion, class, place, occupation, etc. Thus, we need such an alternative institutional set-up besides the conventional system of education, which can reduce disparity in access to education in general and higher education in particular. Open and distance learning can be raised as an alternative way for creating and producing education as accessible as possible for all.

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