

## GROWTH, CHALLENGES AND DILEMMAS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

**Sanjay Kumar,**

*M.Phil. (JNU),*

*Associate Professor,*

*PG Department of Political Science, A N College, Patna.*

### ABSTRACT

*The paper traces the history of higher education in India. It also identifies the challenges before the higher education. Though it does not suggest any measure for reforms, it presents the dilemmas in reforming the Indian higher education sector.*

### INTRODUCTION

Historically India has been a place of scholars and learners. The country had world class institutions like Taxila, Nalanda, and Vikramshila. They attracted student from countries like China, Burma, Ceylon, Korea and Tibet. Over the period of time these universities degenerated and so did the higher education. During the colonial period also, the British deliberately did not pay much attention to education. The first three universities were established only in 1857. These universities were set up in the cities of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. It was only after 30 years that university of Allahabad was established in 1887. Thereafter, the universities of Mysore and Benaras came into existence 1916. The universities were based on the line of University of London. They were affiliating, examining and regulating bodies. The existing colleges had affiliation with these universities.

Currently, India is placed at third after China and US in higher education with regard to students. There has been rapid increase in higher educational institutions since independence. Until, 1980s public sector played dominant role in higher education sector. However, this trend started declining since the early 1990s when country adopted new economic policies. Now, over 60% of higher

education institutions are being run by private sector (Sheikh, 2017). Due to this growth the country has acquired first position as far as the number of higher education institutions are concerned and second position in terms of student enrolment (Shaguri, 2013).

Today, knowledge is considered as power. Having more knowledge is being more empowered. But, India is facing challenges in this regard. Despite increase in investment in education, 25 percent of population is yet not literate. Just 15 percent of students arrive at high school level and only 7 percent at graduate level (Masani, 2008). The quality of education in India is very poor vis-à-vis its leading developing counterparts. Moreover, enough seats are not available in post-secondary institutions. Significant numbers of teaching posts are vacant. Many of the college professors do not have the required eligibility.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the trends in growth and enrolment in higher education sector. The second section engages with the challenges faced by the higher education. In the third section are the dilemmas in reforming higher education leading to the conclusion.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

**(Sharma and Sharma, 2015):** the paper, while looking for the problems of higher education in India, tells the story of Indian situation in higher education sector. It also focuses on the executing framework of twelfth plan. It further suggests the measures for improving the higher education such as improvement in teaching pedagogy, establishing harmony between research and teaching and so on. The paper argues that improvement is mandatory not just for economic growth, but also for societal unity and empowerment of Indian youth.

**(Tilak and Varghese, 1991):** The authors makes an analysis of pattern of funding for Indian higher education. They also discuss the practicability of many other ways of financing the higher education. According to the authors, as education does not only benefit society but also individuals, so burden of finance should be shifted from social to individual domain. They hold the opinion that because of finance limitations, financing the higher education is not practicable in the long term. Consequently, they discuss the other methods of finance like student fees, student loans, graduate tax and so on.

**(Sheikh, 2017):** The article analyses the growth of higher education in India since independence and its unequal accessibility. It argues that despite being one of the fastest growing economies of the globe, a major chunk of its population is still illiterate. This does not only lead to their exclusion, but also it stops them from their contribution to the nations' development. Further, the paper argues for increasing the number of institutions and quality of higher education.

**(Manas, 2020):** The article provides an analysis of current situation of Indian higher education. It highlights the role of university in determining the future of students which rely on transparency, progressiveness, and socially responsible education system. For achieving this there is need of good governance in higher education system. The focus should also be given on good salary, parity and other international level facilities. The paper bats for having international level multidisciplinary institutions of research.

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## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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1. What has been the trend of growth, and enrolment in higher education in India?
2. What are the concerns and challenges before the higher education institutions?
3. What are the dilemmas in reforming higher education in India?

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## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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The methodology of this paper is descriptive in nature. For data collection secondary sources has been used. The sources include research papers, UGC website and news paper articles.

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## GROWTH TREND OF HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

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India has witnessed rapid increase in number of colleges and universities since its independence. By the time of its independence the country possessed 20 universities and 500 colleges which had 230,000 enrolled students. This figure has gone up to 1005 for universities (as on 06.08.2021) and over 45000 (as on 09.09.2021) for colleges which has 38.5 Million students enrolled (2019-20). The decades of 1950 and 1960s registered higher growth in terms of universities and colleges as less number of such institutions existed at that time. This pace was slowed down in the 1970s and 1980s. However, the pace has increased from 1990s onwards. The role of Private sector, especially in technical and professional education, has been significant in this regard. Nevertheless, the expansion of higher education institutions have been uneven. While some Union Territories have very few institutions, some states large number of institutions. Similarly, engineering, technical and medical colleges are more concentrated in the states of southern India.

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## GROWTH TREND IN ENROLLMENT

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0.17 Million students were enrolled in higher educational institutions in 1950-51, which reached at 38.5 million in 2019-20. During the period enrolment rate has registered 8.04 percent of average annual growth rate. Meanwhile, there has been 5.78 percent of growth rate in total number of teachers. The decades of 1950 and 1960 witnessed significantly high growth rates for number of institutions, students' enrolment and teachers. In 1970s the rate was least for institutions and enrolment. The growth rate increased in the 1980s and decreased in the 1990s. Again, the trend took an upward trend after 2000-01 due to increased involvement of private sector.

## CHALLENGES

**Accessibility:** Although the number of higher institutions have grown rapidly, growth in enrolment has not happened accordingly. The current enrolment ratio for youth (aged between 18-23) is 26 percent. The enrolment ratio is not enough for sustainable economic growth. Minimum 40 per cent of enrolment ratio is considered as mandatory for next phase of economic growth.

**Equity:** Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and women are not adequately represented in proportion to their population in higher educational institutions. Moreover, students from these groups are concentrated in certain easy disciplines.

**Poor Quality:** quality and standards in higher education is abysmally low. Particularly, this is the case with private sector institutions in higher education. This poor quality is reflected in growing number of unemployed graduate. Moreover, there is not even a single university which can be claimed to be a world-class university. This is reflected in the global university ranking in which no university of India finds place in top 100 or 200 universities. Whereas, smaller countries such as Singapore or Sweden and our neighbor China have significant number of world-class universities.

**Faculty Shortage:** India is facing severe degree of faculty shortage not only in higher education, but also in school education. The newly established central universities in Haryana, Gujarat, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Jammu and Kashmir and Bihar are running with about 52 per cent of sanctioned faculty strength. Moreover, 64.4 per cent and 47.7 per cent of seats are vacant in Allahabad University and Delhi University respectively. Overall, new central universities are running with 48 per cent of vacant seats, whereas this number is 33 per cent for older universities. Overall, IITs also have 34 per cent of vacant seats.

**Lack of funds:** The funds allocated to higher education institutions are not inadequate. This is because of government's fiscal capacity and specifically because of its unwillingness. Government assumes that higher education system should finance themselves through student fees, loans and private sector.

**Increasing number of private universities:** the number of private universities are growing day-by-day. Until the late 1980s, there was almost zero private universities. By 2021, this number has reached to 388. Moreover, there are 100 private deemed universities. And 65 per cent of colleges are private self financed institutions. The issue of unregulation is associated with private sector and this affects quality, equity and access to higher education. This has led to crude commercialization and run up of public good character of higher education.

**Ineffective Regulation:** the higher education system is poorly regulated. There are 16 regulating bodies in India, but they lack in coordination. The National Knowledge Commission and Yashpal Committee underlined this. However, they had differing views, they believed that the system is more regulated and less governed. Meanwhile, the regulatory institutions have not been successful in making universities and colleges strictly adhere to the norms.

**No long term policy:** the Indian higher education system lacks in coherent long-term policy and

planning. Executive orders and quick fix solutions are being used for management. These often lead to U-turns, inverted U-turns and sometimes zig-zag turns. Introduction and revocation of four year degree program at graduation level in Delhi University is one such example. Other include scrapping and reintroduction of the National Eligibility Test, common entrance test, etc.

## DILEMMAS IN REFORMS

### ***Increasing private institutions:***

In the era of neo-liberalism the dilemma of public versus private has emerged. State is not according due priority to higher education. This may be because of reducing fiscal capacity and unwillingness of the state. The rise of private sector in the system has raised concerns. In such circumstances the state is in dilemma in taking charge of the system in effective manner. The choice has become difficult as the market is becoming powerful and the state is weakening. Although, the market is not perfect everywhere; it is significantly imperfect in developing world. This leads to the concern of market failure in education. Moreover, privatization has adverse impact on marginalized communities. This leads to reduction in participation of students from OBC, SC, and ST communities as well as for girls in higher education thereby reducing the diversity in the system.

### ***Financing higher education:***

Another dilemma is concerned with the ways of financing higher education. Traditionally, state has financed the higher education all over the world. Nonetheless, many countries use other methods of financing such as student fees, their loans and finance from private sector. Now, the state has the dilemma of fees and loans or taxes. In the case of state financing higher education public bears the cost for a common good. But, in the case of students paying high level of fees, they pay for themselves. However, a middle path is taken in the form mix of both types of financing the dilemma emerges as

which side it should take a tilt- towards fees/loans or taxes.

### ***Emergence of single faculty-based universities:***

Traditionally, Indian universities have not been limited to one or two disciplines of study. They have offered various disciplines of study like humanities, social sciences, etc. However, single discipline-based universities have emerged in large numbers in India in recent years. They have taken the shape of deemed to be universities. Currently, there are exclusive universities for every discipline. This is not the case only with engineering and technology but also with law, defence, petroleum, etc. these type of single faculty-based universities do not provide knowledge development as do the comprehensive universities. The traditional universities offer space for communication among students and faculty from various discipline. These communication results in cross-pollination of ideas.

### ***Diversity in universities:***

A university is said to be good one which offers diversity in enrolments, faculty, infrastructure among others. Creative and innovative ideas take place in such environments. In such universities student and faculty come from different socio-economic, cultural and regional environment even from across borders. These universities provide exciting environment of learning various cultures and living with them. Nalanda University is an example of such university which hosted students from across the world.

### ***Integration of UG, PG and research program:***

Various top universities across the globe are engaged in teaching and research at the same time. But, in India undergraduate courses are taught in colleges and various universities are engaged with postgraduate courses and just few of them focus on research. Consequently, India needs a model of university which offers an integrated courses of UG, PG and research programs.

### ***Education and positive externalities:***

The philosophy of higher education should be based on public good. It is widely acknowledged that higher education produces various externalities. According to some economists, in restricted sense even person with low education perform better in high human capital environment due to externalities. Moreover, the externalities are not only economic, but also social, political, cultural and so on. They are also not restricted to the boundaries of a country. Due to this exceptional quality higher education needs to be dealt with different approach from those of other goods.

## CONCLUSION

The growth and enrolment in higher education institutions has witnessed rapid increase since the 1990s. However, this has not resulted in equal accessible to all. Other key areas of concern are faculty shortage, lack of funds, and poor quality among others. Moreover, India is facing dilemmas in reforming higher education which are concerned with financing, emergence of single-faculty based universities, decreasing diversities in universities apart from others.

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