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Challenges Related to Equity in Higher Education in India

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Abstract

The nation's strength depends on its human resources and the human resources is properly channelized through a well-organized education system. After independence access to higher education in India grew in a faster rate in terms of the number of higher education institutes and gross enrollment ratio. There are various Government initiatives like scholarship schemes, hostels for girls, and universities for women, and making education a fundamental right to increase the gross enrollment ratio in higher education institutes. But still, the gross enrollment ratio is lower and the dropout rate is higher in the higher education institutes as compared to school education in India. The challenges faced by higher education in India are related to gender, caste, religion, rural-urban distribution, and interstate distribution of educational institutions. However, the growing rate of unemployment rate persists. So to counter these issues government should focus on increasing awareness about various vocational courses, developing infrastructure and maintain proper pupil teacher ratio irrespective of region and increasing employment rate to attract more students towards pursuing Higher Education. The govt. also needs to address equity and quality in higher education through effective policies to make it globally competitive. The current study aims to highlight different challenges and issues related to equity in higher education in India.

Keywords: Higher education, access, equity

Introduction

The 21st century is a knowledge-based society for which a well-educated human capital is essentially required. To develop a nation socially, economically, educationally and culturally, the strengthening of human capital through a well-organized education system is required for developing capabilities and potentialities. So for various socio-economic upliftment of the country education is considered as the foundation.

India is the fourth best-represented nation in the world university ranking and 91 universities are included in this list. Since independence, India has witnessed a widespread evolution in the field of Higher education. Also, there is a tremendous change in the participation of the private sector in this field. Indian constitution has provided democratic right to each citizen for free and compulsory education from 6 to 14 years of age. But still, the effect of education for all is yet to be achieved. So the government of India has taken various initiatives and policies to achieve this goal. The initiatives like making education a fundamental right in the constitution and the Right to Education Act 2009 are implemented to making education accessible and affordable to all sections of society. In comparison to school education, higher education has less enrollment rate and a high dropout rate i.e. dropout rate of school education is 1.5% and the dropout rate in higher education is 25%. Besides inter-state disparity, gender disparity, rural-urban disparities, and unemployability is the

greater issues. So to address the issues related to the proportion of enrollment and unemployability, the government should make awareness about skill-based vocational courses among students and develop infrastructure and training programs in this regard.

The basic responsibility of every government is to access and equity in education. The government must seek to attain a high quality of higher education system which is easily accessible and affordable to all sections and strata of society. Access to higher education means appropriate availability of higher educational institutes, adequate infrastructure, and number of teachers which fulfill the demands of that region. Equity refers to equal opportunity in higher education for all sections of the society.

Access to Higher Education in India

a) Number of Higher Education Institutions in India: In India, there are 1113 registered universities, 43796 colleges, and 11296 standalone institutions. Three types of educational institutions like universities, colleges, and standalone institutes. There has been an increase in the number of universities in India during 2020-21. The number of universities has increased by 70 in numbers and college has increased by 1453. There has been an increase of 353 universities since 2014-15 which is 46.4%. There are 149 institutes of national importance in 2020-21 which is almost doubled from 2014-15. The

northeastern states are given priority for the establishment of new higher education institutions. Since 2014-15 there are 191 new higher education institutes have been established in north Indian states. Rajasthan has the highest number of universities (92), Uttar Pradesh has the next highest number of universities (84) and Gujarat has the third-highest number of universities (83). 17 universities are exclusively for women and 4375 colleges are there which are only for women. The number of colleges per lakh population is 31. Karnataka has the highest density in college, 62, Telangana has 2nd highest density (53) and Kerala has the third highest density (50). The top 3 districts with the highest number of colleges are Bangalore Urban (1058) Jaipur (671), and Hyderabad (488). The top three states with the highest number of colleges are Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Karnataka. There are 43% of universities and 61.4% of colleges are located in rural areas.

b) Absolute Number of Enrolments in Higher Education in India: Enrollment in higher education is increasing. There was an increase of 4.14 cr in 2020-21. There is an increase of 21% in enrollment since 2014-15. Female enrollment in higher education is also encouraging, that has increased by 28% in 2020-21 from 2014-15. The percentage of women enrollment to total enrollment has increased by around 49% in 2020-21 from 2014-15. The gross enrollment ratio has increased to 27.3 from 25.6 in 2019-20 as shown in the population projection report of 2011. The enrolment ratio of scheduled tribe students is also encouraging. There is an increase of 1.9 points in the gross enrolment ratio of ST students in 2020-21 as compared to the previous year. The number of enrolment of Sedule cast students was 58.95 Lakh in 2010-21 as compared to 56.57 Lakh in the year 2019-20. The number of enrolment of Schedule tribe students has also increased to 24.1 Lakh in the year 2020-21 from 21.6 Lakh in 2019-20. There is also an increase in Enrolment of Other Backward Students by 6 Lakh to 1.48 crore in the year 2020-21 from 1.42 crore in the year 2019-20. The enrolment rate of north northeastern state has increased to 12.06 Lakh in the year 2020-21 from 9.36 Lakh in 2014-15. The male enrolment ratio in north northeastern states falls behind the female enrolment ratio, there are 104 female students out of 100 male students in the northeastern states. Distance education is doing a marvelous job of encouraging to pursue higher education among students in the remotest areas or for students who don't have the money and time to enroll in a full-time course. The enrolment in distance education has increased 7% since 2019-20. The top 6 states having the highest number of students enrolled are Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, and Rajasthan. As per a report in AISHE 2020-21, about 79.06% of the total students are enrolled in UG courses and 11.5% are enrolled in PG courses. The arts Disciplines have the highest number of enrolment (33-5%) and enrolment in science and commerce are 15.5% and 13.9% respectively. At the postgraduate level the highest number of students enrolled in the social science stream (20.56%) and in the science stream 14.83%. the number of male students (26Lakh) falls behind the number of female students (29.5Lakh) in enrolment in science students. The total number of pass-outs students has increased from 94 lakh in 2029-20 to 95.4 Lakh in 2020-21. The government of India also

develops infrastructural facilities in higher education institutions to maintain quality education. 97% of HEI has libraries, 88% of HEI has laboratories, 91% of HEI has computer centers, 61% of HEI has skill development centers and 56% of HEI has connectivity to the National Knowledge Network.

c) Number of Teaching Staff and Pupil-Teacher Ratio: The total number of teachers in HEI is 1551070 of which 42.9% are female and 57.1% are male. The total number of faculty/teachers is 15,51,070 of which about 57.1% are male and 42.9% are female. The female per 100 male faculty has improved to 75 in 2020-21 from 74 in 2019-20 and 63 in 2014-15.

Taking into account all types of Institutions (Universities, Colleges, and Stand-Alone Institutions), the Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) at the All India level comes out to be 26 [and 23 if only regular enrolment is considered]. In the case of the University and its Colleges, PTR is 28 for regular mode. It has been observed that PTR in University along with its Constituent Unit is significantly high at 18 in the case of Regular Mode. Looking at the State-wise variation, it is seen that there are large variations among the States. PTR is more than 50 in Bihar and Jharkhand. Among the top 6 States in terms of enrollment, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have the best PTR of 18 each, in terms of regular mode in all institutions. State-wise details of PTR are given in Table 25.

Equity Issues in Higher Education in India

- 1. Gender Inequity in Higher Education in India:** Women's enrollment in higher education is growing day by day. Many government initiatives like the development of Indian studies in Indian universities & and colleges and capacity building and women managers in Higher Education. There are special scholarship schemes for single girl children like the post-graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship for a single girl child and Swami Vivekananda single girl child scholarship for research in social science. UGC has also special provisions for girls' hostels in colleges and universities. For the promotion of women's education, 8 universities are exclusively for women. For the girls who are pursuing technical education, AICTE is providing PRAGATI scholarship. To improve female enrollment in IIT govt also creating supernumerary seats for women to 20% in 2020-21. Govt also created supernumerary seats at NIT and the Indian Institute of Engineering Science and Technology. After independence, the enrollment of women in higher education was only 14 women in 100 men but in 2011-12 there was a 43% enrollment of women in higher education. All India survey on higher education 2020-21 says that women's enrollment reached 2cr which is 13 lakh more than the enrollment of 2019-20. There is also a regional disparity in women's enrollment northeastern states have more women's enrollment in higher education than male enrollment. In distance education out of 45.71lakh enrollment, 20.9 lakh enrollment belongs to women. The relative access to education of males and female is measured by the Gender Parity Index (GPI). GPI in higher education in 2019-20 is 1.01 than 1.00 in 2018-19 which means there is an improvement in access to higher education for females than males.
- 2. Ethnic Inequity in Higher Education in India:** Ethnic inequality has prevailed in India since ancient times.

There are different categories in Indian societies like schedule cast, schedule tribe, and other backward cast and socially and economically backward classes have remained underdeveloped in assessing higher education despite various government policies to include them in the mainstream of the education system. Since schedule cast peoples are economically not self-sufficient as compared to others and from ancient times they are regarded as untouchable, despite various government policies to mark untouchability as a serious offense. Schedule tribe people largely reside in dense forest areas and it is still challenging for govt to proper infrastructure development in those areas.

The most successful action the government of India has taken to overcome these issues is reservation in higher education for SC, ST, OBC, and SEBC students. The extent of reservation of seats in government-funded higher education institutes is 15% for SC and 7.5% for ST students. The reservation policy is further strengthened by hostel facilities and scholarship facilities for SC and ST students. With all these policies there is a substantial increase in enrollment in 28% of SC students and 38% among female SC students in the year 2020-21 as compared to 2014-15. There is also a significant increase in ST enrollment, there is a 47% increase in ST enrolment and a 63.4% increase in enrollment among girls students in the year 2020-21 as compared to 2014-15. There is also a 32% increase in enrollment of OBC students and a 39% increase in female students.

3. **Rural-Urban Inequity in Higher Education in India:** Inequality means disparity or imbalance in the field of education. Rural-urban inequality in higher education refers to inequality in terms of opportunity and quality of education. The literacy rate shows how there is a disparity between rural and urban India. The main causes behind these inequalities are poverty, literacy rate, lack of infrastructure in educational institutes, and fewer higher education institutes in rural India than urban areas. The government of India is addressing these issues through many suggestive measures like the establishment of new higher educational institutes in remote areas, development of proper infrastructural facilities, improving enrollment through online and distance education modes, improving the student-teacher ratio, etc. AISHE 2020-21 report shows that there are 43% of universities and 61.4% of colleges are situated in rural areas.
4. **Interstate Disparity in Higher Education in India:** There are also inter-state disparities in terms of the educational institute as per the AISHE 2020-21 report. The states having the highest college densities are Karnatak with 62 colleges, Telangana with 53 colleges, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh having 50 colleges, Andhra Pradesh having 49 colleges, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, and Tamilnadu having 40 colleges. The top 8 states with the highest numbers of colleges are Uttar Pradesh, Maharastra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Gujarat. Likewise, the top 8 districts of India with the highest numbers of colleges are Bangalore Urban, Jaipur, Hyderabad, Pune, Prayagraj, Rangareddy, Bhopal, and Nagpur.
5. **Less Representation of Minorities and Persons with Disabilities:** There are Only 5.5% of Muslim students are pursuing higher education as per AISHE 2020-21 and only 2.3% from other minority communities. There are

more female enrolments in higher education from minorities than male students. Person with disability category 9.4% (SC), 3.4% (ST), and 31.6% (OBC) are enrolled in higher education. The number of enrollment of ST PWD women are higher than other category.

Conclusion

Government should take steps in terms of policies and schemes for easy access and equity with the affordability of higher education. The government should consider the policies, schemes targeting easy access and equity. There should be adequate funding for development of infrastructure such as buildings, Labs, ICT, and libraries. Students should be aware of different scholarships. Govt should take the initiative for the development of an inclusive campus. This will lead to an equitable increase in higher educational institutes and also there will be an increase in enrollment across different regions and social categories.

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