

Growth and Development of higher education in India

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Education is extremely important for the development of a nation. It is entirely unimaginable and totally inconceivable in the contemporary world to think of a society or a nation without education. It is the education which contributes immensely to the growth and development in every sphere of life. Higher education is considered to be the key factor in promoting and accelerating the process of national development. Higher education institutions, therefore, play an extremely significant role in providing knowledge and skills through the teaching and research programmes.

Higher education in India covers all post-secondary education beyond class twelve in different subject areas including all professional streams such as engineering and technology, medical, agriculture etc. It comprises three levels of qualifications - Bachelor's or undergraduate degree programmes, Master's or post graduate degree programmes and the pre-doctoral and doctoral programmes such as M.Phil. and Ph.D. Normally a bachelor's programme in India requires three years of education after twelve years of school education. The bachelor's degree in professional field of study in agriculture, dentistry, engineering, pharmacy, technology and veterinary medicine generally takes four years, while for architecture and medicine, a bachelor's degree takes five and five and a half years respectively. There are other bachelor's degrees in education, journalism and librarianship that are treated as second degrees. A bachelor's degree in law can either be taken as an integrated degree programme lasting five years or a three-year programme as a second degree. The master's degree is normally of two-year duration. It could be based on coursework without a thesis or on research with a thesis. The M.Phil. degree is a pre-doctoral programme taken after completion of the master's degree. This can be either completely research based or can include course work. A Ph.D degree is normally awarded two years after the M.Phil. degree or three years after the Master's degree. The students are expected to write a substantial thesis based on original research for the award of Ph.D degree.

The origin of modern higher education system in India can be traced to the middle of 19th century. Wood dispatch of 1854 formed the basis for establishment of modern education in the country (1). Keeping in view the recommendations of this report, the first three affiliating universities, on the model of university of London, were established at the Presidencies of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta in 1857.(2) It may be mentioned here that before the establishment of these three universities, the colleges of India were autonomous in character.(3) There were 27 colleges affiliated to the first three universities in 1857-58. The number of universities rose to 20 and the colleges to 500 with 0.1 million students at the time of independence.(4)

The data regarding growth of higher education in the country over a period of sixty years from 1950-51 to 2010-11 reveals that the country has witnessed an impressive growth of universities and affiliated colleges .While the number of universities during this period has increased from 25 to 611 (i.e 2344% increase in the universities), the number of colleges has increased from 695 to 31324, i.e., an increase of 4407.06% over a period of sixty years. The data regarding decade-wise growth of affiliated colleges indicates that their growth in the country was much faster during the first two decades immediately after independence i.e 1951-61(5) and 1961-71(6) than the subsequent two decades i.e 1971-81(7) and 1981-91.(8) However, it picked up during 1991-2001(9) and reached the top during 2001-11.(10) The main reason for higher growth of affiliated colleges during the decades 1991-2001 and 2001-2011 may be attributed mainly to the increasing demand of higher education as a result of globalization and privatisation.

As indicated above, a lot of expansion of higher education institutions has taken place in the country since independence .Presently , the higher education landscape of the country comprises of 298 state universities, 154 private universities, 130 deemed universities and 44 central universities.(11) Along

with these universities, the country has 39 Institutes of National Importance (INI) that specialize in the fields of engineering & technology, management, medical sciences, languages, information technology, statistical research, pharmaceutical education & research and petroleum studies.(12). In total, the country has 626 universities and university level institutes that impart higher and technical education and provide affiliation to more than 33,000 colleges and institutes in the country which include Constituent Colleges , Government Colleges , Private Aided Colleges and Self- Financing Colleges .The total enrolment of students in these institutions of higher learning during the session 2009-10 was 1,46,24,990 .Out of the total numbers, 19,18,833(13.12%) are enrolled in the university teaching departments and 1,27,06,157 are enrolled in the affiliated colleges of the country. The highest enrolment is in the state of Uttar Pradesh followed by Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Punjab is at 18th position in terms of student enrolment in the country.(13)

As mentioned above, there are different types of universities and colleges in the higher education system in the country. They vary in terms of their academic, administrative and financial arrangements. Universities can either be established by an Act of Parliament or by the Acts of the state legislatures. Those established by the Act of Parliament are the central universities and the ones set up by the state legislatures are state universities. While Central Universities are funded by the Central Government, the State Universities are funded by the respective state governments in which these universities are located. Some higher education institutions are granted the 'deemed to be university' status by the central government through gazette notifications. A few institutions are established by the Parliament/state legislatures as institutions of national importance. Universities, deemed to be universities and institutions of national importance are degree-granting institutions. Further ,the universities could be of unitary type with single or even multiple campuses or of affiliating type. The affiliating universities are those universities which affiliate colleges. These colleges conduct teaching-learning under the academic supervision of the university to which they are affiliated. The colleges do not award their own degrees, but award the degrees of the university to which they are affiliated.

The analysis of the growth patterns of higher education in India reveals interesting patterns .

Growth trends in India up to 1980 show that the higher education sector during this period was controlled by the government . The government not only supported higher education by setting up universities and colleges, but also took over the responsibility of running the institutions set up through private sector. These came to be known as grant-in-aid (GIA) institutions or private aided institutions. In such institutions, though the private sector financed a major part of the capital costs, public subsidies were provided to them to meet a part of the recurrent costs and occasionally for some capital works. Public funding was accompanied with considerable regulation of private institutions by the government Over the years, several private institutions had set high academic standards for themselves. With government regulation, their autonomy was compromised and standards went down. In effect, this led to the *de facto* nationalisation of private higher education and gave serious blow to the community-led private initiatives in higher education in the country. During this period not even a single private university was established in the country .Moreover , during this period , the growth of higher education institutions was largely confined to arts, science and commerce streams and there were only few engineering ,medical and other professional colleges

However, after 1980s, there was an unprecedented demand for quality higher education relevant to the needs of business and industry, putting considerable stress on governmental resources. Also, there was a substantial increase in the population in the middle and higher income groups, which could afford to pay higher tuition fees. This made the non-subsidised higher education a viable enterprise. Faced with such a situation, the state was left with no alternative but to allow the entry of private enterprise in the area of higher education. Additionally, economic reforms in early 1990s saw the middle class grow bigger, younger and richer. These reforms also saw a rise in entrepreneurship in the country. The rising demand of higher education from the growing middle classes and the growing culture of entrepreneurship together accelerated the pace of growth of private higher education in the country. During this period, very few universities and colleges were set up by the government sector and fewer still were also brought within the ambit of government funding. In a way, this period marked the near withdrawal of the government from taking over of additional

responsibility for higher education in the country. During this period, the growth of higher education institutions took place mainly in the field of engineering, medical and other professional areas.

Till the late 1990s, the expansion of higher education largely took place through affiliated colleges. By then, many promoters of private unaided colleges began to realise that the regulatory mechanisms of the affiliating universities and state governments were inhibiting their growth and did not allow them to fully exploit their market potential. The promoters were not able to make money from their educational enterprises. Such institutions explored the possibilities of wriggling out of the control of the state governments and the affiliating universities. Some of the institutions took the deemed to be university route to get the degree granting powers. Though, universities in the country are either set up by an Act of Parliament or State Legislature, however, certain institutions are also given the status of a deemed to be university in terms of section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956. Earlier this provision was used sparingly to declare premier institutions offering programmes at advanced level in a particular field or specialization as a deemed to be university to enable it to award degrees. Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore and Indian Agricultural Research Institute at Delhi were the first two institutions to be declared as deemed to be universities in 1958 for education and research at advanced level in the field of basic sciences and agriculture respectively. It is worthwhile to mention that up to 1981 only 8 higher educational institutions were given the status of deemed to be universities and number of such universities increased to 27 in 1991 and 46 in 2001.(14)

In the early years, the privilege of granting deemed to be university status was extended only to the government /government aided institutions. Manipal Academy for Higher Education (MAHE) – a pioneer in private higher education became the first totally self-financed institution to be declared as a deemed to be university in 1976. However, after 2000, when the provision for conferring the deemed to be university status to a de novo institution was introduced, there was sudden spurt in the growth of deemed to be universities in the private sector. As a result, the total number of deemed universities in the country at present has reached to 130. Out of these 130 deemed universities, 83 have been established after 2001. (15) These universities are mostly under private managements. Though the deemed to be universities do not have affiliating powers, many of them have a number of campuses spread throughout the country. In this way, the new entities were able to wriggle out of the oversight mechanism of the affiliating universities. They were also able to overcome the service area restrictions associated with an affiliating university.

During the past 13 years there has been continuous rise in the number of private universities in the country.(16) The first private university was established in India in 1995(17) and up to 2000 there were only two such universities in the country. (18) Their number rose to 18 in 2005 and 89 in 2010. Now 2011 onwards 65 more private universities have been established in the country bringing their total number to 154. The maximum number of private universities are located in the state of Rajasthan(33) followed by Uttar Pradesh(19) , Himachal Pradesh(16) and Gujarat (14). In Meghalaya out of total 9 universities in the state, 8 are private universities . In Punjab out of total 22 universities , 8 are private universities. Surprisingly , there is no private university in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Goa, Jammu &Kashmir, Kerala, Maharashtra, Manipur and Tamil Nadu.(19) It is also worth mentioning here that almost all the private and deemed universities in the country are running only technical and professional courses because only these courses help them to earn profit which is their primary motive.

Higher education in India has also expanded rapidly over the past one decade with regard to number of affiliated colleges. The number of colleges increased from 12806 in 2000-01 to 31324 in 2010-11.(20)The maximum number of affiliated colleges are located in the state of Maharashtra (4249) followed by Uttar Pradesh(3786) and Andhra Pradesh(3777).Punjab with 940 affiliated colleges is at number 18th in terms of the number of affiliated colleges among states of Indian union.(21) This growth has been mainly driven by private sector initiatives whose primary motive is to earn profit. Thus, there are genuine concerns about many of them being substandard and exploitative. Due to the government ambivalence on the role of private sector in higher education, the growth has been chaotic and unplanned. The regulatory system has failed to maintain standards or check exploitation. Instead, it resulted in erecting formidable entry barriers that generate undesirable rents.

Despite the fact that most of the expansion in the field of higher education in the recent years has been in the technical and professional courses ,but the traditional courses still dominate the field of higher education in the country .

The rapid expansion in the number of institutions of higher education and their intake capacity has not been able to ensure simultaneous sustenance of quality. As per the data available with the NAAC, by June 2010, not even 25% of the total higher education institutions were accredited, and among those accredited, only 30% of the universities and 45% of the colleges were found to be of quality to be ranked at 'A' level.(22) There is a severe shortage of well-qualified faculty, teaching facilities and proper infrastructure. Quality parameters cut across teaching and research and associated systems need sustained attention and policy focus. The UGC has been urging the institutions of higher learning in the country for their periodical assessment and accreditation, and linking the development grant contingent upon their being assessed and accredited. The UGC's support has been effected through (a) general development grants with a substantial allocation for improving the infrastructure in universities and colleges (b) incentivizing new initiatives, and (c) strengthening of the state universities and the college sector. Besides making assessment and\ accreditation of institutions of higher education, the UGC has been supporting and encouraging universities and colleges to establish IQACs so as to continually focus on strategies and programmes for promotion of quality in each university and college.

After having a look at the growth of higher education institutions in the country, it may be mentioned here that at the time of India's independence, the capacity of higher education system in India was small. It catered to a small elite group only. With the expansion of higher education, we now have a system that caters to a much larger number. The expansion has also democratised higher education. A large number of students from the lower socio -economic strata constitute a sizeable proportion of the total enrolments in the country comprising about thirty to forty per cent of the enrolments. The enrolment of women students has seen a consistent

upward trend from 10 percent in 1950-51 to 41.6 percent in 2009-10.(23) Though participation of students from rural areas, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and the minorities is rising over the years, it is still very low as compared to over all GER of the country. The latest figures in this regard show that while GER of India is 19.03% in urban areas , it is only 11.06 % in rural areas of the country. It is also notable that the GER in the ST category is one-fourth of the general category students. It is less than half for the SC and more than half for the OBC students. When compared with the 2004-05 data, there is improvement in the situation for the SC and the OBC groups, but a lowering of the figures for the ST group. This is a serious situation and needs immediate attention. This is also a serious problem as the enrolment and GER for the Muslim population is much lower than that for non-Muslim students. The GER for Muslim students is half of the total GER in the country. (24) Despite the enrolment in higher education for the country as a whole increasing over the years,(25) the GER is far below the world average which is 23% . It is also much lower than the GER in developing and developed countries which is 36.5 % and 55% respectively. Development experience of the developed countries indicates that sustained economic growth requires a minimum of 20 % to 25% enrolment in higher education. Therefore, while studying higher education in the country , one should take in to consideration the dual problem of higher education, namely of low enrolment rate and the regional imbalance. The national target of India was to increase the GER to 15% by the end of the Eleventh Five Year period (2011-2012), which has been achieved, and 30% by 2020. While this goal requires higher capacity for intake, it also requires steps to improve access to higher education across gender and different social groups, and to bridge the rural-urban divide in order to ensure more equitable outcomes in educational participation. Increased enrolments in the Eleventh Plan have enabled Indian higher education to cross the threshold of 15% GER, moving the country from an 'elite' to a 'mass' higher education system. Despite this growth, the unmet demand for access to higher education remains significant, indicating that a further expansion of access to higher education is required. Even though GER at the national level is 20%, there are wide inter-state variations. Delhi, Chandigarh and Pondicherry which attract a large number of students from outside

their states, have GERs exceeding 25% while states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Rajasthan, Orissa and West Bengal have significantly lower GERs. This suggests a need for state-specific strategies in addressing issues of expansion of higher education during the Twelfth Plan period.

Higher education in India suffers from quality deficit in all these respects. Very few Indian institutions have global recognition in terms of being Centres of Excellence in their field. It is essential that these islands of excellence be nourished and if possible expanded. There is a need to ensure that in widening the base of higher education, the apex must not be allowed to slip down. Presently, higher education in India suffers from many basic problems. These include inadequate infrastructure and facilities, large vacancies in faculty positions and poor faculty, outmoded teaching methods, declining research standards, unmotivated students, overcrowded classrooms and widespread geographic, income, gender, and ethnic imbalances. The analysis of higher education in the country also indicates that there is a significant mismatch between supply and demand, and between curriculum content and social needs.

Although the emergence of the private sector has helped expand capacity, this is mostly in a few selected market-related disciplines such as engineering, management, medicine, Information Technology (IT), etc. Education in basic sciences and subjects that are not market friendly has suffered. Research in higher education institutions is at its lowest ebb. There is an inadequate and diminishing financial support for higher education from the government and from society. Many colleges established in rural areas are non-viable, are under enrolled and have extremely poor infrastructure and facilities with just a few teachers.

Public-funded higher educational institutions, particularly the state universities and colleges affiliated thereto, have been subjected to severe resource crunch; per student expenditure in real terms has actually been declining. Most state universities have been somehow managing to meet their salary cost by mobilizing massive resources through self financing, distance mode courses, affiliation fees and examination revenue. In such a situation, they have hardly been able to provide for proper maintenance of existing facilities and development of new infrastructure. Simultaneously, they have been under pressure to increase their intake capacity. All these have led to rapid decline in their quality and efficiency.

One of the serious issues relates to the role of the state governments in higher education. Either because of the lack of resources or absence of political will, several states take minimal interest in providing effective support for innovation and development of higher education. This is a matter of grave concern since a large proportion of students are in the state system. It is high time that this issue is addressed at the highest policy level for making appropriate interventions.

Private investment has been responsible for a major part of the expansion in the last two decades, especially in the areas of professional and technical education. Rising aspirations of young people to go further beyond schooling, large expansion in higher education and a much larger number of school pass-outs has led to an increasing demand for higher education even from hitherto marginalised sections of the society and the communities. At the same time, the barriers to their entry into the portals of higher education also remain. The high rate of growth of the private sector in higher, professional and technical education has created new challenges in this respect. The central and state governments have also pro-actively taken a number of measures to increase equity and reduce disparities in access to higher education, through providing support to and improving the achievement and performance of the students who may have some initial handicaps. Although these measures have led to an improvement in the situation, many gaps still remain which need to be addressed in the 12th Five Year Plan.

According to one U.G.C committee, there is a major structural weakness in our higher education system with the growth of universities in the form of affiliating institutions. Some of the universities have grown beyond limits by having hundreds and thousands of affiliating colleges, which restrict their promotional and developmental role.(26) On the other hand, as pointed out by the Yashpal Committee, there are a large number of very small (uni-disciplinary) or specialized universities, which goes against the grain of holistic and balanced development of knowledge. It leaves little scope for students to make informed choices besides reducing. (27)

Apart from concerns relating to deteriorating standards, there is reported exploitation of students by many private providers. Ensuring equitable access to quality higher education for students coming from poor families is a major challenge. Students from poor background are put to further disadvantage since they are not academically prepared to crack highly competitive entrance examinations that have bias towards urban elite and rich students having access to private tuitions and coaching.

Despite, its impressive growth, higher education in India could maintain only a very small base of quality institutions at the top. Standards of the majority of the institutions are poor and declining. There are a large number of small and non-viable institutions. Entry to the small number of quality institutions is very competitive giving rise to high stake entrance tests and a flourishing private tuition industry. The stakes are so high that quota-based reservation of seats in such institutions in the name of affirmative action has come to occupy centre stage in electoral politics. Despite some merit, it has resulted in fragmentation of merit space and further intensified competition for the limited capacity in quality institutions.

As a result of the above mentioned problems, the higher education system of the country continues to provide graduates that are unemployable despite emerging shortages of skilled manpower in an increasing number of sectors. The standards of academic research are low and declining. Some of the problems of the Indian higher education, such as - the unwieldy affiliating system, inflexible academic structure, uneven capacity across various subjects, eroding autonomy of academic institutions, and the low level of public funding are well known. Many other concerns relating to the dysfunctional regulatory environment, the accreditation system that has low coverage and no consequences, absence of incentives for performing well, and the unjust public funding policies are not well recognised. Driven by populism and in the absence of good data, there is little informed public debate on higher education in India.

REFERENCES

1. When Lord Dalhousie took over as Viceroy of India he realised that the Government had neglected the education for the masses. Vernacular education had declined and village schools (pathasalas) were not in a position to take up the responsibility of educating the mass. The teachers (abadhans) were too traditional and there were no school-houses and no printed books.

The teachers were not paid regularly. The subjects taught in those schools were old and outdated. Thus, Dalhousie thought a scheme to make arrangement for the mass education of the primary education in vernacular languages.

By that time Sir Charles Wood was the President of the Board of Control of the Company. Sir Wood prepared a scheme on education policy for India and through it recommended details to be worked out. The scheme was sent to India and was known as "Wood's Despatch" of 1854. Dalhousie implemented the scheme in the same year.

Wood's Despatch was a complete scheme with certain innovative aspects. It repudiated the "downward filtration theory" that provided education for upper classes.

In stead Wood's Despatch emphasized on the education of the masses and announced the duty and responsibility of the Government to provide education for the people of India.

For more details ,see J.C.Agarwal, Landmarks in the History of Modern Indian Education , Vikas Publishing House , 2001,p.17-21.

2. See, Report of the U.G.C Expert Committee to Formulate Action Plan on Reforms of Affiliating System, p.15 . [ugc.ac.in](http://www.ugc.ac.in)
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p16.
5. During 1951-61 the number of colleges increased from 695 to 1542 thus indicating a growth of 121.87 % colleges during this decade. Directory of Colleges (2003-04), University Grants Commission, New Delhi, March 2007,LIX
6. During 1961-71 the number of colleges increased from 1542 to 3604 thus indicating a growth of 133.72 % colleges during this decade. Ibid.
7. During 1971-81 the number of colleges increased from 3604 to 4722 thus indicating a growth of 31.02 % colleges during this decade. . Ibid.

8. During 1981-91 the number of colleges increased from 4722 to 7346 thus indicating a growth of 55.77 % colleges during this decade. *Ibid.* ,p. LX
9. During 1991-2001 the number of colleges increased from 7346 to 12806 thus indicating a growth of 74.33 % colleges during this decade. *Ibid.*
10. During 2001-11 the number of colleges increased from 12806 to 31324 thus indicating a growth of 144.60 % colleges during this decade.
11. For detailed list of these universities, see official website of the University Grants Commission (ugc.ac.in).
12. For detailed information regarding Institutes of National Importance. See *Ibid.*
13. For further details in this regard, see Inclusive and Qualitative Expansion of Higher Education : Compilations Based on the Deliberations of the Working Group for higher Education in the 12th Five Year Plan9 2012-17) , University Grants Commission, November 2011,pp. 13-19.
14. The data in this regard has been classified from the information provided by the U.G.C on its official website (ugc.ac.in).
15. For latest list of deemed universities in the country. See *Ibid.*
16. Unlike, public sector universities, Private universities are managed by private players and are self-financing institutions. These Universities are competent to award degrees as specified by UGC under Section 22 of the UGC Act with the approval of the statutory councils, wherever required through their main campus. Wherever the approval of the statutory council is not a pre-requisite to start a programme, the Universities are required to maintain the minimum standards regarding academic and physical infrastructure as laid down by the concerned statutory council. Moreover, Private Universities cannot affiliate an institution/college. They cannot establish off campus centre(s) beyond the territorial jurisdiction of the concerned State. However, they can establish off-campus centre(s) within the concerned State after their existence of five years and with the prior approval of the University Grants Commission. So far, UGC has not approved any off campus centre(s) of any Private University.
 - a. Course(s) under distance mode can be started by the private university only after the prior approval of the UGC-AICTE and DEC joint Committee.
 - b. For more details, see official Website of the University Grants Commission (ugc.ac.in).
17. Sikkim Mani pal University of Health, Medical and Technology Science was the first private university in India.
18. For data in this regard, see official website of the University Grants Commission(ugc.ac.in).
19. For more detail about state-wise information of private universities in India, see *Ibid.*
20. Directory of Colleges (2003-04), University Grants Commission, New Delhi, March 2007,LX. Also See Inclusive and Qualitative Expansion of Higher Education: Compilations Based on the Deliberations of the Working Group for higher Education in the 12th Five Year Plan9 2012-17) ,op.cit.,p.12 .*Annual Report , 2011-12, M.H.R.D, Government of India, New Delhi,2012,,p.80.
21. For more details see *Ibid.*
22. Cited in *ibid.* , p 70.
23. See *Ibid.* , pp.15-16.
24. See Inclusive and Qualitative Expansion of Higher Education: Compilations Based on the Deliberations of the Working Group for higher Education in the 12th Five Year Plan9 2012-17) ,op.cit.,pp44-47.
25. The estimate based on SES (Selected Education Statistics) indicates that the access to higher education measured in term of gross enrolment ratio increase from 0.7% in 1950-51 to 1.4% in 1960-61. By 2004 it reached to 12.4% and recently it has been calculated to be 18.8% (20.9% for males and 16.5 for females). For more details, See Higher Education in India: Issues Related to Expansion, Inclusiveness, Quality and Finance, University Grants Commission, New Delhi, November 2008,pp.3 &61. Also see All India Survey on Higher Education, 200-11(Provisional),Higher Education Department, Government of India ,New Delhi,2012,p 7.
26. Report of the UGC Committee to Formulate Action Plan on Reforms of Affiliating System , *Report of 'The Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education'*. See Official website of U.G.C (ugc.ac.in)
27. For details see *Report of 'The Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education'* on official website of the University Grants Commission (ugc.ac.in)