

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT

Since independence, the growth of higher educational institutions has been very impressive. The number of universities has increased to 611, the colleges to 31324 and the student enrolment ratio to 1,46,24,990 during 2009-10. Higher education system in Punjab is roughly a reflection of the higher education system at the all- India level. Before independence, there was only one university, 46 colleges in the unreorganised state of Punjab. The enrolment of students in these institutions of higher learning was only 76108. After reorganisation especially in the post - 1990s , the growth of higher education institution has been very impressive. The number of universities has increased to 20, the number of colleges to 940 and the student enrolment to 3,88,184. In spite of the spectacular growth in higher education system in India its optimum output is hindered by various weaknesses in the system. The problem may vary from one state to another, one university and the other and from one college to another. The present paper deals with main problems and challenges of higher education in Punjab.

KeyWords: Problems of Higher Education, Higher Education, Higher Education in Punjab

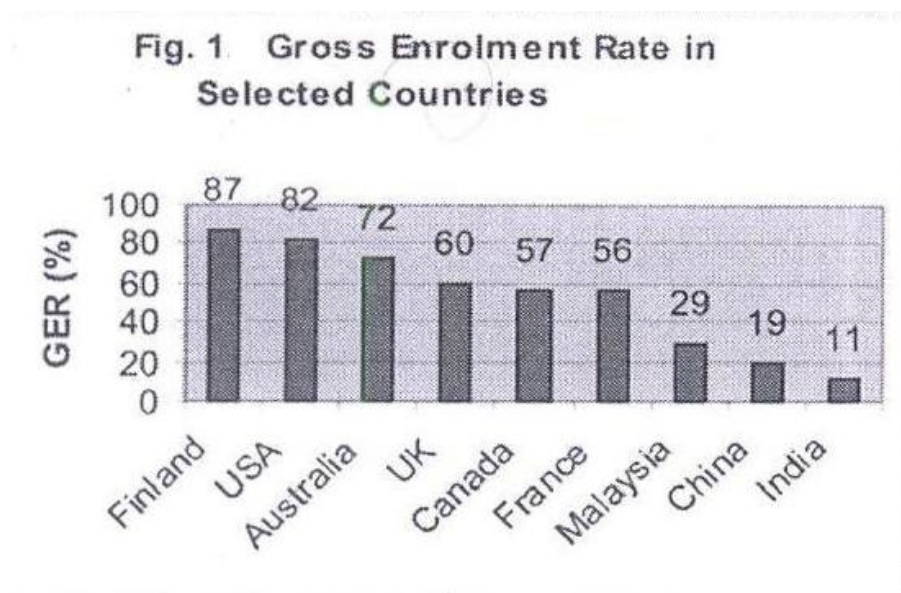
India possesses a highly developed higher education system which offers facility of education and training in almost all aspects of human and intellectual endeavours. The institutional framework consists of universities established by an Act of Parliament (Central Universities) or of a State Legislature (State Universities), Deemed Universities (institutions which have been accorded the status of a university with authority to award their own degrees through central government notification), Institutes of National Importance (prestigious institutions awarded the said status by Parliament), Institutions established by State Legislative Act and colleges affiliated to the universities (both government - aided and unaided). Before independence, access to higher education was very limited and elitist, with enrolment of less than a million students in 500 colleges and 20 universities.

Since independence, the growth of higher educational institutions has been very impressive. The number of universities has increased to 611, the colleges to 31324 and the student enrolment ratio to 1,46,24,990 during 2009-10. Higher education system in Punjab is roughly a reflection of the higher education system at the all- India level. Before independence, there was only one university, 46 colleges in the unreorganised state of Punjab. The enrolment of students in these institutions of higher learning was only 76108. After reorganisation especially in the post - 1990s , the growth of higher education institution has been very impressive. The number of universities has increased to 20, the number of colleges to 940 and the student enrolment to 3,88,184. In spite of the spectacular growth in higher education system in India its optimum output is hindered by various weaknesses in the system. The problem may vary from one state to another, one university and the other and from one college

to another. The present paper deals with main problems and challenges of higher education in Punjab.

PROBLEM OF LOW GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO (GER)

The higher education in India has witnessed many fold increase in its institutional capacity since independence. This expansion in institutional capacity in terms of numbers of universities /colleges and teachers has provided greater access to the students to post higher secondary education. The access to higher education is measured in terms of gross enrolment ratio, (GER) which is a ratio of persons enrolled in higher education institutions to total population of persons in age group of 18 to 23 years. The estimate of GER is generally based on data collected by MHRD/UGC from the educational institutions. Despite this increase, the gross enrolment ratio in the country is still relatively low by international comparison. The GER in higher education in India is still half the world's average GER which is about 24% and about one fifth that of developed nations which is about 58%. It is only 12.4 according to GER (2001) and now 18.8 according to GER (2011). The position of India in relation to other countries of the world in this regard is shown in figure 1 below:



The above figure prepared from the data published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics reveals that the GER is the highest in Finland (87%) followed by USA (82%), Australia (72%), U.K (60%) and France (56%). The GER for Malaysia (29%) and China (19%) are much higher than for India (11%). However, it should be noted that the GER reported for India by the UIS is higher than the GER computed using data from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India.

It is worth mentioning that GER in Punjab, which is one of the richest states of India, is lower than even the national average. While at the national level it is 12.4, in Punjab it is 11.1. It is also lower to seventeen states of India. These states are: Andhra Pradesh (14.19), Assam (15.28), Bihar (11.95), Goa (14.96), Haryana (12.83), Himachal Pradesh (16.12), Jammu & Kashmir (12.58), Jharkhand (14.76), Karnataka (12.04), Kerala (17.6), Maharashtra (17.33), Manipur (33.37), Meghalaya (14.97), Nagaland (24.55), Orissa (13.66), Uttar Pradesh (12.57), and Uttaranchal (17.81). The GER in Punjab is higher to only ten states i.e., Arunachal Pradesh (7.01), Chhattisgarh (8.91), Gujarat (8.94), Madhya Pradesh (8.92), Mizoram (9.0), Rajasthan (8.23), Sikkim (6.24), Tamilnadu (9.5), Tripura (6.24), and West Bengal (8.63). More importantly, 13 of the total seventeen districts which existed at the time

of 2001 census in the country were declared educationally backward by the central government .The following table shows the data in this regard.

Table 1

Educationally Backward Districts of Punjab Classified by College Population Index Category:

Districts	Population Index (CPI) (college per lakh pop. in 18-23 age)	Number of colleges 2003-2004	Average enrolment per college (Actual)	GER All 2001
Mansa	2.4	2	41667	6.8
Nawanshahr	2.8	2	35714	10.0
Ferozpur	6.7	14	14925	8.1
Amritsar	7.7	29	12987	9.6
Sangrur	7.9	19	12658	8.8
Gurdaspur	8.7	22	11494	10.5
Muktsar	9.3	9	10753	8.2
Moga	10.1	11	9901	8.8
Faridkot	10.3	7	9709	10.2
Bathinda	11.5	17	8696	10.5
Fatehgarh Sahib	12.0	8	8333	9.5
Patiala	15.1	35	6623	11.9
Kapurthala	18.8	17	5319	12.3

Source: It taken from official website of the U.G.C.

ISSUES RELATED TO INCLUSIVENESS AND EQUAL ACCESS

It is not only that there is low enrolment ratio of higher education in Punjab, but there is another problem that the growth of higher education system is not inclusive .The failure of the Indian state more than six decades after independence to ensure equal access to higher education among all socio-economic groups and across gender and region must surely rank among the more dismal and significant failures of the development project in the country .Although the enrolment rate in higher education in Punjab is little more than 11% ,there are significant inter group disparities in access to higher education. The data with regard to rural-urban ratio of higher education in Punjab indicates significant rural and urban disparities- GER being 6.6 percent and 19.4 per cent for the rural and urban areas- the GER in urban areas being nearly three times higher to rural areas .The inter-caste disparities are the most prominent. The GER among the SCs (4.4) was much lower compared with Non-SCs (13.8). Thus, the GER for SCs was three times less compared with the Non-SCs.

There is another feature about access to higher education, which the studies bring out quite clearly. The access to these social groups varies within the respective religion to which they belong. Therefore, the SCs, the STs, and the OBCs suffer unequally as religious group. For instance, in 2004-05, the GER of the OBC Muslims was 6 per cent as compared with 7.34 per cent for Non-OBC Muslims. Similar disparities are apparent in the case of SC and the Non-SC/ST Christians. In the case of the SC Sikhs, the GER was only 2 percent compared with 15 per cent among Non-SC Sikhs. Similarly, the GER of tribal Christians was 6.48 per cent compared to 23.29 per cent for Non-SC/ST Christians. It is, thus, evident that the SCs, the STs, and the OBCs from all religion suffer from lower access to higher education. However, the SCs within the Hindu and the Sikh suffer more acutely than the SCs belonging to other

religions. Similarly, the OBCs within the Muslims probably suffer more than the Hindu OBCs. Similarly, the STs within the Hindu fold suffer more than their Christian counterparts. In 2004-05, disparities are also evident in enrolment rate between religious groups. The GER for the Hindus, the Muslims, the Christians, the Sikhs, and the others stood at 11.9, 6.84, 16.68, about 12, and 15.4 percentage points respectively. Thus, the GER was the lowest among the Muslims followed by the Hindus.

The 11th Five Year Plan recognized the problem of multiple natures of disparities in enrolment rate and proposed policy measures to enhance their access to higher education. It brought the inclusiveness in higher education at the centre of our higher education policy. Inclusive education essentially requires an increased access to higher education to these multiple groups who suffers from lower access to higher education. The approach and strategy thus, formulates policies and schemes for the STs, the SCs, the OBCs, girls, minorities particularly the Muslims, physically challenged persons, semi-nomadic and denotified and the poor.

The 11th Plan proposed number of measures for inclusive education. Firstly, the Plan proposes to support Universities and colleges located in 373 districts having lower GER and also envisage under the Prime Minister Dr. Manomhan Singh's initiative to open new colleges in these districts with matching contributions from the States. Secondly, it proposes special support to Universities and colleges located in rural, hilly, remote, tribal, and border areas. Further, about 90 districts concentrated with Muslim population have been identified for Central support. Thirdly, the Plan also proposes enhanced support to Universities and colleges with a high concentration of the student belonging to SC/ST/OBCs, and Muslim population. Fourthly, the plan focused on developing schemes to improve language and competency through remedial coaching classes. Besides, the Plan specifically emphasizes on augmenting fellowship and opening up of hostels, particularly for women to enhance their access to higher education. Further, opening up of new Polytechnics in un-served districts, 500 new community Polytechnics, new 210 community colleges, and various other programmes of the UGC in the ongoing schemes will help to include the excluded social groups. The setting up of 30 Central Universities under initiative by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has a strong component of inclusiveness in so far as it will offer affordable access with due share to the SC, ST, and OBCs. The implementation of the Oversight Committee's recommendations and the Sachar Committee recommendations will also facilitate enhanced access of the OBCs and the Muslims to institutions of higher education. Thus, inclusiveness has a definite strand of thought as well as action in the 11th Five Year Plan. An important aspect of inclusiveness is affordability. Without affordability, it is not possible to increase access and promote inclusiveness. Thus, affordability will have to be ensured through special measures. The 11th Five Year Plan makes provisions for the disbursement of scholarships for 2 per cent of the total students along with Education Loan Interest Subsidy through Higher Education Loan Guarantee Authority. Further, there are provisions for research fellowships for NET and non-NET qualified PhD students.

ISSUE RELATED TO FINANCIAL AID

No system in the society can work smoothly without finances. Finances are life line of institutions. Higher education system is not an exception in this regard. To keep the higher education system running lot of financial resources are required. Up to 1976, education (both school as well as higher) was responsibility of the state governments. However, in 1976 education was included in the concurrent list and became responsibility of the both centre and state governments. Of the two levels of government, the bulk of expenditure on education comes from the state governments, although the Centre shares a greater proportion of the

expenditure on higher education. The share of the Central government in total expenditure declined from 24.7 % during 1970-71 to 1980-81 to 21.1 % during 1981-82 to 1991-92 % and further to 20.3 % during 1992-93 to 2003-04. The share of the government's development spending on education can be estimated by its *plan* spending. There has been a steady decline in the percentage of plan spending to total spending by both Central and state governments – from 23.2 during 1970-71 to 1980-81 to 19.2 during 1981-82 to 1991-92 and further to 16.6 during 1992-93 to 2003-04.

Table 2: Public Expenditure on higher education as share of total expenditure on total Education

	State	Centre	Total
1952-1961	9.3	20.7	10.6
1962-1971	8.9	40.3	11.8
1972-1981	11.5	47.9	14.0
1982-1992	12.23	6.2	14.2
1993-2004	11.4	23.3	12.7

As far as Central government is concerned, the share of higher education in its total expenditure on education was well over 40 percent between 1960-61 and 1985-86 but has been below 20 percent after 2000-01. The share of higher education in the states' spending on higher education has, however, fluctuated between 9 and 12 percent, reaching an average of 12.2 percent during 1982-1992. The share of higher education in total education expenditure of both Central and State governments rose to 14.2 percent during 1981-82 to 1991-92, but fell to 12.7 percent during 1992-93 to 2003-04. Thus by all accounts, the relative priority given to higher education declined after 1992-93.

As a result of the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies the governments are continuously withdrawing subsidies from social sectors. This trend is quite apparent in the field of education. Government is retreating from its responsibility of financing higher education. The government grants to universities and other institutions of higher learning are diminishing. This has created a financial mess in these institutions and that is bound to affect the nature of these institutions as well as the social distribution of higher education. In the presence of this financial crunch it is very difficult for them to survive and maintain quality.

UNPLANNED GROWTH OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

In the recent years, there has been very fast increase in the number of higher educational institutes in the state of Punjab. However, a look at the trend of growth reveals that this growth is not in accordance with the proper planning. While in certain streams, there is genuine need but the institutions are not opened, in other disciplines large number of institutes has opened and most of their seats remain vacant for want of students. For example, over the recent years many B.Ed, Engineering and Management colleges have been opened in the state without their genuine need. Many seats in most of the colleges remain vacant. The day is not too far when some of these colleges may close down .Realising the mistake done in the past; the NCTE has already stopped giving affiliation to new educational colleges in many states including Punjab. However, this year the ban for Punjab has been lifted.

LACK OF PROPER INFRA STRUCTURE IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Higher education in the state is given to the students by the 20 universities and different type of about 1000 colleges. The universities in the state are of four types- central, state, deemed and private .In addition to these universities ,the state has few institutes of national importance like Dr. Ambedkar National Institute of Technology (NIT).The colleges of state

may broadly be divided in to three categories- government, aided and self financing .Each of these institutions has its own problems and consequently of building proper infra structure .So far as government colleges are concerned most of them are neglected lot .They are getting regular infra structural and maintenance grants from the state government .Their teaching posts have not been filled from the past 20 years .In the absence of large number of regular faculty members they are running the show by appointing guest faculty on a mere salary of Rs.7000 per month out of their P.T.A funds. As regards government aided private colleges, their aided posts have not been revised from the last many years. They are also facing acute financial problems and meeting their very essential needs by running self financing courses. The self financing private colleges especially the professional one, are earning lot of many but are neither maintaining good infra structure nor keeping qualified teachers. Of course many of them have magnificent buildings. So far as universities of the state are concerned, they are facing severe financial crunch. In order to meet their expenses they are either charging heavy fees from the students or starting self financing courses. Only the central universities or institutes of national importance situated in the state seems to be comfortable in this regard.

LACK OF QUALITY IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

In the context of education, quality refers to the feature of education which has to satisfy the needs of students, parents and the society at large by developing appropriate knowledge & skills. Quality in education also refers to the availability of competent teachers, an ideal student-teacher ratio, adequate infra structure facilities and the like.

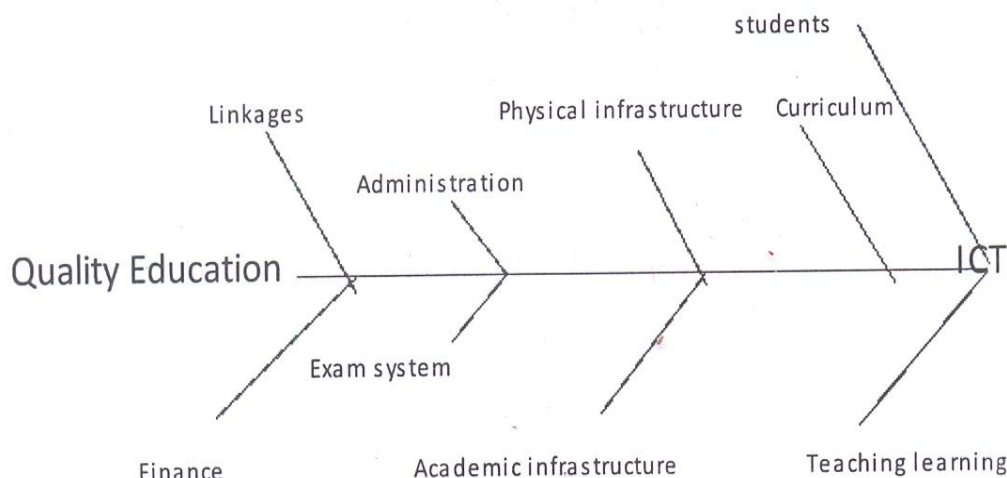


Fig. 2

State-wise data on student enrolment in university teaching Departments and affiliated colleges reveals that out of 3,88,184 students enrolled in higher education in the state of Punjab ,40326 (10.4%) are enrolled in the university teaching departments while the rest 3,47,858 (89.6) are enrolled in the colleges. The back bone of any nation depends on its system of education. If the education is good it will provide better planners, producers, bureaucrats, judicial officers, scientists and Doctors etc. No compromise on quality of education should be made by any civilised and progressive nation. The problem of sources, finances and quality teachers will always be there in any developing country like ours, but quantity and quality in education system need to be balanced. It has been observed that

quantitative expansion of higher educational institutions in the state has resulted in qualitative deterioration of the system. Over the years the higher education system has become infected to many problems that have bearing on the deliverance of quality in colleges. There are many reasons for the poor quality of higher education in the state. One, the higher education or education in general has not remained priority of the state government. It is not ready to finance these institutions adequately for building and upgrading their infrastructure. Two, large number of teaching posts in the government colleges are lying vacant from the years together. Three, the regulatory bodies entrusted with the task of ensuring quality in these institutions are not performing task sincerely. The syllabuses for most of the courses in the universities are out dated and not according to the need of changing times. The practical training imparted in the professional institutes of higher learning is not up to the mark. It is because of this reason that despite getting highest degrees, most of our students remain unemployable. Now, the stage has arrived when the government must try to find some ways for innovative initiatives required for education planning. It may be satisfying to note that Punjab government had already formed a committee to give its suggestions for improvement of education in the state under the chairmanship of Dr. S.P.Singh, former Vice Chancellor of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. This committee has already submitted its recommendations to the Punjab government for implementation.

WEAK SCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE STATE

School education is foundation of higher education in all societies. Without sound school system, we cannot think of good higher education system.

One of the major problem for higher education system in the state is weak education system in the state especially the rural areas where majority of our population resides. In rural areas the schools do not have adequate infrastructure. They do not have required number of teachers. If some of them have, they do not come to schools regularly. The students are very weak in studies. There is no proper arrangement for science stream in most of the rural schools. Most of the students of these areas opt for Punjabi medium. The dropout rate after post-elementary stage is very high.

LACK OF CREATING HEALTHY PRACTICES THROUGH EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

One of the criteria for the growth of higher education is through extra-curricular activities in which probably Punjab is lagging behind. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is an autonomous body established by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India to assess and accredit institutions of higher education in the country. This criterion focuses on the innovative practices of the institutions that enhance their academic ambience.

Out of the various innovative practices, extra-curricular activities stand out as major activities that play a positive role in the institution and enhance the academic mission of the institution. These activities focus on the student's healthy overall development and are an integral part of education.

Extra-curricular activities through which health practices can be carried in the higher education are as follows:

1. Developing Social-Responsibilities.
2. Value Based Education.
3. Bonding and affiliation with the institution.

4. Team work.
5. Team management.
6. Personality Development.
7. Social-interaction.
8. Creativity, divergent thinking.

Discussions, quotations, proverbs staging plays, reflection and reasoning on values, wall magazines, practical activities, yoga, meditation, prayers, work experience related activities, awareness of social evils and remedial measures, community development activities etc.

The practices vary from institutions to institutions. Good practice can always be learnt and adopted from other institutions. The main focus of the institution is the student's development and welfare. The educators are responsible and accountable for what our students turn out to be. So a great responsibility lies on the teachers on shaping the future of our students.

BENEFITS THROUGH EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

1. Extra-curricular activities function as an important source of value education.
2. Through debates, discussions, staging plays, communication skills sharpen. Creativity and divergent thinking emerges.
3. Participation and competition in extra-curricular activities taps the potential of the students, thus leading to knowledge of their strengths. Communication skills and language proficiency are enhanced.
4. Along with extrinsic rewards, these activities provide intrinsic rewards too i.e. self knowledge that grows out of self-competition.
5. Leadership qualities are adopted. Skills to handle pressure and resilience are inculcated.

LACK OF POLITICAL WILL REGARDING ISSUES WHICH EFFECT HIGHER EDUCATION

The constitution of India throughout has emphasized upon fairness, justice and rejection of arbitrariness in order to achieve the ideals of equality, secularism and democracy. However, in reality, there is a huge gap between theory and practice.

In Punjab, societies move in the direction of democratic values with a deep appreciation of human rights, divergence of opinion and resistance to the predominant ideology became fashionable. As a result, social sciences in particular found it hard to resist the ideological nuances in teaching, whereby it was very normal for the teacher to teach from a specific ideological angle, claiming it to be democratic and liberal thinking.

Though the higher education in Punjab has shown a rising trend but there are a lot of problems which shows the dismal position of higher education in Punjab. It was refreshing to come across the comment made by Justice Joseph at the Vice-Chancellors conference in Shimla recently that higher education must never be mixed with politics. Unfortunately, the higher educational institutions in Punjab have become a breeding ground for future politicians. Still more worrisome is the fact that it is the teachers who offer use class room teaching as a means to impregnate the impressionistic minds with endocentric ideas, dangerously hitting at the constitutional spirit of secular and democratic ways of life, the same teacher who teach the power of critical thinking and rational, scientific attitude, enjoy

watching their trainees engage in most communal, negative and damaging things, posing a several dent on the credulity of the future caretakers of the state of Punjab, that swears in the name of democracy and secularism.

It is wonderstruck to note that the same student's, who are so obedient and well managed at the school level, turn into an unmanageable and undisciplined lot on entering the colleges and Universities. The problem of higher education lies on so many factors.

Dominance of politics: the educational system is dominated by politics. The education is not in the hands of the eminent educationists but in the hands of politics. The higher posts in the Universities like Vice-Chancellor, Dean, Registrars and others are appointed by the government of the ruling party and they please their possess rather to serve the cause of education.

Defective Courses of studies: in Punjab the courses which are taken up for higher education level are defective. No effort is made by the Universities to revise the present curriculum. Moreover in Punjab there are three Universities namely Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar, Punjabi University Patiala and Panjab University Chandigarh where the students are taught different courses at graduate level. If a student of B.A part I migrates from one University to another he/she cannot migrate due to different curriculum prevailing in the University. The application of theory to practice leaves enough room for revision and restructuring. The weightage on content is negligible. The emerging concepts of educational technology have yet to make an impact. There is hardly any conceptual framework in the overall course structure.

The above discussion on problems and challenges of higher education in the state of Punjab reveals that though there is spectacular growth of higher education system in the state in terms on educational institutions, number of teachers and enrolment of students but the optimum use of this system is hindered due to various problems which have crept in system over a period of times. Unless these problems are tackled by the governments at the state as well as at the central level, our education system would continue to lag behind other states of the Indian union. The main problems being faced by our higher education system are many. First, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is very low as compared to other states of India ; Second, in spite of rapid expansion , our education has not been able to become inclusive and there lacks equal access to all socio-economic groups in the society ; Third, the institutions of higher learning in the state face acute shortage of funds ; Forth , there is unplanned Growth of Educational Institutions; Fifth, there is significant lack of Proper Infra Structure in Educational Institutions; Sixth, lack of quality education in most of the higher education institutes ; Seventh , there is lack of creating Healthy Practices through Extra-curricular Activities; Seventh, there is lack of political will concerning issues which effect Higher Education. Thus we may conclude the discussion in the words of Dr. Manmohan Singh (Prime minister) "Our University system is, in many parts, in a state of disrepair....In almost half the districts in the country, higher education enrolments are abnormally low, almost two-third of our universities and 90 per cent of our colleges are rated as below average on quality parameters....I am concerned that in many states university appointments, including that of Vice-Chancellors, have been politicised and have become subject to caste and communal considerations, there are complaints of favouritism and corruption".

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