

# The Challenge before Higher Education in India

Dr. Ashok<sup>1\*</sup> Dr. Rajesh Kumar Jangir<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, CESP/SSS/ JNU, New Delhi

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, RLS Government PG College Kaladera, Jaipur, Rajasthan

**Abstract – Higher education has been expanding rapidly in India since the last decade. Regional social and rural-urban inequalities are declining, but still, there is a big scope to do efforts to increase in enrolment and reduce inequalities. The distribution of higher education in India is skewed in aspects of faculty, level, and region. There are various challenges and problems still present today related to quality, employability, corruption, and regulation in the higher education system in India.**

**Keywords: Higher Education, Neo-Liberal Approach, Privatisation, Expansion, Challenge, Autonomy, Regulation**

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental agency for human development. Higher education enables to develop brain and its higher level of cognitive abilities. Generally, the purpose of education is to train a person for leading a meaningful life for community development and to make him a better citizen, but the purpose of higher education is more than this. Education beyond school is considered higher education in India. In higher education, the teacher transfers the currently available knowledge to the next generation and creates new knowledge by research. In the process of transferring the existing knowledge to the next generation and creating a new knowledge both students and teachers participate actively and both are accountable to the society. Therefore, it is expected that both must create some new knowledge, which is beneficial for the society in the long run. Teachers and students are organic intellectuals, who work collectively and have a responsibility towards the society (Patnaik, 2007).

Historical and political reasons are the most responsible factors for the problems in higher education in India. After Independence, various achievements have been gained in the development of higher education in India. The number of higher education institutions has increased many times. In 2016-17 these were 864 universities and 36852 colleges in the higher education system. Out of this 28675 colleges were in the private sector and 8177 colleges were in the government sector. The number of students enrolled in higher education also has increased manifold. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education in India was 11.0 per cent in 2005-06 which increased to 25.2 per cent in 2016-17 (Table-1). Enrolment in private higher education

institutions is continuously increasing. At the same time, private sector higher education institutions are also increasing. Private sector higher education institutions constitute 67.3 per cent of total enrolment in 2016-17, which was 61 per cent in 2010-11.

Table-1

Gross Enrolment Rate in Higher Education in India

Year	Enrolment Rate (per cent)
2005-06	11
2012-13	21.5
2013-14	23
2014-15	24.3
2015-16	24.5
2016-17	25.2

Source: MHRD, UGC, Annual Report, 2017-18

The big share of higher education in India comes under private sector. In 2016-17 the share of total private colleges was 77.81 per cent out of which 64.17 per cent were un-aided and 13.64 per cent institutions were private aided. Higher education is going to be more socially inclusive as the enrolment proportion of socially disadvantaged sections of society, such as Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, Minority and Women, has been increasing. Many new institutions are opening in rural areas, which

are reducing the disparity gap between rural and urban. This new development of higher education institutions has increased access to the commons in higher education, which was earlier limited to the elite only. Even today after this development in the higher education system there can be seen social and regional unequal access to a large extent. Higher education in India is skewed towards general education or liberal education. The development of technical and professional education has remained far behind in higher education system. In addition to this expansion in numbers, the quality is still poor and not beyond doubt.

**DOMINANCE OF LIBERAL EDUCATION**

The development and expansion of higher education have not been according to the requirements of the society and the country. This uneven development has many dimensions. It has also expanded unevenly in the regional dimension. It has hampered the fulfilling of true objectives of higher education in the country. Our resources are limited, particularly the public resources for higher education. Since the resources are limited, so spending on higher education must be according to the need and priority of the society and the nation. Virtually, the resource allocation for higher education is controlled by the political leadership. Similarly, the decision for the expansion of different streams (professional versus general education) of higher education is also taken by the political leadership. In this process of optimisation, one should try to maximize the utility with limited resources but in reality, it is seen that popular political decisions are taken instead of practical and optimal decision, which, in the long run, are not in the interest of the nation and the society. At present (i.e. 2016-17) a big share (68.87 per cent) of enrolment is found to be in general education or in liberal education. Further, within general education the enrolment in science education is less than in social science and arts faculty, which is depicted in Table 2 below:

**Table-2**

**Enrolment and Disparity in Higher Education in India (Per cent) in 2016-17**

Level-wise Enrolment		Faculty-wise Enrolment		Institution-wise Enrolment		Enrolment in Colleges	
Programme	Per cent	Program	Per cent	Institution	Per cent	Institution	Per cent
Graduate	79.39	Liberal / General Education	68.87	University	8.9	Govt. Colleges	35.8
Post-Graduate	11.22	Technology/ Engineering	14.74	College	91.1	Private Colleges	64.2
Research	1.21	Others (Law, Education, etc.)	16.39				
Others	8.18						

Source: MHRD, UGC, Annual Report, 2017-18

Table-2 explains the faculty wise uneven distribution in higher education in India. Out of total enrolment in higher education, 68.87 per cent student were

enrolled in liberal or general education whereas only 14.74 per cent students were enrolled in technical or engineering education and 16.39 per cent were enrolled in Law, Agriculture, etc. If we observe the level-wise distribution of higher education in India, we find that 79.39 per cent students were enrolled at graduate level education whereas only 11.22 per cent at postgraduate level and 1.21 per cent in research. This indicates that the number of students enrolled at the post-graduation and research level extremely low in proportion to higher education. Next skewed distribution is found in the enrolment in colleges and university, that is 91.1 per cent, students were enrolled in colleges whereas only 8.9 per cent students in universities. The management-wise distribution shows that 64.2 per cent enrolment was in private institutions whereas only 35.8 per cent enrolment in government institutions. All these indicate that the level-wise, faculty-wise, institution-wise, and management-wise uneven distribution of enrolment prevail in higher education. There is a huge skewness found in the enrolment at various levels such as in research, in technical education, and in government management institutions.

In our higher education system, students enrolled at the graduate level are mostly in Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) course. This expresses that higher education in India is dominantly B.A. centric. This uneven distribution has serious implications for the higher education system in the nation. The question arises that it was not considered how many B.A. degree holders were required for the nation and how this large number of B.A. degree holders would contribute to national development.

In the absence of any clear plan and policy about higher education, the nation is spending its scarce resources to produce arts graduate (B.A. education). The position of a B.A. degree holder is very pathetic because most of these students do not have any skill required for the job market and by doing this they are continuously increasing only the pool of educated unemployed and all the time seeking the job in the market. Most of these B. A. producing institutions are providing this degree with extremely poor quality education and training, so the quality and skill level in these graduates is extremely low.

Although technical education has expanded very much, the number of technical graduates is little and further the quality of technical education is also low. Indeed most of the formal technical graduates have the real ability below the diploma level; therefore, the low quality of technical education hampers employability of these students. Instead of providing low-quality technical education up to the graduate level it will be better, they should be provided good quality diploma level education to increase their employability in the job market. Low-quality technical education not only reduces the

employability of the students but also keeps them at low productivity level. From the manpower planning point of view, it is better that one should decide in advance the requirement of different skills and provide technical or engineering education accordingly. The students in Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are given diploma certificate if they do not fulfill the required criteria for the graduation level within the four-year degree programme. This should be imitated in all other engineering colleges to augment the quality of technical education. If these diploma level students do not fulfil the diploma level criteria in training they should be awarded the Industrial Training Institute (IIT) pass out certificate. These certificate holder students should be given the chance to take the diploma or degree level exam to get the qualification improvement. For enforcing this there should be an inbuilt system of lateral entry and exit at all levels of technical education.

### QUALITY CONCERN

At present more than half of the posts of teachers in the universities are lying vacant. Autonomy in universities is subjected to strict regulation and they are regulated more than optimal by the regulators. This high degree of regulation and low autonomy is hampering the creation of new knowledge, creativity, and innovation in the higher education system of the nation. There is a welter of rules and even trap because of continuous change in the rules of higher education. This over-control results in the dominance of administrative bureaucracy in the field of academia.

Teaching is not an attractive profession in higher education because of all these and at the same time the social prestige is below other professions. Therefore, the academic field is getting low-quality teachers. Most of the teachers have low academic credentials in India. The higher education system is multilayered. Various types of colleges, universities and stand-alone institutions, such as IIT and IIM, private non-aided, private aided, affiliated colleges, state-level public university state-level private university and central university (Table-3). Apart from these, there are other institutions which are neither a university nor affiliated to any university, but offer diploma (s) and they are popular also. Foreign universities' branches also award graduate degree within India. These are not illegal but are not recognized for employment in the public sector. The quality of the degree from such Universities (such as the London School of Economics) is high and students from these universities are getting good standard employment in the private sector corporate.

**Table-3**

**Distribution of University and Colleges in India  
 2016-17**

Type of Universities	Numbers	Type of Colleges	Number	Per cent
Central University	44	Private Un-Aided	23647	64.17
Central Open University	1	Private Aided	5028	13.64
Institute of National Importance	100	Total Private	28675	77.81
State Public University	345	Government	8177	22.19
Institute under State Legislature Act	5	Total Colleges	36852	100
State Open University	13			
State Private University	233			
State Private Open University	1			
Deemed University- Government	33			
Deemed University- Govt. Aided	10			
Deemed University- Private	79			
Total	864			

Source: MHRD, UGC, Annual Report, 2017-18

In India, the quality of Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) is accessed by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA). Most of the institutions do not want to get accreditation from these institutions. Therefore, formally one cannot infer any direct result about the quality of the whole system, but there is much indirect evidence which shows its poor quality. Out of the total of 864 Universities and 36852 colleges in 2016-17, only 16 Universities and 123 colleges were with the potential for excellence. In a particular area, only 29 centres or departments were with the status of potential for excellence (UGC Annual Report, 2016-17).

The proportion of potential for excellence in colleges, universities, and departments is extremely low. Out of the total appeared candidates in UGC-NET examination, only 0.99 per cent qualified for Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) whereas only 3.92 per cent students were qualified UGC-NET examination in 2016-17. The UGC has an anti-malpractice cell which has issued a list of 21 fake universities so that students can be aware and do not to take admission in these institutions. Unfortunately, no agency is available to command the immediate close down of these institutions, so that nobody can be trapped by these institutions. This indicates the condition of poor regulation of the system. Similarly, the UGC also has a legal cell. A present (i.e. 2016-17) 5794 court cases are pending between institutions and the UGC. This indicates the suboptimal regulation and presence of ambiguity in rules in the regulatory system. The NAAC report as on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2018 indicates that only 14 per cent colleges and 36.46 per cent of universities took accreditation from the NAAC.

It shows that 86 per cent of colleges and 64 per cent of universities of the nation are running without accreditation. The accreditation status of the institution is very pathetic as only 11 colleges out of 5309 accredited colleges were with A<sup>++</sup> grade in 2018 and only 2.22 per cent of the total 315 accredited universities achieved A<sup>++</sup> grade.

Most of the higher education institutions (including colleges and universities), which got accreditation from the NAAC achieved A-grade or below A-grade, as given in Table 4 below-

**Table-4**

**Universities/Colleges with valid accreditation (as on 30/11/2018)**

Grade	Total Number of Colleges	Per cent	Total Number of Universities	Per cent
A++	11	0.00	7	2.22
A+	100	1.88	17	5.40
A	1262	23.77	166	52.70
B++	430	8.10	22	6.98
B+	581	10.94	16	5.08
B	2532	47.69	78	24.76
C	393	7.40	9	2.86
Total Accredited Colleges/Universities	5309	0.14	315	36.46
Total Existing Colleges/Universities	36852		864	
SOURCE: <a href="http://www.naac.gov.in/19-quick-links/32-accreditation-status">http://www.naac.gov.in/19-quick-links/32-accreditation-status</a>				

Table-4 shows the status of accreditation of the higher education system in India. The accreditation in general education is done by the NAAC and in technical education, it is done by the NBA. Thus, indirectly the accreditation agencies prove the poor quality of the higher education system in India. The evaluation of the higher education system only on the basis of ranking only by the regulator is also under criticism as the higher education system has a mission of philanthropy. Patnaik (2007) emphasizes that the mission of nation-building is more important for higher education institutions. The ranking of a university on the basis of its performance is not relevant. The most important thing here is whether a university is involved completely in fulfilling this mission. It is not important that a university gets its evaluation on the basis of certain criteria by an external agency.

The proportion of working age-group population is the highest in India. The median age of the Indian population is 29 years. If this big proportion (demographic dividend) of age-group is equipped with quality education, appropriate skill, and training, it can contribute meaningfully in the national income. The skilled young labour force cannot only fulfil the requirement of the skilled labour force in India but also fulfil the requirement for the rest of the world (the aim of making India as a skill-capital of the world).

### BEING EDUCATED VERSUS ACTING AS EDUCATED

Usually, the prime objective of education is to make a good responsible citizen. Education is considered a merit good. There are many positive externalities of the development of education in the society. Education increases the productivity and employability of the labour force, augments national

income, increases the growth rate of national income, promotes science and technology, develops social and ethical values, increases health consciousness (which encourages healthy habits), develops scientific temper, strengthens democracy, develops tolerance and respect for other cultures, etc. The development of education in the society reduces the rate of crimes, develops civil values, increases the trend of compliance of law and order, and induces the citizen to live a meaningful life with social order. Nevertheless, in reality, these positive externalities of education are not observed in the society to an extent as it is expected. Several examples of this malaise can be found in the society. Many times we see that highly educated people are found involved in many serious crimes. Many qualified and highly educated government officers and employees are found involved in corruption cases. This widespread corruption not only harms the government treasury but also, in a broader perspective, hampers the right direction of development of the society. To a large extent, from not following the traffic signals to committing the cybercrimes, all are done by highly educated people. These highly educated offenders do not inculcate or absorb the values of education in their behaviour. In such a condition these emerge a big question on the purpose of the education system: it makes a clear difference between being educated and acting as educated.

Creation and extension of useful knowledge for the society have been considered as an objective of higher education. Transfer of existing available knowledge to the new generation has also been considered as an important objective of higher education. To achieve these objectives sooner, it is necessary to create new knowledge, develop new ideas, make innovations, and use optimally the existing available resources. For this happening, in reality, we should adopt a long term and macro approach in higher education policy. In the scenario of social and gender inequality in the society, the policy of positive discrimination for social equality and gender justice in higher education should be adopted and implanted effectively, so that increasing expectations of deprived sections of society can be met.

### GLOBALISATION AND MARKETISATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education in India is being affected by globalisation. The role of the market is increasing in higher education with increasing privatisation. Neo-liberal policies are also occupying space in the scenario of higher education in India. Globalisation is taking place through the interconnectedness of the elite class of all the nations of the world; this is why globalisation is one-sided. In practice, globalisation is working for the interest of only for the elite in the world. In this system, the elite have more than sufficient income, so they can spend

more amounts for higher education. In the era of globalisation, the elite can spend on higher education but the other can't spend sufficient, this type of situation is creating and developing economic and social disparities in higher education in India. Neo-liberal market philosophy is completely neutral towards democratic values and ethics. This marketisation places that consumerism is the only valuable consideration, in which consumption maximisation is the only objective. In consumerism, each and every person works only for his personal interest and personal advancement and at the same time, social values are not considered relevant here. All these promote social disorder and chaos in the society. The dominance of the market is making higher education neutral to the social values and ethics. Privatisation and neo-liberal philosophy in higher education increased sharply after 2003 in India. State private university became a distinct and clear entity after 2003. These are being regulated by the UGC regulation 2003. This policy of privatisation pushed the system towards commercialisation and profit motive. These profits making policies make more difficult to implement effectively the regulation in the system. Poor and ineffective regulation promotes corruption in the system. Currently, the major part of higher education is dominated by private operators and these private operators are working only for profit motives.

Jones (1997) expressed that in neo-liberal ideology higher education is considered as a commodity for personal consumption. This ideology is completely consistent with the World Bank's ideology. The Bank recommended for full cost recovery and also suggested the alternative source of funding other than public expenditure such as educational loan and scholarship etc. It also recommended that public education should be decentralized and to promote non-government community agencies. This privatisation with poor regulation is making higher education market prone to corrupt. Profit motives are the main objective of the service providers in providing higher education. Best mind and brilliant people are not being attracted by higher education as this profession does not have a higher social reputation. Best mind and talented peoples do not prefer academia for working because there is a lack of autonomy and basic infrastructure. Academia also has a lot of bureaucratic intervention and political interference. Due to all above-mentioned reasons, the superiority of the academic field is losing and is resulting in reducing social prestige. This trend is becoming more and more prevailing in our social culture. Mostly, average or mediocre are adopting the academic field as a career. One who cannot get success to other socially high reputed and rewarded professions such as bureaucracy, the corporate or higher technological field only those choose academia for the career. Due to the lack of availability of best talent in the academic field, innovations and new ideas are not encouraged and the level of research and development remains low. In comparison with the global higher education

system, the level or quality of the system is quite low in India. This poor quality of the system also adversely affects the growth rate of GDP in the nation, as a result, low-level technological development of the nation make the nation socially unequal and poor.

As mediocre come in academia, they adopt other unethical methods rather than academic excellence for their career advancement. Such people prefer their individual advancement and self-interest rather than national and social welfare. In such a situation the only aim is to elevate their personal career by pleasing their higher authorities. For their personal advancement, they adopt sycophancy and other unethical methods rather than working hard for their academic excellence. They make personal relations with politicians and bureaucrats for their personal interest. Such people get higher position in administration and leadership in the system and promote authoritarianism and bureaucracy instead of academic autonomy, which discards the sue motto development of research and innovation. Finally all these results in loss of quality and research in higher education.

## **CORRUPTION IN THE FIELD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

Corruption is growing rapidly in the field of higher education. In academic appointment, priority has been given to caste, religion, and region instead of academic excellence. Politic interference is increasing rapidly in higher education. In such appointments of academic administration, priority is given to political ideology and loyalty to the politician rather than qualities of academic leadership and superiority. In such a situation, academic leadership promotes only one political ideology of the ruling party. This practice directly leads to political interference in universities. Apart from these, many examples of direct corruption have seen in the appointments. Corruption in higher education is not only in appointments but also in activities like admissions, evaluation examinations, and tender process. Corruption increased more, after the share of the private sector increased in the system. Although the corruption related to appointment and tender process is not present in the private sector, the private sector undermines the regulation by appointing poor quality teachers, who are ready to work at the lowest pay. The nature of corruption in the private sector is different because these institutions are working for profit maximisation. Here in private sector corruption related to admission and evaluation can be found more because students want more marks with low effort and for this, they ready to pay more. Because of this, private sector higher education institutions behave corruptly in admission and evaluation process. Private universities adopt this type of corrupt practice frequently because as these

institutes have a higher scope to do so. The demand for professional and technical degrees is higher so indirectly these universities are making available these degrees for money through corrupt practices. This is the result of commercialisation and privatisation in higher education due to neo-liberal policies and globalisation. Because of all these practices, the role of the private and corporate sector is immensely increasing and power of regulatory institutions is diminishing.

## AUTONOMY AND REGULATION

Ideally, higher education institutions should be considered autonomous so that the researcher can do research and create new knowledge through new ideas and innovations free from fear and favour of the administration, government pressure and any political ideology. A researcher should be free to criticize, to analyse, and to express her views on government policy, administration, and political party. This situation is considered autonomous in true spirit. Any pressure of university administration and bureaucracy on the researcher prevents her in the flourishing of independent ideas. The major part of enrolment in higher education system comes under colleges i.e. 91.1 per cent. Government colleges run under the direct control state governments, so they have almost no autonomy. The private colleges are affiliated with state-level public universities, so these institutions also suffer from lack of autonomy. In principle, all the state level institutions are autonomous, but in practice, these institutions are given a little autonomy. The Vice Chancellors are politically appointed hence they are politically motivated. They are more inclined towards the interest of their political masters than the academic interest of the nation. Therefore, the interest of institutions becomes secondary for them. All these state-level institutions are mostly financed by the state governments. They do not get funds timely and in general, they remain less financed or ill-financed due to fiscal strains of the state governments. Only a few centrally funded institutions like Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), India Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Institutes of National Importance enjoy much autonomy and are free from the government interventions.

Formally institutions of higher education are constituted by an Act passed by the legislature but in practice, these institutions are frequently given instructions by the government which curbs their autonomy. This hampers their routine working. The institutions are working with difficult conditions because they have to follow stringent conditions related to the appointment of teachers, grants or funds and its utilisation (Chattopadhyay, 2013). Autonomy is not flawless because it has the power to produce the best outcome or at the same time, it may impose very high cost and produce low quality (Pathak, 2014). Students and teachers are co-producers in higher education. Both (student and

teacher) work together to achieve the objectives of higher education. Students' active participation is necessary to produce the best result. Here the production of knowledge is completely different from the production of a marketable commodity in a factory. Here no physical commodity is produced with given input-output-technology combinations. The creation of new knowledge and research is not a mechanical process. The production in a factory comes under the concept of the production function with a given technology. Many replicas of a factory and a product can be produced by using the given technology and production function. But it is not possible to replicate an excellent university only by investing money. Each and every mind is unique and each and every person is unique in itself. It is required to have the best mind with long training and conducive environment to make an excellent researcher.

Absolute autonomy is not desirable therefore, absolute freedom and autonomy without any accountability is not appropriate. To whom the teacher should be accountable? Are they should be accountable to vice-chancellors, heads of department or to the governments? Indeed, the teacher must be accountable in the long run interest of the society and the nation. Research output and new knowledge should be useful for the society. Teachers should work keeping in mind the long term interest of the society and the nation. Therefore, the correct spirit of long term and holistic vision is required. Policies related to higher education are determined mainly by the central government in India. The policies on higher education are centralized to UGC and the state governments have a little scope to determine the policy. More than 80 per cent of the enrolment in higher education institutions comes under the state level institutions, which are financed by the state governments, but policies are determined by the central government. This is inconsistent with the true spirit of the federal type of state.

## CONCLUSIONS

After globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation private sector expanded extensively in higher education in India. After the neo-liberal ideology became part in higher education, several issues, challenges and problems such as quality, access, profit motive investment, corruption and regulation arose suddenly and severely in the higher education system in India. Issues related to autonomy and regulation in higher education need to address in priority so that the higher education system can work in order and objectives of higher education can be achieved in true sense. A lot of effort needs to put in the higher education system in the country to achieve the true level and quality of higher education.

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## Corresponding Author

**Dr. Ashok\***

Assistant Professor, CESP/SSS/ JNU, New Delhi