

# Higher Education in India: History, Nature and Challenges

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## ABSTRACT

Higher education plays an important role in the economic development of a Nation and the sustainable earning of people's livelihoods. India's Higher Education system is the world's third-largest education system after China and the United States, but in terms of Gross Enrollment Ratio it is only 25.8 percent. In the last decade, the gross enrollment rate has gone up sharply in 2016-17 from 2005-06 to 25.8 percent from 8.1 percent. The government wants to increase the share of higher education from 25.8 to 30 percent by the year 2020. Even then it will be less, as the percentage is above 80 in the US and UK. India educates about 20 percent of its youth in the age group of 17-23 who enroll in higher education, compared to 30 percent in China and 91 percent in South Korea. Several new initiatives are being taken by the state and central government to increase the gross enrollment ratio in higher education. Higher education of India is managed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and various councils. The UGC, established under the UGC Act 1956, is empowered to promote and coordinate university education in India and also approves grants. The UGC is responsible for coordinating, determining, and maintaining standards and issuing grants for universities and research organizations. Rapid growth in both enrollment and number of institutions has given rise to new challenges of maintaining the quality of higher education. When the UGC was established in 1956, there were barely 28 universities, 578 colleges at that time, which has now grown to 851 universities and 41012 colleges. The 62-year-old structure of the UGC is unable to meet India's higher education needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is the reason that recently the Ministry of Human Resource Development has released a draft Act to dissolve the UGC and replace it with the Higher Education Commission of India, on which opinion has been sought from academics and general public till 7<sup>th</sup> July 2018. Rapid growth in both enrollment and number of institutions has given rise to new challenges of maintaining the quality of Higher Education. Today we need such a form of higher education, which can work at National and International level to ensure the right development of the country.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Quality education, Colleges, Universities, Education system

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Education is a basic element in the creation of the Nation. The standard of progress of a nation is its educational level. Upanishad has called the process of imparting self-knowledge and Brahm Gyan to education through Satyam Gyanam, Eternal Brahma. Therefore, knowledge is attained through the process of education. This knowledge separates humans from animals. In fact, education is a tool, a means of empowerment through which consciousness is awakened against injustice, exploitation and illiteracy. Human beings are aware of

their rights and existence. Education is the best way to check the progress of any society. Education plays an important role in making a person social

## History of Higher Education in India

The tradition of general and higher education in India has been flourishing since the Vedic period; the credit for starting colleges and universities in ancient India goes to the Brahmin culture. In the cities like Kashi, Mathura, Avantika, Mithila, Shravasti, Rajgriha, Kanchi,

the houses of many pundits were converted into colleges. But the most famous Buddhist era was the Nalanda University, where scholars from abroad and abroad came and scholars here established Buddhism as the main religion of Greater India and Asia. It had a hundred villages for its economy, Harsh Vardhan also used to give it, because Vedic literature was studied here. East: Nalanda, Taxila and Vikramashila Universities were famous centers of higher education in India in ancient times, attracting students not only from all over the country but also from countries like Korea, China, Burma, Ceylon, Tibet and Nepal.

The current system of Higher Education in India begins with the 1823 report of Mountstuart Elphinstone, which stressed the need to establish schools to teach English and European science. The Indian Education system of the present era is mostly influenced by Europe. Macaulay is the leader of English education in modern India. But the establishment of Fort William College in Calcutta in 1800 is the beginning of higher education. With this, Presidency colleges started in Madras and Mumbai as well. With their establishment, the importance of Calcutta Madrasa and Banaras Sanskrit Colleges established by the Englishmen was somewhat reduced. Nevertheless, Sanskrit College started in Poona in 1818. In 1886, Swami Dayanand Saraswati started the Anglo Vedic College in Lahore and in 1898 Mrs. Annibesant established the Central Hindu College at Kashi. The revolt of 1857 occurred only after Wood's manifesto in 1854, and at this time the establishment of universities in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay was announced. Secondary and college education expanded rapidly in the next 20 years after the suggestions of the Hunter Education Commission 1882 and Indians made commendable contribution in it. Teaching and examination universities were also established. Punjab University (1882) and Allahabad University (1887) were prominent among them. The Indian Universities Act was passed in 1904 following the report of the Hunter Commission 1882 and the educational reforms of Lord Curzon. Curzon tightened government control in universities in the name of quality and efficiency. But its real aim was to stop the number of educated supporters of nationalism and make them government

devotees. The Calcutta University Commission (1917–19) was only related to the University of Calcutta, but its recommendations were also correct in relation to other universities in India. The Calcutta University Commission (1917–19) report also opened the doors for improvement in higher education. The Hartog Committee (1929) and the Wood Abbot Report (1937) also led to some improvements in education and many universities were started.

Immediately after the independence of the country in 1947, the University Education Commission (1948–49) known as the Radhakrishnan Commission, was formed in November 1948 to report on the university education in the country. The report of this commission has great importance in the field of university education in independent India. This commission made the following recommendations - The university should be pre-12 years of study and the three main objectives of higher education should be - (a) General Education (b) Government Education, and (c) Vocational Education. The number of students in colleges should not be very large. No more than one thousand students should be admitted to a college. Improvement in the level of examinations conducted by universities and university education should be included in the concurrent list. One for overseeing university education in the country University Grants Commission should be set up. The English medium in higher education should not be removed in a hurry. The study should be made compulsory for at least 180 days in universities. On the basis of these recommendations, the University Grants Commission was formed on 28 December 1953 and it was made autonomous by the Parliament in 1956. The task of this commission is to oversee university education, check the level of education and research facilities in universities and establish coordination among them. The government arranges sufficient funds for the University Grants Commission. Subsequently, the Commission suggests allocation of funds to various universities in the country and executes various development schemes related to university education. The University Grants Commission functions with its six regional offices located at Bangalore, Bhopal, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Pune as well as its headquarters at New

Delhi to ensure accessible access and various colleges/universities related to the area Grants can be released quickly for schemes / programs.

### Nature of Higher Education in India

Rabindranath Tagore rightly said, "Higher education is not only what gives us information, but also harmonizes with all existence." Higher Education system in India after China and America is at number three. At the time of Independence, there were only 20 Universities and 496 Colleges in the Country, in which 2.1 lakh students were studying, now the Degree granting Universities in India have increased by 47.9 times and the number of colleges has increased by 82.02 times and the enrollment of students in Higher Education has increased by 174.49 times. In 2017-18, the number of universities has been 851 and the number of Colleges has been 41012 (as on March 31, 2018).

India's Higher Education system is large as well as small. It is the third largest Education system in the world in terms of absolute enrollment but it is only 25.8 percent in terms of gross enrollment ratio, the gross enrollment rate in the last decade has seen a huge jump in 2016-17 as compared to 2005-06 and it is 8.1 Percent to 25.8 percent but with such a low enrollment of Higher Education we still face Unemployment due to lack of skill development in India. India is the first-ranked country in the world in terms of Higher Education institutions but still lags behind other countries in terms of student registration. The government wants to increase the share of higher education from 25.8 to 30 percent by the year 2020. Even then it will be less, because in America and Britain this percentage is above 80. The average of all higher education in China is more than 35 percent. Today the percentage of GDP spent on education is not being achieved. According to a report, 0.8 percent is being spent on research in the country, while at least 2 percent should be spent in the system of higher education, we need to make such basic changes that the right use of education is our economic development and in the field of social justice. Today the situation is that only those parents are able to send college to their children after secondary education who are financially competent.

### Development of Higher Education after Independence

There were only 20 universities in pre-independence country, while now their number has reached beyond 851. The number of Colleges has reached from 496 to about 41012 and the number of students from 3,97,000 to around 32610784. If the quality and practicality of Higher Education is considered, then the Present Education system is preparing a large number of educated unemployed every year.

**Table 1:** Numerical status of Universities and Colleges all over India during the years 1947-48 to 2017-18

Year	Universities	Colleges
1947&48	20	496
1950&51	28	578
1960&61	45	1819
1970&71	93	3227
1980&81	123	4738
1990&91	184	5748
2000&01	266	11140
2005&06	355	18064
2006&07	367	19000
2007&08	408	22064
2008&09	428	25951
2009&10	493	31324
2010&11	523	33023
2011&12	573	34852
2012&13	628	35525
2013&14	666	36634
2014&15	711	38498
2015&16	753	39071
2016&17	795	40026
2017&18	851	41012 (As on March 31, 2018)

**Source:** 1. UGC and higher education in India. Annual reports; 2. FICCI & EY: Higher Education in India: Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017).

During 2017-18, 366.42 lakh students were enrolled in various courses (regular and distance education programs) across all universities/colleges/all levels of higher education. Out of the 366.42 lakh students, 174.38 lakh were women, which is 47.59 per cent of the total number. In most of states, enrollment of male students

was relatively higher as compared to enrollment of female students at all levels. Uttar Pradesh has the highest student enrollment, with 51.2 percent male and 48.8 percent female students. In terms of percentage, female enrollment was highest in Lakshadweep (78.99 percent) followed by Goa (55.66 percent). The total number of foreign students enrolled in higher education is 46,144 (31394 students and 14750 girls). Foreign students come from 166 different countries around the world with a total of 25 percent students from Nepal.

**Table 2:** Increase in Enrollment of students across India during the years 2011-12 to 2017-18.

Year	Total Enrolments in various courses at all levels	Percentage increase
2011&12	2918433	6-13
2012&13	30152417	3-32
2013&14	32336234	7-24
2014&15	34211637	5-80
2015&16	34584781	1-09
2016&17	35705905	3-24
2017&18	36642378	2-62

Source: AISHE Report for the year 2017-18.

**Table 3:** Level-wise student Enrollment in Higher Education (Regular courses) during the year 2017-18

Level	Male	Female	Total	Total %
PHD.	92570	68842	161412	0-50
M.Phil.	12287	21822	34109	0-10
Postgraduate	1278165	1657638	2935803	9-00
Graduate	13484766	12977173	26461939	81-14
Postgraduate diploma	75195	69989	145184	0-45
Diploma	1765994	819196	2585190	7-93
Certificate	40649	50972	91621	0-28
Integrated course	1142233	81293	195526	0-60
Total	16863859	1546925	32610784	100-00

Source: UGC Annual Report 2017-18.

The state of Enrollment of students in Higher Education during the Education year 2017-18 shows that 81.14 percent of the total students enrolled in Graduation. The percentage of student enrollment in Postgraduate courses was 9 percent and the enrollment of students

in Research courses (M. Phil / Ph.D.) was 0.60 percent. The level of enrollment of students in Postgraduate and Research courses after graduation is still very low.

**Table 4:** Number of Universities as on 31 March 2018

Sl. No.	Universities	Number of Universities
1	Central university	47
2	State University	383
3	State Private university	295
4	Institutions established through state legislation	3
5	Deemed to be Universities	123
	Total	851

Source: UGC Annual Report 2017-18.

According to the current status of higher educational institutions, the number of universities listed by the University Grants Commission has gone up to 851 (47 Central, 383 State Public, 295 State Private, 123 Deemed to be Universities, Institutions established through state legislation and 41012 colleges in higher education sector. (AISHE report for the year 2017-18) were established. As far as the established universities in the states are concerned, Rajasthan tops the list with 77 universities followed by Uttar Pradesh (75), followed by Gujarat (63) etc. Among the state-wise colleges Uttar Pradesh ranks first with 7002 colleges and Maharashtra with 4548 colleges is second.

Despite dozens of reports and recommendations of commissions set up for higher education reform in India after independence, the framework of education system in India is the same as that which the British had prepared for getting educated clerks and government servants. It has been repeatedly added to these reports that our education should be practical according to the needs of the country, but neither the education system was Indianised nor did education become useful in daily life. Higher education failed to develop democratic feelings among the citizens of the country, today there is a need to bring changes in our education system. The foundation of current education should be based on Indian life and culture in which the science of the West also has a place that prepares Indians for true democratic



life and makes them world citizens. The development of higher education in India has been unplanned till now, as a result of which there has been a decline in the level of education, while the desire of students to learn has also been destroyed.

### Challenges in Higher Education

Higher education system in India has developed in a remarkable way after independence, which has become the largest system of its kind in the world. We now live in an increasingly diverse, globalized and complex, media-saturated society. Despite this, the system currently has several issues of concern. They are:

- ❖ **Education to be the Subject of concurrent list:** Education in India is placed in the concurrent list of the constitution i.e. both the central government and the state governments are independent in its context. It has some qualities and some defects. The Central Government regulates higher education through the University Grants Commission (UGC Act 1956). Central universities and recognized universities receive 100 percent grant, but the state government's universities, which are more in number, often provide funds for development only under the Five Year Plans, various states themselves bear the normal expenses. Many state governments experience difficulty in carrying the full burden of ordinary amount, which leads to deterioration in the quality of higher education. Prior to 1976, Education was entirely the responsibility of the states, but by the 42nd constitution amendment made in 1976, the five subjects which were removed from the state list and placed in the concurrent list, included education. It is worth noting that the Center and the states work together on the topics included in the concurrent list.
- ❖ **Increasing burden of University Grants Commission:** The Institutional capacity of the Higher Education sector has grown immensely in the years following independence. The number of universities has increased from 28 universities in the year 1950 to about 851 in 2018. The number of colleges has also increased manifold which has increased from 578 in 1950 to more than 41012 at

present. Therefore, due to such a large number of educational institutions, the University Grants Commission has increased the burden of work. No educational institution in India is world class, so the monitoring system of the University Grants Commission has been questioned, along with the ranking, evaluation and other parameters of the institutions have made the improvement in education level inevitable. The UGC and its 62-year-old structure is not able to meet the higher education needs of 21st century India. Right now, barely 25.4 percent of the youth of 18 to 24 years are able to enroll in our universities and colleges. If we imagine GER to be able to make 50 percent then in the coming decades more than four crore additional youth will have to make education arrangements.

### Lack of Quality Education

There are many dimensions of quality in higher education. Providing quality education with expansion in higher education is a major challenge. In terms of numbers, India's higher education system ranks third after the United States and China, but as far as quality is concerned, the ranking of Indian universities in the world's top universities is very low. Very few Indian educational institutions get a place in the top-200 world rankings. India today lacks educational institutions that can compete at the world standard level. In the absence of good educational institutions, the best students of the country go abroad for studies. Most of them settle abroad. It is a loss of intellectual property for the country. Quality is a major challenge in higher education in India. The National Board of Accreditation - NBA has been formed in the year 1994 itself. After evaluation of educational institutions by them, allocation is given to educational institutions based on the grade assigned by them.

### Lack of Resources in Higher Education

Lack of financial resources is a major challenge in higher education. A recent survey has revealed that the state governments of most of the states of the country have no special interest in higher education and are not willing to bear the financial burden of it. Yes. Although the

Central Government has set a target of 30 percent gross enrollment rate by 2020, a large number of universities and colleges will be required to achieve this target. The National Knowledge Commission has recommended to open 1500 universities and about 45 thousand colleges in the country in the next 10 years to bring 30 percent people to the university by 2020. According to the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan Draft Paper of the Planning Commission, more than 90 percent of the enrollments from state universities and colleges affiliated to them are facing problems like lack of financial resources, poor operating system, and poor quality. In India, only 1.22 percent of GDP is being spent in higher education in the 11th Five Year Plan period, while in the US and South Korea, 3.1 and 2.4 percent of GDP is being spent respectively. In 1964, the Kothari Commission recommended spending 6 percent of GDP on education. The Knowledge Commission had suggested spending 1.6 percent on higher education. Currently, 65 percent of the University Grants Commission (UGC) budget goes to central universities and their colleges, while state universities and their affiliated colleges receive only the remaining 35 percent. In such a situation, how can we think of quality in higher education due to lack of resources.

### **Vacant Posts of Teachers**

According to the University Grants Commission (UGC), there are 16,699, 4,731 and 9,585 sanctioned posts of Professors, Associate Professors and Assistant Professors in various central universities. Of these, 5,925 (35 percent) of professors, 2,183 (46 percent) of associate professors and 2,459 posts (26 percent) of assistant professors are vacant. Forty percent of teachers' posts are vacant in 47 central universities of the country, so what will be the status of educational activities and their quality there. This is only the situation of central universities, if state level universities are also added to it, the picture would be very frightening. A recent survey has revealed that the state governments of most of the states of the country do not have any special interest in higher education and do not want to bear the financial burden of it. This is the reason why the state governments do not fill the sanctioned posts and they end, the posts of retiring teachers are also not filled and

instead part-time teachers or guest teachers are being replaced.

### **Lack of Research in Higher Education**

Prof. Yash Pal believed that the educational institutions which do not pay attention to research and its quality, are neither able to do good of education nor of society. After the implementation of the Academic Performance List (API), API is being counted in the promotion of Professors and due to this, we get a wonderful view of research, seminar and publication in education institutes nowadays. In the year 2017, the number of patent applications filed by Indians was about 46582 thousand, while during this time, 13.8 lakh were submitted by China, 6.6 lakh by US, 3.18 lakh patent applications were submitted by Japan. This is a question mark about the quality of our research. In some developed countries, in comparison to the investment to GDP ratio of research work, the US has 2.8 per cent, 2.1 per cent in China and 4.2 per cent in South Korea. According to 2016-17, the number of researchers per one lakh people in India was only 15, while there were 111 in China, 423 in US and 825 in Israel.

### **Need to change Syllabus**

Research by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAC) shows that the education level of 90 percent of the colleges and 70 percent of the universities in India is very weak. Research activities are not high level. In many universities, there has been no change in the syllabus for the last 25 years. The old syllabus is far from its ground realities. This pessimistic environment is failing to make higher education centers a world class place and higher education is only creating an army of semi-educated unemployed. There is now a strong need to refine higher education courses.

### **Political Interference**

Another major problem is the promotion of political interference in the higher management of colleges and universities. Deemed and private universities run on their own. Such Deemed and private universities are mostly of political fraternity and corporate houses. The posts of teachers including vice-chancellors in

universities are filled by political pressure. In fact, the Vice Chancellor should be a distinguished scholar, academician of academic field. They should have clarity, foresight, efficiency, leadership ability, management ability and decision making ability. Higher educational institutions should be kept free from narrowness like politics, casteism, and regionalism.

### The challenge of declaring exam results on time

Declaring exam results have become a major challenge since the semester system was implemented. Late latency in the results of the examination often leads to excessive inconvenience for the students. The students are not able to get the result of the examination immediately after the evaluation under the scheme.

### Student Indiscipline

In the present era, indiscipline has emerged as a major problem. In India, in 72 years of independence, this problem has taken such a terrible form. The current education system is absolutely flawed. It particularly emphasizes intellectual development. Irregular, misbehavior, sexual misconduct, theft, burglary, abuse of rights, duplication of examination. For these reasons our higher education system is not able to contribute to unity and nation building. It is also the responsibility of the parents to give the students a good reception. This problem is getting serious day by day, eliminating indiscipline among students will be a big challenge for higher education in the coming time.

### CONCLUSION

Even after 72 years of Independent India, if we are unable to stop our intellectual property in our country, then it is a serious issue. It is not that we did not make concerted efforts for the development of the country. We are seeing all the positive efforts made in the country to realize the vision of the overall development of the country. The Ministry of Human Resource Development of India has taken a long leap towards changing education with

the motto of 'Good Education for All'. The Ministry of Human Resource Development has launched several new schemes, to promote research and innovation culture in the country. The ministry has followed a policy of gradual autonomy to select higher educational institutions to promote research and innovation on their campuses so that they can make their way into the ranking of global institutions. Today, the government has made a provision of ₹ 400 crore in the financial year 2019-20 to make world-class educational institutions in the country. This amount is more than three times the revised estimates of the previous year.

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