

## A REVIEW ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA AND VIEWPOINT ON ITS CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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**Abstract:** Higher education system of India ranked third in the world after China and USA in terms of student enrolment. Since independence it has seen stupendous growth in the number of Colleges, Universities and Institutions. After 1950, Indian Government has established different organization to promote infrastructure, quality, and transparency in management in higher education system. Establishment of All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) in 1945, University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1956, Education Commission in 1966 are few examples of the above-mentioned fact. The national education policy introduced in 1986 has given a direction to the higher education in our country. After that, several changes have been incorporated in the curriculum design, syllabus modeling, student evaluation processes, faculty development process which needs to be reviewed for analysis to check the present case scenario and need of improvement in higher education system. In this regard, this article is aimed to tabulate and analyse different aspect of higher education such as growth in student enrolment, number in institution, faculties, social parity etc. Further, despite growth in various numbers and investment from public funding, India has failed to reach the mark compared to the higher education system of developed country. This article tried to provide a perspective in the challenges; higher education system is facing everyday and also the opportunity that one should grab to be connected with the system.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, India, Growth, Challenges, Opportunities

### Introduction

System of education in a country teaches their students the techniques of learning first and then implements the learning to grip on the opportunities of employment. In the process, a student must learn to classify the problem correctly, then analyze it and be able to visualize the problem from different angles. Teachers are the builders of the nation. A teacher can train to learn the basic of a subject, enhance the ability to identify critical problems, and help to increase creativity, imagination and visualization power and encourage a student to go to the right direction of individual's maximum capability. Teachers also educate to take social responsibility with utmost dedication to build the nation. Therefore it is extremely important to produce competent and professional teachers through quality assured training programs. Elementary education and Higher education are two main pillars to meet the excellence of education system in a country. In India Higher education has expanded significantly since independence. Large numbers of skilled doctors, engineers, teachers, technicians and managers, trained in India have established themselves in various parts of the world and working with reputation.

The article is arranged in the following manner.

1. There are several phases of development initiatives in higher and technical education are seen in India after independence. A concise and integral account of all those efforts must be kept with adequate supporting data. In this context, at first, the higher education system and its expansion post Independence has been reviewed in detail.

2. Despite prolific growth, there are several challenges India is facing, that must be overcome to become a leader in education from global perspective. It is true that India has expanded its higher education network by increasing number of colleges, universities and teachers although only 12% of students in the age group of 18-23 are benefitted from this education system. In fact, after starting of compulsory schooling under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan or universalization of primary education scheme, the gap between demand and supply increases manifold. In different states of India, the student enrolment ratio varies from (1-38)%. Despite this huge enrolment ratio, many of the aspiring young talents could not get the opportunity to pursue their career after completion of school level certificate course. Moreover, distributions of central and deemed university are not even. Due to some historical reasons central universities with great demand are centralized in states like Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, North-Eastern States and Uttar Pradesh. Further to keep up with increasing demand of aspiring candidates, several colleges and universities are given affiliation with little assurance of quality education which affects the overall education system adversely. Thus, in the next section, these challenges are discussed in great detail in this article.

3. There are plenty of opportunities in Indian higher education system that needs to be analyzed for future endeavour. Thus, lastly, in this article those opportunities are stated and explained their viability in Indian condition by showing appropriate data.

## **Background**

### History of Higher Education in India

University Education Commission Report is the first document published in 1948-49 where the main goals of higher education had been stated by the first Vice-President of Independent India. In 1956 UGC was established which was the first Government initiative for the development of higher education (Ananta Mohan Mishra, 2014). In 1966, an Education Commission headed by Dr. D.S. Kothari was set up by the Government of India whose main focus was to determine the need of Higher Education in India and provide an estimate the budget required for higher education. To promote the development of education in the country the Government set the following principles: (1) Free and Compulsory Education (2) Status,

Emoluments and Education of Teachers (3) Development of Languages (4) Equalization of Educational Opportunity (5) Identification of Talent (6) Work-experience and National Service (7) Science Education and Research (8) Education for Agriculture and Industry (9) Production of Books (10) Examinations (11) Secondary Education (12) University Education (13) Part-time Education and Correspondence Courses (14) Spread of Literacy and Adult Education (15) Games and Sports (16) Education of Minorities (17) The Educational Structure. In the report, function of education in nationwide and financial development was emphasized. It also suggested that the education budget would be increased to 6% of gross domestic product during the next 20 years, (Ananta Mohan Mishra, 2014).

In the 86<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Indian Constitution, a new article 21-A was included to implement free and compulsory education to all children of age group 6-14 years. This was stated as their Fundamental Right (Ananta Mohan Mishra, 2014).

In 1986, the National Policy on Higher Education affirmed its purpose such as (i) Expansion ii) Equity iii) Excellence iv) Relevance and v) endorsement of social values with more emphasis on expansion, equity and excellence (Ananta Mohan Mishra, 2014).

The National Knowledge Commission was set up in 2005. Its primary was to take steps that will help the country to lead in creation, application and distribution of knowledge in the world. Its main focus areas are access to knowledge [“If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it.” - Margaret Fuller], knowledge concepts [“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” - William B. Yeats], knowledge creation [“Discovery consists of seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody else has thought.” - Jonathan Swift], knowledge application [“If you give me rice, I’ll eat today; if you teach me how to grow rice, I’ll eat every day.” - Mahatma Gandhi] and knowledge services [“Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.” -James Madison].

### **Analysis**

The following analysis on higher education of India is done based on the data obtained from All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) for the year 2019-2020(UGC).

### Educational structure of India

			Ph.D.										
			M.Phil.										
	23		PG	M.Ed. B.Ed.									
XVII	22												
XVI	21												
XV	20		UNDERGRADUATE COURSES										
XIV	19												
XIII	18												
XII	17												
XI	16		SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL										
X	15												
IX	14		SECONDARY SCHOOL										
VIII	13												
VII	12		UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL										
VI	11												
V	10		PRIMARY SCHOOL										
IV	9												
III	8												
II	7												
I	6												
	5		PRE-PRIMARY										
STANDARD	AGE												

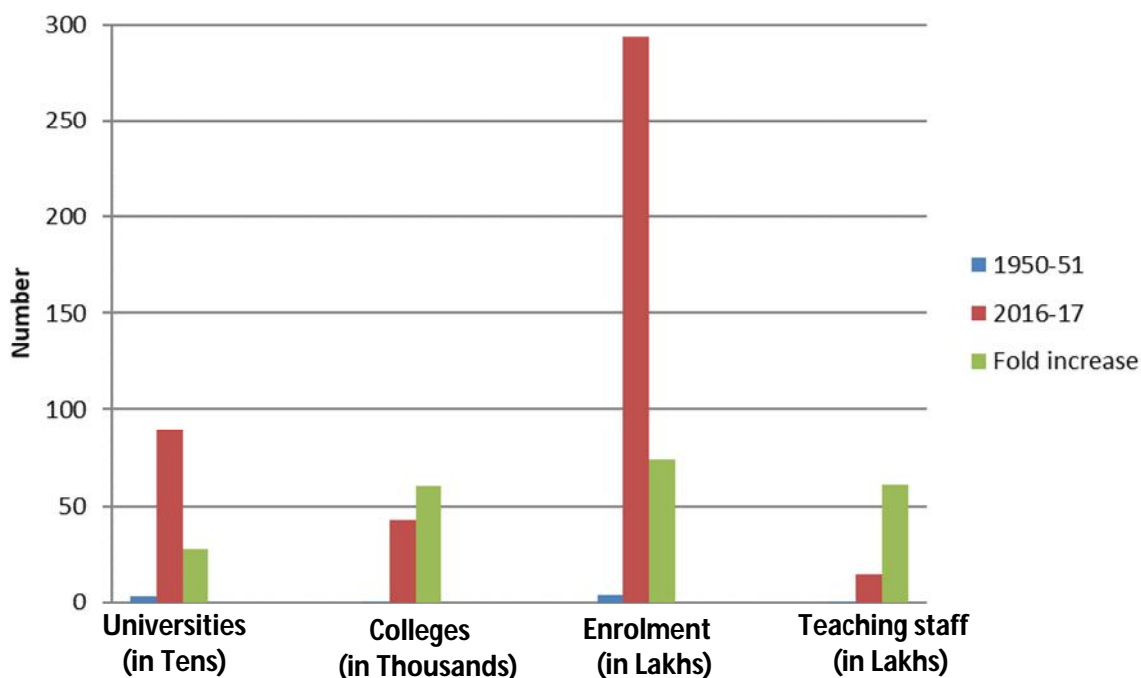
**Figure 1: Educational structure of India**

The overall educational structure in India is portrayed in Figure 1. In this article, only the structure of higher education will be given emphasis.

The enrolment age in higher education is around 18. The undergraduate course is usually of 3 years, 6-semester degree course. In technical and engineering faculty usually the undergraduate courses, the duration is 4 years consisting of 8 semesters. Undergraduate courses are also offered as 5-years integrated course where both undergraduate and post-graduate degrees are conferred after completing the course. In general, after completing the 3-year Bachelor degree, one can pursue their 2-year Master degree course. Completion of Master degree course, an aspirant can enroll them self in M.Phil., M.Tech. or Ph.D. course at the age of around 21. Those who pursue their career in medical profession has to complete their M.B.B.S course for the duration of 4 years starting at the age of 19 and after that 2 year post-graduate courses are offered in the name of Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) or Master of Surgery (M.S.).

## Growth of higher education in India

### A. Growth in Human resource in higher education

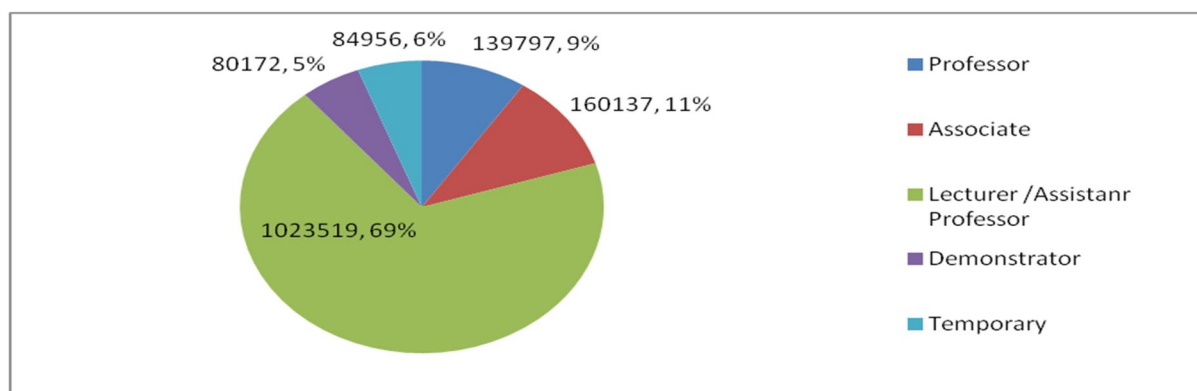


**Figure 2: Growth of higher education**

Figure 2 shows the growth of higher education in Colleges, Universities and Students and Teaching staff enrolment over the year from 1950 to 2017(UGC statistics).

In this section, the growth of human resource in higher education will only be discussed. The enrolment of student in colleges and universities is worth to notice. Enrolment of students in higher education has registered a steep hike over the years. In 2017, 294.27 lakhs were enrolled where only 3.87 lakhs of students were enrolled in 1950-51 session. This increase is about 74.12 fold.

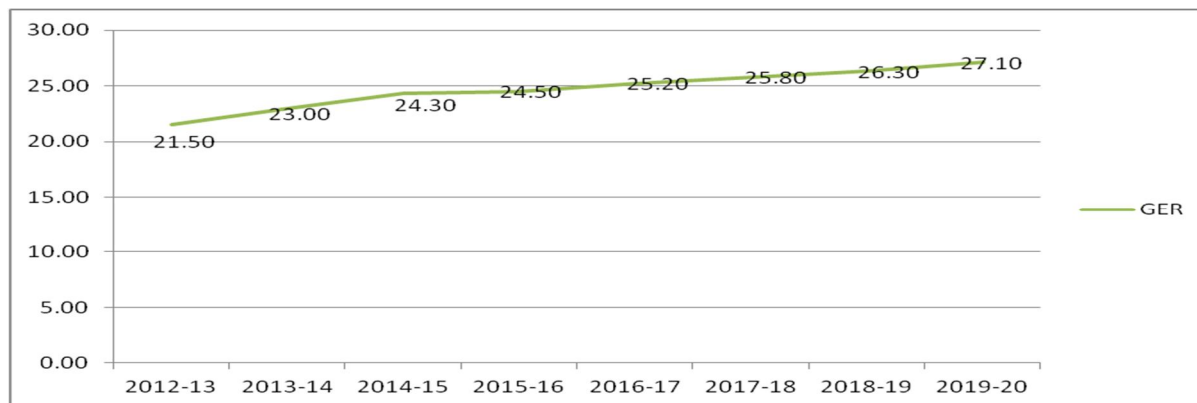
Figure 2 also shows the appointment of teaching staffs also increased from merely 24000 to 14.7 lakhs in these 66 years(UGC statistics).



(Source: AISHE, 2019-20)

Figure 2a: Number of teachers in various grades in 2019-20

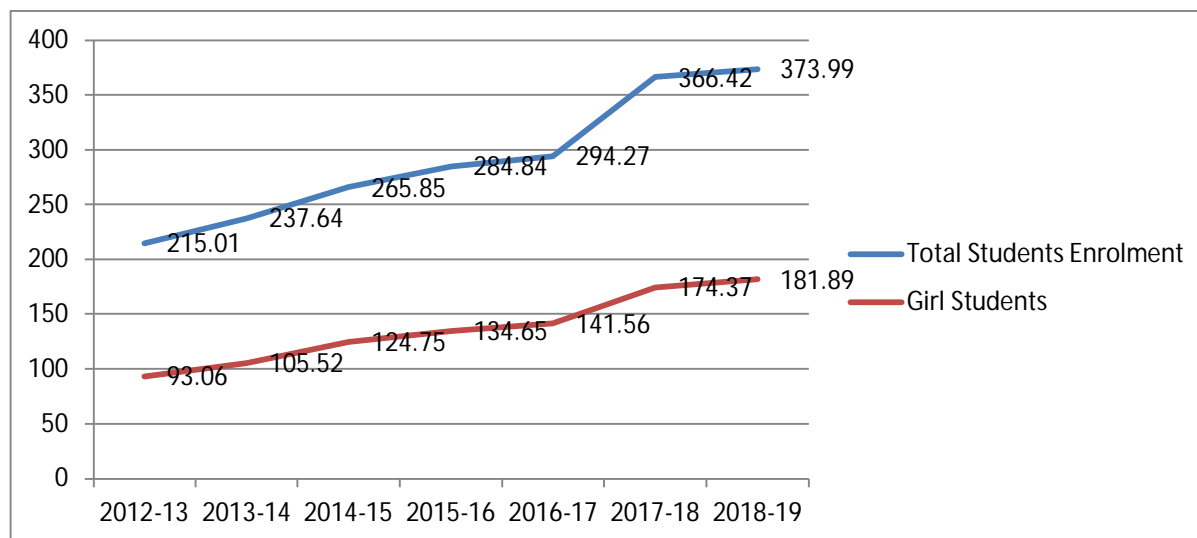
Figure 2a shows the number of teacher in various grades of employment in higher education. Around 69% of the total share is occupied by newly appointed Assistant Professors.



(Source: UGC Annual Report)

**Figure 3: Gross enrolment ratio**

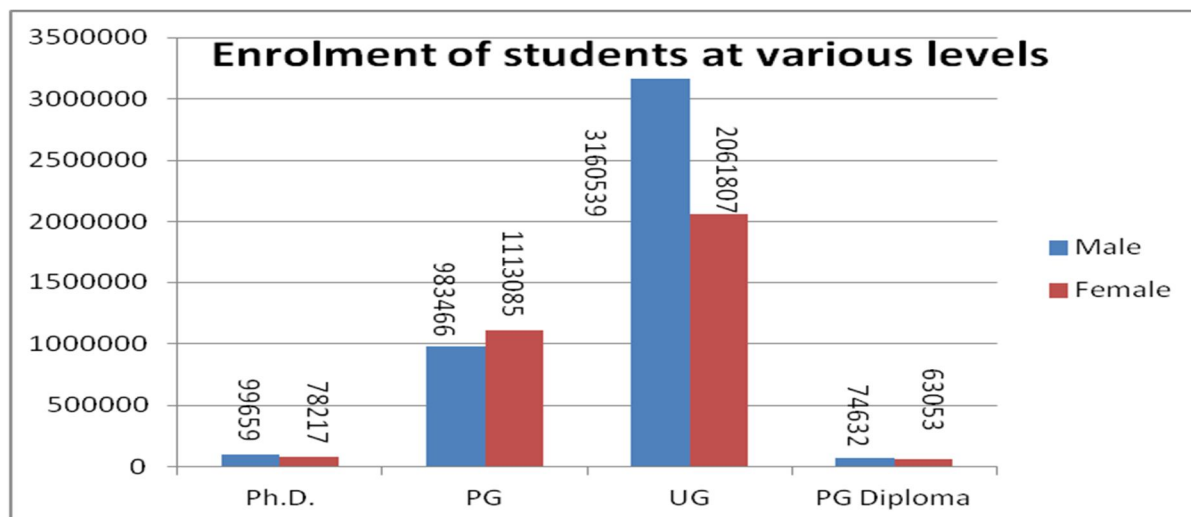
In Figure 3, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of students is plotted starting from 2012-2013 session to 2019-20 session. The important observation is that from 2014-15 the growth in enrolment has flattened (UGC statistics).



(Source: UGC Annual Report)

**Figure 4: Total and Girls student enrolment**

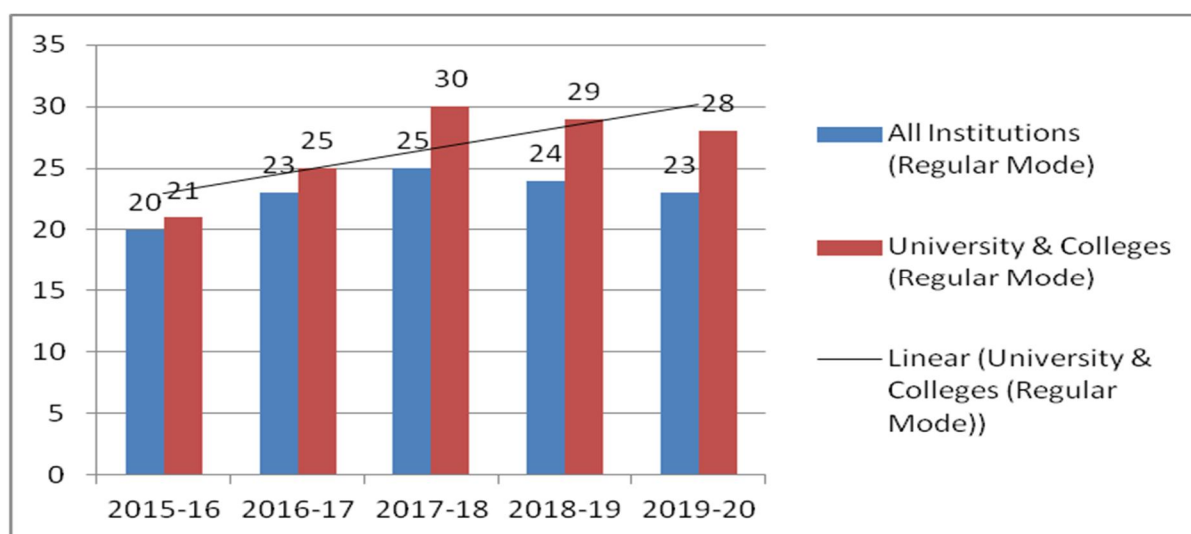
The blue curve (upper) in Figure 4 shows the total number of students' enrolment and the brown curve shows the Girls student enrolment over the period from 2012-13 to 2018-19 (UGC statistics). The data shows an increase in both total student enrolment and in enrolment of girl students over the period. The data in Girls student enrolment is encouraging in purview of social impact and justice to women in India



(Source: AISHE, 2019-20)

**Figure 5: Enrolment of students at various levels in 2019-20**

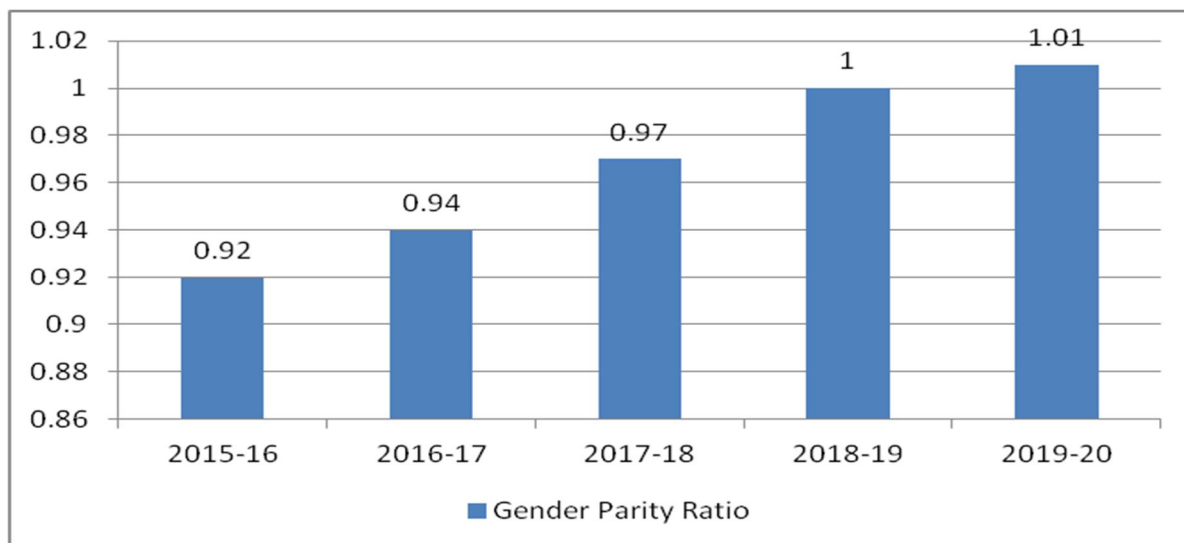
It is important to note that the gap in number of male and female students at the undergraduate level is significant which more or less evens out at the post graduate or higher levels of study (Figure 5).



(Source: AISHE, 2019-20)

**Figure 6: Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) during last 5 years**

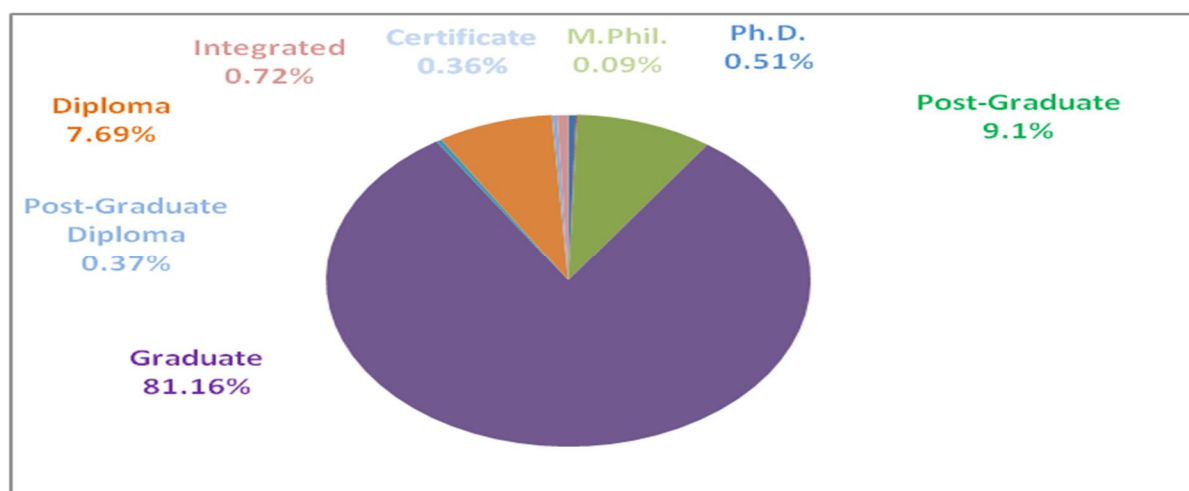
The GER has increased over the years and with that a larger number of students are getting enrolled in higher education, the PTR (Figure 6) is significantly high and there is large disparity among states also.



(Source: AISHE, 2019-20)

**Figure 7: Gender Parity Ratio during last 5 years**

Gender Parity Index (GPI) =  $\frac{\text{number of female students}}{\text{number of male students}}$  enrolled in each level (Figure 7). GPI = 1 indicates equality between the sexes;  $0 \leq \text{GPI} \leq 1$  indicates an inequality in favour of males; whereas a  $\text{GPI} > 1$  indicates inequality in favour of females. It is generally studied to check the increment in girls' enrolment in different level of education. GPI may increase for decrease in number of male student or increase in female students. GPI is not a precise indicator to evaluate the ease of access of higher education for girl students because the value may change for both decrease in number of male student and increase in female students.



(Source: UGC Annual Report 2018-19)

**Figure 8: Level-wise Students Enrolment in 2018-19**

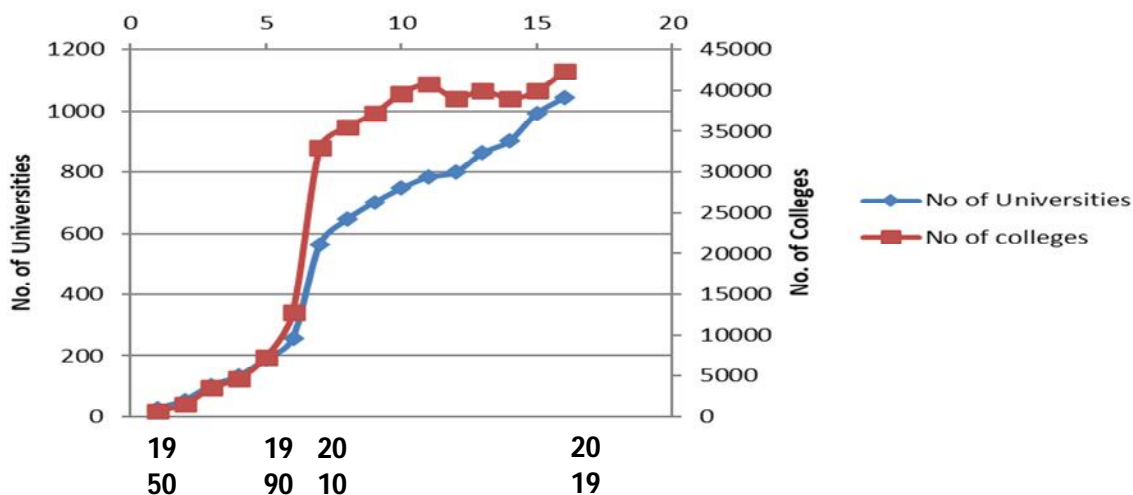
It is important to note that of the total percentage of enrolment; more than 80% enroll as



graduates while around 9% enroll for Post graduation but a dismal 0.60% students enroll for M.Phil and Ph.D. (Figure 8).

B. Growth in number of University/College/Institution

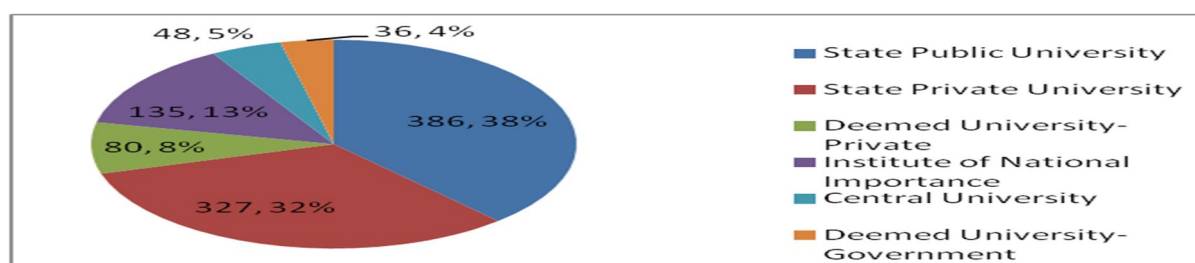
Figure 2 shows that the number of universities increases from 32 to 895, which is 27.96 fold increase over the last 66 years till 2017. Similarly, the number of degree colleges has also increases from 700 to 42300, which is a whopping 60.43 fold higher in the abovementioned time domain.



(Source: UGC Annual Report)

Figure 9: Number of colleges and universities

The magenta curve in Figure 9 shows the total number degree awarding Universities/Institution and the blue curve shows the number of Colleges established over the period from 1950-51 to 2016-17 (UGC statistics). The data shows the increase in the number of Universities/Institutions is about 30 times whereas the same is 61 times for number Colleges in the duration of 67 years. It is noticeable that there is a sudden incremental jump in number of Colleges and Universities is observed within 2005-06 to 2010-11. The possible reason was from the period onward, Indian Government allowed the private organizations to invest in higher education. The AISHE Report 2019-20, has reported that in 2019-20 the total number of colleges and universities in India stand at 42,343 and 1043 respectively.



(Source: AISHE, 2019-20)

Figure 10: Number of Universities by type in 2019-20

Figure 10 shows the distribution of University/University level Institutions in India based on its types till 2019-20 session. There is 38% state run Universities present in our country compared to only 5% Central University run by Central Government of India. The overall share of state private universities is 32%. Institute of national importance such as Indian Institute of Technology, National Institute of Technology etc have their share of 13% only. On the other hand, 4% Institutions deemed to be Universities are there in India such as Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai; Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, Kolkata.

### C. Growth in Private Institution in Higher Education

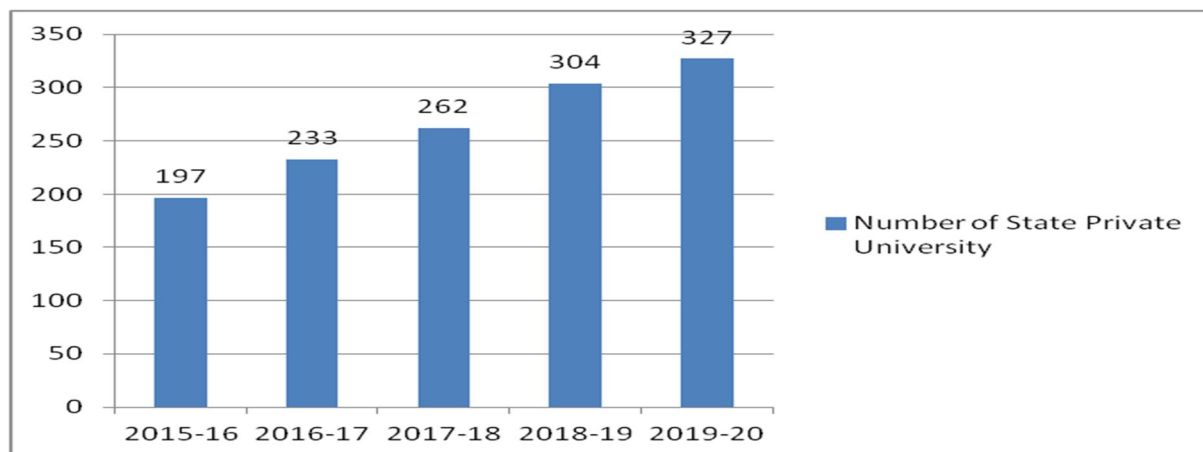
Government allocated 85K crore for higher education during Eleventh Five Year Plan, which seemed to be not enough. Due to financial fatigue and increasing demand, in 1980s, the Indian government allowed private Higher Educational Institutions to function. Since then private education market in India is growing rapidly. In 2005, only 15 private universities were present which is increased to 282 in 2017. Within 5 years from 2006-07 to 2011-12, 115 universities, 7,818 colleges, and 3,581 diploma institutions were established by private concerns. With this increase in number of private institutions which is 77.8% of all institutions, student enrolment has also increased a lot, enrolment of 67.3 percent of all students reported by MHRD.

This growth has been driven by following factors:

- (a) Public funding problem and scarcity of seats in public institutions.
- (b) Students are attracted towards diploma and certificate courses which are usually short-termed as these are more directed towards employment. Private institutions offer these courses.

In India, engineering and management are two different streams where private funding is more than government funding due to high infrastructural cost. Some of private organization are aided by Government where tuition fees are exempted for 50% meritorious students and other 50% students are admitted based on their readiness to pay extra tuition fees. Tuition fees are much higher for unaided private education sectors compared to public or aided private education sectors (Karna, 2014).

The Figure 11 below shows the number of state private universities in India in the last five years. One can see a rise in the number of private universities over the last five years which means more and more of private funds coming into higher education which is also suggests that these universities are sustaining by themselves because of adequate influx of students.



(Source: AISHE, 2019-20 )

**Figure 11: Number of State Private Universities in last five years**

#### D. Growth of Distance Education

It was understood in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that in a vast country like India where provision of everyday classroom teaching is nearly impossible especially for remote, underserved areas. In this very aspect growth of distance education was encouraged and whose result is the establishment of world's largest Open University Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in 1985 which now has more than three million enrolled students. Presently there are 15 open universities set up in different states. UGC's quality assurance body and India's Distance Education Bureau approves distance learning course to 200 additional Higher Educational Institutions, including many state and Central universities.

The following data shows how fast the distance education has grown up in India in need of its high demand.

Student enrolment increases by 1.5 million in open and distance learning programs from 2006/07 to 2011/12. Presently, 11% of all higher education enrolments are in distance education. 2.65 million undergraduate students studied in distance mode compared with only 1.75 million in regular programs in 2016-17, according to the report presented by MHRD (Hammed, 2021). In academic session July 2018 and January 2019, 17,05,059 students got admitted in Distance education Programme through 102 Higher Education Institute (Annual Report, UGC, 2018-19)

#### E. Growth in online learning

In the present COVID-19 pandemic situation across the globe, online education is the necessity of the hour and also future of higher education. In this context, hands-on teachers' training programs on information and communication technology (ICT) and Massive Open Online

Course (MOOCs) are required. To accomplish this, MHRD sponsored various Government institutes in India have started several digital programs. Such initiatives include

1. [National Mission on Education through ICT \(NMEICT\)](#) by IIT Bombay
2. [National Program on Technology Enhanced Learning \(NPTEL\)](#) by seven IITs (Bombay, Delhi, Kanpur, Kharagpur, Madras, Guwahati, and Roorkee) and IISc, Bangalore.
3. [ePathshala](#) by NCERT
4. [Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds \(SWAYAM\)](#)- a (MOOC) platform where from academic session starting from January – May 2019, 58 courses are being offered.
5. [Swayam Prabha](#): a group of 22 DTH channels dedicated for telecasting 24×7 basis high-quality educational programs using the GSAT-15 satellite.
6. [National digital library of India](#) developed by IIT Kharagpur.
7. [National Academic Depository](#) and [Spoken Tutorial](#) developed at IIT Bombay which has 1008 academic institutions on board and has over five lakh registered students (as on 29.03.2019).

### **I. Challenges in Higher Education in India**

Since 73 rd year of independence, our higher education system has not been flourished completely. The fact is established from the recent report on QS world ranking, 2022 which shows that only 3 premier higher education institution of India such as IIT, Bombay; IIT, Delhi and IISC, Bangalore could enter within top 200 Universities/ Institutions in world.

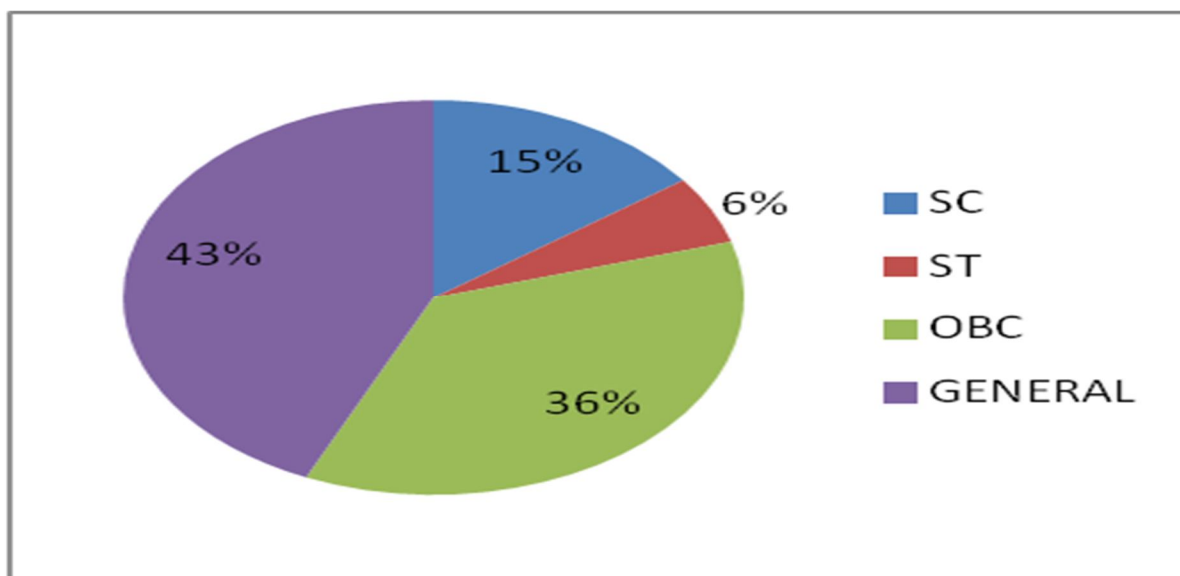
Government of India implemented various education policies time to time which seem to be not sufficient enough. University Grant Commission is continuously functioning and focusing on quality education in higher education sector, but challenges in our education system did not move away. Some of the basic challenges in higher education system in India are discussed below:

**Enrolment:** The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of India in higher education is 27.10 (Source: AISHE, 2019-20) in 2019-20 which is marginally lower than global average of 29.0. If we consider developing countries like USA (88.2), Germany (70.3), UK (60.0), the GER in India is substantially low. It is low even in comparison with other emerging economies such as Brazil (51.3) and China (49.1). Though GER has increased continuous over the years due to insufficient number of higher education institutes growing demand in the country could not be met.

**Equity:** Education should be imparted equally between all irrespective of caste, creed or

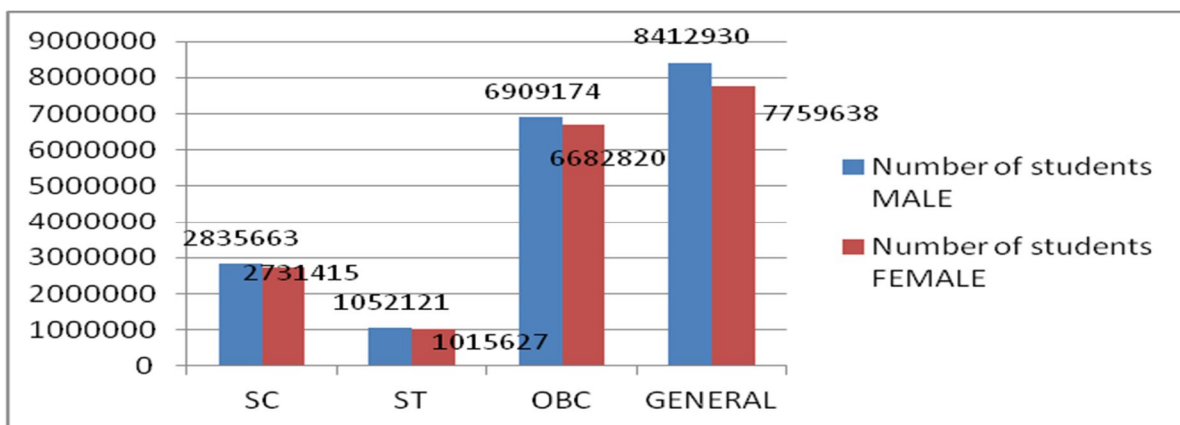
gender.

We have seen in Figure 5 that the gap in number of male and female students at the undergraduate level is significant which more or less evens out at the post graduate or higher levels of study. According to the 2011 census, the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes comprise about 16.63%, 8.63% and 44% respectively of India's population (Source: Handbook on Social Welfare Statistics,2018). If we look into the pie (Figure 12) which shows the social category wise students enrolment (UGC Annual Report, 2018-19) more representation of SC, ST and OBC is required to bring more social parity.



(Source: UGC Annual Report 2018-19)

Figure 12: Students Enrolment according to social category in Higher Education



(Source: UGC Annual Report 2018-19)

Figure 13: Gender and social category wise students Enrolment in Higher Education

Steps should be taken so that more numbers of girl students belonging to SC, ST and OBC category are brought into the fold of Higher Education. Figure 13 shows the category and

gender wise students enrolment till 2018-19.

**Quality:** Quality of education depends four groups of stakeholders: providers (e.g., funding bodies and the community, taxpayers); users of products (e.g., students); users of outputs (e.g., employers); and employees of the sector (e.g., academicians and administrators) (Des Raj Bajwa, 2017). Thus, quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multilevel, and a dynamic concept. Due to lack of disproportion among all these four stakeholders, ensuring quality in higher education is amongst the foremost challenges being faced in India today which is the reason behind the inability of several institutions in our country to meet the minimum requirements laid down by the UGC.

**Infrastructure:** Poor infrastructure in higher educational institution is grass-root level problem in India (Gohain, 2020). There are many government-aided colleges across the country that does not have enough classroom, laboratories or even toilets. Many institutions are there where proper teacher's room is not present. Large numbers of colleges are there which function on second or third floor of the building and commercial shops situate in ground or first floor.

In 2013, [Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India](#) initiated a [holistic scheme](#) of development for [higher education in India](#). Central government provides strategic funding through State government and Union territories to different institutions across the country. The academic, administrative and financial advancements taken under this [centrally sponsored scheme](#) are monitored by central Project Appraisal Board.

**Political interference:** Many higher educational Institutions are present where the governing body comprises of political leaders of the locality. Sometimes they used to take decision of their own interest for example recruitment of teaching staff in ad-hoc basis or recruitment of non-teaching staffs. Further due to their own political interest, they sometime use students' union to function in undemocratic way.

**Inadequacy in quality faculty:** If an institute of higher education is research-centric, the student teacher ratio should be lower than 15:1 and if it is teaching-centric, it can be 20:1. If it is a mix of both teaching and research, the ratio could be 15:1. In the last report presented by All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) for the year 2019-2020 shows the ratio is 28:1 in regular mode which should be improved to meet the ideal ratio. The possible reason is delayed faculty recruitment process in higher education system, inadequacy of quality applicant, very low generation of regular position, tendency of recruitment in ad-hoc basis which creates feeling of insecurity and compels the faculty to search for job of better package. Further, in some states temporary recruitments are done just to run the regular classes because of

inadequate permanent recruitment drive conducted by college service commission regulated by the state government. In these cases recruitment criteria for appointing temporary faculties could not be met due to insufficient quality application for very low salary or for the remoteness of the institutions or the rules are flouted by the governing bodies of the college.

Accreditation: According to MHRD sources, presently 628 universities and 13,091 accredited colleges are operational in the country.

Accredited A++: < 1% colleges and 6.5% universities

Accredited B++ to B: 66.4% colleges and 51.4% universities.

(Trines,2019)

Research and Innovation: India's National Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) in science and technology is around 0.70% of total GDP at present. This share is far lower compared to Israel (4.2%), South Korea (4.0%), Japan (3.3%), Germany (2.8%), USA (2.7%), France (2.3%), UK (1.6%), and Canada (1.7%). India spends much less compared to other BRICS nations for example China spends 2.0%, Brazil 1.3% while Russia spends a bit over 1.1% (Source: Unesco.org). India ranked 48 in Global Innovation Index (GII)-2020 within 131 countries. Apart from the data shown there are other factors which affect the researcher such as poor collaboration of University research scholars with research institutes.

## **II .Opportunities in Higher Education**

So far challenges in higher education system have been discussed. In spite of these obstacles, one should not overlook the huge opportunities lying in front of us. It is expected that with increasing number of higher educational institutions, enrolment of students will increase automatically. In fact, many foreign universities from USA, UK, Australia and Canada are interested to set up their campuses in India. Beside this, huge investments are coming from different private organizations. Few of the eminent private universities those are functioning successfully are Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Karnataka; Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) Pilani; Amity University, Noida; Ashoka University, Sonapat etc. Central and state Government is working in resonance on the ground of equity where students from different social, religion and economic background are able to pursue their dream to enroll them in higher education system. One of the initiatives was taken recently by West Bengal state Government by allowing student to take education loan upto 10 lakh rupees in meager interest through “student credit card scheme” to follow their career in higher education. Further West Bengal SC, ST and OBC Development & Finance Corporation has implemented ‘Education Loan Scheme’ of National Scheduled Castes Finance & Development

Corporation (NSFDC) and National Safai Karmachari Finance & Development Corporation (NSKFDC) as their State Channelizing Agency (SCA). There are several open universities other than IGNOU such as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad; Netaji Subhash Open University, Kolkata; Nalanda Open University, Patna etc. are offering new courses through distance learning which will be beneficial for rest of the deserving candidates. Both the Governments are constantly monitoring the quality and infrastructure in higher educational institutions through accreditation process. Sudden explosion of different facets of online education has also opened the pave way of higher education in several directions. Further, Digital India initiative has eased the processes like invitation through online application, online counseling and online allotment of seats. Introduction of online certificate and diploma courses through MOOC platform shorten the time of completion of the course as well as increases and improves the employability of the candidate.

### Conclusion

In this article, growth in higher education in India is discussed in detail since Independence. The growth was discussed in terms of human resource, infrastructure development, online education and distance education and establishment of open universities. The challenges in higher education in our country are discussed in great detail categorically. Further, despite having challenges, opportunities are there in our higher education system which are also analysed in this article.

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