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REGIONAL, RURAL URBAN DISPARITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Abstract
India has made significant progress towards the goal of Education for all particularly in case of primary and secondary education during the past few years. However, the role of higher education in economic development was given importance and was felt critical only recently. Going by the demographic trends it is necessary to convert the growing labour force into skilled trained and quality workforce which is possible only by developing higher education. Realizing this fact policy makers were induced to frame policy changes to expand higher education. Over the last decade, higher education has witnessed a faster growth making it now the largest higher education system in the world in terms of number of institutions and the second largest in terms of number of students. However, the growth in higher education has not been problem-free, nor is it even. A wide gap exist in the growth rate of higher education enrolment as well as in the number of Institutes of higher education in Rural and Urban area and also between different regions and states in the country. In the wider concept of inclusive growth policies in higher education in India, an attempt is made here to examine how far in reality our system of higher education is inclusive based on secondary data and also aims at suggesting ways to reduce these inequalities.

Key Words Higher Education, Growth, Inclusiveness.

Introduction

In the words of Amartya Sen, the Nobel Laureates in Economics, "education is essentially a capacity building and it widens the choice of the people and empowers the nation."

India is today one of the fastest developing countries of the world with an annual growth rate going above 9 percent. In order to sustain growth rate, there is an urgent need to increase the number of institutions and also the quality of higher education in India. Inclusive growth is the modern day's mantra of development. It can be defined as a concept that advances equitable opportunities to every section of the society. The concept is becoming increasingly important against a background of widening inequalities in the society, which are associated with globalization and related economic reform policies. A major part of any strategy for increasing the 'inclusivity' part of 'inclusive growth' must be to improve the capabilities of persons of all vulnerable and weaker sections of the society.

As G.B Tilak rightly pointed out that Inequalities in education are often examined by social group by caste (scheduled caste (SC), scheduled tribes (ST), other backward castes (OBCs) and non-scheduled/non-backward castes) and by religion (Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others) and by gender between women and men. These dimensions are widely considered as important inequalities that need to be addressed and accordingly receive serious attention of the policy makers. Other equally, if not more, important dimensions of inequalities refer to inter-state inequalities and also between rural and urban population. Further inequalities by economic groups between the rich and the poor, has to be considered.

With the phenomenal growth, higher education system in India emerged as the second largest system in the world after China, producing the second or the third largest stock of scientific and technical manpower. The massive expansion of higher education has also helped in democratizing higher education system to some extent, which was highly elitist and restricted to the high-income groups.

Table 1 Growth of higher education in India

Years	Universities	College	Teachers (000s)	Enrolment Ratio(Million)	Gross Enrolment Ratio (percent)
1950-51	28	578	24	0.17	1.5
1960–61	45	1819	62	0.56	4.2
1970–71	93	3277	190	1.96	4.7
1980–81	123	4577	244	2.75	5.9
1990–91	184	6627	271	4.4	8.1
2000–01	254	10152	395	8.94	15.0
2010–11	700	35500	933	21.7	21.1
2014-15	712	36671	NA	21.7	25.1

Source: Selected Educational Statistics (Ministry of Human Resource Development, GoI, New Delhi, various years); Annual Report(s) (University Grants Commission, New Delhi, various years); and Twelfth Five-Year Plan (New Delhi: Planning Commission 2013).

Objectives and methodology

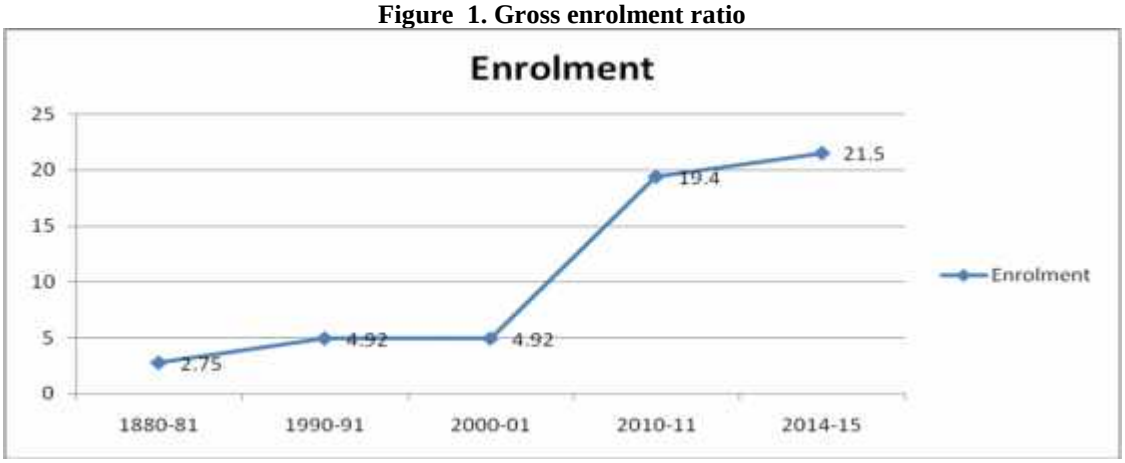
In the wider concept of inclusive growth policies in higher education in India, an attempt is made here to examine how far in reality our system of higher education is inclusive and also to analyze regional rural urban disparities in higher education in India.

The paper is descriptive in nature and based on secondary data. The secondary data is collected from various journals, books, newspapers, Government reports etc.

Discussion

The growth in higher education has also made a significant contribution to socio-economic and political development of the nation. Its contribution in strengthening democracy and ensuring political stability is also significant. However, the growth in higher education has not been a problem-free, nor is it even

Figure 1. Gross enrolment ratio



(Sources: selected educational statistics of several years MHRD)

On the whole overall student enrolment as well as the number of universities /institutions of national importance has grown many folds in the last decades, but the growth has been uneven across different social and economic groups of population, between rural and urban regions and between several states. Though some progress has been made, inequalities in higher education are persistently high. Despite huge numbers and their growth, the system of higher education is believed to be highly inadequate. The gross enrolment ratio in higher education is around 21.5 percent according to estimates of the Government of India, MHRD 2014. The enrolment ratio in higher education in many other countries is much higher it is above 75 percent in developed/ high-income countries; the average for the developing countries is 24 percent and the world average is 31percent in 2011 (UGC, 2014). It can be noted that in no developed country the enrolment ratio is below 40 percent. While the above figures refer to all groups of population on an average, there are wide differences between several groups; certain groups of population fare much worse than others.

Inequalities in access to higher education

Inequalities in access to higher education result in socio-economic inequalities in the society, which in turn, increases inequalities in education. In fact, it is a cyclic chain of inequalities which result in inequalities in employment and participation in labour market, resulting in inequalities in earnings contributing in turn to socio-economic and political inequalities. The inclusive strategies that contribute to equity should be viewed favorably not only from the point of view of social justice, but also even in terms of economic well-being, as the total equity gains might surpass the losses efficiency, if any.

Rural –Urban Disparities

No doubt Indian higher education has grown very fast in the last decade and become one of the largest in the world, but this growth is unequal, there are wide inequalities between different states in India in higher education in terms of number of universities and colleges, infrastructure in those institutions, student enrolment and even public expenditure. Based on NSS data, rural–urban disparities at all-India level are analysed here. In contrast to inequalities by gender, caste and religion, rural–urban disparities seem to be very high in the enrolment ratios.

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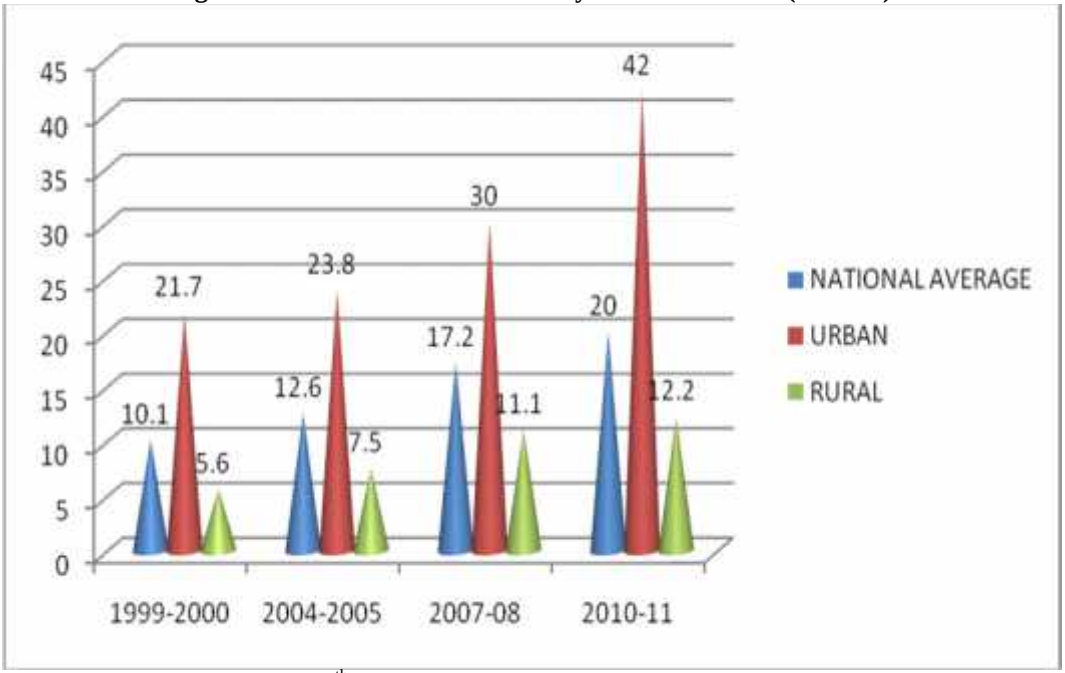
Figure 2. Gross attendance ration by rural and urban (Percent)



(Source: 12th five year plan, UGC reports and MHRD 2014)

While 42.0 percent of the relevant age group population in urban areas attended colleges/universities in 2010–11, it is only 16.5 percent population who attended in rural areas. The ratio in urban areas was nearly 4.5 times higher than the ratio in rural areas in 1999-2000. In 2009–10, this came down to 2.3 times, suggesting narrowing down of rural–urban disparities.

Regional inequalities

According to Martin Trow's classification of stages of development of higher education (Trow, 2006), a country is at an elite stage of higher education when the GER is less than 15 percent; at a stage of massification when the GER is between 15 and 50 percent and at a stage of universalization when the GER reaches 50percent mark. As per this definition, **t**he higher education sector in India with a GER of 21.1 percent in 2012-13 is in its initial stages of massification. The growth and expansion of higher education in India during the post-independence period can broadly be categorized into three stages: 1) a stage of high growth and limited access (1950-70); ii) a stage of declining growth in enrolment (1970-1990); and iii) a stage of revival and massive expansion of enrolment in higher education 1990 and after.

The variations in GER are a good indicator of existing disparities in higher education development among the states. During the period between 2002-03 and 2011-12, all states improved their GERs in higher education (Table 2). While the GER increased by three times in states such as Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu and it doubled in many of the major states while the increase was relatively less in states such as West Bengal. The inter-state disparities in GER increased over a period of time. In 2002-03 the GER varied between 5.0 percent in Jammu and Kashmir and 28.7 percent in Chandigarh, the variation in GER is between 8.4percent in Jharkhand and 53.0 percent in Chandigarh in 2011-12 (Table 2). This shows that the variations in GER increased from 23.7 percent points in 2002-03 to 44.6 percent points in 2011-12. This increase in variation is due to varying rates of growth experienced by different states and union territories. A close examination of the state level data will indicate that larger gains in GER took place mainly in those states where private institutions accounted for a good share of the total institutions and enrolments. The exceptions are smaller states and union territories such as Delhi, Chandigarh, etc.

As evident from Table 2 the states in India belong to varying stages of higher education development. Chandigarh has already universalized higher education and large states such as Tamil Nadu (38.2 percent), are close to the stage of universalization. While most other states have reached a stage of massification of the sector, states such as West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh are lagging behind and have not yet reached the stage of massification.

1. Table 2 Gross Enrolment Ratios

	2002-03 (percent)			
States/UT	Total GER	All Categories 2011-13		SC
		Female GER	Total GER	Total GER
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	-	14.9	13.1	-
Andhra Pradesh	9.51	23.4	27.6	23.1
ıachal Pradesh	6.37	24.9	30.9	-
Assam	8.67	14.2	14.4	11.71
Bihar	7.3	11.2	13.1	8.3
Chandigarh	28.68	53.8	53	19.2
Chhattisgarh	7.27	9.9	11	8.8
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	-	7.1	6.5	6.1
Daman and Diu	-	7.6	4.2	16.2
Delhi		19.4	33.6	34.8
Goa	13.47	40.4	37.4	27.5
Gujarat	9.65	15.7	17.6	18
Haryana	10.56	27.3	27.9	17.9
Himachal Pradesh	12.76	24.2	25	13.5
Jammu and Kashmir	4.95	24.9	23.7	2.8
Jharkhand	8.12	7.6	8.4	5.4
Karnataka	9.92	22.8	24	15.4
Kerala	7.66	26.9	23.1	17.5
Lakshadweep	-	0	0	-
Madhya Pradesh	7.77	14.6	17.4	11.6
Maharashtra	12.3	24.8	27.4	24.9
Manipur	10.19	34.4	33.4	74.5
Meghalaya	10.94	18.3	16.4	37
Mizoram	9.51	19.6	20.6	109.2
Nagaland	4.33	13.7	17.9	-
Odisha	8.71	14.3	16.3	9.1
Puducherry	17.88	35.1	37.1	33.5
Punjab	8.53	17.1	20	8.2
Rajasthan	8.77	14.9	18	12
Sikkim	6.29	24.4	27.9	33.9
Tamil Nadu	10.91	35.2	38.2	27.1
Tripura	5.84	9.1	11.6	10
Uttar Pradesh	7.03	18.1	16.8	12.5
Uttranchal	12.25	-	-	-
Uttrakhand	-	27.9	27.2	16.5
West Bengal	8.21	10.7	12.8	8.6
All India	8.97	18.9	20.4	14.5

(Source: MHRD (2005), MHRD (2012a)

Though the number of colleges and institutions related to higher education has increased but there is disparity in the growth of higher education at the national level In India. Table 3 shows such a disparity in the growth of universities and university level institutions in the country.

Table 3. State wise number of Universities and University level Institutions listed by the UGC

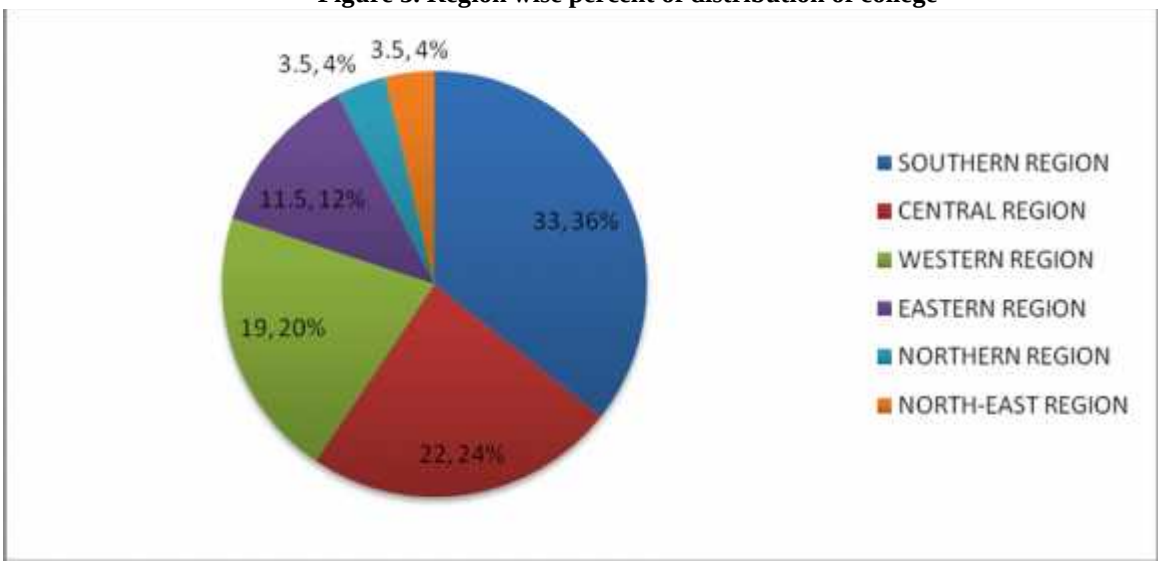
Sl. No	States/ Union Territories	Total
1	Andhra Pradesh	25
2	Arunachal Pradesh	09
3	Assam	18
4	Bihar	19
5	Chhattisgarh	23
6	Delhi	22
7	Goa	01
8	Gujarat	58
9	Haryana	40
10	Himachal Pradesh	22
11	Jammu Kashmir	10
12	Jharkhand	15
13	Karnataka	52
14	Kerala	16
15	Madhya Pradesh	46
16	Maharashtra	49
17	Manipur	03
18	Meghalaya	09
19	Mizoram	02
20	Nagaland	03
21	Orissa	21
22	Punjab	25
23	Rajasthan	73
24	Sikkim	06
25	Tamil Nadu	52
26	Tripura	03
27	Uttar Pradesh	69
28	Uttaranchal	25
29	West Bengal	36
30	Chandigarh	02
31	Pondicherry	02
	Total	777

(Sources: ugc.ac.in)

Table 3 indicates that the total state-wise universities and university level institutions are 777 in August 2016. Universities and university level institutions were highest in Rajasthan (73) followed by Uttar Pradesh (69). It means 18 percent Universities and University level institutions were in these two states. There is a state -wise disparity in case with all these institutions related with higher education**.**

There is also region- wise imbalance in the distribution of colleges. The maximum numbers of colleges were distributed in the southern region, which has resulted into concentration of colleges in particular region. The data related to region, percent of colleges and population in the age group (18-22 years) is shown in Fig. 3.

Figure 3. Region wise percent of distribution of college



(Source: MHRD report 2012-13)

From Fig 3, it is clear that there is a uneven distribution of colleges related with the population in the age group (18-22 years). The central government and the state governments should interfere in the uneven distribution of college. Because, such a skewed pattern of distribution of colleges will be a barrier in the balanced socio-economic development of the country. Such type of concentration of higher education in a particular region should be avoided. The central government should take initiatives to establish colleges in those regions where there is no proper proportion of the population and the number of colleges.

Conclusion

The problem of Indian higher education revolves around financing, equity and excellence. As these problems have been compounded by rapid globalization that requires only educated and skilled manpower which can be provided by the socially advantaged groups. One of the major public policy issues will be to devise ways and means to reduce inequalities while expanding the system. The strategies to ameliorate the situation may focus on regulating the growth of the system and targeting of public investments towards higher education of the backward regions. The social conditions of India demands now also greater role from government both directly and indirectly. To bring parity and inclusive growth in higher education government should assume greater responsibility of regulating and monitoring. The contribution of higher education to development is widely recognised. Direct and indirect benefits of higher education produces to individuals and externalities are indeed large in quantum. To break the cyclical chain of inequalities, equity in participation in education is considered as a very effective strategy. In fact, education can be one of the more sustainable and more effective measures than other measures to reduce inequalities in society.

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