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Emerging Scenario of Higher Education in India: *Implications for Financing*

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Abstract:

Higher education is of paramount importance for economic growth and social development. Despite clear importance of investment in higher education, the sector is in crisis throughout the world, the severity of crisis being most acute for the developing world (World Bank, 1994). The landscape for higher education is undergoing transformation and accordingly the funding structure should also adapt. As rightly pointed out by Aggarwal (2006), the future of financing higher education cannot be merely an extension of the present but shaped by new realities, such as massive growth in enrolment, new mechanism of cost sharing, the appearance of new cross-border suppliers, the emergence and growth of different types of public and private higher education providers, distance education and many other innovations.

Indian higher education system experienced considerable expansion since independence. In fact it has the largest system of higher education in terms of the number of institutions. However in terms of access it still lags behind developed and even several developing countries in relative terms. With adoption of several policies towards inclusion and to diversify the intake of higher education institutes, the winds of change have blown in favor of marginalized social groups including women, thus marking some progress on equity front. But at the same time Indian higher education system suffers from serious qualitative deficits. With the growing compulsion of achieving expansion, equity and excellence in higher education, rises the need for funds. Contrary to this we find that amidst budgetary pressures and scarce public revenue from politically and socially compelling and competing needs, the higher education system in India has not received its due importance in allocation of funds. The most noticeable feature is the negative growth rate of per student public expenditure, both for Central as well as State expenditure, which can be explained by the growth in student enrolment exceeding the growth in real expenditure. Overall, per student expenditure registered a decline of 2.4 percent since 1992-93. From Rs 8322 in the period 1981-82 to 1991-92, the average real expenditure on higher education per enrolled student decreased to Rs 6790 in the period 1992-93 to 2003-04 (Srivastava, 2008). In this scenario of growing resource crunch it has become imperative to find innovative and adequate solutions to the increasing demand for financial resources. As a consequence what we are experiencing is trend towards marketisation. Cost-sharing, privatization and internationalization of higher education are clearly emerging recent trends in this field.

In this backdrop the paper traces the emerging realities of higher education in India that have serious implications for financing of the sector and thereby emphasizes the need for reshaping the financing strategies. However in order to address these emerging realities it is imperative to revisit certain basic issues of higher education which relate to the nature and purpose of higher education. Therefore the paper also attempts to epitomize and reflect upon these basic issues of higher education. Further the paper seeks to establish how these issues play an important role in guiding the financing of higher education in India in the face of emerging realities.

Keywords: India's higher education, financing of higher education in India JEL Codes: I21, I22

1. Introduction

Higher education is of paramount importance for economic growth and social development. And one of the central issues in this area is financing of higher education. The mode of financing higher education is central to higher education policy making because it reflects how education is provided to society and at what price (Chattopadhyay, 2007). The financing strategies/decisions have important bearing on the accessibility, the kind and quality of education that is provided. However despite clear importance of investment in higher education, the sector is in crisis throughout the world, the severity of crisis being most acute for the developing world (World Bank, 1994). In India too financing of higher education is a fundamental matter of concern today. The issue of financing assumes importance as the government realizes the importance of higher education to consolidate India's strength in the world economy and to ensure social mobility and social cohesion (Chattopadhyay, 2007).

The landscape for higher education is undergoing transformation and accordingly the funding structure should also adapt. As rightly pointed out by Aggarwal (2006), the future of financing higher education cannot be merely an extension of the present but shaped by new realities, such as massive growth in enrolment, new mechanism of cost sharing, the appearance of new cross-border suppliers, the emergence and growth of different types of public and private higher education providers, distance education and

many other innovations. Sanyal and Martin (2006) described: the massive expansion of enrolment; the incapacity of the state to fund such an expansion; the vigorous emergence of the private higher education; the tendency to cost sharing by students and their parents; the importance of accountability; the emergence of new providers; and the need for funding by the states to reduce growing inequalities in access, as few key factors that are likely to affect the new financing trends in higher education. Johnstone (2003) too have identified five themes in which consistent financial reform could be grouped: expansion of student enrolments and diversification of types of institutes; fiscal pressure; ascendance of market orientations and the search for non-governmental revenue; demand for greater accountability; and demand for greater quality and efficiency. Consistent with these realities, new and flexible ways of tackling financing issues in higher education have to be found. This would require alternative policies and mechanisms to provide answers to these challenges (Pawan Aggarwal, 2006).

In this backdrop the paper traces the emerging realities of higher education in India that have serious implications for financing of the sector and thereby emphasizes the need for reshaping the financing strategies. However in order to address these emerging realities it is imperative to revisit certain basic issues of higher education which relate to the nature and purpose of higher education. Therefore the paper also attempts to epitomize and reflect upon these basic issues of higher education. Further the paper seeks to establish how these issues play an important role in guiding the financing of higher education in India in the face of emerging realities.

2. Definition and Nature of Higher Education

2.1. Definition

Higher education also known as post-secondary, tertiary or third level education broadly refers to all post-secondary education, including but not limited to universities (World Bank). Universities are clearly a key part of all tertiary systems, but the diverse and growing set of public and private tertiary institutions in every country—colleges, technical training institutes, community colleges, nursing schools, research laboratories, centers of excellence, distance learning centers, and many more—forms a network of institutions that support the production of the higher-order capacity necessary for development (World Bank).

In India, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) defines higher education as the education, which is obtained after completing 12 years of schooling or equivalent and is of the duration of at least nine months (full time) or after completing 10 years of schooling and is of the duration of at least 3 years. The education may be of the nature of General, Vocational, Professional or Technical education (MHRD, HE Survey 2010-11)

The UGC and the Department of Education adopt different definitions of higher education. While Department of Education classifies all post-secondary education as higher education, the UGC considers largely the first degree and above levels as higher education, which is increasingly viewed as a more appropriate definition. Thus significant differences are observable in the estimates of total enrolments in higher education made by the Department of Education and those by the UGC (Tilak, 1993).

Such a problem of variations in definition of higher education gets aggravated at international level. Therefore for purpose of assembling, compiling and presenting cross-nationally comparable statistics and indicators of education, UNESCO provides a classification of education- The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). ISCED presents a classification of education and training systems with a standard set of concepts and definitions. It is designed to serve as a framework to classify educational programmes in internationally agreed categories. ISCED classifies educational programmes by their content using two main cross-classification variables: levels of education and fields of education.

One may also designate higher education as post-compulsory education (World Bank) because unlike the case of primary education, law does not mandates government to provide it to all. Moreover with the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of the United Nations including elementary education as an absolute human right and higher education as an important human right, though qualified, higher education is increasingly seen as a subject of human rights. In India too government holds that nobody should be denied higher education because he or she is poor (CABE Report, 2005).

2.2. Nature

As far as nature of higher education is concerned it is essentially an "experience good" as defined by Teixeira et al (2004), which means that it is only once the students consume it i.e. undergo the entire learning process in the institution and face the market are they able to rightly assess its quality. At the time when students have to take a decision of whether or not to pursue education, not all students are able to equally access crucial information about quality of the course, reputation of the institution and faculty etc and therefore end up making an ill informed choice.

Though education is mainly considered as an "investment good", depending on the objective and interest of the student, it can partly be consumption good. It is also a merit good. The Ministry of Finance, GoI, has recognized post-elementary education at least as a Merit-2 good (revising its stand from the initial position that it was a *non-merit* good), that needs to be financed considerably by the State. [Elementary education is recognized as a *Merit-1* good. Primary education is considered to be a merit good where individual choice in the sphere of market is subjugated in playing its part, and society, or, the state on behalf of society, decides the quantum of its provision (Musgrave and Musgrave, 1984)].

One of the biggest debates in the area of characterizing the nature of higher education revolves around the question of whether higher education is a public, private or mixed good. Those holding higher education as a 'private good' argue that not only can the non-payers be actually excluded from access to higher education; but also given the limited number of seats, its consumption can be rivalrous too. However proponents of the other side contend that once the individuals take a decision on the basis of the private costs and benefits that accrue from higher education, there are spill-over benefits of that education which accrue to the society. Thus, making a case for higher education as a public good. However, as rightly pointed out by Tilak (1993) it is neither a pure

public good like pure air or national defense, whose benefits are received by all members of the society equally, nor it is a pure private good like food or clothing, whose benefits are received only by those who consume. It is both a private and a public (or social) good. And therefore it is more aptly regarded as a mixed good or a quasi-public good i.e. essentially a private good with positive externalities which accrue to the society as a whole. However, such categorization is difficult in case of higher education, as the line drawn between the two, public and private good, is thin and moving depending on the policy stance (Chattopadhyay, 2007 and Tilak, 1993).

The understanding of nature of higher education has important implications for financing of higher education. The public financing of education is supported essentially on grounds of the public and merit good characteristics of education. It is argued that there are externalities attached to education i.e. besides the consumer of higher education; society too incurs some unapparent costs in educating the individual and reaps certain benefits in the form of more productive, skilled, resilient and creative workforce. However these social costs and benefits are not accounted by the consumers of education. As a result the total private investment would fall short of the society's desired or optimum levels, entailing government intervention. However, it is widely felt that the externalities or spill-over benefits of education are maximum with respect to primary level of education, and that they decline by increasing levels of education. On the other hand, individual benefits increase by increasing levels of education making a case for privatization of higher education (Tilak, 1993)

3. Purpose of Higher Education

Policy makers have to make tough choices on matters like where to invest (i.e. what level of education and what type of courses to invest in), how much to invest (appropriate levels of funding), who should be the beneficiaries and finally how to invest. The decisions become even more difficult in the wake of emerging realities like increasing enrolment for higher education, commercialization and internationalization of higher education, emergence of private players and growing resource crunch faced by the government. In this context, the objectives that government aims to achieve through higher education have important bearing on the strategies adopted for resolving the financing issues. Purpose of higher education not only impacts how the funds should be disposed but it also has important implications for issues of equity and quality. Watty (2006) also suggests that differences in perceptions about the purpose of higher education inevitably lead to differences in the definition of quality itself and consequently, differences in systems designed to assure that quality.

Rewards of education in general and higher education in particular are multifold. From demand side, for individuals and families it is means of obtaining higher future earnings, securing better prospects of employability, attaining personal and intellectual development, satisfaction, extend help to others or opportunity to improve the world and avoid other less desirable options in life (Watty, 2006). For the public providers of higher education it serves as an agency for building more productive and skilled manpower, creation of knowledge, driving innovation and progress, for meeting social demands, for achieving welfare goals and addressing social inequality, for promotion of civilization and more recently ensuring efficient management (Watty, 2006; Sanyal and Martin, 2006). Attending to private interests of students and owners will be the main agenda of the private sector. Different agendas would lead to different types of financing strategies. And therefore before deciding on the mode of financing one should have a deeper understanding and clarity on the goals that one is aiming to achieve.

India, in its Twelfth Five Year Plan continues to focus on the 'Three Es'—expansion, equity and excellence. However, the Plan proposes a paradigm change in the way such goals should be achieved—through three new principles: quality, diversifying higher education opportunities and governance reforms. Hence, the Twelfth Plan adopts a holistic approach to the issues of expansion, equity and excellence so that expansion is not just about accommodating ever larger number of students, but is also about providing diverse choices of subjects, levels and institutions while ensuring a minimum standard of academic quality and providing the opportunity to pursue higher education to all sections of society, particularly the disadvantaged (Planning Commission, 2013). The following section makes an assessment of India's current position in respect of these three areas/issues and attempts to trace the emerging scenario in higher education in this context.

4. Emerging Trends in Higher Education

4.1. Expansion

With 44 central universities, 286 state universities, 129 deemed to be universities, 111 private universities, and 4 institutions established under State Legislature Act (as on March 31, 2012), Indian Higher Education system have come a long way and experienced considerable expansion since independence. As shown in Table 1, during 1950-51 to 2011-12, the number of universities has increased from 28 to 574, while the number of colleges has gone up from 578 to 35,539. During this period the number of teachers has also increased from 24,000 to 9,34,000. (Ved Praksh, 2007 and UGC annual reports). The enrolment in higher education has also registered a significant hike, from around 0.174 million in 1950-51 to 20.327 million in 2011-12.

Year	Universities	Colleges	Enrolment @ ('000)	Teachers @ ('000)
1950-51	28	578	174	24
1960-61	45	1819	557	62
1970-71	93	3227	1956	190
1980-81	123	4738	2752	244
1990-91	184	5748	4925	271
2000-01	266	11146	8399	395
2010-11	493	31,324	14625	699
2011-12 P	574	35539	20327	934

Table 1: All-India Growth of Institutions, Enrolment and Teaching Faculty at Higher Education Level, 1950-51 to 2004-05
Source: Ved Prakash 2007 and various UGC annual reports,
Note: P- provisional

While India is the third largest higher education system in the world in terms of enrolment (after China and USA); in terms of number of institutions India is the largest higher education system in the world with 17973 institutions (348 universities and 17625 colleges) (Aggarwal, 2006).

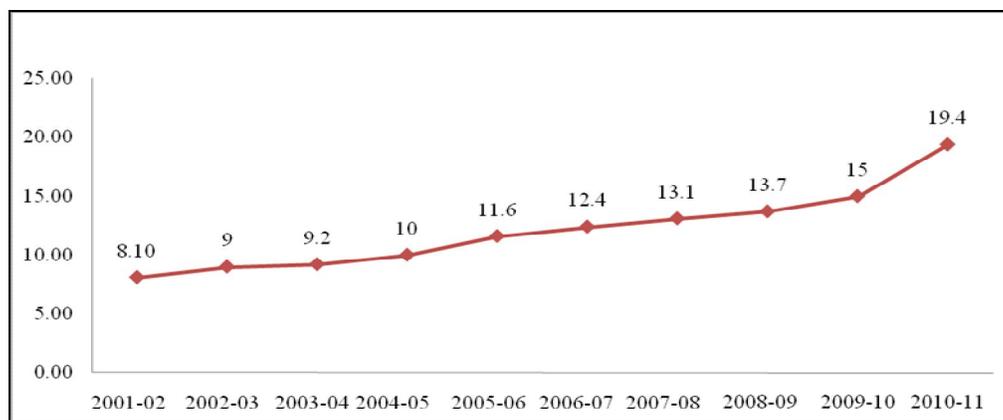


Figure 1: GER in Higher Education in India
Source: Statistics of Higher and Technical Education, MHRD, GOI, (Various Years).

Despite having the largest system of higher education in terms of the number of institutions, access to higher education in India is a major concern. The general level of participation in higher education is measured by the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) i.e. total enrolment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the eligible official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education in a given school year. Though there are doubts on its appropriateness as a measure of current level participation because it includes over-aged and under-aged enrolment as well, but due to data constraints GER is generally used. The GER in higher education in India is still abysmally low, around 19.4 percent in 2010-11. The fact that India is still falling short of the enrollment threshold of 20 percent of early-to-mid 1990s (as per the CABE report 2005-06, the current threshold would surely have risen) is sufficient to indicate India's laggardness in this respect. However on positive note, it is interesting to see that gross enrollment ratio (GER) shows an increasing trend (see Figure 1) and is expected to increase even further given that the pool of 'eligibles' is swelling i.e. increasing number of secondary school graduates as a consequence of the universalization of primary education; from the pool of 'eligibles' the number of individuals aspiring for higher education is also increasing, which may be to meet the requirements of labour market (credential inflation) and to reap higher returns associated with it; and lastly the country's growing urge to become an active member of knowledge society would furthermore create strong pressure for expansion.

4.2. Inter-State Variation

Although overall demand for higher education in India is increasing, wide variation in GER among states and UTs is still prevalent. While top seven states/UTs namely Chandigarh, Manipur, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Puducherry and Andhra Pradesh secured GER above 32, where Chandigarh leads with a GER of 40.4, fifteen states have GER below the national average (See Figure 2). The lowest scorers in this regard are Daman and Diu (3.5), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (3.6), Jharkhand (8.1) and Bihar (10.5). As can be seen from Table 2, in terms of expansion of institutions too large inter-state variation is clearly evident. While 16 states and union territories have much higher levels of access to higher education compared to the national average of 23 in terms of the number of institutions available per lakh population in the age group 18-23 in 2010-11, the presence of higher education institutions is severely inadequate in Jharkhand, Bihar, Daman & Diu, Tripura and West Bengal. While Puducherry has around 54, Bihar and Jharkhand has the lowest level of access with only around five institutions per lakh population in 2010-11.

Sl. No.	STATES/UTs	No. of College	College per lakh population	Average Enrolment per College
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	6	12	492
2	Andhra Pradesh	4780	48	493
3	Arunachal Pradesh	19	11	1943
4	Assam	485	13	1009
5	Bihar	629	5	1794
6	Chandigarh	27	18	805
7	Chhatisgarh	574	20	646
8	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	4	9	223
9	Daman & Diu	3	7	271
10	Delhi	184	8	1081
11	Goa	47	25	705
12	Gujarat	1815	27	624
13	Haryana	1054	33	766
14	Himachal Pradesh	297	38	535
15	Jammu and Kashmir	216	14	1392
16	Jharkhand	187	5	2376
17	Karnataka	3098	44	414
18	Kerala	962	29	557
19	Lakshadweep	0	0	0
20	Madhya Pradesh	2009	23	611
21	Maharashtra	4512	35	756
22	Manipur	78	23	1796
23	Meghalaya	61	16	1107
24	Mizoram	29	21	698
25	Nagaland	52	20	766
26	Odisha	1089	23	600
27	Puducherry	82	54	483
28	Punjab	956	29	724
29	Rajasthan	2435	29	725
30	Sikkim	11	14	814
31	Tamil Nadu	1985	27	574
32	Tripura	36	8	1086
33	Uttar Pradesh	4049	17	1351
34	Uttrakhand	346	28	1224
35	West Bengal	857	8	1655
	All India	32974	23	700

*Table 2: Number of College per Lakh Population(18-23 years) and Average Enrolment per College in States/UTs
Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (2010-11), MHRD, GOI*

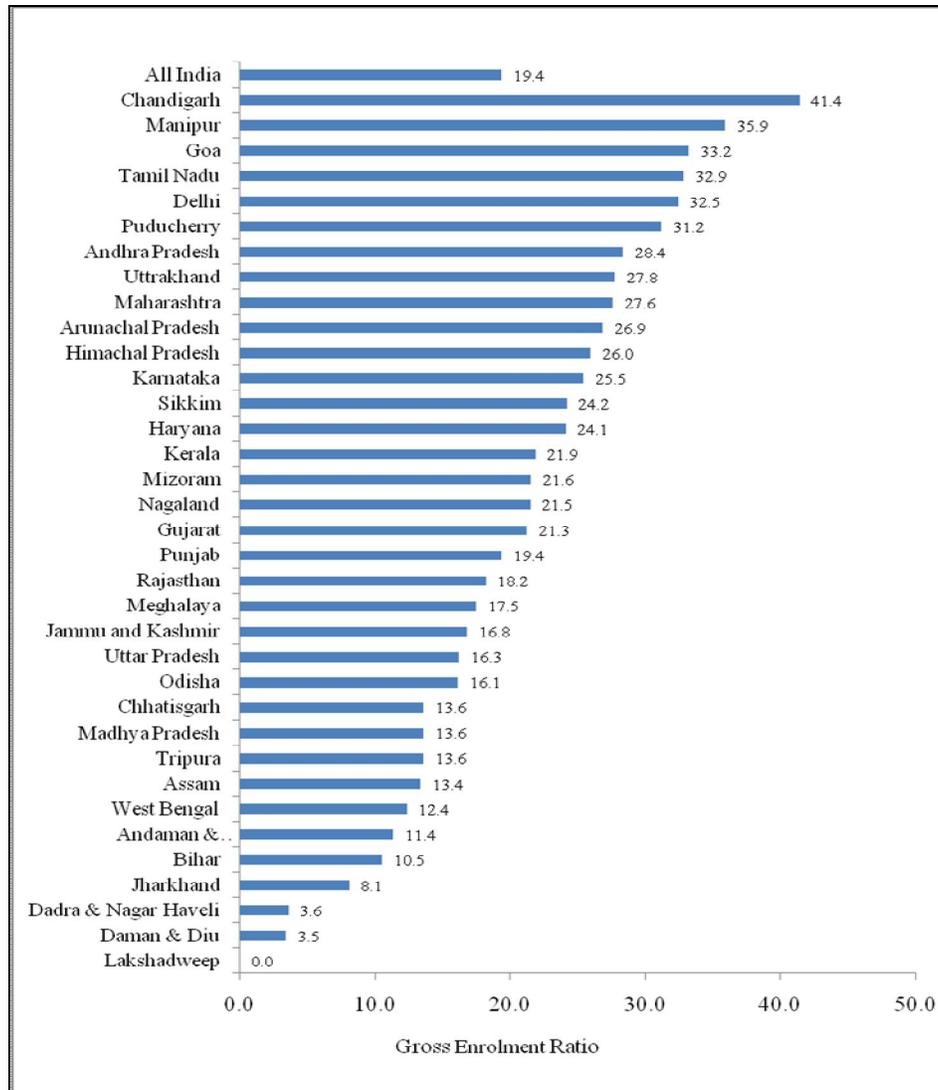


Figure 2: GER in Higher Education in Major States and Union Territories in India, 2010-11
 Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (2010-11), MHRD, GOI

4.3. Equity

The higher education system was highly elitist during its initial years i.e. it largely catered to the elite sections of the society. However with adoption of several policies towards inclusion and to diversify the intake of higher education institutes, the winds of change have blown in favour of marginalized social groups including women. The affirmative policies like special scholarships, fee waivers, separate hostels etc and attitudinal changes are responsible for these positive developments (Planning Commission, 2013).

Year	1970-71	1980-81	1990-91	2000-01	2010-11
Total Enrolment	1715516	2442483	4091438	8625882	27499749
Share of Females' Enrolment (%)	23.6	27.5	33.2	36.8	43.8
Share of Enrolment of SCs (%)	-	-	8.5	9.7	11.1
Share of Enrolment of STs (%)	-	-	2.1	3	4.4

Table 3: Share of Females', SCs and STs in Total Enrolment in Higher Education
 Source: Selected Educational Statistics (relevant years)

Similarly enlarging participation of marginal groups like SCs and STs is reflected in increasing enrolment share of SCs and STs which stood at 11.1 and 4.4 in 2010-11, rising from 8.5 and 2.1 in 1990-91. However, despite improvements in social inclusion in higher education, these groups are still under represented in accordance with their share in total population (SCs only 16.6% and STs only 8.6% in 2011).

On the economic inclusion front too considerable efforts are required so as to ensure that inability to pay does not hinder access to higher education. From Figure 3, as the levels of household economic status rises both in rural and urban areas, so does proportion of population with higher education thus reflecting a direct relation between the two. Less than 2 percent of the population of bottom most MPCE quintile (monthly per capita consumption expenditure quintile) has higher education, and this ratio steadily rises to around 9 percent in rural areas and 41.8 percent in urban areas. Moving from bottom to top quintiles, this ratio increases by around 22 times in rural areas and by 28 times in urban areas indicating greater degree of inequalities in urban areas. Here another point that is worth noting is the wide rural-urban disparity at each quintile.

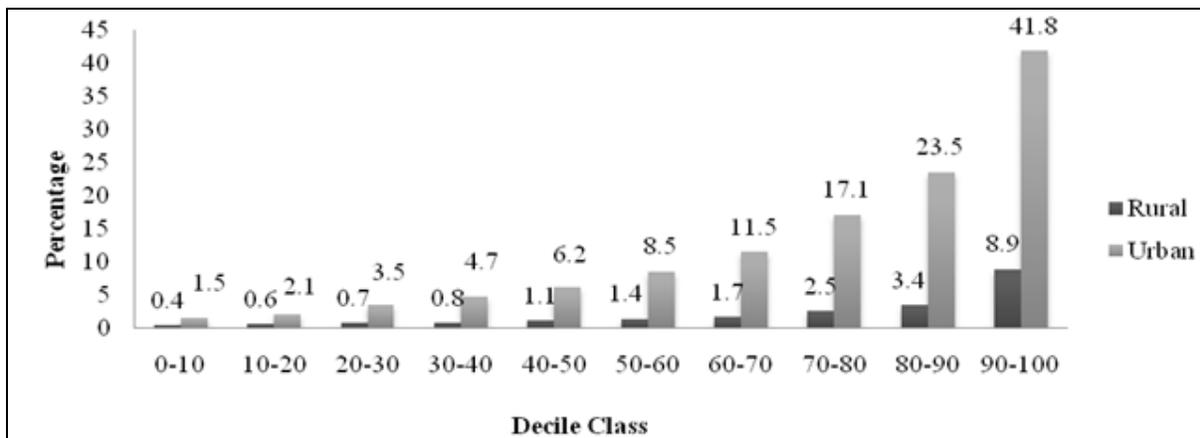


Figure 3: Percentage Distribution of Persons of MPCE Decile Classes by Completed Level of Education
Source: NSS 64th Round Survey Report

4.4. Excellence

It is important to note here that along with aiming to increase access and to make such access more inclusive, we should also strive to maintain high standards. It is only through quality education that we can achieve desired goals. Expansion through poor quality institutions will be useless as it will not only thwart the achievements of higher education but would also create a different kind of divide in the higher education and help in reproducing the socio-economic inequalities (Ved Prakash, 2007). Presently Indian higher education system suffers from serious qualitative deficits. Almost half the graduates are not employable in any sector based on the industry standards of employability. Dr. Sandeep Chatterjee, Registrar of Jawaharlal Nehru University and member of IEF Academic Council, says: "It is a 10-year window at best! If our higher educational institutions do not put excellence on the agenda now, we may miss the bus once again." India could maintain only a very small base of quality institutions at the top. Standards of the majority of the institutions are poor and declining. The dire need for focus on quality can be gauged from the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh's¹ concern over the fact that two thirds (68%) of the country's universities and 90 percent of its colleges are "of middling or poor quality" and that well over half of the faculty in India's colleges do not have the appropriate degree qualifications (CHE, 2007). There are a large number of small and non-viable institutions. Entry to the small number of quality institutions is very competitive giving rise to high stake entrance tests and a flourishing private tuition industry (Aggarwal, 2006). The fact that IITs and IIMs, which supposedly comprise India's tiny quality sector, figure only after 234 rank in Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2012-2013 very clearly signals that India has to go a long way to catch up with the educationally advanced economies in terms of standards.

In the light of these quality concerns, improving academic quality is a major objective of the Twelfth Plan. The Twelfth Plan strategy, therefore, includes a range of reforms aimed at improving the overall educational experience in HEIs. These include reforms in institutional organization; reforms of pedagogy and curricula, particularly at the undergraduate level; and a focus on faculty and their work. These reforms would be supported by smarter use of technology, initiatives to promote internationalization, the fostering of social responsibility in higher education, promotion of sports and wellness, increasing inter-institutional collaboration and coordination, and strengthening the accreditation system (Planning Commission, 2013).

4.5. New Realities of Financing

With the growing compulsion of achieving expansion, equity and excellence in higher education, rises the need for funds. Contrary to this we find that amidst budgetary pressures and scarce public revenue from politically and socially compelling and competing needs, the higher education system in India has not received its due importance in allocation of funds. As noted by Srivastava (2008) public expenditure on higher education rose rapidly till early 1970s and also exceeded the growth rate of national income till the mid-1980s. Consequently, the share of public expenditure in higher education to GDP rose during this period. Thereafter, the trend is towards stagnancy or decline. The most noticeable feature is the negative growth rate of per student public expenditure, both for Central as well as State expenditure, which can be explained by the growth in student enrolment exceeding the growth in real expenditure. Overall, per student expenditure registered a decline of 2.4 percent since 1992-93. From

¹ He said in his speech on reflecting on the findings of a confidential report by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, which is affiliated to the University Grants Commission (UGC). (Source: CHE)

Rs 8322 in the period 1981-82 to 1991-92, the average real expenditure on higher education per enrolled student decreased to Rs 6790 in the period 1992-93 to 2003-04 (Srivastava, 2008).

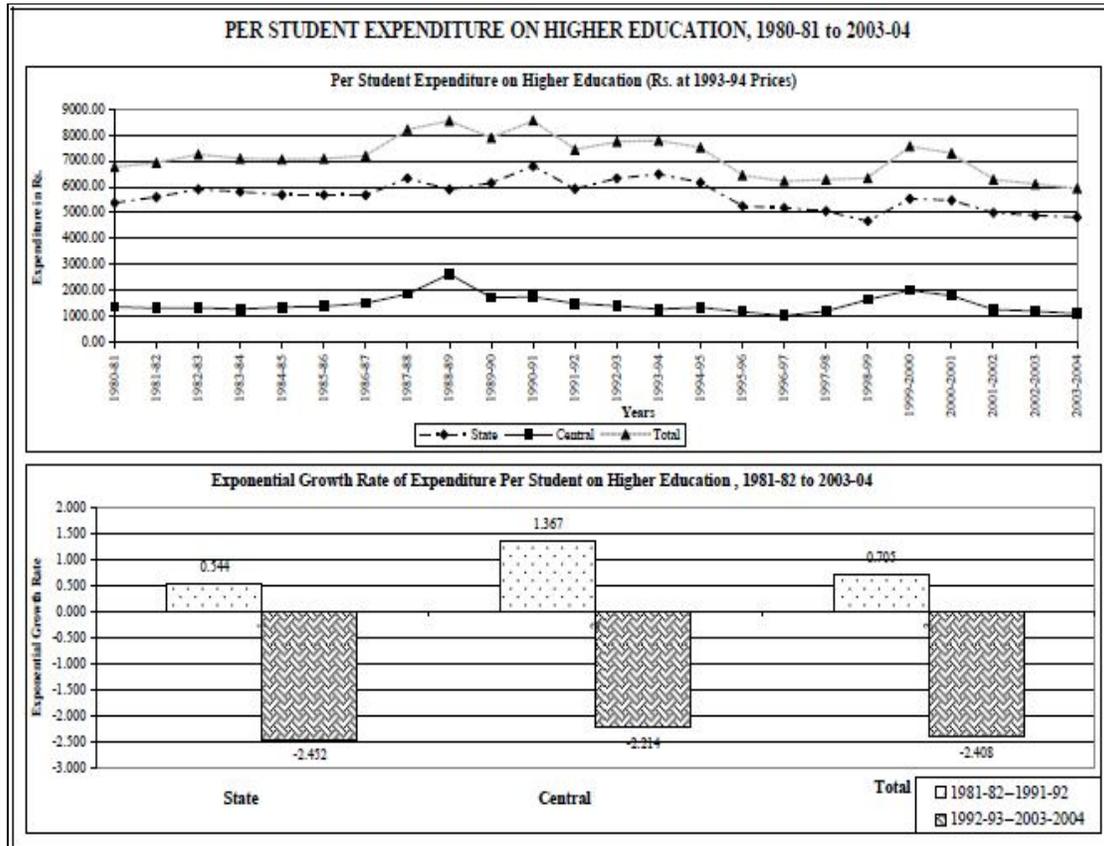


Figure 4: Per Student Expenditure on Higher Education: 1980-81 to 2003-04
Source: Srivastava (2008)

In this scenario of growing resource crunch it has become imperative to find innovative and adequate solutions to the increasing demand for financial resources. As a consequence what we are experiencing is trend towards marketisation. From public funding there is a shift towards private or mixed funding. The growing presence of private players is evident in the number of private higher education institutions and enrolment in recent years. Of the total number of higher education institutions, the share of private unaided institutions was 42.6 per cent in 2000-01, which increased to 59 per cent in 2010-11. Similarly, their share in enrolments too has risen from 32.89 per cent in 2000-01 to 37.02 per cent in 2010-11.

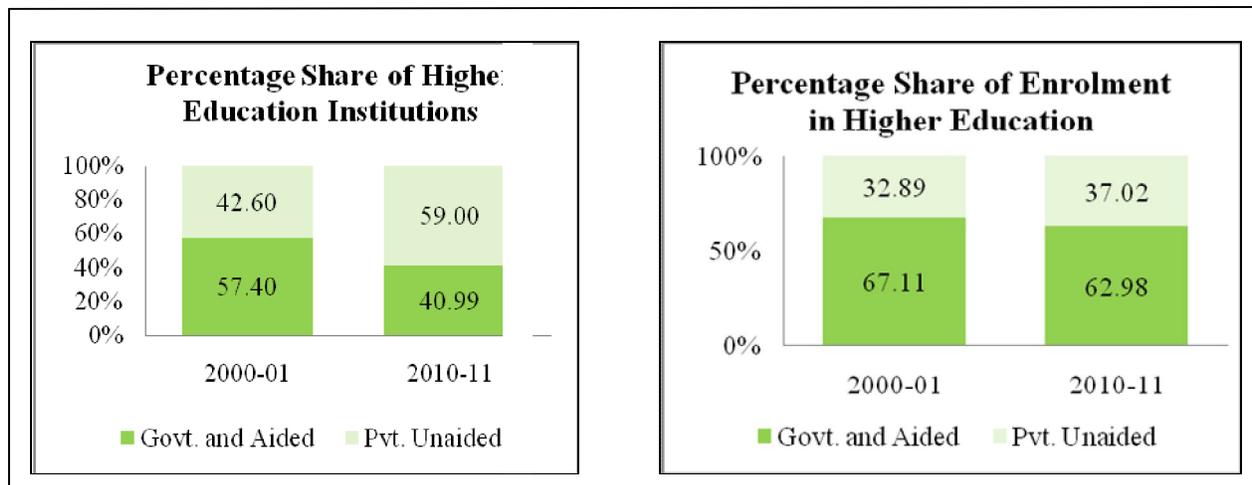


Figure 5: Share of Private Unaided Institutions in Total Institutions and Enrolment
Source: Ved Prakash, 2007 and All India Survey on Higher Education (2010-11), MHRD, GOI

Similarly in case of financing we see a trend towards private financing i.e. cost sharing. Cost sharing in higher education refers to a shift in the burden of higher education costs from being borne exclusively or predominately by government, or taxpayers, to being shared with parents and students (Johnstone, 2003). As is very rightly pointed out by many, the cost of higher education is shifting from "public purse, public purpose to private purse and private purpose". The principle of "Let the buyer pay" seems to be gaining increasing acceptance in the society.

In such a scenario it would be interesting to examine the implications of these emerging phenomena on provision of higher education especially on aspects like equity, access, quality and governance.

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