Higher Education System in India: Is it Inclusive?

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Abstract: *Inclusive education has been the focus of the policy makers now a day after a long neglect of years. Inclusion of people with disabilities into the mainstream society is a much neglected issue in a country like India where a large percentage of children (about 10%) are born with birth defects. These children with disabilities have to face enormous challenges in their lives to get a formal education. The percentage of people who are successful in integrating themselves with the activities of mainstream life is very less as compared to the total number of such people. Children with physical and mental disabilities (like autism, cerebral palsy, hearing and visual impairments,) have to face enormous challenges in their life to get formal education. The attitude of the mainstream schools towards the inclusion of students with disabilities is extremely disappointing. According to the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act, every child with a disability has equal right to free education in an appropriate environment till he attains the age of 18. But how many schools in our country are actually aware of the Act? Very few, it seems. The parents of these children have to face rejection at each and every stage of their endeavor. Few of the lucky out of these reach to higher education level and because of their innate potentials they shine bright sometimes. But, does the university system equip with the system to support these students. Do university teachers have any sort of orientation programme for identifying, recognizing CWD student and their special needs, the special provision provided to them.*
Present paper relooks on the Higher education system for the inclusion of the CWD children in the mainstream. It provides suggestions for the inclusion of such children in the Higher education system.

Key Words: *Higher Education, Children, Disability, Gender.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Inclusive education has been the focus of the policy makers now a day after a long neglect of years. Inclusion of people with disabilities into the mainstream society is a much-neglected issue in a country like India where a large percentage of children (about 10%) are born with birth defects. These children with disabilities have to face enormous challenges in their lives to get a formal education. The percentage of people who are successful in integrating themselves with the activities of mainstream life is very less as compared to the total number of such people. Children with physical and mental disabilities (like autism, cerebral palsy, hearing and visual impairments,) have to face enormous challenges in their life to get formal education. The attitude of the mainstream schools towards the inclusion of students with disabilities is extremely disappointing. According to the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act, every child with a disability has equal right to free education in an appropriate environment till he attains the age of 18. But how many schools in our country are actually aware of the Act? Very few, it seems. The parents of these children have to face rejection at each and every stage of their endeavor. Few of the lucky out of these reach to higher education level and because of their innate potentials they shine bright sometimes. Instead of empathy they often suffer from sympathetic behavior which led them down mentally. But what about those who don't know the actual meaning of inclusion. If we talk about the higher education system inclusion is seen as if these students who get admission they are treated differently by those who do not belong to it. They mare made to look down for themselves after getting reservation in getting admission or sometimes treated badly.
Present paper throws light on the growth of Higher education system for the inclusion of various different groups in the mainstream. It compares the various inclusive groups and their representation in the growth of higher education. How inclusive is education in India? Acknowledging that inequalities in primary and secondary education will produce unequal participation in higher education and hence they need to be studied together, the paper nevertheless proposes to focus on higher education, as higher education is regarded as an engine for equitable economic and social progress, and inequalities in higher education are also reflective of cumulative inequalities in school education.
Inclusive development policies are expected to aim at the creation of a 'society for all'. They are viewed as affirmative policies that aim at empowering the marginalized people and the involuntarily excluded, by ensuring equal access to markets, services and economic, political and social spaces to all. In short, make all effective partners in the processes of socioeconomic and political development. Accordingly, inclusive education is meant to focus on the poor, the marginalized, the disadvantaged strata of the society and those living in backward regions. It is concerned with overall

equity, not excluding any section of the society. 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 (Basu, 2001). This involves increasing their endowment of assets, including human capital endowments.

2. GROWTH OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA:

The growth in higher education during the post-independence period has been remarkable, in terms of number of universities, colleges, students and teachers.

Table one : Growth of Higher Education in India

Year	Universities	Colleges	Teachers ('000s)	Enrolment million	GER(%)
1950-51	28	578	24	0.17	1.5
1960-61	45	1819	62	.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	559	32964			
2011-12	700*	35539	933.7	21.7	21.2*
Source: Twelfth Five-Year Plan (New Delhi: Planning Commission 2013.					

Compared to 20 universities at the time of independence, at present, there are more than 700 universities, including institutions deemed to be universities and university level institutions. The number of colleges has increased from less than 500 to more than 37,000 during the same period, and the enrolments have increased to nearly 21 million from less than 200,000 in 1947–48. Presently, there are nearly one million teachers in higher education. The gross enrolment ratio in higher education stands at 21.1 per cent in 2012–13 compared to 1.5 per cent in 1960–61.

Growth in Higher Education Attainment among Adults (%) is indicated in the report of the National Sample Survey (NSS) a brief of which is given in the proceeding lines.

According to the gross enrolment ratios estimated, based on NSS reports,

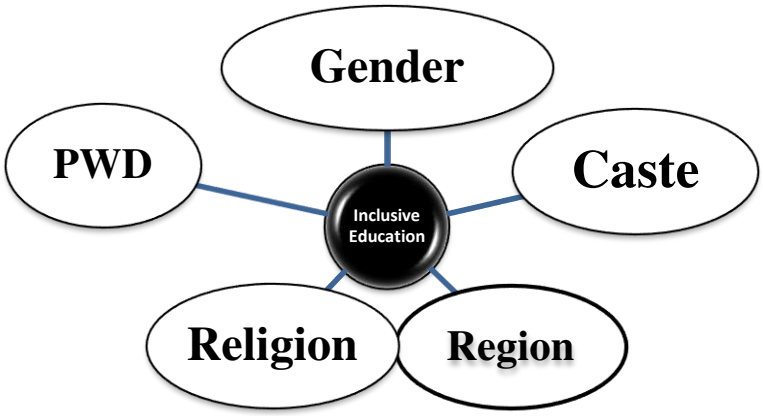
- 10 percent of the 18–23 age group was attending higher education in 1983–84, 23.1 percent have attended in 2009–10 in about 26 years, the ratio increased by three times.
- In contrast, net enrolment ratio increases at a slower pace; it increased very modestly from 8 percent in 1999–2000 to **10.2 per cent by** 2004–05 by about 2 points in 5 years
- The enrolment ratio in higher education in many other countries is much higher: it is above 75 % in developed/ high-income countries;
- The average for the developing countries is 24 % and the world average is 31% in 2011 (UIS, 2014). It can be noted that in no developed country the enrolment ratio is below 40 per cent.
- The enrolment ratio in higher education in India is **21.1 % by 2011** projected.

From the above it is seen that India is still striving to grow in terms of its adult attains the higher education. To bridge this gape government of India has provided various initiatives and inclusive education is one of them.

3. INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA:

According to the UK Department for International Development (DfID) definition, (2000) "Inclusive education in a developing country implies the equal right of all children to the 'educational package', however basic that package may be." (Sapon-Shevin, 2003) said that Inclusion is not about disability, nor is it only about schools. Inclusion is about social justice…Inclusion demands that we ask, what kind of world do **we want to create**? What kinds of skills and commitment do people need to thrive in diverse society?

Government of India in its Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007–12) and later in the Twelfth Five-year Plan (2012–17) already indicated the positive scenario towards the inclusive growth. It further indicated that caste, religion, gender, region and poverty have been the main bases for exclusion in India, it is intended that these groups form the main focus of attention while formulating policies and plans for inclusive growth.

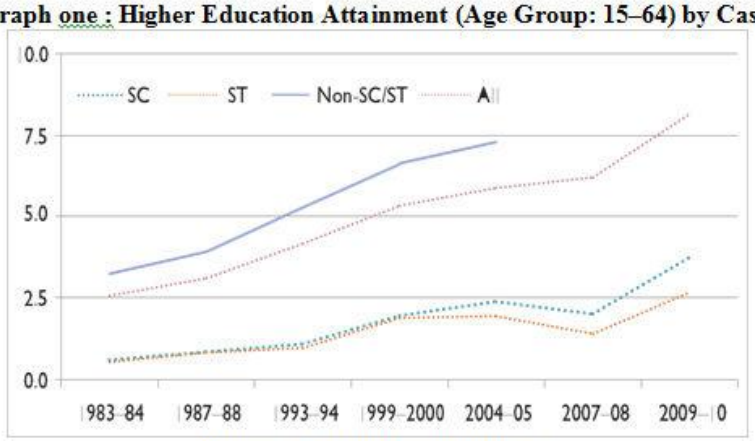


Probably the most important problem faced by the higher education system in India is the persistence of failure of inclusion in access to higher education. Inequalities in access to higher education result in socio-economic inequalities in the society which, in turn, accentuate inequalities in education. In fact, it is a cyclic chain of inequalities: inequalities in access to higher education result in inequities in access to labour market information, 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 socio-economic and political inequalities again are translated into the education sector, resulting in inequalities in education. Inequalities in access to education reflect loss in individual as well as social welfare. That economic returns to investment in education of the weaker sections are estimated to be higher than returns to their counterparts (Tilak, 1987), implies that inequalities in education would cause huge losses in national output; and that inclusive strategies that contribute to equity should be viewed favourably 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 in efficiency, if any (Patnaik, 2012).

4. SCENARIO OF INCLUSION BY CASTE:

The word caste in India has no constitutional definition as India is a secular country. To promote equality, it has declared some sections as scheduled castes and scheduled tribe. But socio-political system has deepened the roots of caste based inclusion in every sector of life.

Graph one : Higher Education Attainment (Age Group: 15–64) by Caste



Source: National sample survey

According to the national sample survey report,

- There is not much variation in the eligible enrolment ratio between several caste groups. While it ranges between 50 per cent and 54 per cent for SC, for OBCs and others (non-backward sections), the ratio is much higher, 62 per cent in case of STs.
- Between various caste groups the transition rate ranges between 14 per cent (for ST) and 22 per cent (SC). SCs are ahead of all others.
- Less than 3 per cent of the STs and just 4 per cent among the SCs had completed levels of higher education in 2009–10.

It is to be noted that there is no constitutional provision for other backward group for the inclusion by caste other than these to prescribed caste originally.

5. SCENARIO OF INCLUSION BY RELIGION:

Gape of inclusion in gross enrolment ratio between various religious groups are much higher. Estimates on gross enrolment ratio are available for Hindus, Muslims, Christians and 'others'. Enrolment ratio among Muslims was only 14 per cent in 2009–10, while it was 24.2 per cent among Hindus and 37 per cent among Christians. The enrolment ratio among 'Others' that includes Jains, Sikhs, etc., is also high—28 per cent in 2009–10. The enrolment ratio is the highest among the Christians and the least among the Muslims (Table two). This is the same situation consistently throughout the period between 1983–84 and 2009–10. While there has been improvement in case of all the four groups between 1983–84 and 2009–10, the inter-group inequalities by religion did not decline much. In fact, the gap seemed to have widened.

Table Two. Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education by Religion

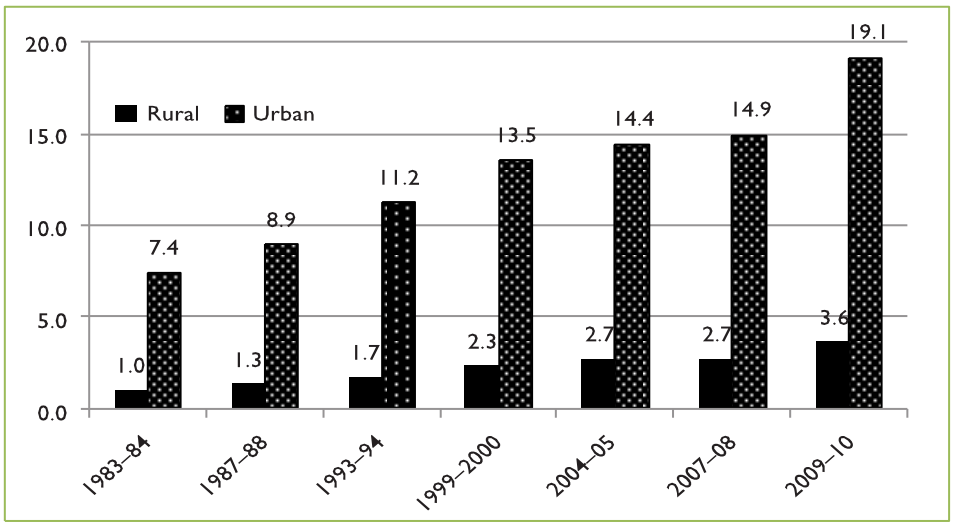
Gross Enrolment Ratio	Muslims	Hindus	Christians	Others
1983-84	4.1	7.5	20.0	10.6
1987-88	4.4	8.8	17.0	11.4
1993-94	4.6	9.1	16.2	10.5
1999-2000	5.2	10.4	18.6	14.0
2004-05	7.6	13.2	20.8	14.7
2009-10	13.8	24.2	36.9	28.0
Transition ratio 2009-10	15.8	19.88	18.96	10.82

Source: National sample survey

6. SCENARIO OF INCLUSION BY REGION:

There exist not only interstate disparities but also a high-degree inequality between rural and urban areas in each state. Based on NSS data, it is observed that in contrast to inequalities by gender, caste and religion, rural–urban disparities seem to be very high in the enrolment ratios. While 39 per cent of the relevant age group population in urban areas attended colleges/universities in 2009–10, it is only 16.5 per cent population who attended in rural areas. The ratio in urban areas was nearly 4.5 times higher than the ratio in rural areas in 1983. In 2009–10, this came down to 2.3 times, suggesting narrowing down of rural–urban disparities. Between 1999–2000 and 2004–05, the urban–rural differences in net enrolment ratio declined from nearly four times to three times. The eligible enrolment ratio is also less in case of rural population compared to urban population. But it only differs by less than 10 per cent points: 48 per cent in case of rural population and 57 per cent in case of urban population in 2004–05 (graph two).

Graph Two : Higher Education Attainment in Rural and Urban Regions in India



Source: National sample survey

Consistently high rural–urban inequalities could also be noted in case of the rate of higher education attainment. The rate increased from 1 per cent in rural areas in 1983 to 3.6 per cent in 2009–10, while in urban areas it increased from 7.4 per cent to 19.1 per cent during the same period. Although the rural– urban gap is getting reduced in terms of rate of increase, in terms of absolute differences it seems to be widening (graph two). In general, the rate of improvement is very slow; and more importantly, the absolute levels of higher education attainment are very low in rural areas.

7. SCENARIO OF INCLUSION BY GENDER:

Women constitute 43 % of the total enrolments in higher education in 2011–12, while there were only 14 women per 100 men in higher education in 1950–51, according to the available UGC statistics (UGC, 2013). One of the most important dimensions of inequality is between men and women. Women are generally found to be lagging behind men in every sector including higher education in India as in many countries, though reverse trends could be observed of late in a good number of countries. During the post-independence period, there is a significant improvement in women's participation in higher education. Thus, compared to the earlier decades, this marks a significant improvement. While this 43 per cent is an all-India average across all disciplines of study, there are wide variations between different states and also across disciplines. Women students constitute 11 per cent in engineering/technology, 4 per cent in medicine and less than 5 per cent in education. Nevertheless, the overall level of participation of women in higher education has improved remarkably and the current overall level is quite impressive.

Table 3. Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education, by Gender

Gross Enrolment Ratio	**Women**	**Men**	**Coefficient of Inequality**
1983–84	4.49	10.87	2.4209
1987–88	5.37	11.82	2.2011
1993–94	5.9	11.7	1.9831
1999–2000	8.0	12.1	1.5125
2004–05	10.4	14.8	1.4231
2009–10	18.7	27.0	1.4402
Net Enrolment Ratio			
1999–2000	6.8	9.4	1.3807
2004–05	8.5	11.8	1.3905
Eligible Enrolment Ratio			
2004–05	48.6	55.6	1.1440
Transition Ratio			
2009–10	19.0	19.7	1.0374
Note: Coefficient of inequality is simply the male–female ratio.			
source: Twelfth Five-Year Plan (New Delhi: Planning Commission 2013.			

The gross enrolment ratio among men increased from 10.9 per cent in 1983–84 to 27 per cent in 2009–10—it increased by 2.5 times in about two decades and a half. In contrast, only 19 per cent of the women in the relevant age group were enrolled in higher education in 2009–10. But what is strikingly clear is: there has been a rapid progress in the enrolment ratio among women compared to men. The gross enrolment ratio for women increased by more than four times. As a result, gender inequalities in gross enrolment ratio have come down very significantly during this period. A simple coefficient of inequality (ratio of male enrolment ratio over female enrolment ratio) declined from 2.4 in 1983–84 to 1.4 in 2009–10 (Table 3). The available estimates on net enrolment ratios, however, indicate that between 1999–2000 and 2004–05, the increase in enrolment ratios is very small in case of both men and women; hardly it increased by 2 per cent points in either case, and the level of inequality remained the same. The male–female differences are much less in case of eligible enrolment ratios. While 49 per cent of eligible girls join higher education institutions, the corresponding ratio is marginally higher for men, 56 per cent, a difference of about 7 per cent points. Gender variations are the least in transition rates—the rate being 19 per cent in case of women and 20 per cent in case of men in 2009–10. Percentage of adults (15+) with higher education reflects the cumulative growth. Absolute rates of higher education attainment have increased in case of both men and women, but there has been faster growth in case of women.

8. SCENARIO OF INCLUSION OF PERSON WITH DISABILITY:

A comprehensive countrywide sample survey was undertaken by the National Sample Survey Organization in 1991 to estimate the number of people with disabilities. It was reported that about 1.9 per cent of the population (i.e., 16.2 million) have physical and sensory disabilities. Many developing and least developed countries and areas do not collect disability data. In the case of those that have done so, the data collected do not reflect the full extent of disability prevalence. This limitation is due in part to the conceptual framework adopted, the scope and coverage of the surveys undertaken, as well as the definitions, classifications and methodology used for disability data collection.'
In India, identification of children by 'head counting' has posed many difficulties. Data on disability are generally under-reported as a result of a lack of adequate skills to identify children with invisible disabilities, and a lack of

precise definitions for identifying children with mild and moderate disabilities. Disability identification in the population was included in the 2001 census; however, the data are yet to be published.
According to UNICEF's Report on the Status of Disability in India 2000, there were around 30 million children suffering from some form of disability. The Sixth All-India Educational Survey (NCERT, 1998) reports that of India's 200 million school-aged children (6–14 years), 20 million require special needs education. While the national average of gross enrolment in school is over 90 per cent, less than five per cent of children with disabilities are in school. The majority of these children remain outside mainstream education. The low turnout can be attributed to causes such as difficulty in coping with general education demands and social reasons. Regional disparities in the number of children with special needs in India are shown in Table 1. Recognizing the problem of disability and regional disparities, the government and NGOs are initiating policy reforms and strategies for special needs and inclusive education.

9. REFLECTIONS ON INCLUSION HIGHER EDUCATION:

The contribution of education to development is widely recognized. Direct and indirect benefits education produce to individuals and externalities are indeed large in quantum Abundant literature is available that highlights the contribution of education to economic growth, poverty reduction and reduction in inequalities. To break the cyclical chain of inequalities—where inequalities in education contribute to inequalities in labour market information, which lead to inequalities in employment, which further cause inequalities in earnings that result in sociopolitical inequalities, which in turn cause inequalities in participation in education—education is considered as a very effective strategy. In fact, education is found to be a more sustainable and more effective measure than other measures to reduce inequalities in society (Carnoy, 1993). It is more so in democratic societies like India where other approaches may not be practicable. Given all this, the role of education in inclusive growth, and also the relationship between education and inclusive growth need no emphasis. After all, education is a constituent of inclusive growth; as an instrument, it contributes to inclusive growth and its development is also influenced by inclusive growth. As the World Bank (2006) notes, 'inclusive growth process is intricately linked with attempts to improve markedly the quality of basic services such as education (healthcare, power and water supply) for every one across the country'.
For education to promote inclusive growth, it has to be necessarily inclusive. A system of education characterized by exclusiveness or by a high degree of inequalities cannot contribute to inclusive growth. It has to be qualitatively good and widely accessible to all sections of the society in an equitable way. Inequality in education or unequal access to education is costly as it results in loss in individual welfare and loss in social welfare as well. Unequal education reproduces social inequality, as Salmi and Bassett (2014) observed, 'given the extensive social and private benefits that result from tertiary education, inclusive access and success are essential for achieving social justice and ensuring the realization of the full potential of all young people'. Even from a narrow perspective of the education sector, inequalities mean loss to the education sector, in terms of lack of or low 'diversity' (UNESCO, 2009).

10. CONCLUSION:

Education and its goals in India are towards the attainment of equality in terms of caste, colour, religion, region and gender since independence. People started talking about the inclusive education where persons with disabilities are given special provision and the system is getting sensitive towards it. But the scenario from this paper pauses questions that are we really moving towards inclusion? What about the other sections having inclusion by provision but still striving to be in the system? Without addressing the inequalities of the system we can not ensure inclusion of these groups. The groups other than CWSN do not required existing infrastructural changes or methodological changes in the education system, rather to be addressed by the changes in mind set only.

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