

# Trends in Enrolment in Higher Education in India

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## ABSTRACT

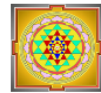
In fact, individual's quality of life can be improved through higher education. Higher education, rationally speaking, also enables an individual to expand one's knowledge and skills. It helps an individual to express one's thoughts clearly in speech and in writing. Higher education not only leads an individual to grasp abstract concepts and theories, but also it helps an individual to increase one's understanding of the world and one's community. The gross enrolment ratio in the higher education has improved from 6 % in 1990-91 to to 27.3 % by 2020-21 in India. The national Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is 27.3 percent in 2020-21, out of which GER for men is 27.9 % and for women, it is 26.7 %. It is found that significant inter-state disparities in the GERs of higher education in India. An analysis of data indicates that enrollment in the HE had gone up from 1.73 lakhs in 1950-51 to 4.13 crores in 2020-21.

**Key Words: Higher Education, Gross enrolment Ratio, Enrolment, India.**

## 1. Introduction

Higher education (HE) is widely considered very important aspect with regard to socio-economic, cultural and technical development of any nation. It is also treated as a public good because it provides a vast range of external benefits. Many research studies such as Samuelson (1954), Majumdar (1983), Marginson (2007), Chattopadhyay (2007) and Mc Mahon (2010) considered education as a merit good.

The main objective of the higher education is to build the society by transforming raw material into finishing product to remain as an asset to the society. It means that student is to be converted into resourceful being who caters to the needs of the society. In fact, it should inculcate the spirit of scientific temper and rationality in thinking and execution among students. HE builds character, strengthens the mind, expands intellect, inculcates wisdom and ethics among the students' community.



## 2. Objectives

1. To study the trends in gross enrolment ratio in higher education in India from 1990-91 to 2020-21.
2. . To analyse the enrolment under various social groups in higher education in India.
3. To examine enrolment across different courses in higher education in India.

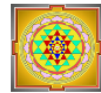
## 3. Methodology

This Study makes use of secondary data only. Secondary data was collected from both the published and unpublished sources. The main published sources are the University Grants Commission's Annual Reports and the Ministry of Human Resource Development's Reports for different years, UNESCO Institute of Statistics etc.,

## 4. Progress of Enrolment in Higher Education in India

Though India has witnessed substantial growth in higher education, it needs further expansion as the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) (25 percent) is lower than the average GER (57 percent) of the advanced countries and also some developing countries. Thus, more universities and colleges should be established so as to improve gross enrolment ratio in India. Hence, there is a need to provide more access to higher education in India. While making policies for further expansion, the issue of access with equity must be given due importance since equity is the major issue before the Indian planners. But, access with equity in higher education throughout the country is a major challenge.

The absolute number of students' enrollment is a key indicator of progress of higher education. An analysis of data indicates that enrollment in the HE had gone up from 1.73 lakhs in 1950-51 to 4.13 crores in 2020-21 and this indicates an increase by about 143 times (Table 1). The percentage of women enrolment to the total enrolment has gone up substantially from 10.9 % in 1950-51 to 48.2 % in 2020-21. The innovative strategies and interventions of governments to provide access to higher education and steps taken to increase universities and colleges have resulted in considerable increase in enrollment in the higher education and also increase the women participation.

**Table 1: Enrolment of Students in Higher Education in India: 1950 -51 to 2020-21**

| Year    | Students    | % of Women |
|---------|-------------|------------|
| 1950-51 | 1,73,696    | 10.9       |
| 1960-61 | 5,56,559    | 16.2       |
| 1970-71 | 19,53,640   | 21.9       |
| 1980-81 | 28,31,563   | 27.2       |
| 1990-91 | 49,24,868   | 32.0       |
| 2000-01 | 83,99,443   | 39.4       |
| 2010-11 | 1,86,70,050 | 41.5       |
| 2017-18 | 3,66,42,378 | 47.6       |
| 2020-21 | 4,13,80,713 | 48.2       |

Source: 1.UNESCO Institute of Statistics Report, 2017  
2. MHRD- AISHE and UGC Report,2020-21

The data in the table shows that the gender gap with respect to enrollment was very high during the period 1950 and 1990. However, thereafter it started declining gradually. Both the central and state governments have initiated several measures to enhance females' enrollment in higher education in the country. The establishment of higher educational institutions and hostels exclusively for women is one such step. Increasing accessibility of higher education particularly in rural areas, reservation for women in admissions and employment in some states have led to increase in the proportion of women enrollment in the country. The change of mindset in the society towards female higher education is a good sign for the gender equality in the Indian higher education.

#### **4.1 Trends in Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education in India**

The GER is used in the educational sector. It is a statistical measure. It speaks about the ratio of enrolment in the HE to the population of the relevant age group (18-23 years). This measure indicates the level of the HE. The GER in the HE has improved from 6 % in 1990-91 to 24.5 % in 2014-15 and further rose to 27.3 % by 2020-21 in India (Table 2).

**Table 2: Gross Enrolment Ratios in Higher Education in India: 1990-91 to 2017-18**

| Year | 1990-91 | 2000-01 | 2010-11 | 2014-15 | 2017-18 | 2020-21 |
|------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| GERs | 6.0     | 11.0    | 17.9    | 24.5    | 25.8    | 27.3    |

Source: MHRD- AISHE and UGC Reports (various Years)

The GER in higher education in India varies across social groups. The national GER is 27.3 percent in 2020-21, out of which GER for men is 27.9 % and for women, it is 26.7 %. For the SCs, it is 23.1 % and for the STs, it is 18.9 % (Table 3). Even after six decades of independence, there is no equality in the HE in India. The GER for STs is very low when compared to the national average of GER. It implies that even now the marginalized sections of the society do not have equal accessibility to the higher education in our country.

**Table 3: The Gross Enrolment Ratio Across Various Social Groups in Higher Education in India in 2020-21**

| Social Groups    | Total |
|------------------|-------|
| All Categories   | 27.3  |
| Males            | 27.9  |
| Females          | 26.7  |
| Scheduled Castes | 23.1  |
| Scheduled Tribes | 18.9  |

Source : MHRD- AISHE and UGC Reports (various Years)

## 4.2 Enrolment across Managements

Since the higher education is a merit good, government has the responsibility to provide it in India. However, Private education also had a long history and it is not a new concept. But, what is new about it is its rapid growth and its changing character in the recent years. Earlier, education under private sector was very minimal and largely managed by Foundations, Trusts, Societies, Missionaries and Philanthropists. These were aided institutions on the basis of noble and principled considerations rather than profit motto. In the recent decades, the whole idea has changed completely. There is an explosion of Private Universities and Colleges and they are owned and managed by individuals and business people mostly based on the profit motto. The inability of the government to invest heavily in the educational sector necessitates inviting the



private capital from both the domestic partners and international investors. Government has already opened higher education to domestic private sector in a big way.

It is observed from Table 4 that higher education under different managements in India is presented under categories like Public and Private Managements in 2000-01 and 2020-21. The relative importance of a particular type of management varies from time to time. The role of government sector was foremost in 2000-01, while that of private sector was insignificant. As a matter of fact, 46.3% of students were admitted in private unaided management institutions whereas in government institutions, it was only 32.7 percent in 2020-21. It is inferred that during the last two decades, the rise of private sector has been significant both in terms of institutions and enrollment. Due to the financial constraints, government is not able to establish higher educational institutions in order to meet the rising demand for technical and professional HE in the state. Government has been encouraging private sector with favorable policies.

**Table 4: Higher Education Under Public and Private Managements in India: 2000-01 and 2020-21**

| Management      | % of Enrolment                     |                                      |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|                 | 2000-01                            | 2020-21                              |
| Government      | 43.9                               | 32.7                                 |
| Private Aided   | 23.2                               | 21.0                                 |
| Private Unaided | 32.9                               | 46.3                                 |
| <b>All</b>      | <b>100.0</b><br><b>(83,99,443)</b> | <b>100.0</b><br><b>(4,13,80,713)</b> |

Source: 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan and MHRD - AISHE-2020-21

Note: Figures in the Brackets indicate total Enrolment

### 4.3 Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education - State Wise

The GERs across the states have been presented in Table 5. It is found that significant inter-state disparities in the GERs of higher education in India. The GER was 11.3 per cent in 2002-03 and it has risen to 25.8 percent in 2017-18. This escalation is about 16.8 percent between the period 2002-03 and 2017-18. However, some states have performed well in terms of higher GERs and some other states' performance was lower in terms of GERs. In 2017-18, out of the 29 states, 17 states' GERs are better compared to the country's average and the remaining

12 states' GERs are poorer (Table 5). The growth of GER is very high (range of 24-38 %) in the states like Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Sikkim, Kerala, Telangana, Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu-Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Punjab during the period between 2002-03 and 2017-18. The growth of GERs is very low in the states like Bihar and Assam.

This situation clearly shows that there is no equal accessibility of HE among all the states. Economically progressive states and states which are more urbanized have shown higher GERs when compared to low urbanized states. However, very interestingly, though being a progressive state the GER in Gujarat (20.1%) is low when compared not only with high GER states but also with national average (25.8%). Central government must give greater support to improve the condition of the states with low GERs thereby achieving inclusive growth in HE in all parts of the country. All the South Indian States have performed well in terms of GER that their GERs is higher than the national average. Tamil Nadu (48.6%) and Delhi (46.3%) performed high GERs that they are on par with the world average.

**Table 5: Gross Enrolment Ratios across States in Higher Education in India**

| States                | 2002-03    | 2017-18     | % Change    |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Andhra Pradesh</b> | <b>9.6</b> | <b>30.9</b> | <b>21.3</b> |
| Arunachal Pradesh     | 6.4        | 29.7        | 23.3        |
| Assam                 | 8.7        | 18.2        | 9.5         |
| Bihar                 | 7.3        | 13.0        | 5.7         |
| Chhattisgarh          | 7.8        | 18.4        | 10.6        |
| Delhi                 | 11.0       | 46.3        | 35.3        |
| Goa                   | 13.5       | 28.0        | 14.5        |
| Gujarat               | 9.7        | 20.1        | 10.4        |
| Haryana               | 10.6       | 28.7        | 18.1        |
| Himachal Pradesh      | 12.3       | 37.9        | 25.6        |
| Jammu and Kashmir     | 5.0        | 27.7        | 22.7        |
| Jharkhand             | 7.3        | 18.0        | 10.7        |
| Karnataka             | 8.2        | 27.8        | 19.6        |
| Kerala                | 10.0       | 36.2        | 26.2        |
| Madhya Pradesh        | 7.7        | 21.2        | 13.5        |
| Maharashtra           | 12.3       | 31.1        | 18.8        |
| Manipur               | 13.2       | 31.8        | 18.6        |
| Meghalaya             | 11.0       | 24.7        | 13.7        |
| Mizoram               | 10.0       | 22.9        | 12.9        |
| Nagaland              | 4.4        | 17.8        | 13.4        |
| Orissa                | 8.8        | 22.0        | 13.2        |
| Punjab                | 8.6        | 30.3        | 21.7        |
| Rajasthan             | 8.8        | 21.7        | 12.9        |
| Sikkim                | 6.3        | 37.4        | 31.1        |
| Tamil Nadu            | 11.0       | 48.6        | 37.6        |



|                  |             |             |             |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Telangana        | 9.6         | 35.7        | 26.1        |
| Uttar Pradesh    | 7.1         | 25.9        | 18.8        |
| Uttaranchal      | 12.3        | 36.3        | 24.0        |
| West Bengal      | 8.3         | 18.7        | 10.4        |
| <b>All India</b> | <b>11.3</b> | <b>25.8</b> | <b>16.8</b> |

Source: MHRD- AISHE and UGC Reports (various Years)

#### 4.4 Enrolment across Various Social Groups

The higher education is not spread out properly in India. There are many inequalities in respect of enrolment across caste groups. The total estimated students’ enrolment is 4.13 Crores in 2020-21, the Scheduled Caste students’ enrolment is 14.8 percent. The Scheduled Tribe’s category constitutes only 5.4 percent. The Backward Castes enrolment is 35.2 percent while it is 44.6 % for Other Castes (Tables 6).

**Table 6: Enrolment across Various Social Groups in Indian Higher Education 2020-21**

| Social Groups | Scheduled Castes | Scheduled Tribes | Backward Castes | Other Castes | All   |
|---------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------|-------|
| Enrolment %   | 14.8             | 5.4              | 35.2            | 44.6         | 100.0 |

Source: MHRD- AISHE Report-2020-21

The proportion of male students’ enrollment in the HE is 52.1% and that of female students is 47.9%. The difference in enrollment between male and female students among all caste groups is about 5%. The enrollment of male students of all castes does not have much difference and similar is the situation with female students (Table 7).

**Table 7: Enrolment – Gender Wise in Higher Education 2020-21**

| Social Groups     | Male        | Female      | All          |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Scheduled Castes  | 52.5        | 47.5        | 100.0        |
| Scheduled Tribes  | 52.3        | 47.7        | 100.0        |
| Backward Castes   | 52.0        | 48.0        | 100.0        |
| Other Castes      | 52.5        | 47.5        | 100.0        |
| <b>All Castes</b> | <b>52.1</b> | <b>47.9</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source: MHRD-AISHE-2020-21.

Already it has been stated that the gender gap has been declining over a period of time. Similarly, the gender gap among different social groups does not show any difference. From this, it is inferred that earlier socially disadvantaged sections had many girls’ dropouts at school level and low literacy rates. The successive governments in the country have given priority for girl education and supported this through the implementation of various welfare programmes and schemes. All these have uplifted the female participation of the marginalized sections in HE and thus are now on par with other social groups in terms of enrollment. It is considered as a good omen for the inclusive development of HE in the country.

#### 4.5 Students’ Enrolment: Level and Course Wise

On the whole 4.13 Crores of students enrolled themselves for the HE during 2020-21 in India. Out of them, the female proportion was 47.6 percent of the total enrolment. In the total enrolment of the students in higher education in India, regular mode of students are 88.9 percent and distance mode of students constitutes about 11.1 percent (Table.8). The highest proportion (79.2 percent) of students is enrolled in Undergraduate level programmes and 11.2 percent of students are under post Graduate Programmes. Just only 0.4 percent of students are enrolled for Ph.Ds. Certificate and Integrated courses.

**Table 8: Enrolment at Various Levels in Higher Education In India: 2020-21**

| Levels of Education   | Students               | Women | Regular Mode |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-------|--------------|
| Ph.Ds.                | 0.4                    | 41.0  | 99.9         |
| M.Phils.              | 0.1                    | 58.9  | 100.0        |
| Post-Graduation       | 11.2                   | 53.6  | 71.7         |
| Under Graduation      | 79.2                   | 46.7  | 90.9         |
| Post-Graduate Diploma | 0.7                    | 46.2  | 70.1         |
| Diploma               | 7.4                    | 29.6  | 95.9         |
| Certificate           | 0.5                    | 56.1  | 69.3         |
| Integrated            | 0.5                    | 40.4  | 99.9         |
| All                   | 100.0<br>(4,13,80,713) | 48.2  | 89.6         |

Source: MHRD-AISHE-2020-21

Note: Figures in the Bracket indicate total enrolment in higher Education





**Table 9: Students Enrolment – Course Wise in 2020-21 (%)**

| Course             | Students                         |                                      | % of Females |             |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|
|                    | 2002-03                          | 2020-21                              | 2002-03      | 2020-21     |
| Arts               | 45.1                             | 35.2                                 | 45.4         | 54.8        |
| Commerce           | 18.0                             | 13.2                                 | 36.7         | 49.2        |
| Science            | 19.9                             | 16.9                                 | 40.2         | 49.8        |
| Education          | 1.4                              | 4.0                                  | 50.6         | 64.3        |
| Engineering        | 7.5                              | 16.2                                 | 22.3         | 28.6        |
| Law                | 3.2                              | 1.6                                  | 20.8         | 34.5        |
| Management         | -                                | 3.4                                  | -            | 39.5        |
| Medicine           | 3.3                              | 4.0                                  | 44.7         | 60.6        |
| Computer Science   | -                                | 3.3                                  | -            | 46.3        |
| Agriculture        | 0.6                              | 0.8                                  | 20.2         | 28.3        |
| Veterinary Science | 0.2                              | 0.2                                  | 16.9         | 32.8        |
| Others             | 0.9                              | 1.2                                  | 37.9         | 46.3        |
| <b>All</b>         | <b>100.0</b><br><b>(9227833)</b> | <b>100.0</b><br><b>(4,13,80,713)</b> | <b>40.1</b>  | <b>48.1</b> |

Source: UGC Report 2003-04 and MHRD -AISHE-2020-21

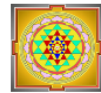
Note: Figures in the brackets indicate total number of students

The distribution of students’ enrolment across courses, out of total students’ enrolment, 35.2 percent of students were enrolled in the Arts courses, 16.9 percent of students in the Faculty of Sciences and 13.2 percent of students in the Faculty of Commerce ( Table 9). Thus, more than 65 percent of students enrolled themselves in the non-professional courses while the remaining 35 percent of students opted for professional courses. Out of the students’ enrolment in professional courses, 16.2 percent of them enrolled in Engineering/Technology courses, four percent each in Medical Courses and education (Teacher Training courses). Though agriculture is the main occupation in India, only 0.8 percent of students enrolled themselves in Agricultural Courses and 0.1 percent in Veterinary Sciences.

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