# Higher Education in India: a Socio-Historical Journey from Ancient Period to 2006-07

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## ABSTRACT

The socio-historical journey of higher education in India has evolved through different periods, viz., ancient, mediaeval, colonial, post independence and contemporary. In this journey, a system of English education takes a position in higher institutions of learning. The institutions of higher learning are considered the most important agency of social change, social transformation, and entire development of the country. In fact, this journey of higher education started with an ancient system of education in the Vedic period in which two types of educational system were present there, viz., the Brahminical and the Buddhist systems of education. The Brahminical system of education was regulated by religious values, while the Buddhist form of education was 'secular' in nature. But the major change in Indian higher education took place through the initiatives of British rulers that made an impact both in positive and negative ways. At that time, the indigenous system of education received a severe setback as the British system created a new class which served the British rulers.

At present, the number of institutions in India is more than four times the total number of institutions in both the USA and Europe. However, the average size of an Indian higher education institution in terms of enrolment numbers is much smaller (500-600) to that of Europe and the USA (3,000-4,000) and China (8,000-9,000). The Knowledge Commission recently advocated the need of expansion of Universities and Colleges in India. Therefore, this paper focuses mainly on the socio-

historical development of higher education in India from ancient period through to the present. It examines the pattern of increase of educational institutions, faculty positions, and student enrolment.

## Introduction

Higher education is not a recent phenomenon for India; it has had long historical roots through which a modern system of education has been evolved. The institutions of higher education are recognized as the most important agency of social change involved in the human resource development of the country. The socio-historical journey of higher education has been started with an ancient system of education in the Vedic period. In the ancient period, there were two types of educational system, *viz* the Brahminical and the Buddhist systems of education. The Brahminical system of education was regulated by religious values while the Buddhist form of education was 'secular' in nature. However, a marked differentiation occurred in the educational system with the arrival of the British educational system. The indigenous system of education received a severe setback as the British system created a new class which served the British rulers. Presently, the Indian higher education system is the largest in the world in terms of the number of institutions. India has 17,973 institutions of higher learning (as compared to around 2,500 in China). The number of institutions in India is more than four times the total number of institutions in both the USA and Europe. The Chinese higher education system is the largest in the world in terms of enrolment, catering for nearly 23 million students. The second largest is the USA followed by India. However, the average size of an Indian higher education institution in terms of enrolment is much smaller (500-600) compared to that of Europe and USA (3,000-4,000) and China (8,000-9,000) (Agarwal 2006, p. 5). The Knowledge Commission recently advocated the need for expansion of Universities and Colleges in India and it is now estimated that, despite having the largest number of higher education institutions, India needs at least 3,000 more universities each with the capacity to enrol not less than 10,000 students to meet the increasing demand for higher learning (Bhargava 2006).

## Higher Education in Ancient India

The nature of higher education in Ancient India was considered as religious. The basic religions were Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Religion-based education in Ancient India had an outstanding role in creating, transforming and transmitting knowledge to the people in society. In Ancient India, there were two broad trends in educational systems - Brahminical education and Buddhist education. (Ghosh 2001, pp. 12-14).

## *Brahminical Education*

Brahminical education developed in the Vedic period (Jha 1991, p.1). Rigvedic education was concerned with an attempt to preserve contemporary religious texts through oral transmission. The Rigvedic educational institutions consisted of small domestic schools run by a teacher (rishi) who admitted pupils for instructions in the literature in its possession. Women were admitted to full religious rites and educational facilities. In fact, women enjoyed equal status with men in all spheres of education during the Rigvedic period. The later Vedic period saw continuity as well as some changes in the educational system. Jha (1991, p. 2) has described the three types of educational institutions which existed in the later Vedic period (B.C. 1000-B.C.600). Firstly, there was the usual system under which the teacher, as a settled householder, admitted to his instruction pupils of a tender age. These pupils left their home for study after the upanayana or initiation ceremony. Secondly, debating circles and parishads were other types of institutions where students discussed various aspects of knowledge. The third type of institution was represented by conferences summoned by kings in which the representatives of various schools participated.

The later Vedic period witnessed the crystallization of the varna system which was monopolised by the twice born castes in general and by Brahmans in particular. Women still managed to have same influence in the sphere of education but they were increasingly relegated to the background. In this period, as Jha (1991, p. 1) points out, the number of types of priests increased from seven to sixteen. Higher education was subservient to the requirements of priesthood and ritualistic religion. The external, material and mechanical aspects of worship and sacrifice became the principal subjects of study. This was before the Upanishads but the fact remains that usually in the days of the four Vedas, the teachers were all Brahmins and came from the priestly class (Ghosh 2001, p. 36).

The Post-Vedic Early classical Period (600-300B.C.) saw the elaboration of rituals related to education. For instance, the pupils' first introduction to education was made by the performance of a ceremony called *Vidyarambha* (Jha, 1991 p.2]. Theoretically, all the twice-born castes were allowed to receive education but, in practice, it was monopolised by the Brahmins (Jha, 1991 p.3). Arthashastra (400-300B.C.) details that the studentship of a prince which should continue only up to sixteen years at which age he must marry (Shamasatry, 1929). During this short period, he had to acquire the knowledge of religion, philosophy, agriculture, trade and statecraft. The Sushruta Samihita (1973) also provides details information about medical education.

## *Buddhist Education*

The nature of Buddhist education was religious as well as secular. The most important aspect of Buddhist education was that it remained open to all persons irrespective of castes except slaves, army-deserters, the disabled and the sick (Jha, 1991 p.3). It grew out of the teachings of the Buddha as classified as Vinaya (monolithic discipline), Sutta (group discourse) and Abhidhamma (works of doctrine) (Ghosh, 2001 p. 54). Buddhist education was centred in monasteries and was in the hands of the monks. In some ways, aspects of these educational institutions can be compared with modern universities.

The curriculum of Buddhist education included what are termed Vinaya, Sutta or Suttanta, and Abhidhamma, together with Suttas and Sutta Vibhanya which were taught orally (Ghosh, 2001 p. 58). A Buddhist text includes numerous disciplines or subjects such as the Lokayata system, Astrology, Witchcraft, the four Vedas and Vedangas, Astronomy, interpretation of omens, the philosophical system of Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya and Vaisheshika, Music, Medicine, Magic, the art of War, poetry, and a number of arts and crafts as well as Arithmetic. In this system of education, the Viharas functioned as residential schools where various groups of students and teacher stayed together. Taxila was the most famous Buddhist seat of higher learning. It was famous especially for the school of Medicine, Law and Military Science which, by midway through the 6th century had acquired a reputation as a great centre of learning, attracting scholars from distant parts of India (Dongerkery, 1997 pp. 1-2). During the reign of Alexander the Great the fame of its philosophers had spread as far as Greece. The students' choice of subjects was not restricted by their caste. For instance, a Brahmin could study Archery and a Kshatriya could study the Vedas. Panini, the renowned Sanskrit Grammarian, and Kautilya, the author of the Arthasastra, were reputed to have studied in Taxila which flourished as a great educational centre until the middle of the 3rd Century A. D.

Banaras, though not as famous as Taxila, was a great centre of learning in the 7th century B. C. It had many learned Brahmin teachers who attracted students from all over India. In Asoka's reign, the Sarnath monastery in the neighborhood of Banaras, attained fame as a centre of learning and had a large number of Buddhist monks. By contrast, as Altekar (1944, p. 111) points out, Banaras did not have an organized, public educational system although the cause of education was promoted by learned Brahmins in an individual capacity.

The universities of Nalanda, Vikramshila and Vallabhi were perhaps the most important universities of ancient India. Nalanda University was an

institution of higher studies situated in Bihar and was known for Buddhist studies, attracting students from China, Nepal, Tibet, and Korea, who went there to study valuable Buddhist manuscripts. The University curriculum included a wide range of subjects such as Brahminical and Buddhist, Sacred and Secular, Philosophical and Practical. It is worth mentioning that the University was run democratically (Jha, 1991 p. 5). The centre at Vallabhi, situated in Gujarat, was a rival to Nalanda. It specialised in Hinayana Buddhism, whereas Nalanda specialized in Mahayana Buddhism. It promoted all branches of higher learning from all types of religious systems. Vikramshila was situated in the present day Bhagalpur district of Bihar. Teaching at Vikaramshila was controlled by a board of eminent teachers and this board also administered the affairs of Nalanda. Other centres of learning included Odantapure and Jagaddala (both Buddhist), Ujjain and Kanchi Ujjain. The latter, the capital of Avanti, was noted for secular learning and specialized in Astronomy and Mathematics (Dongerkery, 1997 pp. 5-6). Kanchi (Kanchipuram) was the greatest centre of Sanskrit learning in South India. Vatsyyayana, the logician who lived in the 4th century A.D., was a Pandit (Scholar) of Kanchi. The great scholar and teacher, Dinnage, is also said to have received his training in Kanchi. In South India, Ghattikas were famous schools of learning.

In Ancient India, the Rigveda was the nucleus of the education system composed orally by the priestly tribes among the Aryans between 1500 and 1000 B.C. It was followed by the composition of three more Vedas - Sama, Yajur and Atharva. The Brahmins had been the advisers and guides of the kings and emperors in their capacity as Purohits, therefore the dominance of the Brahmins was reflected in the creation of a new set of religious scriptures called Brahmanas. Aranyakas and Upanishads were added to the Brahmanas and by 600 BC; they together with the Vedas and their six Vedangas were studied in the Vedic schools by the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaisyas (Ghosh, 2001 p. 157).

On the other hand, for Ancient Indian Sudras in the Aryan society, the study of Vedas was forbidden and they learnt their professional knowledge in agriculture and animal husbandry, spinning and weaving, fine arts and crafts though the expertise of their own families. Buddhism came in the forefront as a challenge to Brahminism, possibly because it offered a simple way to reach salvation. As a result, the Buddhist Viharas did not possess the inherent vitality of the Vedic schools (Ghosh, 2001 p. 158).

However, the greatest contribution of ancient Indian education is its search for the truth, for the knowledge of Atman (individual soul) and the Brahman (supreme soul). As Ghosh (2001, p. 158) writes, "Such search still continues vigorously in the world and often acquires the technical shape of a

satellite around the earth and beyond or the scientific treatise of a philosophical dimension as in Stephen Hawkins 'A Brief History of Times' or in 'Carl Sagan's' popular series, 'Cosmos'". Evidently, India had a very rich tradition of higher education in Ancient times.

## Higher Education in Mediaeval India (9th –Early 18th Century)

The Mediaeval era in the history of India signified a major phase of social and cultural synthesis. In fact, the history of education in Mediaeval India reflects a part of the wider study of the history of society, social history broadly interpreted with politics, economics and religion. The mediaeval state in combination with the various other agencies such as Sufism and Bhakti ideology played a crucial role in the protracted process of integration and co-existence. Despite their diverse religions and cultures, these agencies brought the people together through their common experience in public as well as in private.

Early Indian education and many of its centres continued in the middle ages, but Madrasa emerged as the important centre of education. Thus, the early Indian tradition of learning co-existed with the newly instituted Madrasa, making both continuity and change important features of higher education during the period (Alam, 1991 p. 10). Before describing the Islamic education system, it is worthwhile examining the state of Brahminical (Hindu) and Buddhist learning in India under the Muslim rulers in India.

### *Hindu Learning in Mediaeval India*

It would be erroneous to claim that Hindu learning was confined only to Hindu Kingdoms in Mediaeval India. As Ghosh (2001b, p. 123) writes: "When Islam came to India and settled down to rule the people, many among the Hindus suffering from castes and other disabilities accepted the religion of the prophet Muhammad while many upper class Hindus not only learnt Persian and Arabic to hold important positions in the administration but some of them converted themselves to Islam to do so". Hindus' learning mainly concentrated on the priestly classes who not only served as purohits to the kings but also to their subjects on all social and religious functions including birth, death and marriage.

### *Buddhist Learning*

The Brahminical revival in the early Middle Ages dealt a severe blow to the centrality of the early Buddhist educational institutions such as Taxila and Nalanda (Alam, 1991 p. 10), but the first Islamic invasions under Mahmud left

the temples and Buddhist Vihars in the important cities of Northern India demolished. The Libraries at Nalanda and Vikramshila were burned and the Buddhist monks were put to sword. With the demolition of the Buddhist Vihars, Buddhist learning almost disappeared. However, the various Hindu learning institutions continued to exist despite these threats. For instance, Banaras, Mithila and Nadia became centres of intellectual activities (Ghosh 2001 b, p. 112). In Banaras, the students had to study the Sanskrit language but only the pandit (Brahmins) had the chance to specialise in Sanskrit because this was considered the purest language. Mithila was famous for specialised study in Logic during the Mughal period. Nadia's main claim to fame was its School of Logic. A radical feature of mediaeval Nadia was that the non-Brahmins, including the trading castes, had free access to Sanskrit. Many temple colleges also existed in south India in the early mediaeval period (Alam, 1991 pp. 10-13).

In mediaeval India there were usually three conduits through which knowledge was acquired. These were Maktab, Madrasah and Khangah. While Maktab was a place where elementary education was imparted, higher learning was pursued at a Madrasah and religious education or theology was discussed at a Khangah, the birth place of Sufism or spiritualism in Islam (Ghosh 2001 b, p. 20).

## The Madrasah as a System of Education

By the 11th Century A.D. Madrasahs or colleges had developed as the centres of higher education and learning with a distinctly religious bias. They were primarily theological institutions, providing instruction in language and other secular subjects as a subsidiary activity, and were supported or aided by the government of the day. The Madrasahs were generally attached to mosques in the same way as the Maktabs. The courses of instruction in the Madrasahs included grammar, logic, rhetoric, theology, metaphysics, literature, jurisprudence and science. Some of the Madrasahs enjoyed the status of universities. The medium of instruction was Persian but Arabic was obligatory for all Muslims. In the twelfth century A.D., Lahore became a centre of Muslim learning (Dongerkery 1967, pp. 8-9). Other subjects were also taught such as Agriculture, Accountancy, Astrology and Astronomy, History, Geography, Mathematics, Islamic Law and Jurisprudence and Statecraft or the art of administration (Ghosh, 2001b, p. 22).

By the end of the fifteenth century, the Delhi Sultanate had established their own kingdoms in the regions under their control (Alam, 1991 p. 17). The Mughal rulers (1526-1857) showed a comparatively greater interest in higher education. Zahiruddin Muhammad Babar, the founder of the Mughal Empire, was a scholar of Arabic, Persian and Turkish, and established a Madrasah in the

locality of Azizullah in Jaunpur. Akbar's reign (1556-1605) marks a new epoch for the system of Madrasahs. The most important fact is that Akbar had opened the doors for Hindu students in pursuance of his policy of education based on religious tolerance, to study Sanskrit and Hindu religious scriptures such as the Upanishads (Ghosh, 2001b: p. 22). He also arranged and financed Persian translation of Indian classics and scriptures. By the time of Jahangir (1605-1627), Agra acquired a central position in education in the Mughal Empire (Alam, 1991 p. 13).

The education of girls and women was not neglected in the Mughal period. The fact that Gulbadan Begum, sister of Humayun, wrote the Humayun Nama shows that there were learned women during this period (Dangerkery, 1967 p. 13). Hence, a major achievement of mediaeval intellectuals was that the mediaeval peoples learned to live together. people were educated to ensure a measure of balance between the aspirations and actions of different social groups (Alam, 1991 p. 21).

## Higher Education in Colonial India

The traditional systems of education both among the Hindus and the Muslims were mostly religious and literary in character. They were largely based on ancient religious and philosophical literature of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian. In addition to the Vedas and the Upanishads, the Hindu students specialised in subjects such as Medicine, Surgery, Astronomy, Music, Dancing, Painting, Magic and the art of warfare, while the Muslims studied, in addition to the Koran, Rhetoric, Logic, Law, Euclid, Ptolemy's Astronomy, other branches of natural Philosophy and works on Metaphysics (Dongerkery, 1967 p. 21).

It is generally accepted that the current university system in India is a creation of the British colonialist influence. The East India Company did not make any attempt to impose a western system of education on its Indian subjects for a long time (Basu, 1991 p. 22). English Higher Education in India really began with the establishment of a Hindu College in Calcutta in 1817, the first 'Europeanised' institution of higher learning in the country. In fact, the present system of higher education in India has its roots in Mountstuart Elphinstone's 'minute' of 1823 in which he pressed for the establishment of schools for teaching English and the European Sciences. Subsequently, Macaulay, in his 'minute' of 1835 stated that the objective of the British government ought to be "the promotion of European literature and science amongst the natives of India." But from 1813 to 1835, there was continual controversy between the orientalists and the western school. The orientalists had the upper hand so no government support was available for English teaching (Power, 1995 p. 38) hence, it had to be undertaken by private enterprise. Two conflicting influences were perceptible in the earliest efforts to

introduce western learning to India, the influence of a semi–rationalist school concerned to foster secular training, and sympathetic with corresponding movements in England, and the missionaries for whom English Education was mainly important as a vehicle for religious teaching (Report of the Calcutta University Commission). As a result, in January 1835 when the rival pleas of the two groups were submitted to the Governor-General in Council for decision, Macaulay, as a member of the Council, recorded his opinion in the Minute in the following words (Dongerkery, 1967 p. 2):

> To sum up what I have said, I think it we are not fettered by the Act of Parliament of 1813; that we are not fettered by any pledge, express or implied; that we are free to employ our funds as we choose; that we ought to employ them in teaching what is best worth knowing; that English is better worth knowing than Sanskrit or Arabic; that neither as the language of law, nor as the language of religion has the Sanskrit or Arabic any peculiar claim to our engagement that it is possible to make natives of this country good English scholars, and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed.

Macaulay reflects the view that English education was necessary for the Indian Higher education system. On the other hand, McCully (1940) reported that Indians increasingly demanded an English style of higher education because it provided prestigious jobs in the British bureaucracy or in the growing commercial sector of the economy. Hence, the British themselves were convinced that they needed a class of educated Indians at the secondary level posts in the Government and to act as intermediaries between the Raj and the Indian population. Similar views have been expressed by Basu (1991, p. 22) - that English education was wanted by the Indian urban elite, not only for employment and careers but also because it spread the western secular education's special role in the social and political regeneration of India towards self-rule. The elite were the beneficiaries of this system and have had a vested interest in its continuation.

The idea of establishing universities in India on the model of the London University (i.e. universities of the affiliating type), was first promoted in Sir Charles Wood's Dispatch of 1854 which has been described as the Magna Carta of English education in India (Power, 1995 p. 38). It described the aim of education in India as the diffusion of Arts, Science, Philosophy and Literature of Europe, and the study of Indian Languages. These recommendations also included Law, Medicine and Engineering and were followed by the establishment of universities at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857 following the model of the University of London.

Both Macaulay's Minute of 1835 and Wood's Dispatch of 1854 laid down the basic objectives for the development of English Education in India. Moreover, Curzon's University reform represents a climax in the official attitude against the spread of higher education which had been developing since

the mid 1850s. Curzon's Government was the first to apply a check to free enterprise in education. It introduced a system of control which extended to all grades of institutions from primary schools to universities (Mishra, 1961 p. 288). In fact, Curzon shifted the emphasis from the education of few to that of the many.

Twenty-five years after the establishment of the first three universities, there had been an increase in the number of colleges from 27 to 75 (Power, 1995 p. 38). There was a demand for more universities and by 1923, there were 12. There was a steady growth in subsequent years and by 1943 a need was felt for a comprehensive plan of educational development. The Sergent Report of 1944 was the first attempt to formulate a national Policy on Education in India (Basu, 1991 p. 30). It pointed out the failure of making university education relevant to community needs and suggested means for improvement. However, by the time India became independent, in 1947, it had 18 universities and total student strength of a little less than 0.2 million.

In brief, higher education in colonial India remained concentrated in and around the cities and towns and was more widespread among men than women and amongst the higher castes. It would have been almost impossible to find a rural scheduled caste or scheduled tribe woman studying in a college. There were serious inequalities in the colonial system of higher education.

## Higher Education in the Post-Independence Period

Higher education is the basis of future innovation and progress. Independent India inherited ownership of its system of higher education from the colonialists, but the need for the reconstruction of education was felt long before independence. However, it was only after independence that the national leadership had an independent opportunity to tackle the problem. Nehru's remarks to the educational conference of 1948 (Ghosh, 2000a p. 178) very strongly expressed the view that

> Whenever conferences were called to form a plan for education in India, the tendency, as a rule, was to maintain the existing system with slight modification. This must not happen now. Great changes have taken place in the county and the educational system must also be in keeping with them. The entire basis of education must be revolutionized

What Nehru was emphasising was that the new education of the post-independence period must be made relevant to the new national goals of independent India. These national goals are found in the Indian Constitution. These national goals are: (a) Democracy, (b) Secularism, (c) elimination of poverty, (d) to create a socialist society, and (5) to create national integration (Naik, 1965 pp. 78-80). The nationalist sprit that had brought about the

independence of the country became the motivating force behind a great number of changes that were initiated in the country. Nationalist leaders, faced with the socio-economic reality of India, were all firm in the belief that education had a revolutionary task to fulfill. The Radhakrishnan Commission of 1948 envisaged that as follows:

> The academic problem has assumed new shape; we have now a wider conception of the duties and responsibility of universities. They have to provide leadership in politics and administration, the professions, industry and commerce. They have to meet the increasing demand for every type of higher education, literacy and scientific, technical and professional (knowledge). They must enable the country to attain, in as short a time as possible, freedom from want disease and ignorance, by the application and development of scientific and technical knowledge

> (Government of India (1950), Report of University Education Commission).

As Chair of the Commission, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan recommended the reconstruction of university education as essential to meet the demand for scientific, technical and other human power needed for the socio-economic development of the country. For this, the Commission has gave the following recommendations (Ghosh, 2000a p. 178-179):

> Covering all aspects of university education in India, they emphasized the 10+2 structure at the pre-university stage, correction of the "extreme specialization" in the courses, development of research to advance the frontiers of knowledge and of professional education in agriculture, commerce, law, medicine, education, science and technology including certain new areas such as business and public administration and industrial relations and suggested reform of the examination system by assessment of the student's work throughout the years and introduction of courses on the central problems of the philosophy of religion. They also emphasized the importance of student's welfare by means of scholarships and stipends, hostel, library and medical facilities and suggested that they should be familiar with three languages--regional, federal and English at the university stage and that English be replaced as early as possible by an Indian language. The Commission was also in favour of the idea of setting up rural universities to meet the need of rural reconstruction in industry, agriculture and various walks of life. The universities should be constituted as autonomous bodies to meet the new responsibilities, (Central) University Grants Commission be established for allocating grants, and finally, university education be placed in the concurrent list

The report was considered by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) in 1950 and most of the recommendations were accepted, although recommendations relating to the inclusion of Education in the concurrent list were rejected. The University Grants Commission came into being and assumed a most important role in the co-coordination and development of universities in India (Ghosh, 1983 p. 35). A number of the recommendations of the Radhakrishnan Commission have been implemented including the

expansion of women's education at all levels. In 1950-51 there were only 43 women enrolled in university courses but by 1976-77 they represented 25.8% of the total enrolment for higher education.

Right from the time of the first five-year plan, major changes prompted reform of the university system. The third five-year plan observed that: "Education is the most important single factor in achieving rapid development and technological progress and in creating a new social order based on values of freedom, social justice and equal opportunities" (The Third Five Year Plan, *Planning Commission*, Government of India, New Delhi, 1961, p. 573).

There have been various commissions and committees appointed by the Government of India and the University Grants Commission from time to time. The Kothari Commission was one of them.

## *Kothari Commission (1964-66)*

The most important document on Education in India is the report of the Education Commission under the chairmanship of Dr. D. S. Kothari, then Chairman, University Grants Commission, to advise the Government of India "[o]n the national pattern of education and on the general principles and policies for the development of education at all stages and in all aspects.*"*[Report of The Education Commission (1964-66): Education and National Development, Government of India, New Delhi, Part I and Part II. 1985].

The report made very important recommendations covering all aspects for the future development of national education. The Report emphasised the need for a built-in flexibility in the system of education, and for the necessity of education to be science-based and coherent with Indian culture and values (Power, 1995 p. 39). It also visualised education as an instrument for the nation's progress, security and welfare. It advocated far-reaching reforms:

> Indian education needs a drastic reconstruction, almost a revolution. We need to introduce work experience as an integral element of general education to improve quality of teachers at all levels to strengthen centres of advanced studies and strive to attain in some of our universities, at least, higher international standards; to lay special emphasis on the combination of teaching and research; and to pay particular attention to education and research in agriculture and allied sciences (Report of The Education Commission (1964-66): Education and National Development, Government of India, New Delhi, Part I and Part II. 1985).

The report stressed that there had to be:

- a radical improvement in the quality and standard of higher education and research

- expansion of higher education to meet manpower requirements of the Nation and the rising social ambitions and expectations of the people, and

- improvement of university organization and administration.

The Commission recommended special measures for major universities to ensure quality of research development of other universities and affiliated colleges, improvement in teaching and evaluation by re-organisation of courses and examinations, opportunities for part-time education, and special attention to women's education. As far as the implementation of the Kothari Commission is concerned, the recommendations were discussed in both the Houses of Parliament and there emerged the first national policy in independent India in the form of a resolution in July 1968 (Ghosh, 2000a pp. 183-184). Perhaps not surprisingly, the recommendations of the Kothari Commission were progressively diluted at every stage of the discussions, yet the policy that was born out of them remained the basic framework for all governmental action despite an attempt by the Janata Government to revise it in 1979. The new education policy appeared in May 1986.

## The National Policy on Education 1986

The policy aims at not only developing human power for serving the economy but also at developing crucial values (Power, 1995 p. 40). The policy envisages education for equality and an understanding of the diverse socio-cultural systems of the people while motivating the younger generations towards international co-operation and peaceful co-existence (Ghosh, 2000a p. 184). As regards higher education, the documentation informing the policy expressed great concern regarding the conditions of the colleges and universities so the policy emphasises consolidation and expansion of facilities. In fact the policy indicates a major thrust in higher education (Mukhopadhyay, 1999 pp. 54-55) incorporating:

a. expansion of higher education

b. improvement of the quality of higher education, and

c. increased relevance and job orientation in higher education.

It is evident that much thought has been given to identifying the problems faced by higher education in India and to formulating policies and programs for their mitigation. However, India has not been very successful in implementing the reforms. Valiathan (1993) expresses regret that knowing what is needed but not committing to achieving it has cast shadow on India's national

endeavours. Altbach (1993 pp. 3-20) also concludes that "the complexity of the social context in which higher education exists (in India) very likely makes systematic reforms impossible."

## Growth Trends

In ancient times, Indian universities were renowned seats of higher learning, attracting students from far and wide. During the colonial era, the rulers consciously did not use education for sustainable development. The first three universities were set up in 1857 but it was another 30 years before the fourth was established and yet another 29 years to before the fifth and sixth emerged in 1916. These universities were established on the pattern of the University of London, thus, they were basically affiliating, examining and regulating bodies. The existing colleges engaged in teaching and learning were affiliated to these universities. For several decades, only colleges continued to offer the degree courses. It was only around 1920 that post-graduate teaching and research departments began to be established.

Since independence, the number of colleges and universities has increased significantly. From 1950-51 to 2006-07, while the number of universities has increased from 28 to 369, the number of colleges has grown from 578 to 18,064. During this period, enrolment in higher education has registered a steep increase from around 0.174 million to 11.028 million. The number of teachers has also gone up from around 24,000 in 1950-51 to 4, 880,000 in 2006-07. It is evident from data that during this period, universities and colleges in the country have grown approximately 13 and 32 times respectively. As of March 31, 2007, the country had 20 central universities, 222 state universities, 109 deemed to be universities (an institution other than a university, working at a very high standard in specific area of study, can be declared by the Government of India on the advice of University Grants Commission as an institution deemed to be university. Institutions deemed to be universities enjoy academic status and privileges of universities), and 13 institutions of national importance (Institutions of National Importance established under the Institutes of Technology Act, 1961. Their main objective is to impart world-class training in engineering and technology, to conduct research in the relevant fields, and for the advancement of learning and dissemination of knowledge. These institutes are also contributing significantly to education and research in basic sciences and humanities) established by Central Legislation and five institutions established under the State Legislature Act [UGC 2006-07]. The growth trends in higher education may be seen in the table 1 given below:

**Table 1: All-India Growth of Institutions, Enrolment and Teaching Faculty at Higher Education Level, 1950-51 to 2006-07**

| Year | Universities* | Colleges | Enrolment@ ('000) | Faculty@ ('000) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1950-51 | 28 | 578 | 174 | 24 |
| 1960-61 | 45 | 1,819 | 557 | 62 |
| 1970-71 | 93 | 3,227 | 1,956 | 190 |
| 1980-81 | 123 | 4,738 | 2,752 | 244 |
| 1990-91 | 184 | 5,748 | 4,925 | 271 |
| 2000-01 | 266 | 11,146 | 8,399 | 395 |
| 2006-07 | 369 | 18,064 | 11,028 | 488 |

*Notes: * Universities include Central, State and deemed to be universities as also institutions of national importance established both by the central and state governments.*

*@ Annual Reports of the UGC, various years.*

The decadal growth in the number of universities and institutions was much higher in the 1950s and 1960s, primarily because of the relatively small number of such institutions, since planned expansion of higher education began after independence. In the 1970s and 1980s, growth of institutions of higher learning was relatively slow; it picked up in the 1990s onwards (Figure 1). This happened because of the increased demand for higher education and the participation of the private sector, particularly in technical and professional education.

However, this rapid expansion hides the story of the stark inequality that prevails in access to higher education across states and union territories. While higher education institutions are nearly absent in Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Lakshadweep, 14 states and union territories have much higher levels of access to higher education compared to the national average (12.17) in terms of the number of institutions available per 100,000 population in the age group 18-23 in 2003-04. While Pondicherry has around 27, West Bengal has

the lowest level of access with only around 5 institutions per 100,000 population in 2003-04 (GoI 2006 Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Number of Higher Education Institutions Available per 100,000 Population (18-23 years) in States and Union Territories, 2003-04**
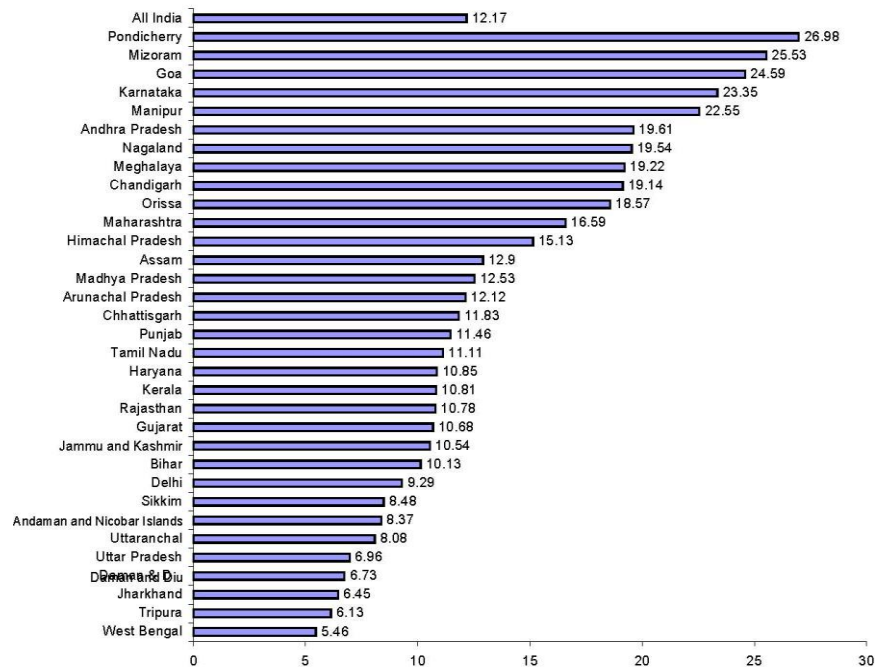


*Institutions Available per 100,000 Populations (18-23 Age Groups)*

*Source: GoI (2006), Selected Educational Statistics, 2003-04.*

Access to engineering and technical colleges is relatively high in Andhra Pradesh (2.59 institutions per 100,000 population in the age group 18-23) followed by Goa (2.34), Karnataka (1.86), Kerala (1.81), Chandigarh (1.59), Maharashtra (1.56), Sikkim (1.41) and Tamil Nadu (1.27) (GoI 2006). These states and union territories also have a high concentration of medical colleges per lakh population. It may be pertinent to mention that such an indicator is crude one, for access to higher and professional education is largely determined by household demand and the learning ability of individual students. Nevertheless, looking from the supply perspective, this indicator provides a fair understanding of the spatial distribution of opportunities.

## Growth Trends in Enrolment

The total enrolment in the higher education system (excluding distance education) has increased from 0.17 million in 1950-51 to 11.02 million in 2006-07 (Table 1). During the period 1950-51 and 2006-07, while total enrolment at higher education level has increased 15.3 times, the total number of teachers has increased 20.3 times (Table 1). Nearly 87% of students in the higher education system are enrolled in the affiliated colleges. In fact, more than 90% of graduate and 65% of post-graduate students are enrolled in affiliated colleges. It is also revealing that only 0.65% of students in higher education institutions are engaged in research (GoI 2006).

An analysis of growth trends in higher education since 1950-51 reveals that the average annual growth rates of institutions, enrolment and teachers were very high in the 1950s and 1960s partly because of the slender base in 1950-51 and also because of fast expansion of the system (Table 1). The 1970s saw the lowest growth rate of institutions and enrolment. Thereafter, the average annual growth rate of universities and enrolment saw an increase again from the 1980s. It declined in the 1990s and registered an upward trend after 2000-01. The hike in the average annual growth rate of institutions after 2000-01 could be attributed to the participation of the private sector, particularly in professional education. The growth rate of teachers was an all-time low (1.1 per cent) in the 1980s, since when it increased consistently.

Although the overall demand for higher education in India is increasing, there are wide variations in GER (Gross Enrolment Rate) across states and UTs (Figure 2). The GER at the higher education level range is as low as 4.33% in Nagaland and as high as 28.68 per cent in Chandigarh. The GER is less than 5% in Jammu and Kashmir and Nagaland, less than 7% in Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Sikkim and less than 10% in 14 states namely, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Mizoram, Orissa, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Keeping in view the increasing demand for skilled labor in the emerging knowledge society, the CABE Committee in its report of 2005 has recommended that it would be necessary to provide for a substantial increase in the GER, perhaps in the range of about 20% in the next 15 to 20 years, by doubling the existing capacity. This would also call for provision of specifically targeted interventions in states where the GER is very low (Prakash 2007, p. 3252).

**Figure 2: GER in Higher Education in Major States and Union Institutions, Teachers and Enrolment in India, Territories in India, 2002-03 1950-51 to 2004-05**
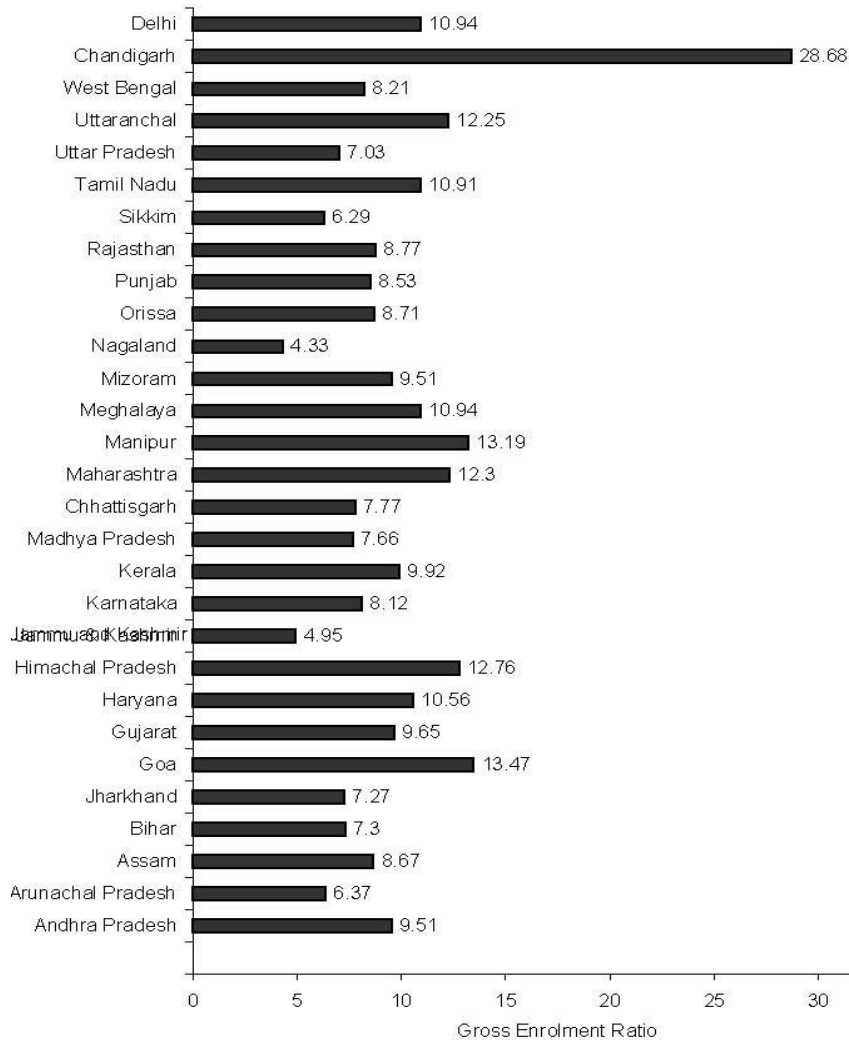


*Source: Anandkrishnan (2004).*

Another point of analysis is the representation of students in different streams. Here, the major fact is that almost 2 out of every 10 students were in science courses. The ratio for commerce has decreased from 21.9% in 1995-96 to 17.99% in 2002-03. On the whole, 84% of total enrolment was in the three faculties namely, arts, science and humanities in 2002-03 while the remaining

67

16% were in the professional courses. Enrolment in engineering and technology accounted for only 7.5% of the total enrolment. In a country that depends on agriculture and allied occupations, enrolment in agriculture was just 0.6% and in veterinary science, it was a miniscule, 0.16% (Table 2). It can also be seen in Table 2 that as against 2002-03, there is not much change in the distribution of enrolment across the faculty in 2004-05.

**Table 2: Faculty-wise Enrolment in Higher Education in India, 2002-03 and 2004-05**

| SI. | Faculty | Enrolment, 2003-03 | Percentage to Total 2002-03 | Enrolment, 2004-05* | Percentage to Total 2004-05 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.** | Arts | 4158606 | 45.07 | 4729048 | 45.12 |
| **2.** | Science | 1834493 | 19.88 | 2142325 | 20.44 |
| **3.** | Commerce/ Management | 1660238 | 17.99 | 1885539 | 17.99 |
| **4.** | Education | 132572 | 1.43 | 154071 | 1.47 |
| **5.** | Engineering/ technology | 692087 | 7.50 | 754635 | 7.20 |
| **6.** | Medicine | 300669 | 3.25 | 330153 | 3.15 |
| **7.** | Agriculture | 55367 | 0.60 | 61838 | 0.59 |
| **8.** | Veterinary science | 14765 | 0.16 | 15721 | 0.15 |
| **9.** | Law | 298291 | 3.23 | 319671 | 3.05 |
| **10.** | Others | 80745 | 0.88 | 88041 | 0.84 |
| | Total | 9227833 | 100.00 | 10481042 | 100.00 |

*Note:*Estimated.*

*Source: UGC, Annual Reports, 2003-04 and 2004-05*

## Share of Private Sector

The processes of globalization and liberalization made a tremendous degree of impact on the privatisation and commercialisation of higher education not only on the international front but also in India. In recent years there has been an increasing trend both in the number of private higher education institutions and

in enrolments. In 2000-01, private unaided institutions constituted 42.6% of the total number of higher education institutions. This increased to 63.21% in 2005-06 (UGC 2006). Similarly, the share of enrolment in private unaided higher education institutions has risen from 32.89% in 2000-01 to 51.53% in 2005-06 (Figure3).

**Figure 3: Share of Private Sector in Higher Education in India**
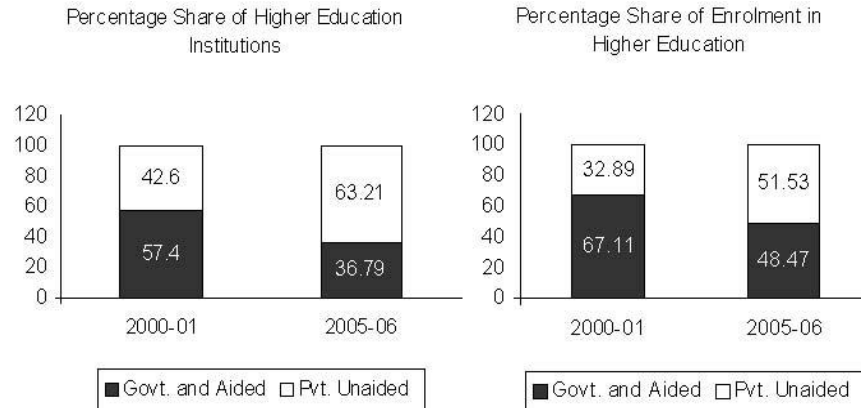


*Source: Anandkrishnan (2006).*

## Concluding Remarks

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, we come to the point that Higher education in India has been a complete socio-historical journey from tradition to modernity as represented in terms of ancient period to 2007, which marked the 60th anniversary of Indian Independence. In fact, higher education in ancient India, perhaps except in north-east India, had a glorious form of education based on Buddhist social virtues and Brahminical Hindu social order. It may be remembered here that, in the absence of a united political India, there had existed a multi-cultural federal polity based on ancient pluralistic norms. One of the defects of the ancient cultural India was that higher education had been confined only to the upper castes, particularly the Brahmins of the country. There had prevailed various regional identities, historical legacies, dominant values as cherished by Lord Buddha, Lord Mahavira, the great-emperor Asoka and the great poet Kalidas in ancient India. In Mediaeval India, one may find the existence of Madrasahs evolved and developed by Muslims scholars under the guidance and supervision of Islamic rulers, particularly under the Mughal Empire. Colonial India witnessed the progress in the evaluation and development of India's education system, though these developments cannot be treated as a uniform pattern of development in the fold of Indian society. British administration in India, beginning from Macaulay's policies of education,

introduced a Western model of education with an aim of creating a professional class which could fulfill their needs. As a result, modern India witnessed a process of modernization, and westernization leading to new waves of socio-politico-cultural changes based on class structure. In the post-independent India, the new leadership lead by Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel moved to the integration of Indian states, organization of provinces and finally the new leadership sponsored the modernization of India's education system based on modern, western social ethos and legacies. However, it cannot be denied that, despite 60 years of India's independence, India still suffers from different kinds of discrimination based on caste, class, gender, religion, region and language not only in higher education but also at other levels of education. There remains a need to re-examine and implement different policies and programs of government in more pragmatic ways so that the Dr. Ambedkar's vision of liberty, equality and fraternity can be materialized into action.

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