**FACULTY FAIRNESS AND INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: MOTIVATED, ENERGIZED AND CAPABLE**

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**ABSTRACT**

The higher education division in India has experienced an unprecedented expansion in the recent decades. It is thus necessary to address the following question: How have the benefits accruing from the massive expansion in higher education been shared among different social groups? Based on experimental evidence, this paper argues that while admittance to higher education has improved across all segments of the population thanks to progressive state policies of confirmatory actions, the rate of sequence has varied, resulting in widening of regional inequalities and persisting socio-economic inequalities.

Furthermore, admittance to elite institutions and study programmes such as in the fields of science and engineering is controlled to those from the most fortunate backgrounds. The prevalence of inter-group inequalities in entrée to opportunities for pursuing higher education, in turn, determines employment outcomes, earnings, and social inequalities among the subsequent generations. Achievements in ensuring equity in access are further over-shadowed by the unfavourable conditions associated with the academic progress and success practiced by students from the destitute groups inside the higher education institutions and campuses. The incidence of a non-inclusive campus culture and the relative ineptness of institutional mechanisms to address diversity result in inconsistent performances, and poor academic achievement and labour market outcomes for students from the needy groups. It is argued that favourable public policies and institutional strategies can help equalise opportunities for pursuing higher education and promote equity in student learning and labour market outcomes. What is emphasised at the institutional level is the need for devising strategies to address diversity and consequently develop socially multiplicity inclusive higher education campuses in India.

**Keywords**: empirical evidence, prevalence, inconsistent performances, inequalities, mechanisms.

**INTRODUCTION**

The idea of inclusive growth is based on the notion of equality of opportunity. Equality of chance demands that admirable students from all social groups are provided sufficient opportunities for self-development. The main bases of prohibiting in India are region, religion, caste, gender, economic disparities, and disabilities. Therefore, strategies for achieving inclusive growth unavoidably need to include affirmative policies targeting the socially disadvantaged, and marginalised, economically poor, and people with disabilities.

The progress made in any society requirements to be assessed on the basis of the distribution of benefits among different social groups for assessing the tastiness of growth and development. India has made considerable progress in reducing poverty and improving the quality of life for its people. The economic and social indicators of development in India have shown substantial improvement. There has been an boost in the per capita income levels and life expectancy, and a decline in the share of people below the poverty line, fertility rates, and infant mortality rates.

Education has been one of the involved interventions for civilizing access to participation in economic activities and the social well-being of the people. Entrée to education has improved at all levels and most children born in this century are enrolled in schools. Ironically, however, these worthy achievements are accompanied by widening income inequalities and persisting social inequalities.

**Equity and Enclosure in Higher Education**

The turn of this century was characterised by growth in economies across the world. However, it was less predictable that this positive economic growth was accompanied by widening economic and social inequalities. Studies have shown that human capital is the single most important factor contributing to faster economic growth (Engelbrecht, 2003). It can be argued that in the current context, the unequal allocation of opportunities for developing human capital can be an important source of inequalities. Therefore, promoting quicker growth of higher education among the destitute sections of the population is a necessary condition for ensuring equity in the future. The development of the education system is expected to lead to greater insertion as compared to a parallel system that is not inclusive and not growing. For example, empirical evidence shows (Shavit, Arum and Gamoran, 2007) that expansion may be accompanied by widening inequalities when the benefits of expansion are shared by the rich. When expansion is accompanied by no change in inequality indicators, both the rich and the poor benefit; when expansion is accompanied by a reduction in inequality indicators, the poor benefit more than the rich. On the basis of these situations, it can be argued that in an unequal society such as India, there is need for a higher rate of progression for the disadvantaged classes in order to neutralise the existing inequalities in admittance to higher education. The policies to improve access need to focus on achieving an accelerated rate of growth of higher education for the disadvantaged groups. Strategies focusing on equity in development are driven more by a pledge to democracy and social justice rather than by narrow economic objectives. Democratic societies are, in general, less forbearing to all forms of inequalities and the unequal condition of opportunities for facilitating progress in life. Further, the public good nature of knowledge (Samuelson, 1954; Stiglitz, 1999) and institutions producing knowledge demands progressive State policies and enhanced pubic investment in higher education. It would also be desirable for the State to fund the upward demands of an expanding higher education sector. However, the fiscal constraints faced by the State may not permit it to allocate adequate funds to the sector. Inequalities in higher education are influenced by inequalities in the preceding levels of education. In a country where basic and secondary education facilities are not equally distributed, it is very difficult to ensure equality of opportunity in higher education. Higher education is offered only to those who have completed the secondary level of education, and the existing inequalities in secondary education may be reflected in the higher education sector too. On the other hand, countries where secondary education is universal, as is the case in most of the developed countries, equity in right to use to higher education may be more easily achieved.

**INEQUALITIES IN ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA**

Empirical Evidence Equity has been an important concern in the expansion of higher education in India (Varghese, Sabharwal and Malish, 2018). The strategies followed in India include measures to diminish regional inequalities in the provision of institutions and infrastructure, reservation policies, relaxation in admission criteria, and financial support for the disadvantaged groups.

Based on the data provided in the 52nd, 64th and 71st Rounds of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), the following paragraphs in the paper discuss the changes in the equity dimensions. The 71st Round refers to the period between January and July 2014, the 64th Round refers to the period between July 2007 and June 2008, and the 52nd Round of the NSS pertains to the period between July 1995 and June 1996. In addition, we have relied on other sources such as the All-India Survey of Higher Education carried out by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD).

The debate on equity in higher education consist of challenges relating to regional, social and gender inequalities.

**REGIONAL INEQUALITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Regional inequalities in development are very common among most countries, particularly so in the higher education sector. Since HEIs have been traditionally established in urban areas, one may observe an municipal bias in higher education development in India (Varghese, Panigrahi and Rohtagi, 2017).

Although there is need for dispersed growth among universities and enhancement of research capacities for balanced regional development, the social demand for higher education in India has largely emanated from the urban areas. Since distances act as a constraint for many people, especially those belonging to the disadvantaged groups, an urban bias in the location of HEIs has reinforced the elite nature of higher education. Based on analysis of data from the NSSO (2014), Borooah (2017) shows that persons from rustic areas attending higher education had to travel a longer distance (4.1 km) than urban students (3.7 km).

This urban bias results in rural-urban disparities in admittance to higher education. For example, in 2014, entrée to higher education remained low in rural areas, at a GER of 24 per cent, as compared to inner-city areas, which had a corresponding GER of 44 per cent.

**SOCIAL INEQUALITIES**

Caste, Religion, Class and Gender Social inequalities continue to persist in the context of the expansion and massification of higher education in India.

Unlike regional inequalities, social inequalities in admittance to higher education have not widened, though they continue to be high. The analysis in this section is based on data from the 71st Round of the NSSO) (for the period January-July 2014), the 64th Round (for the period July-2007-June 2008), and, the 52nd Round of the NSSO (for the period July 1995-June 1996).Income Inequalities Apart from social and religious group disparities, inequalities in right to exercise to higher education are also seen by income levels.

For example, in 2014, the GER for the top quintile was seven times higher than that for the lowest monthly per capita expenditure quintile (0-20 per cent), with the enrolment ratio being the lowest for the relatively poor vis-à-vis the rich, and with admittance to higher education progressively increasing in every quintile. The data thus indicates that economic status continues to have a significant bearing on the likelihood of gaining contact to higher education. Gender Inequalities Another form of inequality reflected in admittance to higher education is by gender with the inequalities being compounded when gender intersects with social belonging.

At the national level, right to use to higher education still favours men with a gender parity index of 0.86. Women among the lower-caste group suffer more acutely in terms of admittance to higher education vis-à-vis women from the higher castes. For instance, in 2014, as against the overall average of 27.73 per cent for women, the GER was 13.05 per cent among the ST women followed by 18.17 per cent among the SC women, 23.11 per cent for OBC women, and 35.39 per cent for the non-SC/ST/OBC women. Thus, the GER of higher-caste women was almost three times that of ST women. Similarly, the GER of higher-caste women was twice that of SC women.

The probability of accessing higher education in India is also significantly related to the state one resides in because the distribution of institutions of higher education is uneven among states, as has been analysed in the preceding section. The predicted probability of accessing higher education in the north-east was 23 per cent lower than that in the southern states. Certain studies (Varghese, Panigrahi and Rohatgi, 2017; Varghese, 2015) point to regional disparities in terms of the number of institutions, with southern states like Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka accounting for a considerably higher share of 37,862 institutions in India, at approximately 10 per cent of the total vis-à-vis the states in the north-east, that is, 0.2-0.3 per cent in Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, and Tripura, respectively.

It is now widely recognized that in today’s knowledge-based economy, a regions growth prospects depends to a large extent on the skills level of regional labour force. The unequal portion of institutions across regions leads to polarisation of admittance to higher education, regional inequalities in the giving out of higher education opportunities, and overall unequal regional economic development. In terms of right of entry of women to higher education, however, the picture is positive. The positive signs of the marginal probabilities of participation in higher education for women indicate that women were at an advantage relative to men in 2014: the predicted probability of women participating in higher education was 2.3 per cent higher than that for the reference group of men. The expansion of secondary education, increase in the number of girls eligible for seeking admission to higher education, and once women cross the threshold of higher secondary education, contribute to an increase in their chances of input in higher education.

Similarly, the probability of contribution in higher education by students residing in rural areas was 4 per cent higher than that for their urban counterparts, indicating that there has been an improvement in access to educational institutions in rural areas.

**THE ISSUE OF INCLUSION**

The dynamics of contemporary campuses in India need to be located in the larger context of massification of the system. With the development of the system, a large number non-traditional learners are entering into HEIs, including students from the disadvantaged social groups, lower income groups, from rural areas, and those who studied in schools with regional languages as medium of instruction, especially government schools. It can be seen that a large share of students in HEIs comprises mostly first-generation higher education learners. This adds to the widening diversity of higher education campuses in India.

While the social detachment between those who are inside and outside the higher education system is narrowing down, that among student groups enrolled in institutions of higher education is widening. This is an important characteristic of the massification stage in contrast to the elite stage in the development of higher education. It may also be observed that the currently disadvantaged social groups constitute a major share of those enrolled in higher education. In fact, in some institutions, their share is close to 70 per cent.

As reported in a large-scale study by Sabharwal and Malish (2016), increasing campus diversity leads to different forms of discrimination and is a major source of social tensions on campuses. This also leads to the reproduction of prevalent social values and associated practices like discrimination based on caste and ethnicity and gender stereotyping in campus life. It can be argued that caste and ethnic origins continue to impact the social and academic lives of students in higher education, with this impact lasting from the first day of the students’ admission right until their from the HEIs.

**CONCLUSION**

Education or lack of it impacts the economic growth of nations, individual incomes, and the social well-being of all the citizens of a country. The attainment of education provides an opportunity for all to grow and improve their life chances. Given this crucial role of education, it is important to provide everybody an equal opportunity to pursue education. This paper argues that providing equal opportunities for accessing higher education is a necessary condition for achieving inclusive growth and a fair and inclusive society free from discrimination.

However, ensuring equality of opportunities to everyone for pursuing higher education is a distant dream in India. The development of higher education in India has progressed at a fast rate, leading to its massification. The spreading out of the system has been accompanied by the widening of regional inequalities and persistence of social inequalities. Inequalities in opportunities of right to use to higher education continue to persist for poor students, and those from the socially excluded groups and from rural areas.

The study shows that regional inequalities have widened while social inequalities persist in entrée to higher education. However, the empirical evidence and analysis show that the indicator of equality in access has improved over a period of time for all groups including for those from the disadvantaged groups. The increase in the GERs of students from the SC, ST and OBC categories is a reflection of this positive achievement.

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