Private Financing and Access to Higher Education in India during 2010 to 2020

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Abstract. The trend towards privatization of higher education has been a dominant feature in India, particularly during the decade 2010-20. The main research question enquired in the current research is regarding the evolution of privatization in India during the period 2010 to 2020 and its consequences for access to higher education in India. The methodology used in the paper is descriptive analysis, based on secondary data. It was observed that, while the absolute expenditure of the government on higher education has amplified, the expenditure as a percentage of GDP has reduced during 2010-20. The proportionate share of private institutes and enrolments has increased consistently and rapidly, and that of the public sector has either stagnated or reduced.

Keywords: private, higher education, India, financing, access, GER, institutes, enrolments

1. Introduction

India is the second-most populous nation in the world after China. The share of the youth population (15 years to 34 years) in 2020 for India (34.46) was higher than the world average (31.12), and the median age of the entire population in 2021 was estimated at 27.73 (MOSPI, 2017). This youth population will continue to be in the job market for about the next three decades before the first section of this group retires. Hence, India has a demographic advantage, provided India is able to convert its demographic dividend into an asset. This would require knowledge production and dissemination to productively engage the young population in rewarding productive activities that can contribute to the economic development of India. Increased access to higher education can facilitate such conditions. Indian higher education has moved from being 'elitist' to a 'system for masses', (Joshi & Ahir, 2013), the sector has registered phenomenal institutional growth and a rise in

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enrolments, particularly during 2010 to 2020. This period also marks a noticeable growth in institutional provision by the private sector in higher education and a relative stagnancy in the government sector.

The current research paper is an attempt to investigate the advent of privatization of higher education in India in terms of financing and access. A literature review attempts to provide a critical appreciation of various aspects of higher education in India for the period prior to 2010, to develop the understanding of the circumstances within which private higher education flourished during 2010 to 2020. In the conceptual framework, the model of 'high publicness to high privateness' propounded by Johnstone (1999) is assessed for Indian higher education during 2010 to 2020. Subsequently, the evolution of private financing of higher education in India and private access to higher education in India are assessed for the period 2010-20. Finally, conclusions and policy implications have been provided.

2. Literature review

Numerous aspects of Indian higher education have been studied by various researchers in addition to reports and publications by the government and various institutions. While the paper deliberates upon the private financing of higher education and private access to higher education in India during 2010 to 2020, this review of literature provides a perspective regarding various aspects related to higher education in India prior to 2010.

Privatization of higher education in India in its present form is a relatively recent phenomenon unlike many other countries of the world including Japan, South Korea, the US, and the Philippines (Altbach, 2013). Privatization both in terms of financing and access has been a prominent feature of the Indian higher education system for the last two decades (2000-2020). The emerging scenario depicts varying degrees of privatization of higher education (Tilak, 1991). Tilak mentions particularly four versions: management and funding of colleges and universities largely by the private sector, with little government intervention, students or employers or both paying for the complete costs of public higher education, public provision of higher education but with a reasonable level of financing from non-governmental sources and higher education institutions that are privately managed but are government-aided.

Since independence, the higher education system in India has faced several challenges related to financing. These have been aggravated during the last three decades. Some of them include the dilemma of prioritizing public funding for higher education (Agarwal, 2006; CABE 2005b), the dilemma of whether and to what extent to permit privatization of higher education (CABE, 2005a, 2005b; Gupta, 2004, 2005; Joshi & Ahir, 2015b; Kapur & Mehta, 2004), insufficiently explored sources of funding higher education like philanthropic contributions, bank loans, stocks, alumni contributions, and providing commercial services like training, consultancies or renting premises

(Joshi & Ahir, 2015b). Ambani and Birla (2000), Agarwal (2006), and Joshi and Ahir (2015a) among others highlight the challenges posed by the governance systems. In terms of government financing, Gupta (2005) and Tilak (2002) highlighted that tuition and other fees comprise the greatest share of household spending on higher education followed by books, transportation costs, stationery, and private coaching. Although household expenditure has increased manifold as noted by Chandrasekhar, Rani, and Sahoo (2019).

Institutional growth and growth in absolute enrolment have been researched by several researchers like Agarwal (2006), Ved (2007), and Joshi and Ahir (2013, 2016a, 2019). They suggest a negligible rise in enrolments during the period from the 1950s to 1980s, a moderate rise up to 2000 and a steep rise since 2000. The increase in the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for over four decades from 1.5 in 1960 to 9 in 2003-04 (CABE, 2005b; Thorat, 2006) is found to be snail-paced. Whereas the growth in GER from 9 percent in 2003-04 to 23 percent in 2013-14 has been note-worthy (Joshi & Ahir, 2016a). It was also noted that the growth in institutions and enrolments has largely been seen in the private sector (Agarwal, 2006; Joshi & Ahir, 2016a). In the process, equity concerns based on gender, ethnic background, space (e.g., rural-urban), economic background, religion, and inter-state/interprovince have been highlighted (Thorat, 2006; Khan & Sabharwal, 2012; Chandrasekhar, Rani & Sahoo, 2019; MOSPI, 2015; Joshi & Ahir, 2016b, 2019, 2021; Tilak, 2002).

The National Education Policy 2020 proposes to revamp the current Indian higher education system by focusing on equity, inclusion, and higher quality. The vision is to advance to a higher education system with large and multidisciplinary institutions with an updated curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation scheme. Establishment of private universities with 'philanthropic and public-spirited intent' will be encouraged. Private institutes are explicitly expected to commit towards quality assurance and equitable education, through Freeships and scholarships. Regulatory regimes, for both private and public institutions are expected to be treated equally, with regards to governance, educational outcomes, transparency of disclosures (particularly in setting of fees to ensure reasonable recovery of cost and fulfilment of social obligations of the institute), encouragement to regional Indian languages as a medium of instruction, and financial stability and security. The policy also focuses on a movement towards providing more autonomy to faculties and institutions where the institutes are governed by independent boards with qualified members having academic and administrative independence (NEP, 2020).

Most of the studies discussed above have been either static in the context of a particular time frame or are based on older data. The current paper is an attempt to analyse the status of privatization of higher education in India using comparable data now available from government sources for the decade 2010 to 2020.

3. Conceptual framework

Higher education in India is massive and complex. The Indian higher education system is the largest in terms of institutions and second largest in terms of enrolment (Joshi & Ahir, 2013). As a consequence of the large variety of higher education institutes in India, the peculiar characteristics of the private higher education system in India can be understood through an adaptation of a model of privatization propounded by Johnstone (1999).

Johnstone (1999) suggests that privatization in higher education denotes the adoption of operational norms and management practices mostly associated with private enterprises, by both public and private enterprises. The privatization characteristics associated with higher education can manifest in the form of autonomy from government, aggressive employee relations, top-down decision making, raising tuition fees, demand-based offering of disciplines to the extent that students are treated as clients, greater emphasis on marketing for 'enrolment management', and, instead of cross-subsidization of some units/disciplines by others, choosing to not offer disciplines that are unattractive to student clients (Johnstone, 1999). Accordingly, he presents the movement from high publicness to high privateness.

In the case of higher education in India, progress has been in the form of expansion of the private sector instead of replacement of public sector by private sector. With the rising demand for higher education in India and the necessity to increase access to higher education, a lot of resources have been consistently invested in higher education by the public sector. While the growth in government expenditure has been evident in absolute terms, the public expenditure on higher education as a percentage of GDP has largely been stagnant. Consequently, the private sector ventured into higher education to fill the gap enthusiastically, once the avenues to do so opened. An entire bandwidth of higher education institutes is operational in the contemporary landscape of Indian higher education, displaying different shades of privatization in addition to the already existing structure of public higher education. Table 1 is an adaptation of Johnstone's model of 'high publicness to high privateness' reflecting the suitability of Johnstone's model to the Indian scenario. While in absolute terms, it may appear that the share of central and provincial/state government-operated higher education institutes has expanded in higher education in India, it's the proportionate share that depicts a different image. The proportionate share of public higher education institutes has witnessed a reduction in terms of both institutes and enrolments over a period of 2010 to 2020, and the proportionate share of private higher education institutes has witnessed a consistent and sharp rise during the same period.

Table 1. 'High Publicness to High Privateness' in higher education in India

Institute Types	Further bifurcation of Institute types	Governance by (besides statutory bodies like UGC, AICTE and other statutory bodies)	Management	Funding	Share in respective Institute Types (2019-20)		Proportionate share in respective institute types (2010-20)	
					Number	Enrolments	Number	Enrolments
Universities (Institutes authorised to grant degrees)	Central Universities	Central Governemnt	Central Governemnt	Large part of recurring and non-recurring expenditure funded by respective governments with highly subisdized tuition fees charged to students (1)	4.6	8.84	Reducing	Reducing
	Deemed University-Government	Central Government	Central Government		3.45	0.48	Reducing	Reducing
	State Public Universities	State / Privncial Government	State / Privncial Government		**37**	**31.6**	Reducing	Reducing
	Government open universities (Central and State)	Central / State Government respectively	Central / State Government respectively		1.43	29.18	Reducing	Reducing
	Institutions of National Importance	Central Government	Central Government		12.9	3.6	Growing moderately	Growing moderately
	Deemed university-Government aided	Central Government	Central Government		0.95	0.69	Reducing	Reducing
	State Private university	State / Privncial Government	Individual, Trust, Society, Private organization	Largely recurring expnditure funded from Tuition fees. Philanthropic/alumni contributions, private organization largely fund non-recurring expenditures (2)	**31.3**	**15.68**	**Growing rapidly**	**Growing rapidly**
	State Private open university	State / Privncial Government			0.095	0.051	Stagnant	Stagnant
	Deemed University-Private	Central Government			7.6	9.69	Reducing	Fluctuating
	Total of Universities				100	100		
Colleges (Affiliated to Universities)	Government Colleges	Colleges are affiliated to universities and so the respective government to which a college is affiliated	Central / State Government respectively	As (1) above	**21.43**	**33.65**	Reducing	Reducing
	Private-aided colleges		Individual, Trust, Society, Private organization	As (2) above	13.35	21.42	Reducing	Reducing
	Private-unaided colleges				**65.2**	**44.92**	**Growing rapidly**	**Growing steadily**
	Total of Colleges				100	100		
Stand-alone Institutions (SAIs) (Not affiliated with Universities)	Government SAIs	One or more statutory bodies associated with respective programs (Like AICTE, India Nursing council)	Central / State Government respectively	As (1) above	**23.8**	NA	Reducing moedrately	NA
	Private-aided SAIs		Individual, Trust, Society, Private organization	As (2) above	9.1	NA	Growing	
	Private-unaided SAIs				**67.1**	NA	Reducing moderately	
	Total of Stand-alone institutions				100	NA		

Source: Adapted by authors from Johnstone (1999)

Universities in the public sector can largely be categorized as those governed and funded by the central government (like Central Universities, Institutions of National Importance, Central Open University, Government Deemed Universities, and Government Aided Deemed Universities) and provincial / state government (like State Public Universities, and State Open Universities). Besides, there are private universities (State Private Universities and Private Unaided Deemed Universities) that are governed by an individual, a trust, a society, or a private enterprise. The deemed university is a special status accorded to a high-performing higher education institute by the central government and is authorized to award degrees like universities. So, they are referred to as 'Deemed-to-be-universities'. Institutes of National Importance are institutions established by an Act of Parliament. Some government institutes also offer self-financed courses whereby recurring expenditure, like the remuneration of teachers, is funded from the tuition fees charged to students enrolling for the respective self-finance course. Such courses are the most popular courses, and are offered only if enough students apply to break-even or reach higher revenues. Private-aided institutes are those that are granted recurring and non-recurring grants by the central / state / local government, but its

management and decision-making authority for a large part lies with an individual, a trust, a society, or a private organization. Private-unaided institutes are largely funded by an individual, a trust, a society, or a private organization for most non-recurring expenses and their management is also largely in the hands of the funding agency. Recurring expenses are largely funded from tuition fees. Private unaided universities are also allowed a lot of academic autonomy, whereas maintenance of quality standards, and its accreditation is governed by statutory bodies as is the case with public universities.

Colleges affiliated with universities are governed by the parent university with less academic or financial autonomy. Tuition fees, syllabus, assessment, and appointments of faculties are governed by the norms of affiliating universities. Ownership and management are in accordance with their recognition as discussed above, for government, private-aided, or private-unaided colleges. SAIs too can be recognized as government, private-aided or private-unaided. A detailed description related to the governance of universities, colleges, and SAIs in India has been described in Joshi and Ahir (2015a).

During the period 2010-20, the transitions in the proportionate shares of state private universities and private-unaided colleges in the total number of universities and colleges were found to register a rapid growth whereas state public universities and government colleges registered a reduction, respectively. The transitions in the proportionate shares of state private universities and private-unaided colleges in total enrolments in universities and colleges registered a rapid growth whereas enrolments in state public universities and government colleges registered a reduction. Hence, Johnstone's suggested transition in higher education from 'high publicness to high privateness' is apparent in the case of India's higher education too. The intricacies of all the arguments in the conceptual framework can be better understood with substantiating information and arguments below.

4. Regulatory provisions for private higher education in India

As discussed previously, private higher education institutions in India include private unaided and aided universities, private unaided and aided deemed universities, and private aided and unaided colleges. The regulatory provisions for the same are discussed further in this section.

Private universities are regulated by a special mechanism with the objective of maintaining quality at these institutes and also ensuring that these are not commercialized. This is also required to ensure that the interests of the students enrolled in higher education are protected. To fulfil these objectives, conditions for the establishment and operations of such universities have been laid down by the UGC. These regulations are applied to all private universities offering degrees, diplomas, or certificates across all formal, informal, and distance modes by these universities. All the private universities in the country are established by a special state act and have to fulfil the requirements of the UGC that are amended from time to time. The academic bodies of the university have to

necessarily approve the courses and degrees that are offered by these universities. The UGC has also prescribed guidelines for the admission process and fixation of fees to private universities. The universities are also inspected by the UGC periodically and the body may call for information from these universities for the same. On inspection and evaluation of the university, the UGC notifies the institute if there is any insufficiency with the regulations that have been laid down. The university is then offered a chance to rectify in a given time. Necessary actions are taken against the university if the university fails to meet the requirements in the stipulated time frame (UGC, 2003).

On similar lines, deemed private universities are funded by private entities. Deemed universities are also regulated by the UGC in order to ensure that the quality of the institute is maintained. To be declared as a deemed university, the institution should have been in existence for more than 20 years. There also are some minimum scores from various accreditation bodies that the institute needs to meet. Besides, there are also other conditions related to the ranking of the institute, the publications by the faculty members, the student-teacher ratio, and various infrastructure-related requirements for an institute to be declared as a deemed university. If an institute fulfils the aforementioned requirements, it can apply for the status of a deemed university. The performance of these universities is further monitored on a timely basis by the UGC (UGC, 2019).

Private unaided colleges are managed and funded by private entities whereas private aided colleges are funded for a large part by government but managed by private entities. However, all private colleges are governed by the parent university to which they are affiliated.

5. Private financing of higher education in India during 2010 to 2020

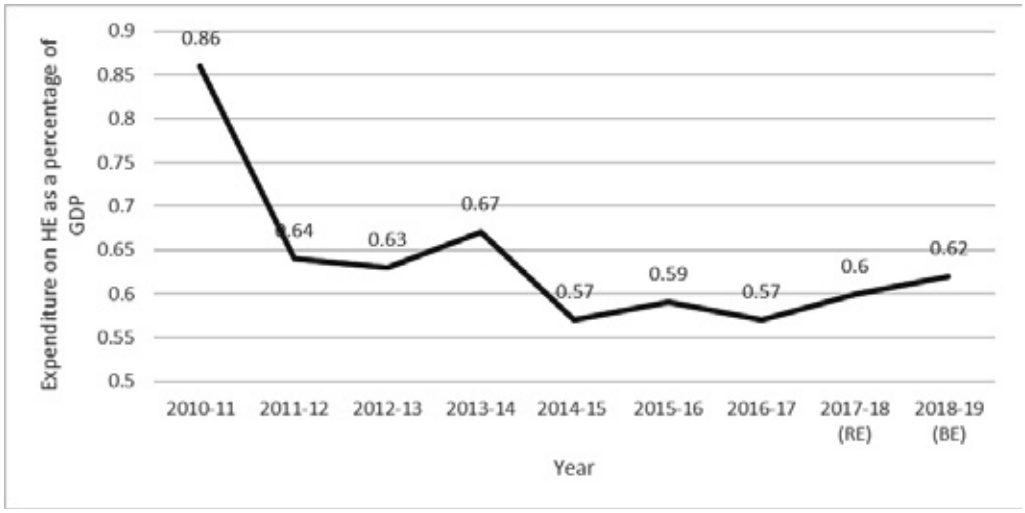
Sources for financing higher education in India can be broadly categorized into two categories, public and private. Since India's constitutional structure is federal and education is constitutionally a combined responsibility of central and state / provincial governments, public sector financing largely comprises financing by central government and state / provincial government. Private financing can take the form of funding from tuition fees in public and private institutes of higher education, private contributors / philanthropic contributions / corporate contributions. Both of these categories of funding are elaborated further below.

5.a. Reduction in public expenditure on higher education as a percentage of GDP in India

India needs a massive budget to sponsor one of the largest higher education systems in terms of the number of institutions and students enrolled. According to the various reports of the Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education (ABE), the actual share of public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP during 2010-11 to 2018-19 ranged between 2.74 and 4.20. The share of higher education as a percentage of GDP on the other hand has ranged between 0.57 and 0.86 for the period

2010-11 to 2018-19 (ABE, MHRD multiple years). Traditionally, 8% of GDP and 20% share in the government's budget devoted to education are considered adequate (Benson, 1987). India's public expenditure on education is far below the suggested expenditure share.

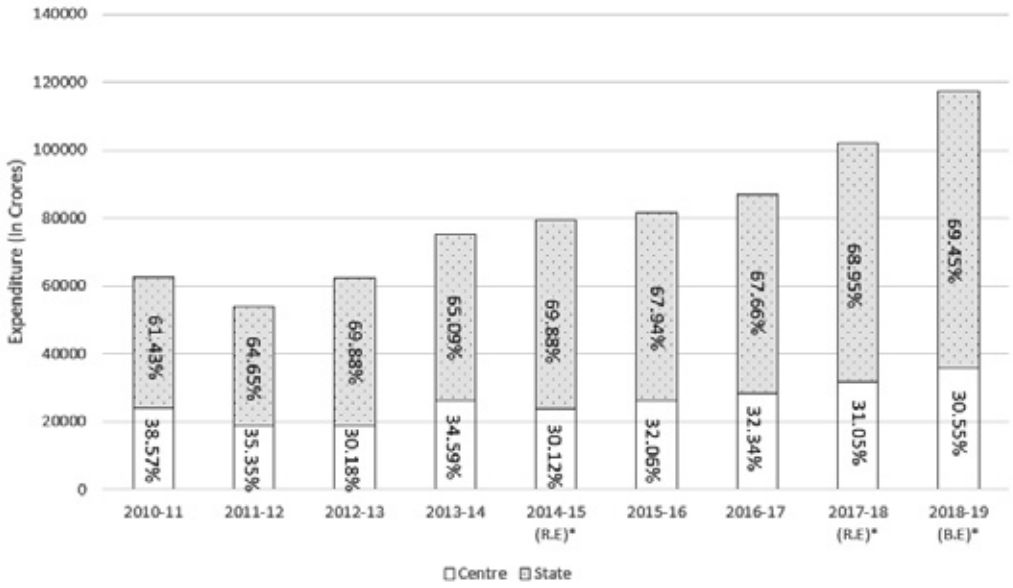
Figure 1. Government expenditure on higher education in India as a percentage of GDP from 2010-11 to 2017-18



Source: Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education, MHRD, 2013 to 2019

Figure 1 explains the trends of public expenditure on higher education in India as a percentage of GDP and Figure 2 explains the share of centre and state governments in the overall expenditure. It can be seen that the total expenditure on higher education by the government has gradually increased over the years. The total expenditure on higher education for the year 2010-11 was Indian Rupees—INR 626541.8 million and the budgeted expenditure for the year 2018-19 was INR 1173459.3 million. From this share, INR 814933.2 million (69 percent) was funded by the State/provincial governments, and INR 358526 million (31 percent) was funded by the Central government. The state / provincial government majorly funds the provision of public higher education in India. The share of state governments in the overall expenditure on university and higher education has increased during 2010-11 to 2018-19 as can be observed in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Share of Central and State Governments in absolute expenditure on higher education in India from 2010-11 to 2018-19



Source: Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education, MHRD, 2013 to 2019

5.b. Greater share of private financing of higher education in India

According to the human capital investment theory, one would opt for a particular school only if the present value of the expected benefits from pursuing that school exceeds the expected costs (Agrawal, 2011). Tilak (1991) noted that the cost-recovery for higher education from students in the form of user-charges is a form of privatization observed in higher education in India. Chandrasekhar, Rani, and Sahoo (2019) suggested that households engaging in higher education have been estimated to spend 15.3 percent and 18.4 percent of their total expenditure, on higher education in rural and urban areas respectively. Besides tuition fees, the other associated expenditures like those on transportation, books, stationery, private coaching, etc are the highest for higher education as compared to other levels of education.

It was also observed that average expenditure per student was lowest for students pursuing education in government institutions. For those pursuing higher education in private aided institutes, it was double and for those in private unaided institutes, it was three times the expenditure incurred per student in government institutes. The expenditure incurred in technical courses was more than four times that of general courses (Chandrasekhar, Rani, & Sahoo, 2019).

With the advent of relatively expensive private higher education access, safety nets for economically vulnerable groups in the form of scholarships, and fee waivers can facilitate access to

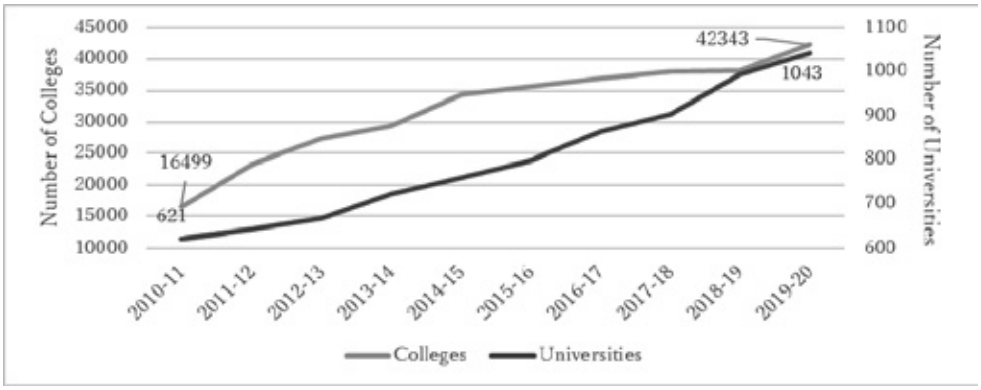
higher education to those willing to pursue them. Students lack financial support like scholarships or loans to pursue higher education in India (Agarwal, 2006; Joshi & Ahir, 2015b). It is estimated that at present only 10 percent of the total students in higher education have access to such financial support and these students do not even comprise the ones that need it the most (Sharma, 2019).

According to the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020), India aims to achieve a GER of 50 percent in higher education including vocational education by 2035. During the period 2010-11 to 2019-20, the GER grew at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 3.4 percent from 19.4 to 27.1. To achieve a GER of 50 percent by 2035, GER will have to grow at a CAGR of 4.17 percent. However, to achieve this objective all students must have access to higher education and should be able to afford it. The massification of the sector currently has largely resulted from the privatization of the sector (ICEF, 2019). Some of the funding also takes place through various philanthropic contributions, industrial income by providing services required by industry, and alumni funding, although the share is minuscule (Ahir, 2019). India needs to invest more of both public and private funds in higher education since the returns are higher as compared to alternative forms of investment (Tilak, 1993).

6. Private higher education access in India during 2010 to 2020

The Indian higher education system has evolved and expanded rapidly in the past few decades, making it the largest higher education system in the world in terms of the number of institutions. Figure 3 depicts the growth in the number of universities and colleges from 2010 to 2020. According to the MHRD (2013, 2020), a rise of about 68 percent and 157 percent was observed in the number of universities and colleges respectively during the period 2010-11 to 2019-20. The rise in the number of colleges and universities over the last decade can be majorly attributed to the increase in private investment in higher education over that time (Joshi & Ahir, 2016a).

Figure 3. Growth in the number of universities and colleges for 2010 to 2020



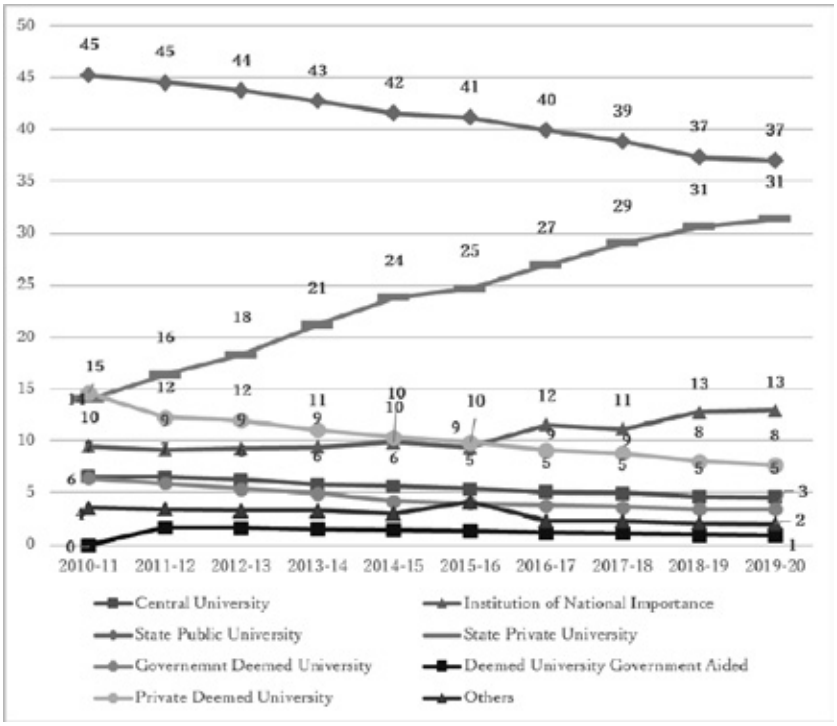
Source: AISHE (MHRD, multiple years)

6.a. Proportionately greater expansion of private universities and colleges

Amongst the various types of universities that are included in the Indian higher education system, state public universities comprise the major portion of the total number of universities in the country. In 2010-11, state public universities constituted 281 of the total universities while in 2018-19 the number stood at 371 universities (MHRD, 2013, 2019a). However, state public universities have demonstrated a proportionate downfall in the share of total universities.

The proportion of various types of universities as a percentage of the total number of universities has changed over time. Figure 4 highlights that the share of public universities has declined continuously, whereas, there has been a proportionate rise in the share of private universities. While the share of state public universities is still the highest amongst all university types, there has been a steady decline in its share over the decade. There has been a rise of over 120 percent in the share of state private universities from 2010-11 to 2019-20. Hence, the share of state private and state public universities is gradually reaching parity.

Figure 4. Change in the proportion of each type of universities as a percentage of the total number of universities for the period 2010-11 to 2019-2020 (by type of universities)



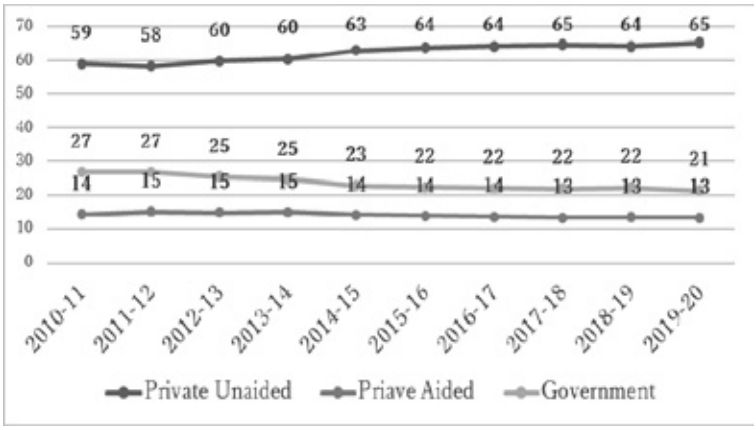
Source: Calculated by authors from AISHE reports for various years

The share of central universities has remained nearly constant whereas the share of both public and private deemed universities has declined over time. The share of Institutions of National Importance has expanded over time, although not to the extent of the expansion observed in state private universities.

In the context of colleges, private unaided colleges had the maximum share in the number of colleges, followed by private aided colleges and government colleges. Hence, even though the share of various colleges as a proportion of total colleges has not changed drastically over time, the share of private unaided colleges has increased, while there has been a decline in the share of both private aided and government colleges as shown in Figure 5. Consequently, the government is gradually withdrawing support from these colleges, compared to earlier periods and more and more private players are emerging on the landscape of higher education in India to provide higher education.

Amongst Stand-Alone-Institutions (SAIs) in 2019-20, 67 percent were private unaided, 9 percent were private aided and about 24 percent were in government sector.

Figure 5. Change in the proportion of each type of college as a percentage of the total number of colleges for the period 2010-11 to 2019-2020 (by year)

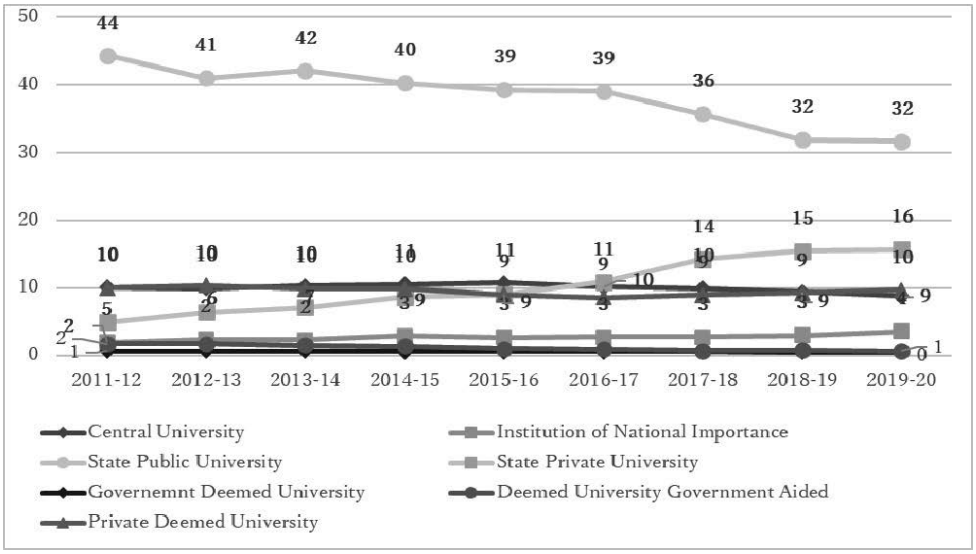


Source: Calculated by authors from AISHE reports for various years

6.b. Proportionately greater expansion in enrolments in private universities and colleges

While the number of state public universities as a proportion of total universities has reduced, the enrolment in the same has not fallen proportionately but less than proportionately. Hence state public universities are bearing a greater proportionate burden of the total enrolment of universities.

Figure 6. Change in the proportion of enrolments in each type of selected universities as a percentage of the total enrolments in universities for the period 2011-12 to 2019-2020 (by type of universities)

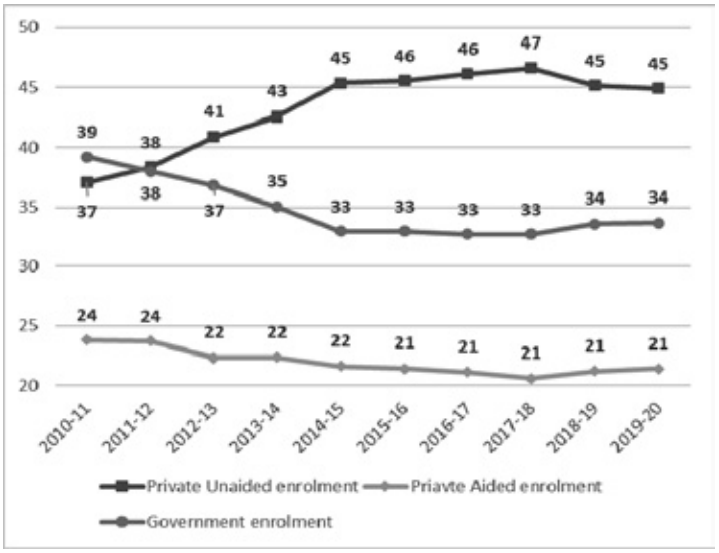


Source: Calculated by authors from AISHE reports for various years

Figure 6 suggests that the proportion of enrolment in state private universities as a percentage of total enrolments has not kept pace with the rise in the institutional growth for state private universities. This suggests a lopsided enrolment share with a maximum proportionate burden borne by state public universities followed by state private universities. This results in increased pressure on resources in state public universities. In contrast, while private universities are willing to attract a greater number of students, they fail to do so due to higher user charges, besides other expenses. The proportionate share of enrolments for state public universities as a share of total enrolments in universities is declining and that for the private universities is increasing.

The share of enrolments in various colleges is not in accordance with their share in the total number of colleges. In 2010-11 the share of private unaided colleges was 59 percent, while its share in enrolments was only 37 percent. The share of the number of government colleges was 27 percent while its share in enrolment was the highest standing at 39 percent. In 2019-20, the share of private unaided colleges in total enrolments increased from 37 percent to 45 percent, and that for government colleges reduced from 39 to 34. Share in enrolments reduced from 24 to 21 for private aided colleges during 2010-11 to 2019-20 as shown in Figure 7. Therefore, the proportionate share of enrolments for private unaided colleges as a share of total enrolments in colleges has increased consistently and reduced for private-aided colleges and government colleges.

Figure 7. Change in the proportion of enrolments in each type of college as a percentage of the total enrolments in colleges for the period 2010-11 to 2019-2020 (by year)



Source: Calculated by authors from AISHE reports for various years

As suggested by Tilak (1991), a rise in the enrolment and number of universities and colleges managed and funded by the private sector (private unaided universities and colleges) and enrolment and number of universities and colleges that are privately managed but government-aided (private aided universities and colleges) is a manifestation of increased privatization of higher education in India.

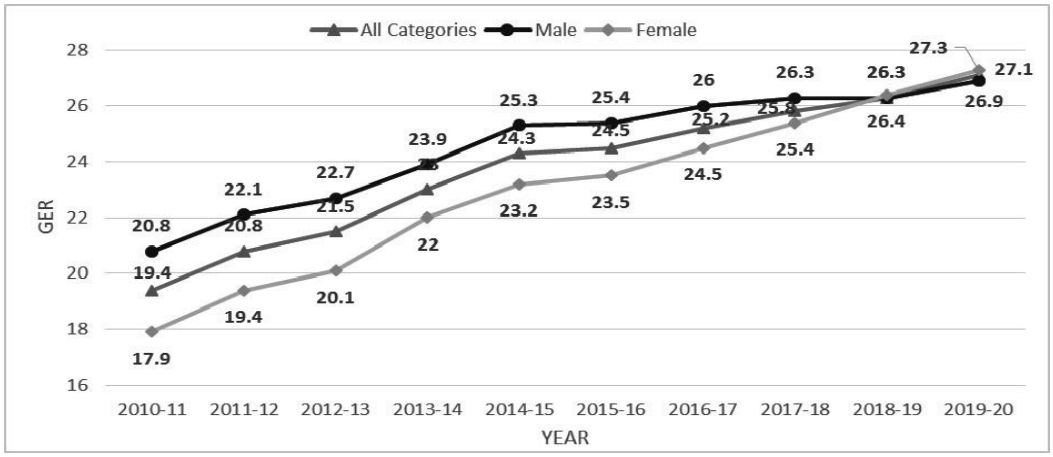
7. Enrolments by programs, disciplines and sector (public/private)

The Gross Enrolment Ratio for higher education i.e., enrolments of students in higher education as a percentage of the population between 18-23 years old, has seen a continuous ascent over time. As shown in Figure 8, the Gross Enrolment Ratio was as low as 19.4 in 2010-11 but has increased up to 27.1 in 2019-20 (MHRD, 2011, 2020). Rising population belonging to the respective age cohort, increasing turnout at previous levels of education, increase in access largely in private higher education institutes, rising aspirations of youth to contribute to the nation's growth through improved human capital, and greater access to higher education, are some of the reasons for rising GER (Joshi & Ahir, 2019; Agarwal, 2006).

Even though the GER for higher education in India has seen an increasing trend and has improved over the years, it was found to be lower when compared internationally. For international comparison, the GER is calculated considering the 18-22 age group. The GER for India, in that case, would be 30.6, which is higher than Pakistan and Bangladesh with a GER of 9 and 21 respectively.

However, when compared with other Asian countries the higher education GER in India is low. China has a higher education GER of 51 while the GER is as high as 94 in South Korea. Looking at the scenario globally, the higher education GER is 88 in the USA, 60 in the UK, and 70 in Germany (Kancharla, 2019). Hence, GER in India is low compared to many countries.

Figure 8. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) from 2010-11 to 2019-20



Source: AISHE (MHRD, multiple years)

The total enrolment in higher education can largely be classified into eight levels of higher education, namely: Undergraduate, Postgraduate, M.Phil., Ph.D., PG Diploma, Diploma, Certificate and Integrated. The percentage share of students enrolled in these categories has not changed drastically over time. The highest number of students (79.5 percent) have been enrolled at an undergraduate level, and 11.2 percent of the total students are enrolled in postgraduate courses. The remaining 6 categories (M.Phil., Ph.D., PG Diploma, Diploma, Certificate and Integrated courses) comprise 9.3 percent of the total enrolments (MHRD, 2020).

At the undergraduate level of higher education, Arts (33 percent), Engineering and Technology (13 percent), Science (16 percent), and Commerce (14 percent) collectively enrol more than 75 percent of total students pursuing undergraduate programs. In masters' programs, social sciences and management disciplines have the highest share of enrolments, whereas in PhD programs Engineering and Technology and Sciences have a dominant share of enrolments (MHRD, 2020).

In 2019-20, enrolments in private unaided institutions in professional courses (like engineering, and management) were about 72 percent in undergraduate programs and about 60 percent in postgraduate programs. In contrast, non-professional academic courses (like science, commerce, and arts) enrolled greater number of students in government institutions in undergraduate programs (49 percent) and postgraduate programs (65 percent). Amongst Stand-Alone Institutions (SAIs), programs

with very high (more than 60 percent) numbers of private unaided institutes included nursing, paramedical, polytechnics, teacher-training and business management.

According to an analysis by Tilak and Choudhary (2019), it has been observed that the cost of attaining education and higher education in technical professional courses in particular has been rising continuously. Despite the fact suggested above that the costs incurred in private unaided institutions are much higher, and particularly for professional and technical courses, it is noteworthy that a greater number of students choose private unaided institutions for pursuing professional courses. One of the observable reasons, as also suggested by Johnstone (1999), is that even the critiques of privatization accept that private higher education has greater market orientation than government higher education institutes in terms of offering various courses that are more suitable to the demands of the job market. Professional courses in India engage in explicit efforts for enhancing placements from campus for students. Such campus placements serve as a major influential factor for students determining the kind of courses to enroll in.

Conclusion and policy implications

Higher education in India is massive and complex. The growing aspirations of citizens and the nation's urge to contribute as a knowledge economy have increased the pressure on higher education access in India. Scarce government treasury and alternately prioritized fiscal policies has resulted in a reduction in the real share of public expenditure on higher education as a percentage of GDP. Consequently, private higher education proceeded to fill the gap between demand for and supply of higher education in India. Particularly for the decade 2010-20, it was observed that the proportionate share of private higher education institutes and enrolments was growing rapidly and that of public sector institutes and enrolments was stagnant or shrinking. This refers to the transition of higher education from 'high publicness to high privateness'. The household expenditure on higher education was observed to be higher in private institutes as compared to government institutes, considering expenses on books, stationery, transportation, private coaching, besides tuition fees.

If the trend observed during the period 2010-20 continues, Indian higher education will certainly witness a greater share of private institutes and enrolments. If NEP 2020 targets are to be achieved, and given the fact that trend suggest a shrinking public sector share in higher education, greater impetus will have to be provided to private higher education. Although, caution needs to be observed that India does not compromise one of the missions of higher education, that whoever is willing to pursue higher education should not be devoid of the opportunity to do so. Thus, necessary banking provisions, Freeships, and scholarships for disadvantaged groups should be available to assure equitable inclusive growth of higher education whereby everyone gets an opportunity to participate.

Privatization of higher education in India cannot be escaped and should rather be embraced for the opportunities that it can offer to assure increased access and efficiency. The government may

accordingly focus on assuring facilitative yet competitive and accountable regulatory mechanisms. Further, the government will have to shoulder the responsibility of assuring equitable access besides shouldering greater responsibility to offer courses associated with promoting cultural heritage, whereby market-oriented private institutes may show less interest. The National Education Policy (2020) promises to narrow the demand-supply gap as well as the gap between the employers' expectations and graduating students' capabilities. NEP (2020) attempts to strike a perfect balance between traditional Indian education and globally leading education systems, and draw on the best from both.

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