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## India's Education System: Issues and Challenges

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### Abstract

It has been observed that India's educational development is a mixed bag of remarkable success and glaring gaps and its developmental history may be viewed in different phases. Education in India is provided by the public sector as well as the private sector, with control and funding coming from three levels: central, state, and local. The development of education was faster during the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and after this, the progress of education slowed down because of socio-political problems in the country. India's education system is divided into different levels such as pre-primary level, primary level, elementary education, secondary and senior secondary education, undergraduate and postgraduate level. Each educational stage has its objectives and aims accordingly, and each state has striven to develop its educational pattern and system, that's why variation in the educational system has occurred among the states. The present study tries to assess the critical issues and challenges in education system of India and put forward suggestions for removing its problems.

**Keywords:** Education, elementary education, secondary education higher education

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### 1. Introduction

India's improved education system is often cited as one of the main contributors to the economic rise of India. Our organized education has a long history and education and learning have been deeply rooted in Indian society. It has been observed that India's educational development is a mixed bag of remarkable success and glaring gaps and its developmental history may be viewed in different phases. Education in India is provided by the public sector as well as the private sector, with control and funding coming from three levels: central, state, and local. The development of education was faster during the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and after this, the progress of education slowed down because of socio-political problems in the country. At the advent of independence, only about 30 per cent of eligible children were receiving elementary schooling and only about 10 per cent among eligible adolescents were in secondary schools. At the university level, only about 1 per cent was receiving instruction, and even there, the standard was not entirely satisfactory (Kabir Humayun, 1957) <sup>[1]</sup>. After Independence, a more comprehensive system of education for all section of the people in different regions came into existence. Education for the general masses became a laudable goal only after 1947 as the Father of the Nation felt that education for all (EFA) might help in achieving socio-economic, political and cultural progress. (J. V. Vil'anilam, 2012) <sup>[2]</sup>.

India's education system is divided into different levels such as pre-primary level, primary level, elementary education, secondary and senior secondary education, undergraduate and postgraduate level. Each educational stage has its objectives and aims accordingly, and each state has striven to develop its educational pattern and system, that's why variation in the educational system has occurred among the states. India has made progress in terms of increasing primary education attendance rate and expanding literacy to approximately 75 percent of the population. Hasan and Aashish (2006) <sup>[22]</sup> tried to examine the representation of backward classes in college education in India. They used NSSO data for their study and found that scheduled castes and tribes, other backward classes and Muslims are under-represented in India's colleges relative to their population shares, this happens due to their low higher secondary school completion ratio.

Therefore, the primary distortions creating unequal representation in college lie at the lower position of the education ladder. They argued that there should be given priority to the quality of primary education, not college reservation. They found that compared to their 15 per cent and 7.5 per cent reservations, scheduled castes and tribes comprise only 10.2 per cent and 3.9 per cent of the college availing population, and these results emphasise the unequal representation of groups in college and suggest to policy-makers to seriously consider ways of making the primary education system better serve marginalised groups. Desai and Kulkarni (2008) [23] found that the narrowing gap between dalits, adivasis, and others with respect completing primary school during the 1980s and 1990s. Such improvement is not true for Muslims, and this group does not benefit from affirmative action. They observed that marginal increment in inequality at college level. Further, they also found that top income class, the so-called creamy layer of dalits and adivasis, disproportionately benefit from the affirmative action programs at the expense of their lower-income counterparts. Singh J. D (2011) [27] pointed out the challenges and issues prevailing in the Indian higher education system. He had gone through many studies and reports relevant to higher education and observed that the current phenomenon of higher education does not suit the objectives which have set. He also noted that the inclusion of people from low-income families in higher education is one of the most severe challenges of higher education. He has a view of that for fruitful outcomes; there are urgent requirements of restructuring of financial pattern, provision of access and equity improvement of quality standards in the higher education system. Borooah Vani K. (2011) [28] accessed the educational disparity among children age group 8–11 years

from different social groups in India. He used the Indian Human Development Survey of 2005, which includes over 12,300 children, tested their ability to read, write, and arithmetic at different levels of competence. He also enquired why different children have different levels of educational achievement. He observed children from all the different social groups were disadvantaged in some or all of the three competencies of reading, arithmetic, and writing after controlling for some parental, household and school-related factors as compared to Brahmin children. However, this disadvantage was most significant for Muslim, Dalit, and Adivasi children. These children were disadvantaged concerning all three competencies, and their disadvantage embraced failure as well as success. The study quantified the 'structural advantage' that Brahmin and High Caste children enjoyed over their Dalit and Muslim counterparts.

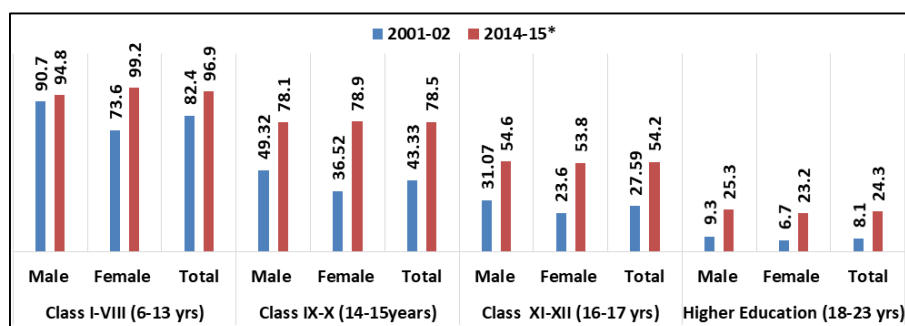
## 2. Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the critical issues and challenges in education system of India.
2. To put forwards suggestions for removing the problems of education system of India.

## 3. Data Source

The study is based on secondary data. The relevant secondary data have been accessed from Planning Commission, educational reports and surveys of Ministry of Human Resource Development, University Grants Commission Annual Reports, Government of India and Directorate General of Employment & Training, Ministry of Labour.

## 4. Discussion



Source: Department of School Education and Literacy, Education at glance various reports, Ministry of Education, GOI

Fig 1: Gross Enrolment Ratio in India since 2001-02 to 2014-15

It is found that gross enrolment of each level of education has been significantly increased over the period. At elementary level of education gross enrolment of male was increased from 90.07 to 94.8 and 73.6 and that of female was 73.6 to 99.2 over the periods. At Secondary level of education gross enrolment of male was increased from 49.32 to 78.1 and that of female was 36.5 to 78.9 over the periods. The similar trends were also observed at senior secondary level of education and higher education thought the periods.

**Issues in Elementary Education:** Elementary education has been observed remarkable success, says government's raise annual budget for its basic education steadily, elementary school infrastructure facilities has been underway across the country, additional classrooms and toilets have been

constructed, thousands of teachers have been newly appointed, and most of the habitants now have a school within walking distance. This significant achievement towards universalisation of elementary education has led to more than 96 percent of all children being enrolled in school and ASER (2016) [9] reported that 3.1 percent children in the age group of 6-14 years still not in school. Many studies have shown that India education system has faced severe problems and challenges. Here we are trying to focus on issues and challenges which are still persistent in elementary education. Marie Lal (2005) [10] argued that enrolment in primary education has increased, but still millions of children aged 6–14 years are not in school. Moreover, there disparities still persistent in gender, regional, as well in caste. There are some focus on severe issues and challenges of elementary

education which are exits at present time in the country given below:

**Quality of Elementary Education:** Since independence, the provision of good-quality of basic education has remained on the top of the list of educational agenda. Numbers of policies, official resolutions and judgments have endeavoured to ensure better quality education for all the segments of the population. The Indian Education Commission (1964–66), National Policy on Education (1986), Programme of Action (1992), SSA (2001) and Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, have all emphasised to provide quality education in the country. Good quality of education, consequently leads to good learning outcomes and it is very important for inclusive growth. The quality of education is even poorer in rural areas where the large number of children strapped by illiterate parents, poverty, lack of parental support and dismal facilities. As children born and brought up in the deprived rural system in disadvantaged family backgrounds carry a twin deprivation in terms of access to quality education and poor learning achievements. The quality of elementary education always a serious concern for academicians and policymakers. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2010 shows that, 53 percent of class V children in rural India could read class 2<sup>nd</sup> level text; this indicated that even after five years in school, about half of all children are not even at the expected level and 36 percent children could solve a three digit by one digit division problem. Education for all Review Report (2014) found that children still not prepared for going to school and do not have ability in cognitive and proficiency in language when they go primary school despite attending pre-primary classes. This shows the poor quality of the education at this particular level. A significant proportion of children are not ready cognitively for primary schooling and nor are school ready for children. Since the possibilities of benefiting from later educational interventions gets reduced if children do not come with the basic foundation leading to cumulative deficit later on. Kaur Satvinderpal (2017) <sup>[11]</sup> conducted a study of rural schools in Mansa district of Punjab and found that the quality of schools and learning outcomes of rural children is very poor. In search of quality education, poor parent send their children to private school from government school but no fruitful improvement in learning outcomes and quality of education. The study also analysed that 66 percent of government and 51 percent of private schools are located within a range of 2 km from the village, only 3 percent of the sampled government schools and 3 percent of private schools have filtered drinking water facility for children, with the 78percent of government and 79 percent of private schools have available groundwater for drinking, however 19 percent of government and 17percent of private schools do have municipal water supply, it is only supply for limited hours and children are forced to drink groundwater and 98.5 percent of private and government schools have functional toilets, separate for boys and girls, but a proper playground was available to only 36 percent of government and 8 percent of private schools as well as first-aid kit is available at only 6 percent of government and 2 percent of private schools. In the government schools, 98.2 percent of teachers were trained, but in private schools, 68 percent of teachers were untrained. The survey also indicates that surveyed government schools have a pupil–teacher ratio (PTR) of 43, against 39 for private schools. Neither government nor

private schools fulfil the PTR required under RTE. Moreover, in conclusion of the above following findings we can say that government made significant efforts for upgrading the quality of elementary education but still there are remedial actions required to cover those segments where quality degraded.

**Drop out in elementary education:** The eleventh FYP had targeted a reduction in dropout rates from 50 per cent to 20 per cent at the elementary level. Even though the drop-out rates at elementary education have been reducing, but this progress has not yet been at satisfactory level. The low NER at the upper primary level and the increasing enrolment gap from elementary to secondary level indicates that however, a larger number of children are participating in educational system, a significant proportion of them are not progressing through the system to complete elementary stages of education. Though the drop-out rate is a serious concern in the case of all categories of students, drop-out rates among disadvantaged groups, especially for girls from these groups, remain higher than the national average. R. Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2008) <sup>[12]</sup> analysed that a substantial number of children were found to be dropping out because of they considered education was not necessary, they had to support household income (especially urban boys) or they had to attend to domestic chores (girls in particular). Mukherjee (2005) analysed that although the enrolment rates for children have significantly improved over the years, poor retention and completion rates in school are continually bothered. Mukherjee found poverty, child labour, the absence of secure employment after schooling and infrastructural problems as main factors in contributing substantially in leaving the study.

**Out-of-school children in some States:** A study conducted by IMRB found that the proportion of OoSC has been decline to 4.2 per cent of the population age 6-13 years in 2009-10. While there has been continually reduction in the percentage of out-of-school children (OoSC) across gender and social categories, and nationally, but still the proportion of out-of-school children remain much higher than the national average in a few States. The States of Uttar Pradesh (34 per cent), Bihar (17 per cent), Rajasthan (12 per cent) and West Bengal (9 per cent) accounted for 72 per cent of the 8.1 million OoSC in the country in 2009. The proportion of OoSC in 2009 was higher than the national average for SC children (5.9 per cent), ST children (5.2 per cent) and Muslim children (7.7 per cent) (EFA 2014). Such situation shows that some States and children belonging to Muslim community, scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) need greater help and focused attention.

**Poverty:** Incidence of poverty is one of the major obstacle in achieving universalisation of elementary education, and severe poverty occurs especially in rural areas (25.70 percent of population below the poverty line) and in some of the sates such as Bihar, Orissa Rajasthan, Uttar Parades and Madhya Parades. Because of poverty children have to do work for wages or in their own fields, in order to supplement the income of their families. Financial constraints do not allow poor people to send their children especially girls to school. It is generally accepted, particularly in official circles that poor people cannot afford to send their children to school. Kiran Bhatta (1998) <sup>[13]</sup> found that lack of motivation among poor parents as the major obstacles to achieve

universalisation of primary education.

**Inequalities in access to education:** Despite many attempts to bring equity in elementary education system, inequality with different form still existing in our educational system. In India, large number of children from weaker section and disadvantage section of the society still remain far away from basic education system as compare to other section. Poromesh Acharya (1994) pointed out (hat education for all is still a distant dream in India. Tilak (1987) <sup>[17]</sup> there is a grave inequality in education in terms of differences in per pupil expenditure, infrastructure, quality and quantity of teachers, and other similar objects. Equality in education is not possible if the participants in the race start from different points. The problem gets worse if educational inequalities get translated into occupational inequalities and better jobs being occupied by a selective group and the weaker sections getting no other option but to choose "inferior" jobs, which results in economic inequalities. Thus, equality in education is the need of the hour in our society. The policy-makers in India mainly focus on school reforms only. A shift in attention is necessary from schools to homes. Now government had taken few serious measures to remove educational inequality and trying to provide elementary education to every door through RTE act.

**Lower level of teacher attendance rates in some of the educationally backward States:** Improving teacher attendance rates: Studies on attendance of primary and upper primary school teachers show that the teacher attendance rates remain a concern, especially in some of the States. There is considerable variation across States in the percentage of teachers who were present on the day the schools were visited. Of particular concern is the fact that, in 2012-13, some of the States (Assam, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal) showed a decline in teacher attendance rate compared to the attendance rate in 2006-07. This highlights the need to set up a reliable system for tracking teacher absenteeism and implement effective strategies for reducing teacher absenteeism and sustaining high levels of attendance throughout the school year.

**Deficiencies relating to teacher quality:** The key challenges relating to teacher quality are to ensure that young talent enters the elementary/secondary school teaching profession, that teachers are professionally prepared, academically supported and retained in the profession through appropriate career development and occupational mobility options. Specific teacher-related challenges include: putting in place institutional mechanisms to overcome shortfall of professionally qualified teachers without compromising long-term goals of a sustained cadre of professionally qualified teachers; recruiting teachers who are socially closer to children and who are professionally prepared to meet the learning needs of diverse groups of learners; reforming the curriculum for and process of initial preparation of teachers with the aim of preparing teachers for diverse environments (rural and remote areas) and addressing diversity in the classroom with special focus on addressing the learning needs of children from socially and economically disadvantaged groups; ensuring that in-service teachers have adequate access to subject-specific education through regular refresher courses and that periodic in-service education is

complemented with sustained on-site academic support to teachers and in-service education programme address the specificities of teacher needs and classroom concerns; ensuring an effective teacher cadre and career management system that facilitates and enhances teacher quality, motivation and accountability and enable teachers to upgrade their professional qualifications and plan for occupational mobility.

**Issues in Secondary Education:** Although there has been a significant increase in the number of school going children, they face a number of problems. Secondary education spreads over the age 15-18 years. These years of transition and adolescence are the most crucial years of the student life. Students' physical structure undergoes a fast change during this period and there are various sort of emotional transformation and mood swings. This is the stage where students have to shift from education to the world of work, it must equip the students by sharpening their skills and talents to make this transition quite smooth. The girls have to experience more difficulties in this transition because of age-old beliefs, social bias, prejudice and taboos prescribed for females in the society. ASER 2017 indicates that a large proportion of 14-18 year olds can at least read simple texts. Their math levels are quite poor and do not show improvement with age. At this age perhaps pen-paper assessments like PISA will help to assess higher level abilities. Increasing number of students, lack of infrastructure, shortage of teachers and loss of credibility and quality have created a complete crisis (ASER 2017)

**Lack of trained and dedicated teachers:** Major contributing factors in this situation are the unparalleled efforts in India to expand educational opportunity at the secondary school level, the determination to diversify secondary school curricula, the shortage of teacher training facilities and the distressingly low economic, social and professional status of teachers. While all of these factors are important, it has been concluded that most central to achieving improvement in the quality and supply of secondary school teachers is the necessity for improvement in teacher status. The problems of teacher status are widely recognized at all levels of Indian education Although the "guru" tradition of service continues to survive and provide able and promising teachers in the rural areas where secondary schools may exist, the influence of this tradition has appreciably weakened, especially in cities, and seems destined to be still more weakened as modern industrialization progresses.

**Peer-Pressure:** Peers play a pivotal role in student life as their social, emotional and character development takes place during this period. During this special period of transformation, they learn many a lesson of support, reliance and maturity through mutual interactions. However, friends can also have negative influence on their personality. They may learn many bad habits as skipping the classes, stealing and cheating. Some students are influenced to the extent that they imbibe the bad habits of smoking, alcoholic drinks, drugs or other addictions and unhealthy practices. The kids give in to peer-pressure because they want to make a high image in the eyes of their friends. Sometimes they copy and follow their friends lest they might be rejected, neglected or scoffed at, if they don't go along their peers. However, the kids can be guided to overcome peer-pressure by advising

them proper course of action. Teach them not to be unnecessarily influenced by others and beware of friends who pressurize them to do certain unethical, unrighteous and prohibited things. Let them develop their sense of judging and differentiating between right and wrong. Also tell them that the practice of always saying "yes" should be avoided and they should learn and practise to say "no" at times. They must be encouraged to sense when they should take the help and support of the teachers and parents. Tell them to make friends with students having positive attitude towards life. Inspire them to spend their time in worthwhile activities. Then they will have no time for undesirable habits and activities. Parents must inspire the children to have open and honest interaction with them. The kids must have faith in the parents so that they may approach them if they're feeling undue peer pressure. Children must be told the advantages of being positive yet assertive, so that they can easily overcome adverse situations and negative influences. Parents must invest some time for children's well-being at this crucial stage of their life. They must know what type of students their children are having friendship with. They must create confidence in their kids. Kids having good self-esteem are hardly likely to be vulnerable to peer-pressure. Parents must discuss the matter with the respective teacher, principal, school counsellor or family doctor, if the children are having difficulties with peer pressure, or are found to have mood swings, depression, low self-esteem, or any other behavioural abnormality, and take extra care and precaution.

**Equity:** India is a male-dominated country where even in high class families males are responsible for females. For many centuries, women in rural areas were discouraged from study as they were considered fit for doing work at home alone and not worthy of pursuing a job or carrying out a business. With so much dependence on their guardians in almost every decision, girls feel like slaves and getting demotivated, they drop out from schools.

**No emphasis on practical training:** Practical training is considered a waste of time in many schools. Students are not provided the right environment to develop their practical knowledge and skills. There is lack of proper laboratories, instruments or staff. Students get only theoretical knowledge which results in the students coming out of school without the knowledge of technology and its practical use. As a result they are not able to get suitable employment.

**High Pupil-Teacher Ratio:** In many of the secondary classes, the number of students is found to be quite high, as compared to the availability of teachers. In such a situation, teacher-pupil relationship and personal contact are lacking. As the teacher has to teach a very large class, he can't bring any improvement in methods of teaching. There are problems of inadequate infrastructure in many schools and buildings are not sufficient; class sizes in such schools grow quite large.

**Lack of career guidance:** Parents of most of the students do not ask them about their own choice of career or interest; instead, they force them to opt for a particular career of their choice. Thus the students remain under constant pressure. Due to lack of career counselling, many students lose better opportunities. This deprivation results into the students taking up a profession in which they are either not interested or for which they do not have flair. This, in turn, causes

depression in them and also results into low or decreased productivity.

**Lack of adequate infrastructure:** Most of the schools, particularly government schools, do not have adequate infrastructure. There are no proper classrooms, furniture, laboratories, libraries, playgrounds, urinals, safe drinking water and other related amenities etc. There is lack of playgrounds, libraries, which cause them face a lot of inconveniences. Girl students particularly face the problem of safe and hygienic urinals, and it may be one of the causes of low female student enrolment. This deprives the students of the actual benefit of learning. Due to lack of proper facilities, students' physical and mental growth is hampered. Government schools can be easily noted for their mess. Students are provided unhealthy food which adversely affects their health. In most of the cases, corrupt practices defeat the basic purpose of the beneficial mid-day meal scheme.

**Issues in Higher Education:** Despite visibly impressive success, there is widespread dissatisfaction among the public in general and youth in particular, many studies have shown that some of the obvious problems are, poor quality of education, unequal access and not linking with employment. This show that there is something fundamentally wrong and entire system of higher education needs to be re-engineered. We all consider that higher education is simultaneously the most potent conservative force as well as the most effective change maker.

**Access:** At present, higher education is open to all only in principle, but in practice gets monopolised by entrenched elites, traditional hierarchies get transformed into modern meritocratic ones and availability of seats in government-run institutions is still much smaller than the number of people wanting them. There is a wide gap in the supply of higher education and demand for it, has encouraged private sector participation, but a rigorous regulatory mechanism has to ensure high standards and affordability. Currently, there is shortage of faculty in institutions of higher learning and unequal access to the institutions (Shobhit Mahajan 2012). It is important that the increased access to higher education should be inclusive. Education, particularly higher education, is being looked at providing direction for social mobility for the marginalised sections of the society. Indeed, the recent spurt in the demand for reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) may be a reflection of the important role of higher education in social mobility. We can no longer afford to ignore such demands. Neither these demands can be satisfied with tokenism.

**Financing:** As the system of higher education grew in size, its maintenance required more and more funds. At the time the proportion of non-governmental financial resources successively reduced. Consequently, the contributions of government to higher education remain stagnant since last decade and a half. India's education system is still far behind the target set by Education Commission 1964-66. The financial stringency has led to cuts in expenditure on several occasions not on the basis of importance and relevance to higher education but the ease with which one can cut expenditure. As a result, the austerity measures have taken a heavy toll on the quality of education. Thus, it is imperative that these trends in funding be reversed and public funding

for higher education raised (Parkash Ved. 2007).

**Quality:** The quality of higher education is an equally serious problem. There have been remarkable quantitatively expansion in terms of number of higher educational institution established and a large number of population participated in higher education. This huge number of expansion and increment in enrolment has cause the serious problem in maintaining standard norms. The overall scenario is that higher education is being subsidised by the government. Those are benefited by the subsidy in higher education do not bother about its quality because they are getting it almost free. For the quality of higher education, the 11th Plan (2007-12) recognised three areas for interventions- physical infrastructure, academic reform and ensuring adequate faculty.

**Disparity:** In 2008, as against an all-India enrolment rate of 17 per cent, enrolment of the categories such as 7 per cent for Scheduled Tribes (ST), 11 per cent for Scheduled Castes (SC), 28 per cent for Other Backward Classes (OBC) and 47 per cent for higher castes. Moreover, it was 9 per cent for Muslims, 18 per cent for Hindus and 30 per cent for Christians. In a comparison of disparities between the poor and the affluent and in terms of income levels, it was 6 per cent for the bottom 20 per cent of society as against 37 per cent for the top 20 per cent. The expansion of the private, self-financing education sector, with its aim profit making, has been another reason for the propagation of disparities (Throat Sukhdev 2015) <sup>[7]</sup>. The key challenge is to find a path to achieve the divergent goals for the growth of higher education in India. Combining access with affordability and ensuring high-quality undergraduate and postgraduate education are vital for realising the potential of the country's 'demographic dividend'. Future expansion should be carefully planned so as to correct regional and social imbalances, reinvigorate institutions to improve standards and reach international benchmarks of excellence, match demand with supply by improving employability, and extend the frontiers of knowledge. India must develop world-class research universities as well as have sophisticated teaching institutions to impart key vocational and generic skills in a timely manner to cope with the rapidly changing labour market needs.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper the current issues of India education sector has presented. It is identify that challenges like demand-supply gap, lack of quality, problem of infrastructure and basic facilities, shortage of faculty etc. in the education system at all levels. It is suggested that public subsidies related to education need to be targeted to the poor. While the scope for targeting various kinds of public subsidies in education sector may have to be carefully examined, it has to be noted that even in elementary education, many subsidies like textbooks, learning material, uniforms, and attendance scholarships are de facto targeted to the poor only. Incentives such as mid-day meal, tuition fee, and free education are expected to be provided on a universal and pro-poor basis. Regional, gender, and social disparities in access and participation in secondary education system continue to be a major concern. As a result of a shift in educational ideology, the teaching-learning process should become more interactive and student-centered. Stakeholders see education as something that promotes a child's entire growth, not just in appearance but in

reality.

The central government give second priority to higher education after elementary education in terms of allocation. But still more fund is needed to this sector with growing demand for higher education in emerging Indian economy. It has been observed that in case of India, there is large number of graduate unemployed still exists, it means that higher education is still not linking with job phenomenon. Thus, there is need of more quality teaching institution at the higher educational level.

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