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Introduction

Education

One of the most important ingredients of socio-economic development that has attracted the attention of the planners, policy-makers and leaders in the recent past is education. It is an established fact that education is an important catalyst of socio-economic transformation. In the advanced industrial societies of the world, education is provided by the state as a matter of right to all its citizens.

The term education is derived from the Latin word ‘educate’, which means bringing up a child, both physically and mentally. In a broad sense, education denotes a group process by which culture is transmitted from one generation to another. Aderemi Olutola (1981) describes education as “a process of socialization, of change and innovation, of preservation and dissemination of societal values and of the total development of an individual from birth to death”.

Education influences the structural elements of the society and the living mode of the individuals. It has also a bearing on the thought and behaviour patterns and the personality structure of an individual. Education, in fact, performs two important functions-conservative and creative. In its conservative function, education transmits the cultural heritage to the younger generation of the society. The traditional societies favour this function of education and it still continues to be of prime importance. However, in modern human societies, innovation and change are more important than they were in the traditional societies. To provide change is the creative function of education. Modern education inculcates new ideas and thought patterns along with the transmission of established cultural, social and moral values. It does not make an individual dogmatic; rather, it makes him or her a national human being capable of challenging the old values and generating new ones. Thus, creative function of education makes individuals receptive to change. However, these two functions of education, i.e. the conservative and the creative, are not opposed by complementary to each other (Bhatnagar, 1972).
The creation of new social patterns is another important function of education. This function is, however, a bit complex and cannot be performed by education alone unless it is supported by social, economic and political systems. Thus, the main objectives of education are two-fold. On the one hand, education is regarded as a process of empowerment through the imparting of knowledge, skills and values to the individuals and on the other hand, it is an important instrument of social change. The role of education was recognised as vital in arousing an awakening among the Indian masses even in the pre-independence era. Its contribution in breaking the shackles of slavery cannot be undermined as far as it helped in the growth of an enlightened intelligentsia which carried forward not only the movement for independence but also a relentless struggle for socio-economic reforms. After independence, our planners, policy-makers and leaders placed immense faith in education as an important means of socio-economic transformation and modernization.

**Importance of education**

The National Policy on Education 1986 states that Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. Education will definitely serve the following areas,

- Enhance self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Build a positive image of women by recognizing their contributions to the society, polities and the economy.
- Develop ability to think critically.
- Foster decision-making and action through collective process.
- Enable them to make informed choices in areas like health and social status.
- Ensure equal participation in development process.
- Provide information, knowledge and skill for economic independence.
- Enhance access to legal literacy.

So it is explicit that educated women can definitely shine in their life.

**Education system in India**

The present educational system of India is an implantation of British rulers. Wood's Dispatch of 1854 laid the foundation of present system of education in India. Before the advent of British in India, education system was private one. With the introduction of Wood's Dispatch known as Magna Carta of Indian education, the whole
scenario changed. The main purpose of it was to prepare Indian Clerks for running local administration. Under it the means of school education were the vernacular languages while the higher education was granted in English only. British government started giving funds to indigenous schools in need of help and thus slowly some of the schools became government-aided.

Contemplating on the new system which was introduced Mahatma Gandhi expressed his anguish in following words, "I say without fear of my figures being challenged successfully, that today India is more illiterate than it was fifty or a hundred years ago, and so is Burma, because the British administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. They scratched the soil and began to look at the root, and left the root like that, and the beautiful tree perished. The village schools were not good enough for the British administrator, so he came out with his program. Every school must have so much paraphernalia, building, and so forth. Well, there were no such schools at all. There are statistics left by a British administrator which show that, in places where they have carried out a survey, ancient schools have gone by the board, because there was no recognition for these schools, and the schools established after the European pattern were too expensive for the people, and therefore they could not possibly overtake the thing. I defy anybody to fulfil a program of compulsory primary education of these masses inside of a century. This very poor country of mine is ill able to sustain such an expensive method of education.

**Stages of today’s Indian Education System**

- **Pre- Primary** - It consists of children of 3-5 years of age studying in nursery, lower kindergarten and upper kindergarten. At this stage student is given knowledge about school life and is taught to read and write some basic words.
- **Primary** - It includes the age group of children of 6-11 years studying in classes from first to fifth.
- **Middle** - It consists of children studying in classes from sixth to eighth.
- **Secondary** - it includes students studying in classes ninth and tenth.
- **Higher Secondary** - Includes students studying in eleventh and twelfth classes.
- **Undergraduate** - Here, a student goes through higher education, which is completed in college. This course may vary according to the subject pursued by
the student. For medical student this stage is of four and a half years plus one year of compulsory internship, while a simple graduate degree can be attained in three years.

- **Postgraduate** - After completing graduation a student may opt for post graduation to further add to his qualifications.

**Education Governing Bodies**

- **The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE):** This is the main governing body of education system in India. It has control over the central education system. It conducts exam and looks after the functioning of schools accredited to central education system.

- **The Council of Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE):** It is a board for Anglo Indian Studies in India. It conducts two examinations 'Indian Certificate of Secondary Education' and 'Indian School Certificate'. Indian Certificate of secondary education is a k-10 examination for those Indian students who have just completed class 10th and Indian school certificate is a k-12 public examination conducted for those studying in class 12th.

- **The State Government Boards:** Apart from CBSE and CISCE each state in India has its own State Board of education, which looks after the educational issues.

- **The National Open School:** It is also known as National Institute of Open Schooling. It was established by the Government of India in 1989. It is a ray of hope for those students who cannot attend formal schools.

- **The International School:** It controls the schools, which are accredited to curriculum of international standard.

**Education Policy**

The national policy of education (1986) and program of action (1992) lay down the objectives and features of Indian education policy. It includes:

- Development of International cooperation and peaceful coexistence through education.

- Promotion of equality. It could be achieved by providing equal access and equal condition of success to children.

- A common educational structure (10+2+3) for the whole of India.
• Education for women's equality. The Indian education should be used as a tool to change the status of women in the society.
• Equalization of SC population with others in the matter of education. This is ensured by giving incentives to parents who send their children to schools, providing scholarship to SC students for higher studies, reservation of seats in institution of higher studies in India, recruitment of SC teachers.
• Opening of primary schools in tribal area for promotion of education in ST people.
• Development of curriculum and study material in the language of tribal people.
• Emphasis on the education of minorities.
• Adult education - Initiation of National Literacy Mission, for teaching illiterate people of age group 15-35. And making them aware of the day-to-day realities of their surroundings.
• Special emphasis on early childhood care and education by opening up of day care centres, promotion of child focused programs.
• Increasing the scope of Operation Blackboard for enlistment of standard of primary education in India.
• Secondary education curriculum should expose the students to differentiated roles of science, the humanities, and social science.
• Redesigning of courses of higher education to meet the increasing demand of professionalism.
• Providing enhanced support to the research work in Universities. Efforts to relate ancient Indian knowledge with the contemporary reality.
• Setting up of Open Universities and Distance Learning centres to promote the goal of education as a life long process.
• A combined perspective of technical and management education.
• Minimum exposure to computers and training in their use to be the part of professional education.
• The All India Council for Technical Education will be responsible for maintenance of norms and standards, accreditation, funding, and monitoring of technical and management education in India.
• Multiple task performance for teachers such as teaching, research, development of learning resource material, extension and management of the institution.
• Providing teachers a better deal to make education system in India work in proper way, as teachers are the backbone of the system. Providing better facilities to institutions and improved services to students.
• Development of languages in great deal.
• Measures to be taken for easy accessibility of books at minimum costs to all sections of students.
• Strengthening of science education for the development of spirit of inquiry and objectivity in the minds of students.
• The purpose of examination to be to bring about qualitative improvement in education. It should discourage memorization.
• Methods of teacher recruitment to be recognized one to ensure merit and objectivity in the system.
• Overhauling of the system of teacher education and establishment of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIEET) to organize courses for elementary school teachers.
• Reviewing of educational developments by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE)
• Involvement of local communities for school improvement programmes.
• Review of the implementation of the parameters of the policy every five years,
• Strengthening the base of pyramid of Indian population for proper development of education system in India.

National Policy of Education (1992) laid down many objectives for the development of education system in India but it has not been successful in achieving all of them. It has specified that the examination system should discourage the memorizing but it is what is going on. The education in India seems to encourage rote learning instead of experimentation and questioning. There is some disparity in assessment as all the State Boards have different standards of evaluation.

The reservation on the basis of caste and religion is also a negative point in Indian education. Corruption is visible in the allocation of seats of institutions of higher studies and student politics is another sore point. These are some of the issues, which need to be worked upon.
Though there are disparities between the objectives and their implementation in education but still education system in India has come a long way and will continue to improve in the future.

Women’s education

In Hindu culture, Saraswati is considered the goddess of education, but it is an irony, that in the same culture the education of women is at stake. With the advancement of education in India some problems have also cropped up. They are concerning the aim of education, unsuitable curriculum, wastage and stagnation, management of education, growing indiscipline, medium of instruction, the education of women and problems relating to the impact of technical, political, social and economic change on education. They need skilful solutions. The problem of women’s education is a century old and still occupies the minds of educationists today. Various education commissions and committees of experts have from time to time endeavoured to eradicate the evils from the educational fields through suitable suggestions and recommendations. Now with the passage of more than four decades after independence, there is a change in the aims and objectives of Indian education. The present need is to view the educational problems of the country in the light of the basic requirements of the people, so as to fulfil their high aspirations.

Problems in women’s education

Illiteracy and ignorance are prevalent more in women than in men. This evil is seen more in rural areas and in the lower strata of urban population and backward communities. Under the fast changing conditions in the country in the recent times increased attention is being paid to women’s education. Now in various parts of the country, a large number of primary and secondary schools and colleges are being started to meet the growing need of women’s education. But most of these higher educational centres have been concentrated in urban areas only. Some of them are co-educational whereas others are meant exclusively for women. In almost all the universities of India, there is provision for co-education. Higher education institutions for women are very less in number.

Factors influencing the education of rural girls
Women education is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. No single factor or cause can be held responsible for very low literacy rate of women in India. Subsequently it is associated with combination of many factors including social, cultural, economic, educational, demographic, political and administrative and so on. The following are the some of the important factors which could be attributed for the present poor state of affairs of womenfolk in education.

**The Lower Enrolment:** The lower enrolment of girls in schools is one of the foundational factors which stand as stumbling block for women empowerment in India. Reliable sources indicate that more than 50 % of the Non-Starters (those who have never been to school) are girls. According to the latest statistics, two out of every ten girls in the age group of 6-11 are still not enrolled in schools.

**Higher drop-out rate among girls from schools:** The incidence and prevalence of drop-outs among girls especially in rural, tribal and slums areas seem to be quite high. According to available sources, occurrence of drop-out and stagnation amongst girls is nearly twice that of boys all over India.

**Girl Child as Second Mother:** In many families girl children play the role of second mother by shouldering the responsibilities of household work such as looking after the sibling, fetching water, collecting firewood, bringing fodder for cattle, cleaning and cooking etc. In rural India especially in poor families this traditional sex role makes girl child handicapped and conditioned by the attitude of mother and the family and discourages girl child to go school as it becomes secondary.

**Bonded Labour System:** This social evil is a quite discouraging phenomena which stand as barrier for girl’s education in rural areas for the underprivileged families of washer men and agricultural labour, scheduled caste and scheduled tribes.

**Cast System as a Barrier:** Children belonging to low caste families are forced to learn skills and work ways and not encouraged to go to school due to various factors in the sphere of strict instruction /threat from high caste communities for their selfish motives of keeping them as domestic servants and child labourers in the farms or factory.
**Dowry as cordon:** Dowry system and other social practices act as main causes of the neglect of the girl child and discrimination against girl child including the deprivation of right of education. In many families especially poor and down-trodden think that if their daughters are educated more, they have to accumulate more assets and properties to provide as dowry in large proportion at the time of marriage, so prefer rather to either stop their children with average education and so on but never higher education. This prevails more in underprivileged families and communities.

**Child Labour Practice:** A large segment of child population in India is engaged in child labour practices. According to UN sources India is the most child labour populous nation in the globe with more than 50 million child labourers indulged in beedi works, carpet making, bricks, mining, quarrying, glass, bangles, match and fireworks, gem polishing, handloom works, zari, embroidery, coir industry, domestic works, construction etc. In most of these industries girl children are preferred for high productivity and low cost.

**Poor School Environment for girls:** In general the school environment for girls in India is not really interesting and encouraging. The subjects taught in schools are also not related to the environment of girl children. The methods of teaching are mostly out – dated, rigid and uninteresting. There are still hundreds of schools with poor basic amenities such as drinking water, latrine and toilet facilities, improper building, and inadequate number of teachers’ especially female teachers preferable for any parents for safety of their girl children from different types of exploitation and abuse.

**Female age at marriage:** There is high association of female literacy with female age at marriage. By and large the female age at marriage of 18 (recently 21 years) as prescribed by various legislations not at all followed in India. It is very much ignored and neglected by the families of parents with low literacy and illiteracy background. This obnoxious practice discourages female children to continue their schooling and higher education as they enter into family life at the early age which is not advisable from the physical and mental health point of view and also of social development.

**Inferiority, subservience and domesticity:** The female child in Indian culture especially in rural, tribal and poor families is expected to develop the qualities of
inferiority; subservience and domesticity which place sever limitations on her education and development

**Poverty as a Barrier:** In many poverty stricken families, children especially girls are considered as economic assets as they bring income for livelihood as well to save from economic crises due to death or incapacity of parents (sick/ handicapped/aged)

**Ineffective Law Enforcing Machinery:** Indian constitution and various legislations pertaining to education to children assure free and compulsory education all children of this nation but unfortunately the enforcement machinery fail to discharge its duties and responsibilities to the satisfaction of the public interest and welfare of women

**Demographic Factors:** The high population growth rate, rapid urbanisation, migration etc also attribute immensely for the poor literacy level of women and girls in India

**Poor Political Will and Conviction:** Government officials, policy makers, politicians etc of our country have neither political will nor conviction for the empowerment of women in general.

**Development in women’s education**

In post –independent India, women’s education made progress. Gradual improvement was effected in women’s education on the basis of the recommendations of Radhakrishnan commission, the Secondary Education Commission, the Five-year Plans and the Kothari Commission. The importance of girls’ education cannot be underrated. The role of educated women in society, particularly with respect to the management of household, shaping the character of children. She is now adopting a career of her own and sharing equally with man the responsibility for the development of society in all its aspects. In the struggle for freedom, Indian women fought side by side with men. This equal partnership will have to continue in the fight against hunger, poverty, ignorance and ill-health.
Importance of women’s education was recognized as the most potent agent for improving their status in society. There are so many measures taken by both government and nongovernmental organisations for the basic education of women. However, backwardness is still there at the higher education level. During the last five decades the participation of girls has increased in higher education from 10.0% to 36.89%, so more than half of the female population are not getting higher education( Source: selected educational statistics 2000-2001,P.14). However, this change is confined to urban areas only and among the educated classes, girls belonging to the urban slum and rural areas continue to lag behind (Gowri Srivastava 2003). Higher education is one of the biggest potential factors for fundamental changes in the existing conditions. Higher education provides upward mobility in the modern society through raising the status of women in the family and in society. The whole idea of the
purpose of women’s education underwent a radical change based on the civil and social obligations. The consciousness of the indispensable necessity to equip women for taking up multiple roles of homemakers as well as equal partners of men in all social, industrial and administrative activity is a new development; this can be only achieved through expansion of education. Because the Commission on Higher Education of women (1977) observed that for men and women, college education is necessary for character formation, ability to earn, creative, self-expression and personality development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D/D.Sc/D.Phil</td>
<td>29149(64.8%)</td>
<td>15855(35.2%)</td>
<td>45004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.A</td>
<td>264262(63.4%)</td>
<td>152444(36.6%)</td>
<td>416706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.Sc</td>
<td>70408(55.5%)</td>
<td>56365(44.5%)</td>
<td>126773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.Com</td>
<td>64689(62.3%)</td>
<td>39170(37.7%)</td>
<td>103859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.A/B.A (Hons)</td>
<td>2690712(61.9%)</td>
<td>1657325(37.7%)</td>
<td>4348037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Sc/B.Sc(Hons)</td>
<td>876722</td>
<td>525346(37.5%)</td>
<td>1402068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Com/B.Com (Hons)</td>
<td>964952(64.6%)</td>
<td>529858(35.4%)</td>
<td>1494810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.E/B.Arch</td>
<td>324914(77.7%)</td>
<td>93279(22.3%)</td>
<td>418193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Ed/B.T</td>
<td>69625(57.2%)</td>
<td>52108(42.8%)</td>
<td>121733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBBS</td>
<td>88396(59.4%)</td>
<td>60303(40.6%)</td>
<td>148699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate/ Jr.College/ Pre.degree/ Pre-University</td>
<td>1583392(65.4%)</td>
<td>838680(34.6%)</td>
<td>2422072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Secondary</td>
<td>4493390(60.5%)</td>
<td>2935829(39.5%)</td>
<td>7429219</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Women and Child development 1997.

In urban areas in India, women’s education has made remarkable progress but in the rural areas, education of girls especially the higher education is not in an appreciable condition. This is because of so many reasons like socio-economic
conditions, parental education and encouragement, availability of higher education services like colleges, hostel facilities and knowledge about higher education facilities, exposure and fear of co-education colleges, social practices like child marriage and sex stereotyping in higher education etc. the socio economic status of both the urban and rural students was includes the social systems like child marriage and family, traditional practice of gender bias, sex stereotyping, fear of co-education institutions and the economical standard of like.

**Enrolment in Higher education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Women (%)</th>
<th>Men (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-93</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>66.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-95</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>65.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>65.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


From the above table, it is clear that there are changes in the enrolment of girls in higher education but that is not so progressive, because there are so many hindrances affect the women’s higher education.

**Women’s enrolment to total enrolment in higher education in India**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total enrolment</th>
<th>Women enrolment</th>
<th>Percentage of women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>95-96</td>
<td>6574005</td>
<td>2363607</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>97-98</td>
<td>7260418</td>
<td>2722062</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>99-00</td>
<td>8050607</td>
<td>3112090</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>01-02</td>
<td>8821095</td>
<td>3514450</td>
<td>39.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concern for Inequities in Education

‘Growth with equity’ is now considered to be one of the objectives of planning in many of the developing countries. It may be noted that there is in the context of the developing countries, no contradiction between the demands for equity and growth. Equity without growth is a stagnant cesspool, wherein only misery, ignorance, obstantism and superstition can be equitably distributed. Growth without equity leads to the accentuation of structural disequilibrium and, chronic persistence of low purchasing power of the mass of the toiling people constrains growth itself. The social concerns for the two can be handled together sustaining and sustained by each other.

It was in this context that equalisation of educational opportunities was recognised as one of the major goals of Indian educational policy. The National Policy Resolution, 1968, calls for strenuous efforts to correct regional imbalances and minimise inter-group disparities in the educational sphere. The National Policy on Education (1968) lays special emphasis on the removal of disparities and equalisation of educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far.

Concept of Equity

The concept of equity can be understood by differentiating the two terms i.e., equality and equity. While the concept of ‘equality’ in general and ‘equality of opportunity’ in education in particular, has a long history, the concept of equity in education is a more recent one. There is considerable confusion regarding the meaning of the two terms-equality and equity-and these have been used inter-changeably by scholars although literally they have a very different connotation. Bronfenbrenner (1973) distinguishes between these concepts by taking ‘equity’ to mean social justice, or fairness. It refers to a subjective and ethical judgement. ‘Equality’ refers to the pattern of distribution of something such as income or education. It is more objective and a descriptive term and can be measured. But equity, or fairness, of a situation of inequality can be evaluated only by appealing to value judgement Bronferbrenner (1973).

In education the idea of ‘equality of opportunity’ came in with French Revolution and took shape in United States of America after the war of American
Independence. The concept of equality of opportunity in education started with provision for ‘equal accesses. Later on equal input’ we considered necessary for equalising educational opportunities. Today, along with equal access and equal input, ‘equal output’ is considered a necessary criterion. The last one calls for measures of protective discrimination in favour of the disadvantaged sections of the society. Equity in education can also be achieved by pursuing the policy of protective discrimination in favour of the disadvantaged section of the society. In this sense, today equality and equity in education have the same connotation and most of the developing countries of the world have these as major goals of education policy.

Soon after attainment of independence in 1947, ‘India also committed itself to achieve an egalitarian social order where equality in general and equality of opportunity in particular were taken as important elements of State Policy’. Further, under Article 46 of the Directive Principles of state policy, the State was directed “to promote with special care the education and economic interests of the weaker sections of the society, and in particular of SC, ST and girls” (Article 46).

Planned efforts have been made since independence to achieve growth of all parts of the country and all the groups of population. Special allocation for the backward areas and incentive and facilities for different groups of disadvantaged are all part of the strategy to achieve a more equitable distribution of opportunities.

**Inequities in the Indian Education**

**The Socio-economic Context**

Inequity in education is not purely an educational issue for it cuts across the entire social, economic and political fabric of a nation. The social disparities that show up in educational systems are in no small extent, reflection on deeply embodied inequalities in the whole society and economy. In most of the countries the disparities are tied to sex, geographical location and socio-economic status. The available evidence shows that in spite of efforts at large scale expansion, the disparities still exist literally in all the countries. The forces underlying disparities are too complex to explain by a single theory of one way cause and effect.
Male –female disparities

The most common form of disparities in the Indian and as in most of the pre-industrial societies is, male-female inequalities, wherein female was assigned a place in the home to bear children, look after her husband and otherwise to drudge for the household. Even here she had no hand in decision making.

Modernisation has done little to improve the status of women in Third World countries. The process of modernization in these societies has followed a return creating two way economy, one with capital intensive modern sector, and the other with labour intensive traditional sector.

Scheduled caste and non-scheduled caste disparities

The separation of work from knowledge was operationalised by the separation of training from education. The former was intended to transfer the skills of labour and secrets of craftsmanship to the younger generation of toiling poor; the latter was intended to pass on the abstracted generalisation of social practice as gems of knowledge to the propertied class to enable them wield the power through knowledge and appropriate surpluses generated by the labour of the former. The separation of work from knowledge and work from power has been the most potent instrument of in equalisation. In India since Independence efforts have been made to break the dichotomy between work and education by introducing work experience in school and by vocationalisation of the secondary education and professionalisation of higher education. Special incentives and facilities are also being provided to bring the traditionally working classes (SC) within the fold of educational system. There is some progress (Yogendra Singh, 1967) but the situation continues to be largely unsatisfactory not only quantitatively but more so qualitatively.

Scheduled Tribes, non-scheduled tribes disparities

The tribes differ greatly in stage of their development (Gore, M.S. 1967) but they share certain common characteristics which mark them out as one of the most disadvantaged groups. In the first instance they occupy tracts of sloppy land, hills and forests having been ousted from great fertile valleys. They are in command of poor resource regions. Secondly, the communication and infrastructure in the area is little developed which has led to the isolation of tribes from rest of the world as well as from
one another (Mathur-1973). Lack of cross-fertilisation of ideas has been responsible for hampered growth and advancement. The level of technology has remained low. The problems of tribes were further aggravated by the British who followed a policy of isolation. Thus the tribes were further removed from the mainstream. What is worse they were all the time exploited by the non-tribes who took advantage of their simplicity and innocence. Their produce was purchased at a very low price and they were alienated from land for non-payment of fictitious loans. In their own land they were treated as serfs for minor default. The physical isolation of tribes and the system of economic exploitation acted as a serious constraint to their educational development (Arora-1978). By and large the spread of education among the tribes is contingent of the state of their social evolution, ecological setting, mode of economy, their exposure to language other than their own dialect, the pattern of economic interaction with non-tribal groups in the neighbourhood, the role of tribal elite and the exogenous forces that operated in the tribal region before and after independence.

Rural-urban disparity

The rural urban disparities in education are part of a much broader imbalance in rural and urban economic and social development which underlined the heavy concentration of extreme poverty in rural areas of most of the developing countries. In India also there are rural urban disparities of high order, the rural literacy rates being only 29.57 per cent in 2001 as compared to urban literacy rates of 57.19 per cent. The provisions of schooling facilities in rural and urban areas are widely different in terms of availability of schools within the habitation or within 1km of walking distance. Disparities are larger in terms of infrastructural facilities and percentage of trained teachers which make urban schools qualitatively superior to the rural schools.

Regional disparities in education

Yet another dimension of inequities in education is spatial/regional. This dimension embraces all the other forms of inequities. Regional disparities in education reflect on the physical aspect of accessibility and quantitative and qualitative aspect of utilisation. The educational disparities in this context are part of marked disparities in socio-economic conditions across the region. Regional disparities in India are found at variety of scales. For example, there are disparities between different states, between districts within the same state or region, between different blocks within a district. So
far much of the work in regional disparities in India has taken state as the unit of analysis. This may, however, hide more of differences than reveal. For any meaningful analysis of regional disparities in the Indian context district need to be taken as the unit of analysis. District as an administrative unit not only has a particular vitality in the Indian context but it only at this level that remedial action for minimisation of regional disparities can be effectively undertaken.

**Pyramid of inequality**

Inequalities in education seldom express themselves singly as between two discrete categories. In fact, in a given societal set up, there are layers and layers of disparities. Taking the Indian situation specifically there are disparities between males and females, between rural areas and urban areas, between scheduled groups and non-scheduled groups, between advanced regions and backward regions of a state. Females have been found to be educationally deprived as compared to males but it is also observed that an urban female of non-scheduled group is less deprived as compared to a rural male or a scheduled caste male of urban area. She is certainly much better off as compared to females of any other category. To understand the system of inequalities in a realistic perspective it is necessary to know the relative deprivation of various groups in a society. This can be done by building a pyramid of inequalities.

In the Indian context one need at least to consider the following sub-groups:

- Male as compared to females.
- Rural males as compared to urban males.
- Rural people as compared to urban people
- Rural females as compared to urban females.
- SC males as compared to SC females.
- SC rural males as compared to SC rural females.
- SC urban males as compared to SC urban females.
- Rural SC as compared to urban SC.
- SC rural males as compared to SC urban males.
- SC rural females as compared to SC urban females.
- ST males as compared to ST females.
- ST rural males as compared to ST rural females.
- ST urban males as compared to ST urban females.
- Rural ST as compared to urban ST.
- ST rural males as compared to ST urban males.
- ST rural females as compared to ST urban females.

Factors of educational inequities and indicators

Educational inequities get expressed in a variety of forms. Starting from unequal access it extends to unequal inputs and then to unequal outputs. The indicators have been classified in the following seven broad categories;

1. Indicators of accessibility
2. Indicators of availability
3. Indicators of quantity
4. Indicators of quality
5. Indicators of inter-connectivity
6. Indicators of equity
7. Indicators of utility.

Government initiatives on educational development

Following India's independence a number of rules were formulated for the backward Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes of India, and in 1960 a list identifying 405 Scheduled Castes and 225 Scheduled Tribes was published by the central government. An amendment was made to the list in 1975, which identified 841 Scheduled Castes and 510 Scheduled Tribes. The total percentage of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes combined was found to be 22.5 percent with the Scheduled Castes accounting for 17 percent and the Scheduled Tribes accounting for the remaining 7.5 percent. Following the report many Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes increasingly referred to themselves as Dalit, a Marathi language terminology used by B. R. Ambedkar which literally means "oppressed".

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are provided for in many of India's educational programmes. Special reservations are also provided for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India, e.g. a reservation of 15% in Kendriya Vidyalaya for Scheduled Castes and another reservation of 7.5% in Kendriya Vidyalaya for Scheduled Tribes. Similar reservations are held by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled
Tribes in many schemes and educational facilities in India. The remote and far-flung regions of North East India are provided for under the Non Lapsible Central pool of Resources (NLCPR) since 1998-1999. The NLCPR aims to provide funds for infrastructure development in these remote areas.

The government objective for the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), started in 2001, is to provide education to children between 6–14 years by 2010. The programme focuses specially on girls and children with challenged social or financial backgrounds. The SSA also aims to provide practical infrastructure and relevant source material in form of free textbooks to children in remote areas. The SSA also aims at widening computer education in rural areas. SSA is currently working with Agastya International Foundation - an educational NGO - to augment its efforts in making science curriculum current and exciting. However, some objectives of the SSA, e.g. enrollment of all children under the scheme in schools by 2005 remain unfulfilled. Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education are components of the SSA.

Women from remote, underdeveloped areas or from weaker social groups in Andra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, fall under the *Mahila Samakhya Scheme*, initiated in 1989. Apart from provisions for education this programme also aims to raise awareness by holding meetings and seminars at rural levels. The government allowed 340 million rupees during 2007–08 to carry out this scheme over 83 districts including more than 21,000 villages.

Currently there are 68 *Bal Bhavans* and 10 *Bal Kendra* affiliated to the *National Bal Bhavan*. The scheme involves educational and social activities and recognising children with a marked talent for a particular educational stream. A number of programmes and activities are held under this scheme, which also involves cultural exchanges and participation in several international forums.

India's minorities, especially the ones considered 'educationally backward' by the government, are provided for in the 1992 amendment of the Indian National Policy on Education (NPE). The government initiated the Scheme of Area Intensive Programme for Educationally Backward Minorities and Scheme of Financial
Assistance or Modernisation of Madarsa Education as part of its revised Programme of Action (1992). Both these schemes were started nationwide by 1994. In 2004 the Indian parliament allowed an act which enabled minority education establishments to seek university affiliations if they passed the required norms.

**Higher education**

There is no simple definition of higher education. The international definition of tertiary (post school) education divides it into two parts. Type A (Higher Education) and Type B (Further Education). A higher education qualification at degree level takes a minimum of three years to complete, more typically four. It will have a theoretical underpinning, it will be at a level which would qualify someone to work in a professional field and it will usually be taught in an environment which also includes advanced research activity. Shortly, Higher education mainly and generally means university level education. It offers a number of qualifications ranging from Higher National Diplomas and Foundation Degrees to Honors Degrees and as a further step, Postgraduate programmes such as Masters Degrees and Doctorates. These are recognized throughout the world as representing specialist expertise supported by a wide range of skills that employers find very useful. Further education is generally includes those post graduate studies in where you can gain your Master and Doctorate degrees.

These degrees mark the highest one can earn, though they are divided into two levels. A master's degree, for instance, is awarded for a particular course of study beyond the baccalaureate degree. They come in various categories, such as a Master of Arts, Master of Science, and Master of Theology. The amount of time it takes one to earn a master's degree depends upon the program one is enrolled in, but one should usually expect to study at least for 2 years. The second type of graduate degree, and one considered higher than a master's degree, is a doctoral degree. These are awarded for a particular course of study beyond the master's degree. Doctoral degrees can be professional degrees, such as the Doctor of Ministry, or academic degrees, such as the Doctor of Philosophy. Those who earn doctorates often assume the title 'Doctor.' The amount of time one must study before earning such a degree varies greatly by field, institution.
Higher education is education beyond the secondary level, especially education at the college or university level (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, 2009).

Study beyond the level of secondary education is higher education. Institutions of higher education include not only colleges and universities but also professional schools in such fields as law, theology, medicine, business, music and art. They also include teacher-training schools, community colleges, and institutes of technology. At the end of a prescribed course of study, a degree, diploma or certificate is awarded.

Higher education provided by universities, vocational universities (community colleges, liberal arts colleges and technical colleges etc.), and other collegial institutions that award academic degrees such as career colleges. Post secondary or tertiary education, also referred to as third-stage, third level education, or higher education, is the non-compulsory educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education, such as a high school, secondary school, or gymnasium. Tertiary education is normally taken to include undergraduate and postgraduate education, as well as vocational education and training.

Higher education includes teaching, research and social services activities of universities, and with in the realm of teaching, it includes both the undergraduate level and post graduate level. Higher general education and training generally takes place in a university and/or college. Such education is based on theoretical expertise. Higher general education might be contested with higher vocational education, which concentrates on both practice and theory. A university is an institution of higher education and research, which grants academic degrees; including Bachelor's degrees, Master’s degrees and doctorate in variety of subjects. However, most professional education is included within higher education, and many postgraduate qualifications are strongly vocationally or professionally oriented, for example in disciplines such as social work, law and medicine.

**Growth of Higher Education**

The theme of higher knowledge and higher education was fashioned in India by the ancient Rishis and sages in the Vedic Age, the date of which is uncertain but is
supposed to be traceable to great antiquity. The early Gurukul system of education flourished in the Vedic and Upanishadic periods, but a huge University came to be set up at Takshashila in the 6th Century B.C. Two other universities, namely, Nalanda and Vikramasila were established in the 4th and 5th centuries A.D., respectively.

India has had a long tradition of inquiry and articulation of concepts of universe, self, role of state, economy, social order and other related matters. The methodologies adopted were subjective and objective and included observation, conceptualisation, verification, articulation and teaching.

As a result, India had gone further in science than any other country before the modern era—specially in mathematics, astronomy and chemistry, metallurgy and physics. Indian scientists discovered and formulated and anticipated by force of reasoning or experiment some of the scientific ideas and discoveries which Europe arrived at much later. Ancient India was well equipped in surgery and its system of medicine survives to this day. A vast literature is also available on "Vriksha Ayurveda" (Herbal Medicine). In literature, in philosophy and in systems of yogic knowledge not only ancient India but medieval and modern India reached highest levels of achievement. The higher education system flourished in ancient India well; and it continued to influence developments during its subsequent ages, in spite of diverse forms that developed under the impact of changes in religion, and in social, economic and political life.

**Beginnings of Modern Higher Education**

The modern higher education system is only 140 years old, when the first three universities were set up in 1857 under the British Rule. Policy guidelines given by Macaulay and Wood’s Despatch (1854) shaped the scope and the role of universities in India. To begin with, colleges set up in India were affiliated to British universities. In 1857, for the first time, universities were set up in India. Existing colleges got affiliated to these universities.

The period 1857 to 1947 was the period of slow development of institutions of higher education in India. They were set up mostly in administrative headquarters and port towns. They provided education in literature, history, philosophy, political science,
social science and natural sciences. The thrust of development was mainly on liberal arts education. Science education occupied a very small proportion. The rate of development was slow as in a period of 90 years only 18 universities were set up in the country. Most of these followed the model of the three leading universities at Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Along with liberal arts, some engineering and medical colleges were also set up. Most of the colleges imparted education as formulated by the universities. The universities also acted as examining and degree granting bodies. The initiative in the hands of college teachers in terms of curriculum development was, therefore, very much limited.

The guiding principles of colonial rulers were slightly modified by Indian scholars who desired to blend Indian culture with western thought. They felt this would make Indians appreciate knowledge both from Indian as well as from the British point of view. These two philosophical approaches simultaneously operated during the colonial period.

But the development that followed was greatly influenced by Macaulay’s Minutes, which had crippling effects, and even till today those effects continue to obstruct the process of major reforms that are now felt to be urgent and imperative.

During this colonial period, particularly after 1906, the desire for a national system of education and need for imparting knowledge of India’s philosophy, art and literature also gained momentum. Some of the leading persons attempted to establish indigenous educational institutions with the support of the community. A National College was set up by nationalist leaders in 1906 at Calcutta under the principalship of Sri Aurobindo, and some other institutions too came to be established, such as Viswa Bharati by the great poet Rabindra Nath Tagore.

**Development after Independence**

After independence, India adopted the approach of planned development of the country. The First Five Year Plan focused on agriculture, the Second Five Year Plan on industry and the Third Five Year Plan again attempted to focus on agriculture and agro-based industry for the development of the country. This approach for development called for development of the education system in the subsequent Five Year Plans, to
meet the challenges of development and the needs of agriculture, industry and society in general.

At Independence in 1947, India inherited a system of higher education which was not only small but also characterized by the persistence of large intra/inter-regional imbalances. Determined efforts were made to build a network of universities, and their affiliated colleges which provided tremendous outreach to a country of vast diversities in language as also in the prevailing standards of education at the lower levels. The feeder schools differentially impacted on the higher education system leading to significant qualitative imbalances within it.

When India became independent, it had only 20 universities and 500 colleges located in different parts of the country. It enrolled around a hundred thousand students in higher education. Participation of women was limited and those who graduated annually were no more than a couple of dozens or so. The policies and aspirations of people influenced the development in the following decades.

In the post-independence period, higher education has expanded fast, and it is mostly public in nature. Today, India ranks very high in terms of the size of the network of higher education institutions, with 6.75 million students enrolled. The teaching force numbers about 321,000. Student enrolment increased from 263,000 to 6,755,000 by 1996-97. It grew at an estimated rate of 7 per cent between 1987 and 1993 but has now declined to 5.5 per cent compound rate of growth, with 14 states (out of 23 States and 1 Union Territory in India which have Universities) having a lower rate. In spite of this phenomenal growth, the total enrolment, however, forms only about six percent of the relevant age-group (17-23) population.

The number of students per 100,000 populations has increased significantly since independence. It was only 48 per 100,000 in 1951 increasing to 613 per 100,000 in 1997.

India’s higher education system compares favourably with the other countries of South Asia and Africa in its enrolment, while our South East Asian neighbours show much higher enrolment such as in the Philippines (27.8%), Thailand (19.0%), and
Malaysia (10.1%). Hence, in spite of the rapid expansion of the system in 50 years, access to higher education still remains an issue as the pressure of India’s very youthful population continues to bear on it.

With this scientific and technical manpower India has the potential to become the largest reservoir in the world. Compared to the situation that the country inherited from the colonial rulers about half a century ago, these numbers mark a phenomenal expansion of the system.

The number of women’s colleges has recorded a substantial increase from 780 colleges in 1986-87 reaching a figure of 1195 in 1996-97. Of the total enrolment, women’s enrolment accounts for 34 per cent.

**Governance and Management**

Significant progress has been made in recent years not only in the development and strengthening of higher education in terms of improved student access, strengthened research and postgraduate programmes, more equitable representation of different social groups, renewed curricula and adoption of new teaching and delivery methods, but in enhanced institutional management and strategic planning capacity as well.

The higher education system has been experimenting with management approaches to deal with challenges arising from internet factors, such as changes in academic disciplines and new instructional methods, and external factors such as population growth, diverse clienteles and changing labour market requirements. Non-university institutions and establishment of open universities and distance learning system have been particularly important initiatives.

Involvement in decision-making by all key stakeholders of higher education institutions is recognised as imperative. To this end, a large measure of autonomy is being stimulated in the system to encourage freedom to select staff and students, determine curriculum and degree standards and to allocate funds; while at the same time being accountable to the system.
Higher education in India is coordinated by several agencies. While the university system falls within the jurisdiction of the UGC, professional institutions are coordinated by different bodies. The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) is responsible for coordination of technical and management education institutions. The other statutory bodies are Medical Council of India (MCI), Central Council of Indian Medicine, the Homeopathy Central Council, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Indian Nursing Council, the Dental Council, the Pharmacy Council, the Bar Council of India, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), etc. There are also bodies at the state level, such as State Councils of Higher Education that were established recently. There is yet another type of coordinating agency called Association of Indian Universities (AIU), which was earlier known as Inter-University Board of India. All the universities and other equivalent institutions of higher education are members of the AIU. The AIU has no executive powers, but plays an important role as an agency of dissemination of information and as an advisor both to the government and/or UGC and universities.

**Higher Education Reform in India: Prospects and Challenges**

The system of higher education now existing in India was originally implanted by the British rulers in the mid-19th century to serve the colonial economic, political and administrative interests, and in particular, to consolidate and maintain their dominance in the country. It was inherited by the state managers after independence (in 1947) as a colonial legacy, and has been expanded phenomenally during the last five decades. The massive system of higher education in India consists of 214 (198 state and 16 central) universities, 38 institutions ‘deemed-to-be universities,’ 11 institutes of national importance, 9,703 colleges, and 887 polytechnics. The system now employs 321,000 teachers and caters to 6,755,000 students. Critical appraisals undertaken by the governmental committees and independent academicians have highlighted the crisis confronting the system: ‘over-production of “educated” persons; increasing educated unemployment; weakening of student motivation; increasing unrest and indiscipline on the campuses; frequent collapse of administration; deterioration of standards; and above all, the demoralizing effect of the irrelevance and purposelessness of most of what is being done.’ While the politicians and policy makers have often spoken about the need for radical reconstruction of the system, what has been achieved in reality is only moderate reformism.
After a long period of protected expansion with state patronage until the mid-1980s, a complex turn of events has thrown higher education into a vortex of change. The foremost among such events was the adoption by the Government of India in 1990 of structural adjustment reforms. Influenced by the World Bank-International Monetary Fund combine, structural adjustment has meant the gradual withdrawal of state patronage for higher education and a coterminous privatization of that sphere. However, with the government dithering about the long-term policy to be adopted in this regard, higher education in India is now passing through a period of stunted growth and uncertain future.

The conventional university system in India, confronting as it is a systemic crisis, has proved itself to be incapable of introducing any significant educational innovation or effectively implementing any educational reform. Given the mounting pressure for increasing accessibility and over democratization, the trend in the universities is toward reducing everything to the lowest common denominator or levelling down quality rather than raising it.

The Indian university system is extraordinarily rigid and pronouncedly resistant to change: The impetus to change does not come from within the system. When experiments or innovations are introduced from outside, they are resisted; if enforced, they are ritualized. The fate of such innovations as the merit promotion scheme, faculty-improvement program, vocationalization of courses, and semesterization of courses, curriculum-development centres, annual self-appraisal report, college-development council, academic-staff College and refresher and orientation courses are too well known. It is indeed ironic that higher education, which is expected to function as an agency of change, should itself be resistant to it. The void created by the paralysis and drift of the conventional university system is being filled by private entrepreneurial initiatives. Thus, significant educational innovations and experiments are currently taking place in institutions outside the university orbit and in the private sector. In view of the rapid expansion of and increasing variety in knowledge and skills, there is enormous scope for educational innovations and initiatives. The private institutions have been more responsive to the demands of the economy and industry and the changing employment scenario. They have also shown their ability to match relevance
with flexibility both in costs and regulation. This does not, however, mean that all private institutions are necessarily good. Some of them are brazenly commercial establishments out to swindle gullible people looking for better-quality education at affordable prices. As in any commercial operation in a market economy, such establishments get exposed.

Privatization of higher education is apparently a fledgling but welcome trend: Higher education requires it to maintain creativity, adaptability and quality. The economic trail of liberalization and globalization demands it. Considering the chronic paucity of resources, gradually unburdening itself of the additional responsibility for higher education may be advisable for the government. Instead, it could better utilize the scarce resources for realizing the goal of universalization of elementary education and for improving the quality of school education. Privatization of higher education, however, is not without social costs.

In a polity such as India’s, where structured inequalities have been entrenched, privatization is sure to reinforce existing inequalities and to foster in egalitarian tendencies. This requires the social supervision of the private sector and effective measures for offsetting imbalances resulting from unequal economic capacities of the population. Thus, we again confront a dilemma: Theoretically, how do we advance equality without sacrificing quality? Practically, how do we control the private sector without curbing its creativity and initiative? That is the challenge in higher education at the beginning of the new millennium

**Role of higher education in National development**

The benefits of higher education accrue primarily to the recipient, and by implication, that the benefit to the nation is not much, suggest a lack of appreciation of the role of higher education in national development. In fact there is universal appreciation of the fact that higher education provides the competencies that are required in different spheres of human activity ranging from administration to agriculture, business, industry, health, communication and extending to the arts and culture. In fact the World Bank document itself states: “higher education is of paramount importance for economic and social development. Institutions for higher education have the main responsibility for equipping individuals with the advanced

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knowledge and skills required for positions of responsibility in government, business and the professions. Estimated social rates of return of 10 percent or more in many developing countries also indicate that investments in higher education contribute to increases in labour productivity and to higher long term economic growth, which are essential for poverty alleviation.” (World Bank, 1994). It goes on to add: “Higher education investments are important for economic growth. They increase individual’s productivity and income, as indicated by rate-of-return analysis, and they also produce significant external benefits not captured by such analysis, such as long term returns to basic research and to technology development and transfer.” World Bank 1994, in a follow up document, 'perspectives and strategies for education’, the World Bank concludes “Higher education also contributes to self sustaining growth through the impact of graduates on the spread of knowledge.”(World Bank, 1995). More importantly this second World Bank document admits that, “Not all the external effects of higher education-such as the benefits from basic research and from technology development and transfer-are fully reflected in the earnings used in calculating those rates of return.”

UNESCO in a policy paper “Document of policies for the change and development of higher education” (UNESCO, 1995) maintains that there is a well established correlation between investment in higher education and the level of social, economic and cultural development of a country. It expresses concern over the observed trend towards a reduction in State contribution for higher education and its reallocation to earlier educational levels. It maintains “State and society must perceive higher education not as a burden on federal budgets but as a long term domestic investment, in order to increase economic competitiveness, cultural development and social cohesion. As a conclusion one could say that the public support to higher education is still essential in order to ensure its educational, social and institutional mission.

**Higher Education for Social Development**

As mentioned earlier the National Policy on Education, 1986, visualizes education to be a process of empowerment through the development of knowledge, skills and values. Primary and secondary education can fulfil this objective through the creation of awareness and the generation of employment at the lower levels. However,
for meaningful contributions that would lead to economic development it is tertiary education that holds promise of substantial contribution. Internationally, in the years between the two World Wars, the concept of elite universities for the privileged was slowly replaced by the concept of egalitarian universities responsible to society and committed to its needs. Dailland (1990) believes that the vigorous growth of socially committed universities reflects a confidence in higher education as a major instrument of social and economic progress.

In the years following independence, and especially in the late sixties and seventies, Indian Higher education underwent rapid growth with conversion of the elite systems of pre-independence days to a mass system. In consonance with this change the University Grants Commission, in 1977, adopted ‘extension’ as the third dimension of higher education. The policy statement issued at that time stated: “The University system also has a great responsibility to the society as a whole. All Universities and colleges should develop close relationships of mutual service and support with their local communities, and all students and teachers must be involved in such programs as an integral part of their education” University Grants Commission (1987).

Admittedly, not all universities have given due importance to extension work in their communities. However, many of them have been active and a few have made outstanding contributions towards generating awareness and assisting in development activities. Works relating to adult literacy, population control, village uplift, prohibition, environment awareness and a number of other subjects have been undertaken by the universities through the National Service Scheme (NSS). Though the Government has been utilizing this scheme to push through a number of their socially relevant programs the colleges and universities through the National Service Scheme (NSS). Though the Government has been utilizing this scheme to push through a number of their socially relevant programs the colleges and universities have not been given due credit. Planners and economists must appreciate the fact that the universities have been contributing to community development by acting as critic, advisor and helper. As critic their function has been to analyze the economic, social, political and cultural developments of the nation, and particularly of their own region. As advisors they have been conducting research on various social problems and problems relating to agriculture, industry and management, and rendering advice. And as helpers they have
undertaken tasks related to various socio-economic programs through the extension activities described earlier.

**Issues and challenges in Higher Education**

As rightly observed by K. Hanumantappa, the main challenges and issues of concern in the coming Decade and beyond are

1. Access and Adaptation
2. Administration, Accountability and Governance
3. Knowledge Creation and Dissemination
4. The Academic Profession
5. Private Resources and Public Responsibility
6. Diversification and Stratification
7. Economic disparities
8. Political and Academic Forces
9. Resource Crunch and societal Needs
10. Vocationalisation

**Higher education aspiration**

The aspiration to go to higher studies is a critical prerequisite to higher education participation. Unless an individual has some interest in higher study, they are unlikely to apply for or accept a place in higher education. Where higher education aspirations are strong, individuals and their families may be willing to make significant sacrifices to make dreams of attending university a reality, while for students with weaker aspirations, barriers to higher education participation are likely to have a more decisive influence.

The higher education aspirations arise from an array of attitudes, beliefs about the relevance and intrinsic value of higher education. It is determined by the different levels of interests in the subjects in higher education. It is also based on the perceptions of the rewards that flow from higher education qualification. It rests on a belief that higher education is a realistic and attainable choice which is based on the academic capabilities and preparedness for higher education. It can also be affected by actual and perceived practical constraints such as distance and costs.
The 4 A’s: Past conceptions of the relation between aspiration and higher education

Anderson et al.’s (1980) study of the social composition of students in Australian higher education in the 1970s identified four conditions that must be met for students to gain university entry. Aspiration was one, availability, accessibility and achievement were the others; collectively known as the four As. Anderson et al. argue that students seeking entry to higher education could only do so if there were places available and their academic achievement qualified them for entry and they had the financial and geographical means to take up study and they were motivated to do so. Differences between the degrees of policy influence that can be exerted over each of these four conditions are also described by Anderson et al. For example, availability and accessibility are considered to be readily influenced by government and university policy decisions, such as increasing the available higher education places or providing scholarships and other forms of financial assistance. In contrast, achievement and aspiration are considered less readily influenced by policy and more directly affected by factors such as academic ability, family environment and socioeconomic status. While influenced by parents, family environment and socioeconomic background, aspirations for university study and the academic ability to pursue them are largely conceived as conditions for which the individual is responsible. In particular, aspiration was considered an important condition for university entry, but of relatively distant concern for policy makers and higher education institutions. Anderson et al. (1980) describe a set of interrelationships between the four conditions. For example, the level of achievement required for university entrance is related to availability: There is competition for [university] places when the number of qualified aspirants exceeds the number of places. In Australia the competition is settled by selecting students according to their level of academic achievement or potential. Thus alteration of the availability of places influences the level of achievement required for entry. There are also relationships between aspiration, achievement and accessibility. For example, increased achievement may have positive effects on both aspiration and accessibility: ‘high achievement may raise a student’s level of aspiration; it may also improve accessibility by helping him gain a scholarship or simply by increasing his determination to overcome obstacles to accessibility’. And, in turn, an increase of aspiration may have positive effects on both achievement and accessibility: ‘a high level of aspiration is likely to lead to better achievement and to greater determination to gain access’.
Notably, the two conditions considered most readily influenced by policy—accessibility and availability—are not imagined to have any effect on aspirations, which are considered to lie largely beyond the purview of policy makers. However, the separation of aspiration from availability reflects certain assumptions about the inherent desirability of the university places on offer. In a subsequent study drawing on the same ‘four conditions’ model, Anderson and Vervoorn (1983) recommend three policy strategies for increasing access and participation, especially for disadvantaged groups. These include: increasing the number of qualified students through the reform of schooling policy (intervention to increase achievement); expanding the higher education system (increasing availability); and creating alternative pathways to higher education via the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector (increasing accessibility). Anderson and Vervoorn argue that once ‘the structural considerations—an enlarged base [of qualified students], an enlarged system, and flexibility across sectors—have been attended to it then becomes appropriate to turn to motivational factors’. Enhanced financial assistance is one motivational factor discussed Anderson and Vervoorn, but aspirations are not explicitly addressed. Indeed, it is suggested that ‘improvements in the availability of higher education, such as the removal of barriers to access like tuition fees, are unlikely to be effective in democratising participation if unchanging environmental conditions depress scholastic achievement or keep aspirations low’ (Anderson & Vervoorn, 1983, p. 4). The separation of aspiration from the effects of policy rests on the assumption that the normative context of higher education is not related to the aspirations of those for whom it makes places available. That is, students who do not aspire to take up university places are considered to have ‘low’ aspirations—a motivational problem of individuals and their environments—while access to these places is considered to reflect both high aspirations and relative advantage. Or put another way, students For example, the Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations measures educational disadvantage according to an Index of Education and Occupation drawn from the Australian Bureau of that do not seek university places are considered to have low aspirations that place them at risk of educational disadvantage, while the assumed desirability of the university places on offer remains embedded in policy as is largely unquestioned. Three points are worth highlighting in relation to these studies from the early 1980s. Firstly, the discussion is characterised by the contrast between high and low or lacking aspirations. High aspirations enable entry to higher education while low aspirations are an obstacle.
Discussion of aspiration in these terms implies a normative telos based on the implied value of higher education in its current forms. Secondly, aspiration is described as an individual resource that is largely distant from the influence of policy makers and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are considered more likely to lack this resource. Finally, there is no description of the relation between aspiration and availability. It is accepted that governments and institutions determine the number of university places for which an excess of qualified aspirants will compete, based on their level of academic achievement. Of course, this analysis reflected the social theories, policy contexts and demographic trends of a different period. However, the four conditions described by Anderson et al. (1980) have continued to significantly influence discussions of higher education access and participation. We argue that, in the current Australian context, a rethinking of aspiration in relation to each of these three points is necessary, for both empirical and theoretical reasons.

**Factors related to higher education aspiration**

There are various factors influencing higher education aspiration. Their achievement at school is one of the factors for formation of higher education aspiration.

The self concept is the individual’s perception of her abilities and her status and roles in the outer world. There is a causal relationship between the self concept and the rate of learning and achievement. It is one of the important determinants of achievement motivation. The ideal self is important for higher aspiration and high future performance. The students’ self concept will decide what goals suit him and how she should strive for their realisation and it will also determine her level of aspiration.

The achievement motive is a pattern of planning, of actions, and of feelings connected with striving to achieve some internalised standard of excellence. Though it involves planning and striving for excellence, the more important dimension in this concept is the attitude towards achievement. Whether the individual has accomplished the goal or not is secondary. Thus, achievement motivation includes a wide variety of activities. The definition of motive, as given by McClelland, is “a red integration of a change in a fact by a cue and anticipation of a future change in affect contingent, upon certain actions”. The term ‘red integration’ indicates the reinstatement of psychological process at conscious level because of stimulation by an environmental event. The
environmental event may have some psychological bearing. The environmental event acts as a cue and becomes the cause of the affect in arousal. Therefore, for motivation, two factors are important. These are environmental cue and affective arousal. McClelland strongly contends that all human motives are learnt in the environment. The development of the need for achievement is influenced by a number of factors. These include cultural values, social role system, educational process etc. of course, culture, social role system and educational process cannot be separated. For example, a society where the culture is to aspire, the individual will somehow be placed in a social role where he is to be ambitious and achieve. This aspiration is slowly induced and imbibed by the individual through the educational process. The society influences the educational process in such a way that culture of aspirations is developed within the individual.

The individual’s attitude towards education will also influence the higher education aspiration. There are factors influencing adolescents attitude toward education, these are

- peer attitudes
- parental attitudes
- grades which indicate academic success or failure
- the relevance or practical value of various courses
- attitude toward teachers, administrators, academic and disciplinary policies
- success in extracurricular activities
- degree of social acceptance among classmates

There are three types of adolescents who have little interest in education and they are,

- Adolescents whose parents have unrealistically high aspirations for their academic, athletic or social achievements and who are constantly prodding them to come up to these goals.
- Adolescents who find little acceptance among their classmates and who feel that they are missing out on the fun their age-mates are having in extra curricular activities.
Thirdly, early mature who feel conspicuously large among their classmate and who because they look older than they are actually and often expected to do better academic work than they are capable off.

Adolescents who have little interest in education usually show their lack of interest in the following ways:

- They become under achiever
- Working below their capacities in all school subjects or in the subjects they lack interest in.
- They become truants and try to gain parental permission to withdraw from school before the legal age for learning.
- Early matures find school not only uninteresting but often a humiliating experience.

The socio-economic status yet another vital influencing factor, it creates confidence in the attainability of higher education not only for the students but for their community. Family background influences a young person’s decisions about post school pathways. It includes the parents’ educational and professional background, parents’ involvement in their children’s’ career development.

Other aspects of the environments like school and community in which students interact are also important because the values, perceptions regarding education and opportunities, exposures and chances available there in those places will have greater influence on young people’s higher education aspiration. A related issue is the stimulus provided by the presence of educational and occupational role models within the local community or within the young person’s social circle (Kava, R, 2008). The importance of community role models who have participated successfully in higher education provides in direct encouragement to young people (Kolowski, 2008)

Social Work perspective

Education is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. The greatest single factor which can incredibly improve the status of women in any society is education. It is indispensable that education enables women not only to gain
more knowledge about the world outside of her hearth and home but helps her to get status, positive self esteem, and self confidence, necessary courage and inner strength to face challenges in life. Apparently it also facilitates them to procure a job and supplement the income of family and achieve social status. Education especially of women has a major impact on health and nutrition as an instrument of developing a sustainable strategy for population control. Moreover educated women can play an equally important role as men in nation building. Thus there is no denying fact that education empowers women. Indeed the different organs of the United Nations and experts on women’s liberation argue for women’s education as the basic step to attain equality with men.

One of the recommendations of National Policy on Education (1986) by the Government of India is to promote empowerment of women through the agency of education and it is considered to be a landmark in the approach to women’s education of illiterate. The National Literacy Mission is another positive step towards eradication of illiteracy in the age group of 15-35 years. Women’s education has assumed special significance in the context of India’s planned development, as it is incorporated in every Five-year plan as the major programme for the development of women. Universalization of elementary education, enrolment and retention of girls in the schools, promotion of balwadis and crutches, raising number of schools and colleges of arts, science, and professional for girls, politechniques, girls hostels, multipurpose institutions and adult education programmes are some of the steps being taken by both central and state governments in India to boost-up women’s education.

Education is considered as a value in itself because it leads to the development of the overall personality of the individual. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and self confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Educating women benefits the whole society. Higher education is one of the biggest potential factors for fundamental changes in the existing conditions. Higher education provides upward mobility in the modern society through raising the status of women in the family and in society. The aspiration to go to higher studies is a critical prerequisite to higher education participation. Unless an individual has some interest in higher studies, they are unlikely to apply for or accept a place in higher education. Where higher education aspirations
are strong individuals may be willing to make significant sacrifices to make dreams of attending higher studies a reality. The aspiration for higher education is influenced by socio-economic status, self concept, motivation, school environment, parents’ involvement, teacher’s encouragement, their attitude towards education, the level of exposure and awareness. If all these components are in a favouring condition then it directs the individual to take higher education. But it is not possible in all cases. There are various factors hamper the higher education aspiration especially among rural girls. Hence the researcher has concentrated some of the vital social and psychological attributes like socio-economic status, self concept, study involvement, achievement motivation, academic achievement motivation and students’ attitude towards education and how these factors influencing rural girls in aspiring for higher education. The intervention of school social work, guidance and counselling and career education are highly useful to enhance the personality and motivation level of students and it will be helpful to the students to get informed and exposed in the areas of higher education and future orientation. But unfortunately most of our schools do not employ school social workers, career educators and students’ counsellors on their staff to help and support the students. So there are no specific sources of motivation and aspiration apart from parents and teachers. The presence of the above mentioned professional sources of motivation will be of greater use to enhance the students’ performance, behaviour, attitude and higher education enrolment and attainment.