

Status of Higher Education in rural areas

Dr. Alka, Assistant Professor in Physics
Govt. College, Barwala (Panchkula)

Abstract:

Higher education is the backbone of modern society. It has the power to transform human beings to human resources. Quality of higher education decides the quality of human resources in the country. It is the key to national development. Along with primary and secondary education, higher education is also an instrument to build future generation. In India, majority of the population belongs to rural areas. People residing in villages represent the true image of 'Real India'. However due to lack of literacy and opportunities for higher education, the rural areas witness many drawbacks. This paper is an attempt to find out the problems that the rural population is facing with regard to higher education. Along with that the paper tries to find out the possible remedies to overcome those barriers.

Keywords: *Higher Education, Rural areas, Infrastructure, Curriculum*

Introduction:

Education has always been considered as the key component of human development and the greatest liberating force. It enables an individual to look at society and its aspects with a wider perspective. Without education, people are unable to develop the basic sense required. Traditionally, higher education has always held the most vulnerable position in our society. It is considered as fundamental to all round development of the individual both at material and spiritual levels [1]. Higher education is intrinsically intertwined with the development process and constitutes the instrumentality of modernisation of tradition. Higher education is the process of helping people to achieve their individual and social goals by realising their potential. It is the process that aims at developing competency among people and creating such conditions as favourable Government policies, programmes or interventions etc. where people can apply these competencies for the benefit of all.

“Higher Education” the word itself indicates how much important it is for sustainable development of any area whether urban or rural as well as the country. So development of higher education can be defined as sustainable development of rural areas. It can also be

taken as main force of economic development of a country. The acceptance of higher education as a developmental force will lead to the advancement of rural areas. Rural people are often unaware of their rights and here is when education comes into play. Proper education relates to awareness of rights, schemes, facilities available for the betterment of the rural areas and development of those areas. These will lead to a better understanding of the situations resulting in rise in standard of living and also in the improvement in the economy of our nation.

Issues related to higher education in rural areas

- **Rural urban disparity:** India's higher education system is the world's third largest in terms of students, next to China and the United States [2]. In spite of this large education system, there is a wide gap between rural and urban education. The condition of higher education in rural areas is very poor. Presently the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in rural areas is estimated to be about 7% as compared with 23% in urban areas [3]. Lower GER is the biggest challenge before us; therefore there is an urgent need of inclusion of the remaining people in higher education. Though the current rural- urban disparity in access to higher education opportunities is continuously shrinking, however this disparity is still very clear. Through this study, an attempt is made to highlight the status of higher education in rural areas as well as the challenges being faced by the higher educational institutions in rural areas.
- **Lack of proper transportation:** Most villages have poor connectivity from one place to another and that is often one of the main reasons why, despite efforts by local governing bodies to build institutes of higher education, these often go in vain. Most of the times, students have to walk miles to reach these institutes or there is a lack of all-weather condition of road facilities. As a result, it is tedious for the students to walk and often demotivates them to attend colleges on a regular basis; especially during harsh weather conditions.
- **Poor Input:** In most of the colleges located in rural areas, the students' enrolment is from the socio-economic backward families. Most of the students are the first generation learners of higher education [4]. People belonging to remote rural areas have meagre incomes, which at times is too less to sustain a family of maybe four or five. Parents tend to see education as an expense rather than an investment. Most likely, children from these families won't be sent to colleges, instead would be asked to assist the earning member of the family to add up some extra income.

For taking admission in a rural college, any student who has passed the last qualifying examination can enrol his name [5]. There are no admission tests, no screening of applications and no minimum cut off marks for admission in the rural college. In fact; most of the students are not academically prepared to a carrier in higher education. They simply take admission for time pass or pressure of parents [6]. The colleges are bound to enrol them, because they were established for these students. They were established with the objectives to provide education to these economically, socially and educationally weaker sections of the society. In fact, more than 70% of the students are scholarship holders as they belong to socio-economic backward families [7].

- **Lack of proper infrastructure:** Higher educational institutes in rural areas lack behind in different aspects as compared to the institutes of urban areas. Poor infrastructure at these rural colleges is also a cause of big concern. Most of the colleges don't have well-stocked libraries, properly equipped laboratories, computer centres, health centres, sports facilities, hostels, guest houses, teacher's housing, canteens, common rooms, gymnasiums, auditoriums and seminar rooms and even basic facilities like clean toilets. Added to that, most of the colleges do not have electricity. Thus, poor infrastructure at these colleges is a big reason to drive away students.
- **High dropout rate:** Dropout rate in rural areas is very high [8]. It simply means leaving school or college life for practical reasons or necessity by any person, without completing the prescribed course. Dropout rate is high due to many reasons like failure in exams, burden of family, financial reasons; apathy of parents towards higher education etc.
- **Gross Attendance Ratio:** The colleges located in rural areas have their own specific patterns of student's attendance in the classroom. Especially in rural areas more than 50% of the students remain absent in the classroom during the sowing season in the fields as they are from the farmers' families and the land-less labourers' families and again in the season of harvesting the classrooms are vacant. The annual teaching plans prepared by the teachers are not much helpful to carry out the process of teaching and evaluation in practice.
- **Lesser use of ICT:** Today we live in a technology-driven world and the education system of today also uses technology to make teaching-learning process interesting

and easier. Information and communication technology (ICT) can positively affect the delivery of education and enable wider access to the same [9]. In addition, it increases flexibility so that learners can access the education regardless of time and geographical barriers. It can influence the way students are taught and how they learn. ICT based education helps in improving their skills and abilities. But most of the rural educational institutions are not well equipped with basic modern gadgets like computer, laptops, tabs, high-speed internet, Wi-Fi etc. Use of ICT is hardly seen while teaching. There are lots of colleges in India where electricity problem is a common phenomenon. In those institutions, we can expect only the traditional method of teaching making their students incompetent in the present digital world.

- **Curriculum and Teaching-learning Process:** There is a big difference between city and village students; not in terms of brain or development but their initial environment, skills, learning ability, availability of infrastructure and access to different facilities [10]. All of these must be considered while making the curriculum which should not be different but how it is going to be taught would make the difference. The curriculum can be updated and can include vocational education related to local needs of the area. The teaching-learning methods need to be implemented in accordance to the needs and requirements of the students [11]. Genuine rural students who are interested in education should be encouraged and made competent. The teaching-learning processes should be well-organized, student-centric and adequately implemented.

Initiatives taken by Government for Ensuring Quality Education in Rural India

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: The proposed National Education Policy, 2020 is set to have a major impact on the current higher education system in India. It aims at making “India global knowledge superpower” by making several changes right from school to college level in the Indian education system. It provides a road map and directives to both government and higher education institutes to make higher education inclusive and equitable.

Digital Learning: To combat issues such as declining student attendance, lack of proper infrastructure and quality and access to education, the government has taken several digital initiatives. These digital platforms like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Study

Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM), and National Digital library of India (NDL) can be accessed through any part of the country.

Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) to make education inclusive: Several other measures have been taken by the Government to increase the enrolment in higher educational institutions such as opening of more centrally funded institution, encouraging opening of institutions by State Governments through the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) scheme etc.

New phase of RUSA targets to reach out the unserved/underserved areas; remote/ rural areas; difficult geographies; areas with low GER etc., and to benefit the most disadvantaged areas.

Suggestions for improving status of Higher Education

To assess the availability of various policies, programmes and facilities in higher education, there is an urgent need to access and find out from the students their awareness and utilisation of facilities, as also to cross check the availability of the facilities in institutions where they are enrolled. Also, all plans for expansion must have a major thrust on enhancing quality of education. Hence due care must be taken for developing skills of teachers for enhancing teaching-learning transaction, creating conducive academic environment, improving the learning infrastructure, putting technology enabled learning into practice wherever possible. The drop out ratio should be checked and counselling centres should be set up to guide students about the benefits of higher education and pursuing and completing their education.

This will help the teacher as well as student community to create, think, adapt, share contents, and encourage innovations to solve real-world problems. Teacher education programmes both pre and in-service can help to make them updated and rigorous.

Conclusion:

The significant role of higher education institutions towards development of a nation cannot be denied. Higher educational institutes should be highly committed to establish the relevance and meaningfulness of their existence. These institutes should participate in the development process of the society. Concrete efforts towards this direction are needed. Education imparted in rural centres lacks in quality and it's high time, proper attention is paid to these centres and a platform is created where students from rural areas can get

proper education, the right encouragement to pursue further studies and jobs. The Indian education system needs to expand faster to cater to the increasing student population. There are wide social and regional disparities in enrolment rates and availability of institutions of higher education. Although India has made appreciable progress in this regard, particularly with reference to growth in the number of universities and colleges over the years, the rural-urban and regional differentials in availability of institutions of higher education along with other infrastructure have widened over the years. In conclusion, it may be said, the Higher Education system in India while critical for the development of economy is afflicted with some serious concerns. If India envisages achieving faster, inclusive and sustainable development goals then, it can only be fulfilled by imparting quality education in rural areas. The huge urban-rural divide can be overcome by adopting multi-pronged approach that comprises lifting of the standards of higher institutes in rural areas. The collective efforts of educators, NGOs as well as the government are needed to spread awareness among rural people about the need and significance of education.

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