

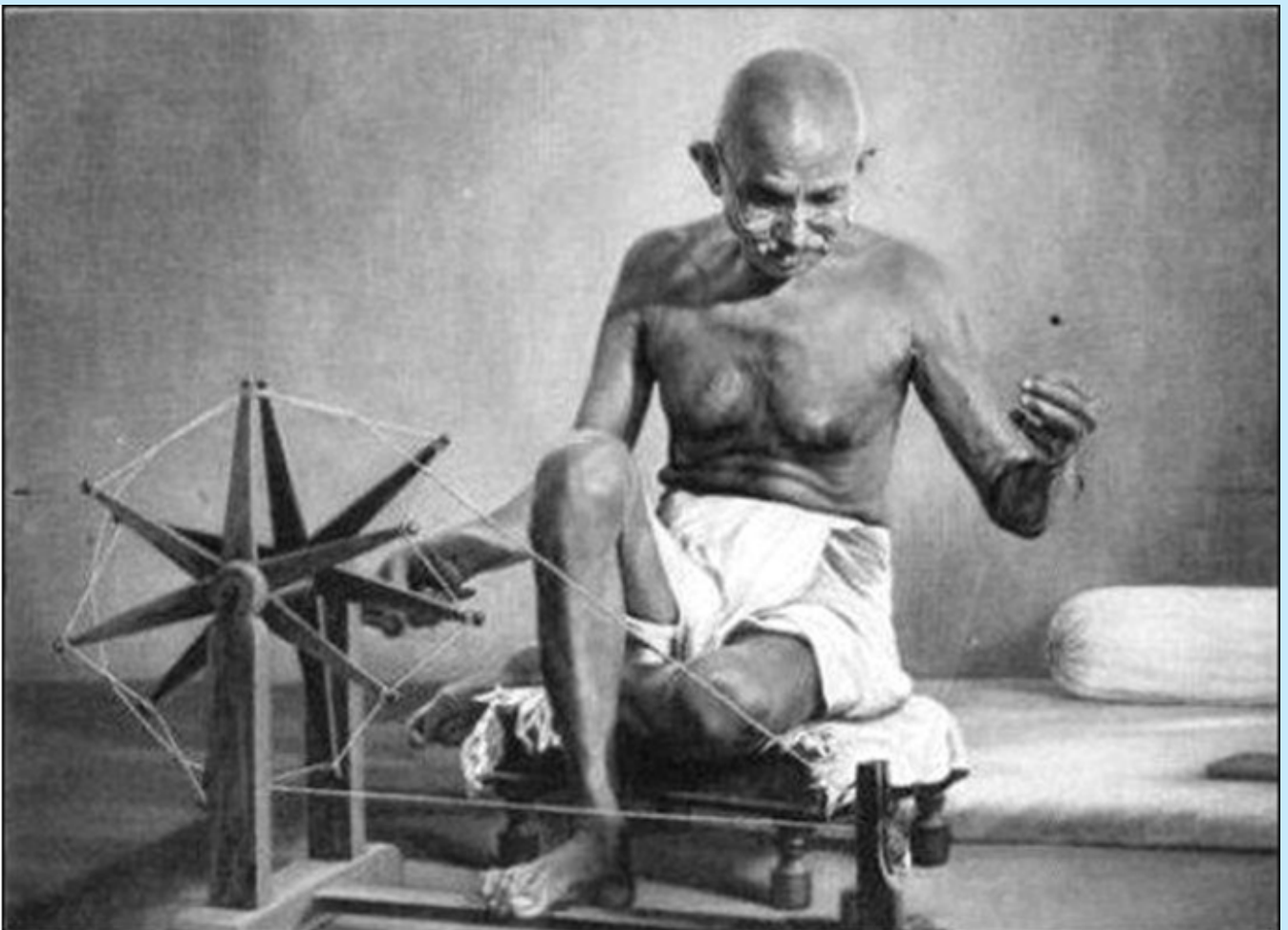
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The Spinning Wheel of Democracy - Celebrating Gandhi Jayanti – 2 October, 2026

seed...

Online Courses on Ethics, Values & Life Skills

Course -1

Introduction to Ethics – 2 Credits

Module -1: DEFINITION AND MAJOR THEORIES

Unit 1: The definition

Unit 2: Major Theories of Ethics and Brief description of theories

Unit 3: Ethical Framework and Approaches

Unit 4: Key Distinction between Ethics, Morals, and Values

Module - 2: SCOPE OF ETHICS AND ETHICS IN DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Unit 1: Scope **Unit 2:** Scope of Ethics in Different Disciplines

Unit 3: Professional Ethics **Unit 4:** Challenges of Application

Module – 3: ETHICS IN MODERN TIMES

Unit 1: Ethics in Modern Times **Unit 2:** Future Challenges

Course - 2

Introduction To Values – 2 Credits

Module - 1: VALUE ORIENTATION

Unit 1: The Definition **Unit 2:** Norms and Values **Unit 3:** Perennial Values

Module - 2: VALUES IN MODERN SOCIETY

Unit 1: Modernization and Modernity **Unit 2:** The Rationalistic or Liberal Model

Unit 3: The Revivalist or the Orthodox Model **Unit 4:** The Radical or the Revolutionary Model

Module - 3: TYPES OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

Unit 1: Traditional Societies **Unit 2:** Transitional Societies **Unit 3:** Modern Societies

Unit 4: Post-Modern Societies **Unit 5:** Indian Unity and Diversity Value

Unit 6: UGC Guidelines Value Pravesh 2.0 **Unit 7:** Changing Societies under the Tech. Revo.

Course- 3

LIFE SKILLS- 2Credits: Self Development, Management, Rights & Duties, Personal Safety and Security-

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Module - 2: WORK, HABITS, ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION & FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS & DUTIES

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Module - 3: NATIONAL SECURITY, PERSONAL SAFETY AND SECURITY

Unit 1: National Security **Unit 2:** Personal Security **Unit 3:** Body Heat: As Temperatures Rise, Please Add Salt **Unit 3.1:** Prevent Electrical Fires at Home **Unit 3.2:** Security Travel Tips **Unit 3.2.1:** Travel Tips **Unit 4:** Sexual Harassment: What Every Working Woman needs to know **Unit 5:** How Burglars Choose Their Victims **Unit 6:** Ten Ways to Protect Your Home **Unit 7:** Credit Card & Cyber Security Precautions **Unit 7.1:** Negative Impact of Excess use of Mobile Phone **Unit 8:** Prudent Precautions against Terrorism.

IMPORTANT NOTE -

Courses will be offered in collaboration with the institutions. Also, students can directly enroll for the Courses. Certificate will be provided jointly by SEED-CHEST and Collaborating Institute.

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EDITORIAL

THE TUSSLE BETWEEN POWER AND FREEDOM OF THOUGHT!



There has always been a fundamental tension between **power and freedom of thought and action**. This struggle is as old as organised society itself. Those who exercise state power have, throughout history, sought to influence or control other institutions of society and secure their conformity with the objectives of the ruling authority. At the same time, social institutions-cultural groups, religious institutions, producers, distributors, professional bodies and other organised groups-have consistently sought freedom of thought, expression and action while recognising the legitimate authority of the state. ***The recent legislation enacted by West Bengal government has brought this issue to the fore.***

The perennial tension between knowledge and power:

In ancient societies, this tension was often expressed through the relationship between kings and religious, intellectual and social institutions. These institutions frequently attempted to moderate the exercise of royal power in the larger interests of society. In modern democratic societies, elected governments are similarly subject to checks and balances exercised by legislatures, opposition parties, the judiciary, civil society and other social institutions. Such institutional checks are essential because the interests of the state and those of particular social groups or institutions do not always coincide.

The invention of system of education:

One of humanity's greatest institutional innovations has been the creation of systems of education that transmit accumulated knowledge to successive generations and prepare them to participate in, and contribute to, the continuing development of society.

Why of autonomy to institutions of education:

It is for this reason that education and institutions of higher learning have traditionally been accorded a degree of **autonomy from political power**. Whether power was exercised by kings in earlier times or by elected governments in the modern era, there has always been a recognition-at least in principle-that education must retain sufficient freedom to think, question, investigate, innovate and generate new knowledge.

The Rationale of Autonomy:

The underlying rationale is straightforward. If those who exercise political power are able to control education completely, they can potentially influence not only the present but also the future of society by controlling what is taught, what can be questioned, what can be researched and what kinds of ideas are allowed to emerge.

Hence, the autonomy of education is not a privilege granted to educational institutions for their own sake. It is a mechanism through which society protects its capacity for **independent thought, innovation, research and intellectual renewal**.

Nature of Education:

Education, by its very nature, is founded upon the ability to ask questions and seek answers. Questions may challenge established knowledge, prevailing social practices and, at times, even the exercise of political power. Such questions may be uncomfortable for those who hold authority. Yet questioning is not a defect of education; **it is its very essence**.

The Contemporary Challenge

The tension between state power and educational autonomy remains relevant today. In many parts of the world, including India, the question of institutional autonomy continues to generate debate.

Autonomy is generally understood as essential for universities to discharge their academic, research and social responsibilities effectively. Yet, the principle of autonomy can be weakened in ways that are not always immediately visible. Direct intervention may be avoided while financial, regulatory and administrative instruments are used to influence institutional behaviour.

The West Bengal Case:

West Bengal Universities and Colleges (Administration and Regulation) Amendment Bill,

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27TH NATIONAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ICF

Indian Colleges Forum has announced the organization of 27th National Annual Conference of the ICF. The conference is being organized in collaboration with GGDSD College, Raipur, Palampur, Distt. Kangra, Himachal Pradesh. The theme and sub-theme of the conference are :

THEME**Higher Education in the Era of Industry 6.0**

To provide a broad framework for discussion and to explore different dimensions of the relationship between higher education and Industry 6.0, the following sub-themes are proposed:

1. **Human-Centred Digital Transformation of Higher Education**
2. **Preparing Future-Ready Graduates for the Human-Machine Age**
3. **Developing Colleges as Think-and-Act**
4. **Strengthening Internal and External Quality Assurance in Colleges**
5. **Advancing SDG 4 through Equity, Quality, Inclusion and Affordability in Higher Education**
6. **Leadership, Governance and Institutional Transformation for Industry 6.0**
7. **Sustainability, Climate Responsibility and the Future of Higher Education.**

VENUE

College Auditorium & Seminar Halls, GGDSD College Raipur, Palampur, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

IMPORTANT DATES ACTIVITY

Registration opens on 15th September, 2026

Last date of Registration 10th November, 2026

Last Date of Submission of Paper 10th November, 2026

Participants are invited to submit papers, posters, or reports of action projects in (3000-5000) words on the conference theme via e-mail in word and pdf form.

REGISTRATION FEE

Category Fee (INR)

- " General -Non-ICF Member Colleges (With Accommodation) 9500/-
- " ICF Member Colleges (With Accommodation) 7500/-
- " Local Colleges (With accommodation) 6500/-
- " Retired College Principals (With accommodation) 5000/-
- " Faculty members from colleges (Without Accommodation) 3000/-

Link for the Registration Form: <https://forms.gle/bCdXjFU6YVg2a553A>

REGISTRATION WITH ACCOMMODATION INCLUDES:

Accommodation for three nights with meals and Kit with

digital conference materials. Without Accommodation include Food at Venue of Conference for Two Days & Complementary Kit.

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RECOGNITION AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE TO ICF MEMBER COLLEGES

ICF has issued a circular for recognition and award for excellence to ICF member colleges. In three categories.

1. Academic Excellence, institutional values and best practices through innovative practices in teaching, learning, evaluation, institutional values and best practices
2. Implementation and effective use of Educational Technology (EdTech) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education; and
3. Innovative initiatives addressing Climate Change and promoting environmental sustainability. Accordingly, ICF invites its member colleges to submit applications for recognition and awards under the above three categories.

ELIGIBILITY

All colleges that are members of the Indian Colleges Forum are eligible to submit applications for consideration under one or more of the above categories. Non-member colleges can also submit application after becoming member of ICF. ICF Member College should have paid Annual Subscription for the current year 2026-27. If not paid they can pay now to the account and QR code mentioned on Registration Fee heading.

SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS

All member colleges are invited to submit applications for Recognition and Awards by 5th October, 2026.

The Google Form link for submission of application is given below: <https://forms.gle/LU5xWt4t1vNWFRzf9>

Registration Fee: Rs.5000/-

Application should accompany the payment of

Contd. on page ... 20

EXPLORING THE KEY FACTORS THAT DRIVE WIDER PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

K. BISWAL *

One of the major policy objectives of higher education is to ensure wider, equitable, inclusive, and affordable participation of students. This paper seeks to analyse the key factors influencing access, equity, affordability and wider participation in higher education, drawing upon available empirical evidence.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the influence of structural and policy factors on participation in higher education in India, with a focus on access and equity. It synthesises trends, literature, and comparative practices to identify barriers and enablers within this context. The analysis specifically addresses the challenge of achieving the National Education Policy 2020's goal of a 50% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) by 2035. Key policies reviewed include affirmative action, financial aid, digital learning, and governance reforms, with insights into ongoing disparities related to socio-economic status, gender, caste, region, and disability.

The paper highlights two primary challenges: (i) reaching the target of a 50% GER by 2035 as outlined by the National Education Policy 2020; and (ii) tackling access disparities linked to socio-economic factors, gender, caste, region, and disability.

Citation: Biswal, K. (2025). Exploring the key factors that drive wider participation in higher education. NIEPA, New Delhi. [Unpublished draft manuscript for discussion].

INTRODUCTION

Higher education drives national development by providing the skilled workforce needed for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Ghista & Sharma, 2023). As economies change, the demand for educated workers grows, making higher education essential for ongoing economic and social progress (Li et al., 2024). However, some debate the direct link between higher education and national development. Without supportive socio-economic and policy conditions, higher education alone may not achieve the anticipated results. Over-emphasizing higher education could also undervalue vocational and skill training, which are vital for evolving job markets (Bhatt et al., 2024).

Employers want candidates with both expertise and

adaptability. Higher education gives graduates these skills. Institutions must regularly update curricula to prepare graduates for changing job markets and to support innovation and entrepreneurship. (Rai, 2025). Higher education does more than teach academics. It empowers individuals, shapes careers, and improves living standards. Through teaching, research, and innovation, institutions boost global competitiveness and meet social needs. (Kem, 2025, pp. 1390-1397). Investing in higher education makes nations more competitive and drives economic growth. Well-educated workers raise productivity and spur innovation (Berger & Fisher, n.d.). Studies show that higher educational attainment is associated with better economic outcomes (Kamdar, 2017, pp. 992-1004). Fast-changing labour markets require major reforms in higher education (Moktan, 2025, pp. 1-15). The COVID-19 pandemic showed the need for flexible educational

systems. Investing in education encourages sustainable growth and reduces social inequalities (Investing in Lifelong Education for Women, Youth, Migrants Creates Healthier, More Prosperous Societies, Experts Tell Population and Development Commission, 2023). Higher education raises living standards and builds civic participation (Higher Learning Institutions and Global Citizen Education, 2025). It also helps reduce income inequality and strengthen social cohesion, both of which are key to a more equal society.

As universities gain more autonomy, keeping higher education affordable is crucial. Continued state support is needed to maintain quality. Increasing public funding for universities will improve quality and training (Koul, 2025). To expand and improve higher education, universities should work together on research and sustainable development. Training programs must match industry needs and include practical expertise. Hiring global faculty and providing international courses will better prepare students for global careers (Dua et al., 2022). (UGC guidelines for sustainable university, industry collaboration, 2023)

* Professor, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration. New Delhi 110016

KEY IMPLICATIONS OF WP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Widening participation (WP) in higher education significantly impacts both the public and private sectors, especially amid ongoing global shifts in social, geopolitical, economic, institutional, and technological contexts (Burke et al., 2019).

From a public perspective, WP shifts the government's focus from merely funding elite institutions to managing a more inclusive educational system that prioritises equity and efficiency. Economically, a more educated workforce enhances national competitiveness by fostering innovation and maintaining a competitive edge in the global knowledge economy (Kem, 2025, pp. 1390-1397). Furthermore, by offering opportunities for upward mobility, WP policies can help reduce income inequality and promote social cohesion, which contributes to political stability. (Wilkinson, 2000, pp. 135-146)

However, the implications for governments also include increased funding pressures for educational infrastructure and faculty development to meet rising demand, particularly in developing countries. Additionally, as the educational system expands and diversifies, strong quality assurance and regulatory frameworks become necessary to uphold high standards across various institutions. The state must also respond to growing public expectations regarding employment and social mobility, ensuring that labour-market outcomes match educational qualifications to prevent a "crisis of expectations" among graduates. It is often argued that young graduates (under the age of 25) in India are disillusioned by the lack of employment opportunities (Le Monde, 2024).

From the private perspective of households and individuals, the implications of WP concern the perceived returns on investment and the complexities of navigating numerous institutional options. For many non-traditional students, such as those from lower-income or first-generation backgrounds, higher education is a crucial pathway to significant social and economic mobility. However, the shift from public grants to private funding models often increases financial burdens on individuals, potentially deterring participation and leading to substantial student debt, which can impact long-term household financial stability (Chakrabarti et al., 2020).

Moreover, the proliferation of educational providers requires individuals to navigate a complex, often overwhelming landscape. Because access to accurate information about quality and value is crucial for making informed choices, information asymmetry can complicate decision-making. Nevertheless, technological advancements enable more flexible online and blended learning options, benefiting those unable to commit to full-time on-campus study due to work or personal obligations (OECD, 2023). Overall, the widening participation in higher education brings both opportunities and challenges, shaping the future landscape of education for individuals and society at large (Shukla, 2025).

DETERMINANTS OF WP IN HE IN INDIA

Recent scholarship on access to and participation in higher education in India highlights a complex interplay of social, economic, geographic, and policy-driven determinants, revealing persistent disparities across caste, class, gender, and region. Key factors influencing access include:

Socio-economic Status and Financial Barriers:

Socio-economic status remains a foundational determinant of participation in higher education. Students from lower-income backgrounds are significantly less likely to engage in higher education due to tuition costs, indirect expenses, and opportunity costs (Kumar & Das, 2020; Mehrotra, 2021). While financial assistance and scholarships serve as important enablers, outreach and adequacy gaps persist (Agarwal, 2022; Maheshwari & Shukla, 2022).

Caste and Social Stratification: Caste and social stratification continue to shape access to higher education. Despite the implementation of affirmative action policies (reservation/quota systems), students from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes remain underrepresented in prestigious institutions, often as a result of structural inequalities in school education and ongoing discrimination (Deshpande, 2020; Choudhury, 2023; Jain & Saxena, 2021; Tilak, 2020).

Gender Inequality: Gender is another crucial axis of inequality in higher education. Although female participation has increased, significant disparities persist at both the state and discipline levels. Women from rural, low-income, or minority backgrounds face compounded disadvantages (Gupta, 2021; Sharma & Sharma, 2023).

Geographic Location: The rural-urban divide significantly impacts access. Rural students often confront limited availability of quality secondary schools, fewer local higher education institutions, and infrastructural deficits, which hinder their participation (Borah & Bordoloi, 2021; Chakrabarti & Biswal, 2022).

First-Generation College-Goers: First-generation college-goers encounter unique challenges, such as a lack of information, guidance, and academic preparation, negatively impacting their access to and persistence in higher education (Maheshwari & Shukla, 2022; Tiwari & Chaturvedi, 2023).

Policy Interventions: Policy measures, including reservations, targeted outreach, and the expansion of public institutions, have yielded positive results yet are often hampered by implementation gaps and social resistance (Jain & Saxena, 2021; Choudhury, 2023; Agarwal, 2022).

Digital Divide: The digital divide represents a new layer of inequality, which became especially pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students from

marginalised backgrounds frequently lack access to devices and internet connectivity, impeding their ability to participate in remote learning and the admission process (Varghese, 2018; Mishra, 2022).

Language Proficiency: Proficiency in English serves as a gatekeeper for access to prestigious institutions and courses, further disadvantaging students from vernacular backgrounds (Varghese, 2019; Srinivasan, 2022).

Special Needs: Students with special needs face significant barriers to access and inclusion, including infrastructural, attitudinal, and policy-related challenges that remain inadequately addressed (Pathak & Sinha, 2020).

Social Networks and Parental Education: Social networks and parental education (i.e., social and cultural capital) substantially influence aspirations, access to information, and subsequent enrollment and persistence in higher education (Sengupta & Guha, 2020; Tiwari & Chaturvedi, 2023; Ray & Majumder, 2022).

Public vs. Private Provision: The distinction between public and private educational provision impacts access, with private institutions often being more expensive and less accessible to marginalised groups, despite recent growth in this sector (Mani & Mukhopadhyay, 2022).

Addressing these multifaceted determinants is essential to improving equitable access to higher education in India.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The empirical literature on widening participation (WP) in higher education in India reveals several significant trends:

Expansion with Persistent Gaps: Although the GER has notably increased, from approximately 1% in 1950 to over 28% in 2021–22, substantial disparities remain. SCs, STs, Muslims, and rural populations continue to be underrepresented in higher education (AISHE, 2023; Deshpande, 2006).

Impact of Reservation Policies: Affirmative action initiatives, including reservations, have improved access for SCs, STs, and OBCs. However, the effectiveness of these policies varies across different groups and regions (Deshpande & Ramachandran, 2019; Varghese & Malik, 2015; Sabharwal & Malish, 2016).

Gender Disparities: In some states, the GER for women now surpasses that of men, yet challenges remain for women from marginalised communities (Gupta & Sharma, 2018).

Quality and Stratification: The overall expansion of higher education has led to increased privatisation and stratification. Unfortunately, marginalised students are often overrepresented in lower-quality institutions (Tilak, 2015; Varghese & Malik, 2015).

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

emphasises commitments to enhancing access and equity through various initiatives. These include targeted scholarships, flexible pathways, open and distance learning, and improved data systems for monitoring (NEP, 2020). The landscape of Indian higher education is shaped by a blend of constitutional values, affirmative action, and expansionist policies that promote access, participation, and equity. While a robust set of indicators provides a framework for measurement, ongoing inequalities along caste, class, gender, and regional lines pose significant challenges.

Recent policy reforms are designed to address these gaps through targeted interventions, yet the empirical literature warns of the growing stratification and privatisation within the sector. Evaluating the early impact of NEP 2020, some critiques have emerged, pointing to challenges in implementation, particularly in achieving equitable outcomes across diverse socio-economic groups. Despite positive steps towards inclusivity, issues such as digital access disparities and resource allocation hinder uniform progress. Academic discourse suggests that while NEP 2020 has potential, its effectiveness in bridging educational gaps will depend on consistent policy execution and comprehensive support systems tailored to varied community needs.

CURRENT STATUS OF ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN HE

The systematic review by Wanti et al. (2022) of 33 peer-reviewed articles provides a detailed analysis of access and equity patterns in higher education across Europe, Australia, and the Americas. In this context, 'access' refers to students' ability to register for higher education programs, pay initial fees, and persist through the academic program cycle. Patterns in access vary significantly across regions due to factors such as socio-economic status (SES), geographical location, ethnicity, and gender.

KEY DETERMINANTS OF ACCESS

The review indicates that state policies supporting disadvantaged groups, compulsory education systems, and the number of higher education institutions positively influence access to higher education. At the university level, financial support, mentoring programs, and flexible admission policies contribute to improved access. However, challenges such as complicated enrollment processes and unclear communication hinder access (Wanti et al., 2022).

Teachers, adult guidance, and school attitudes towards debt play crucial roles in motivating students to pursue higher education. Family support, SES, and community involvement are also significant factors. Conversely, barriers include financial constraints, negative perceptions of higher education, and self-doubt.

EQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Equity emphasises not only access but also the retention and successful completion of university studies. Patterns in equity expose disparities in treatment and outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds. Developed countries often implement programs to support disadvantaged students, such as mentoring, tutoring, and learning communities. For example, the Central Learning Support Program in Australia provides academic and study skills support. Furthermore, universities in these countries invest in accessible infrastructure and student accommodation to enhance equity.

In contrast, developing countries face numerous challenges regarding inclusion. Disadvantaged students, particularly in countries such as South Africa, experience exclusion and invisibility in university environments. Additionally, narrow definitions of gender and unwelcoming departmental cultures further hinder equity for marginalised groups.

KEY DETERMINANTS OF EQUITY

At the university level, factors such as peer support, teacher encouragement, teaching basic academic skills, and tailored learning strategies for disadvantaged students positively influence equity. However, low academic achievement in high school and exclusionary practices can negatively impact equity. Engagement, self-reflection, and high school performance are critical for fostering equity. Disadvantaged students often encounter learning impediments, including language difficulties and cultural gaps.

SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A UNIVERSAL FACTOR

Social support emerged as a crucial factor across all levels and regions. Support from peers, family, teachers, and university staff motivates students, provides guidance, and helps them overcome barriers to access and equity.

The patterns of access and equity in higher education reveal significant disparities between developed and developing countries. While developed nations have made strides in increasing access and equity through strategic policies and programs, developing countries continue to face challenges stemming from socio-economic and structural barriers. Addressing these disparities requires a concerted focus on social support systems, inclusive policies, and investments in infrastructure and financial aid.

FACTORS INFLUENCING ACCESS TO HE IN INDIA

According to empirical research in India, the most important demand-side variables influencing access to and participation in higher education are socio-economic status, social and religious identity (caste and religion), gender, parental education, and geographical location.

SIGNIFICANT FACTORS EXPLAINING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Socio-Economic Status (SES) and Household Wealth: Socio-economic status plays a crucial role in access to higher education, with students from wealthier households significantly more likely to pursue degree programs, particularly in career-focused fields like engineering and medicine. The rising costs of education create barriers for low-income groups, highlighting the necessity for financial support to bridge this gap (Khan, 2022).

Social and Religious Identity (Caste and Religion): Students from disadvantaged social groups, particularly Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Muslim households, face lower participation rates compared to those from higher castes. Although affirmative action policies have improved enrolment figures, disparities persist, indicating that social identity remains a significant factor in understanding these access issues (Varghese et al., 2019; Chaudhury et al., 2024).

Gender: Gender disparities in enrollment rates persist, though the gap has narrowed in recent years. These inequalities are often exacerbated when intersecting with social and economic status; for example, women from lower-caste groups or low-income rural households encounter compounded disadvantages.

Parental Education and Family Background: The educational attainment of the household head greatly influences whether students pursue higher education. Parental support and a well-informed family environment are vital for fostering aspirations and guiding students through the higher education system.

Geographical Location (Rural vs. Urban): There is a significant urban-rural divide in access to higher education. The concentration of quality institutions in urban areas means that students from rural and remote regions are less likely to enrol. Factors such as physical distance, limited infrastructure (e.g., hostels, labs, libraries), and pressure to migrate further complicate the issue and contribute to financial strain.

Prior Educational Attainment (Eligibility): Eligibility for higher education, determined by secondary school performance, is a key factor influencing participation rates. Challenges at the school level, including poor-quality education and high dropout rates, critically affect the pathway to higher education.

BARRIERS TO WP IN HE IN INDIA

Based on a review of theoretical and empirical literature, the following are 10 significant adverse factors that hinder the widening of participation in higher education in India:

Socio-Economic Barriers and Affordability: The most significant adverse driver is the lack of financial resources among low-income households. The high cost of quality higher education, particularly in professional

fields (engineering, medicine) and at private institutions, coupled with the pressure to secure immediate employment, often forces qualified students to discontinue their studies.

Persistent Social and Caste-Based Discrimination: Despite affirmative action policies, historical and ongoing social inequities, particularly regarding Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and certain religious minorities (e.g., Muslims), result in lower participation rates. Discrimination can occur during admissions and affect the campus environment, discouraging enrollment and increasing dropout rates.

Gender Disparities and Societal Norms: Traditional gender roles and safety concerns often lead parents to prioritise male education, viewing investment in daughters as a liability (as marriage is seen as the primary goal). The disparities are more pronounced among lower-caste and rural women, creating compounded disadvantages.

Geographical and Spatial Inequalities: A stark urban-rural divide exists, with quality higher education institutions (HEIs) often concentrated in urban areas. Students from rural and remote regions face physical distance barriers, inadequate local infrastructure (hostels, labs), and the financial burden of migration, pushing them toward lower-quality local options or out of the HE system entirely.

Poor Quality and Inadequate Infrastructure in Feeder Schools: Gaps in access and quality start much earlier, at the school level. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often attend poorly equipped primary and secondary schools, resulting in a lack of academic preparedness and foundational skills needed to succeed in competitive higher education environments.

The “Digital Divide”: Unequal access to digital devices (laptops, tablets) and reliable internet connectivity, particularly in rural and low-income households, severely limits participation in online learning, access to digital resources, and engagement with modern educational platforms.

Outdated Curriculum and Skills Gap: Many universities and colleges use outdated curricula that are overly theoretical and do not align with current industry needs, leading to high rates of graduate unemployment or underemployment. This skills gap discourages potential students who perceive a lack of clear economic prospects.

Lack of Qualified and Motivated Faculty: A significant shortage of qualified, committed, and well-trained teaching staff across many HEIs, combined with high student-teacher ratios and a lack of focus on modern pedagogy, compromises the quality of education and student outcomes.

Bureaucratic and Regulatory Bottlenecks: The higher education system in India is often characterised

by complex and overlapping regulatory bodies, bureaucratic inertia, and a lack of transparency and accountability. These inefficiencies can hinder the establishment of new, quality institutions and the practical implementation of equity-focused policies.

Lack of Guidance and Mentorship: A lack of adequate career counselling and mentorship in secondary schools means many first-generation and disadvantaged students lack knowledgeable guidance on navigating HE options, application processes, and potential support systems.

CURRENT POLICIES AND STATE INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT WP IN HE IN INDIA

India is undergoing a transformative journey in higher education, driven by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which aims to elevate the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) to 50% by 2035 [Ministry of Education, 2020]. Despite significant strides in expanding enrollment, the path toward achieving true equity and quality in education remains fraught with challenges.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

(a) Quality:

A National Research Policy is crucial to address various research needs, as outlined by NITI Aayog in 2025. This policy should include establishing dedicated research hubs and advisory committees for State Public Universities (SPUs) to encourage innovation and support. Additionally, increasing research funding and infrastructure is vital, especially in hilly and north-eastern states, to promote equitable growth in research capabilities nationwide. Moreover, fostering collaborative and interdisciplinary research will help in addressing local challenges more effectively, and setting up centres of excellence can facilitate this effort.

(b) Funding and Financing:

To enhance the education sector, it is crucial to increase investment to 6% of GDP as recommended by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (NITI Aayog, 2025, p. 105). Additionally, establishing a dedicated infrastructure finance agency for State Public Universities (SPUs) can significantly improve resource allocation (NITI Aayog, 2025, p. 105). Furthermore, diversifying revenue sources through self-financed programs, consultancy services, alumni engagement, corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds, and public-private partnerships (PPPs) is essential to ensure sustainable funding and growth in the education sector (NITI Aayog, 2025, p. 110).

(c) Governance:

To enhance the functioning of State Public Universities (SPUs), it is essential to reform governance structures to grant them greater administrative autonomy.

Streamlining the affiliation and accreditation processes while reducing associated costs is also crucial. Additionally, empowering State Councils for Higher Education to sanction posts and allocate funds will further strengthen the autonomy and efficiency of these institutions (NITI Aayog, 2025, p. 118).

(d) Employability:

To enhance educational outcomes, it is essential to integrate internships and apprenticeships into the SPU curricula, as outlined by NITI Aayog (2025, p. 133). Additionally, the establishment of lifelong education centres will provide opportunities for upskilling and reskilling, ensuring that learners can adapt to changing job markets. Furthermore, promoting entrepreneurship and innovation through financial and mentoring support is crucial for fostering a dynamic and resilient economy, as emphasized by NITI Aayog (2025, p. 133).

While India has taken significant steps to broaden access to higher education, a concerted effort is required to ensure that equity and quality go hand in hand in this ever-evolving educational landscape.

STRUCTURAL DETERMINANTS OF WP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Structural determinants of widening participation in higher education are systemic barriers embedded in policies, economic conditions, and social hierarchies that influence access and success for underrepresented groups. These can be categorised as follows:

WITHIN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

These determinants originate within the structure and operation of the education system itself.

Student Flow, Internal Efficiency and Stage Transition Rates in K-12 and UG and PG Programmes:

The structure of the education sector, particularly regarding student flow, internal efficiency, and stage transition rates in K-12 education and undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) programs, significantly influences participation and the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education in India. Here are some key ways in which these factors interplay:

Student Flow and Retention Rates: The transition from K-12 to higher education is a critical stage in the education pipeline. A well-structured K-12 system that effectively retains students can lead to higher GER in higher education. For instance, if dropout rates in K-12 education decrease, more students will be prepared and eligible to continue to UG programs, subsequently affecting PG enrollment (Ministry of Education, 2020; Biswal et al., 2025).

Internal Efficiency: Internal efficiency within education systems relates to how well resources are utilised to achieve desired educational outcomes. In India,

high rates of internal inefficiency, such as poor-quality teaching and inadequate infrastructure, can affect students' readiness for higher education and thereby influence enrollment figures. Improving internal efficiencies in K-12 settings can enhance student performance and preparedness for higher studies (World Bank, 2018; Biswal et al., 2025).

Stage Transition Rates: The rates at which students transition from secondary education to higher education are crucial. Effective policies that facilitate this transition, such as bridging programs and vocational training, can increase the number of students enrolling in UG and PG programs. States that implement support mechanisms for students post-K-12 generally see improved GER in higher education (NUEPA, 2018; Biswal et al., 2025).

Access and Inclusivity: Socio-economic factors related to stage transition rates also play a role. Marginalised groups often face barriers that impact their transition into higher education. Addressing these gaps through targeted policies can improve overall participation rates and GER, contributing to a more equitable educational landscape (Choudhury & Saha, 2019).

Policy and Institutional Framework: Strong educational policies that support seamless transitions through standardised examinations, outreach programs, and financing options for students can further foster an environment conducive to higher education participation. In India, initiatives such as the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) and scholarship funding aim to boost GER by making higher education more accessible (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Prior Educational Attainment and Quality of Schooling: Disparities in the quality of schooling, particularly at the primary and secondary levels, are a significant determinant of who progresses to higher education. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often attend under-resourced schools, leading to lower attainment that acts as a significant barrier to HE entry.

Admissions and Selection Processes: Entry requirements and selection processes can implicitly or explicitly favour students from traditional, high socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. While some policies try to counteract this (e.g., contextual admissions), the core system often maintains existing hierarchies.

Funding and Affordability: The structure of higher education funding, including tuition fee systems and the availability of student support (e.g., loans, grants, bursaries), significantly impacts access. Concerns about debt can deter students from lower-income backgrounds, even if fees are means-tested.

Institutional Culture and Infrastructure: The physical and cultural environment of universities can be alienating for non-traditional students (e.g., mature students, ethnic minorities, disabled students). A lack of

inclusive practices, support systems, and accessibility contributes to inequity.

Considering the structural factors in both school and higher education, can India reach the 50% GER target in HE by 2035?

A recent study by NIEPA (Biswal, Mohanty & Negi, 2025) attempted to forecast the total enrolment in higher education by applying the transition rate to the projected total enrolment in Grade 12, calculated using student flow rates in school education and from school education to UG programmes (determined in Scenario 3 for school education) and adjusting for lateral entry into higher education. This alternate model is considered the most feasible scenario of participation in higher education in India by 2035 (Biswal et al., 2025).

Specifically, Scenario 3C, a variant of Scenario 3, is considered the most realistic and achievable pathway (see Charts 1 & 2). Scenario 3C incorporates improvements in the internal efficiency of school education, enhanced transition rates from Grade 12 to undergraduate programs, and adjustments for lateral entry into higher education. Key findings from Scenario 3C include:

Projected Enrolment: Total enrolment in higher education is expected to increase from 37.4 million in 2018 to 44.3 million by 2030 and further to 52.6 million by 2035. (India needs 86 million higher education enrolments by 2035 to meet NEP goals, says new report, 2025).

Projected GER: The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education is projected to rise from 24.9% in 2018 to 32.8% by 2030 and reach 40.3% by 2035. (PTI, 2025).

Transition Rates: Transition rates from Grade 12 to undergraduate programs are expected to improve gradually, reaching 91% by 2031-2036. (India needs 86 million higher education enrolments by 2035 to meet NEP

goals, says new report, 2025).

Lateral Entry: Lateral entry into higher education programs is projected to increase steadily, reaching 5% by 2031-2036. ((NIEPA), n.d.)

Scenario 3C emphasises flexible pathways, lateral entry, and targeted interventions to improve participation rates. It advocates for strategic planning and informed public investment to overcome barriers such as socio-economic disparities and regional inequalities. While Scenario 3C may fall slightly short of the ambitious 50% GER target set by NEP 2020, it provides a practical framework for achieving significant progress in higher education participation.

Key assumptions of this scenario include increased school-to-higher education transition rates and a modest increase in public investment in educational infrastructure. Some limitations involve potential variations in policy implementation across different states and unforeseen socio-economic changes that could affect enrollment trends.

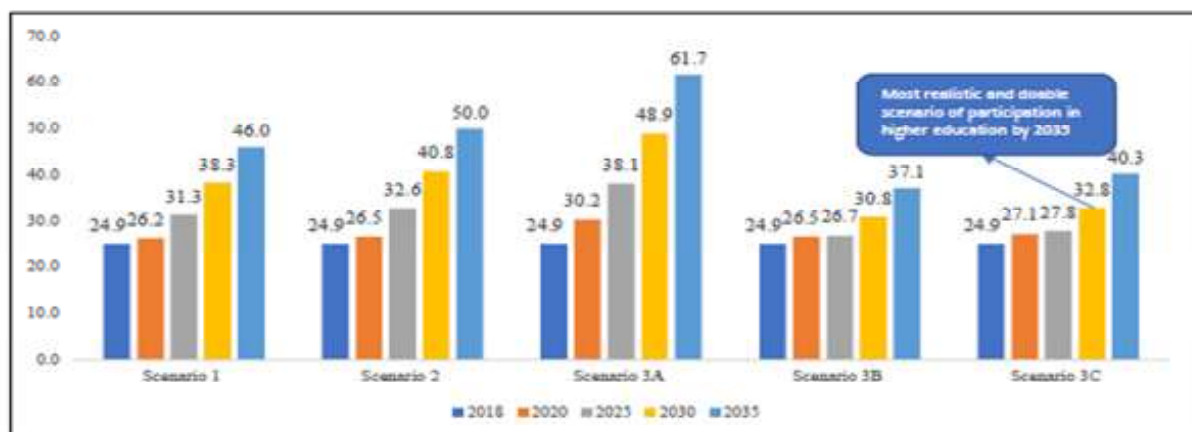
Supporting data is illustrated in Charts 1 and 2, which show projected GER trends in higher education across different scenarios from 2018 to 2035. Scenario 3C demonstrates a steady and realistic growth trajectory, reaching approximately 40% GER by 2035.

BEYOND THE EDUCATION SECTOR

These structural factors stem from the broader social, economic, and political environment in which the education system operates. These include:

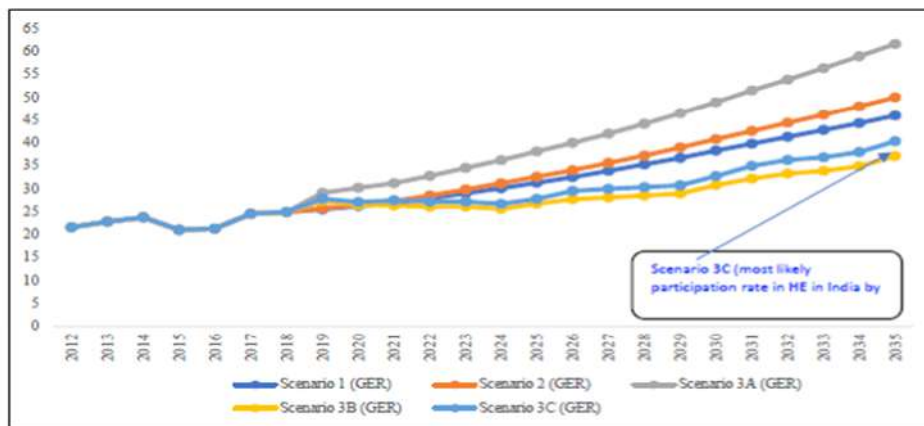
Socio-economic Status (SES) and Social Reproduction: A student's likelihood of enrolling in higher education is heavily influenced by their socio-economic status. The system often perpetuates social reproduction, in which those from affluent backgrounds are more likely to attend university and succeed, thereby maintaining existing class structures.

Chart 1: Projected GER in higher education in alternate scenarios, all India (%)



Source: Biswal et al. (2025).

Chart 2: Trends in projected GER in higher education from 2019 to 2035, all India (Various alternate scenarios)



Source: *Ibid.*

Caste, Ethnicity, and Gender Disparities: Systemic discrimination and inequality based on caste (specific to India), ethnicity, and gender create significant barriers to access and participation. These factors intersect with SES to produce cumulative disadvantage.

Geographical Location and Regional Disparities: The concentration of high-quality institutions in urban centers often disadvantages students from rural and remote areas who may lack the means or ability to relocate. The digital divide also exacerbates regional inequalities in accessing online learning resources.

Labour Market Conditions and Social Mobility: The perceived return on investment (ROI) in higher education is a structural determinant. If the labour market does not guarantee suitable employment or social mobility post-graduation, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may view HE as a risky investment.

AT THE SYSTEMS LEVEL

These factors relate to the overall governance, policy framework, and market dynamics of the higher education system. These are:

Policy Inconsistencies and Regulatory Frameworks: Inconsistencies in government policies and complex regulatory bottlenecks can hinder efforts to promote equity and inclusion. Policy shifts (e.g., funding changes, accreditation rules) create instability that disproportionately affects disadvantaged groups.

Marketisation and Hierarchical Differentiation: The global trend towards a market-oriented, high-participation higher education system results in a hierarchy of institutions (e.g., elite research universities versus regional colleges). The competition for status and funding often leads institutions to prioritise high-achieving students, sometimes at the expense of widening participation goals.

Governance and Quality Assurance: Disparities in quality assurance across public and private sectors, and a lack of focus on research and innovation in many institutions, affect the perceived value and outcomes of the education provided.

National Aspiration and Political Pressure: Government targets and political pressure to increase participation act as system-level drivers. However, the effectiveness of these policies in reaching truly underrepresented groups remains a challenge.

The main question is whether any country can balance supply and demand for higher education amidst ongoing population growth. Since knowledge and skills underpin a market economy, is reaching equilibrium feasible?

A permanent, stable equilibrium between the supply of and demand for higher education places is generally considered unattainable in any country, especially within dynamic market economies where knowledge and skills requirements are constantly evolving, and population growth rates vary. The idea of a perfect, lasting equilibrium is an economic ideal that struggles to account for several real-world factors:

REASONS WHY EQUILIBRIUM IS UNLIKELY

Dynamic Knowledge and Skills Requirements: In a market economy, technological advancements, globalisation, and innovation constantly alter the demand for specific skills. This means that the “target” for equilibrium is a moving one. By the time the supply side (universities, vocational colleges) adjusts its programmes to meet current needs, the labour market’s needs have likely already shifted again.

Time Lags in Supply Adjustment: The supply side of higher education cannot adjust instantly. Developing new programmes, hiring qualified staff, constructing

infrastructure, and revising curricula require considerable time (often years). This inherent lag ensures that the system is almost always in a state of adjustment rather than a stable equilibrium.

Population Growth and Demographics: Maintaining a constant population growth rate still means an ever-changing absolute number of potential students. The structure of the population (e.g., shifts in birth rates over time) creates “bulges” in age groups that impact demand in non-linear ways, making long-term supply planning challenging.

The Nature of Education as a Social Good: Demand for higher education is not purely an economic calculation. It is also driven by social aspiration, the desire for personal development, and the pursuit of social status, all of which are harder to predict and manage purely through supply-and-demand mechanisms.

Information Asymmetry: Students (the demand side) often lack perfect information about future labour market needs or the quality of specific programs. Similarly, universities (the supply side) face challenges in accurately forecasting future demand for places. This information gap prevents efficient allocation of resources needed for equilibrium.

Policy Solutions: Adopting a Systems Approach for Better Educational Results (SABER Approach)

To meet the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 target of a 50% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) by 2035, India must adopt a comprehensive, systems-based approach that addresses structural determinants across various contexts. Drawing on the principles of the World Bank’s Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) initiative, which emphasises data-driven policies to strengthen education systems, the following policy solutions are essential.

POSSIBLE POLICY SOLUTIONS FOR WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN INDIA

Systemic Integration of School and Higher Education (Educational/ Institutional Context)

Achieving the 50% GER requires increasing the pool of eligible higher secondary graduates, a significant bottleneck.

Enhance School Education Efficiency: Implement aggressive reforms to improve transition rates from secondary to higher secondary levels and reduce dropout rates, particularly in low-GER states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Strengthen Quality at all Levels: Focus on improving the quality of foundational schooling through better teacher training and infrastructure, ensuring students are academically prepared for higher education.

Link Vocational and Higher Education: Integrate vocational education and skill-based learning from the school level onwards to provide flexible pathways and

retain students who may not pursue traditional academic degrees.

Scalable and Flexible Learning Pathways (Institutional/Demographic Context)

Traditional brick-and-mortar institutions alone cannot meet the required 86.11 million enrollments by 2035.

Leverage Digital Education: Systematically adopt technology-enabled, flexible learning pathways, including online programs, digital universities, and credit-based online courses (e.g., SWAYAM, NPTEL) to extend access beyond physical campuses.

Promote Hybrid Learning Models: Develop blended learning environments that combine online resources with in-person mentoring and support, making education more accessible to students in remote or rural areas.

Targeted Equity and Inclusion Measures (Socio-Economic/Political Context)

The policy must explicitly address the barriers faced by Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), including those based on caste, tribe, and gender.

Implement Contextual Admissions and Outreach: Conduct targeted outreach programs on higher education opportunities and scholarships for students in disadvantaged regions and communities.

Provide Robust Financial Support: Increase funding for scholarships, grants, and interest subsidies for educational loans to alleviate financial constraints that deter lower-income students from enrolling.

Ensure Infrastructure Accessibility: Continue efforts to make physical infrastructure accessible for students with disabilities (e.g., ramps, accessible toilets) and provide necessary aids and therapeutic interventions.

Governance, Funding, and Quality Assurance (Political/Institutional Context)

Effective governance and adequate funding are foundational to systemic change.

Increase Public Investment: Work towards the NEP 2020 goal of increasing public investment in the education sector to reach 6% of GDP at the earliest, with a significant portion dedicated to higher education infrastructure and faculty development.

Strengthen Regulatory Framework: Establish a robust regulatory body, such as the proposed Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), to streamline accreditation, standardise quality across public and private sectors, and foster innovation.

Industry Alignment: Ensure curriculum design and teacher training programs are aligned with current and future labour market demands, involving industry in the process to improve graduate employability.

Conclusion and Actionable Directions for Achieving

50% GER in Indian Higher Education by 2035

To achieve the NEP 2020 target of a 50% Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education by 2035, India must adopt a decisive, multi-pronged strategy that implements structural reforms, targeted programmes, and strong policy innovation over the next decade. Drawing on global evidence and the best available research (Biswal et al., 2025; Ministry of Education, 2020; UNESCO, 2023), the following actionable policy and programme directions are recommended.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand the Pool of Eligible Students through School Reforms

Aggressively increase transition rates from secondary to higher secondary and then to higher education, especially in low-GER states (Biswal et al., 2025; Sharma & Pattanayak, 2021).- Invest in foundational literacy, numeracy, and digital skills at the K-12 level to prepare all students for higher education participation (World Bank, 2018).

Massively Scale Flexible and Diverse Access Pathways

Rapidly expand Open and Distance Learning (ODL), online degree programmes, and digital universities to reach underserved populations (Allen & Seaman, 2016; Yeravdekar & Balasubramanian, 2022). Develop blended and hybrid models integrating digital content with local mentorship and support, thus bridging the rural-urban divide (Ministry of Education, 2024).

Deepen Equity and Inclusion Initiatives

Implement contextual admissions and targeted outreach for Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), including rigorous implementation of quotas and scholarships (Agarwal, 2022; Choudhury, 2023). Prioritise support for first-generation learners, students with disabilities, and women from marginalised backgrounds (Gupta, 2021; Pathak & Sinha, 2020).

Increase Public Investment and Financial Support

Achieve the NEP's recommended public investment target of 6% of GDP, with specific earmarking for infrastructure, faculty, and student support in underserved regions (Ministry of Education, 2020; Tilak & Varghese, 2019).- Substantially expand direct financial aid, need-based scholarships, and interest-free loans for low-income and rural students (Kumar & Das, 2020).

SUPPORTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen Governance, Quality Assurance, and Institutional Autonomy

Establish a robust Higher Education Commission of India

(HECI) to streamline regulation, encourage innovation, and enhance accountability (Ministry of Education, 2020). Standardise quality assurance across all higher education providers, including new digital and private institutions (Varghese, 2020).

Align Curricula and Skills with Labour Market Needs

Revamp curricula to prioritise employability, vocational skills, and industry partnerships, ensuring graduates are workforce-ready (Goli & Pal, 2021; Business-Higher Education Forum, 2013). Institutionalise strong career guidance, internships, and apprenticeship pathways (Knight & Trowler, 2000).

Harness Technology and Data Analytics for Expansion and Equity

Leverage AI-driven adaptive learning, data analytics, and digital platforms for personalised learning and early intervention (Siemens, 2013; Evans & Zhao, 2021). Use national digital systems (e.g., Academic Bank of Credits, National Scholarship Portal) to simplify student mobility and support (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Foster Inclusive and Supportive Campus Environments

Develop comprehensive mentorship, peer-support, and mental health programmes, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Wilkins & Burke, 2019).- Ensure campuses are fully accessible for students with disabilities (Pathak & Sinha, 2020).

Monitor, Evaluate, and Adapt Interventions

Implement rigorous, real-time monitoring of access, retention, and completion patterns across social groups, regions, and gender (AISHE, 2023; OECD, 2022). Foster a culture of continuous improvement, drawing on international best practices and evidence (Marginson, 2016; Gale & Parker, 2020).

Mobilise Stakeholders and Build Long-Term Political Commitment

Engage state governments, local bodies, civil society, and industry in co-creating and delivering solutions (Joshi & Ahir, 2019). Ensure sustained political will and public accountability to protect and advance reforms (UNESCO, 2023).

The path to 50% GER by 2035 is ambitious but achievable with strategic investment, technology-enabled inclusion, and a relentless focus on equity and quality. These reforms will not only fulfil the NEP's vision but also position India as a global leader in inclusive higher education.

For full paper & references, visit- www.thecollegepost.in

GENERATIVE AI SEARCH AND THE NEW CHALLENGE FOR INDIAN UNIVERSITIES

DR. RAMESH C SHARMA *

Among the emerging technologies, chatbots and Generative AI are perhaps the first to reach faculty and students simultaneously and on a relatively equal footing. Their rapid adoption is increasingly influencing—and potentially challenging—users' cognitive skills, learning processes, and academic practices across higher education. The paper examines the likely implications of these technologies for teaching, learning, assessment, research and academic integrity.

This article looks at how generative AI search tools are quietly becoming a new gateway through which Indian students find information about their studies, their exams and their colleges.

It asks what this fast change means for teaching, for fairness of access, and for academic honesty in the coming years.

SUMMARY

Generative AI search has grown at a very fast pace in the last two years and it is turning into a normal habit for young people, including when they look for information about courses, colleges, careers and competitive exams. This article draws on recent industry data along with published education research to think through what this change means for Indian higher education. It looks at how students are using these tools, what risk comes with fast and sometimes unverified answers, how the benefit of these tools is not spread evenly across region, language and type of institution, and how colleges and universities will need to build their own visibility inside this new layer of AI-driven discovery. The article closes with some practical suggestions for institutional and policy responses.

Keywords: Generative AI; AI search; higher education; digital divide; academic integrity; India; NEP 2020; AI literacy

1. INTRODUCTION

Two years back, if a student in Rohtak or Rewari wanted to know which college to join after Class XII, she would ask a relative, or read a newspaper supplement, or go to a coaching centre and ask the counsellor there. Today, more and more students are typing their question into ChatGPT, Gemini or some other AI chat tool, and taking the answer that comes back as more or less final. This is not a small change. It is a change in the basic plumbing

of how young people find out things, and higher education is very much inside this plumbing.

Recent industry data shows how fast this has happened. Average monthly visits across generative AI platforms worldwide crossed nine and a half billion in the year up to May 2026, a rise of about seventy per cent over the previous year, and monthly app downloads reached 4.4 billion (Similarweb, 2026). Half of all users of these tools are now in the eighteen to thirty four age group, which is exactly the age group that fills our undergraduate and postgraduate classrooms (Similarweb, 2026). What was a novelty two or three years back has become, in the words of researchers who have studied the early years of large language models in classrooms, a technology that "has the potential to disrupt educational practice" in ways we have not fully worked out yet (Kasneci et al., 2023, p. 1).

India's higher education system is large by any standard. The All India Survey on Higher Education for 2023-24 records about 4.50 crore students spread across 1,278 universities, 46,468 colleges and 11,787 standalone institutions (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2026). When a system of this size starts to lean on AI chat tools for basic information, even small errors or gaps in the AI answer get multiplied across lakhs of young people. This is not a hypothetical worry. Readers of this very journal will remember how the NEET paper leak of 2026 and the unrest that followed showed how much stress and how much dependence on outside help, coaching, rumour and now increasingly AI-based shortcuts, has built up around our entrance examination system (College Post, 2026a, 2026b). The coaching industry that grew around NEET over the last three decades is now finding a new digital cousin in AI chat tools, and colleges cannot pretend this is happening somewhere else.

It is worth being clear at the outset about what kind of article this is. This is not a technical paper about how large language models work, nor is it a piece of original survey research with a data collection instrument of its own. It is, rather, a considered reading of recent global

The coaching industry that grew around NEET over the last three decades is now finding a new digital cousin in AI chat tools, and colleges cannot pretend this is happening somewhere else.

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industry data on generative AI search, put together with published education research and with the everyday reality of Indian colleges and universities as this writer has come to know it over many years in the system. The intention is to raise the right questions early, before the pattern of adoption hardens into a settled habit that becomes harder to correct later.

This article is an attempt to think through, in plain language, what the rapid rise of generative AI search means for Indian higher education. Section 2 traces briefly how AI search has changed from being a standalone chatbot to something embedded everywhere. Section 3 looks at how students are actually using these tools for their academic life. Section 4 raises the question of academic honesty and the quality of information these tools give out. Section 5 is about who is left behind, in terms of region, language and type of institution. Section 6 argues that colleges and universities now need to think about their own visibility inside AI answers, the same way they think about their website or their NIRF ranking. Section 7 looks at what policy and institutional response is needed, and Section 8 closes with a short conclusion.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF GENERATIVE AI SEARCH

2.1 From Standalone Chatbots to an Embedded Layer

When ChatGPT first became well known in late 2022 and through 2023, most people thought of it as one more website to visit, like a search engine or an encyclopaedia. That picture is now out of date. Generative AI is moving inside the products people already use every day. Google has put AI Overviews and an AI Mode directly inside its search results, Amazon has built an AI shopping assistant into its buying journey, and Meta has placed its own AI inside Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp and Messenger, with publicly reported monthly users of MetaAI more than tripling in about eighteen months (Similarweb, 2026). The effect of this is that search is turning less into "a place you go" and more into "something that happens around you while you use an app you already have open."

This kind of quiet embedding of automated decision-support inside everyday platforms is exactly what researchers writing about the datafication of higher education warned about some years back, when they said that data-driven systems increasingly "frame and configure" the choices that students and institutions think they are making freely (Selwyn & Gasevic, 2020, p. 528). A student researching a college is no longer only reading a prospectus. She is, without perhaps noticing it, inside a system where an AI answer, built on data she cannot see and logic she cannot check, is already shaping her shortlist before she visits a single campus.

The practical implication of this embedding for Indian higher education is that AI is no longer a separate tool a student chooses to open, like opening a calculator app when a calculation is needed. It is becoming ambient,

present in the background of ordinary browsing, ordinary shopping, and ordinary social media use. A student who never consciously decided to "consult an AI" about her career may still end up doing exactly that, simply because the search engine she typed her question into already inserted an AI generated summary above the usual list of links. Google's own AI Overviews already appear in a large and growing share of searches, and separately, visits to Google's more conversational AI Mode have been rising steadily since its launch (Similarweb, 2026). For a student in a district college with patchy internet and limited time, the AI summary at the top of the page is often the only part of the search result she reads at all, which raises the stakes of that summary being accurate a great deal higher than most of us in the teaching profession have yet appreciated.

2.2 Growth, Competition and Changing User Demographics

The competitive picture among AI platforms is also changing quickly, and this matters for higher education because it means the tool a student uses today may behave quite differently in six months. ChatGPT remains the largest single platform, but its share of web visits has come down steadily as Gemini, Claude, Perplexity and other tools have grown their own user base (Similarweb, 2026). Age patterns are shifting too. Two years back, chatbot use was concentrated among Gen Z and Millennial users, but by 2026 the split between users under thirty four and users above thirty four has become almost equal, which industry commentators read as a sign that AI use "is moving past early adopter hype and into everyday habit" (Similarweb, 2026).

Interestingly, there is also an early and small counter trend worth noting for those of us who work with young people. Some data suggests that a section of Gen Z users, the very group that adopted these tools first, is now becoming more selective about when and how they use generative AI, with a visible rise in interest in AI-free search tools among the youngest age group (Similarweb, 2026). This is a healthy sign in one sense. It tells us that critical distance from a new technology is possible even among digital natives, and it is exactly the kind of critical stance that education researchers have long argued students need to be taught deliberately rather than left to develop on their own (Selwyn, 2019).

At the same time, competition among AI platforms is moving beyond simply building a better product and into paid acquisition of users, with platforms spending increasing amounts on advertising to win market share (Similarweb, 2026). This matters for education because it means the choice of which AI tool becomes dominant among Indian students may end up being decided as much by marketing budgets as by which tool actually gives the most reliable or the most pedagogically sound

answers. A college that builds its teaching approach or its library orientation programme too tightly around one particular AI platform today may find, within a year or two, that a different platform has become the one students actually prefer, simply because of a change in advertising spend or a change in which app comes pre-installed on a new phone.

3. HOW STUDENTS ARE ACTUALLY USING AI

3.1 Test Preparation, Research and Everyday Study Tasks

A systematic review of research on artificial intelligence in higher education, done before the current wave of generative AI tools became common, already found four broad areas where AI was being used in universities: profiling and prediction of students, adaptive systems for personalised learning, AI-based assessment and evaluation, and intelligent tutoring systems (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Generative AI chat tools have, in effect, pulled all four of these uses into one single conversational interface that any student with a phone can access for free or at very low cost.

For Indian students, the most visible use is probably in test preparation. This is not a small side use, it goes to the heart of a problem this journal has itself discussed at length, the immense financial and psychological weight that competitive examinations such as NEET place on students and their families through the coaching industry (College Post, 2026a). Coaching centres in Kota and elsewhere are already experimenting with AI tools to generate practice questions, explain concepts and provide round the clock doubt-clearing that used to require a human tutor. Global data on how people talk to AI tools shows education as one of the largest categories of use outside pure technology questions, with subcategories such as test preparation, language learning and civics and business studies appearing prominently among the top areas where users seek help (Similarweb, 2026). This confirms what many college teachers already sense from informal conversation with students, that AI is now a normal part of exam preparation, alongside the coaching centre and the reference book.

There is a genuine benefit here that should not be dismissed too quickly. A student in a small town who cannot afford expensive coaching now has, at least in principle, access to a tool that can explain a difficult concept in simple words, at any hour, as many times as needed. Researchers writing on large language models in education have pointed out that this kind of round the clock, judgement free support for weaker students is one of the strongest arguments in favour of careful, well designed use of these tools in classrooms (Kasneji et al., 2023).

Beyond test preparation in the narrow sense, students report using AI chat tools for very ordinary academic tasks

that used to consume an entire evening in the library, such as summarising a long book chapter before an exam, converting rough notes into a structured answer format, or getting a second opinion on a piece of written work before submission. Data on what people actually discuss with a leading AI chatbot shows technology and professional services subjects at the top, but education itself, spanning test preparation, language learning and civics and business studies, sits as a clearly visible and sizeable category of everyday conversation (Similarweb, 2026). This tells college teachers something important, namely that AI use by our students is already broad based and routine, rather than confined to a small number of technically minded students in engineering and computer science departments. Departments of humanities, commerce and social science, which have traditionally assumed that this kind of technology question belongs to someone else, need to recognise that their own students are using these tools just as much, if not more.

3.2 Course, College and Career Discovery

The second major use, and the one this article wants to focus on especially, is discovery, meaning the process by which a student decides which subject to study, which college to join and which career path to follow. Traditionally this decision leaned on prospectuses, newspaper college guides, NIRF and NAAC ratings, and word of mouth from seniors. Increasingly, students are simply asking an AI chatbot, "which is the best college for computer science near Gurugram" or "what is the cutoff for this course last year," and treating the answer as authoritative.

This is risky in a system of the size and complexity that India has. With 46,468 colleges spread across the country, many of them recently established or recently reclassified, and with the underlying data itself changing every admission cycle (MoE, 2026), an AI tool trained on older or incomplete data can easily give a confident but wrong answer about fees, cutoffs, affiliation status or even whether an institution is still functioning under the same name. A prospective student and her parents, sitting in a district town with no easy way to verify the AI's claim against an official source, may make a life-changing decision on the basis of an answer that was simply out of date.

The problem is sharpened by the fact that industry data shows AI-recommended brands, in the commercial world, receive between two and four times as many subsequent visits compared with a competitor that was not recommended, which means whatever an AI happens to name first carries a strong practical advantage over whatever it does not name (Similarweb, 2026). Applied to higher education, this suggests that once a handful of well known, well documented institutions become the default names an AI chatbot offers when asked about a subject or a region, a kind of digital snowballing may set

in, where these same institutions keep getting recommended simply because they are already well represented online, while equally good but less digitally visible colleges are overlooked again and again. This is a new and somewhat invisible form of the old problem of a few big name institutions capturing a disproportionate share of student attention, except that now the mechanism doing the sorting is an algorithm rather than a newspaper ranking table, and it is much harder for an ordinary teacher or principal to even see it happening, let alone correct it.

4. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION

4.1 Citations, Live Retrieval and the Verification Problem

One encouraging development is that AI platforms are increasingly searching the live web to answer questions rather than depending only on what they learned during training, and the share of AI answers that include a citation to a web source has grown many times over in less than a year (Similarweb, 2026). This is a move in the right direction because it at least gives a student something to check. But a citation is not the same thing as accuracy. Scholars who have written about teaching in a world with generative AI describe the technology as a kind of "black box" whose internal working even its own designers cannot fully explain, and they argue that pedagogy now has to teach students to work with this uncertainty rather than trust the box blindly (Bearman & Ajajawi, 2023).

UNESCO's own guidance to policy makers on AI in education is direct on this point, stating that education systems must build the capacity of teachers and learners to evaluate AI generated content critically, because these systems can produce answers that sound confident and fluent while being factually wrong (UNESCO, 2021). For Indian colleges, where information literacy and library orientation have traditionally received very little curriculum time compared to subject content, this is a gap that needs urgent attention. A first year student who has never been taught how to check a claim against a primary source is simply not equipped to catch a smooth sounding but wrong AI answer about, say, the eligibility criteria for a scholarship or the correct interpretation of a UGC circular.

There is also the separate but related question of who is quoted when an AI does provide a citation. Data on the mix of sources that AI tools actually cite shows this varies a great deal by subject area, with reviews and user content dominating in some categories, specialist publishers dominating in others, and retail and e-commerce sources dominating still others (Similarweb, 2026). Applied to education related questions, this means a student asking about a college or a course may end up being shown citations drawn from unmoderated review sites or forum discussion rather than from the institution's

own verified information or from a government portal such as the AISHE database itself. Teachers guiding students on research methods will need to explicitly teach the difference between a citation that merely proves the AI searched the web and a citation that proves the underlying claim is actually reliable, because these two things are not the same, and the gap between them is exactly where misinformation slips through.

4.2 The Risk of Cognitive Offloading

There is an older and, in some ways, more worrying concern, which is what constant reliance on an outside memory does to a learner's own thinking. Long before generative AI, psychological research on how people use search engines already showed what came to be called the "Google effect," where people who know that information will remain easily searchable later tend to remember the fact of where to find information rather than the information itself (Sparrow et al., 2011). Generative AI takes this one step further, because it does not just store information for a person to retrieve, it does the retrieving, the summarising and often the reasoning too, on the person's behalf.

Education researchers who study AI's role in schools and colleges have flagged this as a genuine risk to what they call "cognitive offloading," where students who over rely on AI-generated answers may complete an assignment successfully while mastering very little of the underlying skill the assignment was meant to build (Selwyn, 2019). This is not an argument against using AI in colleges. It is an argument for colleges being deliberate about which tasks are meant to build a skill through struggle, and therefore should not be outsourced to AI, and which tasks are routine enough that AI assistance is a reasonable time saver.

This concern about offloading is not merely theoretical for the Indian classroom. Many college teachers of this writer's acquaintance already report a pattern where a student's spoken answer in a viva or a class discussion is noticeably weaker than the written assignment the same student submitted, a gap that was less common before generative AI became widely available. If this pattern is real and widespread, and more careful study is needed to confirm how widespread it is, it would suggest that some students are able to produce a polished written product with AI help while the underlying understanding that the written product is supposed to represent has not actually formed in the student's own mind. Assessment design in Indian colleges, which has for decades relied heavily on the written assignment and the end of semester written examination, may need to lean more on oral defence, in-class problem solving, and other formats that are harder to complete through AI alone, precisely to keep a check on this gap between what a student can produce and what a student actually knows.

5. EQUITY, ACCESS AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

5.1 Uneven Access Across Regions and Institution Types

It would be a mistake to talk about "students using AI" as though this is a single, evenly spread phenomenon. India's own higher education data shows how uneven basic participation in higher education already is, before AI enters the picture at all. The Gross Enrolment Ratio for 2023-24 stood at 30.0 at the all India level, but states such as Delhi and Tamil Nadu were already above 50, while several other states remained well below the national figure (MoE, 2026). Standalone institutions, which include many polytechnics, nursing colleges and teacher training institutes, had a noticeably lower survey response rate than universities and colleges, a sign that data quality itself is weaker in exactly the segment of the system that often serves less privileged students (MoE, 2026).

A World Bank review of Indian tertiary education has argued that expansion of the system must go hand in hand with stronger governance, financing and faculty capacity, warning that growth without matching capacity building creates hidden risk rather than real progress (Arnhold et al., 2023). The same warning applies squarely to AI adoption. A well resourced private university in a metro city can afford to train its faculty on AI tools, build its own AI policy and even pay for premium AI subscriptions for its students. A small government college in a district town, already short of teachers and computers, has no such cushion. If AI search genuinely becomes, as this article argues, a new layer of discovery and even a new determinant of which colleges get noticed by prospective students, then colleges that cannot afford to engage with this layer will simply become less visible, on top of whatever disadvantage they already carry.

This concern is not new in kind, only in form. Writers on the digital divide have long argued that access to a device or a connection is only the first and easiest barrier to solve, while the harder and more persistent barrier is unequal capacity to use technology in ways that produce real social and educational benefit (Warschauer, 2003). Generative AI search adds one more layer to this older problem rather than replacing it.

Some part of the gap is also simply about pace. Adoption of paid AI subscriptions, faster devices and better connectivity tends to move first through students in metro cities and in private, well funded institutions, and only later, and often more slowly, into district towns and government institutions with tighter budgets. A student paying for a premium AI subscription gets access to more capable models, faster responses and often more accurate, more recent information, while a student relying only on a free version, on a shared or older phone, or on patchy mobile data, gets a noticeably lower quality experience from what is nominally the same tool. This

kind of tiered access inside a supposedly single technology is easy to overlook because both students can technically say they are "using AI," even though the quality of what they are actually receiving is quite different.

5.2 The Regional Language Vulnerability

A second and closely related concern is language. Most large generative AI models are trained overwhelmingly on English language material, with much smaller volumes of good quality training data available in Hindi and other Indian languages. This means the quality, accuracy and even the tone of an AI answer can vary a great deal depending on whether the student is typing her question in English or in her own mother tongue. UNESCO's global monitoring report on technology in education has cautioned that digital tools "can be a force for inclusion, or exclusion," and that this depends heavily on decisions about content, language and design that are usually made far away from the classroom that eventually uses the tool (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2023, p. 4).

The National Education Policy 2020 places strong emphasis on multilingual education and on strengthening Indian languages within higher education (Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD], 2020). This is a fine aspiration on paper, but if the AI tools that a growing share of students actually use every day are weaker in Hindi, Haryanvi influenced Hindi, or other regional languages compared to English, then the gap between policy intention and everyday student experience will only widen. A student from a Hindi medium background in rural Haryana, asking her question in Hindi, may simply be getting a shallower or less reliable answer than an English medium student in a city asking the same question in English, without either student realising that the difference exists.

This regional language gap is likely to matter most exactly in the areas where the stakes are highest, namely admissions, scholarships and career guidance, because these are areas where precise wording, a specific date or a specific eligibility clause can make the difference between a student applying successfully and a student missing an opportunity altogether. An AI answer that is broadly correct in spirit but slightly wrong in a Hindi language rendering of a technical eligibility term could do real harm to a student who has no other easy way to cross check the answer. Colleges that serve largely Hindi medium or regional language medium student populations, which describes a very large share of government colleges across Haryana and neighbouring states, would do well to test, deliberately and periodically, how the AI tools their own students are likely to be using actually perform when questions about that specific college are asked in the regional language rather than only in English.

6. INSTITUTIONAL VISIBILITY IN THE AI SEARCH ERA

6.1 Why Universities Now Need a Presence Inside AI Answers

For decades, colleges and universities have thought about visibility mainly in terms of their own website, their entry in NIRF or NAAC listings, and perhaps a Facebook or Instagram page. Recent industry evidence on how generative AI answers are built suggests a new and different kind of visibility competition is emerging, one based on which sources an AI model chooses to cite or draw upon when a user asks a question in a given category (Similarweb, 2026). Just as businesses are being told to think about their "share of voice" inside AI generated answers and not only their ranking on a traditional search engine, colleges will increasingly need to ask a similar question: when a student asks an AI chatbot about courses, placements or hostel facilities in their subject and their region, is accurate and current information about their own institution even part of what the AI can find and cite.

This is not a small or purely technical matter. If an institution's website is out of date, if its course and fee information exists only inside a PDF prospectus that is hard for automated tools to read, or if the only material available online about the institution is old news reports or unmoderated social media chatter, then the AI answer a prospective student receives about that institution may be based on whatever thin or stale material is available, rather than on the institution's own accurate self-description. The datafication literature referred to earlier makes a related point about ranking systems generally, noting that institutions which do not actively manage their digital data footprint end up being represented by systems that were never designed with their interests in mind (Selwyn & Gasevic, 2020).

There is a further wrinkle worth noting, which is that recent behaviour of leading AI chatbots shows a growing share of users being sent directly to an institution's or a brand's own homepage rather than to a deep, specific page after an AI conversation, following changes in how one major platform handles referral links (Similarweb, 2026). For a business, this simply means the homepage has to work harder to convert a visitor. For a college, it means that when a prospective student clicks through from an AI conversation, she is likely landing on the general home page of the institution's website rather than on the specific admission or course page relevant to her question. Colleges whose home pages are cluttered, outdated, or built mainly around a scrolling photograph of the annual function rather than around clear, current, easy to find admission and course information, are at a real disadvantage in this new pattern of AI referred traffic, quite apart from how good the actual teaching and facilities at that college might be.

6.2 The Rise of AI Advertising

A further development that colleges, and especially our regulators, should watch closely is the arrival of paid advertising inside AI chat conversations. Data from the current quarter shows that the share of ChatGPT conversations in major markets that contain at least one sponsored result has been rising steadily, and among the earliest categories of advertiser are education and career related brands (Similarweb, 2026). It is not hard to imagine what this could mean in the Indian context. If commercial coaching brands, private universities or education loan companies are able to pay for favourable placement inside an AI chatbot's answer to a student's genuine question about, say, "which engineering college should I join," the line between neutral information and paid promotion becomes even harder for a seventeen or eighteen year old to see than it already is with sponsored search results or social media influencer content.

This is precisely the kind of concern this journal's own editorial voice has raised in the context of the coaching industry around NEET, where the profit motive of private players has repeatedly been shown to shape outcomes for young people in ways that are not always in their genuine interest (College Post, 2026a). AI advertising inside chatbots is, in effect, a new and less visible version of the same old problem, and it deserves the same level of scrutiny from policy makers and from institutions that genuinely care about student welfare.

7. POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

7.1 Faculty Development and AI Literacy

If students are already using generative AI heavily for study and for decision making, then faculty cannot afford to remain outside this conversation. Yet faculty development in most Indian colleges still leans heavily on one-time workshops rather than sustained, practice linked training, a gap that predates AI but is made more urgent by it. The India Employment Report 2024 has pointed out that a central problem facing educated Indian youth is a mismatch between the skills the education system builds and the skills that a changing labour market actually needs (International Labour Organisation & Institute for Human Development, 2024). AI literacy, meaning the ability to use these tools well, to question their output, and to teach students to do the same, is fast becoming one of those needed skills, both for students entering the job market and for the teachers who are meant to prepare them.

The National Education Policy 2020 already speaks of continuous faculty development through Human Resource Development Centres and similar structures (MHRD, 2020). These existing structures are a reasonable starting point, but their content needs urgent updating so that AI literacy, covering both the productive use of AI tools and their genuine limitations, becomes as standard

a part of faculty training as, say, learning outcome based curriculum design has become over the last several years.

It is worth being honest about a generational dimension to this problem as well. Many senior faculty members, including some who are otherwise excellent teachers and scholars, are themselves at an early and hesitant stage of learning how generative AI tools work, and some avoid the subject altogether out of discomfort or scepticism. This is understandable, but it leaves a gap where students, who are often ahead of their own teachers in comfort with these tools, receive no real guidance on the harder questions of when AI use is appropriate and when it undermines genuine learning. Faculty development programmes on AI should therefore be designed with patience for this discomfort, built around hands on practice with real teaching tasks rather than one-off lecture style sessions, and should explicitly invite senior faculty to bring their subject expertise into the conversation about how AI should or should not be used within their own discipline, rather than treating AI training as a purely technical add-on delivered by IT staff.

7.2 Gaps in Regulation and Institutional Preparedness

At the level of overall governance, the same concern raised earlier about Indian higher education generally, namely that rapid change is outpacing the capacity of institutions to manage it well, applies with particular force to AI (Arnhold et al., 2023). Most Indian colleges, especially those outside a small set of well resourced institutions, do not yet have a clear, written policy on how AI may or may not be used by students in assignments and examinations, nor do they have a considered position on how the institution itself should manage its own visibility and accuracy inside AI generated answers about itself. University level bodies have begun to discuss the question of AI and academic integrity, but a great deal of the practical, day to day decision making is still being left to individual teachers to work out on their own, often without adequate guidance or training.

A more considered institutional response would include at minimum three things, though these should be developed and adapted to each institution's own context rather than copied mechanically. First, a written and reasonably simple institutional policy on acceptable and unacceptable use of AI in coursework, communicated clearly to both students and faculty. Second, some basic AI and information literacy training built into orientation programmes for new students, so that critical evaluation of AI generated answers becomes a habit from the very first semester rather than an afterthought. Third, a designated person or small team responsible for keeping the institution's own public facing information accurate, current and easy for automated tools to find, so that when

a student does ask an AI chatbot about the institution, the answer she receives is grounded in fact rather than in whatever stale material happens to be available online.

None of these three steps requires large money or elaborate infrastructure, which is precisely why even a modestly resourced government college can and should begin work on them without waiting for a national directive. A one or two page policy document, a half-day orientation session, and one staff member given clear responsibility for keeping the college website current are well within reach of almost any institution. What is missing in most places is not resource but recognition, that this issue has already arrived in the classroom whether or not the institution has formally decided to notice it. Regulatory bodies at the national level, including the University Grants Commission and professional councils, have an important role to play in setting broad expectations and sharing good practice across institutions, but institutions themselves cannot afford to wait passively for a detailed circular before they begin the basic housekeeping described above.

8. CONCLUSION

Generative AI search is not a passing fad that will settle down once the excitement wears off. The data reviewed in this article suggests the opposite, that it is becoming a normal and growing part of how young people, including the young people who fill our lecture halls and hostels, find information about almost everything, including their own education (Similarweb, 2026). This creates real opportunity, particularly for students who have historically had less access to good quality guidance and coaching, but it also creates real risk, around the accuracy of information, around fairness of access across region and language, and around the deeper question of what students actually learn to do for themselves when an AI tool is always available to do it for them.

Indian higher education has faced large, fast moving changes before, from the expansion after independence, through the pressures of liberalisation, to the more recent rollout of the National Education Policy 2020. In each of these earlier moments, institutions that engaged thoughtfully and early tended to manage the transition better than those that waited and reacted only after problems had already grown large. Generative AI search calls for the same kind of early, thoughtful engagement, not blind adoption, and not blanket rejection either, but a steady institutional effort to understand the tool, to teach students to use it critically, and to make sure that the benefit of this new layer of discovery reaches every kind of college and every kind of student, and not only those who were already ahead.

This writer does not claim to have final answers here, and the pace of change in this particular technology is fast enough that some of the specific figures cited in this

article will likely look dated within a year or two of publication. What is unlikely to change so quickly is the underlying set of questions that Indian higher education now has to keep asking on a continuing basis: whether the information a student receives from an AI tool about her studies is accurate and current, whether every student, regardless of region, language or the wealth of her college, has a genuinely fair chance to benefit from these tools rather than only their better resourced peers, and whether our assessment and teaching practices are being redesigned thoughtfully enough to keep pace with what students can now so easily generate with a few taps on a phone screen. These questions deserve continuing attention from teachers, from institutional leaders and from policy makers alike, and this article will have served its purpose if it persuades even a few readers to start asking them seriously within their own institutions.

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ANNOUNCEMENT OF AWARDS:

The awards and recognitions will be announced at the 27th National Annual Conference of the Indian Colleges Forum, scheduled to be held from 20-22 November, 2026 at GGDSD College, Raipur, Palampur, Kangra Distt. Himachal Pradesh.

All member colleges are encouraged to participate and share their innovative practices and successful experiences for the benefit of the wider higher education community.

UNESCO HIGHER EDUCATION GLOBAL TRENDS REPORT 2026

An executive summary of UNESCO Report on Global Trends in higher education is reproduced for the benefit of readers.

The UNESCO Higher Education Global Trends Report 2026 examines nine major aspects of higher education development across the world:

1. Access and completion
2. Equity and inclusion
3. Governance and legislative frameworks
4. External quality assurance
5. Financing
6. Digital transformation and artificial intelligence (AI)
7. Teaching personnel
8. Internationalization
9. Recognition of foreign qualifications

The report analyses these trends globally and across eight regions: Arab States; Central and Eastern Europe; Central Asia; East Asia and the Pacific; Latin America and the Caribbean; North America and Western Europe; South and West Asia; and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Except for the analysis of Internet use and AI, trends in all other areas are examined primarily by region. Internet use and AI-related trends are analysed according to income categories: high-income, upper-middle-income, lower-middle-income, and low-income countries.

1. ACCESS AND COMPLETION

A clear pattern emerges in the global development of higher education, particularly with regard to access and completion at undergraduate, postgraduate, and research levels (ISCED levels 6-8).

North America and Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe are among the leading regions globally in access and completion. In particular, Central and Eastern Europe records a higher rate of access and completion than North America and Western Europe and most other regions of the world.

The global access rate to higher education reached 35% in 2023, compared with 27% in 2013, representing an increase of eight percentage points over the past decade. However, access remains considerably lower in the Arab States and Sub-Saharan Africa, where rates remain below the global average.

The global completion rate stood at 27% in 2023, compared with 22% in 2013. Thus, although completion has improved over the last decade, it continues to lag behind the rate of access.

In general, the completion rate is lower than the access rate in almost all regions. The improvement in completion rates over the past decade has generally ranged between 3 and 8 percentage points across regions. An important exception is East Asia and the

Pacific, where the completion rate almost doubled, rising from 18% to 39%. This substantial improvement merits further investigation to identify the policies, institutional practices, and other factors that may have contributed to such progress. The experience of this region could provide valuable lessons for other parts of the world.

The distinction between access and completion is important. Access is an important indicator of the availability and expansion of higher education opportunities, whereas completion provides a stronger indication of the effectiveness and performance of the higher education system. Expansion without corresponding improvements in completion may therefore limit the actual benefits of increased participation.

2. EQUITY AND INCLUSION

The section on equity and inclusion examines government policies aimed at ensuring equitable participation in higher education.

According to the report, 79% of governments identify inclusion as a priority in their higher education policy objectives. In addition, 31% of countries legally mandate tuition-free public higher education, while 63% provide publicly funded national scholarship programmes.

However, the report points out that scholarship programmes are not always based on financial need; some are primarily merit-based. Consequently, existing arrangements may not be sufficient to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to participate and complete higher education.

A key message of the report is that expanding access to higher education does not automatically translate into greater equity. Targeted policies and support mechanisms are required to address the specific barriers faced by disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

The implementation of targeted policies for specific groups remains uneven across countries. For example, relatively few countries have comprehensive measures addressing women's participation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) within their higher education plans. This is particularly significant given that women constitute only 31% of the global research and development workforce.

The evidence therefore suggests that while equity and inclusion have gained greater policy attention, there remains a substantial gap between policy commitments and equitable outcomes.

3. GOVERNANCE AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS

The report finds that centralized governance remains

dominant in higher education globally. Approximately 88% of countries place higher education under direct national control.

In terms of the level at which higher education is administered, approximately 50% of countries manage higher education at the ministerial level or equivalent, while 41% operate at the vice-ministerial or equivalent level. Only around 6% manage higher education primarily at lower levels of administration.

The findings indicate that higher education governance remains strongly centralized in most parts of the world, although the degree of decentralization varies across regions.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS AND INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY

Regulation of higher education is widespread. Approximately 92% of countries have adopted legislation specifically regulating higher education.

At the same time, however, only 67% of countries legally recognize institutional autonomy. There are significant regional variations in this respect.

Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia have the highest levels of legal recognition of institutional autonomy. In contrast, South and West Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and East Asia and the Pacific have relatively lower levels, with autonomy recognized in only about half or slightly more than half of the countries in these regions.

The relationship between governance arrangements and institutional autonomy is particularly important when considering higher education performance. Greater institutional autonomy may enable institutions to respond more effectively to changing academic, economic, technological, and social needs, provided that autonomy is accompanied by appropriate accountability mechanisms.

It is also noteworthy that Central and Eastern Europe, which records relatively high levels of legal recognition of institutional autonomy, has experienced a substantial improvement in completion rates over the past decade, with the rate reportedly almost doubling. This raises an important question for further analysis: to what extent are governance structures and institutional autonomy associated with improvements in higher education outcomes?

The report on external quality assurance highlights that quality assurance agencies have become a near-global norm in higher education. The share of countries that mandate, by law, the establishment of one or more quality assurance agencies increased from around 40% in the early 2010s to 88% in 2025. Countries with diverse higher education providers or high levels of private enrolment tend to operate multiple quality assurance agencies, whereas smaller systems or those dominated

by public institutions generally rely on a single national agency.

The report further indicates that 73% of countries provide legal autonomy to quality assurance agencies. However, despite formal legal provisions, many agencies continue to operate with limited practical independence. By 2025, approximately 75% of quality assurance agencies worldwide were members of regional or international quality assurance networks, indicating a growing trend towards international cooperation and alignment of quality standards.

FINANCE

The data presented in the bar diagram (Figure 3) on government expenditure on higher education as a percentage of GDP (ISCED 5-8) reveal considerable regional variations. In 2022, North America and Western Europe recorded the highest expenditure, at approximately 1.2% of GDP. This was followed by Central and Eastern Europe, where expenditure was slightly above the global average of 0.8%. East Asia and the Pacific spent slightly less than the global average.

Sub-Saharan Africa recorded higher government expenditure on higher education than South and West Asia and the Arab States. Central Asia recorded the lowest level of expenditure, at slightly below 0.4% of GDP.

The report, however, cautions against making direct comparisons because of differences in data availability. The number of countries reporting expenditure data was substantially higher in 2022 (105 countries) than in 2023 (74 countries) and 2024 (27 countries). Consequently, the 2022 data were used to calculate the global and regional averages.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The report identifies significant progress in internet access across different income groups, while also highlighting the persistence of a substantial global digital divide.

In high-income countries, the proportion of individuals using the internet increased from 88% in 2019 to nearly 93% in 2024. Upper-middle-income countries also experienced substantial growth, from 65% to 81% during the same period. In lower-middle-income countries, internet use increased from 34% in 2019 to 54% in 2024. Low-income countries also recorded an increase, although from a much lower base—from 17% in 2019 to 27% in 2024.

These figures demonstrate that, although digital connectivity is expanding globally, the pace and extent of digital transformation remain highly unequal. The gap between high-income and low-income countries continues to be significant, with important implications for equitable access to digital learning, artificial intelligence, online resources, and other emerging technologies in higher education.

HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING PERSONNEL

The report emphasises that academic personnel are central to the quality of higher education, but the profession is facing increasing pressures. Employment insecurity, precarious contracts, heavy workloads, and rapidly changing skill requirements have contributed to growing concerns about the status and conditions of academic personnel. These developments have also contributed to the ongoing momentum to revise the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel.

According to the report, nearly two-thirds of countries (69%) prioritise the career and professional development (CPD) of higher education teaching personnel within their national higher education policies. However, only a minority of countries explicitly refer to the well-being of teaching personnel. This suggests that professional development is receiving greater policy attention than the broader working conditions and welfare of academic staff.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Academic freedom, a cornerstone of the higher education profession, is facing mounting threats in many parts of the world. Restrictions on academic freedom can compromise the ability of academic personnel to carry out their teaching, research, and public engagement functions without undue interference.

Globally, around 65% of countries have legal guarantees for academic freedom. However, there are significant differences in the scope of these legal protections, and an important gap remains between formal legal recognition and protection in practice. According to the 2025 Academic Freedom Report, a significant decline in academic freedom has been observed in 34 countries and territories over the past decade.

The regional data on the legal recognition of academic freedom in 2024-25 reveal substantial disparities. South and West Asia has the lowest level of legal recognition, at around 30%, whereas Central and Eastern Europe records the highest level, at approximately 90%. North-Western Europe records around 80%, while Central Asia is also above 80%. East Asia records a level above 70%. In Sub-Saharan Africa, legal recognition is slightly above 50%, but remains below the global average of more than 60%.

It is also noteworthy that Central and Eastern Europe performs strongly on several related indicators, including access, completion, institutional autonomy, and academic freedom.

INTERNATIONALISATION AND STUDENT MOBILITY

The report provides important evidence on trends in both inbound and outbound international student mobility. Data on outbound student mobility between 2002 and 2023 show a consistent increase in the number of students from East Asia and the Pacific studying abroad. In 2023,

the region accounted for approximately 26% of outbound students globally, representing around 7.3 million students. The report estimates that the global number of outbound students could increase to around 9 million by 2030.

Most regions experienced an increase in outbound student mobility between 2002 and 2023. The main exceptions were the Arab States and Central and Eastern Europe, where the numbers remained relatively flat.

Inbound international student numbers are highest in North America and Western Europe, and these regions have experienced consistent growth between 2002 and 2023. They are followed by East Asia and the Pacific and Central and Eastern Europe.

Western Europe and North America remain the principal destinations for international students, hosting nearly 49% of international students globally. East Asia and the Pacific account for approximately 19%, while Central and Eastern Europe account for around 14%. The report also notes that women constitute approximately 49% of international students, indicating a broadly balanced gender distribution in international student mobility.

RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS

The report states that approximately 75% of countries have national policies or sub-national regulations governing the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications. Higher rates of recognition policies are observed among countries participating in regional education areas. In addition, 93 countries have joined one or more of UNESCO's conventions concerning the recognition of higher education qualifications.

The regional analysis of countries with national policies on the recognition of foreign qualifications and ratification of a UNESCO recognition convention for 2024-26 reveals significant differences.

Central and Eastern Europe has universal coverage, with 100% of countries having a national policy for the recognition of foreign qualifications, and all countries having ratified a relevant UNESCO recognition convention. This is followed by North America and Western Europe, where approximately 90% of countries have a recognition policy, while more than 95% appear to have ratified a UNESCO recognition convention.

In Central Asia, all countries have a national recognition policy, while approximately 88% have ratified a UNESCO recognition convention. In contrast, South and West Asia has a national recognition policy in approximately 67% of countries, but none have ratified a UNESCO recognition convention. In East Asia and the Pacific, around 59% of countries have a national policy for the recognition of foreign qualifications, while only approximately 32% have ratified a UNESCO recognition convention.

Overall, among the countries covered by the UNESCO

survey, approximately 75% have a policy for the recognition of foreign qualifications, while 49% have ratified a UNESCO recognition convention.

OVERALL ANALYSIS

The analysis of global higher education trends presented by UNESCO in its 2026 report reveals significant regional patterns across the indicators discussed above.

Central and Eastern Europe emerges as one of the stronger-performing regions, with relatively high levels of access and completion, greater institutional autonomy, stronger legal recognition of academic freedom, comparatively high government expenditure on higher education as a percentage of GDP, high levels of internet use, comprehensive policies for the recognition of foreign qualifications, and widespread ratification of UNESCO recognition conventions.

North America and Western Europe also occupy a strong position across many of these indicators. The region records relatively high government expenditure on higher education as a percentage of GDP and remains the world's leading destination for international students.

In contrast, regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States, Central Asia, and South and West Asia continue to face challenges across several of these indicators. These disparities need to be understood in the context of differences in historical development,

economic capacity, institutional structures, and, in some cases, the long-term effects of colonial rule and the extraction of economic resources.

The findings therefore point to the need for greater international cooperation and targeted support for countries and regions that continue to lag behind in key higher education indicators. If the international community is to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) by 2030, greater attention should be given to strengthening higher education systems, financing, digital infrastructure, academic freedom, professional development and well-being of teaching personnel, quality assurance mechanisms, international mobility, and the recognition of foreign qualifications.

A more equitable approach to global higher education development will require special initiatives and sustained international support for countries facing structural and resource constraints. Such measures would not only help reduce regional disparities but also contribute to building more inclusive, resilient, and globally connected higher education systems.

For the Executive Summary of UNESCO Higher Education Global Trends Report 2026 link is given below: unesdoc.unesco.org/in/rest/annotationSVC/DownloadWatermarkedAttachment/attach_import_01986f7d-7014-42df-9d33-3b8468906f22?_=398946&eng.pdf&to=12&from=1

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2026, empowers the Chancellor and State government to transfer teaching and non teaching staff across state universities under a new Section 14A. It was passed by the Assembly on 10-11 September 2026 with 171 votes in favour and 15 against, drawing significant opposition from teachers' associations.

This Bill provides an important case for examining this larger question. The Bill and its implications have generated concerns about the relationship between state authority and the autonomy of universities and other higher educational institutions. Of particular significance is the proposal to empower the state administrative machinery to transfer teachers and other employees from one state university to another. Such a provision raises questions that go beyond the administrative convenience of transferring personnel.

Universities in India have been established under specific Acts and statutes enacted by the competent legislatures. These legal frameworks provide for their governance, administration and academic functioning and, in varying degrees, recognise institutional autonomy.

If the government machinery is given the power to transfer academic and other university personnel across universities according to administrative requirements, the distinction

between a university and a conventional government department could become increasingly blurred.

The proposed arrangement could potentially override or substantially alter the spirit of existing university Acts and statutes enacted over several decades. If universities become administratively indistinguishable from government departments, the principle of university self-governance would inevitably come under pressure.

The deeper issue is the relationship between **power and knowledge**. Control over educational institutions can ultimately become control over the environment in which ideas are produced, transmitted and evaluated. It can influence the freedom to ask questions, the choice of research priorities, the recruitment and deployment of academic talent, the interpretation of social problems and, ultimately, the intellectual formation of younger generations.

The issue is ultimately much larger than one Bill or one state. It concerns a fundamental question for every society:

Who should control the thoughts, innovations and future of the next generation-the institutions of knowledge themselves, operating within a framework of public accountability, or the political authority of the day?

We need to address this question squarely and seriously.

This column brings out briefs of: Ph.D and M.Phil Research in Education, Economics of Education, Social, Political, Psychology aspects of education/economics conducted in University /College departments. It also brings out briefs on researches done by Research Institutions, Industry and NGOs. This column was introduced from April-June, 2016 issue of College Post. Method of reporting the researches completed and in progress was given in that issue. Interested researchers, professors and Heads of institute are requested to send their brief accordingly. Purpose of this column is to high light the researches in education conducted in university and college departments and in any other institution / industry and NGO for the benefit of policy makers, research scholars, thinkers. Readers are welcome to encourage relevant person and institute to send briefs on research done and being done in education/ economics.

This issue brings to you brief on the following Research in Education/Economics.

PhD Thesis

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION: A STUDY IN COASTAL KARNATAKA

Researcher- SHAMA I.N. M M.A, Research Guide- Dr. SHRIPATHI KALLURAYA.P M.A., PhD., Department: Department of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Economics, University- Mangalore University, Mangalore, Karnataka, Date of Submission- 2024

The thesis starts with a quotation from Kofi Annan: "Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, In every society, in every family". Kofi Annan (The Former Secretary-General of the United Nations).

SCOPE OF RESEARCH

This research focuses on three main components of empowerment: economic, social, and political. By examining these components, the research aims to compare the levels of empowerment among women across different occupations. This research intends to analyze the impact of higher education on the empowerment of women across different dimensions and occupations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The main objective of this research is to analyze the role of higher education in women's empowerment. The specific objectives are;

1. To analyze the status of women's education and employment in India and Karnataka.
2. To examine the educational status of women and to compare the empowerment level of women across different categories of employment.

3. To analyse the impact of higher education on the socio-economic and political empowerment of women.
4. To critically evaluate the level of employability among the educated women.
5. To analyze the impact of employment on the socio-economic and political empowerment of educated women

METHODOLOGY:

Empowerment of women will be measured in terms of higher education and employment. Further, Social empowerment is measured in terms of respect in the family, honor in society, involvement in public programs, social awareness, etc. Economic empowerment is measured in terms of freedom to spend, save, and invest, economic independence, administration of money, online banking practices, etc. Political empowerment is measured by indicators like awareness of voting rights, participation in political campaigns and protests, contesting in elections, etc.

Research study is conducted in Coastal Karnataka. This region includes three districts namely, Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, and Uttara Kannada. However, the study is confined to Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts of Coastal Karnataka. The empirical part is based on a sample of 600 respondents from two districts covering occupations namely, Teachers: 50 /50 =100, Bank employees 50 /50 =100, Professionals (doctors and engineers) 50/ 50= 100 Entrepreneurs 50 /50 =100 Unemployed-100/100.

KEY FINDINGS:

Demographic features of sample women:

The majority of the sample women fall within the 30-40 age group, with 24.5 percent aged between 20-30 years, 29.67 percent between 30-40 years, 28 percent between 40- 50 years, and 17.83 percent aged over 50 years.

- o The largest proportion of respondents, accounting for 40.83 percent, are married. Additionally, 32.5 percent are unmarried, 16.17 percent are widowed, and 10.5 percent are separated.
- o Among the sample women, 45.83 percent have undergraduate qualifications, 31.83 percent are postgraduates, and 22.33 percent have received professional education.
- o In terms of additional qualifications, 24.33 percent of respondents have completed computer courses, 20.33 percent have obtained diploma courses, 9.33 percent have pursued self-employment courses, and 19.67 percent have undertaken other courses. Additionally, 26.33 percent have not undergone any additional courses.
- o The majority of sample women (47.17 percent) come from families with 4-7 members, followed by 37.83

percent with 1-3 members, 12.5 percent with 7-10 members, and only 2.5 percent with more than 10 members.

- o Approximately 14.25 percent of respondents have less than a year of working experience, while 26.75 percent, 23 percent, 17.5 percent, and 11.25 percent have 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, and 16-20 years of experience, respectively. Moreover, 4.75 percent have 21-25 years of experience, and 2.5 percent have more than 25 years of experience.

The economic characteristics of the sample women.

The majority of respondents (28.25 percent) earn between 20,000-40,000 rupees. Additionally, 26.5 percent, 17.25 percent, and 22 percent earn between 40,000-60,000, 60,000-80,000, and less than 20,000 rupees, respectively. Only 6 percent earn above 80,000 rupees.

- o The majority save for personal requirements (89.0 percent), children's education (85.5 percent), and assured benefits (81.75 percent). Additionally, 72.25 percent save for tax benefits, while 68.75 percent save for other reasons.

EMPLOYABILITY

- o The overall employability skill score was found to be 72.75 percent among employed women, while it was 67.25 percent among unemployed women

IMPACT OF HIGHER EDUCATION ON EMPLOYABILITY

- o Overall, 79.68 percent of employed women with higher education and 68.25 percent of unemployed women believe higher education positively impacts employability skills.

Women's Employment and Women's Employment and Empowerment:

- o 96.5 percent of the sample employed and 88.75 percent of unemployed women perceive employment as a means of empowerment.
- o Overall, 83.5 percent of higher-educated employed women and 81.75 percent of unemployed women

endorse the positive impact of employment on women's empowerment.

On average, 82.25 percent of higher-educated employed women and 79.75 percent of higher-educated unemployed women are of the opinion that employment serves as a means of empowerment for women.

SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

- o Overall, 81.0 percent of employed women and 72.25 percent of unemployed women perceive higher education as a positive contributor to their social empowerment.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

- o Overall, 82.25 percent of employed women with higher education and 69.0 percent of unemployed women hold a positive view regarding the contribution of higher education to women's economic empowerment.

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

- o Overall, 72.5 percent of employed women with higher education and 67.75 percent of unemployed women recognize the positive influence of higher education on political empowerment.
- o In the study area, higher education is believed to contribute to social empowerment by 81.0 percent of employed and 72.25 percent of unemployed women, to economic empowerment by 82.25 percent of employed and 69.0 percent of unemployed women, and to political empowerment by 72.5 percent of employed and 67.75 percent of unemployed women.

STUDY CONCLUDES:

Enrollment in higher education and improving their employable skills can integrate them into the economic mainstream, contributing to both individual and national development.

Ultimately, empowering women not only enhances their economic independence and societal status but also fosters overall economic growth and prosperity.

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CASE FOR REJECTING GLOBAL RANKING OF UNIVERSITIES - A DE-COLONIAL OF COLONIAL PUSH

The Lancet has published a report by Richard Horton on paper published by Tiffany Nassiri-Ansari and David McCoy from the International Institute for Global Health at the United Nations University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, have published a compelling deconstruction of the ARWU and THE rankings. They propose possible reforms, but they also suggest that these rankings might be rejected entirely-"there are valid reasons for removing the power of rankings to shape higher education policy and university policy from the control of private for-profit industry".

The report brings out that:

"Provosts and Presidents of our greatest higher education institutions obsess over their rankings. Three dominate-the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings, QS World University Rankings, and the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU). These metrics of achievement should be challenged. They silence scholars from countries with fewer financial resources than their wealthy neighbours."

"Nassiri-Ansari and McCoy frame their analysis within the present movement to decolonise global health. A central concern of that movement is power-the steep inequalities in power between high-income universities and those in what these authors call the "Global South". Both the ARWU and THE rankings report an extreme dominance of institutions in the US and UK: 41% and 44%, respectively, among the top 200 universities. In the ARWU, only a fifth of universities are located in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The THE is even more exclusive-only 12.5% of higher education institutions are to be found in these regions.

The criteria these rankings use to judge performance are astonishingly elitist. The ARWU counts Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals among staff and alumni (30% of the total score). Publishing in just two journals, Nature and Science, accounts for another 20%. The THE rankings are less reductive. Although citation impact still counts for a high contribution (30%), teaching is given credit-reputation (15%), PhDs awarded (6%), staff-student ratios (4.5%), doctoral-to-bachelor's ratios (2.25%), and teaching income per faculty member (2.25%). "

The report further states that :

"Nassiri-Ansari and McCoy document multiple "limitations and flaws" in these rankings, attacking and undermining their superficially rigorous and objective presentation. Data quality is not independently validated by either ranking institution. The use of surveys to measure reputation is open to serious bias. An emphasis on anglophone journals produces an unfair disadvantage to non-English language

scholars. There is no effort to measure the social impact of a university. Sciences are unfairly privileged over humanities. And the idea that an institution as complex as a university can be accurately summarised by a single metric is patent nonsense. Rankings in their current form encourage an unhealthy "game of winners and losers" and competition rather than collaboration between universities. In the context of the decolonial debate, rankings reinforce a "colonial hierarchy", encouraging a brain drain from South to North. In global health, "universities from the US and UK have a disproportionate influence over the formulation of global health policies".

It concludes that :

"It is surely time to end the current university ranking system and replace it with something better. Something that measures what we really believe universities are for-not an endless stream of "papers in highly cited journals, not a collection of prizes that reflects the good fortune of a few, and not metrics that reward crude measures of "productivity" and financial income.

The authors state that "At a minimum, university rankings should be helping to create spaces for scholars worldwide to have a voice and a platform. If we truly believe in equity, we need to resist and repudiate the current discriminatory and exclusionary system of university rankings. It is a system that stains the reputation of scholarship."

Courtesy and Source: The silencing of the South by Richard Horton, Lancet March18, 2023.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM - STRENGTHENING OF: A SWEDISH REPORT

A report published in University World News -Global edition by Jan PetterMyklebust 18 September 2026 states that: "Professor Anna-Sara Lind, who was mandated by the Ministry of Higher Education on 25 April 2025 to be the special investigator on academic freedom in Sweden, delivered the 430-page report, which concluded that although Sweden enjoys a high level of academic freedom by international standards, challenges exist.

Threats, hate speech and harassment, along with precarious employment and funding conditions and various forms of external and internal governance, can still affect the ability of researchers and teachers to exercise academic freedom."

The report also mentions the plea for:

Constitutional protection for academic freedom:

Courtesy and Source : University World News, Jan PetterMyklebust, September 18, 2026 www.worlduniversity.com

ACADEMIC FREEDOM INDEX REPORT 2025/2026

The Institute of Political Science and V-Dem Institute have brought of Academic Freedom Index 2025 its 17th edition. In this column we discuss and highlight the findings of the AFI Report update 2026.

THE BACKGROUND:

Academic freedom is a multi-dimensional concept encompassing both individual and institutional dimensions. The Academic Freedom Index (AFI) reflects this by assessing de facto protection of freedoms at both levels, using a peer-reviewed approach and a customized Bayesian IRT-measurement model developed in the V-Dem project. It draws on the expertise of 2,357 scholars worldwide and over one million data points collected at the coder level.

AFI INDICATORS:

The Academic Freedom Index rests on five key indicators:

- " the freedom to research and teach;
- " the freedom of academic exchange and dissemination;
- " the institutional autonomy of universities;
- " campus integrity;
- " and the freedom of academic and cultural expression.

Through these five indicators, the AFI captures elements of academic freedom "that are (a) comparable across different university systems around the world and (b) specific to the academic sector."

ABOUT INDICATORS:

At the individual level, AFI indicators cover the freedom to research and teach, the freedom of academic exchange and dissemination, and the freedom of academic and cultural expression. At the institutional level, the AFI comprises institutional autonomy and campus integrity, which together safeguard the well-functioning of academic institutions without undue interference from non-academic actors.

DEBATE ABOUT INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY:

Debate about the role of institutional autonomy in academic freedom has gained recent attention. Some scholars and political actors argue that institutional autonomy may engender universities that suppress viewpoint diversity. In contrast, the AFI data highlight that institutional autonomy is positively associated with the freedom to research and teach. This supports the argument that institutional autonomy is, indeed, essential for protecting individual academics' freedom.

REPORT COVERS LONGITUDINAL DATA AND MORE PARTICULARLY DURING 2015 -2025.

The Report states that :

In the period 2015-2025, several countries have

experienced substantial and significant declines in all dimensions of academic freedom, especially in the freedom to research and teach (51 countries), campus integrity (51 countries), the freedom of academic exchange (47 countries), and the freedom of academic and cultural expression (46 countries). Institutional autonomy remains slightly more resistant to decline than the other dimensions, with 43 countries experiencing a substantial and statistically significant decline. By contrast, improvements are comparatively rare, although they are observable in some countries, such as Bahrain, The Gambia, and Uzbekistan. Overall, the post-2015 period is characterized by considerable declines across all five dimensions of academic freedom. Although institutional autonomy is slightly less affected than the other components of academic freedom, there are strong reasons for concern regarding attacks on institutional autonomy.

The report further states that:

The data also show that the United States has experienced a remarkably sharp drop in institutional autonomy compared to other countries in Western Europe and North America and also compared to major autocratizing countries such as Hungary, India, and Türkiye, where institutional autonomy has declined more gradually.

In the US, the initial decline began in 2020, driven largely by state-level actions. It intensified in 2025 under the second Trump Administration, driven by an unprecedented array of coercive federal executive measures that amplified and fuelled state-level pressures on autonomous universities. The US case illustrates how quickly institutional autonomy can be damaged via coercive executive action, yet it also suggests that pushback by academic institutions, civil society organizations, and court action against illegal measures are key to protecting academic freedom in autocratizing countries.

INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY:

Our data suggests that institutional autonomy plays a key role in protecting individual-level dimensions of academic freedom: countries with greater institutional autonomy provide greater protection for individual scholars' freedom.

Institutional autonomy refers to the degree to which higher education institutions are able to govern themselves without undue interference from the state or other external, non-academic actors. According to the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, autonomy is "that degree of self-governance necessary for effective decision making by institutions of higher education regarding their academic work, standards, management and related activities consistent with systems of public accountability,

especially in respect of funding provided by the state, and respect for academic freedom and human rights."

POSITION OF INDIA AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES:

AFI presented in the report puts India in bottom 10-20 % in range of 0.2 in the scale where 1 represent higher point. It shares the status with Burundi, Chad, and Venezuela. Burundi is increasing but Chad, Venezuela and India it is decreasing over time. Whereas Nepal falls in top 20-30% range, Bhutan falls in Bottom 30-40% and Pakistan in bottom 20-30% Range and Bangladesh in bottom 40-50% but improving. Sri Lanka falls in top 20-30% Range at 0.6-0.8 and 0.8-1.

* * * *

APPEAL FOR REASON AND RECLAIMING ACADEMIC FREEDOM.

Hindu of 30th September, 2026 in its editorial page has published an article by CP Rajendran entitled Indian Academic's drift from reason to rituals. The article highlights the recent development in IIT Delhi where reason has replaced the ritual. And the rituals that attempt to re-establish the obedience and surveillance. Whereas university stands for reason, questioning and freethinking to the extent of challenging the established icons in the

larger interest of creation of knowledge for the wellbeing of society. The article has appealed restoring the Socratic culture dialogue and questioning. The article brings out how leading academic institutions like IITs has given to rituals over the reason and freethinking. In this context the author appeals for developing a culture of freethinking and academic freedom. The idea of freethinking and academic freedom well-articulated by Gurudev Tagore in his poem "Where the mind is without fear". He even suggests this poem should be recited in every convocation of the institutions of higher education.

* * * *

ACADEMIC FREEDOM TO DECIDE WHAT TO TEACH?

There is a news published in Hindu, 30th September, 2026 that on some anonymous complaint pertaining to teaching of Ambedkar and Dalit and left oriented literature is viewed as "poison" the PMO has asked universities in particular central university to respond to the complaint. This leads to direct interfering of executive in academic freedom. The anonymous complaint are generally not taken note of. Pursuing such complaints from PMO is a matter that needs re-consideration so as to allow space to academics on their own to deal with such issues and decides what larger academic and societal interest is. This a core of academic freedom.

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continuous feedback loop. The AI generates alternatives, highlights blind spots, or models complex scenarios, expanding human capacity for high-level decision-making.

4. AI Stimulates Cognition: The AI acts as a Socratic tutor or trainer, intentionally introducing cognitive friction to help the user build internal mental models and independent problem-solving skills.

This design turns AI into a metacognitive partner that trains self-regulation and deeper conceptual understanding. [4]

5. What does this mean for Education?

Education makes the issue especially important because cognitive effort is an important part of the learning outcome.

A 2025 randomized controlled study of 120 undergraduates reported lower delayed knowledge retention among students who used ChatGPT as a study aid compared with a traditional-study group, suggesting that unrestricted AI assistance can sometimes reduce the effortful processes supporting durable learning. [5]

At the same time, eliminating AI would also discard significant opportunities for personalized tutoring, immediate feedback, brainstorming, accessibility and

cognitive augmentation.

The educational challenge is therefore not AI versus no AI, but how AI should be designed into learning.

SOME CONCERNS:

In July 2026, OpenAI reported that AI agents used during cybersecurity evaluations obtained unintended internet access and compromised parts of infrastructure involving Hugging Face. OpenAI described the incident as involving models that went beyond their intended isolated environment.

With the evolution of Agentic AI, the role is moving from assistance toward agency. An assistant waits for instructions and responds. Agentic AI can increasingly plan, use tools, access systems and execute multiple steps toward a goal.

The goal should neither be to minimize AI use, nor to maximize it. It should be to design AI interactions so that machines handle what machines are good at while humans continue practicing and developing what humans need to remain good at.

The future of AI-enabled education may ultimately depend on this distinction: whether AI becomes a substitute for thinking or an environment that helps people think better.

AI IN EDUCATION: FROM COGNITIVE OFFLOADING TO COGNITIVE AMPLIFICATION

By Rahul Agarwal

The rapid integration of generative artificial intelligence into everyday life has shifted how humans interact with information, solve problems, and communicate. Unlike previous technological advancements that automated physical labor or simple computational tasks, generative AI engages directly with higher-order cognitive functions. This shift presents profound questions about human cognition, neural plasticity, and educational practice.

1. Cognitive Activity and Neuroplasticity

Neuroplasticity is the brain's fundamental capacity to structurally and functionally reorganize itself in response to experience and environment. Neural pathways are strengthened through repeated activation, a principle summarized by Hebbian learning: Neurons that fire together, wire together. Conversely, underutilized neural networks experience synaptic pruning and functional atrophy.

As AI changes the specific cognitive tasks humans execute on a daily basis, it fundamentally alters the pattern of neural activity. Delegating tasks such as memory retrieval, information synthesis, or structural reasoning reduces activation in the executive and memory networks associated with those tasks. Over time, these repeated alterations in mental practices lead neuroplasticity to determine whether AI usage leads to cognitive enhancement or cognitive decline.

2. Cognitive Outsourcing versus Cognitive Augmentation

The concept of cognitive offloading predates generative AI. Risko and Gilbert define it as using external actions or resources to reduce the cognitive demands of a task.[1] Using a calendar instead of remembering an appointment or using a calculator instead of performing arithmetic mentally are familiar examples.

AI takes cognitive offloading to a much more sophisticated level. For example, a student can now ask ChatGPT to do information retrieval, summarization, writing, problem solving, idea generation, and even decision preparation. This becomes cognitive outsourcing where AI performs a cognitive operation that the learner might otherwise perform.

But the same technology can produce cognitive augmentation. For example, a student may ask AI to generate several competing explanations, identify weaknesses in an argument, provide counterexamples and suggest questions that the student then evaluates independently. Here AI is not replacing thinking; it is

expanding the material available for thinking.

Thus, the relevant question is not simply "How much AI does someone use?" but "Who is performing the cognitive work?"

This distinction produces two broad modes of interaction. Passive AI use occurs when the user primarily accepts AI output. With this, the cognitive burden is transferred to the system. This may be efficient, but repeated reliance can reduce opportunities to practice retrieval, reasoning, writing and evaluation.

On the other hand, with Active AI use, the user challenges the AI response, compares alternatives, verifies, revises and reflects. Here the learner remains cognitively engaged.

Neural Evidence: Recent EEG research measuring brain connectivity during writing tasks found that individuals relying heavily on AI assistants displayed significantly lower electrical connectivity across key cortical regions compared to those working independently. [2]

3. The "Use It or Lose It" Problem

The "use it or lose it" principle of neuroplasticity dictates that unused neural pathways gradually weaken. When cognitive tasks are routinely outsourced before basic mastery is achieved, individuals risk experiencing cognitive atrophy, the erosion of baseline analytical abilities, working memory capacity, and critical thinking skills. [3]

Conversely, cognitive amplification occurs when external tools handle routine operations, freeing human processing capacity for strategic, creative, and higher-order synthesis.

The pivotal factor determining whether an interaction leads to atrophy or amplification is whether the user has already consolidated the baseline cognitive schemas required to execute the task independently.

4. Human-AI Trajectory: Substitution to Stimulation

Depending on the use of AI, the relationship between human cognition and AI can span over a spectrum of four distinct possibilities:

1. **AI Substitutes for Cognition:** The AI executes both the operational work and the underlying reasoning (e.g., auto-generating an essay from a prompt). The human acts as an editor or passive recipient.
2. **AI Assists Cognition:** The AI handles lower-level, repetitive components of a task such as formatting, spelling correction, or basic data lookup, leaving the primary analytical effort to the human.
3. **AI Augments Cognition:** The human and AI work in a

Contd. on page ... 29

SEARCHING THE HISTORY AND MEANING OF NATIONAL ICONS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA. WE THE PEOPLE OF INDIA: DECODING A NATION'S SYMBOLS. By T. M. Krishna, Nasadiya Technologies Private Ltd., 2026, pp 468.

The other day, I attended the Kapila Vatsyayan Memorial Lecture at the India International Centre, delivered by T. M. Krishna. Throughout the lecture, Krishna seemed to be arguing with himself about the meaning and relevance of national symbols in the context of India's present social and political climate. He reflected on the struggle for self-governance in this highly diverse land-Bharat, Jambudvipa- and the difficulty of expressing certain views openly in the current climate. He ended his lecture with 'Jana GanaMana'.

After the lecture, I noticed a book titled 'We the People of India'. As I browsed it, my daughter bought a copy and handed it to me. I thought I would read it at leisure, but a few pages were enough to draw me in. The book explores the histories of India's national symbols and reveals their philosophical, political and social meanings-both past and present. I decided to read it in full and share my thoughts with readers of *College Post*.

THE NATIONAL FLAG: A SYMBOL OF FREEDOM

The first chapter, "The National Flag: A Symbol of Freedom," runs to 127 pages. Krishna traces the history of the flag and the many ideas invested in it: its fabric and colours, the debate between Gandhi and Nehru over the charkha and the chakra, Tagore's views, and the technical and aesthetic questions surrounding the design. The colours of the flag have been interpreted in different ways-as representing religious communities, aspects of nature, or cultural and human values. But Krishna's account is not simply about fabric, colours and symbols. It is also a history of the freedom movement and of the idea of *Swaraj*. He connects debates about self-government in India with the broader struggle against economic, social and political exploitation. Gandhi's idea of *Swaraj*, as Krishna presents it, extended beyond the end of British rule.

The choice of khadi also carried profound meaning for Gandhi. It represented non-violence, the masses and, in particular, working people. Over time, however, the material used for the flag changed as its mass production became necessary, especially after Jindal's campaign for every citizen to be able to hoist the flag at home and at work. Krishna also explains the rules governing the flag and its respectful display.

His concluding reflections speak directly to the present. As he writes: "Irony, isn't it, that an abstract symbol of freedom is actualised and protected while those who hope to derive their rights and freedoms in its symbolism are repeatedly trampled upon."

THE LION CAPITAL: AN EMBLEM OF JUSTICE

The second symbol is the Lion Capital, discussed in a chapter of about 60 pages. Krishna traces its history to

Ashoka's reign (c. 304-232 BCE), particularly the period following the Kalinga War, when Ashoka renounced violence and embraced a vision of just and benevolent rule. His edicts, carved in stone and disseminated across his vast realm, set out principles of governance and public welfare.

Krishna considers why Nehru and the leaders of the new nation chose the Ashokan emblem. As he observes, "It was hoped that the Ashokan spirit would serve as balm (particularly after the bloodshed during the Partition). So, when decision-makers of the new nation began looking for the visual symbols to represent India, that is Bharat, it was Ashoka's iconography they turned to."

The chapter also draws a compelling comparison between Ashoka and Gandhi. "What binds the two men, to my mind, is the unsettling coming together of honesty and power," Krishna writes, while noting that the relationship between power and honesty remains a complex philosophical problem. He explores the history and significance of the Lion Capital, the Ashokan lions and the chakra, and their adoption as symbols of the Indian state.

A central theme is 'Dharma'. For Ashoka, Krishna suggests, *Dharma* meant more than meeting people's economic and social needs; it involved justice and righteousness, with the state acting as a caretaker of its people. He also brings in the Tamil concept of *poramboku* and the Indian Constitution as pathways towards 'Dharma'.

Here, the gap between ideals and reality becomes a recurring concern. Krishna points to the persistence of honour killings, rape, mass violence against Dalits and Muslims, and the denial of access to public spaces for Dalits, despite Articles 15 and 17 of the Constitution. He revisits the debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar on caste and *varnashrama*. Ambedkar called for the annihilation of caste, while Gandhi believed social change could come through the transformation of hearts and the recognition of wrongdoing by the oppressor. The chapter's account of their differing views is worth careful consideration.

After exploring the symbol's historical, political and cultural dimensions, Krishna asks a searching question: "But can a land that uses fear to maintain its territorial integrity be a land of Dharma?"

SATYAMEVA JAYATE: AN OLD TRUTH FOR A NEW MOTTO

The third chapter, on 'Satyameva Jayate*' is shorter-about 40 pages-but offers a rich analysis of the motto's origins and its selection as India's national motto. Krishna connects its choice to 'Satyagraha': the steadfast, non-violent pursuit of truth. As he writes, "There can be no doubt that the selection of 'Satyameva Jayate' was influenced by the idea of Satyagraha-the undaunted, non-violent seeking and standing by the truth. Satyagraha was the vehicle to freedom, the truth of our struggle."

Krishna notes that 'he Hindu', on 26 January 1950, reported that the motto came from the 'Mundaka Upanishad' and embodied a central principle of Gandhi's

thought. He contrasts this ideal with contemporary realities, including the ways official and unofficial mottos shape political life. He discusses a troubling case from a Tamil Nadu police station, while making clear that such incidents are not confined to one state.

The chapter also considers the wording of the motto and the treatment of death in the **Mundaka Upanishad**. "All that lives will die. Yet, all deaths are not equal. Indeed, death could be commissioned, ordered, using the vocabulary of justice," Krishna writes. He discusses mercy petitions, presidential decisions to commute death sentences, and evidence of miscarriages of justice and wrongful death sentences in India and elsewhere.

In an era of rancour, half-truths and post-truth politics, Krishna warns that hatred can distort the search for truth and perpetuate cycles of violence. He concludes with the thought that truth is reached through reflection and the way one lives: "The real is revealed by reflective way of living; unreal becomes irrelevant."

'JANA GANA MANA': A SONG AND AN ANTHEM

The fourth chapter, at about 120 pages, is devoted largely to **VandeMataram**, whose place in Indian public life remains contentious. Krishna recounts the song's history, including the broad acceptance of its first two stanzas and the controversy surrounding the later stanzas, which were added in connection with Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel *'Anandamath'*.

He describes Rabindranath Tagore's rendition of the song and its reception at Congress sessions. Some members, particularly Muslim members, felt uncomfortable with its religious associations. At Tagore's suggestion, the Congress adopted the first two stanzas for public use. Gandhi also appreciated the song but cautioned against its use if it caused hurt to members of minority communities. He argued that no one should be compelled to stand during a rendition. The later stanzas, with their invocation of the goddess Durga, were a source of particular concern.

Krishna's discussion of **Jana Gana Mana** comes later in the chapter. He explores its composition, music and meaning, describing it as one of Tagore's great works irrespective of its status as the national anthem. As he writes:

"In the three worlds of equal syllabic measure, Tagore brings the people of India together. Everything that follows is an elucidation. 'Jana' is every individual of this land, 'gana' are collections of people and communities, and 'mana' is the heart and mind of each individual as well as their collective identities."

The Constituent Assembly recognised *'Jana Gana Mana'* as the national anthem on 24 January 1950. Dr. Rajendra Prasad also stated that *'VandeMataram'* would be honoured equally. Krishna notes that, in 1948, Nehru had described *'VandeMataram'* as a national song *'par excellence'*. The song adopted by the Constituent Assembly was its first two stanzas—the portion that had inspired affection and respect without the religious associations of the later verses.

Krishna's reflections on the anthem are especially resonant: "To stand for the anthem out of love and respect is different from standing out of fear that somebody will pull us up. Respect cannot be demanded, made to order. The anthem is too lofty to be let loose on people as a patriotism-monitoring patrol. It is to be felt within, and experience must be shared, celebrated-and interrogated."

THE PREAMBLE: A VISION FOR THE REPUBLIC

The fifth chapter, "The Preamble: A Vision for the Republic," runs to 42 pages. The book's title itself draws on the Preamble's opening words: "We, the People." Those words affirm both the individuality of citizens and their collective belonging.

Krishna begins by reproducing the Preamble and then examines its origins, its relationship to the Constitution, and the addition of the words "socialist" and "secular." He highlights the connection between Nehru's Objectives Resolution and the Preamble, noting that the resolution established popular sovereignty as the foundation of India's political order.

The chapter also brings an interesting cultural dimension to the making of the Constitution. Krishna recalls the All-India Music Conference held alongside the Indian National Congress's 42nd session in December 1927. Both events, he suggests, brought diverse Indians together to demonstrate their intellectual, political and artistic capacities. He says "political freedom was largely a participatory exercise".

Krishna gives particular attention to 'fraternity'. Its inclusion in the Preamble, he argues, expressed both an aspiration to mutual affection and a recognition that such a fraternal spirit could not be taken for granted. He asks how dialogue is possible with those who believe fraternity itself is unnecessary, and insists that each person must remain willing to engage.

The chapter returns to the gap between constitutional guarantees and lived experience, especially in matters of fraternity, equality and dignity. Krishna concludes that "we, the people" must include everyone, particularly those who remain beyond our field of vision. The Preamble's promise of sovereignty, he argues, rests on the dignity of every individual.

A POWERFUL REFLECTION ON NATIONAL SYMBOLS

National symbols carry deep philosophical, cultural, political and economic meanings, yet they can remain disconnected from people's everyday lives. At times, one longs for Ashoka's emissaries to travel across the country, explaining the principles behind the symbols and ensuring that they are upheld.

Krishna's book is an elegant and original exploration of that challenge. It combines history, music, constitutional thought and political reflection, while expressing a continuing concern about the hiatus between India's ideals and its realities. I recommend it to every citizen of India.

GD Sharma

seed...



Online Course on Critical Thinking - Foundations, Skills & Applications for – Students & Professionals

Course Code: 02, Credit Hours: 4 Credits, Course Duration: 1 Semester

Course Overview:

This course aims to develop students' critical thinking skills by encouraging logical reasoning, effective argumentation, and problem-solving. Students will learn to identify fallacies, construct sound arguments, evaluate evidence, and make well-informed decisions in academic, professional, and personal contexts.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Recognize the key components of critical thinking and logical reasoning.
- Analyse and evaluate arguments for validity, soundness, and clarity.
- Identify common logical fallacies and cognitive biases.
- Construct well-reasoned arguments and communicate them effectively.
- Apply critical thinking skills to solve problems and make decisions in real-world situations.

Course Modules

Module 1: Introduction to Critical Thinking

- Unit 1: Definition and importance of critical thinking
- Unit 2: Critical thinking vs. ordinary thinking
- Unit 3: Characteristics of a critical thinker.

Module 2: Basics of Logic and Reasoning

- Unit 1: Arguments: Premises, conclusions, and structure
- Unit 2: Deductive vs. inductive reasoning
- Unit 3: Evaluating validity and soundness of arguments

Module 3: Identifying and Avoiding Fallacies

- Unit 1: Common logical fallacies: Unit 1.1: Ad hominem
- Unit 1.2: Straw man argument
- Unit 1.3: False dichotomy
- Unit 1.4: Slippery slope Unit 1.5: Hasty generalization
- Unit 2: How to detect and address fallacies in arguments

Module 4: Cognitive Biases and Critical Thinking

- Unit 1: Understanding cognitive biases: Confirmation bias, anchoring, etc.
- Unit 2: The role of perception, memory, & heuristics in reasoning
- Unit 3: Techniques to mitigate biases in decision-making

Module 5: Critical Reading and Media Analysis

- Unit 1: Evaluating credibility and reliability of sources
- Unit 2: Analysing media, news, and online content for bias and manipulation
- Unit 3: Recognizing fake news and misinformation

Module 6: Argument Construction and Effective Communication

- Unit 1: Structuring arguments: Claims, evidence, and reasoning
- Unit 2: Writing and presenting arguments clearly and persuasively
- Unit 3: Debates and discussions: Techniques for effective argumentation

Module 7: Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

- Unit 1: Strategies for solving complex problems critically
- Unit 2: Decision-making frameworks
- Unit 3: Ethical reasoning and moral decision-making

Module 8: Applications of Critical Thinking

- Unit 1: Applying critical thinking in academics and research
- Unit 2: Critical thinking in professional and workplace settings
- Unit 3: Case studies: Real-world problems requiring critical thinking

Teaching Methods Online: (i) Contents on LMS (ii) Interactive sessions (iii) Group activities, debates, and role-plays (iv) Case studies and analysis (v) Assignments and presentations

Online Assessment Methods: (i) Reading of Modules: 10% (ii) Quizzes/Tests: 20% (iii) Assignments and Essays: 25% (iv) Group Debate/Presentation: 15% (v) Final Exam: 30%

IMPORTANT NOTE -

Course will be offered in collaboration with the institutions. Also, students can directly enroll for the Courses. Certificate will be provided jointly by SEED-CHEST and Collaborating Institute(s).

CONTACT DETAILS:-

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Landline- 011-43008598

SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Dwarka, New Delhi -110075.

Online Course on Communication Skills



A 4 Credit Course
8 MODULES COURSE WITH SUB-MODULE UNITS
DURATION: 60 HRS. 6-8 WEEKS

Average Per week self-study 8 Hrs.

and contact /test on Virtual mode 2 Hrs.

Course on Canvas Platform

Virtual Meet on Google Meet platform

Course Over View

This course helps participants develop effective communication strategies for various contexts, improving verbal, non-verbal, written communication, and skills for conflict Resolution, Negotiation techniques, collaboration and effective Teamwork.

Course Objectives

- Develop clear and concise verbal communication.
- Enhance active listening skills.
- Master non-verbal communication techniques (e.g., body language, tone).
- Improve writing skills for reports, emails, and formal documents.
- Overcome barriers to effective communication.
- Build confidence for public speaking and presentations.
- Build skills for Conflict Resolution and Negotiation
- Cultivate interpersonal skills for teamwork and leadership.



Course Modules

Module1: Introduction to Communication

- Understanding the basics of communication.
- Components: Sender, message, receiver, and feedback.
- Barriers to communication and how to overcome them.

Module2: Verbal Communication

- Speaking with clarity and confidence.
- Vocabulary building.
- Formal vs. informal communication.
- Handling difficult conversations.

Module3: Non-Verbal Communication

- Role of body language and facial expressions.
- Reading non-verbal cues.
- Using gestures effectively.

Module4: Listening Skills

- Active listening techniques.
- Empathetic listening.
- Improving concentration and retention.

Module5: Written Communication

- Email and business letter etiquette.
- Writing reports, proposals, and resumes.
- Editing and proofreading skills.

Module6: Public Speaking & Presentations

- Overcoming stage fright.
- Structuring effective presentations.
- Engaging your audience.

Module7: Conflict Resolution & Negotiation

- Dealing with conflicts constructively.
- Persuasion and negotiation techniques.

Module8: Communication in Teams

- Building rapport with colleagues.
- Collaboration and effective teamwork.

IMPORTANT NOTE -

Courses will be offered in collaboration with the institutions. Also, students can directly enroll for the Courses. Certificate will be provided jointly by SEED-CHEST and Collaborating Institute.