

## INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: SOME REFLECTIONS

Dr. K.M. JOSHI

Professor of Economics of Education  
Department of Economics

Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji Bhavnagar University, Bhavnagar, INDIA  
(m) 0091-9427202840  
Email: kishoremjoshi@yahoo.com

Dr. Kinjal Vijay AHIR

Senior Lecturer  
Tolani Institute of Management Studies  
Adipur, INDIA  
(m) 0091-9879360054  
Email: kinjalahir@gmail.com

**Abstract.** The higher education system in India is complex. The regulators associated with governance are overlapping and entangled across various ministries and regulatory bodies. With a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 15 per cent, India is still below the world average. With relatively stagnant growth of public sector, private sector now accounts for 63 per cent of the total higher education institutions and 52 per cent of the total enrolments in Indian higher education. Despite various intervention measures to address equity objectives, disparity still exists in terms of gender, ethnic groups, and economic criteria and by location. Quality and efficiency policy responses and their endeavours have been insufficient accompanied by poor regulations and its subsequent implementation. Multiple regulations and measures have been envisaged by different commissions and committees to enhance the access, quality and equity to face the challenges of opening-up this sector globally.

**JEL classifications:** I22, I23, I24, I28.

**Keywords:** Indian higher education, governance, access, financing, privatization, equity, efficiency, quality, issues.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** Indijos aukštasis mokslas, valdymas, finansavimas, privatizacija, lygybė, efektyvumas, kokybė, problemos.

### Introduction

It is widely recognised that higher education promotes social and economic development by enhancing human and technical capabilities of society. Technical change and institutional change are key components of development. Higher education plays

an important role in facilitating these changes by incorporating all of the various demographics of the population.

Higher education has been found to be significantly related to the human development index and greater for the disadvantaged groups (Joshi, 2006). Similarly, the lack of such education causes the inverse to occur; i.e. the greater the level of higher education in a society, whether in stock or flow forms, the greater the level of human development can be, through its influence on two main components of human development index: life expectancy, and GDP per capita (Tilak, 1994).

In its size and diversity, India has the third largest higher education system in the world, next only to China and the United States. The higher education system in India grew rapidly after independence (Agarwal, 2006). Today, Indian higher education is comprised of 33,657 institutions, made up of 634 universities and 33,023 colleges; it is the largest higher education system in the world in terms of the number of institutions. With the changing demographics, political, philanthropic and economic environment, the objective of higher education has now a more focused attention on access and equity. The Indian higher education has seen three phases of funding, philanthropic to public, and then to private financing. The changing financing patterns have altered regulations, equity, efficiency and quality aspects of higher education.

### **1. Objectives of the Research**

This research paper has the following objectives:

1. To understand the governance of higher education in India
2. To review the access to higher education in India
3. To study the financing of higher education in India
4. To understand the nature of privatization in higher education in India
5. To understand the equity related issues in Indian higher education
6. To examine the efficiency and quality concerns of Indian higher education

### **2. Data collection**

The research paper is based on secondary data. Various sources that have been used for the same include the reports and documents of Ministry of Human Resource Development, various regulatory bodies like the University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), accreditation organizations, National Sample Survey Organization, Five Year plan documents, etc.

### **3. Observations and Findings**

The observations and findings with regard to the Indian higher education have been mentioned here along the same lines as the objectives, i.e. governance, access, fi-

nancing, privatization, equity, efficiency, quality and internationalization of the Indian higher education.

### **a. Governance**

In India, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Department of Higher Education is the Apex body of governance, acting more as an umbrella organization. Indian higher education consists of fifteen regulatory bodies performing overlapping roles in addition to influences from few other ministries too. The judicial interventions have at several times complemented or contradicted the objectives associated with higher education (Agarwal, 2006). It thus results into ambiguity related to policy understanding, policy implementations, accountability, and answerability. It has also been often criticized that the higher education system is influenced by political ideologies (NKC report, 2009). Higher education being the joint responsibility of both the Central and the State governments, the state/provincial governments' shares a lion's share of about 80 per cent and to that extent influence higher education.

### **b. Access**

India has the largest higher education system in the world by the number of institutions with around 634 universities and about 33,023 colleges. But it ranks third in terms of enrolments with about 17 million students (UGC, 2012). The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) has seen steep growth in recent past decade, which is appreciable considering the ever increasing population and thereby the relevant age cohort in absolute terms. During the last five years the GER has increased more than 5 per cent and for some of the disadvantaged sections of the population it has been much more. With a GER of 15 per cent, India still lags behind world average, the averages of other countries including its growth sharing BRICS nations, and even the average of developing nations. But the GER attainment of 15 per cent is a result of increase in social demand and deliberate policy efforts to improve access (MHRD, 2012).

Besides low GER, there exists demand supply gap in higher education in India. On the demand front, the rising population of the age-cohort, increased numbers of secondary education pass-outs, increased social and private returns to higher education induce the pressure to raise the access to higher education, whereas public higher education lacks enough funding from its competing and prioritized ends. Ever since the higher education has opened up to the private sector, it has shared most of the responsibility of increasing access.

Of various types of institutes, 47 per cent are State Universities, 20 per cent Deemed Universities<sup>1</sup>, 16 per cent Private Universities, 7 per cent Central Universities, and other

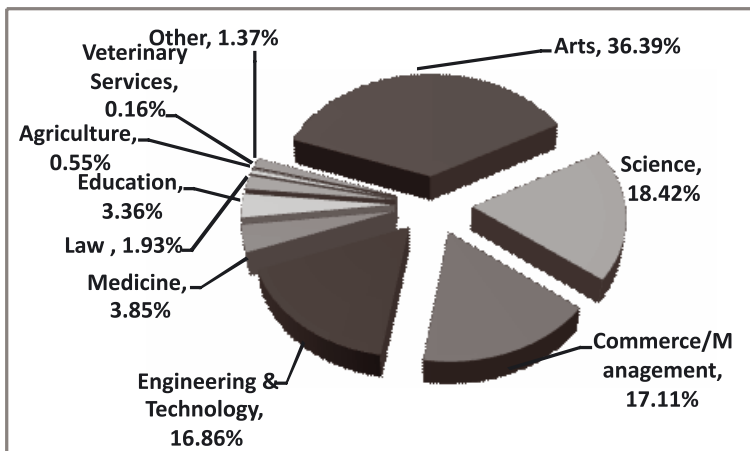
<sup>1</sup> Deemed University is an institution that has been awarded a "Deemed" status by the MHRD given that it has acquired the characteristics of a university as demonstrated by the diversity of its programmes, the quality of research, and proven contributions to innovation and teaching. They get approvals through Gazette Notifications of Central Government. They have degree granting power and are regulated as per the UGC [Institutions Deemed to be Universities] Regulations, 2010, which is a comprehensive regulatory framework covering the establishment and operation of such universities including eligibility criteria, infrastructure, funding, etc.

10 per cent comprising of various Institutes of National Importance and other university level institutes (UGC, 2012). Thus the non-public sector accounts for a higher share than public sector.

In Indian higher education, about 86 per cent of students are enrolled at undergraduate level and only about 12 per cent are enrolled at post graduate level. Surprisingly, diploma and certificate education has a meagre 1 per cent enrolment as it is considered as an available provision for those who are not able to make it in the mainstream higher education. Unfortunately, for a nation aspiring to become a knowledge economy, a trivial 1 per cent enrolment in research would not be praiseworthy (UGC, 2012).

It has been observed that the share of enrolment in traditional courses viz., humanities, social sciences and pure/natural sciences has declined during the last one decade and the same trend is likely to continue in near future. The inclination for professional courses and thereby enhanced enrolment is favoured by increased private providers and other stakeholders, who anticipate better job prospects. This is likely to hamper the basic research output. The contribution of India in research publication has increased during last one decade but compared to its contemporary developing nations its growth has not been appreciable (DST, 2012). Further the Distance education accounts for 26 per cent of the total students' enrolments and the remaining 74 per cent is the share of classroom teaching in higher education (FICCI, 2011). Figure 1 shows a more detailed bifurcation of the faculty-wise enrolments.

Fig. 1. Faculty-wise students' enrolment in higher education 2010–11



Source: UGC, 2012

### c. Financing

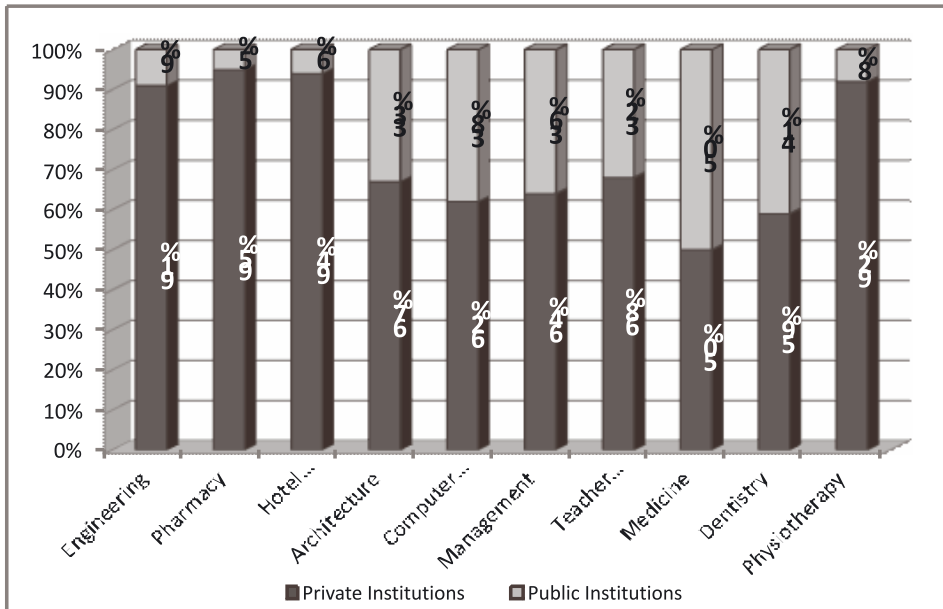
The responsibility of financing higher education is shared by both public and private sector. Even in public sector it's a joint responsibility of Central/Federal government as well as State/Provincial government. India being a developing economy, amongst competing governmental priorities higher education is treated as a "merit 2 god." About 80 per

cent of the public higher education funding has been sourced from State governments and about 20 per cent from the Centre. Of the 80 per cent State government funding about 82 per cent goes in non-plan expenditure, i.e. routine administration and maintenance and hardly in any capacity building (FICCI, 2011). The Central government spending is lopsided towards central universities and centres of excellence serving hardly 3 per cent of the total students. While the trend has always been upwards, the total public expenditure on higher education at about 1.25 per cent of the GDP, is by any standards certainly insufficient (UGC, 2012). The private expenditure on higher education has increased about 12.8 times during last one decade. The household expenditure on higher education shows that the share of tuition and other fees have increased to about 53 per cent, which largely due to increase in the share of private institutions.

#### **d. Privatization**

Kapur and Mehta (2007) described the evolution of privatization in Indian higher education using a phrase, “from half-baked socialism to half bake capitalism.” They argued that much of the massive privatization has not resulted from ideological commitments of key actors but is instead a result of collapse of the state system resulting in weak ideological and institutional foundations. Trends show that of the various forms of institutes of higher education that exists, the number supported by public funding have stagnated by growth (like the central and state universities, aided colleges, etc.) and rather the numbers with private funding have witnessed a speedily rising growth (like the private universities, deemed universities, unaided colleges, etc.) (Agarwal, 2006). Within a small duration of five years from 2001–2006 the unaided private higher education accounted for 63 per cent (from 43 per cent in 2001) of the total higher education institutes and 52 per cent (from 33% in 2001) of the total higher education enrolments (FICCI, 2011). Since 2005–2011, the State Private Universities have witnessed a fifteen-fold rise in the number of institutes from 6 to 94. Of the 130 Deemed Universities, 73 are in the private sector. About 1 per cent of colleges have been granted an autonomous status (FICCI, 2011). Quiet obviously most of this growth of private higher education has happened in the more marketable professional courses like engineering, medicine, management, computer applications, etc. ranging between 50 per cent to 95 per cent of the private institutions as shown in Fig. 2.

**Fig. 2.** Share of public and private institutions in select professional institutions



Source: FICCI, 2011

The per capita private expenditure on education almost quadrupled from 1.2 per cent in 1983 to 4.4 per cent in 2003 (Agarwal, 2006). As mentioned by Gupta (2005), in early 2000s, of the total household expenditures for higher education in India, 41 per cent was bagged by tuition fees and another 10 per cent by private coaching, and the remaining spared for the support system of providing higher education. But the share of tuition and other fees have crossed 50 per cent during the last five years.

But the fact remains that if regulatory framework is not changed from its current form to such a framework so as to suit the objectives of the private sector, especially those related to privatization, commercialization, autonomy regarding fees, students admissions, reservations, faculty appointments, qualifications and salaries, allowing to earn profit, tax any such income, etc. right from specifying their definitions to setting specifically their limits, one cannot expect private sector to participate in an encouraging way (Joshi and Ahir, 2007).

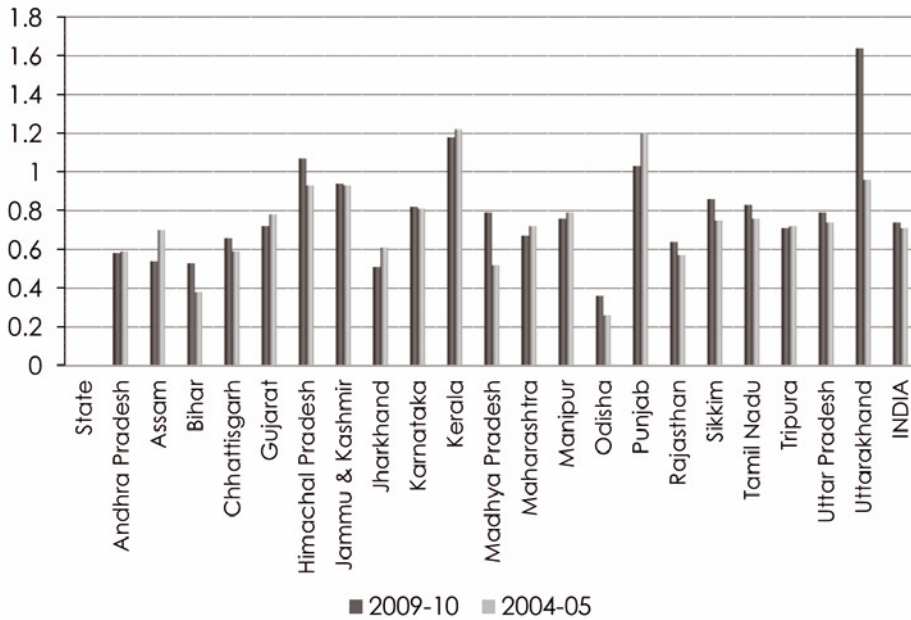
**e. Equity**

The issues related to inequity have four dimensions in India: gender disparity, geographical inequity (by state/province), ethnic groups based inequity, and inequity based on economic class.

Males register a GER of 17.1 per cent as against that of female being 12.7 per cent. The Gender Parity Index (GPI)<sup>2</sup> for higher education in India is 0.74.

<sup>2</sup> Gender Parity Index (GPI) is calculated by dividing the female GER by the male GER. A GPI of 1 indicates parity between sexes, a GPI that varies between 0 and 1 means a disparity in favour of males, and

Fig. 3. An inter-state comparison of GPI for 2004–05 and 2009–10



Source: MHRD, 2011

As shown in figure 3 while some states like Uttarakhand, Punjab, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, etc. are above national average of GPI, states like Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar and Assam face the concerns of gender parity. A wide disparity can be observed in the GER by states ranging from as low as 9 per cent as that in Assam to as high as 48 per cent in Delhi. The inequity on the basis of peoples' ethnic background is highlighted by GER for Scheduled Castes–SCs<sup>3</sup> (the most disadvantaged group of indigenous population) being 11 per cent, Scheduled Tribes–STs (indigenous population) being 10 per cent as against 15 per cent for all categories combined (MHRD, 2011). Even the lack of necessary funding can halt a student from the access to higher education amid growing private sector, insufficient scholarships, lack of a mature loan system, etc.

The private rates of returns as well as unemployment across gender and ethnic groups highlight disparity. The vision statement of Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) highlights the consciousness amongst the policy makers for affirmative action. Equitable access of higher education is described as an unambiguous

a GPI greater than 1 indicates a disparity in favour of females.

<sup>3</sup> The Scheduled Castes (SCs), also known as the Dalit, and the Scheduled Tribes (STs) are two groupings of historically disadvantaged people that are given expressed recognition in the Constitution of India. The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 lists 1,108 castes across 25 states in its First Schedule, while the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 lists 744 tribes across 22 states in its First Schedule. The exclusion of a Scheduled Caste is linked to the caste ideology whereas Scheduled Tribes in India are generally considered to be Adivasis, meaning indigenous people or original inhabitants of the country.

objective. The most prominent policy for promoting access to higher education has been reservations. The policy of reservation in higher education is based on the assertion that participation of disadvantaged groups has been low, and reservation would enhance their participation. The percentage of reservation varies across the States in accordance with the population of these groups in respective States. 22.5 per cent quota/seats are reserved for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe students. An additional quota of 27 per cent is reserved for other backward castes in federal educational institutions. It means 49.5 per cent seats are reserved for the marginalized social groups. Effective caste based seats crosses 65 per cent. Many States of India already have reservations above 50 per cent since long. Along with reservation, the government provision of scholarships, special hostels, meals, book loans and other schemes exclusively for SC and ST students have encouraged the participation (Joshi, 2010).

#### **f. Efficiency**

Higher education is seen as one of the sources to increase private and social rates of returns thereby justifying the efficiency resulting from pursuing higher education. As per the study of Agrawal (2011) the private rates of returns on higher education are estimated at 15.9 per cent. The returns for higher education were found to be higher for rural areas than in urban areas. Individuals with higher education are likely to participate more in labour force than those with other educational levels. Females are less likely to participate than their male counterparts; and the probability of females to participate in the labour market was found to be 57 per cent lesser. A substantial wage difference was observed between males and females. Females earn 38 per cent less than males. Also observed was the fact that STs, OBCs and SCs are likely to earn less by 14, 13 and 7 per cent, respectively as compared to “Others” category (Agrawal, 2011).

Conditions of employment may also be looked at as a parameter of efficiency. While private rates of returns on higher education show a brighter picture, so is not the case by employment. Unemployment rate at graduation level is 9.4 per cent and that at post-graduation level is 10 per cent. For Urban India it was 8.2 per cent and 7.7 per cent respectively. Among SCs, graduate unemployment is 11.3 per cent and post-graduate unemployment 12.7 per cent, while for “others,” the corresponding figures are 9 per cent and 9.7 per cent. Unemployment among graduate and post-graduate STs and OBCs is also higher than for “others.” Across social groups, graduate unemployment among women is above 25 per cent [1].

#### **g. Quality**

There are various parameters using which one can attempt to judge the quality of higher education like faculty availability, infrastructure, etc. With 816,966 faculties at universities and colleges, and it being a 35 fold increase over 1950–51, the numbers prove to be insufficient and a faculty shortage is observed (UGC, 2012). In 2007–08, 45 per cent of the positions of professors, 51 per cent positions of readers, 53 per cent positions for lecturers were vacant in Indian Universities (FICCI, 2011). The appointments are almost stagnated in most of the sections of the public sector, left alone expanding



the faculty intake in accordance to the ever-growing higher education sector.

As for infrastructure, 48 per cent of universities and 695 of colleges have infrastructure deficiencies (FICCI, 2011). With high variations across institutes the institutes would have anywhere between 9 books per student to 53 books per student in IIT Mumbai.

External Quality assurance was conceived in India in 1990s as a solution to the deteriorating higher education quality in India. There are three main agencies to evaluate quality of institutions: The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), National Board of Accreditation (NBA) for technical education, and the Accreditation Board (AB) for agriculture institutions. It shows that majority of accreditation process is carried out by NAAC. But as accreditation is voluntary, except for in some states, only 161 universities and 4371 colleges have been accredited by NAAC, i.e. about 40 per cent.

The accreditation grading for as many as 66 per cent colleges and 52 per cent of the universities settles at "B grade." A minor 10 per cent of colleges but 32 per cent universities do score an "A grade." Almost settling to a normal distribution curve 24 per cent of colleges and 16 per cent of the universities score a "C grade." Yet the process of accreditation receives much acclamation for the way in which the national context has been balanced with international expectations (Stella, 2002)

But it is unfortunate that such grading is not associated with either rewards or punishments. Neither is there a motivation to re-accredit as it is disconnected with funding mechanism. Rigidity and bureaucratic delays in accreditation on the part of accreditation bodies further acts as a deterrent. Unlike many other countries accreditation is largely of the institute not of a particular program *per se*.

In terms of research and publications, India has registered a growth of 66 per cent as assessed through five years moving average from 2001–05 to 2006–10 with chemistry, physics, material sciences, engineering and clinical medicines, being the active areas of research. While declining, the percentage of papers remaining un-cited is still as high as 48 per cent. Citation impact of papers emanating from India has increased to 0.68 in 2006–10 (from 0.35 in 1981–85). An 81 per cent increase in the number of publications in top 1 per cent impact making journals during 2006–10 as compared to 2001–05 has been observed (DST, 2012).

#### 4. Policy Implications

While there are more complications facing Indian higher education, there are equal good hopes grounded on certain bills either cleared or at various stages of parliamentary approvals. Complications can be traced in the form of multiple and overlapping regulations, allowing operational efficiency to private sector with continued increased support from public sector, more efficient and prolific affirmative actions, efficient and qualitative higher education system, etc.

Certain bills related to higher education do offer a ray of hope:

- (i) The Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operations) Bill, 2010: It allows foreign quality higher education institutions to set up

- branch campuses and operate in India but with a lot of stringent regulations.
- (ii) The Prohibition of Unfair Practices in Technical Educational Institutions, Medical Educational Institutions and University Bill, 2010.
  - (iii) The Educational Tribunals Bill, 2010: This Bill envisages arbitrating on disputes among stakeholders within institutions and between institutions so as to reduce litigation in courts involving universities and higher education institutions.
  - (iv) The National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010: This Bill is for mandatory accreditation of all higher education institutions &
  - (v) The National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER) Bill, 2010: The proposed NCHER will cover all areas/disciplines of learning and disciplines including general, technical and professional education. Only agricultural education is excluded from its purview because agriculture falls within the State List in 7th Schedule to the constitution.

Also a Bill to provide for Creation of a National Electronic Database of Academic Awards and its Maintenance by an Authorized Depository is suggested. The Universities for Research and Innovation Bill, 2011 provides a framework for the establishment of Universities for Innovation.

## Conclusions

India is one of the largest, vibrant and oldest democracies being the second largest country by population. As the world looks east for global leadership in economic growth, India has to consistently pay attention to her higher education as a source of growth in current times of knowledge driven growth. Within these challenges, underlie the promising opportunities for India to outshine on the global map.

Indian higher education has various complexities in context of regulations, access, financing, equity, efficiency, quality, internationalization, etc. Regulations remain entwined resulting in lack of clarity for the ones who are supposed to implement the same. As a result, regulations associated confusions cause apprehensions in terms perceiving the regulation to suit the individual requirements the best. Judicial interventions add fuel to the fire with at times judgments going against the very objectives set for higher education. While the aggressiveness to achieve higher rates of gross enrolment ratios still remains unfulfilled, it would be very challenging to create sufficient opportunities to assure access to every eligible candidate in the relevant age cohort. This might continue to smooth the process of increased role to be played by the private higher education sector vis-à-vis public sector struggling to meet ends on other prioritized avenues of public expenditure. Equitable access may still be a misnomer for policy framers as there are complex challenges in assuring the same. Efficiency and quality remain a cause of concern within ever-expanding higher education sector. While India struggles with such internal concerns the wave of internationalization seems to be approaching rather more rapidly amidst India's international diplomatic associations as a member

of WTO and more specifically GATS (Tilak, 2011). But as expected it might improve access and competition, while there are apprehensions on their “national institutes” equivalent status, equity concerns, financing models, mistakenly allowing leeway to fly-by-night institutes, etc.

Nevertheless, India continues to walk its way forward carrying a chaotically huge but more-or-less harmonized higher education system. Higher education does hold many promises for a bright future for India in the years to come.

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## INDIJOS AUKŠTASIS MOKSLAS: KAI KURIE ASPEKTAI

DR. K.M. JOSHI, Dr. Kinjal Vijay AHIR

Indijos aukštojo mokslo sistema yra labai sudėtinga. Ją valdo įvairios ministerijos ir kitos reguliuojančios institucijos. Bendroji mokymosi aprėptis siekia 15 %, ir Indija vis dar atsilieka nuo pasaulio šalių vidurkio. Esant gana lėtiems viešojo sektoriaus augimo tempams, privatus sektorius apima apie 63 % visų aukštojo mokslo institucijų bei 52 % visų besimokančiųjų aukštosiose mokyklose Indijoje. Nepaisant įvairių priemonių, kuriomis siekiama užtikrinti lygybę, egzistuoja dideli lyčių, etninių grupių, ekonominių klasių ir vietovių skirtumai. Kokybės bei efektyvumo užtikrinimo politikos rezultatai buvo nepakankami dėl blogo reguliavimo ir nenuoseklus įdiegimo. Daug reguliuojančių aktų ir priemonių buvo numatyta įvairių komisijų ir komitetų, siekiant pagerinti aukštojo mokslo prieinamumą, kokybę ir lygybę bei pasitikti šio sektoriaus atvėrimą pasauliui.

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**Kishore MAHENDRAJOSHI**, PhD., Prof, Department of Economics, Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji Bhavnagar University, India. Research fields: Economics of Higher Education, Sociology of Education and Private Higher Education.

**Kishore MAHENDRAJOSHI**, socialinių mokslų daktaras, profesorius. Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji Bhavnagar universitetas, Ekonomikos katedra, Indija. Mokslinių tyrimų sritys: aukštojo mokslo ekonomika, švietimo sociologija ir privatus aukštasis mokslas.

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**Kinjal VIJAYAHIR**, PhD., Faculty of Economics, Tolani Institute of Management Studies, India. Research fields: Economics of Higher Education, Private Higher Education, Quality & Equity Issues in Higher Education.

**Kinjal VIJAYAHIR**, socialinių mokslų daktaras, Tolani vadybos studijų institutas, Ekonomikos fakultetas, Indija. Mokslinių tyrimų sritys: aukštojo mokslo ekonomika, privatus aukštasis mokslas, kokybė aukštajame moksle.