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Information Asymmetry in Indian Higher Education Markets: Are the Contracts Honoured?

Maneesha N*

Abstract

Information in the market for human capital like education is crucial as it is vital for the development of any country. This paper empirically examines the extent of information asymmetry in the contracts in the Indian higher education market between the higher education institutions (HEIs, the contractors) and the students (the contractees) based on the information disseminated on the quality of the education provided. The study is specific to Masters in Business Administration (MBA) programmes in Tamil Nadu, a state in India where private MBA colleges have mushroomed. The study also examines the causes and consequences of the observed asymmetry. This study is the first of its kind, both in terms of the method used to measure information asymmetry as well as the market in which the concept is applied. The study measures information asymmetry involving 90 contracts based on primary data collected through structured interview from 138 respondents (90 contractees and 48 contractors) involved in the contracting. A novel method is used to measure the information asymmetry; additionally, appropriate statistics like averages, percentages, scatter plots and trend analysis have been used to draw inferences. The findings showed that over 50 per cent are bad contracts (lemons) as they have displayed high information asymmetry. Primary reason for the observed asymmetry is the opportunism by the contractors incentivised by short-sighted public policies. Hence, the study calls for better public policies in the Indian higher education market and for further research in this direction.

“An untrained worker may have natural talents but it should be certified by the ‘educational establishments’ before the company can afford to use them, the certifying establishment must be credible” (Akerlof, GA, 1970: 494).

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Introduction

Information is crucial about the contracts in the market for human capital like *education* for few reasons. First, education is an important investment in human capital with life time returns (Becker, 1962); education determines the potential earnings and consumption of people. It also affects the present consumption by embedding people's resources for a long period of time (*ibid*). Second, education belongs to credence goods, the quality of which is difficult to assess even after consumption --- unlike search goods, the quality of which can be easily judged through search before consumption. Third, cost of evasion is very high for education; leaving a course or programme is not easy as funds and time are tied up for a particular period. Finally, and most importantly, education is a signal to the labour market; certification done by educational institutions signals productivity of potential employees before the employers (Spence, 1973).

However, studies all over the world reveal huge information gaps in the education sector (Dill and Soo, 2004; Hossler and Litten, 1993) despite the fact that education is an important human capital investment (Becker, 1962; Spence, 1973). In the context of contract theory, this can lead to information asymmetry and market failure. Studies discussing information asymmetry on the contracts in higher education have gained momentum over the years, especially in the context of privatisation of higher education markets. The Indian government's focus on expansion of educational opportunities and race towards higher education index has increased the number of privately funded higher educational institutions (HEIs) in the Indian higher education market. One of the criticisms levelled against these HEIs is related with the credibility of information disseminated by them on the quality of education they offered (e.g. Chattopadhyay & Nandi, 2012). In this context, the present study measures the extent of information asymmetry on the contracts between HEIs (contractors) and their students (contractees) in the Indian higher education market on the quality of education provided by citing the market for private management education from Tamil Nadu as the case of the study.

The paper is organised into six sections. Section 2 briefly reviews relevant literatures that form the background of this study. Section 3 explains research methodology including data, measuring techniques, sample and methods used for analysis. Section 4 briefs theoretical framework of the study. Section 5 presents the findings and discussions and Section 6 concludes.

Background

In the context of contract theory, information asymmetry refers to a situation where one party to a contract is better informed than the other party, which gives the informed party an opportunity to take advantage of the situation. Information asymmetric models are mainly of three types,¹ i.e. moral hazard models (Ross, 1973; Mirrlees, 1974 & 1975; Harris & Raviv, 1978; Holmstrom, 1979; and Shavell, 1979), signalling models (Spence, 1973 & 1974; Grossman, 1981; Migrom & Roberts, 1982; and Cho & Kreps, 1987) and adverse selection models (Akerlof, 1970; Rothschild & Stiglitz, 1976; Stieglitz & Weiss, 1981; Myerson, 1983; Guesnerie & Laffont, 1984). The concept of information asymmetry and adverse selection

¹ As cited by Stadler & Castrillo (1995).

has been previously applied in various markets such as the market for used cars (Genesove, 1993; Schneider, 2005), insurance (Chiappori *et al*, 2013), credit (Dobbie, 2013), labour (Spence, 1973; Campbell & Kamlani, 1997; Landers *et al*, 1996), financial services (Drucker, 2005; Ariccia, 1998), health (Arrow, 1963), training (Katz & Ziderman, 1989) and so on.

The concept has also been discussed in the market for human capital like education (Arrow, 1973; Tilak, 2008 & 2015; Hossler & Litten, 1993; Ging, 2002; Dill & Soo, 2004; Davis, 2013; Rani, 2010; Varshney, 2006). According to Robert M Davis (2013), market failures are intentionally created in the education markets through 'asymmetric information sharing' where an individual intentionally limits the information on transaction from other individual for more 'competitive advantage'. The study observed asymmetry on the information provided through the college website and catalogue of the institution on the mandatory non-educational and general fee in Virginia's public higher education. According to Hossler and Litten (1993), information provided by different college guidebooks about the same institution is often inconsistent and sometimes contradictory. With respect to Malaysian higher education market, Ging (2002) mentioned the presence of information asymmetries in the context of mushrooming of educational establishments.

India has one of the largest higher education systems in the world. There are 993 Universities, 39,931 colleges and 10,725 stand-alone institutions in India with a total enrolment of 37.4 million students (AISHE, 2018-19). Currently, about 78 percent of the total colleges in India are private colleges (*ibid*). Earlier studies have mentioned the presence of information asymmetries in the market for Indian higher education. Varshney (2006) opined that information asymmetry and quality-uncertainty considerably decreases the reputation of Indian higher education market. According to Chattopadhyay and Nandi (2012), it is difficult to gather accurate information at the time of investment in education; inefficiency of the prices to reflect the true quality of education as well as the lack of willingness from the part of producers or authorities of education to make the information public also encourages asymmetry in this market. According to Tilak (2008), due to information asymmetry, many students do not know whether a university is public one or private one, whether it is a full university or deemed university, or even legally constituted university or fake university, and whether the degrees offered by a private university are recognised by concerned public bodies like University Grant Commission (UGC) and All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) or not. However, these studies did not investigate the extent and consequences of the problems empirically; but gave valuable insights into the issue.

Tamil Nadu is one of the Indian states with a large number of HEIs. The state privatised its higher education sector in line with the privatisation across the country. According to AISHE (2018-19), around 87 per cent of the colleges in Tamil Nadu belong to private sector. Tamil Nadu's position in higher education is significantly higher than the national average. A comparison of Tamil Nadu with India on selected indicators of education is given to draw the relevance of this state-specific study (Table 1).

The growth of the market is skewed towards the urban regions of the state namely Chennai and Coimbatore. For example, these regions together constitute more than 70 percent of the institutions in case of management education, and in Coimbatore region comprising 4 districts, Coimbatore is the most urbanised district constituting over

50 percent of the programmes within the region (AICTE, 2014-15).² A regional distribution of the colleges that provide management education is given to show the relevance of Coimbatore region in the context of this study (Table 2).³

TABLE 1
Comparing Tamil Nadu on Selected Education Indicators

<i>States/Country</i>	<i>GER</i>	<i>Density of Colleges</i>	<i>Gender Parity Index</i>	<i>Average Enrolment per College</i>	<i>Pupil Teacher Ratio</i>	<i>Share of Private Colleges (%)</i>
Tamil Nadu	49.0	35	0.97	924	17	87
Uttar Pradesh	25.8	28	1.14	743	46	88
Maharashtra	32.0	33	0.90	681	27	83
Karnataka	28.8	53	1.04	426	15	81
Rajasthan	23.0	35	1.00	521	29	79
Andhra Pradesh	32.4	49	0.81	524	18	88
Gujarat	20.4	31	0.85	513	26	86
India	26.3	28	1.00	693	26	77.8

Source: AISHE (2018-19)

Note: These are *top seven* states in terms of density of colleges. Density of colleges is defined as the number of colleges per lakh eligible population (population of 18-23 years). The gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education is also calculated for 18-23 years of age group. Private colleges include both private aided and private unaided colleges.

TABLE 2
Regional Distribution of Management Programmes in Tamil Nadu

<i>Regions</i>	<i>Number of Programmes</i>	<i>Intake (Number of Seats)</i>
Coimbatore	167 (38.7)	14,900 (42.1)
Chennai	145 (33.6)	11,362 (32.1)
Trichy	51 (11.7)	44,50 (12.6)
Thirunelveli	38 (8.8)	23,20 (6.5)
Madurai	31 (7.2)	23,90 (6.7)
Total	432 (100)	35,422 (100)

Source: AICTE (2014-15)⁴

² Calculation is based on the data accessed from <https://facilities.aicte-india.org/dashboard/pages/dashboardaicte.php>

³ As per the regional classification given by Anna University, Tamil Nadu, the Chennai region included six districts, namely, Chennai, Kancheepuram, Thiruvallur, Thiruvannamalai, Vellore and Villupuram while the Coimbatore region comprise nine districts, namely, Coimbatore, Dharmapuri, Erode, Namakkal, Karur, Krishnagiri, Salem, The Nilgiris and Thirupur.

While Tamil Nadu's educational achievement remains notable, it will be interesting to study the extent of information asymmetries and quality uncertainties in this market. Earlier attempts to study information asymmetry have mentioned the presence of the problem in the market. While discussing the patterns of higher education, Rajendran and Udaya Kumar (2016) pointed out the need to focus on quality as well as on periodical quality checks while encouraging private institutions in Tamil Nadu. Continuous reporting by the media (e. g., *The New Indian Express*, 2014; *Times of India*, 2020; *Deccan Chronicle*, 2021) also highlights quality issues in this market. Referring to higher education market in Tamil Nadu, Rani (2010) mentioned the need for better information to the students as they have the right to gather information about the fee structure, infrastructure, placement history and the like, to judge the quality of education provided by various insti.

From the literature reviewed, it is understood that many studies acknowledge information asymmetry as one of the reasons for quality-uncertainty in higher education market in many countries. However, the empirical works falls short of theoretical works and hence this perceived information asymmetry could not be empirically tested in the Indian higher education market. This paper empirically examines the extent of information asymmetry on the contracts in the Indian higher education market based on the information disseminated on the quality of education provided. The study also examines the causes and consequences of the observed asymmetry. Finally, the study aims to make suggestions at policy level in order to improve the quality of information dissemination in the market. According to researcher's knowledge, this study is the first of its kind both in terms of the method used to measure information asymmetry (Section 3d) as well as the market in which the concept is applied.

Research Design

This section discusses the research design of the study which includes the data used, development of the measuring techniques, the sample design and the methodology employed to analyse the data.

Data

The study uses primary data collected through a structured interview with the contractors and the contractees during the last quarter of 2016. The data pertain to information disseminated by the contractors through brochures and web portals⁵ on the quality of education provided. The study identified four aspects of information dissemination (or constructs of information asymmetry) namely, the quality of learning, employability, social life and infrastructure. Information on learning is distinguished as claims on experience of faculty, pedagogy, etc, that aids learning within the class room and claims on student exchange programmes, international tours etc. that facilitates learning

⁴ Calculation is based on the data accessed from <https://facilities.aicte-india.org/dashboard/pages/dashboarداicte.php>

⁵ Other sources of information in the market include advertisements, educational exhibitions, government reports, newspaper reports, consumer reports or journals and ranking or rating reports.

outside the class room. Similarly, information on employability includes assurance on both direct (e.g., industry visits, internships, etc) as well as indirect (e.g., soft skill training, value-added courses, etc) interaction of contractees with the labour market. The information on social life consists of the contractor's claims of ensuring better social life in the campus (e.g., club activities, personality training, etc) and financial security (e.g., education loans, scholarships, etc). Information on infrastructure includes the guarantee on both necessary infrastructures (e.g., library, audio-visual aids, etc) as well as supportive infrastructure (e.g., air-conditioned classrooms, health clubs, etc). The responses of sample respondents are arranged in a four-point scale to ascertain the information of the respondents.

Measurement of information asymmetry

To measure the information asymmetry of the target population, the study developed a questionnaire containing 51 statements (given in Table 4) consisting of twelve, fourteen, six and nineteen statements on learning, employability, social life and infrastructure, respectively. The instrument was tested in a pilot study and then refined to be used in the final survey.

Sample

The study focusses on private MBA colleges in Coimbatore district, the education hub of Tamil Nadu. There were 44 private⁶ MBA colleges in the district for the period 2014-15 (AICTE, 2014-15). The 44 colleges are classified into three categories based on their reputation⁷ (number of years of experience in the market), less reputed (<10 years of experience), moderately reputed (10 – 17 years of experience) and highly reputed (>17 years of experience), and 12 MBA colleges were selected by using the stratified random sampling technique assuming these three categories as each stratum. Due to the homogeneity observed in the sample, about 6 percent of the potential contracts⁸ (1440) signed across each category of reputation were selected. Thus, the study considered 90 contracts and individually interviewed 90 contractees and 48 contractors involved in these contracts.⁹ In this study, contractee is defined as a final semester student (awaiting final result) of the selected MBA college and contractor is referred to the middle level personnel of the selected colleges belonging to admission, placement, administration, teaching and library responsibilities, who are the initiators of the contract as they are

⁶ In this study, 'private' means private unaided (or self-financed) colleges.

⁷ According to Banerjee and Duflo (2000), the reputation of a service provider really matters in the contracts.

⁸ Potential contracts refer to the total contracts offered in the market. Reliable data on the actual contracts signed during the period of study could not be obtained. Though the study collected information from the respondents, unfortunately its reliability appears to be uncertain. Therefore, the study used the number of potential contracts to determine the sample size. It is observed that all most half of the seats were not filled in the market. Therefore, the sample is believed to be representative in the study.

⁹ The demographic and socio-economic profile of the sample and information asymmetry is given in the Appendix II.

directly involved in the marketing activities of the programme. Details of sample selection are given in Appendix 1.

Methodology for analysis

There are no standard methods for measuring the information asymmetry (Schneider, 2005) and hence different studies have used alternative proxies such as proprietary data (Schneider, 2005), prices and propensity to sell (Genesove, 1993), consumer expenditure data (Peterson & Schneider, 2016), etc, to understand the problem of information asymmetry and market failure. This study measured the extent of information asymmetry on each information content area by applying the formula; Information Asymmetry Coefficient (K) for each information content area = \sum (information difference on each attribute) / the number of attributes multiplied by the maximum difference allowed for each attribute.¹⁰ The extent of information asymmetry on each contract is the average value of K across the information content areas. The value of K is expected to vary from the minimum value of zero (complete symmetry) to the maximum value of one (complete asymmetry). The study uses appropriate statistics like averages, percentages, scatter plots and trend analysis to draw inferences.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

A contract in the market for professional education is defined as an agreement between a contractor and a contractee on the quality of education provided for a particular period in which the package of training is expected to be given by the latter by which, the former is expected to improve his or her skills to perform a particular profession. It is assumed that information asymmetry prevails in the contract where the contractors are better informed than the contractees on the credibility of the contract, which gives the former an opportunity to take advantage of the situation. The assumed information asymmetry is modelled as follows:

There are 'N' numbers of contracts for a given type of professional programme 'X'. Given the information asymmetry in the market, it is reasonable to frame two types of information dissemination, i.e., contractor's information (IP) and contractee's information (IC).¹¹ IP consists of two types of information, i.e., information actually with the contractor (IP₁) and the exaggerated information they disseminate in the market as part of the endorsement to initiate the contract (IP₂). If the information is disseminated symmetrically, it gives rise to the situation where IP = IC, where IP₁ = IP₂. If the information is disseminated asymmetrically, the symmetrical situation should be restated as IP ≠ IC, where IP₁ ≠ IP₂. The gap between IP and IC arising out of difference between IP₁ and IP₂ measures the coefficient of information asymmetry denoted as 'K' in this study.

If 'K' persists beyond the threshold level, contractees may overestimate the credibility of the contract and possibly enter into bad contracts. Such frequent occurrences lead to

¹⁰ Modified version of the method used by Pa and Zin (2009) to measure the communication gap in the software requirements elicitation process.

¹¹ Contractors are Providers and the contractees are the Consumers of education service. Therefore, information possessed by Contractors and Contractees is IP and IC respectively.

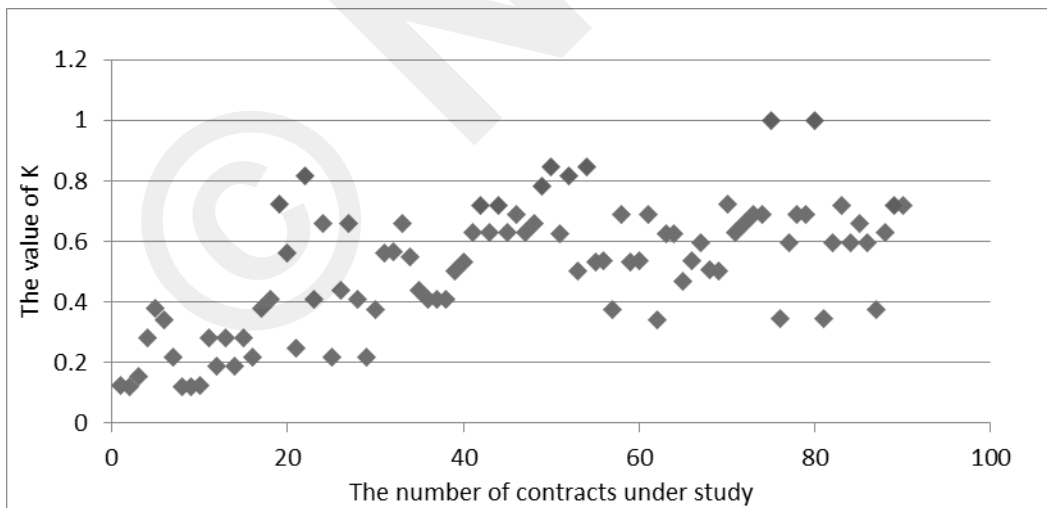
adverse selection where bad contracts run good contracts out of the market. During the period of the contract, however, the contractees can identify the bad contract they have entered. For a contractee in the education market, this is a market trap as the contract can neither be reversed nor be traded. The reason for such a market trap is the persistence of K which works in line with bad contracts when the possibilities of a good contract are still strong in the market.

Information Asymmetry in the Market under Study

The results show significant information asymmetry across the contracts in the market under study; the value of K varies from $K = 0.12$ to $K = 1$, with mean 0.51 and standard deviation 0.21 (Figure 1). Figure 1 shows that the information asymmetry is more or less equally distributed from 0.21 to 1. They are positively scattered, with a mild cluster between the values 0.4 and 0.8. Outliers lie at the values below 0.2 and exactly at 1. The presence of few plots below 0.2 shows that information asymmetry is at minimal in certain contracts. Finally, the plots between the values 0.2 and 0.8 indicate that information asymmetry is at medium level with only few outliers. Based on the observed values of K, the study grouped contracts into four, less asymmetric ($K \leq 0.35$), moderately asymmetric ($0.36 \leq K \leq 0.51$), highly asymmetric ($0.52 \leq K \leq 0.67$), and extremely asymmetric ($K \geq 0.68$) group. Highly asymmetric and extremely asymmetric category together comprise more than 50 percent of the contracts, which demonstrates the domination of bad contracts in this market (Figure 2).

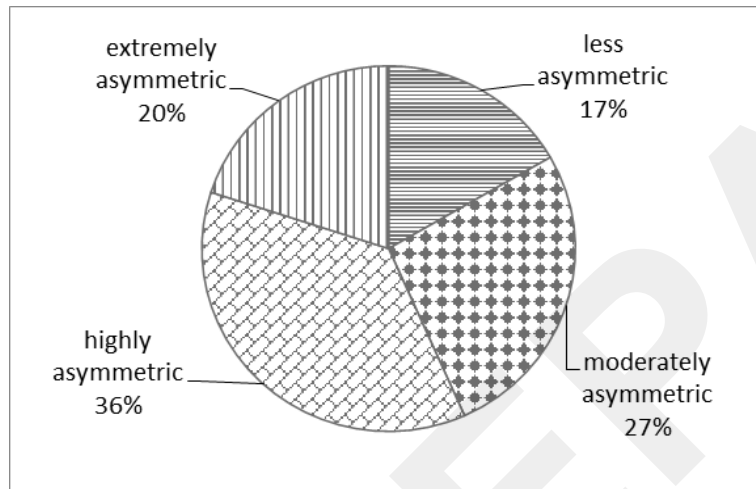
FIGURE 1

Information Asymmetry across the Contracts under Study



Source: Author's own elaboration

FIGURE 2

Classification of Contracts Based on Information Asymmetry

Source: Author's own elaboration

From Figure 2, it can be seen that 20 per cent of the contracts are extremely asymmetric, 36 per cent are highly asymmetric, 27 per cent are moderately and 17 per cent are less asymmetric. This indicates that more than half of the contracts (56 per cent) exhibits significant information asymmetry.

Causes of the observed asymmetry

The observed information asymmetry can be understood from the value of K recorded against each information content area. Information asymmetry was high on learning ($K = 0.58$) and employability ($K = 0.52$) whereas, information disseminated on social life ($K = 0.44$) and infrastructure ($K = 0.43$) was moderately asymmetric (Table 4). Disagreements by the contractees on the contractors' claims help us to explore the information asymmetry on each information content area.

Contractors generated information asymmetry

We can understand that the information on learning was highly asymmetric owing to the disagreements on research activities (81 per cent), international tours (80 per cent) and students exchange programmes (77 per cent) (Table 4). Disagreements were also considerable on the information regarding experience of faculty (47 per cent) and pedagogy, for instance case study (44 per cent). Similarly, the information asymmetry on the employability of the programme was accounted for by the disagreements on placement (61 per cent), career & guidance (52 per cent), coaching classes (52 per cent) and value-added courses (57 per cent).

However, the study observed relatively fewer disagreements on the information on social life as well as infrastructure associated with the programme. The average disagreements were relatively low on information enriching social networks (30 to 35 per cent), however, it was noticeably high on scholarships (43 per cent) as well as education loans (41 per cent). Similarly, the percentages of disagreements were more on supportive infrastructure such as health clubs (67 per cent), sports centre (67 per cent) and A/C class rooms (53 per cent) that helps the contractees to save their time and energy and thereby keep them focused more on the training.

The information asymmetry was high on information content areas including learning and employability against social life and infrastructure primarily due to the fact that the information units encapsulated in the area of learning and employability were intangible while the information units included to measure social life and infrastructure were tangible. For instance, the information on quality of experienced faculty cannot be verified and only be felt during the training because both exceptional faculties (from the industry who come to the academia to share their knowledge) and poor faculties (who lose their job and choose academia as a pressure-free haven) are both labelled as industry-experienced faculty in this market. However, the value of K was still significant on the information on social life and infrastructure. The fact that the contractees couldn't verify claims of the contractor in spite of having tangible information units presents us an interesting matter for further scrutiny. For example, about 53 percent of the contractees reported that they were provided with air-conditioned classrooms that rarely worked or was rarely used. This illustrates that in spite of verifying the claims made by contractors, they are not able to ensure its potential benefits. The responses of the contractees cite opportunistic behaviour of the contractors as the main reason for this dishonest contracting (Table 5).

Contractors deliberately keep the contractees miss-informed at the time of initiation of contracts, given the fact that the contractors are fully aware of the quality of the programme provided, as their policies intend profit maximisation. It has been observed that the websites and brochures supplied by the contractors are filled with tall but false promises. This observed misinformation is disseminated through all possible sources including newspapers, magazines and even banners on vehicles plying through the respective target market of these contractors.

The contractors presented exaggerated information about their ability to successfully contract in the market but didn't reveal the number of contracts that they have signed in recent years, citing denial of permission from the top management. Not being able to contract even with half of the permitted count of contractees, the contractors create an artificial demand for their service with false information and convince the contractee the urgency to pay in advance in order to contract with them. In the wake of crisis, the contractors who used to publish contracting history in their websites started to remove such materials as this displays acceptance of their program in the market. It has also been observed that these contractors restrict the communication of a potential contractee with their contractees, who are the most authentic and reliable source of information for the former.

Another source of information evolved as part of privatisation is the educational exhibitions, where the contractors disseminate information to lure potential contractee into their contracts. While it is a place for a potential contractee to collect information about the available contractors in the market and the programme they offer, it sometimes becomes a

method of data collection (contact details of potential contractee) for contractors and thus starts influencing the former's decision process by disseminating information in favour of the latter.

Since every investment in a professional programme is a contract, it is important that both the contractor and the contractee oblige to the terms and conditions of the contract. The level of efforts made by the contractors to keep the promises made to the contractees is an important factor in honouring the contract. However, the study indicates that these contractors have no incentive to behave honestly in this market as any attempt to fulfil these promises would adversely affect their profits, which is their primary objective. Moreover, the contractees cannot incentivise the contractors to follow honest behaviour because unlike frequent purchases, education is a one-time purchase. The contractees have their limitations to monitor the contractor during the contract period, which is evident from the widely unkept promises on proposals like international tour, research, etc, in the study.

Contractees generated information asymmetry

The role of contractees in creating information asymmetries in the market cannot be completely ignored. As consumers, contractees can influence the quality of education decisively for which their moral standards are of high importance. Unfortunately, the study observed that they do not initiate enough efforts to gather true information and therefore their intention shall be treated with suspicion. This raises a question on the behaviour of the potential contractees as well; are they searching for a good quality MBA programme via a better contracting or an MBA certificate with cheap price and less effort? From the responses of the contractees, the study felt that they are focused mostly on the placement possibility of the programme and not on learning or enhancing employability from the program. Often, contractees are primarily job-seekers and do not understand the importance of learning activities or social life related with education.

Expansion, privatisation and information asymmetry

The expansion of Indian higher education was not balanced as it was rapid with massive privatisation. It was one sided too as it focused on specific institutions, regions, and programmes. Therefore, to a great extent, the unbalanced growth of the sector was supported by public policies without proper vision. Often, the public policies on the sector were based on public pressure rather than long-term concerns (Agarwal, 2006) and therefore, it failed to incentivise contractors to behave honestly. The unbalanced nature can be traced easily from the growth trajectory of the market.

First, the expansion of Indian higher education sector happened during and after the 1990, characterised by rapid growth and decline in just few years (Figure 3) and it has now reached the saturation point in many states including Tamil Nadu (e.g., *Times of India*, 2019a, 2019b & 2020).

Second, the expansion was mainly due to the increased participation of private sector. As mentioned earlier, about 78 percent of the total colleges in India are private colleges. This was very high in few Indian states like Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh (88 per cent) followed by Tamil Nadu (87 per cent) (AISHE, 2018-19). Among the private colleges, about 64.3 percent are private unaided colleges and the same states had very high proportion like

Andhra Pradesh (93 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (89 per cent) and Tamil Nadu (88 per cent) (*ibid*).¹² Undoubtedly this investment lifted education from elite to mass¹³ and thus benefited society. However, privatisation of the Indian higher education system was harsher than the higher education system of many other countries as it is regarded as transfer of responsibilities from the Government of India to private (Tilak, 2015), which challenged the quality and credibility of Indian higher education (e.g., Draxler, 2015).

Third, the expansion was skewed towards the establishment of a particular category of institutions namely “colleges”. According to various reports of AISHE, ‘colleges’ accounted for about 75 percent of the total HEIs in the country during 2010-11 to 2018-19 (Figure 4). These colleges were not interested in developing themselves into HEI of learning and research. Interestingly, only 4 percent of colleges have enrolment more than 3000; 64.4 percent of colleges enrol less than 500 students.

Fourth, these colleges focused on one or two flagship programmes like Engineering or MBA based on the need of the hour and this led to the domination of some programmes in the Indian higher education scenario. Various reports of AISHE from 2010-11 to 2018-19 reveal that few programmes accounted for 82 per cent of the total enrolment in Indian higher education in the last ten years. For instance, While 15 programmes out of 150 constituted 83 percent of the total enrolment in Indian higher education in 2011-12, merely 10 out of 180 programmes accounted for 85 percent of the total student enrolment for the period 2018-19. It has affected education in basic sciences and those subjects that are not market friendly have suffered (Agarwal, 2006; Tilak 2015).

Fifth, the colleges were highly unequally distributed across the country. Bangalore district tops in terms of number of colleges with 880 colleges followed by Jaipur with 566 colleges, and top 50 districts constitutes around 32.2 percent of colleges (AISHE, 2018-19). This situation led to mushrooming of private HEIs and unhealthy competition at least in few Indian states. After nearly two decades of privatisation of higher education, the current bleak landscape of the market shows that their actions have backfired in few states, particularly Tamil Nadu where HEIs mushroomed (*The Frontline*, 2015) and they follow desperate marketing strategies including the dissemination of wrong information in order to survive in the market.

¹² Calculation was done by the researcher based on Table 5: Number of private and government colleges (based on actual response) AISHE 2018-2019; due to data discrepancies noticed in the percentage of unaided colleges in the document.

¹³ Trow (1973) classified higher education systems in countries based on its enrolment. He defined 'elite', 'mass' and 'universal' states when the GER ratio is (a) less than 15 per cent; (b) between 15 and 50 per cent; and (c) more than 50 per cent equivalent respectively. India's current GER in higher education (for 18-23 age group) is 26.3 (AISHE, 2018-19).

TABLE 3

Asymmetry on Four Constructs of Information Asymmetry (Group - wise)

<i>Constructs of Information Asymmetry</i>	<i>Observed Values of K</i>				<i>Mean Values</i>
	<i>G1</i>	<i>GII</i>	<i>GIII</i>	<i>GIV</i>	
Learning	0.20	0.60	0.68	0.83	0.58
Employability	0.26	0.58	0.60	0.65	0.52
Social Life in the Campus	0.20	0.34	0.55	0.67	0.44
Infrastructure	0.20	0.36	0.56	0.61	0.43

Source: Author's own elaboration

Note: G1, GII, GIII & GIV represent less, moderately, high and extremely asymmetric groups respectively.

It can be seen that highest information asymmetry is scored against two important aspects of education namely quality of learning and employability. It can be seen from table that the value of K recorded against Learning is 0.83, 0.68 and 0.60 for GIV, GIII and GII respectively which leads to considerable asymmetry (0.58) on the total sample. Similarly, the value of K scored against employment aspect of the programme is 0.83, 0.68, and 0.60 for GIV, GIII and GII respectively which leads to significant asymmetry (0.58) on the total sample. However, the overall asymmetry observed on the information related with social life offered in the campus as well as the infrastructure was relatively small compared to asymmetry on learning and employability.

TABLE 4

Disagreements (%) among Contractees, Group - wise

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Attributes</i>	<i>Information Disseminated/Promises Made by the Contractors</i>	<i>GI</i>	<i>GII</i>	<i>GIII</i>	<i>GIV</i>	<i>Total Sample</i>
Information disseminated by the contractors on the quality of learning	Information disseminated by the contractors on the quality of class room learning	Project based learning	00.0	29.2	30.3	55.6	30.0
		Case study	6.7	20.8	60.7	77.8	44.4
		Learning based group discussion	6.7	41.7	30.3	66.7	36.7
		Experienced faculty	13.3	33.3	60.6	72.2	47.8
		Language training	33.3	45.8	39.4	66.7	45.6
	Information disseminated by the contractors on the quality of learning outside the class room	Guest lectures	00.0	20.9	27.3	50.0	25.6
		Seminar / conferences	13.3	29.2	33.3	50.0	32.2
		Workshops	20.0	25.0	30.3	44.4	30.0
		Research venues	73.3	66.7	90.9	88.9	81.1
		Students exchange programme	33.3	66.7	93.9	100.0	77.8
		Projects in good company	26.7	37.5	54.5	88.9	52.2
		International tour	53.3	83.3	81.8	94.4	80.0
	Information disseminated by the contractors on the quality of potential employability	Information disseminated by the contractors on the quality of direct industry interaction	MOUs with company	20.0	75.0	84.9	88.9
Industry internship			20.0	33.3	30.3	61.1	35.6
Industry visits			13.3	37.5	51.5	38.9	38.9
Interaction with experts industry			13.3	45.8	51.5	44.4	42.2
Information disseminated by the contractors on the quality of indirect industry interaction		Value added courses	13.3	62.5	57.6	88.9	57.8
		Soft skill training	00.0	37.5	42.4	77.8	41.1
		Coaching classes	00.0	45.5	66.7	77.8	52.2
		Communication skills	6.7	37.5	51.5	77.8	45.6
		Mock interviews	13.3	41.6	42.4	77.8	44.4
		Outbound Training	00.0	50.0	33.3	33.3	40.0
		Mentoring	00.0	45.8	18.2	18.2	30.0
		Entrepreneurship development programmes	00.0	62.5	39.4	39.4	47.8
		Career Guidance	00.0	29.2	60.6	60.6	52.2
Placement	13.3	62.5	69.7	69.7	61.1		

Cont...

Information disseminated by the contractors on the quality of social life	Information disseminated by the contractors on the quality of social life	Organising management meet	20.0	33.3	36.4	50.0	36.7
		Club activities	26.7	37.5	24.2	38.9	35.6
		Orientation programmes	26.7	20.8	36.4	44.4	32.2
		Personality training	13.3	41.7	24.2	38.9	30.0
	Information disseminated by the contractors on the quality of financial security	Education loan	26.7	16.7	60.6	50.0	41.1
		Scholarships	26.6	25.0	51.5	50.0	43.3
Information disseminated by the contractors on the quality of infrastructure	Information disseminated by the contractors on the quality of necessary infrastructure	Computer Lab	6.7	16.6	24.2	33.3	21.1
		Discussion Room	6.7	25.0	51.5	50.0	36.7
		Seminar Hall	0.0	12.5	36.4	38.9	24.4
		Power Supply	6.7	8.3	12.1	27.8	13.3
		Smart Boards	6.7	12.5	51.6	66.7	36.7
		Audio-visual Aids	6.7	20.8	45.5	33.3	30.0
		Wi-fi	6.7	37.5	30.4	66.7	35.6
		Library	00.0	12.5	9.1	33.3	13.3
	Water Supply	6.7	12.5	6.06	61.1	18.9	
	Information disseminated by the contractors on the quality of supportive infrastructure	Air Conditioned Class Rooms	13.3	41.7	69.7	72.2	53.3
		Hostel	26.7	16.7	33.3	77.8	36.7
		Language Lab	46.7	25.0	66.7	72.2	53.3
		Canteen	20.0	29.2	33.3	77.8	38.9
		Healthy Food	20.0	33.3	48.5	77.8	45.6
		Health Clubs	13.3	58.3	87.9	88.9	67.8
		Sports Centre	20.0	54.2	93.9	77.8	67.8
Stationeries		00.0	16.7	48.5	77.8	37.8	
ATM	00.0	33.3	48.5	83.3	43.3		
Transportation Facilities	00.0	29.2	45.5	55.5	35.6		

Source: Author's own elaboration

TABLE 5

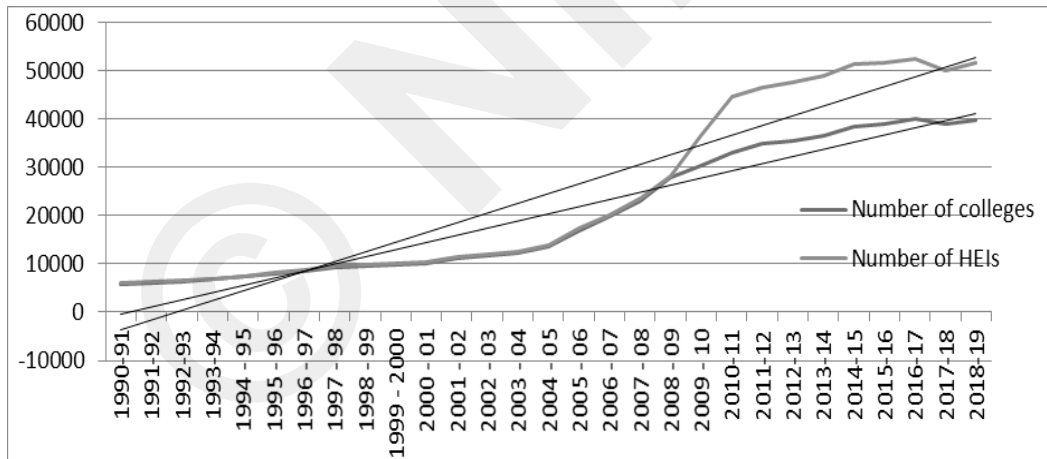
Sources of Disagreements of the Contractees to the Contractors' Claims

<i>Claims by the Contractors</i>	<i>Responses by the Consumers</i>
Institute has good research wing	We do not have any faculty with research experience or ongoing research projects
International tours	International tours are not provided for which technical or financial reasons are cited.
Facilitate projects in good companies	Colleges do not facilitate the projects in good companies and got projects in own efforts
MOUs with reputed companies	Colleges do not have the industry links as they exhibited in their websites
Students exchange schemes with foreign universities	Either it goes beyond contractees' ability to make additional payment or colleges lacks such kinds of tie-up
A/C class rooms	Either not working or not permitted to use

Source: Author's own elaboration

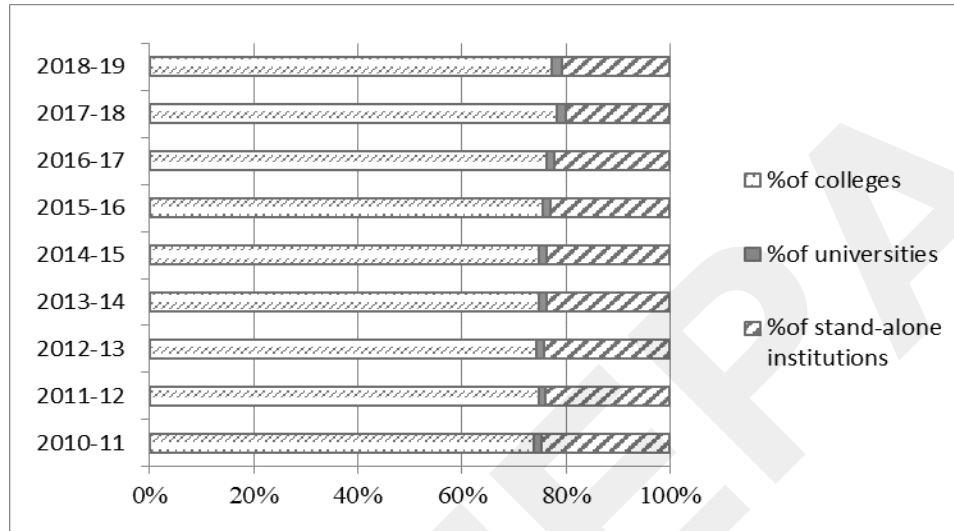
FIGURE 3

Growth of Indian Higher Education Market since the 1990s



Source: EPWRF, Educational statistics (1965-2010) & AISHE reports of various years from 2010-2019.

FIGURE 4
Composition of HEIs in India



Source: AISHE Reports of various years from 2010-2019

Conclusions and Policy Implications of the Study

The study examined the extent of information asymmetry on the contracts in the privatised higher education market in India using a new method of measurement. The coefficient of information asymmetry is shown in the study as 'K', which is expected to vary from zero (symmetry) to one (maximum asymmetry). The area selected for the study was Tamil Nadu, which was one of the Indian states where education expanded through private HEIs. The overall findings of the study can be concluded as follows;

First, the study found that contracts in the market for management education in Tamil Nadu are signed under critical level of information asymmetry. The category of high or extreme levels of information asymmetry encompassed more than half of the total contracts. Therefore, the study concluded that a large part of the market is held by bad contracts. Monitoring of information asymmetry existing in the educational institutions is mandatory. The Government may form a high level committee to check the status of the institutions every year and validate with information provided by these institutions in the form of advertisements through print and other social media.

Second, a detailed investigation into the information aired cited high information asymmetry on information disseminated on learning and employability due to considerable disagreement of contractees on information on research, international tour, project in good companies, student exchange schemes, placement, value added courses etc. However, the value of 'K' was relatively small in the case of information disseminated on social life and infrastructure. The study cited opportunism of the contractors as the main reason for this asymmetry as they deliberately create information asymmetry by keeping the potential

contractees less informed. The study also mentions short-sighted public policies on education as an incentive for the opportunism (of both the contractors and the contractees) which is observed in the market. Though the academia industry tie-ups are at the core these days, a full-fledged partnerships is required for maximum placements through on campus job drives. International collaborations and signing the memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with institutions abroad provide a varied kind of exposure and campus learning. Thus the institutions can be encouraged to have partnerships with abroad institutions. Social life in the campus is featured by collaborative learning of the students inside the campus. Cultural programmes and other activities induce the social life of the student. Such intensive programmes can be organised deliberately and the students may be fostered their participation.

Overall, the study found significant information asymmetry in the market and concluded that contracts were not honoured in this market; most of the contracts were violated by contractors. The consequence of this dishonest contracting is that the misinformed contractees, not understanding the reality of the situation get certified in their respective programme without skill and employment. In short, the contractees fail to get their due share from the training. This in turn, challenges the credibility and competitiveness of the human resource of the country by adding mere certificate holders, the so called half-professionals into the system. However, a survival based on a competitive advantage resulting from information asymmetry is not a long- term solution. The correct information will be disseminated in the long run and of course, being part of any market in the long run is a matter of 'credibility'. Severity of punishments is required for violation of information provided and the real picture of the institutions.

The study indicates the need of better long-sighted policies in the Indian higher education market. Considering the fact that this study represents institutions recognised by government agencies, the situation demands more efficient implementation of the accreditation process so that it acts in order to double it as an information agent in the market. In addition, there should be a reliable information database as well as a legal framework that can regularly monitor the information dissemination process by the contractor and also ensure that the contracts are honoured. Else, this information asymmetry would lead to a market failure as in other markets, which would prove to be very costly considering the relevance of human capital in a country's growth and development. In a nutshell, the article makes an important contribution towards understanding the extent and various dimensions of "information asymmetry" and "market failure" in education market. Since the empirical context of this study is narrow, similar studies can be conducted to validate the genuineness of this study.

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APPENDIX I

Sample Selection of Contractees under Study

<i>Classification of MBA Based on Reputation</i>	<i>Number of Colleges under Each Category of Reputation</i>	<i>Number of Colleges Selected</i>	<i>Number of Potential Contract</i>	<i>Samples Selected</i>
Highly Reputed (17-24 Years of Experience)	5	2	300	17
Moderately Reputed (10-17 Years of Experience)	6	2	180	11
Less Reputed (3-10 Years of Experience)	33	8	960	62
Total	44	12	1,440	90

Source: Author's own elaboration

Sample Selection of Contractors under Study

<i>Departments to Which the Employees Belong</i>	<i>Number of Samples Selected</i>
Faculties	18
Admission	13
Placement	9
Administrative Officer	6
Library	2
Total	48

Source: Author's own elaboration

APPENDIX II

Demographic and Socio-Economic Background of Contractees and Information Asymmetry

<i>Attribute</i>		<i>Frequency (%)</i>	<i>Value of K (σ)</i>	<i>Correlation with K</i>
Gender	Male	42 (46.7)	0.46 (0.21)	-0.23*
	Female	48 (53.3)	0.56 (0.20)	
Age*	Below mean (< 23 years of old)	28 (31.1)	0.46 (0.20)	0.09
	Above mean (> 23 years of old)	62 (68.9)	0.46 (0.20)	
Location	Urban	44 (48.8)	0.6 (0.17)	0.42**
	Rural	46 (51.1)	0.43 (0.21)	
Monthly Family Income (Mean Income = ₹41,000)	Below ₹41,000	61 (67.7)	0.56 (0.15)	-0.37**
	₹41,000 -87,000	20 (22.3)	0.51 (0.19)	
	Above ₹87,000	9 (10)	0.52 (0.11)	
Educational Status of Parents*	Below mean (< 6.4 years of schooling)	54 (60)	0.46 (0.20)	-0.12
	Above mean (> 6.4 years of schooling)	36 (40)	0.47 (0.20)	
Occupational Status of Parents	Organised	37 (38.9)	0.47 (0.20)	-0.17
	Unorganised	53 (61.1)	0.55 (0.19)	
Extent of Search Done by the Contractees	Below mean (< 23 days)	57 (63.3)	0.49 (0.17)	-0.05
	Above mean (> 23 days)	33 (36.7)	0.55 (0.19)	
Social Networks Used by the Contractees	Highly reliable social network	22 (24.4)	0.36 (0.21)	-0.44**
	Less reliable social networks	68 (75.6)	0.57 (0.20)	

Cont...

Geographical Distance between Contractees' Home Town Institution*	Below mean (<130 km)	58 (64.4)	0.46 (0.20)	
	Above mean (> 130 km)	32 (35.56)	0.47 (0.19)	-0.1
Credit Status of the Contractees	With education loan	41 (45.55)	0.56 (0.18)	
	Without education loan	49 (54.45)	0.48 (0.20)	0.22*

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Socio-Economic Background of Contractors and Information Asymmetry

Attributes		Frequency (%)	Value of K (σ)	Correlation with K^*
Business Background	Industry	11 (12.2)	0.21 (0.10)	-0.56**
	Education	24 (26.7)	0.48 (0.18)	-0.09
	Others	55 (61.1)	0.59 (0.17)	0.46**
Reputation	High	66 (73.3)	0.21 (0.10)	
	Medium	13 (14.4)	0.46 (0.11)	-0.59**
	Low	11 (12.3)	0.58 (0.18)	
Ownership	Single	55 (61.1)	0.59 (0.17)	-0.46**
	Group	35 (38.9)	0.40 (0.20)	
Autonomy	Autonomous	20 (22.2)	0.32 (0.19)	
	Non-autonomous	70 (77.8)	0.57 (0.18)	-0.50**
Price Charged	Below mean	63 (70)	0.48 (0.21)	
	Above mean	27 (30)	0.60 (0.16)	-0.01
Exclusiveness	B - schools	48 (53.5)	0.59 (0.20)	
	Others	42 (46.6)	0.42 (0.19)	0.43**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: The study considered 6 attributes to assess the background of the contractors namely the business background (the core area of business of the contractors), reputation (the number of years of experience in education market), ownership (whether the contractor has a chain of institutions or not), autonomy (autonomous or non-autonomous), exclusiveness of the education provided (typically B-schools or not) and price charged (highly priced or not).

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Aspiration, Social Capital and Vocational Career Choice

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Abstract

In India, vocational aspiration is seldom studied as the outcome of one's interactions with various forms of social capital. An individual's aspiration of vocational career can be influenced by multiple factors such as family, education, personality, individual aptitude, socialisation, role models, social support, and other forms of resources. While developing individual vocational career goals, the role of social capital in the form of significant others cannot be undermined. Social capital emerges as a critical element in enabling individuals to aspire for vocational career goals by developing appropriate career choices, wherein appropriateness is seen in terms of the needs and values of significant others. Drawn on a field-based research study of vocational graduate employees of three manufacturing industries in Bengaluru, the study underscores the unique role of various forms of social capital in shaping individual vocational career aspirations and outcomes.

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Introduction

In India, vocational aspiration is seldom studied as the outcome of one's aspirations and interactions with various forms of social capital. This article, hence, is aimed to capture various aspects of vocational aspirations associated with social capital while developing an understanding of vocational skill aspirations as one's career path. At the outset, we wish to argue that any individual aspiration must be understood as a social phenomenon that is socially determined, however individualistic it might seem to be. As Arjun Appadurai (2004: 67) observes, "aspirations are formed in the thick of social life." Even the general ideas of a "good life" arise from the ideas that are systemic or, as Debraj Ray (2002: 1) states it plainly, aspirations are the "social grounding of individual desires." They (ibid, 199) function as motivators for attaining the goals in future and are "...generally perceived as an ambition to reach a multi-dimensional life outcomes." The aspiration of a person is thus understood to be largely determined by the capital the person possesses, in all its forms.

Hans Eysenck (1973) views aspiration as the level of a possible goal an individual sets for oneself. Aspiration is understood to have a strong desire for realisation of one's ambition, idea or accomplishment of a goal. It is in the process of goal setting, that, different forms of capital form the "aspiration window" (Ray, 2002: 1). This observation provides a useful tool in developing an understanding of the role of capital in the formation of individual aspirations. As argued by Ray, the aspiration window of an individual consists of "...similar, attainable individuals." This set of "similar" individuals can be roughly defined as the people that constitute the immediate socio-economic capital of a person. Ray (2002) further argues that one's aspirations are shaped by one's aspiration window. This window can change with a change in the social space that the person is in. For example, a shift from a school to higher education or a vocational course can bring a change in the aspiration window of a person.

While describing the "career striving process," Raynor (1978) argues that an individual develops step-path scheme in career striving process. He further adds that individuals from a very early age try out career roles with reference group model such as doctor, nurse, policeman, teacher, fireman, and so on. In various ways and to various extents, individuals learn about the adult world of work, occupations, or careers for which the role of significant others serve an important model as reference group. A reference group, as proposed by R K Merton (1968), an American sociologist, is the group which an individual aspires to emulate as a frame of reference. Reference frame is seen important for directing a person's self-identity, occupational roles, vocational aspirations, performance and so on. In this sense, aspirational goals directed towards better future job prospects, specialised skilled knowledge, job roles, social standing, etc, are an index of upward social mobility. Therefore, individual motivation of vocational career choice can come not solely from within but outside of a person such as social capital in the form of significant others and reference groups.

Social Capital: Conceptual Framework

The term "social capital" is popularly associated with the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Robert D Putnam and James Samuel Coleman. According to an American political scientist, Robert D Putnam and others (1992), social capital consists of the networks of individuals, households and organisations which all are governed by norms and values that create

externalities for a community for positive action. People develop networks of relations by becoming members in voluntary associations, political organisations, religious associations and so on. These members are involved in informal group activities and develop networks by virtue of being members of the organisation. While underlining the importance of group associations, social capital and its networks, Putnam differentiates between two forms of social capital — “bonding capital” and “bridging capital.” Bonding capital strengthens the exclusive interactions and networks among close social circles such as kinship, local clubs, community, social class in workplaces and so on, while bridging capital brings heterogeneous groups of people together forming networks.

James Samuel Coleman (1990), an American sociologist, extended the concept of social capital to a broader interpretation by associating with aspects of social structure that creates values and norms to propel individual human actions. He further argued how social capital is developed through human relations within a social structure. For example, an individual’s location within families, neighbourhoods and communities can, in turn, influence individual actions such as the level of educational achievement or career aspirations. In this context, Coleman’s main argument is that the social capital for a person’s development is rooted in the functional communities, parental relations with institutions within the community and so on. For Coleman, social norms and values of a communities can result in building up different levels of social capital that directly or indirectly influence differential opportunities for its people. For example, families residing in a community that value conformity to a socially desirable set of norms and values will encourage its young members to avoid developing undesirable actions/behaviours and increase opportunities for building up social capital. Social capital therefore is a direct or indirect determinant of the values and norms in which an individual interacts within families and communities.

For the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1986), social structures consist of the *habitus* that not only influence the attitudes and dispositions that individuals acquire over a period but also their level of familiarity and ability to navigate their social space of interactions in the realm of different forms of capital — social, cultural and economic. Hence, social capital represents the aggregate of resources possessed by members of a society as a result of a durable network of informal/formal institutionalised relationship (material/symbolic) to a group. From the perspective of social capital discourse, and its relationship with individual aspirations, it is thus observed that young people tend to develop career aspirations by being dependent on the resources and or flow of *information* available in their own social networks.

Significantly, the appropriateness of making a future career choice is seen in terms of familial needs, values, and preferences. Studies have proved that there can be a “transference of job-related values and orientations to family-related values and orientations. (Schulenberg *et al*, 1984: 134). Kohn (1977), for example, demonstrates the link between working-class families and the conformity sought from their children. According to him, working class families seek conformity from their child compared to middle-class families which emphasis the value of self-direction. Vocational socialisation is therefore to be understood as a family-oriented process which starts from one’s childhood. Appadurai (2004) proposes that an individual’s capacity to aspire is his/her ability to read a map of a journey into the future. Hence, aspirations are complex understandings of the future pathways available to people. Individuals can access these pathways if they are provided with the required capital, information, knowledge and confidence to map the

unexplored possibilities for their future career goals, for which the role of significant others cannot be underscored. It is in this context that the value of significant others has been recognised by social capital perspectives in generating motivations for individuals to achieve certain identifiable future goals. In the present study, we use social capital in the form of significant others which bracket family/parents, schoolteachers, peer groups, mass media, career guidance/counselling facilities and so on to understand its function in shaping the respondent's orientations towards vocational aspirational goal.

Study Design and Sample

This is an empirical study, focussing on vocationally trained graduate employees such as Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and diploma graduates currently employed in manufacturing industries of Bharat Heavy Electronics Ltd, Bharat Electronics Ltd, and Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd, Bengaluru. The main objective of the study is to understand the role of social capital in shaping individual vocational career aspirations among ITI and diploma graduates, factors that motivated the respondents to choose ITI and diploma vocational courses, their career aspirations and pathways. Although the method used is mixed, having information of both qualitative and quantitative, the data is predominantly of quantitative in nature. Probability sampling method was used to identify the respondents. The data set used in the study has the strength of 290 respondents — 100 each from Bharat Electronics Ltd and Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd and 90 from Bharat Heavy Electronics Ltd. When it comes to gender composition, only 20 per cent are females and hence the proportion of female respondents are significantly low when compared with their male counterparts. However, the study doesn't deal separately with male-female respondents *per se*. The occupational position of the respondents comprises of technicians of different grades such as boiler attendants, artisans, draughtsmen, senior mechanics, engineers, assistant engineers, deputy engineers, supervisors, assistant supervisors, inspectors, managers and so on. Age group of the respondents range from 18 years to 57 years. Of the total respondents, ITI graduates comprised 52 per cent, followed by 46 per cent diploma graduates and 2 per cent BE graduates. The trades of the ITI graduate employees are in electronics, mechanical, electrical, and automatic, while those of diploma and BE are electronics, mechanical, electrical, civil and production engineering. The period of work experience of the respondents varies from one year to five years (29 per cent) to five to ten (21 per cent) and 10 years above (50 per cent).

Social Capital and Vocational Aspiration among the Respondents

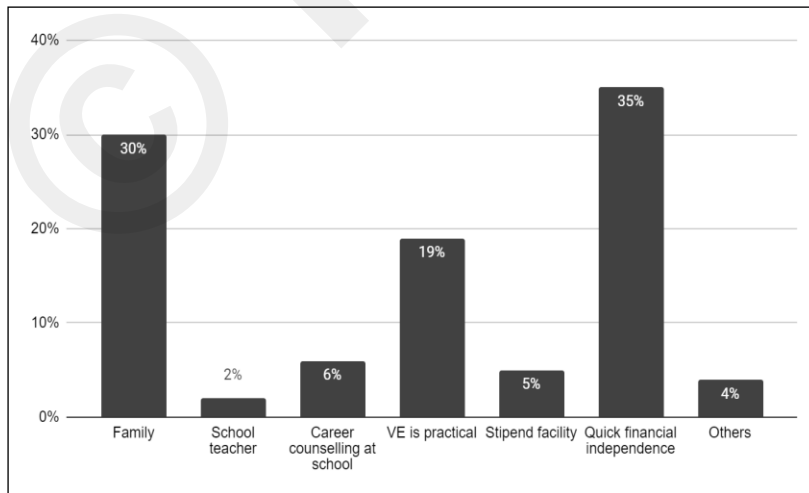
This section examines the role of social capital in the form of significant others in motivating vocational aspirations as career path choice among the respondents. The influence of significant others assumes how one's vocational aspiration is formed and developed through interactions with others. In Coleman's view, by facilitating the communication of norms, trust, and authority, significant others in the form of social capital have a productive role in enabling members of a group to interact in a rational and individualistic manner, to achieve goals that would not otherwise be possible (Pichler and Wallace, 2009). For Coleman, one's socialization and learning space hinge on this collaboration within the family (i.e., parents' interaction with their children) and even the

school-community close coordination of activities between parents, teachers and schools (Dufur *et al*, 2013). The present study observed that significant others, by serving as reference model, seem to influence the respondent’s vocational aspirations.

In the present study, the respondents were given a set of parameters to identify motivating factors of choosing vocational education as their future career path after having completed formal education such as Grade X grade or Grade X11. As shown in Figure 1, the highest proportion of respondents, which is about 35 per cent, had chosen quick financial independence as the most important reason for having chosen vocational education. As revealed by the study, the respondents believe that opting for a vocational course would ensure them future job security and quick monetary rewards. Therefore, rather than opting for a general academic course, opting for vocational education and its immediate association with financial returns occupied top priority among the respondents. Also, this implies that individuals with vocational education and training certification are believed to be more likely to find job opportunities within a short span after the completion of their course than those who have completed general academic stream of education. The fact that being in vocational career helps one in career identity formation from early on could impress the respondents to perceive that vocational education training provides them an edge over others. It is often overlooked that vocational development takes place from one’s childhood. As Hartung *et al* (2004: 388) argue, “contrary to established career theory, a sizeable proportion of grade-school children are capable of employing their emerging understanding of interests and abilities to engage in both a cognitive and physical exploration of the world-of-work and to state career aspirations.” The respondents were more eager to join the workforce in skills based or trade related career so that they can jumpstart their career from early on in life; become employed and financially independent within a short span of time.

FIGURE 1

Factors for Opting Vocational Courses



Source: Primary Survey, 2016-2017

However, this seemingly individual choice of vocational career on the part of the respondents may not be solely an individual decision. Parental aspirations and influence on children's career aspiration choice is a consistent finding in several research studies (Taylor, Harris & Taylor, 2004). Children tend to conceive the system of work through their parents. They are therefore likely to pursue careers that fall in line with the aspirations and occupations of their parents (Lee & Byun, 2019). Parents as significant others play a central role in planning and prediction of career opportunities of their children through a series of choice making decisions at the home front with the prospect of immediate future employability and financial security. In the present study, majority respondents reported family such as mother, father, or both as the most influential significant other and primary movers in shaping the vocational goal as their future career path. As indicated by Figure 1, next to the factor such as quick financial independence, family/parental influence occupied the second most popular reason of having pursued vocational career choice among the respondents that 30 per cent of the respondents had opted vocational aspiration and the decision was influenced by their family/parents. Family, parental expectation for the respondents and their involvement in the respondents' career choice turns out a central indicator of social capital. Although schools, peer groups, friends, teachers, media and so on — all have varying influence on the respondent's career development, parental expectations and perceptions of vocational fit for the respondents are seen playing a key role in shaping up the respondents' vocational career goal. Consistent parental emphasis on vocational career choice of the respondents is closely associated with parental perception of the prospect of vocational education in propelling their children to become financially self-reliant within a short time. The need for employment and financial independence for their children could be attributed to socio-economic and financial position of parents at home front as in the words of few informants:

"Deciding to join vocational course was mainly my brother's decision. My family wholeheartedly supported me to join a vocational course. I passed the entrance test and got admission in a government polytechnic institute in Baliya which had good facilities in terms of practical equipment. My mother is below grade X and my father is only a sub-inspector in the police department. Family and quick financial independence are the main reasons for opting vocational choice."

33-year-old assistant engineer

"My father is a farmer. When parents are below the poverty line, they send their children to courses such as ITI. When students join ITI, mobility's also easier. From ITI, one can join diploma and then BE course. I needed to earn money soon. My friends informed me about the course and the Institute. I had full family support while preparing for the course."

32-year-old ITI graduate

"It is my mother and father who wanted me to join a vocational course. My father is a businessperson and mother, a housewife. Both mother and father inspired me to take up the course. The institute, Government Krishna Gopal Engineering Institute, Bishnupur, is also near my residence."

37-year-old diploma graduate

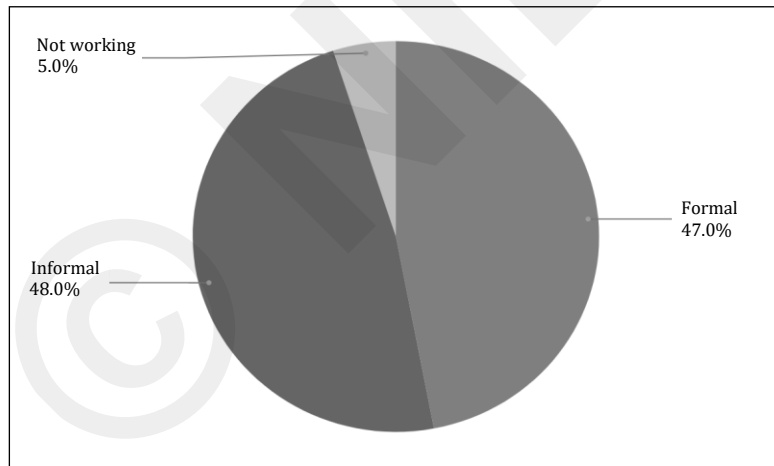
“My mother is only Grade 10. My parents are daily wagers. I prefer work to long years of study. I joined an ITI course in a private institute because of my senior friend’s suggestions. they pursued the same course from the same institute, Shree Jiveshwar Shiksha Samitee in Dharward. This is the only college where could get training in my concerned field.”

22-year-old ITI graduate

The study shows specific parental role in consistently emphasising the value of vocational achievement with immediate future goals of earning a professional degree that can secure their children’s future monetary needs while providing resources and patterns that affect their career choice that is clearly illustrated in the present study. In this, parental occupation, especially father’s occupation played a key role in clearly defining the choice of vocational aspirational goals amongst the respondents as it is evident from the present set of the data. In this study, while considering the parents’ occupational background, we excluded mother’s data (Figure 3) as most of them do not earn income. As depicted in Figure 2, a considerable proportion of fathers (48 percent) work in informal sector as against 47 per cent of fathers working in the formal sector.

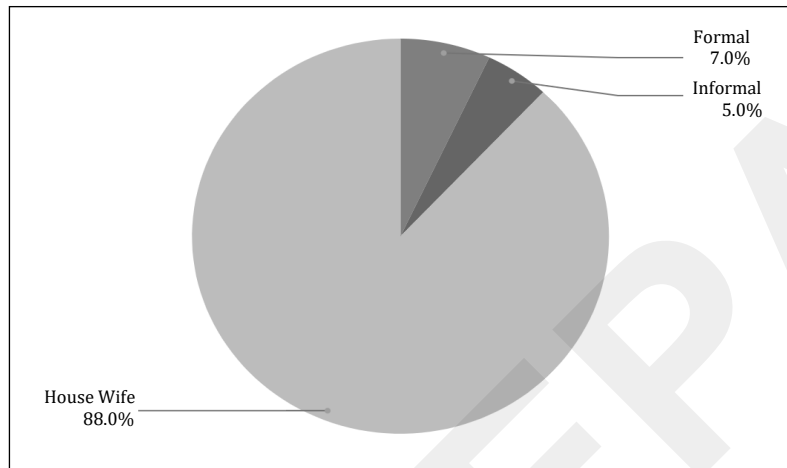
FIGURE 2

Father’s Occupational Profile



Source: Primary Survey, 2016-2017

FIGURE 3

Mother's Occupational Profile

Source: Primary Survey, 2016-2017

As revealed by the data, a sizable proportion of the respondent's fathers engage as unskilled manual, semi-skilled and marginal workers in informal sector. These occupations consist of casual, contract labourers and self-employed as farmers, carpenters, tailor, goldsmith, auto drivers, construction workers, mason, sheet metal fitter, daily wagers and so on. The occupational profile indicates that they enjoy a little or no job security at all. Going by Richard H Hall's (1969) criteria of occupational characteristics, these occupations are accorded low status and least rewarding in terms of income, while V S D'Souza and R M Sethi's (1972) study categorised them as working class according to the social class groupings — upper class, middle class, working class and lower class. Theodore Caplow (1954) too discusses the role of occupational position in determining individual prestige, allocation of social privileges and income status in society. According to Caplow's scale of definition, the range of occupations the respondents' fathers engage fall well within low-income, working-class group as compared with moderate or high-income category such as the occupation of a physician, an engineer or a realtor.

Among the fathers working in the formal sector, most of the occupations fall within semi-skilled jobs, with low or moderate income while an insignificant percentage of occupations belongs to high skilled jobs with decent income. Both the occupations include services such as clerical jobs, postman, sub-editor, sub-inspector in police department, military, schoolteachers, lineman in electricity department, security guard in forest, engineer (one), doctor (one), and executive level (one). Most of the fathers working in the formal sector were placed in low-income white-collar jobs. The argument that differential occupational positions carry differential significance in terms of income, rewards and over all class status is well established in the work of British sociologist, Frank Parkin (1980), who argues that even when classes are not seen as defined simply by typology of occupations, the class position is seen largely determined by occupations, and hence

differential rewards, that occupational classification and class status are inextricably related. For example, a doctor or an engineer or an executive level worker acquires skills and training appropriate to the position. As argued by K Davis and W E Moore (1945), skilling a highly specialised job requires training of substantial time. Individuals who undergo training make sacrifices of one kind or the other. Differences in rewards are inevitable and necessary because positions are not all equally important to society, nor do they require the same talent or training. The main argument advanced by Davis and Moore is, the more important a position is, and the more training a position requires the greater are its rewards that include income and prestige.

The foregoing discussion tends to establish a close association between occupation, income and class. As evident in the present study, it is observed that when compared with parents working in informal sector (grouped as working class), respondents from families whose fathers are employed in formal sector are in better occupational and financial position. However, the occupations may vary in terms of differential functional importance, status and income. Interestingly, the data reveal that, of the total percentage of fathers working in the formal sector, a decent proportion of 34 per cent of them are ex-employees (BEL, BHEL and HAL) of the companies where respondents are currently employed. This further reveals a strong parental projection and expectation of career goals for the respondents that their children pursue similar career goals, secure stable income, with incentives such as medical, housing, children's educational opportunity at low cost, free transport facility, uniform and so on or with perhaps a higher status than their own. Data from the present study reveal that the respondents avail different employee benefits such as medical (92 per cent), children's free education/subsidised fee (72 per cent), employee free uniform facilities and shoes (73 per cent), food subsidy (75 per cent), housing facility (54 per cent), transport facility (10 per cent) and others (84 per cent) that include and other welfare schemes according to company guidelines such as sports facilities, special perks, creche facilities, free training facilities for promotional purposes, free training for skill improvement, cash awards for higher studies and so on. It is obvious that respondents of ex-employees of the companies were in privileged position in terms of resources to which they had access through what is termed as bonding social capital developed through parental networks. This is clearly reflected among the respondents' narratives in the present study. A few of such narratives are provided below:

"My father was a manager in Bharat Electronics Limited. I completed diploma in electronics and communication from a good, reputed institute, Kamla Bai Institute of Polytechnic. My family provided me with the best support and guidance. I joined my parent company as an engineering assistant. I am now a senior engineering assistant. I aim to become a deputy general manager."

A 36-year-old diploma graduate

"My father was a diploma graduate in mechanical engineering. My family is solely responsible for guiding me to join vocational course. After completion of the 10 level, I joined a diploma course in electronics and communication. I joined my present company as an engineering assistant. I am now working as junior section officer."

A 43-year-old diploma graduate

“My father was an ex-BEL employee. After completing ITI, I received in-house training at BEL. I joined as technician Grade C. My current designation is technician Grade A. I am very satisfied with my current job. Company facilities are excellent.”

A 37-year-old ITI graduate

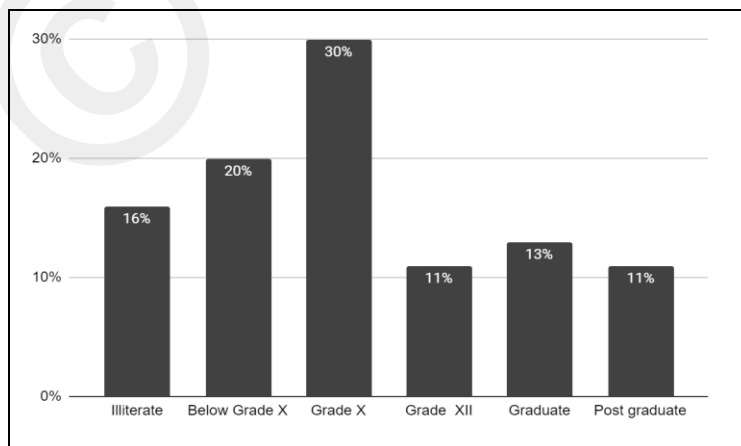
“My father was an ex-HAL employee. My father provided the information source of good institutions offering ITI course and got enrolled in a good institution, with good facilities. I joined as a fitter in my parent company. I am now working as a senior technician.”

A 30-year-old ITI graduate

Sociological studies on the role of education in social mobility in terms of associations between social origins, education and destinations point to the role of education as a major player in determining in social mobility among people of different strata (Goldthorpe, 2016). The main argument is: education influences the choice of occupation, amount of income and lifestyle. Different social classes with different income levels have unequal access to education and the influence on educational achievement as access to education is more for the high-income social strata and low for lower ones. While the above observations find relevance in several studies including the popular Coleman Report (1966), the data of the present study observes that the connections between class and educational participation/success between generations is not a straightforward argument and remains complex. In the present study, when compared with the parental educational participation, informant’s educational participation (68 per cent Grade X and 32 per cent Grade XII) fares comparatively better than that of their parents as indicated in Figures 4 and 5, depicting only 30 per cent of fathers and mothers having completed Grade X, followed by 11 per cent of fathers and 13 per cent of mothers with Grade XII completion.

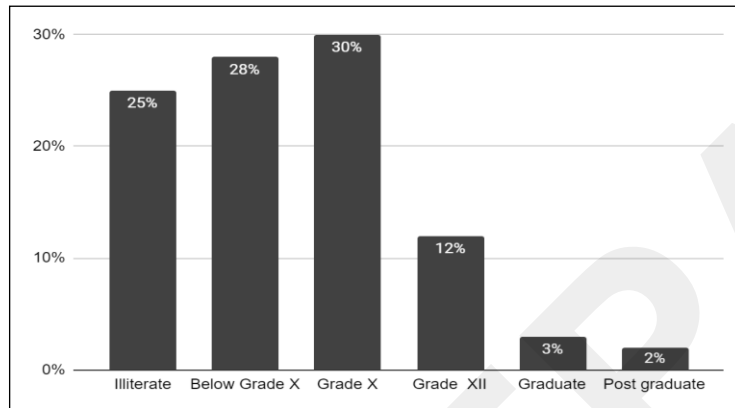
FIGURE 4

Father’s Educational Status



Source: Primary Survey, 2016-17

FIGURE 5

Mother's Educational Status

Source: Primary Survey, 2016-2017

As is evident from the present study, there is intergenerational vertical social mobility between parents and the respondents both in terms of educational participation and occupation. The respondents, especially those whose fathers belong to the working-class category, are able to make successful outcomes with respect to education, career choice and employment. Also, as revealed from the data, when compared with parental educational participation, a higher number of respondents with Grades X and XII completion indicates that education is seen as an instrument of securing a career in vocational field. Interestingly, the present study also found that among the respondents, 28 per cent of them aspired to opt for higher academic studies even after completion of vocational training. Few of them were found enrolled in non-vocational courses either in the evening programme or through correspondence, mostly in the field of social sciences and humanities such as sociology, economics, and English literature. Hence, respondents who come from families with few economic resources are more likely to view vocational profession as a viable career destination by scaling down their educational aspirations; and direct their perceived sense of where they fit in the world of work. The aspiration for such career pathways remains affordable for individuals from lower socioeconomic status (SES). Students from such socioeconomic spaces lack the capital to even try out educational opportunities that are highly valued and monetized. As Appadurai (2004) puts it, the poor lack the accumulated experiences of taking forward one's aspirations through different sets of ends and means. There is no generational transference of such career experiences among the marginalised owing to one's socioeconomic condition.

Apparently, respondents who are currently employed in manufacturing industries where their fathers were employed were in an advantageous position, when compared with respondents without having such background; in accessing to useful information and building social networks that helped them in securing a position in the current job. While, for many of the respondents, such networks offered little chance to influence the decision of vocational career. The findings of the current study, nonetheless, suggest parents play a

significant role in providing the sort of resources and opportunity structures available within the limited resources of families and significant others in the form of social capital and their networks.

According to the respondents, unlike general academic stream, about 80 per cent of the vocational course content consists of practical classes. The respondents shared that as compared to non-vocational course, vocational course is relatively of small-study-load with a good portion of practical and hands-on-training courses that are oriented towards preparing skilled occupations. So, practically organized courses oriented to work seem to have played a motivating role in the respondents' choice of vocational career as another motivating factor. Considering these factors, the present study observed that 19 per cent of the respondents had chosen vocational career as the respondents find vocational education as practical and job oriented. This played an inspiring role for the respondents to study vocational course and training as better career option, that would give them the prospect of getting skills in hands-on-training which the respondents perceive as a safety net when compared with theory driven general academic courses. Also, as discussed earlier on the close relationship between vocational training and quick financial independence, while opting for vocational course, the respondents also felt that they become financially less dependent on parents and become more confident about future occupational career choice. The respondents also believe that in terms of employability opportunity, vocational training and education provide them with an edge over those in general academic courses. A shorter duration hands-on-practical oriented vocational education is also perceived to be of great value for providing the right choice for those who do not wish to go to long years of general academic course. A few narrations provided by the respondents are shared below:

"I am a draughtsman in the mechanical field. After completing my 10th. I joined ITI, wanted to get training in skills, get employment soon unlike others who get degree and remain without a job. Vocational training is practical. I got information about vocational course from advertisements. In newspaper and exhibitions. Luckily, I appeared for an interview and written test."

A 31 years old ITI graduate

"I have a diploma degree in electronics and communication, but my formal qualification is only 10th pass. In today's time even after getting into vocational course, it is difficult to get employment. 60-70 per cent vocational trainees don't get jobs. One can imagine those who are pursuing general courses."

A 45 years old diploma graduate

"After my 12th I joined the Govt ITI, Chacka Trivandrum, and did apprenticeship in Indian Space Research Organisation in Kerala. Father acted as the greatest support for me. I also received a stipend. Job was the only motive for joining a vocational course. I work as a draughtsman in civil construction."

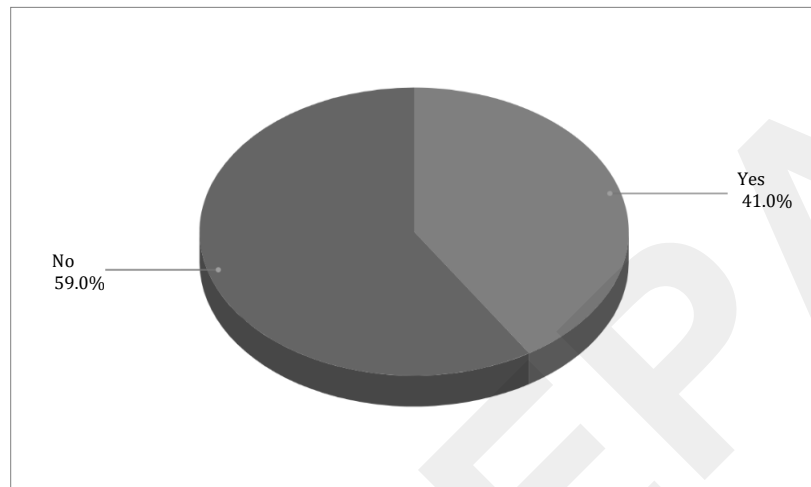
A 34 years old female ITI graduate

Vocational guidance and counselling are widely accepted as a powerful and effective method of support to bridge between education and the world of work for young students while they are still in school. What's more, school career vocational programmes and vocational career counsellors in various skill trades are an excellent way to provide additional and further information about career opportunities and guidance on employment problems and prospects for adolescent students. Furthermore, today, with a wider choice and an ever-increasing competition in labour market, the role of vocational education and training in schools can help in easy navigation of pathways of school-to-work transition for students. Furthermore, the close link to skill and hands-on-practical experience is expected to motivate more practically oriented students to opt for the best available vocational options that are there for them while they are still in school. Students also expect that a well-planned career goal, in turn, will result in an employment destination that fits better with their personal aptitudes and appropriate professional goals. Hence, careful long-term preparation for this challenging adolescence phase of a student's life could transform into a period of carefully planned transition that is occupationally fulfilling and worthy through vocational career guidance.

Despite such manifold benefits of vocational career counselling facilities in schools, the present study depicts a dismal picture as a significant proportion such as 94 per cent of the respondents cited non-availability of such opportunity in their schools. The lack of occupational career counselling facilities in schools as indicated in the present study reflects the larger scenario of most secondary schools in India. This calls for serious attention in understanding policy implementation failure of vocalization of secondary schools initiated in 1970s by the Government of India. Of late, the policy is aligned with the National Skills Qualification Framework, set up by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), 2015, by integrating within it the National Vocational Education Qualification Framework conceptualised by the Ministry. The National Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Policy, under MSDE (2015), envisions integration of 25 per cent of schools with the skill development programme by 2022, while NEP 2020 aims to achieve 50 per cent of student exposure to vocational education by 2025 by integrating the skilling component in all secondary schools.

A close interaction with the respondents further reveals most vocational stream students hail from poor families, which is especially true among respondents who pursued ITI course from government institutions. Despite the overwhelming number of respondents demanding a stipend facility, only 5 per cent received stipend that provided additional inspiration to pursue vocational course. Yet, the respondents pointed out that the stipend grant is generally small and can hardly support their necessities of completing the full vocational course. A universal opinion among the respondents is that vocational education must be subsidised while arrangements such as stipends and scholarships should be provided to overcome the lack of demands for vocational career and its sub-fields among vocational aspirants. Other motivational factors such as peer groups, friends, information through mass media, schoolteachers played a negligible role as vocational guidance/career shapers of the respondents.

FIGURE 6

Employment on Completion of Training

Source: Primary Survey, 2016-2017

As depicted in Figure 6, employability of vocational graduates on training completion turns out to be a discouraging picture, despite parental and respondent's expectations of the prospect of getting employment and becoming financially independent. Based on the present finding, the employability among respondents on completion of vocational course was as low as 41 per cent. This sheds light on the disturbing scenario India currently faces a plethora of challenges in the delivery of quality vocational training programme. Another observation is that a significant number of them did not have the opportunity to be employed in the trade for which they were trained. Furthermore, before joining the present company, most of them were employed in rudimentary jobs in small unorganised private companies on a daily wage basis without employee benefits. According to the respondents, the low employability rate among vocationally trained graduates is that many vocational training institutes do not interact with industries and there is a lack of understanding of industry needs. Hence, absence of industry's intervention in training institutes and lack of networking between the two render many vocational graduates unemployed and their skills irrelevant. What is more, even the placement opportunity during training among the respondents was as low as 30 per cent. This speaks of poor quality of vocational training institutes, and ability to network with industries, company establishments and corporate firms.

Vocational Choice of ITI and Diploma Courses

This section of the study highlights the levels of vocational aspirations such as the choice of ITI or diploma course among the respondents and factors contributing towards the respondent's decisional choice of the said courses. In India, the policy on vocational education and training is presently being offered through polytechnics, diploma courses,

Industrial Training Institutes, certificate courses in apprenticeship and courses run by Advanced Industrial Training Institution and vocational education at the +2 level within the school system. Polytechnics and Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) are recognized as the main institutions that conduct vocational education training programmes outside the school system.

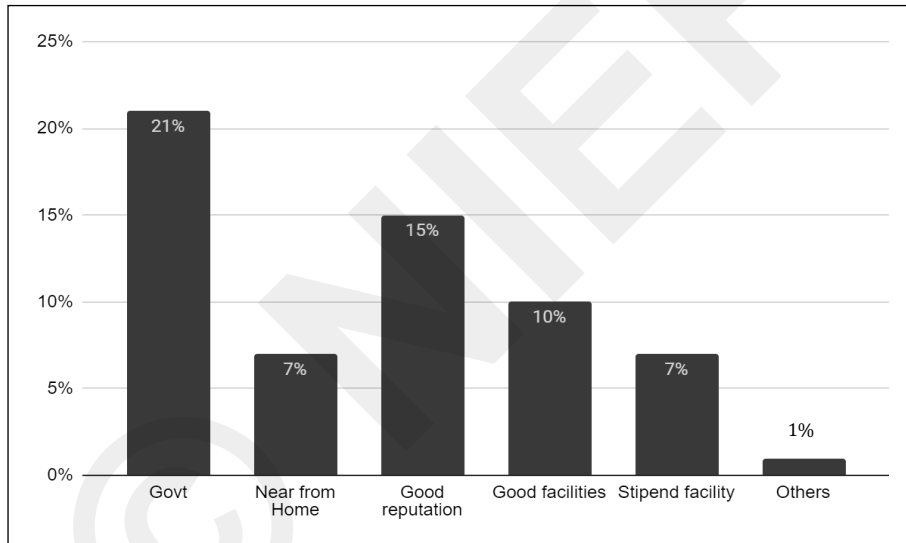
The vocational curricula consist of both theory and practicums, of which a large proportion such as 80 per cent of the ITI curriculum course contains practical classes and hands-on-practical training course, while 20 per cent course content consists of theory curriculum. The ITI course thus prepares a student for hands-on- skilling in areas such as draughtsman, technicians, artisans, mechanics, boiler attendant, and so on. As revealed from the present study, these job roles are predominantly of skilling the trainees to prepare porcelain insulator, solar module testing, preparing of and testing on radical drilling machines, solar photovoltaic, control of robots on shop floor, maintenance of effluent treatment plant/water supply/sanitary drainage system, quality control products and maintenance of machines, operation on solar cell manufacturing machines, process, control testing for setting up of solar plants and so on. Associated with this nature of training such as provided by courses in ITI, there is limited scope of vertical mobility for an ITI graduate employee in occupational hierarchy within reasonable time span. On the contrary, when compared with ITI courses, about 60 per cent of the content of diploma courses consists of theory learning while 40 per cent are of practical nature. The diploma and BE courses prepare students for supervisory or middle level managerial or executive positions in various capacities. The study found that majority of the vocational graduates who have completed diploma and BE courses are in the position of senior mechanic, supervisors, assistant engineers, senior assistant workshop, deputy engineers in manufacturing, construction, trouble shooting, quality assurance, and so on designated in a variety of technical fields such as welding, soldering, electronics, communication, thermal power plantations, building constructions, electricity and so on. The work profile of these employees involves a variety of activities of highly skilled technicians, complex, quality control and inspection.

Hence, the motivation to be trained in a diploma course/BE is directed towards high skill acquisitions of specific job positions. The respondents' aspirations for such job roles could be related to future job satisfaction and upward vertical mobility. In all the industries under study, it is observed that there was overwhelming presence of diploma graduate employees with additional qualifications such as mechanical and electronic engineers, most of who aspire to become specialists, supervisors, senior managers and so on. Also, interestingly, the aspiration for an overwhelming proportion of ITI graduate respondents to become diploma graduates could be noticed in the present research. However, they couldn't reach the threshold of their vocational aspiration owing to several constraints, of which financial conditions and non-possession of the required formal educational qualifications are important factors to cite.

It is thus understood that the vocational aspiration levels among the respondents can be related to what is termed as "the level of aspiration," in which the concept was first used by Dembo (1976) to understand a situation wherein, when an individual finds an imagined future goal too difficult to achieve, he/she negotiates career pathways by setting up an intermediate goal which is easier and feasible than the imagined goal. Citing the present study, it is found that, while a significant proportion of the ITI graduate respondents

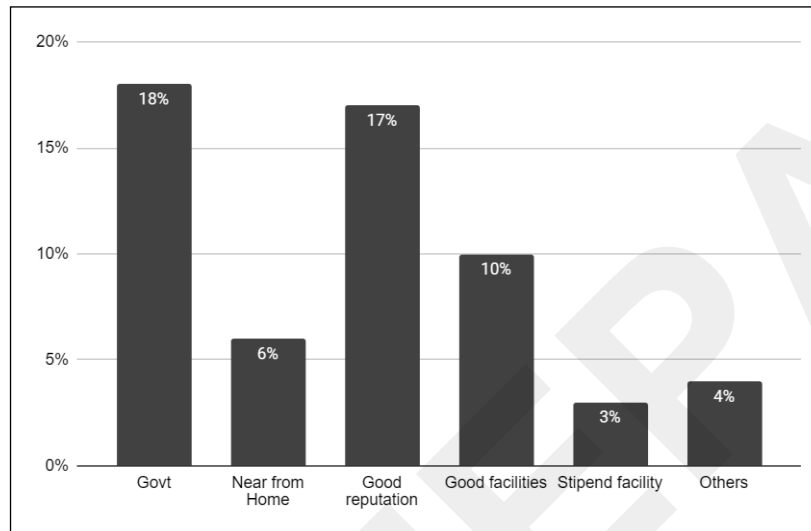
informally shared about their aspirations to join diploma or BE courses in the vocational hierarchy, there were indeed as many as 52 per cent of them who ended up choosing ITI course, as against 46 per cent respondents who opted diploma course and 2 per cent of respondents who opted for BE course. The reasons of these varying vocational aspirational levels, however, could be attributed to a set of factors, as Frank (1941) argues, level of individual aspiration may carry varied meanings, depending upon a set of personal and situational factors that may result in the creation of differential individual aspiration levels. The present study observed such complex set of circumstances while making choices of vocational courses by the respondents. These circumstances could be attributed to various compelling factors such as levels of individual educational achievement of the respondents, their access to differential resources and so on as depicted in Figures 7 and 8.

FIGURE 7
Factors for Choosing an ITI Course



Source: Primary Survey 2016-2017

FIGURE 8

Factors for Choosing a Diploma Course

Source: Primary Survey, 2016-2017

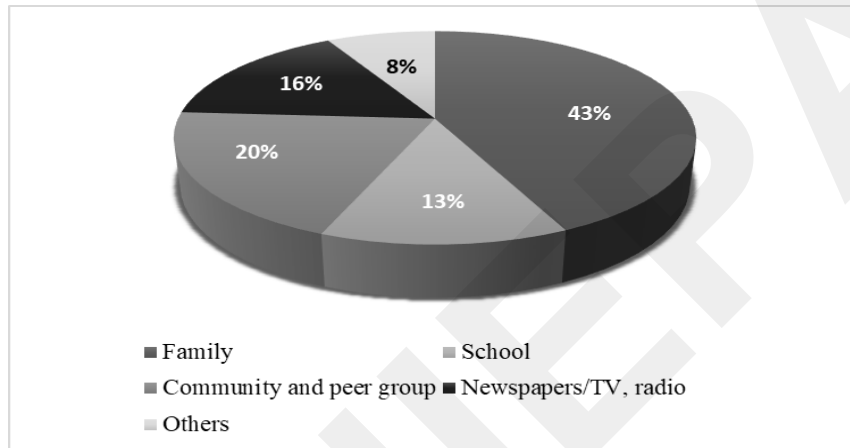
The findings of the study as illustrated in Figures 7 and 8 reveal that there is a significant association between choice of courses and management wise of institutions. The study finds that the largest number of ITI graduates such as 21 per cent got enrolled in government institutions, rather than opting for private-aided institutions. This may be owing to several reasons including waiving off tuition fees, provision of stipends and scholarships, etc, and overall low expenditure in completing the full course of the study. This was followed by a share of 15 per cent respondents who stated that reputation of the institute was important for choosing ITI institution. Reputation of the institution may range from availability of various resources such as good infra-structural facilities, up-to-date practical equipment, vocational laboratories, well-trained and adequate teaching manpower competitive admission policy rules, and most importantly, impressive passing out rates and employability among graduates who have been trained in the institution. Along the lines, 10 per cent respondents cited good facilities provided by the institution and 7 per cent respondent considered stipend facility as reasons for choosing their training institutions while favourable distance between home and the training institution accounted for as many as 7 per cent of the respondents when considering to enrol in ITIs.

Among diploma trained employees, 18 per cent respondents made decision about institutional choice based on management by government bodies. This was followed by 17 per cent respondents who choose a particular institution based on good reputation of the institution followed by 10 per cent respondents who had chosen good facilities provided by institution; while 4 per cent of respondents opted diploma owing to the influence by others such as friends, school, peer groups, neighbourhoods, etc. In contrast to ITI graduate employees, availability of financial support stipend/scholarship did not make the same

motivational level as the ITI trained employees while considering the choice of an institution for diploma course as only a small proportion such as 3 per cent of the total respondents felt that they were motivated to join the institution because of financial support in the form of scholarship/stipend.

FIGURE 9

Sources Learnt about ITI and Polytechnic Institutes



Source: Primary Survey, 2026-2017

Figure 9 depicts various sources of vocational institutional information among the respondents while they were making decisional choices about joining training institutions. As revealed by Figure 9, it is found that family emerged as the most important source of information since as the highest number of respondents such as 43 per cent considered family having played a significant role in identifying a particular institution appropriate for pursuing a training in vocational course. It suggests that parents have helped their children in evaluating available resources and information related to training opportunities and uses the information in the respondent's decision process. Community such as friends, neighbourhood, relatives, local clubs played second most important source of information that as many as 20 per cent respondents considered community and peer group as an important source while choosing a particular institution for training. The third most important source of information is the mass media in the form of newspaper, television, radio as a source by which the respondents come to learn about the institution they joined. Mass media such as television, radio, newspapers play a significant role in spreading awareness about vocational/skill courses, institutions, and career paths. Such information can help aspiring young students to make appropriate decisions and interventions for their career trajectories and future career goals. Considering such an important role of mass media in disseminating information, about career courses, mass media failed to create the much-desired impact on the respondents as only 16 per cent respondents found the medium as the source of information of training institutions. Equal concern is about the marginal role played by schools in disseminating career/occupational information guidance, facilitation

and transmission of existing vocational/skill policy institutional information and so on. Unlikely, the present study found a low proportion of only 13 per cent respondents having relied on school as the only source of information about the vocational training institution they joined. This was followed by 8 per cent of the respondents who learnt about training institutions through other sources such as peer groups, friends, and neighbourhoods.

In conclusion, vocational career aspirations, employment goals and overall life chances of the respondents are mostly limited to and shaped by the status of family income, occupation, and other forms of limited capital available within the family structure and its networks. Family/parental factor in the form of social capital emerged as critical intervening element as vocational career shapers among the respondents to override the influence of subsidiary factors such as schools, teachers, career counselling guidance, mass media, peer groups, friends, neighbourhoods and so on. The study also depicts a significant upward vertical social mobility between generations in class destinations irrespective of class origins. A considerable proportion of respondents from working-class families could make upward vertical social mobility with more successful outcomes in education, career and life chances. This is despite coming from disadvantaged background and economic marginality generally considered as closing opportunities for the respondents given the limited social capital support and networks that could be instrumental for vocational aspirations.

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Improving Academic Research in Indian Higher Education Institutions: An Enquiry into Teachers' Perspectives

Sangeeta Angom*

Abstract

The importance of research and innovation is more critical today than ever before for the development and progress of a nation. The Indian higher education system, one of the largest in the world, is still teaching oriented, and with low research output. In recent years, there has been a strong drive to improve research performance in universities. Against this micro context, the paper revisits the meaning and importance of academic research; investigated the status of PhD and MPhil education; identified the currently focussed areas of research and explored the challenges in conducting research by the faculty members. The paper presented here is based on the findings of a survey which was conducted to explore the experiences of the teachers in research at public universities in India. Data were collected through a mailed questionnaire from 29 public universities/college teachers. Findings confirm that research must be an integral part of any academic institution and therefore promotion of research in a huge and diverse country like India is a must to enable the nation to evolve as a knowledge reservoir in international arena. Challenges that were reported include fund constraints, heavy teaching loads, lack of infrastructure facilities, lack of adequate and administrative institutional supports, and lack of research culture. In addition, some factors responsible for the poor quality of academic research, like dilution of research spirit, low quality publication, irrelevant research, lack of interdisciplinary collaboration, original and sparkling research, etc, were identified. Implications are discussed in the light of the findings and recommendations formulated for future research directions.

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Introduction

India, one of the rapidly growing economies of the world, is also having the largest higher education system in the world, next to China's. The Indian higher education system has around 1,043 universities, 42,343 colleges and 11,779 stand-alone institutions. However, the Indian higher education system is still facing major problems, like a severely fragmented educational ecosystem; less emphasis on cognitive skills development and learning outcomes; a rigid separation of disciplines with early specialisation and streaming of students into narrow areas of study; limited access in socio-economically disadvantaged areas; limited teacher and institutional autonomy; inadequate mechanisms for merit-based career management and progression of faculty and institutional leaders; lesser emphasis on research at most of the universities and colleges, and lack of competitive peer-reviewed research funding across disciplines; suboptimal governance and leadership of higher education institutions (HEIs); an ineffective regulatory system; and large affiliating universities resulting in low standards of undergraduate education (Government of India (GOI), 2020b). Further, in a world increasingly propelled by technology, university research is the foundation of any nation's economic growth. Thus, research and innovation are now becoming important functions of higher education worldwide. The National Education Policy document of 2020 rightly notes that "India has a long tradition of research and knowledge creation, in disciplines ranging from science and humanities to art and literature to phonetics and languages to medicine and agriculture. This needs to be further strengthened to make India lead research and innovation in the 21st century."

During the decades since India's independence, there has been much development of research institutions/universities that focussed on national wealth development rather than primarily a vehicle for liberal education of undergraduates. Despite the critical importance of research, the research and innovation investment in India is only 0.69 per cent of GDP as compared to 2.8 per cent in the United States of America, 4.3 per cent in Israel and 4.2 per cent in South Korea (GOI, 2020a). This can be further linked to the statement of 12th Five Year Plan of India which addressed why HEIs in India continued to have limited research capacity as. It said: "Low levels of funding and segregation of the country's research and development (R&D) institutions from universities and colleges have been responsible for the weak research capacity of Indian universities. It is disappointing to note that even the country's top universities remain largely teaching-focussed with limited research and doctoral education.... The lack of research orientation, even in the best of the Indian institutions, is reflected in their standing in global rankings, most of which rely heavily on measurable indices of research performance. In terms of innovation and the creation of intellectual property, (the concerned patent department in India) receives only a small number of worldwide patent applications and hardly any Indian academic institution figures in the list of top applicants for patent filing." In this context, one may need to introspect and to have further dialogue on why research output of our HEIs is still low and how to improve it.

Literature Review

Research, one of the primary functions of any true university, is an inseparable part of scholarship in any field. According to Dillon *et al*, (1972), the term research must be considered to embrace all those creative acts whereby man either extends his knowledge of the universe or makes it a better or more beautiful place in which to be. Considered in that sense, the concept of teachers who are actively involved in scholarship is one of the cornerstones of the educational system. Since the main function of any university has always been the search for truth, research in all fields needs to flourish in the academic atmosphere. Historically, universities have been involved in activities for providing both education and research. Alfred North Whitehead (1967), a philosopher, stressed that the fundamental purpose of a university is to impart information more imaginatively for the society and thereby creating an atmosphere of excitement which is arising from imaginative consideration transform knowledge. Taking this very idea of Whitehead, Penfield *et al* (2013) also added that one of the fundamental reasons for undertaking research is to generate and transform knowledge that would benefit society. Buffo *et al* (1999), stated the 'invasion' of research properly only began in the 19th century and it thereafter maintained the basic orientation of academic disciplines. Research has become an essential and increasingly important function of the universities for knowledge production as well as research application and knowledge intensive services. Moreover, with the expansion and diversification of its missions, the universities have become subject to multiple sectoral policies and policy interests. Further, they are increasingly affected by science, technology, and innovation policies, as well as by regional development policies. Recent studies show that their role and status as places of research are undergoing major changes which seem to have common characteristics across the countries (Gibbons *et al*, 1994; OECD, 1999).

Some scholars opine that universities contribute indirectly, and sometimes directly, to economic progress by fulfilling their research functions. Reflecting on Geuna (1999)'s third social goal for the university system in European nations --- to increase the knowledge base by pursuing knowledge for its own sake and for the creation of wealth --- Vessuri (2008) opines that scholarship and research should be pursued by universities, both for their inherent value and to produce a stock of useful knowledge that might be applied elsewhere for the benefit of society. He further says that HEIs have come to serve specific training needs and support needs of the knowledge-based economy at the local, regional and national levels, and are seen as direct participants in the process of economic development. Allen (2010) expressed the view that research is investigation and exploration of possibilities, directed at eliminating those that do not correspond with the real world, thereby achieving increasingly accurate descriptions of reality and explanations of our experience of it. He also revealed that some funding policies seem to have been badly devised and they do obstruct research rather than promote it. Thus, he suggested the need to provide able and motivated researchers with the resources need for advance knowledge and understanding.

Hazelkorn (2004) opines that the amount of research activities that are produced by HEIs reflect its quality and status. However, in regard to the development of a research culture, they face problems like low level institutional setup, lack of resources for research activities, stress of the teaching workload, and lack of required research skills among faculty. According to Memon (2007), research develops curiosity and provides relevant solutions to concerned problems but there are factors that become hindrances to the development of a

research culture, like the involvement of only specific group of people in research related activities and lack of research funding and facilities. Taking the case of Pakistan's public universities, he identified the problems, in terms of the environmental, institutional and personal factors, which are responsible for a low research output. Environmental factors like collaborative situation, mentoring, encouraging group environment, communication between faculty members and head of department, provision of resources and facilities for professional development of faculty members do motivate the faculty members to utilise their individual characteristics in order to increase their research output (Bland, *et al*, 2006). Patel (2016), in his articles relating to research culture in Indian universities, argues that in order to flourish, any activity needs not only funds but also the adequate socio-cultural support. The scarcity of both material and cultural resources for science and higher education in India is evident from the account of the inadequate financial resources and deficiency of research culture in the universities. He also mentions that successful transmission of the scientific culture, as built by the great scientists from one generation to another, both in terms of quantity and quality, needs a socialisation process whereby senior members of the community educate the members of the next generation. Though such a process is often latent and less visible, it is an inevitable part of scientific activity. He rightly said that if India aspires to be a world power in the 21st century, it will have to become a knowledge society by promoting research not only by guaranteeing substantial financial support, but also by regenerating a research culture and ceaselessly transmitting it among the coming generations of students. Considering the fact of declining standards of higher education and research in Indian universities, Shah (2005) points out that there is hardly any attempt made by the government to address the problems arising out of the long-established basic structure of the university system and to deal with the changing ground realities. Thinking along the need for structural reforms, he suggests that the political class must avoid treating universities and research institutes as instruments of their power. A healthy university-government relationship is the only way to develop and encourage a culture of merit in the arena of higher education and research.

Various other factors which are directly or indirectly responsible for low research performance in the institutions are university policies, mission and goals (Meigounpoory and Ahmadi, 2012); lack of time for teaching and research activities (Salazar-Clemena and Almonte Acosta, 2007); time allocated for both research and teaching activities (Hardre, *et al*, 2011); and lack of research skills (Salazar-Clemena & Almonte-Acosta, 2007). Having proper infrastructure facilities like laboratory, computers, internet and library, etc, is also a must for good research activities in an institution. Besides, personal factors include research knowledge, research experience and encouragement for research activities (Meigounpoory & Ahmadi, 2012). Iqbal *et al* (2018) point out that environmental and institutional factors were not prevalent at appropriate levels in public universities in Punjab. Insufficient institutionalisation of a scientific culture in Indian academic institutions, for some or other historical reason, is a glaring weak point of the Indian system of scientific research and higher education (Patel, 2016). According to Sawyerr (2004: 211), research capacity includes the quality of the research environment, funding, adequate infrastructure, research incentives, and time available to the researcher, while the negative institutional conditions include poor infrastructure and lack of funding impose clear limitations on research and research capacity development. Weng'ua *et al* (2018) identified the challenges encountered by university faculty members while undertaking research and scholarly publishing, such as

inadequate research funding and infrastructure, poorly funded libraries, insufficient time for research and training, and a poor research culture. Further, they recommended that universities need to motivate and facilitate their faculty members to undertake research and publication.

Huenneke (2017) points out that many public universities face pressure to expand research activities and to increase the external research funding. However, conflicts within the faculty roles and other aspects of university operations influence the effectiveness of strategies for increasing research activity. Further, increased research activity leads both to increased revenue and to higher rankings, in turn leading to more student applications and increased tuition (Litwin, 2009). Expanding research, however, can cause tensions with traditional expectations for teaching, service, and outreach (Neumann and Terosky 2007; Romainville 1996). Increasing the focus on research also presents challenges in managing risk and regulatory compliance for institutions (Rosenzweig, 1987). Chatterjee & Moulik (2006) say that the state of doctoral education and academic research in India is poor, and the country has scant representation among the world's great universities. They explored several probable causes for this in terms of resources / facilities / opportunities granted to PhD students, faculty quality, financial resources, academic leadership, and other issues. A strong barrier of the doctoral research in India is "university culture and research environment" (Reddy *et al*, 2016).

Regarding social science research in India, Vaidyanathan (2001) reflects on the unawareness of the policy-makers about the existing sources of information and their content. Though the government spends money to collect data from the district and the block levels, but it is difficult to ensure quality of the data collected. Such efforts go wasted in as much as the detailed data are, all too often, not processed or analysed. Further, he argues that with a few exceptions, the mechanisms for screening of project proposals, monitoring their progress and reviewing the output leave much to be desired. On having limited scholarly and policy value of these research projects, the reasons he points are the funding agencies' narrow and short-term view of policy relevant research, low completion rates of projects, absence of mechanism of critical review of final reports, inaccessibility of the information on ongoing and completed projects and no arrangement for archiving the studies and the data for future reference. Besides, research institutions are facing increasingly severe difficulties due to internal weaknesses in the institutions and inadequacy and uncertainty of funds to the researchers. Finally, he suggests the following: i) Increased funding must be accompanied by measures to ensure its effective use; ii) Funding agencies should be encouraged to prepare a broad agenda covering both current and emerging issues on which more information and analytical studies are needed, in consultation with experts from both government and non-government institutions; iii) Only such individual research proposals must be entertained as are relevant to the agenda as well as the conscious effort to support sustained institution-based work on well-defined themes would benefit both government and research; iv) A rigorous and transparent procedure must be followed for screening, approval and monitoring projects; v) Measures must be adopted to ensure greater accountability of non-government researchers and institutions for both the quantum and quality of work they do with public funding, and vi) The system must promote the culture of judging the quality of research output by peer review process. thinking on a line similar to other scholars in the area of science education and research, Desraju (2008) pointed out that a notable reason why the Indian scientists have degraded to the point where they are unable

to recognise quality anymore, is the greatest damage that administrative and bureaucratic setup has inflicted so far. In this respect, he is also of the view that the government should involve itself less in the day-to-day running of science and scientific establishments. It should restrict itself to broad policy questions with societal, strategic and humanitarian implications. Moreover, the university system should be re-established as the primary agency where all the teaching and fundamental research is carried out.

According to Ahmed (2020), though Indian higher education has been experiencing fast improvements in terms of access, affordability, quality, and relevance, the sector needs to be drastically re-energised and rejuvenated through innovation and excellence --- both in academics and research. For that purpose, there is an urgent need for reassessment of the research policies, procedures and practices of the country followed by brainstorming deliberations on the challenges emerging out of the fast-changing international scenario. He also feels that Indian higher education institutions need to develop a goal-oriented and focussed blueprint to achieve the highest possible standards in research and teaching-learning in order to keep pace with the changing world. Finally, he suggests ten most important measures that need to be taken to enhance research and promote research quality at the higher education institutions, such as research funding, infrastructure for research, adequate, qualified, trained well-oriented and specialised manpower, goal oriented and focused research policies, incentives for research, collaborative research, contextual and need based research, translational research, and maintaining integrity and ethics in research. Besides, in order to realise the dream of transforming universities into future-ready higher education institutions of global standards within a span of 10-15 years, the sector needs a dynamic political and academic leadership, visionary governance, and dedicated workforce.

Building on the existing literature, the main aim of the present study was to investigate the challenges of faculty members in conducting research in Indian HEIs and how this affects the quality and productivity of research by the faculty. This paper sought to find out what academic research means for teachers in these institutions. The paper also brings out status of academic research degree programmes of the universities. In this light, the study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. How do faculty members conceptualise academic research and its importance?
2. What is the status of academic research degree programmes of the universities in India?
3. How do faculty members view the quality of research in Indian HEIs in general and in their respective institutions in particular?
4. What challenges the faculty members faced in conducting academic research in their institutions?
5. What improvements do they perceive for productivity of quality academic research?

The purpose of the present paper is to bring out those key areas of importance to be addressed by the institutions and the authorities for bringing transformation in academic research in higher education. Therefore, responses to these questions could lead to implications for policymaking concerning the development of research institutions in India.

Methodology and Respondents' Profile

A qualitative research method has been applied here in order to understand the exploratory reasons and to assay how and why a specific programme or phenomenon operates in the way it is working. For data collection, the study adopted a qualitative survey by using a questionnaire of only open-ended questions. It partly applies the phenomenological approach that seeks to describe the meaning and essence of research by exploring it from the perspective of those who experienced it (Tehrani *et al*, 2015). The phenomenological research in the present study is based on a pool of samples, and of data from multiple samples, which highlight many possible situations. This approach helps in describing the lived experiences of an individual, that is, the faculty, of research in their respective universities. This approach also studies the phenomena that have impacted a faculty. Moreover, this approach highlights the specifics and identifies a phenomenon that is as perceived by an individual in a situation. Through this method, the author tries to extract the purest data that have not been generated before. The type of questions included here allowed the subjects to be at ease and open up.

The survey was conducted by the author as a part of the workshop on "Research, Innovation and Technology in Higher Education," organised by the author in connection with a regular programme of the institute in 2019. The respondents, who were also the participants of the workshop, were the university professors and college principals. The survey was conducted in the month of January 2019 and its specific aim was to explore the teachers' conceptual understanding about academic research; to find out the focus areas of academic research as well as their views on quality of research in the universities and colleges; and to identify the issues and challenges faced by the respondents in conducting academic research. The respondents were chosen through a purposive sampling exercise. For the survey, the author used a self-developed questionnaire and it was mailed to the respondents, whereafter the filled-up questionnaires were collected either in soft or hard version. The data collected from the exercise were analysed mainly by a content-based method. Further, disorganised data generated through the questionnaire were coded manually by labelling and organising the qualitative data into relevant categories. Through coding, the author could scan the data line-by-line to develop a thorough understanding of its contents. This entailed making annotations and highlighting the text to identify the recurring themes. In the process of categorising open-ended answers thematically, each response was flagged with a code (a word or simple phrase that summarises the idea). List of the codes were determined from the responses which were found important. Then, as the author proceeded to analyse the responses, she also kept on adding to the list of codes. She also tried to be consistent with the code used once. For deciding on the key findings, the author tallied the number of times each code appeared; this was done to determine the key issues. Using the frequency values, the most frequently occurring criteria were selected. In this process, the criteria that were too uncommon, less important and those showing ambiguity were rejected. The author used verbatim or excerpts to bring the findings to life.

Further, in order to understand the status of PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) and MPhil (Master of Philosophy) degree programme in terms of enrolment and output, the author used secondary data from the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) report, issued by the Government of India and UGC's annual reports. The secondary data were analysed quantitatively by using cross tabulations and percentages.

Out of 36 sample respondents, 29 returned the filled-in questionnaires. The response rate was, thus, 80.6 per cent. The distribution of the respondents, who were mainly from the public universities while a few were from aided colleges, was given in Table 1. With respect to the type of institutions, 57.7 per cent of respondents were from state public universities while 0.03 per cent come from the aided colleges (colleges which are not purely funded by the government), and the remaining respondents included those from the central universities (19.2 per cent) and government colleges (15.3 per cent). It is evident that the sample is not fairly distributed as there was no representation from the private institutions. This is due to the reason that the respondents were the participants of a national level workshop which was conducted only for public institutions.

As far as gender is concerned, there were more males (68.9 per cent) than females (31 per cent). As far as disciplines of the respondents are concerned, they consisted of social sciences 37.9 per cent, Science 31 per cent, Education 17.2 per cent, Commerce 6.9 per cent, Pharmacy 3.4 per cent and Technology 3.4 per cent. This composition reflects the proportional distribution of Indian public higher education between social sciences and science, barring a few subjects like technology and pharmacy.

The respondents were mainly university professors (44.8 per cent) and college principals (24.1 per cent), smaller proportions of assistance professors (17.2 per cent), associate professors (6.9 per cent) and readers (3.4 per cent). As for the teaching and research experience, only 3.8 per cent of respondents had below 10 years of teaching experience and while a majority (44.8 per cent) had a teaching experience of 10-20 years. Similarly, a majority of the respondents (44.8 per cent) were with 21-31 years of research experience and a few (3.4 per cent) had the longer years of such experience.

TABLE 1
Profile of the Respondents

<i>Particulars</i>		<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Type of Institution	State Universities	14	19.2
	Central Universities	08	57.7
	Government College	03	0.08
	Aided College	04	15.3
Gender	Male	20	68.9
	Female	09	31
Designation	Assistant Professor	05	17.2
	Associate Professor	02	6.9
	College Principal	07	24.1
	Professor	13	44.8
	Pro-Vice Chancellor	01	3.4
	Reader	01	3.4
Experience in Teaching	Below 10 years	01	3.8
	10-20 years	13	44.8
	21-31 years	09	31
	31 years and above	06	20.7
Experience in Research	Below 10 years	04	13.8
	10-20 year	11	37.9
	years	13	44.8
	31 years and above	01	3.4
Disciplines	Science	09	31
	Social Science	11	37.9
	Education	05	17.2
	Commerce	02	6.9
	Pharmacy	01	3.4
	Technology	01	3.4

Source: Author's tabulation

Findings and Discussions

The study has developed five main themes and subthemes, as are reflected from the research questions. These were revisiting the concept and importance of academic research; an overview of the status of academic research degree education; current changes and focus areas of research; quality of academic research; and challenges in conducting academic research.

Revisit the Concept and Importance of Academic Research

Out of 29 respondents, only 17 answered to the open-ended question, "What is academic research and why is it important?" This question aimed to 'get at' the insights of the respondents concerning meaning and importance of research. The responses to this question were analysed qualitatively by reading through words and sentences, notices recurring items, create categories and describe them. Thus, the analysis of data follows the steps of reading and coding data. Through coding, it was able to create and describe patterns and categories, then could develop themes. The findings from the analysis of an open-ended question on the theme, even though only a small sample, provided rich conceptualisation of academic research in various ways. Consistent with the prior literature described above, respondents reported a variety of meaning of academic research and its importance. The findings revealed that academic research involves systematic work done by a student or a professional to increase the quantum of knowledge. Moreover, it is careful and systematic investigation in field of knowledge to establish facts and principles. So, its main purpose is to seek the truth and new knowledge which can enhance positive behaviours, academics and social interactions. It is used to establish or confirm facts, reaffirm the results of previous work, solve new or existing problems.

One of the respondents noted: "Academic research is a systematic investigation into a situation or an issue, and to have a fresh understanding of the problem encountered in various aspects concerning human life with a view to understand the 'why' of it and if possible, to find a solution to it. It also involves accessing and analysing various forms of information before concluding about an issue. Sometimes it may stem from a mere inquisition into a subject purely for academic purpose. It aids in removing human maladies and making life better and easier than before." In other words, to this respondent, it is purported to enhance the quality of life of the people and to provide continuous light and vision in the framing of policies and programmes of a nation that would enliven the life of its citizens. Furthermore, academic research is investigation and writing based upon the idea of scientific inquiry by making assumptions about what he or she expects to find after conducting research on a topic. Another respondent said: "Academic research comprises creative and systematic work undertaken to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humans, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications."

As the foundation of discovery research, it evaluates, understands, and characterises a particular knowledge domain to its core such that any exercise with that knowledge becomes easy, comprehensive, and reproducible. What research is and what are its importance can be summarised from the words of a science professor: "Academic research, to me, is the foundation of discovery research that evaluates, understands and characterizes a particular knowledge domain to its core such that any exercise with that knowledge becomes easy, comprehensive and reproducible. In other words, academic research gives a structure to a general consensus that such a knowledge domain can exist on its own mettle and that further extension of the same could be beneficial to the human existence and life goals. However, any kind of research, academic or not, cannot be insular. It is and shall remain inexorably tied to society and its needs. Societies have changed over time, and consequently, so has science. For example, during the first half of the 20th century, when the world was enmeshed in war, governments made funds available for scientists to pursue

research with wartime applications — and so science progressed in that direction, unlocking the mysteries of nuclear energy. At other times, market forces have led to scientific advances. For example, modern corporations looking for income through medical treatment, drug production, and agriculture, have increasingly devoted resources to biotechnology research, yielding breakthroughs in genomic sequencing and genetic engineering. And on the flipside, modern foundations funded by the financial success of individuals may invest their money in ventures that they deem to be socially responsible, encouraging research on topics like renewable energy technologies. Science is not static; it changes over time, reflecting shifts in the larger societies in which it is embedded.”

It must be further noted here that some scholars’ views on importance of academic research was about generating and transforming knowledge for the benefit of the society (Penfield *et al*, 2013; Vessuri, 2008); to create of nation’s wealth (Geuna, 1999); and is for the need of advancement of knowledge and understanding (Allen, 2010). The findings revealed some of the important features of research as perceived by the respondents.

Firstly, research must be an integral part of any academic institutions and research should be as per the local needs. One of the respondents commented on this and said: “A nation cannot develop on borrowed ideas, so institutions need to do research as per its environment needs and availability of materials to solve local issues.” Further, research as an academic activity not only add new knowledge in the existing one but helps to expose students with practical knowledge and improve analytical skills to have in-depth understanding on any topic. Thus, it enhances the knowledge and understanding of the subject, clarifies the confusion, improves the knowledge about the methods and issues, and helps them to know how the original study originated by understanding the rationale.

Secondly, as initial stage of research, the academic research through finding truth and new knowledge, plays an important role in sustainable socioeconomic development of a country. So, it is imperative to have knowledge-driven growth based on innovations or new ideas. In recent decades, the commercialisation of education has become more apparent and the need for using marketing tools is greater than before. Therefore, academic research must contribute to enhance the quality of life, and the knowledge gained through research may felicitate growth of the country as well as solves many social and economic problems. Thus, quality research helps in the sustainable inclusive and economic development of the country as well as the wellbeing of humankind. The role of academic research for developing a nation and a society was thus summed up by one respondent: “In a globalised world, the role of research in an academic institution is significant for its sustainability and development, and it is imperative to have knowledge-driven growth based on innovation. The quest for knowledge is the basic principle behind research. The quality of research work directly translates to the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom, thereby benefiting the students, the society and the country. The promotion of research in a huge and diverse country like India will help the nation evolve as a knowledge reservoir in the international arena. It is well accepted that academic research has contributed enormously to finding solutions to too many problems faced by our society and industries. There have been multiple instances when industries have turned to academics for finding solutions to vital issues. Needless to say, academic research is an integral part of global development.”

Thirdly, the quest for knowledge is the basic principle behind research and the quality of research is directly translated into the quality of classroom teaching and learning for benefitting the students, the society, and the country. The promotion of research in a huge

and diverse country like India will help the nation evolve as a knowledge reservoir in the international arena. Further, academic research has contributed enormously to finding solutions for many problems faced by our society and industries. There have been multiple instances when industries have turned to academics for finding solutions to vital issues. Academic research should lead to policy formulation of a country besides addition of new knowledge. Thus, systematic, and objective investigation of social phenomena should be the foundation for a country's policy making.

Finally, academic research promotes the creation of new thought which is possible only in a country that allows free thinking to its citizens. It is also exploration of new facts, re-establishing or refuting the existing body of knowledge by logical conclusions and scientific procedure. It allows the people to be in constant of new knowledge.

Overview the Status of Academic Research Degree Education

Doctoral and MPhil education is intimately connected with academic research, which is typically conducted in higher educational institutions. In India, these two programmes are mostly run by universities and university level institutes, while only 2.7 per cent of the total colleges offer PhD degree programmes. The total enrolment in higher education increased from 34.6 million in 2015-16 to 38.5 million in 2019-20 with an increased enrolment at the levels of PhD, undergraduate (UG), postgraduate (PG) diploma and certificate (see Table 2). Further, at most of the levels of study, except MPhil and PG, male enrolment numbers exceeded those of the females. In 2019-20, out of the total enrolment in higher education, 79.5 per cent of the students were enrolled in the UG level programmes, while enrolment at PhD and MPhil level was lower than 1 per cent of the total enrolment. This shows that academic research in terms of PhD and MPhil education is still low in the Indian HEIs. This may be due to three factors: i) Students prefer to go in for a job after graduation, ii) Students mostly prefer the technical and professional courses for graduate degree, and iii) There is lack of motivation for pursuing PhD and MPhil education.

TABLE 2

Percentage Share of Student Enrolment at Different Levels, 2015-16 and 2019-20

<i>Enrolment/ Year</i>	<i>Per cent of Male</i>	<i>Per cent Share of Enrolment out of Grand Total</i>							
		<i>PhD</i>	<i>M.Phil.</i>	<i>PG</i>	<i>UG</i>	<i>PG- Diploma</i>	<i>Diploma</i>	<i>Certificate</i>	<i>Integrated</i>
2015-16	53.8	0.37 (58.9)	0.07 (41.1)	11.3 (46.4)	79.28 (53.7)	0.66 (53.7)	7.3 (70.4)	0.42 (59.6)	0.45 (57.5)
2019-20	50.9	0.52 (55)	0.06 (37.8)	11.2 (43.1)	79.5 (50.8)	0.59 (53.5)	6.9 (65.1)	0.41 (56.8)	0.77 (62.5)

Source: AISHE, 2015-16 & 2019-20

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentage shares of male students

There are also state-wise and discipline-wise variations in the enrolment number of scholars at MPhil and PhD levels. In the five years from 2015-16 to 2019-20, PhD enrolment increased significantly from 24 thousand to 0.2 million with an increasing percentage share of female scholars. Table 3 below brings out the enrolment trend in research in India from 1973-74 to 2019-20. Notable findings from analysis of the table are as given below.

1. Till the year 1977-78, the percentage share of enrolment in research below 1 per cent of the grand total of enrolment in higher education. But from 1977-78 onwards till 1996-97, the percentage share of research has been consistent at 1.1 per cent. But it went down below 1 per cent from 1997-98 onwards. It was only 0.67 per cent in 2002-03 and it was still below 0.8 per cent till 2007-08. Suddenly, in the year 2009-10, this percentage share went past 0.80 per cent. If we see the decadal trend from 2009-10 to 2019-20, then we see a decreasing trend, though it has been somewhat inconsistent.
2. The absolute enrolment number in research has increased drastically in the last four decades --- from a mere 16,417 in 1973-74 to 2,26,484 in 2019-20. However, the percentage share is still showing a decreasing trend. This needs serious thought about how to motivate more students to pursue research.
3. The percentage increase of enrolment in research from the preceding years shows inconsistency, and the maximum increase happened during the year 1994-95, at 27.2 per cent over its preceding year of 1993-94. There was a minus increase in percentage terms, from the preceding years during years, i.e., 1979-80, 1997-98, 2014-15 and 2015-16.

TABLE 3

Enrolment Trend in Research from 1973-74 to 2019-20

<i>Year</i>	<i>Percentage Share of the Grand Total of Enrolment in HE</i>	<i>Enrolment</i>	<i>Increase over the Preceding Year</i>	<i>Per cent Increase</i>
1973-74	0.7	16417	*	*
1974-75	0.8	17977	1560	9.5
1975-76	0.7	18381	404	2.2
1976-77	0.9	21910	3529	19.2
1977-78	1.1	26259	4349	19.8
1978-79	1.1	30078	3819	14.5
1979-80	1.1	29570	-508	-1.7
1980-81	1.2	32171	2601	8.8
1982-83	-	-	-	-
1983-84	1.1	36249	4078	12.7
1984-85	1.1	38160	1911	5.2
1985-86	1.1	39280	1120	2.9
1986-87	1.1	40500	1220	3.0
1987-88	1.1	41958	1458	3.6

Cont...

Improving Academic Research in Indian Higher Education Institutions

1988-89	1.1	44821	2863	6.4
1989-90	1.1	46716	1895	4.1
1990-91	1.1	48678	1962	4.2
1992-93	1.1	52853	4175	8.6
1994-95	1.1	67253	14400	27.2
1995-96	1.1	70682	3429	5.0
1996-97	1.1	74310	3628	5.1
1997-98	0.9	63207	-11103	-14.9
1998-99	0.9	66241	3034	4.6
1999-2000	0.8	68369	2128	3.1
2000-2001	-	-	-	-
2001-02	-	-	-	-
2002-2003	0.67	62213	-6156	-9.0
2003-04	-	-	-	-
2004-05	-	-	-	-
2005-06	0.64	70716	8503	13.7
2006-07	-	-	-	-
2007-08	0.66	82277	11561	16.3
2008-09	0.70	95872	13595	16.5
2009-10	0.80	117999	22127	23.1
2010-11	0.81	137668	19669	16.7
2011-12	0.79	160872	23204	16.9
2012-13	0.84	180574	19702	12.2
2013-14	0.85	200730	20156	11.1
2014-15	0.67	178781	-21949	-10.9
2015-16	0.48	168974	-9807	-5.5
2016-17	0.51	184304	15330	9.1
2017-18	0.53	195521	11217	6.1
2018-19	0.53	199862	4341	2.2
2019-20	0.58	226484	26622	13.3

Source: UGC Annual Reports;

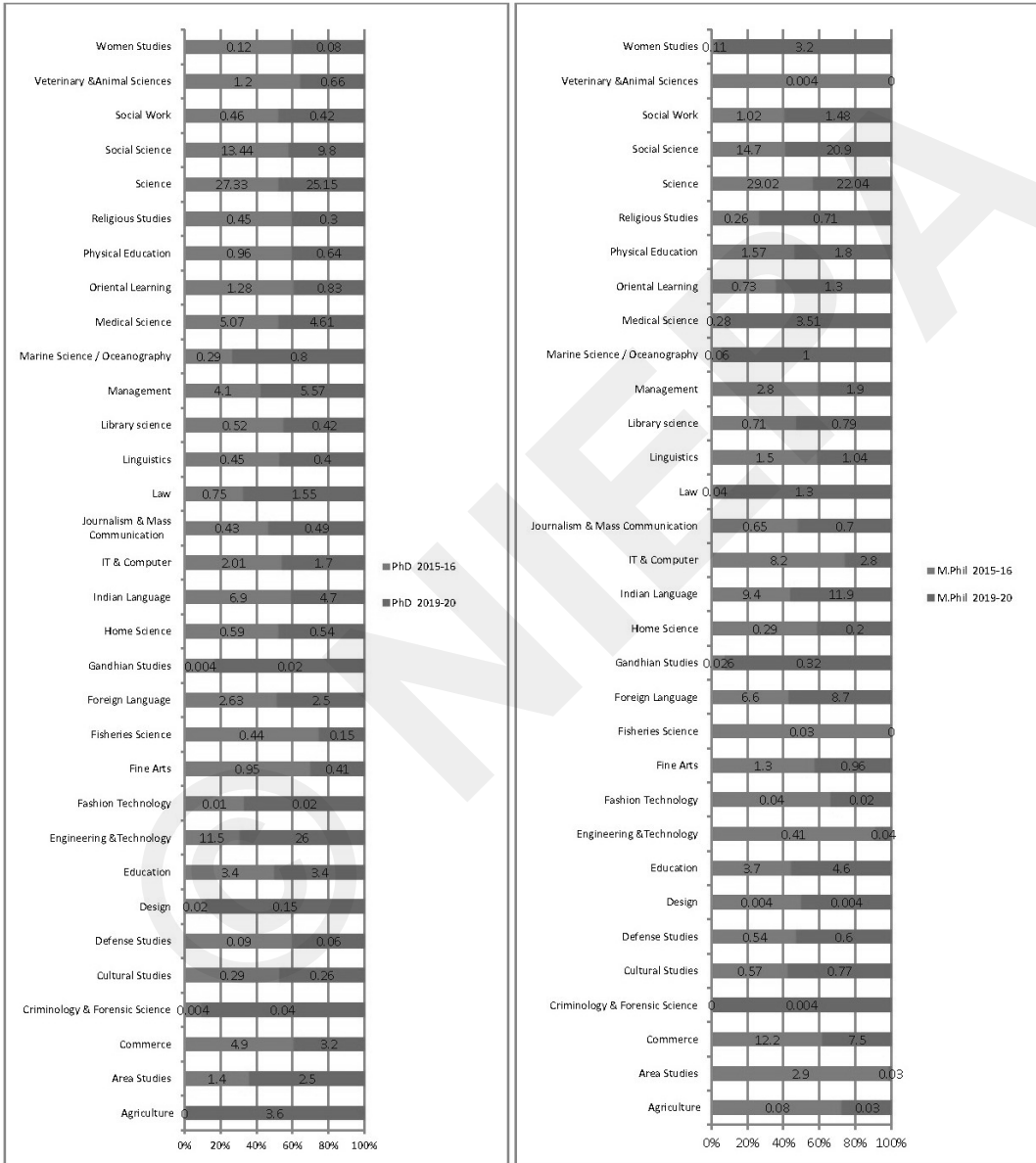
(-) data not available;

(*) cannot be calculated as the preceding data are not available

Currently, PhD and MPhil degree education is being offered in about thirty-two disciplines (See Figure 1). A good proportion of the PhD scholars (26 per cent) were enrolled in Engineering and Technology followed by enrolment in Science (25.15 per cent); Social Sciences (9.8 per cent); Indian Languages (4.7 per cent); and Medical Science (4.6 per cent). Male still dominates PhD enrolment in most of the streams except in Commerce, Home Science, Fashion Technology and Foreign Languages, etc. There has been no significant difference in MPhil enrolment trend in the last five years. Dominating subjects in terms of MPhil enrolment are Science (22.04 per cent); Social Sciences (20.9 per cent); Indian Language (11.9 per cent), Foreign Languages (8.7 per cent), and Commerce (7.5 per cent). In contrast to the PhD programme, MPhil programme has more female scholars except in streams like Defence Studies, Library and Information Science and Physical Education. Overall, the share of female students at the PhD and MPhil levels is 44.9 per cent and 62.2 per cent respectively in 2019. State-wise data of AISHE 2019-20 show that the maximum figure of enrolment in PhD programmes is reported in Tamil Nadu (15.1 per cent), followed by Uttar Pradesh (11.7), Delhi (8.03); Karnataka (7.4); West Bengal (6.3); Maharashtra (5.9); Rajasthan (5.34); Punjab (4.4); Kerala (3.7); and Gujarat (3.9). States like Ladakh (0.004); Andaman & Nicobar Island (0.007); Sikkim (0.2); Goa (0.2); Puducherry (0.25) and Nagaland (0.3) have low enrolment at PhD level. The top ten states having the highest figures of MPhil enrolment are Tamil Nadu (40.8 per cent); West Bengal (9.1); Delhi (5.2); Maharashtra (6.2); Odisha (4.9); Gujarat (3.9); Madhya Pradesh (3.7); Kerala (3.6); Punjab (2.6) and Assam (2.6). States like Goa (0.02); Manipur (0.05), Meghalaya (0.14), Uttarakhand (0.14) and Nagaland (0.16) have the lowest figures of MPhil enrolments. Except for Assam, the rest of the north-eastern states have almost negligible share (below 1 per cent) of the total enrolment of PhD and MPhil students. There is need to give some attention on the HEIs and their situation in the states having low enrolment in PhD.

FIGURE 1

Percentage Share of Enrolment in MPhil and PhD, Discipline-Wise, 2015-16 to 2019-20



Source: AISHE, 2015-16 & 2019-20

Note: figures in parentheses are female enrolment percentages. No data were available for PhD in Agriculture in 2015-16, and for MPhil in 2019-20 for Fisheries Science and Veterinary & Animal Sciences

Among all the university and university level institutions, state public universities have the largest share, i.e., 37 per cent, of such enrolments which is followed by state private universities with 31.4 per cent share of the total. There are only 48 central universities and only 135 institutes of national importance offering such programmes; this amounts to only 4.6 per cent and 12.9 per cent of the total respectively. Referring to Table 4, we see that the state public universities had the largest enrolment share of MPhil (65.3 per cent) and PhD students (29.8 per cent) in 2019-20 but then enrolment percentage share showed a decline. Enrolment share of research in open universities was almost negligible. Further, the percentage share of enrolment in PhD is declining in both central universities and state universities, while its share shows an increasing trend in private universities and Institutes of National Importance. A major chunk of PhD enrolment was there in the Institutes of National Importance too. Though private universities are the second largest HEIs in terms of size, their enrolment share at PhD level is only 13.1 per cent of the total. On the other hand, deemed private universities have a better share of enrolment --- at 13.9 per cent in PhD, though they share only 7.7 per cent in terms of size. There are a number of reasons why private universities have a lower enrolment rate in PhD --- such as the high fee structures, lack of experienced faculty to guide, and frequent change of supervisors, etc.

TABLE 4

Percentage Share of Enrolment of MPhil and PhD Students in the Universities and University Level Institutions, 2012-13 to 2019-20

<i>Type of university</i>	<i>Per cent Share of PhD Enrolment</i>		<i>Per cent Share of MPhil Enrolment</i>	
	<i>2012-13</i>	<i>2019-20</i>	<i>2012-13</i>	<i>2019-20</i>
Central University	22.2	13.6	10.1	14.3
Central Open University	0.43	0.04	0.1	0.006
Institute of National Importance	17.2	23.2	1.6	1.6
State Public University	33.8	29.8	74.5	65.3
State Open University	4.3	0.10	0	0.16
State Private University	6.1	13.1	4.1	7.5
State Private Open University	0	0.04	0	0.28
Institute under State Legislature Act	13.4	0.16	0	-
Deemed University-Govt.	6.1	4.48	1.5	1.8
Deemed University-Govt-Aided	2.39	1.5	2.5	2.7
Deemed University-Private	13.4	13.9	8.3	6.3
Grand Total	82529	177876	18747	15874

Source: AISHE, 2012-13 & 2019-20

Overall, enrolment growth of MPhil showed a decline from 18,747 in 2012-13 to 15,874 in 2019-20. This is mainly due to closing down of the MPhil degree programme in most of the universities in the country at one stage. In future, universities will not offer any MPhil programmes as per the NEP 2020's recommendation for discontinuance MPhil programmes and the introduction of 4-years degree programme and research-intensive post-graduation programme. MPhil programme has its own relevance if it is associated with advanced research and if students undergo research training which they can use for their doctoral work. Hence there should not have been this haste to remove the programme. However, by scraping MPhil degree programme, one can save 1.5 to 2 years' time and can go direct to PhD after getting a Master's degree.

Doctoral Output

During the last 5 years, there was an increasing trend of overall pass-outs in higher education --- from 8.85 million in 2015 to 9.4 million in 2019. The pass-out percentages at most of the levels of higher education have increased significantly over the period except at the levels of MPhil, PG Diploma and Certificate courses (see Table 5). In 2019-20, 70.7 per cent students passed out at the UG level, while only 0.41 per cent and 0.19 per cent of students passed out at the PhD and MPhil levels respectively. State-wise data show that Tamil Nadu has the maximum number (5,324) of students who were awarded PhD degrees, followed by Assam (3,738), Karnataka (3,350), and Uttar Pradesh (3,315). The top five states having the largest percentage share of MPhil outputs were Tamil Nadu (55.4); Delhi (7.1); Odisha (5.1); Madhya Pradesh (4.3); and West Bengal (4.01). Streams like Science, and Engineering and Technology, had the largest number of PhD output in 2019-20.

TABLE 5
Percentage Share of Pass-outs at Different Levels of Higher Education,
2015-16 and 2019-20

Pass-outs /Year	Per cent Share of Pass-out of Grand Total								
	Per cent of Male	PhD	MPhil	PG	UG	PG- Diploma	Diploma	Certificate	Integrated
2015-16	50.4	0.27 (61.6)	0.26 (37.6)	15.8 (47.4)	71.6 (49.4)	2 (54)	8.9 (63.5)	0.89 (47.4)	0.25 (55.2)
2019-20	46.8	0.41 (55.3)	0.19 (33.0)	16.8 (41.6)	70.7 (32.9)	2.02 (47.4)	8.5 (58.2)	0.86 (41.9)	0.41 (55.2)

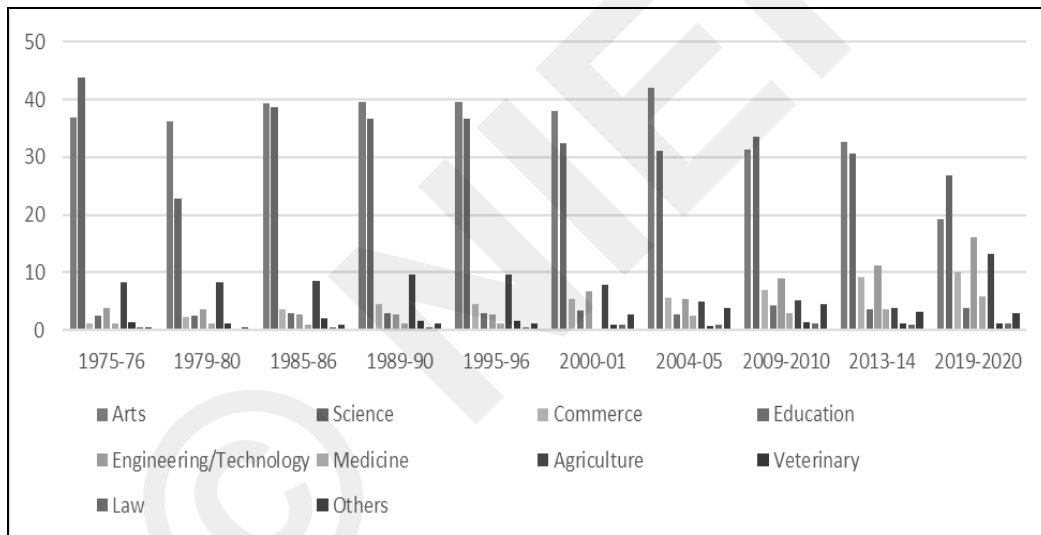
Source: AISHE, 2015-16 & 2019-20

Note: Figures in parentheses are the percentage shares of male students.

Figure 2 shows that in terms of the doctorate outputs in Indian universities by the subject concerned, there was an increase in their absolute numbers from 34,56 in 1975-76 to 37,306 in 2019-20 --- a 976 per cent increase. The percentage of doctorate outputs has been maximum in the arts and science subjects. However, the output's share in both the

subjects showed a decline from 36.9 per cent and 43.8 per cent in 1975-76 to 19.3 and 26.8 per cent in 2019-20 respectively. There has been a drastic decline in the percentage share of doctorate output over the years. Of all the disciplines, the output share of arts and science shows a decreasing trend from 36.9 per cent and 43.8 per cent in 1975-76 to 19.3 and 26.8 per cent in 2019-20 respectively. A substantial increase in the percentage share of doctoral output was seen in the case of subjects like engineering, commerce, and agriculture. Similar observations were made by Kumar (2004) as he reflected a decline in science doctorates and shift towards commerce, arts and education in India. The percentage share of doctorate outputs in veterinary sciences and law was among the lowest --- at 1.1 and 1.05 per cent respectively. The doctorate output in medicine also showed an increasing trend which is a good sign as there is need for more research in the field of medicine in India. However, overall percentage of doctorate output in India is still very low --- at a paltry 0.41 per cent.

Figure 2
Doctorate Awarded by Major Fields (figures in %)



Source: UGC Annual Reports for the year 1980-81, 1987-88, 1990-91, 1996-97, 2002-03, 2005-2006, 2010-11, and 2014-15; GOI, 2019-20

Taking the world scenario in terms of the number of doctorate outputs, as per the OECD (2019) report, just 1.1 per cent of 25- to 64-year-olds held a doctoral degree on an average across the OECD countries in 2018. The share of the population with a doctoral degree varies significantly across OECD countries. Globally, it varies from almost 4 per cent in Slovenia to 0.1 per cent in Indonesia. Overall, the number of doctorate holders is on the rise, growing by about 8 per cent across OECD countries between 2013 and 2017, and in particular in Mexico, Spain and the United States. When it comes to sheer numbers, the United States has the most doctoral graduates by far (71,000 in 2017), though it is ranked fourth in per capita terms. Germany and the United Kingdom rank next with around 2,800 each. India produced 34,400

doctorate graduates in the year 2017-18 (AISHE report, 2017-18). This is much behind the US as India is one of the largest higher education systems, next to China and US. However, it is ahead of Germany and the United Kingdom.

Overall, enrolment and output in MPhil and PhD degree programmes is still insignificant and below 1 per cent in the country. Subjects like engineering and technology, science and social sciences, have the largest number of doctoral scholars. At MPhil level, subjects like science, social sciences and Indian languages have the maximum enrolment. In the recent years, female enrolment increased in doctoral education; this is a good sign and this may be due to the financial support through scholarship schemes or more women prefer to do research. In most of states, the enrolment at the PhD and MPhil levels is still low except for states like Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Karnataka and West Bengal. Research intake and student demand for research is more towards public universities and this may be due various motivating factors available with public universities, like scholarship support, low fee structure, and experienced supervisors.

Promoting research and doctoral studies is important for an advancement of knowledge and research across academia and industry. Doctoral students and doctorate holders can help to make economies more innovative. Many countries have adopted various measures to attract students in doctoral studies. For instance, countries namely, Australia, Italy and Switzerland have tried to attract more doctoral candidates with incentives such as charging lower fees; while Norway and Switzerland tried to attract doctoral students by recognising them as employees rather than students (Hutt, 2019). In India too, doctoral studies are being promoted by providing scholarships and fellowship by the government bodies like UGC. Central universities provide fellowships, though in smaller numbers and with smaller amounts. However, looking at the current low enrolment rate, it is felt that there is need for a better policy, both at the level of government and institutions, for attracting students to go for doctoral studies after their postgraduate studies. A policy to have higher completion rate in doctoral studies is also crucial.

Academic Research in Universities and Colleges: Current Changes and Focus Areas

Data reveal that changes have been happening in the field of academic research over the years. Such changes are also becoming more visible due to various factors, such as impact of technology on research, globalisation of research, change in research focus areas and in its methodology, increasing collaboration in research, initiatives to promote quality research, adoption of research monitoring mechanism and mechanism to promote research culture, and openness among faculty to exchange ideas.

From the responses it is evident that the focus area of research in the universities and colleges in India has undergone changes compared to the past. Social Science researchers are now showing more interest to work on the region specific or local issues or to focus more on finding concrete solution to the local problems, while pure science researchers focus more on application of nanotechnologies in various fields. About this aspect, a professor of geography thus wrote down his response: "One of the basic ways in which the University endeavours to fulfil its "local" responsibilities, as enshrined in its Act is by focusing its attention on the North-East in its curricular programme including research. Thus, research areas are of local issues of the region. For example, social, cultural, natural resources,

ethnicity, tribe, rural development, environment etc..... Research used to be more descriptive before, but it is more analytical now. The use of new tools and techniques, like remote sensing, geographic information system, and global positioning system, etc, has become common especially in the field of social sciences and humanities”.

Similarly, another respondent narrated that his department focusses on the projects of the region’s specific concern. To quote his words, “To promote advanced knowledge in science and technology, and to open fresh avenues for research, his department is focussing on region-specific concerned projects.” The thrust areas of research in economics has also changed. As an economics professor said: “There is a change in the department’s thrust area from rural economics and institutional economics to economics of the social sector, financial economics, economics of education and health economics in current times.” She also said that “research activities of scholars are being monitored by a Subject Research Committee and that they are promoting open discussion among teachers.” The changes in the social science research areas over the years are also evident from the response of a professor who stated: “Before the 1990s researches were focussed on social problems like economic conditions of the people and public sector operational problems. But after the 1990s, researchers are focusing on problems like consumer behaviour, advertising, retailing, problems of service sector, corporate governance, mergers and acquisitions, corporate reporting, and ethical practices and corporate scams, etc.” Another observation was that the social science departments in some state universities were interested in researches dealing with the marginalised sections of society.

Technology has brought quantum changes in the research process, especially in the science subjects, and this is a major shift in science research. In this regard, a zoology professor stated that “The research has become more of a translational type where use of sophisticated technology and bigdata generation through high-throughput has taken over research-mindedness. Overall, while there has been a definite shift towards cutting edge technology and outcomes-based research, critical thinking has taken a backseat. Frugality in research which may pave the way to greater innovation has, I feel, somewhat side-lined by fancy data generation, rather than, for being an understanding of the core system. However, greater automation has led to objectivity and cleaner data, and the mathematical systems pattern had led, through Internet of Things, to connecting many erstwhile disjointed systems into a comprehensive whole. Capacity building has increased manifold and the department is able to attract much higher funding leading to positive feedback of higher output in terms of PhDs, post-doctoral training and higher quality of MSc dissertation theses which benefit the students in their future career prospects.” About the changes in both life science and social science research, another professor stated: “In life sciences, recently much of our focus has shifted to taxonomy, ecology and biodiversity conservation. We have initiated research in the field of nanotechnology. In the field of social sciences, more emphasis is laid on policy related work.”

Besides the integration of technology in academic research, collaborative research has become more prevalent globally over the past years. Such collaborative research promotes research work across disciplines, institutions and borders. Findings confirmed that one of well-established state universities has experienced the dramatic impact brought by ICT and computing technologies on its academic research across various disciplines. Besides, this university has already globalised its research activities. In this regard a professor stated: “The current changes in the field of academic research there is that the continued

exponential rise in the power of ICT/information and computing technologies has had a dramatic impact on research across many disciplines. These technologies have not only increased the speed and scope of research but have made it possible to conduct investigations that were not possible before. Information technology advances have enabled new forms of inquiry such as those based on numerical simulation of physical and biological systems and the analysis of massive datasets to detect and assess the nature of relationships that otherwise would go unseen. Another current change in the field of academic research is the globalisation of research, by encouraging our own students and researchers to travel to other countries to study and work and welcoming researchers from other countries." It is also learnt that research activities cannot be made visible easily in the young and budding university where PhD programme is at the beginning and with very few undergoing projects. In this regard, an assistant professor from a state university stated: "Ours is only a budding university (only 11 years old) and the research programme (PhD programme) was started only in 2018. Hence, no major changes I have observed in the field of academic research in our institution. At present I could see only one or two projects are undergoing in our university."

Another observation is that some of the universities are promoting research by the faculty through support mechanisms like providing financial support, applying policy to curb research outcome issues, and by providing support in filing patent and copyrights for the research outputs. A faculty member from a state university confirmed that his university supports teachers financially with research grant and students' research projects through a scheme. Research outcome issues are dealt with its IPR and consultancy policy. In this connection, he said: "Nowadays our university is promoting research in various ways. Providing seed funding for beginners and also giving assistance to filing patent and copyrights for their research." Another faculty from another state university also stated: "We have a conducive atmosphere for academic research. University is publishing two journals. The challenges in research like plagiarism has been dealt with well by setting up mechanism to curb the plagiarism. My university has started supporting its faculty members with research grant and it has also started a scheme to fund the students' research projects. The university has its IPR and consultancy policy in place to deal with research outcome issues."

In comparison to the university departments, the extent of research in colleges remains limited to a few of the subjects. Moreover, there is change in their research focus areas too. In this regard, one college principal commented: "The focus for research in life science has shifted to taxonomy, ecology, and biodiversity conservation with more initiation in nanotechnology field. In social sciences, more emphasis is laid on policy related research and research on marginalised sections of society".

The changes which have occurred in the focus areas of social science research can be well surmised from the words of another college principal as noted that "Before the 1990s, the focus of social science research was on social problems like the people's economic conditions and public sector operational problems. But after the 1990s, the focus areas of research have been changed to the problems relating to consumer behaviour, advertising, retailing, service sector, corporate governance, mergers and acquisitions, corporate reporting, ethical practices, and corporate scams etc."

Some colleges took the initiatives for research development like promoting research culture, encouraging faculty to do research, and publications through the Research and Consultancy Cell, identifying the priority research areas, and initiating the seed fund to

provide financial support to faculty for doing basic research. Though college teachers showed interests in research, any serious research engagements are absent due to the lack of proper infrastructure facilities and research environment. This was what a college principal put forth when he stated that “More teachers are now showing interest in academic research. Frankly speaking, serious engagements in our kind of undergraduate institutions are difficult to find due to lack of infrastructure and the absence of environment that facilitates research.”

It is well evident that universities and colleges have taken various initiatives for development of academic research. However, it is strongly felt that initiatives like academics-industry linkages, international research collaboration, financial support to teachers and scholars, in-house publications, policy for evaluation for research output, research conducive environment, and research ethics should be adopted and strengthened.

Quality of Academic Research in Universities and Colleges

The issue of “quality” in research has been a topic of great debate in many forums. Chatterjee and Moulik (2006) opine that the quality of academic research has declined in India despite early achievements. Findings reveal that barring a few prestigious institutions in India, most of them display a dismal picture in terms of quality and quantity of research. Some of them expressed that the quality of research in Indian HEIs is at its lowest ebb, not at its zenith; it has declined visibly and adversely affected in the last few decades. Important factors contributing to the dismal picture of research in HEIs, as found by the respondents, were: (a) Resource related issues like insufficient resources and facilities, faculty crunch, and inadequate funding; (b) Research publication issues like low quality publication due to rush in publication for career advancement or for Academic Performance Indicators (API) or repetitive research and publication; (c) Doctoral education issues due to limited quality faculty to advise students, keeping research degree programme as second choice or those who pursue higher education are mostly accidental or uninterested groups, and employed teachers mostly seek doctoral degree for promotion; (d) Research project related issues like poor quality of social science research without enough networking among disciplines, lack of access and outdated research methodology, limited focus on research and internationalisation, less number of original, fundamental and sparking research, and lack of good research projects; (e) teacher related issues like limited time for research due to overburdened loads of teaching and other administrative works, lack of encouraging academic environment; (f), lack of adequate number of research institutes; and (g) absence of mandatory research goals for individual faculty in many institutes. The situation is similar across universities in India but there exists variation in quality of research among different institutions. These factors are directly or indirectly responsible for lagging Indian universities in international ranking and global recognition. No doubt, HEIs are generating good number of publications but have failed to make an impact either in generating new knowledge or providing a solution to the problems being faced by society and nation. Many universities fail to consider fundamental or basic research. Research in colleges becomes irrelevant as it mostly continues from prevailing research trends in respective fields with no compatibility with recent technologies and trends.

The overall sentiment of the respondents on the issue of research quality can be summed up in the words of one respondent who commented: “In my view, quality of

research has been affected when compared to the last decades in Indian HEIs. In my personal discussions with some of the regular faculty across the country during some refresher courses I attended, I found that most of the Indian institutions are more concerned about administration and teaching work rather than academic research. Coming to our institution, where research programmes are started recently forgetting about quality but, even to persist with the same tempo with the prevailing conditions is little difficult as there is no research environment.... If a research environment prevails in the institutions, other staff members in the university including non-teaching staff would understand it is a part and parcel of the duties of institutions and it is for the growth of university/institution. If that is not the case, at every step of research progress, research personnel need to face many problems to continue with the project progress.”

One of the respondents expressed the view that the quality of doctoral education in her university is being diluted as scholars in general want a degree in as less time as possible. Moreover, the number of students who are in the quest for quality training to avail good job is growing exponentially. Thus, original thinking, critical assessment and insightful design is being rapidly replaced by rote learning and irrelevant research without generating original knowledge or capacity building for employability. Further, the doctoral research hardly reflects the impact of advancement in sphere of knowledge due to lack of required social commitment and responsibility on one hand, and motivation to gain personal benefits rather than to promote social benefits out of research.

Challenges of Conducting Academic Research

The challenges faced by teachers while conducting research may directly affect their research productivity as well as its quality. Based on the earlier works as well as on our own experiences, we have identified here six important themes which researchers often feel to be like challenges. The themes were *fund constraint, research project approval issue, research staff management issues, inadequate infrastructure, lack of research culture, and time management issues*. Against each theme, respondents were asked to give the challenges they faced in an open-ended way. Their responses were coded and categorised thematically.

Funding Issues

Research funding is one of the most important elements in higher education and highly impacts academic research. However, fund constraint is one of the most serious hurdles for research development in universities and colleges in India. Data confirm that in the higher education institutions, teachers face research funding issues in many ways. A bulk, viz 33.3 per cent, of the respondents expressed the opinion that there are delays in funding or release of grants for research. They pinpointed various reasons for the delays, such as delay in release of grants from the funding body like the UGC, administrative delay at each step of the process, delay in transfer of funds from the university account to the project account, and delay at the stage of submission of Utilisation Certificate (UC) to the funding agency. On this matter, one respondent thus commented: “Research grant release is a must to keep academic research in progress. Nowadays funding agencies are very slow in releasing funds at an appropriate time for the ongoing projects; this has been observed even with the post-docs like CSIR-pool scientists working in our department. They are reluctant in accepting the

fresh project proposals these days, giving a variety of reasons even when the proposal is technically sound. This way even those with appropriate experience face the paucity of funds. Even at the institution level the PI (project investigator) is not given any independence in utilisation of the funds, which would not work at least in biology related projects." Another professor commented that "There is an administrative delay at each step of the process: there is a delay in transfer of funds from the university account to the project account as well as at the stage of submission of UC to the funding agency." Only 11 per cent of the respondents revealed that they faced no such issue in funding. In this regard, a professor stated that "There is no such challenging issue in my institute." Another 11 per cent of the respondents revealed that there were limited research funding agencies available. To quote one response here: "There are limited funding agencies. UGC is not active in funding research nowadays." Some other notable issues relating to research fundings, as faced by the respondents, are getting less funds to explore research the in desired fields, irregular funding, meagre amount for research as sanctioned by the university, and funding based on institutional profile. It has also come to light that there is non-availability of research funds to colleges from various government agencies and, also, they have lack of industrial funding which is due to the poor laboratory facilities.

From the responses, it is well understood that there are various kinds of research related funding issues faced by HEIs in the country. First, public HEIs generally get research fund from the central agencies through the UGC. However, the universities or colleges face erratic and irregular research funding due to either unnecessary bureaucratic delays in the release of funds by the UGC or administrative delays at the institution end. Such an unwanted funding process is a serious cause for delay in research progress. Secondly, the practice of biased funding also hampers research in the institution as funding is mostly done by the agencies based on profile of the institute not on quality of the research proposal. Thirdly, state universities/colleges have limited funding agencies as well as industry sponsored projects. State universities suffer from a lack of research funding and have limited scope for resource generation. Fourthly, most of the colleges suffer non-availability of research funds from both government and industrial funding agencies. Moreover, many colleges fail to fulfil the norms of the funding agency to avail the fund due to various reasons. For instance, colleges hardly get industrial funding due to lack of good laboratory facilities. Finally, at the institution level, the project investigator is not given any autonomy for utilising the funds. Moreover, the amount sanctioned for research by a university is very meagre; thus, the investigator is handicapped even about exploring the desired field.

Research Project Approval Issues

Out of the total 29 respondents, 40.7 per cent revealed that there was no issue with regard to the research proposal approval process. This is due to many reasons as experienced by the respondents:

1. The university adopts proper project approval process.
2. The university cell, like the RDRM cell, provides seed money to help the new faculty members to develop research proposal.
3. The Research Degree Committee reviews the research proposal, finalises its topic, and guides the researcher to develop the research design and methodology.
4. The university follows their own project approval mechanism.

However, 29.6 per cent of the respondents found that there was delay in the process of research project approval because of the practices followed in their respective institutions. For this, they listed various reasons, such as bureaucratic delay in the processing and approval of the research proposals; delayed process due to technical and administration issues; longer time taken for approval of proposal; delays in timely submission of the research proposals to the funding agencies after due approval from institution authorities, and delay in getting quality and scientific review of the proposal from the expert. Besides, one respondent revealed the presence of an unsatisfactory administrative process of the university; he said: "This was very tedious and long drawn out earlier, when I had first joined the university. But now I have a personal style of following up, sometimes quite aggressively that expedites the process. However, with an acting registrar administering for the last four years, it continues to be a longish process and file movement and accountability of personnel responsible for such movement continue to be murky and unsatisfactory."

Colleges face different issues in this matter as one college principal opined: "colleges could not fulfil the norms to avail fund of the major funding agencies as per the guidelines." One professor thus reflected on the issues of getting interdisciplinary research fund: "Research proposals are approved as per their quality. There is no hindrance for a good project. But with some bodies like the ICHR, it's difficult to get approval for the interdisciplinary projects."

Another notable factor that hinders smooth project approval process is the existence of arbitrary rules pertaining to submission of projects. In this regard, he said that, "The rules pertaining to submission of projects are arbitrary and are not updated in the today's scenario. One example is the inclusion of Post-docs as Co-PI in the research proposals. There are a number of Post-docs available in the country who are only temporarily placed (not with the professors as they are also mostly missing) and have vast experience (similar to us) but in most cases are not recommended as Co-PIs. A similar problem we observed some time ago in our institution."

A respondent very rightly reflected that research scholars are not able to submit their research proposals and seminars as per schedule. This problem is quite common in many of the universities. According to yet another respondent, there were very limited linkages or collaboration for joint research in his institution.

To summarise, an improper research approval process is one of the hurdles for development of quality research. Factors which leads to this issue are: (a) delays in processing and approval of the research proposals due to bureaucratic delay or technical and administration issues; (b) lack of professional training in designing good research proposals; (c) university's arbitrary and outdated rules pertaining to submission of projects; (d) limited linkages or collaboration for joint research; (e) lengthy approval process of research proposals; (f) difficulty in getting approval for inter-disciplinary project proposals from the funding agencies, (g) delay in submission of research proposal and other related documents by the scholars, and (h) non-approval of post-doctorate fellows with experience as Co-PI in the research proposal.

Research Staff Management Issues

Out of the total 29 respondents, 18.5 per cent found no issue in regard to the management of research staff in their respective institutions. One notable comment on this was that “The parent institution provides all possible facilities to its faculty. Wherever required, they get research fellows also who are selected after proper advertisement.” But 63 per cent of the respondents faced an issue in the management of research staff in their respective institutions. Out of that, 18.5 per cent of the respondents faced issues in getting good research staffs. Some of comments as given by the respondents were like this: (i) Getting committed and studious staff is always an issue. (ii) There is no recruitment of skilled manpower. (iii) There is difficulty in finding appropriate research staff as per the need of the research project. Further, only 11 per cent of the respondents found that staff related issues were related either to limited funding or to inadequate funding or irregular scholarship. In this regard, the comments given by the respondents were like this: (i) There is inadequate financial provision on the part of the funding agencies for procurement of research staff. (ii) The funding for skill-based training is limited. (iii) There is no provision for payments or salaries. (iv) There is high attrition rate. (v) Scholarships are irregular and due to that the researchers have to face hardships. Untimely recruitment of staff is another issue, as faced by 11.1 per cent of the respondents. One of the notable reasons of this is due to existence of long and cumbersome, time consuming and energy consuming staff recruitment processes.

Besides the abovementioned issues, the existence of the least motivated research staff, of staff without interest in research activity, is another problem relating to the proper management of research staff. What one of the professors commented on this score can be thus summarised: “We PIs hire research staff as per our funding structure, through advertisement, interview, probation in lab, and recommendation. In my 9 years in this department, I have trained 23 PhD students, 92 dissertation writers, 7 post-docs, and I have worked with 6 inter-disciplinary collaborators. I find that by and large, research staff are more interested in the degree than the quality of training. Often, they lack skill and for them even rigorous training is not sufficient, as they lack a certain fundamental knowhow. Unfortunately, universities like ours are losing quality students to research institutes, but even there the same problem exists. Technical staff are least motivated and often do more damage than good. Of about a dozen technical staff who were hired in my many projects over the years, only two were found to be academically sound and technically strong with a committed loyalty to the project and the lab.” On the issues relating to effective utilisation of available human resources, another respondent commented: “Limited permanent faculty along with teaching and several administrative responsibilities imposes constraints on the effective utilisation and execution of the available human resources.”

The findings confirm that HEIs have been facing various issues in the management of research staff. Prominent ones are given as below:

1. Difficulty in getting committed, qualified and studious project staff.
2. Inadequate financial provision by the funding agencies for procurement of research staff.
3. Limited funding for skill-based training of the staffs.
4. High attrition rate of project staff in some universities due to improper provision regarding salaries and other emoluments.

5. Delayed appointment of research staff due to the long, cumbersome, time consuming and energy consuming staff recruitment processes.
6. Having inadequate number of technical and support staff.

Besides, some universities do face challenges in getting recruitment of skilled manpower, and in having separate staff for only research purpose.

Thus, more than infrastructure, it is the inefficient manpower as well as ineffective utilisation and execution of the available human resources that hampers research progress in HEIs. Also, the issues of research staff management in colleges are different from those in universities and this is well understood from the following statement of a college principal: "The college is facing constraints created by the rules and regulations of the university, which do not allow college level staff and departments to avail guidance, and to develop recognised research centres in various subjects and recognised PG departments. This has hampered research work in the colleges."

Lack of Research Culture

Creating a conducive research culture for an institution takes time, and it entails careful planning and constant process of development (Salazar--Clemena & Almonte-Acosta, 2007). Research culture is a kind of environment created by an institution for research productivity among the faculty. A substantial portion of the respondents, 40.7 per cent, have expressed the opinion that there is absence of a good research culture in their respective institutions. Their responses further revealed that if a university fails to build a conducive research culture, it affects the research and publication activities of the faculty. The reasons for this are many. In this regard, one respondent commented: "Research culture is directly related to administrative issues. Huge amounts of unnecessary red-tapism, and slow and inefficient administration, act as huge deterrents that discourage the faculty members from taking up research projects." This has been put here in the words of a respondent: "The culture of research is sadly lacking in the university administration who still ask questions like – Why do you want to use a certain reagent, or – Who told you to get the grant, or – Isn't teaching still a university teacher's primary responsibility? Unfortunately, this happens mostly with the arts subjects." The respondent further said the following on the importance of promoting collaborative research and academic interactions: "In science, collaboration is completely a personal objective and is not practised as a community. I wish there were greater academic interaction among the faculty and also an open classroom system where anyone could come in for a discussion. I personally practise that and have organised a few meets and greet sessions in my conferences or courses so that networking and free flow of ideas and sharing of expertise may occur. I have also launched a portal www.zoologyhub.org for research resource sharing between the less-endowed labs and their richer counterparts."

Unhealthy competition among teachers leads to a deterioration of the research culture, as one respondent commented: "Of course, it is due to unhealthy competition." Similarly, in an upcoming institution where research is limited due to various reasons, like lack of research infrastructure or lack of compulsion to do research in career advancement etc., there persists a different kind of problem where those colleagues who are not interested in academic research always try to create nuisance and obstacles in execution of the sanctioned research projects. This was thus commented upon by a respondent: "In a university where

very few projects are going on, it is difficult to continue the same tempo. Moreover, if even research interest persists, funding issues raised by funding agencies would kill the remaining little interest too.”

Another respondent revealed that several researchers emphasise more on quantitative, short term, less beneficial research just to earn points for promotion or for instant publication, thus leading to a deterioration of research culture in the institution. However, 33.3 per cent of the respondents opine that research culture prevails in their institution. Some of the notable opinions in this regard are given here:

“All the elements of research culture, i.e., fairness, enquiry and conscientiousness exist.”

“Research culture is well maintained. Faculty gets adequate training in regarding methodology, digital resources, etc, and we adopt ethics also.”

“There is a research culture, but it should be facilitated institutionally.”

“RPC is helping to improve the research culture at the university.”

“We have good research culture in our campus.”

“Good culture thrives in the university.”

About 7.4 per cent of the respondents revealed that a research culture is in the process of development in their university. One notable comment in this matter was this: “The university still tends to show signs of infancy and on its way to develop a healthy and vibrant research culture.” A college principal also thus pointed out the issues involved: “There are a lot of efforts put in to ensure the development of research culture in college. Faculty members need to be felicitated after acquiring MPhil or PhD. Re-imbursment of registration fees and TA to attend international, national and state level seminars, conferences and workshops should be made easy. Motivation of faculty members to take up research had to be undertaken.”

Studies reveal that very few HEIs have elements of research culture. i.e., fairness, enquiry and conscientiousness, but most of the institutions fail to promote research culture. In some of the universities, research culture is well maintained and improved through the Research Project Committees (RPCs). Teachers are equipped with adequate research training. It is also noted that research culture needs to be facilitated institutionally. Some colleges try to inculcate research culture among the teachers by motivating them to acquire MPhil/PhD degree or to conduct research, and by providing them TA/registration fees to attend seminars/conferences. Findings reveal that the main reasons behind institutions proving unable to promote good research culture are as below: (i) The faculty emphasises more on research which are quantitative, short term, less beneficial, just to earn points for promotion or for instant publication. (ii) Institutions having few research projects finds it difficult to create a research culture and to continue its tempo. (iii) Inadequate infrastructure facilities, coupled with absence of motivation for research on the part of the faculty, limits research activities. (v) Unhealthy competition hampers research culture. (vi) Red-tapism, slow and inefficient administration acts as a powerful deterrent and demotivates the faculty to do research. (vii) There is lack of an interdisciplinary approach to research. (viii) There is an indifferent attitude and lack of support from the non-teaching staff.

Inadequate Infrastructure Facilities

Having adequate infrastructure facilities like a good library, laboratory and computer facilities are needed for an institution to continue motivating the faculty as well as students to do research. As many as 40 per cent of the respondents revealed that there are inadequate infrastructure facilities for research in their institutions. One of the notable responses thus reflected about the inadequate laboratory and library facilities existing in one of oldest state universities: "This is a constant drawback. Infrastructural support is poor. A new structure required for specific research has to be created or the plan abandoned due to poor support. Cell culture facility, molecular biology facility, animal house and experimentation facility, microbiology facility, Drosophila stock centre, aquaculture facility and planaria culture were created by myself with all extra-mural funding of about 5 crore rupees awarded to me as the sole PI. Some infrastructural support such as animal house and main lab maintenance comes from the university but regular maintenance of instruments, consumables for facilities are lacking. The museum, a valuable resource, was shut down after an accident and is now simply used as a seminar room whereas it could be developed as a centre of excellence for zooarchaeological research with its unique collection of ancient faunal specimens. The departmental library is also not satisfactory and students and scholars are obliged to depend more and more on e-resources." Another respondent said: "A multi-campus university imposes constraints on the adequate requirement of funds for the development of necessary infrastructure." Another respondent's statement confirmed the need for infrastructure related funding in these words: "Lack of infrastructure and resources is a big problem. There is a need for strong government intervention in terms of funding for infrastructure development. The cost of maintenance of instrumental facilities is also very high." It was also revealed that many at time, the required infrastructure was not available and so the researcher had to look for alternative solutions.

About 18.5 per cent of the respondents said that their institutions had adequate infrastructure facilities. Their statements are here: "Adequate infrastructure is available for conducting research." "Infrastructure is adequately available." "The grant agencies provide finance for purchase of chemicals, books and equipment. Some researches require field studies as well and they get leave to a limited extent." "At our place, adequate infrastructure is being developed as per global research challenges. RPC is making sure that adequate infrastructure is available to researchers."

About 11.1 per cent of the respondents talked about the issue of development of the infrastructure facilities of their universities or colleges. To quote such a statement: "There are multiple challenges to infrastructure development. Funding constraints, land acquisition issues, delays related to identification and award of projects, and shortage of skilled manpower are some major reasons currently causing delays in infrastructure projects." Only 7.4 per cent of the respondents particularly talked about the issue of software or technological issues faced by them. One talked about the "lack of access to high-speed internet and free access to good research journals and books," and another stated: "We need more infra-like software's." Another respondent said that more than infrastructure, it is the inefficient manpower that hampers research.

To summarise, firstly, in most of the cases the institutions have insufficient physical infrastructure for research, while very few institutions have adequate infrastructure facilities. Having adequate software and technological resources for research is also an issue

in case of some universities. Besides, other challenges are delays in the purchase of equipment due to administrative delays in approvals; slow project progress due to diversion of project grants towards development of the infrastructure; and inadequate funds for development of necessary infrastructure in multi-campus university. Colleges and upcoming universities suffer more about producing timely and world class research output due to absence of adequate infrastructure and ultra-modern instrumentation. In this regard a college principal thus commented: "Lack of adequate infrastructure and ultramodern instrumentation at college level is a big constraint in producing timely and world class research outcomes." It was also learnt that some of the oldest Indian universities lack vision and policy for research and innovation. May be this is the reason that university authorities could not perceive the exponential changes took place in science and technology research in the past years. This further leads to a deterioration of conditions of the laboratories. Moreover, the laboratory setup available more than three decades ago has not developed much because of apathy of the concerned state authorities.

Time Management Issues

As many as 62.9 per cent of the respondents said that they faced the issue of finding time for research. But if they get less time to engage in research, it is mainly due to their involvement in various activities, such as co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, CBCS pattern of the university, administrative workload, work pressure due to staff crunch; lengthy process of disposal of files, slow administrative process, delay in release of fund, and conduct of examination and assessment. Two of the respondents informed that delay in or untimely release of funds from the funding agency further delays the research progress. In addition, the rigid procedure for using research grant also makes the time management difficult for a teacher. There were at least two teachers who talked about the role of time management for research scholars. As one of them revealed: "Scholars are engaged in conducting theory classes which often affects their own studies. Clearing of the NET exam is another issue which affects their research output." The other one said: "Some of the research scholars are not able to complete their research within the stipulated time." About 22.2 per cent of respondents found no issue in management of time for research. From their responses, it was evident that time management is possible if one could fix the time and stick to it for getting the approval and finance at both the UGC and university levels, and when the RPC disseminates information about research project grants timely to all the departments.

A notable reason why college teachers could not devote time to research is that most of the college teachers were burdened with more classroom exercise due to shortage of teachers. Thus, they are not able to allot adequate time for research. A college principal also stated that it is difficult for a principal to give leave to teachers for research due to shortage of teachers. One respondent said: "Time management between research and other activities in the institution totally rests on the project or research under investigation."

To summarise, faculty crunch imposes constraints for a teacher to devote proper time for quality research, and the work pressure hampers research potential of a faculty. Further, involvement in administrative work harms the focus of a teacher on research. Moreover, slow administrative processes and poor time management by the university administration result in a multiplier effect on academic and research output of the institution. A faculty member, who engages in administrative and other activities, teaching being the priority,

often neglects research, thus affecting her or his potential. This issue is more acutely faced by the faculty who serve in a new university or the college having a shortage of faculty. Besides, untimely release of funds by the funding agency and the rigid procedure for using research grant by the investigator further add to the issue and affect research progress of the scholars.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

The aim of the present study was to investigate the challenges faced by HEIs in conducting research and to find out how this affected quality and productivity of research. Besides, the study sought to find out what academic research meant to teachers. By applying qualitative research method and from the analysis of open-ended responses, we were able to achieve the goals of the study. Besides, we were also able to achieve the aim to understand the status of academic research programmes in India, particularly the doctoral education programmes, but only by analysing the secondary data on enrolment and output. Findings revealed a variety of meanings of academic research: systematic work done by a scholar to increase the quantum of knowledge, to establish or confirm facts; reaffirmation of the results of previous work; resolution of new or existing problems; a creative and systematic work undertaken to increase the stock of knowledge; as the foundation of discovery.

Thus it shows how a research evaluates, understands and characterises the core of a particular knowledge domain. This study confirms that research is not only an integral part of an academic institution, but it also furthers the horizons of knowledge and plays a significant role for sustainable economic development of a country by finding the truth and creating new knowledge. Research must be an integral part of any academic institution and research should be as per the local needs. Further, the academic research has contributed enormously to finding solutions of many problems faced by the society and industry. Therefore, academic research should lead to policy formulation of a country through systematic and objective investigation of social phenomena as its foundation.

Secondly, Indian universities are still teaching oriented and have low outputs of quality research. Doctoral education and research are comparatively more frequent in public universities than in the private ones. As compared to university departments, at college level the extent of research remains limited to a few subjects. Further, the status of doctoral education in terms of enrolment and output is still insignificant, and therefore it needs greater attention.

Thirdly, findings confirm that the research quality of Indian HEIs is not that impressive and it lags behind on any in international ranking scale and global recognition. There is also limited focus on research and internationalisation, and very few Indian HEIs are globally recognised. Although the Government of India provides funding for R & D through several agencies, it is still far behind many developing economies in terms of its share in the GDP. This is probably one of the important reasons for our low ranking vis a vis the developed countries. Other factors affecting our global rankings are the lack of adequate number of research institutes, faculty crunch, and inadequate resource or infrastructure facilities. Besides, not many institutes have mandatory research goals for individual faculty. It is also visible that HEIs are generating a good number of publications but most fail to make an impact either in terms of generating new knowledge or providing solutions to problems of the society and the nation. So far as research is concerned, the work culture of any

institution needs to be congenial because it has a key role for our performance in every aspect of life including research. Most universities have failed to inculcate a research culture and research ethics among the scholars and faculty.

Fourthly, the findings revealed the challenges faced by the teachers in conducting research in their respective institutions. These include irregularity and delay in funding, faculty crunch, delays in the process of research project approval due to bureaucratic delay or delay due to technical and administration issues, lack of infrastructure and research resources, and lack of research culture. These challenges are directly or indirectly responsible for hampering the research quality and its promotion in HEIs.

The findings of the present study have some weighty implications for academic research policies, as listed below.

1. Funding for research, either from the government or corporate agencies, should be continued for the universities and colleges. Research grants should be released timely through transparent and smooth mechanisms. Although there are start-up programmes of UGC and DST, the university must provide some seed money to the freshly appointed teachers to start own research.
2. A university should have its own objective and transparent mechanism to identify good research studies of basic, applied, socially oriented, and high-quality interdisciplinary kinds, across fields, addressing societal issues. Teachers should be encouraged to engage with socially relevant research topics that can lead to the production of knowledge for improving educational practice and bringing a radical change in society. Such research will have policy implications.
3. Every institution should frame proper and strict guidelines relating to project proposals and should follow every stipulated step after the submission of a research proposal --- like forwarding the research proposal from the concerned department to the funding agency through the university. There should be a policy for regularly monitoring and facilitating the research programmes and research studies, and for dissemination of research findings in the form of publications. Bodies like Research Assessment Committees should be created for the purpose.
4. Academic research should be backed by adequate institutional and administrative supports like quick and easy delivery mechanism, researcher friendly as well as academically oriented procedural, post-project monitoring, and assessment system. Besides, research staff support should be strengthened in the institution on a regular basis by formulating the provision timely and with proper salary. Post-doctorate fellows may be accepted as Co-PI in research projects in the upcoming institutions having limited faculty.
5. Every university should develop a healthy and vibrant research culture like encouraging an academic ambiance, peer-group support along with better scope for constant, continuous, collective academic discourses, and constructive feedback mechanism. Critical thinking, challenging the status quo and societal responsibilities should be the key concern areas to back the academic researches.
6. There should be a policy in every institution for regular maintenance of library and laboratory equipment, for acquiring new technologies, and for providing basic or advanced infrastructure facilities to the researchers. Standard operating procedures for conducting research should be followed by the researchers.

7. The university should have a policy to encourage faculty members to develop collaboration with international faculty and industry, to promote exchange programmes, to create research network of young faculty across universities, to enhance research capacity in applied and empirical studies, and to provide strong mentoring support or training in research for college and university teachers.
8. There should be strong regulation or ethical policy regarding research publication in every university. This will improve the quality of publications by the scholars and faculty.
9. Young minds should be motivated and supported to pursue doctoral studies by providing financial support in the form of scholarships and fellowships. Special arrangement should be made for attracting female scholars, such as accommodation, fellowships, etc. Research spirit and analytical thinking should be imparted right from the beginning.
10. For improving the quality of doctoral education, PhD admission process should be streamlined. Every university must have a proper and strict mechanism to monitor the PhD course work and the investigation work as it progresses. Moreover, PhD programmes of the university should have a robust student centric curriculum and other support services. There should be plan for further improvement of PhD enrolment in the field of medicine, law, agriculture, besides science.

To our knowledge, the present paper is a contribution of its kind and sheds light on the challenges during the conduct of academic research --- as it is experienced directly by the faculty in higher education institutions ---and it presents their views for improving the quality and productivity of research. The paper also confirms the urgent need to rethink about the policy for academic research in India as there is a huge gap between the societal needs and current research trends. The findings of the study can be used to understand the identified specific challenges of academic research where special attention needs to be given. Though the sample is small, it is felt that the findings of the study are not only relevant in the Indian HE setting, but also for all HEIs in the developing countries and elsewhere in the world. A serious attempt to analyse the conditions of academic research in both public and private universities by using the survey or interview method, and also the comparative studies, would be welcome steps in this direction.

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Social Inclusion of Students from Economically Weaker Sections under Education Act 2009: Case of a Private School in Ahmedabad

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Abstract

The present paper attempts at linking the ideas of social justice, exclusion and inclusion with education by delving into the specific concepts surrounding social inclusion and social justice, in order to contextualise the same in terms of institutional processes. The study does so by providing an overview of educational inclusion and exclusion, and subsequently utilises key findings of the qualitative study of a school to link the processes of a socially inclusive school with the broad framework of social inclusion and social justice. The paper refers to the core definition of what inclusion and exclusion are as conceptual and real phenomena manifesting within institutional structures. The findings of the study link the various forms of exclusion and injustices with the deep-rooted institutional processes and socio-cultural perceptual structures. The preliminary findings and recommendations of this ethnographic study of a socially inclusive school unearths the notions of social inclusion and exclusion via observation of participation, distribution, recognition and representation at the site of the study, which are central to the idea of social justice.

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The Indian education system is one of the most complex and stratified ones in the world. The broad category of public funded schools can be further divided into government schools, government aided schools, government schools for meritorious students, and government schools for government employees. The children attending each of these schools come from different socio-economic strata. The most marginalised communities send their children to the government schools which run solely on the government flagship programmes for funding. Similarly, the private schools can be broadly classified into budget schools, private schools that serve the middle class, and private schools that serve the elite or the upper middle class. As the definitions and different types of schools signify, the intrinsic structure of a school itself contributes to inclusion and exclusion by making it accessible to few while being inaccessible to others. The accessibility is 'primarily' determined by the financial status.

Government schools, which cater among others to the most marginalised groups of students, are grounds for myriad forms of discrimination and exclusion. At times, the location of a school itself makes it difficult for students from economically weaker sections (EWS), like Dalit students, to attend the school as they are discouraged by others while reaching the schools (Thorat & Lee, 2010; Sabarwal, Naik *et al*, 2014). Discrimination experienced by Dalit students has been studied in India by such eminent academicians as Geetha Nambisan and activists such as Martin Macwan. The discrimination prevalent in Indian society at large is also reflected in schools against Dalit and Muslim children who attend schools with students from the so called higher caste groups in the form of subtle discouragement and ostracism that make schools a painful place to be in (Thorat and Newman, 2010: 26). The present author has some personal experience about it and has reflected on some of the very subtle forms in which teachers practise discrimination by way of words and body language in private schools (Singh, 2014). However, the experiences in the same school with peers and other teachers encouraged the present author to pursue her dreams and also experience a multicultural school environment. This paper attempts to capture this form of institutional bias that tends to prevail in subtle and overarching forms even after social inclusion efforts are undertaken.

About the Research

The present study, an ethnographic exercise, spanned over one academic year during which students in kindergarten grades and Grade 1 of a school were observed. Specific focus was on children enrolled under the RTE quota to unearth insights into the interactions and experiences of these students. Teachers who taught in these specific grades were also interviewed and observed, along with the informal time and space that the researcher 'enjoyed' with them to understand their perspective and practices. The founder and principal, administrator, coordinator of the primary section, seven teachers and sixteen parents connected with the sampled school were interviewed.

Some of the key criteria for selection of the school were as below ---

1. The school practises social inclusion as a dedicated paradigm of academic function, in part due to the impetus from RTE Section 12(1)(c).
2. The school must be open and allows its premises and social environment to be a focal point for research.

3. The school must have instituted social inclusion practices within the realm of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) or pre-primary education in terms of pedagogy, social environment and overarching elements of management and access.

The school chosen for the study is one of the leading private schools in India located in Ahmedabad city. The school was started by a young educator and designer by pooling together family funds and space. The school began in 2001 with a strength of 27 students and seven teachers in a bungalow owned by her family. It is a K-12 school following the International General Certificate of Secondary Education – conducted by Cambridge International Examinations (IGCSE curriculum) for Grades 8-12. In the year 2014-15 when the research was conducted, the total number of students in the school was 375.

According to a study conducted by Noronha & Srivastava (2013), the highest proportion of children in India who are enrolled in private schooling institutions belong to the pre-primary phase of academic development and personal growth. However, even in the face of such a fact, studies in the past have not placed any adequate focus on pre-primary classes in private institutions while exploring or examining the concept and practical implications of social inclusion. In order to seek a viable empirical site for the study, the aim was to identify the schools that implemented social inclusion practices in the realm of early childhood education. On a deeper analysis, the present researcher found that, barring a select few, most of the schools in the region of Ahmedabad, Gujarat, had not focussed on social inclusion in the context of pre-primary education. This was so even after the official announcements and policy changes that have mandated the application of Section 12(1)(c) in the RTE in the pre-primary phase of education, thereby extending its implied legal framework around social inclusion and 25 per cent quota for EWS students to early childhood education as well. However, as discussed by authors like Juneja (2014), the present scenario of lack of social inclusion practices, specifically within ECCE, due to legal and administrative loopholes, has been a characteristic consequence of the way in which several private institutions across India contested in the RTE act when it was put into force, with specific focus on the inclusion criteria regarding EWS. Coupled with both an overarching hostility towards the social inclusion clauses of the RTE Act as well as the lack of adequate and direct mandates regarding inclusion practices in pre-primary classes, most private schools in the region do not meet the selection criteria. Under the following circumstances, the researcher found Riverside School to be one of the only viable options for an empirical site of study.

Kindergarten and Grade 1 classes were observed for one academic year as it included twelve children of EWS category, while the total number of students in these grades was 75. The observations were made on the following key aspects:

1. seating arrangements in the classroom;
2. interactions with peer group both inside and outside the classroom;
3. participation levels of different children in the classrooms in terms of asking questions, attention and following the teacher's lesson, ability to answer the teacher's questions, and participation in group activities;
4. whether teachers gave their attention equally to all children in the class, among other things by specifically encouraging certain children to participate in the classroom activities and tailoring lessons according to the different capacities of the students;

5. whether teachers motivated and gave affirmation to all children in their classroom and, if so, in what ways;
6. whether there are instances of discrimination, segregation, punishment, or differential behaviour towards or treatment of certain groups of children;
7. what were the issues surrounding classroom lessons, in terms of what supportive teaching learning practices are adopted.

Objectives

The research explores key facets of the selected school which had initiated implementation of Section 12 (1) (c) of the RTE Act. The main research objectives are as follows:

- To explore, analyse and document how the school is following the RTE mandate of 25 per cent quota for marginalised children.
- To identify and describe the pedagogic and administrative processes adopted by school management and teachers towards inclusion of children enrolled under the EWS category.
- To recognise what role do teachers have in creating an inclusive school and the kinds of challenges faced by them.
- To outline the parents' understanding about admission of their children in a private school under Section 12 (1) (c) of the RTE Act.
- To chart out the systemic and structural measures and capacity building measures for teachers and staff undertaken by school towards implementation of Section 12 (1) (c) of the RTE Act.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, the concepts of inclusion and exclusion have been applied and developed in the context of poverty and participation of marginalised communities in the wider socio-economic processes. Sen (2000) and Kabeer (2005) draw from the early definitions of social inclusion, developed in Europe over a period of a few decades beginning from 1970. According to Kabeer (2005), the social exclusion perspective draws attention to the common types of various kinds of disadvantages, such as:

- Disadvantage due to lack of resources
- Disadvantage due to discrimination based on identity
- Spatial dimension of exclusion

Kabeer (2000) also explains "how exclusion operates in institutions," and refers to the term *mobilisation of institutional bias*. She describes institutional bias as certain practices through which group behaviours cause patterns of social inclusion and exclusion. Further, Kabeer (2000) refers to Lukes (1974) while describing the term "mobilisation of institutional bias," wherein the institutional values, beliefs, rituals and procedures work in a systematic and consistent way to benefit particular groups and persons at the cost of others. A core aspect of this specific realm of institutional bias is the curriculum structure and its deeply entrenched design perspective that tends to favour children from the upper and middle class social strata rather than disadvantaged children. According to McCarthy (1997)

and Sayed *et al* (2007), the curriculum is a focus of power and, hence, it should address not only the diverse needs of various learners but also those aspects that reinforce inequality if true social inclusion is to be achieved.

Authors like Balagopalan (2003) have pointed out that social inclusion in private schools dedicated to the education of *adivasi* and scheduled tribe children in general has focussed on encouraging assimilation into mainstream society under the context of inferiority. The author further states that such forms of assimilation come at the cost of neglecting the inherent abilities of the children warranted by their unique cultural backgrounds. This is similar to the observations laid out by authors like Armitage (1995) who point out that policy frameworks dedicated to social inclusion of indigenous children in Canada was essentially focussed on and motivated by the need for eradication of their inherent cultural influences, which are perceived as being inferior and counter-intuitive to educational development. At the same time, authors like Preston *et al* (2011) have also identified the need for rethinking inclusion of tribal children in private and government schools by developing new curriculum structures which are more aligned with indigenous forms of learning, including experiential formats and poetry/art oriented lesson plans. This further includes the inclusion of native language studies for indigenous and tribal children in private schools, which is often replaced by compulsory English lessons as well as the forced integration of customs and rituals such as uniforms and prayers, taking the form of coerced social assimilation rather than true social inclusion (Romero-Little, 2010). The works of such authors point to the fact that social inclusion is a more complex issue than the mere consideration of increasing the number of pupils in schools belonging to economically weaker sections of society.

Various theoretical paradigms have been constructed in order to analyse and examine social inclusion as a conceptual framework that is at play in a multicultural environment, such as a classroom. One of the theoretical paradigms is the one put forth by Watson, Emery, & Bayliss (2012) which ties social inclusion with the deeply fundamental need for emotional well-being, which is a core facet of early childhood care and education. According to the authors, emotional well-being is facilitated in a large part not by the curriculum structure and other academic aspects, but rather by the presence of and seamless integration into an anti-discriminatory and humanistic educational environment. In lieu of this particular construction of social inclusion as a theoretical and pragmatic framework of emotional development, Benei (2008) conducted a study in which she utilised the body and emotions as a phenomenological medium through which identity construction amongst Hindus and Muslims in schools can be examined. Her study pointed out that the emotional contexts as well as the representation of the body, established through rituals and customs in school as well as the curriculum, played a core role in promoting devotional as well as gender-based perspectives and perceptions in children. Phenomenological studies of the body and emotion have also pointed out several differences imbued into the way in which children from different cultural and economic backgrounds learn, specifically through experience and interaction with curriculum.

Hence, there is a need for structured inclusion that considers the more subtle aspects of an institutional framework as far as the integration of pedagogical paradigms and social contexts are concerned with regards to disadvantaged and economically backward children. The study conducted by Harwood & Graham (2011) analysed the way in which two schools changed social and cultural practices within their premises to better deal with

the consequences of unstructured social inclusion. One of the schools analysed in this case was Tralee Public School in New South Wales, Australia, which implemented a socio-cultural practice known as the “transitional playground” to help children who had difficulties with behavioural problems and could not cope or learn at the same rate as their peers. The “transitional playground,” which was an initiative developed keeping in mind the higher number of male children at the school, was an alternative to punishing children who were without friends and could not socialise like the others. The playground, rather than isolating the children, allowed them access to safe haven where they could bring their chosen friends along and learn how to act with their peers in an appropriate manner without having to expose themselves to the same institutional practices and social norms that tend to pervade the school system. The transitional playground further allowed teachers to partake directly in the development of the socially disadvantaged children, enabling the development of strong bonds between especially difficult-to-mentor children and teachers, as well as development of core behavioural abilities, such as ‘how to accept defeat’ and ‘lose gracefully’ when playing a game.

The intricacies of the theoretical framework suggest the need for a comprehensive ground building to enable effective implementation of postulated social inclusion policy frameworks. This ranges from how the application and admission processes need to be simplified, contextualised and made more accessible to parents to defining clearer norms in a way that it benefits the most vulnerable students. This also includes preparing the schools to integrate the students under the quota more seamlessly allaying concerns of teachers and parents of both sets of students (quota and non-quota). This requires capacity building initiatives around the theory and practice of inclusion and diversity while also introducing systemic changes in the school processes.

Key Findings

The findings, presented below, are based on a year-long observation of school processes, specific grades which had enrolment of children from EWS category, interviews of teachers, parents, founder and administrative staff. By engaging with the social justice and inclusion framework, the findings also tease out the intricate dimensions of how various actors exert power and agency, as well as how the meta policy framework might convert into school level systems and processes which are further facilitated through the various actors. The key findings are based on the interactions amongst various actors that create moments of inclusion and exclusion which are situated in the overall school and classroom culture, processes and systems set up by school to enable inclusion of EWS category students.

Role of the School Leadership

The role of the leadership is crucial in many respects. One is in introducing the mandate and setting the intention to follow the inclusion mandate. In this instance, the founder initiated the enrolment of children under EWS category from kindergarten grades instead of Grade 1 even before the Gujarat Government initiated the implementation of the provision of 25 per cent quota on a pilot basis. The school leader mentioned in her interview that the thought and action were triggered by the speech of former Prime Minister, Shri Manmohan

Singh, when he presented the Act to the country. A macro level action of the formulation of an Act was converted into a meso level action for inclusion by the school leadership.

The leadership is involved in establishing or changing processes and systems in place to ensure that various actors such as teachers, administrators and school staff consciously practice inclusion. This also serves as a measure to safeguard against any institutional bias seeping into the school processes, systems and interactions. The school leadership worked in this direction by way of dialogue with teachers, creating spaces for reflection and review to gauge where the inclusion mandate is being met, especially around 'academically including' all teachers. Moreover, the founder is also involved in interacting with the EWS learners and parents to check with their experience of the school and use that as feedback to improve school processes on a regular basis.

Studies around inclusion of children admitted under the RTE Section 12 (1) (c) provision have focussed on the efforts made by schools and especially the leaders of the institutions to foster inclusion. Reports suggest that there are no special provisions made to foster inclusion across a majority of schools. In schools studied these include: extra coaching for children, helping children with homework during school hours, introducing bilingual curriculum and paying extra attention in class. One school in Delhi in the study conducted by Mehendale *et al* (2014) reported appointing school counsellors and special educators since they had admitted children with disabilities and one school had appointed assistant teachers to help the teacher deal with the 'weak' children. In one study it was pointed out that inclusion was not an issue since children were young and "not yet conscious of social differences" (Mehendale *et al*, 2014). One of the other factors that were pointed out was the similarity in the socio-economic backgrounds of the students who studied in the school and who were admitted under the provision, which contributed to social inclusion.

Role of the Teachers

The role of the teachers is critical as they are the everyday touch points with the children and are instrumental in creating experiences of inclusion and exclusion in the classroom. In this study the teachers were found to follow several measures to support the inclusion of EWS students; these included after-school classes, home visits and in-class support. The teachers undertook these measures since the school had 'institutionalised' these processes. These were part of the regular role of a teacher for all the students. The teachers shared that the discussions and workshops on RTE Act, challenges and possible ways to respond to those challenges with the admission of EWS category of students were helpful to them and also created a space for them to express their apprehensions and have a dialogue with the founder and amongst themselves.

The school leadership built micro level practices and processes for teachers to critically look at their practice to include students enrolled under the EWS category. The academic coordinator interacted with teachers on a weekly basis and one of the discussion points was about EWS category students and how they were doing. The responses in these discussions emerged from various points, such as interacting with other students, learning as per the grade, challenges faced by teachers, and so on. On numerous occasions, teachers vented out frustrations about few EWS category students not being able to follow instructions and they also celebrated how certain EWS category students were learning. The teachers discussed academic aspects in detail, such as how student X has good expression capabilities but needs

to build vocabulary or student Y is very attentive and learns fast, but needs to be encouraged to speak and express.

However, beneath the institutionalised processes invoked for the purpose of social inclusion, there were several emergent tendencies that resulted in unconscious biases or exclusion via the attitudes and perspectives of teachers. Teacher C shared in her interview how her reflections and practices has made her question her own assumptions about the children enrolled under the EWS category. The teacher was also found conducting five home visits where she interacted respectfully with parents in all the visits. The teacher had water, tea and snacks offered by the families during these visits and discussed the students' progress with the parents. The same teacher also attempted to ignore the parent of an EWS category student during a parent teacher meeting.

In another brief incident during the morning assembly, the students conducting the morning assembly had just presented a dance and music session. They invited other students to come and join them for dance. Rehman (pseudonym), who was enrolled under the RTE category and who also has speech and hearing problems eagerly moved out of his queue, in an attempt to join the other students. There was noise and commotion in the assembly area. The teacher who was standing just behind the group spoke in Gujarati language, "*tu rehva de*" meaning "you leave it" or "you let it be." I was also standing nearby and heard it. It is difficult to know if it was a deliberate attempt at preventing the EWS category student from participating in the activity or if the teacher was concerned about him and based her decision on the same. The voice and gestures used by the teachers leaned more towards the possibilities of preventing the student from participating due to perceived in-efficacy.

In one of the quarterly meetings of Pre-K, after all the role-play, songs and dance activities and presentation by teachers was over, the parents were having a discussion with the two teachers responsible for the class. On one side of the teacher were parents enrolled under EWS category and on the other side were parents of children enrolled under the non-EWS category. The teacher was interacting with parents of a non-EWS category student when a parent from EWS category stepped forward to enter a conversation. As the parent stepped forward, the teacher turned a bit towards the other parents and did not acknowledge her. Again, as the parent from the EWS category bent forward to speak, the teacher further turned towards the other parents, but she was still not completely facing the other parent and was aware of the presence of the parent from the EWS category. The parents from non-EWS category said: "They too want to speak to you," to which the teacher responded "Oh, we meet them every fifteen days and update them about everything."

This was one such episode where EWS parent, non-EWS parent and teacher, all three were present and both the parents wanted to interact with the teachers. The teacher gave importance to the non-EWS parents and was about to turn her back on parents from the EWS category. This episode points towards teachers' "attempted exclusion or ignoring" of parents of the EWS category when other parents are around. The same teacher takes an hour to explain a child's learning performance to EWS parents in fortnightly meetings and during the home visits. But in presence of the other parents, she gave more attention to the non-EWS category parent. During the same quarterly event the academic coordinator of the primary section had facilitated the activities of role play, singing and dance by making groups that had a mix of both EWS and non-EWS category parents. She also went around in each group and in one of the groups she pointed out that Sonu bhai (pseudonym),

an EWS category parent, was very good with old Hindi songs and that he should lead the group activity. He was seen presenting the parody that the group created during the activity.

The act of inclusion, making EWS and non-EWS parents acquainted to each other and enabling communication among them on the one hand, and an “attempted-exclusion or ignoring” on the other, both occurred in a span of three hours in the same physical space with the same set of people and the same teachers who were facilitating the overall process.

As an observer, I sensed that the act of inclusion is very conscious and the administrator was doing what she was doing very deliberately. The act of “attempted exclusion or ignoring” pointed towards two possibilities:

- i) The teacher did it consciously to communicate that the non-EWS parents are more important;
- ii) Possibly, it was an interaction in which the teacher was not very conscious of how her act was being interpreted and did not consciously make an attempt to ignore or exclude the EWS category parents.

Authors like Sharma (2018), have pointed out that there are various underlying belief systems and perceptual mechanisms within the teacher’s mind that can lead to attempted exclusion instances when it comes to parent interaction. Some of these include a deep level of discontentment with parents due to their inability to provide for children and to focus resources and energy into their upbringing process. As per the studies conducted by the author, teachers harboured various thought-processes and views regarding parents, including that they were casual and non-serious about their children’s education, and that they were irresponsible when it came to behaviours and patterns of child-rearing in the domestic environment, leading to fundamental problems in the growth and development of the child. In most or all of these cases, the teacher’s own educational, economic and socio-cultural background was often used as the reference point for both understanding the plight of EWS parents as well as the judgments and biases against them. In the case of the above-mentioned situations, the point of individual bias is important but so are institutionally driven circumstances, namely the fact that the teacher mentioned that the grounds for exclusion at that moment pertaining to the EWS parents was that they already had ample opportunities to interact with teachers on a regular basis. It is usually a combination of both individual as well as institutional factors that leads to these attempted forms of exclusion.

Pedagogy and Participation

The sitting arrangement in the primary grades was in clusters and children from the EWS category were found to be sitting in different groups and not only with fellow EWS category students. Similarly, during many group activities, sports activities and outdoor activities which were done in groups, the EWS category were not segregated in one group but were spread across different groups. The teachers’ chairs were also at the same level as that of children and teachers used a table of the same height that the students use. Even students of Grade 1 and Grade 10 or 12 could be easily seen sitting very close to the teacher or resting the arm on the teacher or leaning on the teacher and into the notebook to understand something that the teacher might be explaining in the notebook. The children of Grade 1 or 2 could also be seen lying on the floor while working or discussing a subject or topic. Overall, the school pedagogy did not focus on disciplining the body but the mind.

The school also introduced various methods to develop thinking routines. In the grade that I observed children sitting on a table (six children around one table), they were seen talking to each other asking for erasers, sharpeners, also helping each other to form a word, clapping for each other and also calling out each other's names to encourage during sports sessions. Similarly, during the lunch hour, the kids would sit in a large circle in the backyard to have lunch and the EWS category students would also sit along with all other students. Many EWS students also had pairs like the non-EWS students and these pairs would be part of the other smaller groups. But the smaller groups never had only EWS students together, it always had a mix of EWS and non-EWS category students together.

It was observed that during the quarterly events of parents' meetings that each and every student of the class was included in presenting the learning activities that the class undertook during the quarter. Out of three such events that were observed during the research period, in one of them, a EWS category students led processes like conducting a quiz for parents. A huge applause from the entire parent group who were present for the event was showered on the EWS category student. The parents of the EWS category student were present in the event along with members of the extended family and were seen beaming with pride. Two other EWS category parents in informal conversations after the event shared that they were in tears watching their children doing the activities in front of a large audience.

The school already had a culture which had elements of 'inclusion' integrated within the same. For instance, after-school sessions were held for students who need more focussed attention or for the purpose of developing the relationship between students and teachers. Quarterly share-out events with parents where children shared their learning by way of projects, installations, plays and activities were also conducted. The existing systems and processes created a more participatory school culture, where school was perceived as a space where children's voices were prominent and important. Classroom discussions and even when teachers discussed amongst themselves, it was largely about the children.

With the question of participation comes the concept of assertion and how it differs between EWS and non-EWS students. Three separate episodes in the school strongly reflected the ways in which EWS and non-EWS students asserted themselves.

The first of these occurred in pre-K grade during lunch time, when one of the non-EWS students did not want to eat the food packed in her lunch but instead wanted what some other student had got. The teacher pointed out that she should be eating from her lunch and not of others. The child responded saying she did not like it, to which the teacher said that she gives this excuse every day. The student said with her brows raised and in a loud voice that she wanted to eat from the other student's lunch and she added that she would complain about the teacher. The teacher said that she was free to complain, on which the student repeated her threat, saying that she would complain to her mother and to the ma'am (founder) that the teacher did not allow her to have lunch. The teacher just told the kid to stop shouting and to eat her food, also stating that she was free to complain to anyone she wanted to.

In K-2 class, one of the EWS students had used the toilet faucet to sprinkle water on another student and the student complained to the teacher. When Sunita (pseudonym) came out of the toilet and settled on her chair, the teacher said in a loud voice: "What were you doing in the toilet? You do everyday; how many times have I told you not to wet other student's clothes." Sunita kept her head down and listened. The teacher ended by saying I do

not want to hear this again from any other student. After the school was over and students had packed up the bags and moved out, Sunita stayed back in class and approached the teacher: "Ma'am, I want to share something." The teacher responded in a loud voice: "What do you want to share? I don't want to listen anything." Sunita interrupted her saying: "But ma'am....." The teacher did not listen and said I don't want to hear anything. Sunita had tears in her eyes but she did not let them roll down her cheeks as she moved out of the class. Sunita lives in a house behind the school with her parents and two other siblings. The house consists of one room and an open space is used by about 12 such other houses for bathing. There are no lavatories and the families use open fields for defecation.

One of the teachers of Grade 1 was called for an explanation by the coordinator of the primary school. After the meeting, the teacher was in tears and did not participate in any discussion during the teachers' Saturday meeting. The teacher had not allowed a K-1 student to move seats in the bus because of which the student cried throughout the ride. The teacher also told other kids to leave the child and not try to engage. The parent had called up the school and reported about the incident following which the teacher was called for an explanation.

A comparison of these three episodes builds the point of the power that elite class students exercise over teachers, which students enrolled under EWS category could not / would not exercise over teachers. This also points towards what Nambissan (Nambissan & Lal, 2011) calls "terms of inclusion." The overall school processes and pedagogy create opportunities for all the students to participate. Annual events, parent teacher meets, and sports day that were observed, had every child enrolled under EWS category and other students participate together. The EWS category students also won prizes and accolades from the other students and parents. I did not observe any incident or interaction that could be categorised under 'privileged inclusion' for EWS category or students or the other students studying in school.

All of the above three episodes can be classified under what Krishna Kumar (2010) refers to as educational quality from the perspective of teacher autonomy. In essence, according to Krishna Kumar, the fundamental perspective of quality and social inclusion within education should be based not only on overarching ideals, such as transparency, accountability and competitiveness, but rather on the dispositions and degrees of autonomy that exist between the teacher and the learner within an educational institution. According to him, the ability to address inequality in society is based upon the degree of control that a teacher as well as a learner has over a specific teaching-learning situation. The above episodes clearly indicate the perceptions that certain privileged non-EWS students feel they have when it comes to autonomy over teacher-learning situations, while others clearly showcase the way in which teachers exercise control over circumstances in order to ensure that a specific outcome is borne. However, at the same time, these episodes also showcase the influence that is exercised due to involvement of the parent within a specific circumstance, thereby indicating an imbalance in the teaching-learning autonomy due to the intervention of a third-party. However, in contrast to the same, certain episodes also show that non-EWS parents are driven by the impulse to intervene within teaching-learning, which no matter how necessary it might seem, does indicate a higher level of learner control over outcomes, an aspect which is not readily visible within the same institution among EWS parents and children as is visible through their counterparts. The crux of social inclusion and dealing with social inequality within an educational institution, as per Krishna Kumar, lies in

defining or understanding where authority lies and how it is shared when it comes to the relationships between teacher and student.

Curriculum: Representation and Diversity

The for the school, academic coordinator and teachers interacted with all students and EWS category students and parents on a regular basis. The reflections from these interactions triggered few changes in the curriculum of the grades to suit the context of EWS category students. The school leadership and the teachers make constant efforts to use examples and content which the students will find relatable. An example of this was seen when the founder of the school interacted with a student from an EWS category and found out that the class was studying about 'Polar Bears.' The child, however, was not able to identify or relate to the polar bear. She kept calling it 'Kolar Bear' and when asked to identify the image of the bear she called it a doll instead. Based on this instance, the founder had a discussion with the teachers and the polar bear was removed from the chapter on 'Habitations' and the camel was instead introduced as an example which all the children in the class could relate to.

In another instance, K-1 students shared about what they did during the weekend, during which one of the children said that she helped her mother in clothes-related chores. The teachers asked her if she helped to wash, fold or iron, the student through the actions of her hand said that she helped her mother to fold the clothes. This experience was shared in the same manner as other experiences, such as playing with her brother, purchasing new shoes or celebrating a festival. The example also points towards the issue of respecting and recognising the work and social realities of the children who come from weaker sections. During the same session where many students shared their experiences celebrating Rakhi (a Hindu festival), one of the teachers reminded the other teacher while she was probing about Rakhi with a particular student, that the child was Muslim and may not have celebrated Rakhi. Constant efforts need to be made by teachers to be mindful of the content and examples they are using. In another instance to introduce the concept of digestion, dog poop and pizza were used as examples. Most of the children identified the pizza as garlic bread. However, the EWS students had not seen or eaten garlic bread before and therefore, they could not relate to it and that made them more curious about what it is.

Language and its various manifestations in pedagogy and curriculum structure is yet another fundamental point of observation when it comes to analysing social inclusion within educational institutions. According to Sarangapani (2018), schools that cater to lower income families and economically disadvantaged pupils tend to include dialogic pedagogy, often involving lessons being conducted in the mother tongue of the children to ensure a more conducive learning environment. As per the author's observations, teachers in schools where dialogic pedagogy is practised focus on a learning method that does not encourage rote learning but rather is dedicated to the enabling of critical thinking and self-assessment in children. Due to poverty and other disadvantages on socio-cultural levels faced by the children in these schools and their families, the teachers are observed to view their conditions with empathy and therefore, do not shy away from native-language teaching methods. This in turn further allows them to nurture discussions and engage the children in such a way so as to ensure that they feel included within the process of learning and interpreting new concepts.

The school did not change the language of instruction and continued with English, though changes in examples for various chapters were revised and teachers were mindful of using appropriate examples for discussion to which EWS category and non-EWS category students could relate. It does not solve the larger issue of teaching in native language that could foster and nurture discussion and feeling included in the process of learning from early years of schooling.

Teachers from respective classes conduct after school hour sessions to provide support to students enrolled under EWS category and other students who are identified by the teachers for academic support. In all after-class sessions that were observed during the study, the sessions were largely conducted by the coordinator of RTE in the school or by the 'junior' (one who is new to the class) teacher of the class. In one such session conducted for the K-1 class, the teacher was teaching the 'r' sound using the phonics method. This session had three students from the EWS category and one from the non EWS category. The teacher had used a story and performed the dramatisation of the story, which included words such as rock, rabbit, rope, race and many others. During her session, she created a word cloud with all the words beginning 'r' sound. In the after-school hour session, the teacher sat along with students around the table. She had got a few objects such as a rope (coconut rope), chalk, duster, books, rubber (eraser), her own finger ring, red crayon and few other things.

She showed and kept each of these objects on the table speaking out the objects' names loudly and the students repeated it. She asked students to pick up objects which had 'r' sound in the beginning. One of the students picked up a ring and similarly other students picked up red crayon and rubber but no one picked up the rope. The teacher asked again, if there was anything else on the table that had the 'r' sound in the beginning. None of the students picked up rope. The teacher held the rope in her hand and said "rope," she then placed it back on the table and all other objects were also kept on the table. She again asked students to pick up the objects with 'r' sound in the beginning and speak their names. None of the students was able to say rope even though some of them picked it up. The teacher asked each one of them what it was but they did not respond. One of them said 'sutli' (a Gujarati word for a specific kind of rope), The teacher looked exasperated, her facial expression was tensed, she asked the other teacher who was in the class: "What should I do; they don't understand such simple words." The other teacher only smiled. English is not the first language of all the EWS category children and many non-EWS category children. The word "rope" was definitely not part of their vocabulary and they were not able to remember it easily. The teacher's frustration was visible to students; they also heard her speak "they don't understand."

Native language-based teaching methodologies, according to Sarangapani (2018) tend to be limited mostly to the educational institutions catering to the "poorest of the poor," which essentially tend to include government schools. In private schools, native language is usually shunned in return for the more widely accepted institutional norm of English medium pedagogy, which in turn does cause several issues with regards to social inclusion for EWS category children, as is evident from the episode outlined above. Even though private institutions definitely harbour teachers who are interested in ensuring a dialogic pedagogy is maintained and rote learning is discouraged, the inability to functionally make use of native language in the classroom due to institutional boundaries tends to limit social inclusion in terms of learning outcomes and potential development of the child on conceptual and empirical levels.

Discussion

The following key findings emerged after applying the categorisation for inclusion provided by Kabeer (2000) in the context of the empirical observations listed above.

1. The school has been able to put to practise some basic principles of transparency, inclusion and freedom in certain ways. Children from EWS category and those from non-EWS category voice themselves in different ways; children from EWS category do not exercise the kind of power that a child of Non-EWS category exercises on the teacher.
2. Putting certain decisions of the school into practice is a day-to-day endeavour and the teachers' efforts are most important. While teachers do not directly exclude students or discriminate against them, they find it frustrating to walk the extra mile to include the students from EWS category in the teaching-learning process.
3. The informal interactions amongst teachers also indicate that while in the interviews the teachers appreciated the founder and the efforts for inclusion, informally they do challenge some of the views of the founder and question the system. In one specific instance, teachers were also found working out ways to circumvent the said system, which would point towards specific behaviour and skills of teachers to create inclusive teaching-learning spaces.

Thus, what Kabeer mentions as Institutional bias gets confirmed.

Privileged inclusion of parents of children from EWS category was not observed or covered by the interviews. However, the mechanisms and processes set up by the school to support the parents and students of EWS category could be constructed by non-EWS category parents as special privileges for the other. The episodes also point towards non-EWS category parents exercised power on teachers and school which can be constructed as privileged inclusion.

Adverse incorporation or problematic inclusion of EWS students or their parents could also not be observed in the school. Adverse incorporation or problematic inclusion is explained as those who are included but on adverse terms. While this creates access to certain resources, it may be problematic since it does not address the issue of social recognition and valuing their identity, However, there were instances which have been categorised as *attempted exclusion or ignoring*.

The EWS category parents or students could also not be categorised as self-excluded, they were present and participated to an extent in the various school level events such as the parent teacher meetings.

The interaction amongst EWS and non-EWS category parents cannot be bound in a system. Few episodes of interactions of EWS category parents with teachers and other parents point towards the ways in which they are excluded at different moments. Also, the non-EWS category parents came across as more benevolent, thus not having an equal relationship. Hence,

1. The school processes are, on the contrary, designed to include parents of the EWS category in academic and non-academic activities of the school. The school does not seem to find it necessary for non-EWS parents to be part of such processes. Thus, a differential approach is adopted by the school to the EWS and non-EWS category parents.

2. The culture of speaking English in pre-primary grades, actions for greeting the teachers and peers, assembly performances such as tap dance are dominant in the school.
3. The teachers and administrators acted towards affirming respect and inclusion of EWS category parents and students by holding the non-EWS category parents accountable for their actions. They made the non-EWS category parents apologise and a concentrated effort towards restoring the relationship of equals amongst parents was made.

Two instances of attempted exclusion or encouragement by a teacher (both by the same teacher) and by a student were observed. The teachers and founder did recognise the limitation of parents not being able to support children at home but in the same breath they talked about the other students not enrolled under the EWS category. However, there was an instance where the teachers had hesitations about EWS category students, though it was a recently appointed teacher. The school has been constantly working towards supporting parents and also creating access to resources such as the computer lab to respond to certain resource limitations of the family, thereby responding to certain areas of worry expressed by the parents.

Possible New Categories to Study Inclusion and Exclusion in Private Schools Implementing the Section 12 (1) (c)

Media reports have highlighted that many private schools that accepted enrolment of students from the EWS category are segregating them by having a separate class, time or a completely separate physical space, thereby interpreting the mandate of the RTE Act in a very narrow or perhaps in a faulty manner. If socially inclusive schools that have integrated students from EWS category under the same physical space and time have to be studied from a sociological perspective and if the limitation of the studies to compliance of guidelines is to be broken, then the following key points could be considered.

1. Overt behaviours and gestures of exclusion, such as not touching, not sharing water or not sitting together. These may be difficult to find in private schools, since the urban and middle-class culture creates space for all children to have individual water bottles and separate lunch boxes. Similarly, private schools and 'elite private schools' should have sitting arrangements which get students to sit together, have discussions, participate in group work and activities together.
2. Participation and voice of the students enrolled under the EWS category in school processes and classroom activities.
3. Representation of the students enrolled under the EWS category in school processes and classroom activities.
4. Scope for assertion, and developing ways to assert themselves in the schools.
5. Opportunities to seek support from teachers and peers.
6. Acceptance of EWS category students by peers, teachers and school staff.
7. Voice of EWS students and parents in school processes and interactions.

Conclusion

It is clear that the larger private education system can be labelled as having an institutional bias towards the students from economically weaker sections of the society, which manifests itself in form of the fee structure, school processes and systems, curriculum and pedagogy which is rooted in the experience and aspirations of the affluent class and the majoritarian culture. With the implementation of the RTE Act and especially the provision of 25 per cent quota for EWS students, schools willingly or reluctantly have included the students from EWS backgrounds. However, the study of inclusion or exclusion in these schools may not reveal some stark forms of exclusion such as having a separate classroom for the EWS category students, having a separate school time for EWS category students, and having different teachers for the EWS category students. The following may be some of the finer and subtler forms of exclusion:

- Discouragement in participation;
- Unequal/Differential attention to the students;
- Specific kinds of behaviours exhibited by teachers, other students and parents;

The processes and systems set up by the school are geared towards reducing the institutional bias towards the EWS category students. However, the interactions between different actors lead to everyday experiences of exclusion and inclusion which might be very subtle, at times conscious and at other times not-conscious.

The school's choice to implement the provision of inclusion and proactively initiating discussions with parents, teachers and staff as well as conducting activities to understand the apprehensions of the teachers, creating processes and policies to address those concerns and apprehensions builds the case of Riverside School. Here, the founder exerted her agency and did not follow the larger norm where the school approached the court of law to resist the Section 12 (1) (c) of the RTE Act. In this study the school and especially the founder of the school created a vision for herself and also created a shared vision with the teachers and parents. She exercised her agency in the larger context where private schools were abstaining from taking the responsibility entrusted upon them through the RTE Act. The founder of the school shared her dream: "These children may be able to help their families to break from the cycle of poverty." She also encouraged mothers to study and appear for grade ten exams saying that "If all your children are going to be graduates then you too have to make an effort to study at least up to grade ten."

The enthusiasm and aspirations are not just for students; the school has been able to kindle the same spirit in mothers too. Two mothers who were interviewed shared that "if our children can make an effort and learn, then we can also make effort and learn, these kids are our inspiration." These mothers took up the preparation for Grade ten exams seriously. Thus the school just did not expect mothers of the EWS category to play the role of academic support at home --- which the middle class mothers provide and which have been studied by many eminent researchers. The school, moreover, systematically supported the EWS category mothers and in some cases fathers to support the children at home.

This shows that there is an immense need for the school leadership in most private schools to take an active interest in the structured inclusion of EWS children into their institutions, specifically because of the fact that this can lead to more seamless action and openness among the staff and the teachers. In essence, the school leadership is involved in

setting the core ideological approaches and perceptions that shape the institution's perspective towards the children, without which structured inclusion, that demands a more holistic change than merely including children from EWS categories, would not be possible. The core change that is required for structured social inclusion is ensuring that pedagogical processes and procedures are re-envisioned in order to ensure that EWS parents and children both are provided an accessible and approachable environment for their education and empowerment. This includes ensuring provisions for sharing and communicating via Hindi text messages between teachers and EWS parents, as well as arranging fortnightly sessions with EWS families so that their child is provided the support and attention that he/she deserves.

Some of the main causes of social isolation within inclusive environments in education have always been the lack of any major changes in curriculum as well as lack of adequate special training or employment of trained specialists or tutors who could make informed decisions regarding the inclusion of disadvantaged children. Hiring more SC/ST teachers to promote the integration of under-represented groups in the school ecosystem, both at the learner and teacher levels, making the curriculum more localised and relevant to the EWS children, and providing practical as well as theoretical opportunities for students to learn about various cultures, religions, languages, gender identities, etc, to sensitise them and help nurture respect for diversity within them are core aspects worth exploring within such a context.

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Book Reviews

SRIVASTAVA, Anshu (2022): *Liberalised India, Politicised Middle Class and Software Professionals*, New York: Routledge Publications, ISBN: 978-0-367-21919-2, Price: ₹ 995.00 (Hardbound)

The present volume titled *Liberalised India, Politicised Middle Class and Software Professionals* by Dr Anshu Srivastava is an attempt to understand the emergence, socio-economic and historical trajectories, and the changing connotations of middle class in India. The volume focusses on the study of class phenomena and its ambivalent relationship with political institutions in the metropolitan middle class in India. Based on empirical research, the present work is an addition to the scholarship on social-political aspects of middle class in the modern Indian society.

The “middle class” is one of the most enigmatic yet frequently discussed and deliberated concept in the social sciences. The present volume, in its introductory chapter, successfully traces the historical and political trajectory of the middle class, and contextualise its emergence and expansion in the colonial, post-colonial and post-liberalisation periods. The concept of middle class has been defined through various philosophical orientations. Wherein an analysis of class in the capitalist society by Marx has been highlighted, since he can be credited as the first philosopher to draw attention to the austere division of classes in society.

The book under review defines the middle class in India as an auxiliary class that mediates between the capitalist class and the working class, and its historical roots have been traced back to the colonial period, with the introduction of English education through the famous Macaulay’s minutes. It was this fragment of the English educated section of Indian society which formed the middle class and played a significant role in the freedom struggle by raising the public opinion and mobilising the masses. However, in post-colonial India, the development and expansion of the middle class has been phenomenal. Srivastava also sheds light on the stark differences in which the western and the Indian middle classes have emerged and expanded. The former has its roots in the industrial revolution, whereas the later can be traced to the precolonial times and then to the post-colonial Nehruvian socialism in various ways. In the initial days of independence, class politics was not a determining factor in electoral politics, and therefore no need was felt among scholars to develop a systematic understanding of the dynamics of middle class and its mechanism of negotiation and participation with the State. However, the role of the middle class has been significantly analysed in the social and political spheres which has transpired in the country in the last few decades.

The book gradually moves towards tracing the emergence and functional modalities of the “new middle class” in India with the unveiling of the economic liberalisation of the 1990s. The surfeit of economic prospects and their capricious nature, paired with excessive chances to labour mobility, was propelled as an ideal for the state’s rapid development. These new developments were infused with the rise of the new middle class, which notably differed from the old middle class in distinctive ways. The old middle class was defined by its income and occupation. Whereas the new middle class, along with these parameters, is identified also by their social, cultural, and economic attributes and patterns of consumption. There has been a serious hiatus of contextualising the middle class through the social and political transformations. Besides, a serious investigation of the unexplored specific sections of the middle class and their fluid identities in the constantly changing segments is much needed. The middle class cannot be compartmentalised under a heterogeneous category. Leela Fernandes conceptualises the middle class as an immensely differentiated socio-economic category, as an ongoing project through the restricted relationship between the state and itself. Marking a departure from the analysis of Fernandes, the present book attempts to unravel the formation of this new middle class, aspects of its fluid identity, their notion of democracy and development, their contribution to civil society, the strategies through which it negotiates with the state, and the collective impact of the above-mentioned analyses on the electoral politics.

The author discussed further historical as well as contemporary aspects of class composition and class division in India. For Srivastava, the class division in India is threefold: the working class, the big business class and the middle class. The working class is a potential actor in class politics. It was well mobilised by the Congress in the post-independence times through various unions and is also capable of resisting the power structures when required. The business class manages its interests through competitive party politics. It relies on state to maintain its economic monopoly as well as cultural hegemony. The third is the middle class, the term used first by Aurobindo Ghosh in 1893 to describe the professionals, doctors, lawyers and journalists. This list of middle class continued to expand in the later times to include civil servants, clerks, teachers, socio-political workers, successful small-scale entrepreneurs, people in middle and higher salaried brackets in private and public institutions. The volume under review traces the emergence of the new middle class back to the 1990s economic reforms, and defines this class mostly by its consumption patterns. It differentiates this class from the lower classes through a set of cultural markers that proclaim one’s good taste and style. It is the way through which the product is consumed which marks the new middle class as distinct in its nature. The heterogeneous nature of the middle class riddled with abstruseness in terms of its consumption patterns and ways.

The present work adopts a case study approach to a structurally defined group of software professionals based in NOIDA to understand how far they can be categorised as a suitable product of the pre-defined social imagination and discourse on the new middle class and its attributes. The economic reforms have given impetus to the IT industry and has connected it to the global economic affairs. The software professionals carry significant social and symbolic weights in the middle-class public sphere, and they seemingly represent the aspirations of the global middle class, identified with the imagination of the new India.

However, the research findings revealed that the middle class possessed limited knowledge of what exactly constituted the structure and content of the economic reforms. With respect to the impact of the economic reforms, it is usually argued that the reforms accentuated the process of social and economic reorganisation in various ways. However, the software professionals opined that these reforms have either benefited everyone equally or added to the advantage of the rich class. Nevertheless, the impact of economic reform has never been an issue of debate in the elections, mostly due to the lack of knowledge regarding their implementation and impact.

The present work reveals that, contrary to the scholars who would argue that the new middle class works independent of the state, 50 per cent of the software professionals responded that they believe in the idea of state, and state-run institutions. Their idea of privatisation of public institutions can best be defined as public-private partnership. Their notion of democracy is essentially rooted in the equal rights to each citizen and freedom to express their opinion. However, the notion of equality prevalent amongst them did not emanate from any idea of equitability, as they are largely opposed to the practice of reservation in the public institutions. As far as the market is concerned, this idea essentially operates under the "veil of ignorance" where the social identity and backgrounds of the individuals are considered mostly inconsequential. At best, some of the respondents favoured reservation during primary and secondary education. Furthermore, the research findings unveil that the growth of IT industry and MNCs is also narrowing the gender inequality in theory; however, there are arguments that the IT industry has restricted them to newer categories of low skilled jobs, pushing them to the lower rungs in the hierarchy of work. The jobs which women perform in any sector are not always unskilled; rather the skill content of the job is socially determined. This creates a glass ceiling impeding the upward mobility of women in the hierarchy of work. Only 40 out of the 131 respondents favoured gender neutral policies.

The last two sections of the book focus on an understanding of the new middle class in political terms --- through their notions of politics, public consciousness, their interaction with the state-run institutions and their ideas and practices of participation in the democratic-collective efforts to bring transformations. Srivastava asserts that the new middle class believes in the rights-based approach, rather than the need-based approach. They believe in direct participation through collective interaction. The author further seeks to understand the relationship of middle class with the state and their idea of the state as an institution? The idea and nature of the state can be seen through various lenses, and a simpler monolithic theorisation of state is an impossible task. Notwithstanding their dissatisfaction with the state, many software professionals did not question the existence of the state. They usually approach the state to receive services, not necessarily goods. Their relationship with the state may be limited but their interest in politics is not partial. Their identity as political beings are essentially shaped and reflected in their interactions with the state and through their participation in formal and informal ways. During the "India Against Corruption" movement, the majority of protestors, in fact, belonged to the new middle class of urban spaces. The interviews conducted of the software professionals reasserts their faith in the outcome of the social movements.

Additionally, there is heavy emphasis on individual change as a precursor of any major transformation. The software engineers, in the present work, opine that their participation in the social affairs and supports for the initiatives of corporate social responsibility is meant for bringing a positive change in the society. This new middle class, drowned in the “culture of consumption,” emphasises upon ‘cleanliness,’ beautification of public spaces, better traffic management, etc, and it is reflected in their active groups, like the RWAs, and their activism. The distinctive views with regard to social movements and activism is a result of the particularity of middle class as a heterogenous group. This element of heterogeneity, at times, makes it difficult to provide an indubitable analysis of middle-class’s attributes and facets. The new middle class neither succumbs to the claim of a global homogenised class nor essentialises the cultural differentiation. This further raises the question: Whether the middle class has a homogeneous political identity at all? The book argues that the middle class heterogeneity is premised on a shared meaningfulness and demands, while the articulations of the middle class affiliations and desires are made politically.

While discussing the notions of transparency, integrity and also law and order, as held by middle class professionals, the present work finds that there is always a shared, selective and opaque outrage with regard to corruption. The police and the transport authority were seen as the most corrupt institutions by the interviewed respondents. However, the shared outrage with regard to corruption in private sector is minimal. A similar kind of transparency and accountability is not expected from the corporates. The participation of the middle class youths in Anna Hazare’s movement against corruption in the public sector was a manifestation of their belief that corruption is hurting the collective morality of the country. The new modalities of protest and mobilisation could be very well traced back to this movement where the communication technology played an important role in converting this struggle into a mega movement.

Environmental degradation is one of the domains wherein there seems to be a basic awareness of the need of transformations. But in lieu of a negligible role of the middle class in any environmental movement, their activism in the direction of sustainable environment has been termed as “bourgeoise environmentalism.” Their consumption-based lifestyle has contributed immensely to environment destruction, leading to their voices against conservation of environment as a futile attempt in the direction. There is an inherent dilemma associated with global aspirations and environmental discourses, and the question remains how do we balance the two. The discourse of any struggles relating to environmental justice has also been limited to the educated elite public sphere. Moreover, the hierarchy of work, which has always dominated the Indian society, is reproduced in the actions of the middle class, since the responsibility of maintaining the purity and cleanliness predominantly lies on the domestic workers.

So far the political scientists have failed to capture a dense theorisation upon the emergence, expansion and participation of the middle class. The question of class divisions and mobility, consumption patterns and participation have been mostly investigated through numbers and social behaviours by the economists and sociologists. This book is a contribution towards underlining the engagement of the middle class and the new middle class with the political institutions in lieu of the continuously changing economic, social and political dynamics. It presents us with a fascinating, insightful, and well researched analysis of the new middle class’s tryst with the state and society. The present work successfully

highlights the juxtapositions of the middle class as a political category, with the state. Hence, the present volume can be helpful for scholars and students of political science, economics, sociology, and history alike.

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KUMAR, C Raj (Ed) (2019): *The Future of Indian Universities: Comparative and International Perspectives*, Oxford University Press: New Delhi, India, pp. 482, ISBN-13: 978-0-19-948065-4, ISBN-10: 0-19-948065-6 (Hardcover)

In the last two decades, the Indian higher education system has seen a positive growth in terms of several educational outcomes including the gross enrolment ratio (GER). While discussing this massification of education in the CPRHE Research Paper titled “Challenges of Massification of Higher Education in India”, N V Varghese (2015) argues numerical growth has become a parameter and visible marker of higher education across the globe. However, in the meantime, the need for a roadmap to make sense of this massification by further enabling the process with policy, planning and practice has been felt by policymakers and practitioners. The Future of Indian Universities is a timely intervention in this regard. This edited volume by Prof C Raj Kumar critically evaluates the existing higher education policies from the management, leadership and pedagogical perspectives, and also provides a framework for Indian universities to make their presence felt in the community of global higher education institutions.

Divided into three sections, this book deals with the “imagination, aspirations and expectations” of Indian universities in the first section. The second section of this volume engages with “a comparative perspective of Indian higher education,” which critically examines the concerns related to “policy, regulation and management.” The final section deals with the “pedagogy of the interdisciplinarity,” particularly “law, humanities and global studies” in the Indian context. This review attempts to present the essence of the book by engaging with the fundamental ideas developed by the authors in their respective presentations.

To begin with the first section, Chapter One sets up the agenda for the succeeding chapters of this volume. It provides a critical view of the Indian higher education system and the policy-practice gap that restricts Indian universities from making their presence felt in the world ranking order. Focussing on the rarely discussed but crucial aspect of institution-building and the vision of an institution, the author argues that lack of innovation constraints educational transformation. This directly corresponds to the capabilities of Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) in competing with the well-established global institutions. Further, the author argues that, for a socially transformative higher education, there is the

need to restructure the essential aspects of higher education that are “curriculum, courses, teaching pedagogy, faculty recruitment and student admission process.”

Given the complex regulatory mechanisms and the funding constraints prevalent in the Indian higher education system, leadership with an institutional vision for the future can play a crucial role in overcoming the “conflicting regulatory mechanisms.” Funding, understandably, has a prominent role in deciding the future of Indian universities to mark their presence in the world ranking order. The Government of India has a decisive role in this regard, along with the respective state governments and regulatory bodies such as the UGC, Ministry of Education and others. In maintaining and improving the academic standards, the regulatory bodies must be prepared to provide the higher education institutions with a “free, liberal and facilitative environment” (pp 15). On the other hand, the author also suggests some measures for universities to be accountable to the concerned institutions’ stakeholders. The underlying vision is to fully develop an institution without compromising on the duties and rights that serve the purpose of teaching-learning and research. Chapter Two engages with the “quality, diversity and the epistemic of university” in a coherent manner. It draws attention to the sociological and philosophical aspects of the university system. This chapter raises critical questions related to the idea of education, which derives its complexity from its role in shaping the chances of employability in a developing economy. The despair and anxieties of this education-market linkage have resulted in the downgraded quality of education and a rat race among the parents and students that is detrimental to their well-being, manifesting as high incidents of suicides among the students.

Engaging with the theme of “voices from within beckoning for the future,” Chapter Three begins with seven critical questions, drawing on the historical role of the universities that has been considered a pathway to “wisdom” through “knowledge.” It seeks answers to the question related to the “identity, purpose, future and stakeholders” of the university, thereby developing a perspective for its future. The key argument is to cultivate the “ethos and pathos” of human existence beyond the domain of courses and curriculum structure. With the help of pedagogical objectives, the higher educational institutions can critically develop an understanding that will lead to social-cultural and economic well-being of future generations. Chapter Four of the volume, “The Indian University in a Comparative Perspective” engages with the policy perspective for world-class higher education and the existing challenges in achieving the same. This chapter extensively discusses the universities as organisations in “distress” due to political pressure, corruption and governance of the institutions. The poor state of the Indian universities needs a policy shift and leadership for transformative changes. However, the question whether such measures will be enough for Indian universities to follow the foreign model of higher education, remains unanswered. Further, can there be a replication of a world-class university in India that promotes its linkages with industry along with research focus and autonomy in internal functioning needs a critical enquiry. The posing of “social justice and equity” as a “political problem” or as an impediment to quality education, however, does not adequately engage with the profound need of shaping universities as an inclusive space in a nation as inequitable as ours. Thus, the task of thinking about the future of Indian universities demands a serious reflection on the ideas of inclusion and representation. Without strategic management and policy

intervention, a positive change cannot be achieved, despite a recent expansion of the Indian higher education system.

Chapter Five, critically engages and elaborates the argument. The author provides representative data and figures, and spells out the conceptual issues present in the Indian university system. Additionally, the chapter engages with the access and financial issues and provides a framework to improve the quality of education with suggestions about enhancing the funding, fostering the private sector, pedagogical engagement, use of technology, improvement in academic culture and effective global engagement (pp 94). It also proposes monitoring and evaluation that may enable the worldwide presence of Indian universities. The final chapter of Section One is based on three case studies of higher education institutions. These are the Indian School of Business (ISB), the Ashoka University and the Young India Fellowship programme of Ashoka University. These case studies dwell on the process of institution-building through management, leadership and governance.

The second section of this volume is about "Indian Higher Education in a Comparative Perspective: Policy, Regulation and Management." It starts with the theme of a "liberalised legal regime" in Chapter Seven. It explains various legislative initiatives by the Government of India that have "failed" to achieve their intended purpose, and have created only complexity rather than creativity that is needed to strengthen the knowledge economy. UGC, as a regulatory body, has been criticised as it does not address the issues of internal governance and academic freedom of the universities.

Chapter Eight is based on the author's experience and reflects upon the critical aspect of "alienation of Indian universities from the world." When the Indian universities are compared with world-class universities on some parameters such as publications, collaborations, and organisation of international conferences by adhering to the world-class standards, these are found entirely missing. This chapter suggests an academic shift in "public policy education" in India. It also argues that there is a need for critical engagement with the current state of "public policy studies" and what can be done to improve the discipline. Also, setting up of new public policy schools as per the international standards along with the thinktanks are the key suggestions of this chapter.

Chapter Nine engages with one of the important aspects of a university's functioning – that of "knowledge creation." Decoding of the philosophical realm of knowledge and its purpose along with the existing challenges to the creation of knowledge has been discussed at length. This chapter further examines the structural issues and politics of knowledge that pose a challenge in the process of knowledge creation, means and knowledge as an end in itself. Also, the author suggests that both of the "socio-democratic" and "neo-liberal" models can, with the help of ICT, help Indian universities to improve the level of knowledge creation.

Moving further, Chapter Ten, represents the issues and challenges present in the field of "science policy" in an era of global commodification. In an attempt to bridge the gap between science and social sciences, this chapter focusses on the role of social scientists and science practitioners in developing an improvised policy for higher education institutions that includes the theoretical reasoning of sciences and social sciences.

Based on the historical trajectory of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA) as a model institution, the chapter by Shailendra Raj Mehta offers some insights into developing an institutional culture. This model explains the six institutional cultures including the old forms of building a culture of knowledge, that are, collegial, managerial and

tangible. The new forms of the institutional cultures that are development, advocacy and virtual cultures have also been discussed as part of this case study. Creating a world-class private university from an administrator's perspective has been discussed in the next chapter. This chapter critically engages with the state of higher education in India and the challenges for a private university which is aspiring to become a globally recognised university. Illustrating the development trajectory of Jindal Global University, the chapter further highlights the tussles between the regulatory bodies and the university in the form of administrative, financial and bureaucratic procedures.

The final chapter of Section Two is on "Deconstructing the Discourse on University Social Responsibility." It maps out the historical development of social responsibility of the university in international as well as national context. The existing dichotomies within knowledge capitalism --- "working for self and working for society" --- remains a dogma that needs a resolution. The linking of higher education with the society has been suggested as a broader approach to ensure quality, access and governance. Also, the governance structure within the university system needs to be made more democratic; this is one of the central ideas which the chapter focusses on. Section Three of the volume discusses the "Pedagogy of Interdisciplinarity: Law, Humanities and Global Studies in India." This section marks a progressive shift in the structure of the volume under review and sets up a discourse on pedagogy and research in higher education, while offering some insights. The chapter titled "The Phoenix of Interdisciplinarity in Higher Education" reflects on the historical and policy perspective for developing an interdisciplinary research culture beyond the boundaries of discipline-restricted or discipline-specific research culture.

The next chapter engages with an important aspect: the "role of humanities in university education." It provides a glimpse of the institutional identity of Somerville College, University of Oxford, and its contribution to producing Indian leaders for the future. Enriching the pedagogical discourse, the "liberal Arts in the American Context: What India can Learn from Western Liberal Education" calls for a creative education system that will provide jobs to the Indian students (here it means the "American jobs") but also develop leaders. "Public Policy as Practice" is an extension of the more significant debate that the volume engages in. The previous sections, which are sections one and two, dealt mainly with the administrative and regulatory aspects of public policy. However, this chapter in the volume draw attention to the pedagogical perspective which, as suggested, will lead to strengthening the democratic values.

"Global Studies in Indian Universities" raises some nuanced questions on the curriculum and course framework to study "international relations." The author suggests that there is a severe need to update the existing theories of international relations and include some new aspects in order to understand the global politics as well as the contemporary issues and challenges present in the current world order.

The final chapter of this section, "Clinical Legal Education," highlights an interesting relationship between the Indian democracy and clinical legal education, and discusses why it is the need of the hour. The author also suggests that this will develop experiential learning for law students in India. Citing the American case, this chapter argues why such initiatives can be beneficial for a democratic nation like India.

To conclude, this volume provides an interesting discussion on the issues and challenges in Indian higher education and suggests policy-level interventions for the future of higher

education in India. Certainly, the contributors of the volume are the practitioners and leaders of the educational institutions, and their reflection in the form of their academic contribution is noted in their writings. However, this academic contribution by the editor opens up the floor and points out several policy shortcomings. Also, it provides a roadmap to developing world-class universities in India. Of course, given regulatory limitations, private universities also need to positively engage in a dialogue with the central and the respective state governments. Apart from the issues and challenges faced by the private universities, we believe the private universities should develop some programmes to collaborate with the international as well as Indian universities as future higher education policy initiatives. This aspect, however, is not reflected in the volume. As a developing arena in innovation and employment for the future, research can be seen together with the social development that this volume also engages in a progressive manner. If institutional autonomy and accountability are treated as aspects of equal importance, it will certainly make a difference in the Indian higher education system. Further, the global universities will notice this positive aspect and possibly engage in the process of knowledge creation, research and innovation, eventually leading to making Indian universities world-class.

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GANDHI, M (2022): *Enforcing Criminality: Application of the Criminal Tribes Acts in India*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, ISBN: 978-9390729999, pp. 480, Price: ₹ 2195

“Nowhere in the world do we hear that the entire section of society were declared as criminal tribes or that some tribes are criminals by birth.” This is a line that resonates throughout the book under review, highlighting an excruciating history of exploitation, suppression and violation of human dignity of the denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, initially at the hands of the colonial regime and then by the subsequent authorities during the post-independence period. The situation of the denotified and nomadic tribes has not changed much even after the repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act. Many of the denotified tribes are yet to receive citizenship and continue to survive in very poor conditions without any basic amenities. Moreover, not much is known about many of the denotified tribes because they lack permanent settlements or residences, which is a major reason that they are not able to avail any benefits from welfare schemes. There are no data to indicate the health, employment and educational status of the denotified tribes. For these reasons, this book becomes a necessary contribution to the existing literature on denotified tribes. The book under review sheds light on the historical and legal perspective of the Criminal Tribes Act and its implications on the social, economic and cultural lives of denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes.

The book is divided into ten chapters, followed by an appendix comprising all the important acts and government rules dating from the colonial period to the post-colonial period.

In Chapter 1, the author presents a brief and systematic introduction of the history of the Criminal Tribes Acts and recommendations of various committees on the NT/DNT communities. The chapter is divided into four sections, wherein the initial section provides a quick overview of how the list of denotified tribes or *vimukta jatis* came into existence after the repeal of the Criminal Tribes Acts. Section II chronologically describes various Act such as the Criminal Tribes Act (1871, 1879, 1911, 1923 and 1924), Madras Restriction of Habitual Offenders Act (1948) and Criminal Tribes Laws (Repeal) Act (1952). Section III gives a summary of the different committees and commissions on the Denotified and Nomadic communities including the Criminal Tribes Enquiry Committee (1947), Ayyangar Committee (1949), Kalelkar Commission (1953), Lokur Committee (1965), Mandal Commission (1980) and Justice Venkatachaliah Commission (2002). The last section discusses the current status of the DNTs and recent post-colonial efforts to improve their condition in society.

The next few chapters focus on the central theme of the book, i.e., the enforcement of the CT Act in the major provinces of British India. Each chapter discusses a specific province, including Madras, the Nizam's dominions, princely states of Mysore and the United Province. In the following chapters, the overarching theme of criminality shadows the discourse of nomadic tribes while also highlighting the stigma of branding an entire community as criminal. What remains common in all these chapters is the intention of the colonial authorities to dehumanise the nomadic tribes to gain exclusive control over the rich natural resources upon which the tribes were dependent for subsistence and livelihood. This dehumanisation allowed the colonial government to justify the enactment of the CT Acts. With every subsequent amendment to the CT Act, the state was able to tighten its clutches over the social, economic and cultural lives of the nomadic tribes. They were registered and thrown into settlements with no mobility, livelihood, or basic facilities required for survival. There were stringent punishments against those who acted against any clause of the draconian law.

Here is a brief discussion of the main tenets of these chapters. Chapter 2 provides an analysis of the historical condition of the criminal tribes in present day Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The chapter charts the evolution of the Criminal Acts, the ensuing amendments, and the resistance of the nationalist leaders to the repeal of the CT Act by the end of colonial rule, using Madras as a point of reference. Chapter 3 throws light on the workings of the state machinery, especially the powers of the local government to deal with the "criminal tribes" in the Nizam's dominion. Chapter 4 elaborates on the implementation of the CT Act in Mysore province, vis a vis the maintenance of registers and reformatory activities undertaken by the Christian missionaries in the fields of education and health. Chapter 5 mentions the recommendations of the Tiwari Committee which raised concerns over the declaration of the entire tribes as criminals. The chapter also discusses the failure of the local government and non-governmental agencies in doing any good for the members of the criminal tribes.

The situation of the denotified tribes in the post-independence period is presented in Chapter 6 entitled "Criminal Tribes, Their Plight and Attempts to Assert Their Rights: Maharashtra." It highlights the poor condition of denotified tribes in Maharashtra and the sheer denial of basic constitutional rights even in post-colonial India. By citing various constitutional provisions and recommendations of reports given by different commissions, the author argues that none of these reports attracted any attention from policy makers. Gandhi also questions the working of state machinery, claiming that state interventions in terms of budgetary allocation, planning and administration were inadequate in addressing the situation of nomadic tribes. Even after declaring these communities as denotified tribes, the attitude and perception of the state and society never really changed. These tribal communities continue to live in isolated ghettos with minimal or no basic facilities since most of them are not recognised in any of the three social categories, viz, Scheduled Tribes (STs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), or Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Towards the end of the chapter, the author emphasises that the state was instrumental in directing a huge amount of violence against these communities through police and settlement managers. In Maharashtra, the educational status of denotified tribes further deteriorated after independence.

Chapter 7 provides a historical and legal perspective of the CT Act and its implications on the everyday lives of nomadic and semi nomadic tribes. Gandhi questions the concept of "criminal tribes" by calling it a colonial construct. He deliberates on the iniquitous intentions of the colonial government behind criminalising the nomadic/semi-nomadic tribes under the pretext of maintaining law and order --- only to seize control over the indigenous people's resources. It is interesting to note that the colonial state's assumption of born criminality was deeply rooted in their understanding of caste as a defining characteristic of Indian society. The colonial administrators wrongly used this premise of hereditary link between caste and occupation to comprehend why certain wandering tribes indulge in "criminal activities." This chapter also gives a clear picture of the main features of the CT Act, idea of criminal settlements, listing of criminal tribes and the use of legal sanctions to victimise a significant population. For this reason, I feel this chapter could have been the introductory chapter of this book.

In Chapter 8, the author elaborates on the reformation and rehabilitation efforts for criminal tribes in Andhra Pradesh during the colonial and post-independence period. Gandhi provides detailed insights on the approaches and strategies adopted by various agencies and their struggle to carry out reformation and rehabilitation activities in Stuartpuram, an enclosed settlement for the criminal tribes. The chapter frequently leaves the reader in a precarious position regarding the initiatives taken for their social, economic, and cultural rehabilitation because it is possible that they did more harm to the already stigmatised tribes than good. For instance, separating children from their families in order to 'educate' them or compulsory reading of the bible by all tribes in rehabilitation settlements managed by the Salvation Army. However, there were certain initiatives related to livelihood and education that helped members of the criminal tribes break away from the cycle of criminality.

Development for the mainstream almost always brought destruction to the Denotified tribes. This is well pointed out in Chapter 9 where the author discusses the developmental challenges experienced by the denotified communities. The author points out that even after

the repeal of the CT Act, the denotified tribes continue to remain at the peripheries of the developmental agenda. Many of them are still struggling to attain citizenship, and lack education, basic health care and employment. Lastly, in the concluding chapter, the author tries to analyse the situation of the NT and DNT communities and suggests a few recommendations for the development of the denotified communities.

By emphasising that the notion of criminal tribes is a colonial construct, the book brings us to terms with the institutional violence that took place within the impermeable boundaries of criminal settlements. These settlements were primarily built to restrict, monitor and control the movement of the criminal tribes, and any disobedience was met with harsh punishments. They were subjected to social stigma and segregation not just by the state but also by the mainstream society. Certain terms like “dacoit,” “lazy,” “rogue,” “unclean,” “habitual offenders,” etc, were used to refer to the members of denotified tribes by the colonial rulers, which shows the extent of negative perceptions held towards these communities. Such concepts remained ingrained in the minds of the state and mainstream society even after independence. No doubt this book is an important contribution because it tries to bring together the fragmented discourses on the situation of nomadic and denotified communities, focussing on different parts of the country. However, there are certain gaps in the book that need to be addressed. There is a continuous repetition of facts and statements across many chapters, which could have been avoided. Another concern is related to the perception of the author, which at times is confusing. For instance, the author writes, “They (denotified tribes) were unable to evade the domination of the superior people.” Does this mean to suggest that the members of denotified tribes are inferior to the mainstream population? Additionally, the author has made a few passing references about sexual and physical abuse of women and children throughout various chapters, but neither adequately addressed the problem nor offered any recommendations for the same. Overall, the author deserves an appreciation for bringing out a nuanced understanding of the criminalisation of denotified and nomadic tribes as an outcome of colonialism interwoven with social and psychological trauma. The book urges policy makers, planners, academicians and society as a whole to reflect on why we are still failing to address the issues related to denotified tribes even after so many years of independence.

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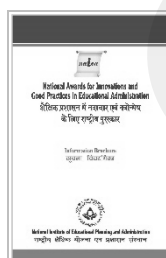
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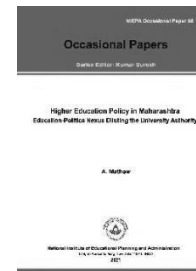
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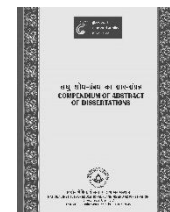


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