

INCLUSIVE INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND EQUITY ISSUE OF MARGINALIZED SOCIAL GROUPS.

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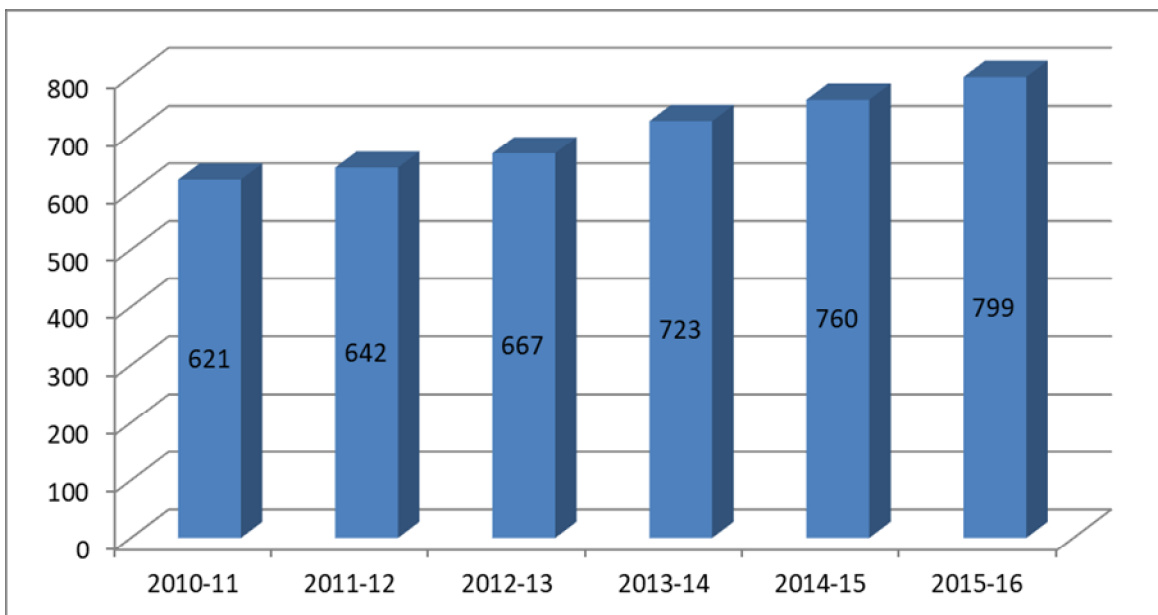
ABSTRACT

Inclusion in Indian higher education means to provide access and opportunity to all groups of people irrespective of their social class, caste, gender, ethnicity to participate in higher education. The inclusiveness has two main dimensions including all sections of society and including all expected goals of education. Indian higher education is the third largest in the world in terms of enrollment, next to the United States and China. The sixth report on All India Survey on Higher Education for 2015-16 states that there are 799 universities, 39071 colleges and 7154 standalone institutions which provide only diploma level courses. Over the years higher education in India has gone through a phase of unprecedented expansion, marked by a huge increase in the volume of students and in the number of institutions. The increase, however has not been commensurate with the growth of population and its diverse needs. According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development's Report on All Indian Survey on Higher Education, the Gross enrollment ratio (GER) which is calculated for 18-23 years of age group is 24.5% during 2015-16. In addition to very low access to higher education in general, there are disparities between various marginalized social groups like schedule castes (SC's), schedule tribes (ST's), other backward classes (OBC's) and women whose Gross enrollment ratio is below than the national average. The present paper attempts to highlight the issues concerning equity and inclusion in higher education in Indian context. The paper attempts to highlight the extent and manifestation of non-inclusion or exclusion in Indian higher education with special reference to marginalized sections like schedule castes, schedule tribes and women.

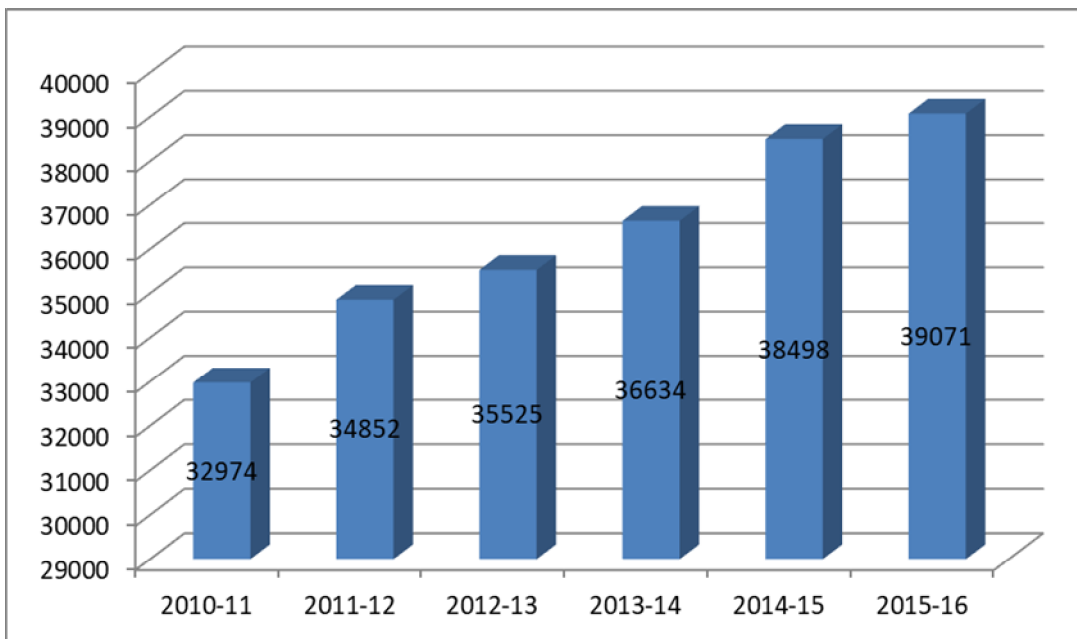
Keywords: Higher education, Gross enrollment ratio, equity, access, inclusion, marginalized groups.

Introduction

The inclusive education is a precondition for socio-economic growth of any country (Kumari, 2013). It is well documented in the history of various countries like Japan and china in Asia and a number of countries in Europe accorded highest priority to education which resulted in higher growth of these countries (Thennady, 2013). The focus of the government in recent years has shifted from promoting incredible India to building inclusive India to which higher education is no exception. The focus of the higher education in India in recent decades has been to have inclusion of marginalized groups like schedule castes, schedule tribes, and women through various schemes like scholarships, reservation, education loan etc. The last decade has witnessed an exponential growth in Indian higher education system (Mahli, 2013). The number of institutes have grown at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11% while student enrolment at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.8% (Joseph, 2013). In a press release, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) informed that the Gross enrolment ratio for higher education in India increased to 24.5% during 2015-16 from 17.9% in 2012 (AISHE, 2016).



Number of universities: AISHE (2010-16).



No of colleges: *AISHE (2010-16)*.

Access of social groups to higher education: In India exclusion takes place on account of three parameters in *higher education*. One is social exclusion on the basis of caste. Most people belonging to lower castes don't have opportunity for higher education, skill training or availing decent jobs. Second is economic exclusion, on account of poverty, because of which there is no upward mobility (Manisha, 2013). Historically, education in India had an elitist and upper caste centered basis. In ancient India the education was the monopoly of Brahman class and rest of society was excluded from education due to the water tight compartments of caste (Shahlani, 2013). The traditional deprivation kept schedule castes and schedule tribes at a lower rung of the caste hierarchy and denied access to any form of education with the demand of knowledge driven society under globalization left them out of mainstream as social misfits and disposable people of society because of their lack of education (Sundar, 2013).

Poor enrolment of schedule castes (SC's), schedule tribes (ST's) and other backward classes: Out of every 100 students getting into institutions of higher education, less than 11% are from schedule castes and less than 5% are from schedule tribes, despite reservation in education (Pinto, 2013). The schedule castes constitute 16.6% of the total Indian population and schedule tribes constitute 8.6% (census, 2011). The poor enrollment percentage of schedule castes and schedule tribe students in universities and colleges has been brought to the fore by a nationwide survey conducted by a Govt appointed task force for the academic year 2011 (Pinto, 2013). According to the results of the survey conducted for the first time in the country, the enrollment of schedule caste students in higher education institutions stood at 10.2% of the total while the percentage of schedule tribe students came out just 4.4%. The data includes enrolment of students in higher educational courses conducted in distance mode. The recent Report of the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2015-16 the Gross enrollment ratio of schedule castes has reached up to 19.5% and for schedule tribes to 14.2% (HRD, 2016). The low participation of schedule castes and schedule tribes in higher education as compared to the national average 24.5% is a matter of grave concern (AISHE, 2016). The enrollment of the other backward classes (OBCs) in the year 2010-11 pegged at 27.1% and the state was able to fill the 27% OBC quota (The Hindu, 29th sep. 2012). But the percentage of the population of the other backward classes in the country is 54% according to the Mandal report. In proportion to their population Muslims were worse off than schedule castes and schedule tribes. Muslims comprise 14.4% of India's populations but account for 4.4% of students enrolled in higher education (AISHE, 2015).

Reasons for exclusion of schedule castes and schedule tribes:

1. Education in India has an elitist and upper caste basis from very early times.
2. The traditional deprivation kept schedule castes and schedule tribes at a lower rung and denied them access to education as main stream.
3. Lack of accessibility to institutions of higher learning especially for ST, s who experience geographical isolation from the main stream society.

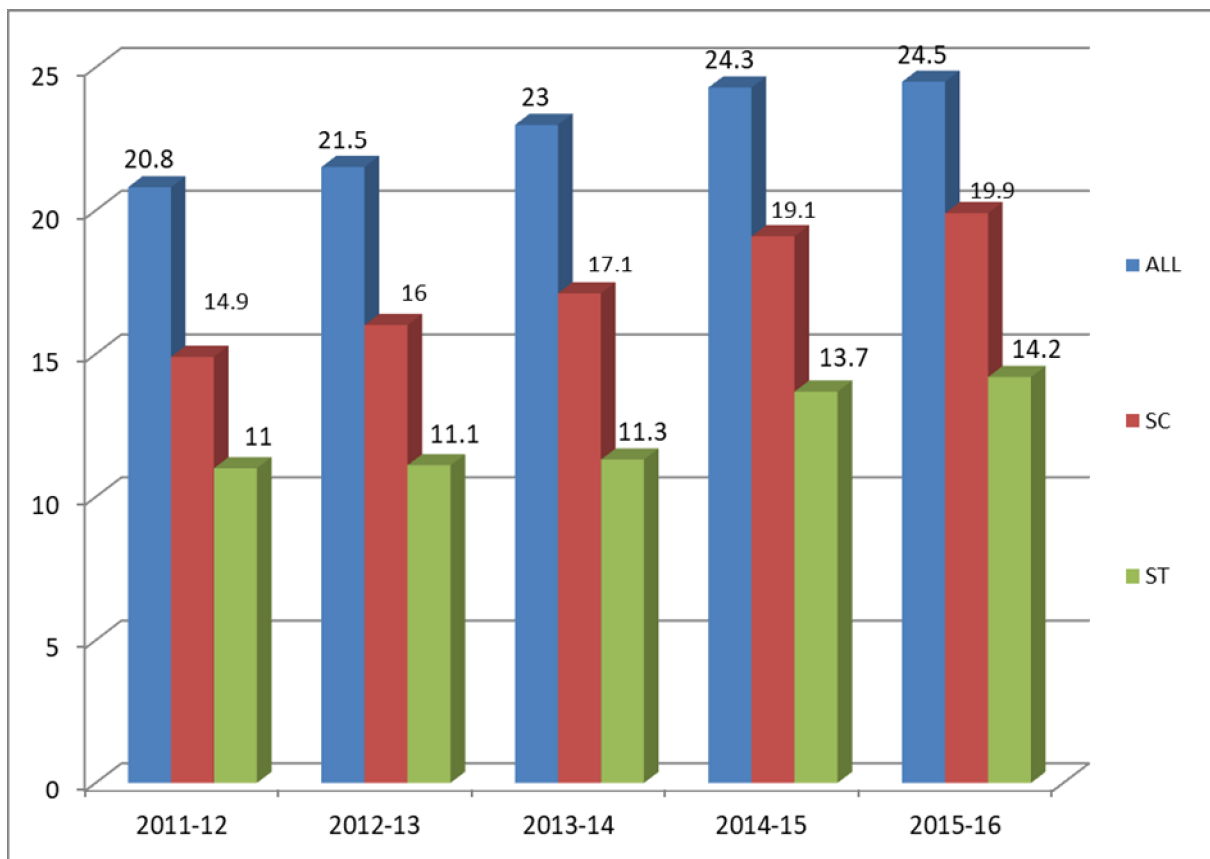
4. Economic backwardness of SC s and ST s is also an abstacle that denies them access to higher education.

5. Lack of proper financial assistance and awareness among SC s and ST s also acts as a source of exclusion.

Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) 2011-16

Year	GER(Overall) in percents	Male GER (in percents)	Female GER (in percents)	SC(Schedule caste) GER (in percents)	ST(schedule tribe) GER(in percents)
2011-12	20.4	21.6	18.2	-	-
2012-13	21.5	22.7	20.1	16	11.1
2013-14	23.0	23.9	22	17.1	11.3
2014-15	24.3	25.3	23.2	19.1	13.7
2015-16	24.5	25.4	23.5	19.9	14.2

Source: All India Survey on higher Education (AISHE) 2015-16.



Category-wise GER (AISE, 2011-16)

Population constitution of students as per their category.

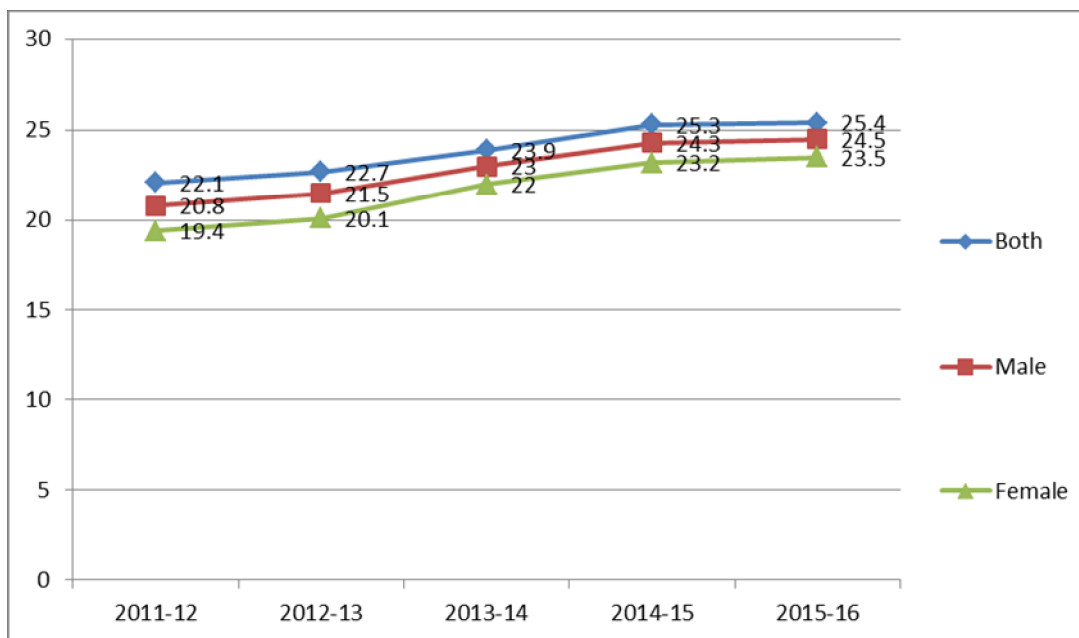
Year	Schedule caste(in percents)	Schedule tribe(in percents)	Other backward classes(In percents)	Muslims(in percents)	Others(in percents)
2011-12	12.5	4.2	31.6	4.5	2.1
2012-13	12.8	4.4	31.2	4.2	1.9
2013-14	13.1	4.6	32.4	4.3	2.0
2014-15	13.44	4.8	32.8	4.4	1.9
2015-16	13.9	4.9	33.75	4.7	1.97

Source: All India Survey on higher Education (AISHE) 2015-16.

Enrollment of Women in Higher Education: Though gender is another source of exclusion in Indian *higher education* but in recent years the number of women enrolled in higher education has risen almost 50% in four years, according to *the Times of India* (Joseph, 2013). This is a very positive development given the fact that women remain subjugated and subordinated in the country. In the 2010-11 academic year almost 7 million women enrolled in colleges, compared with 4.7 million in 2006-7 (AISHE, 2011). The Gross enrollment ratio of women in 2010-11 was pegged at 16.5% while it was 12.7% in 2009-10 (AISHE, 2011). The present enrollment ratio of women as the report of All India Survey on Higher Education is concerned is 23.5% (AISHE, 2016). Though the increase in the enrollment of women is a sign of progress but they don't have access to *higher education* commensurate with their population share and still there is a gap when we compare it with the gross enrollment ratio of men which is 25.4% (AISHE, 2016).

So the inequality or disparity experienced by social groups like schedule castes, schedule tribes, other backward classes and women reflected by the afore mentioned data is a matter of grave concern for India. The exclusion experienced by these groups on the basis of caste, ethnicity or gender is aggravated by insufficient scholarships, lack of mature loan system administrative apathy etc (Nagraja, 2013). The vision statement of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) highlights the consciousness amongst the policy makers for affirmative action. Equitable access (equity) of *higher education* is described as an unambiguous objective (Sharnapa, 2013). The most prominent policy for promoting access to higher education has been reservations. The policy of reservation in higher education is based on the assertion that participation of disadvantaged groups has been low and reservation would enhance their participation. The percentage of reservation varies across the states in accordance with the population of these groups in respective states. 22.5% quota /seats are reserved for schedule castes and schedule tribe students. An additional quota of 27% is reserved for other backward castes in federal institutions (Jairam, 2013). It means 49.5% seats are reserved for the marginalized social groups. Along with reservation, the Govt

provision of scholarships, special hostels, meals, book loans and other schemes exclusively for schedule castes and schedule tribe students have encouraged the participation (Joseph, 2013).



Gross Enrollment Ratio (AISHE, 2011-16).

Causes for low Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of women.

1. Negligence of female education due to gender inequality.
2. Imposition of domestic responsibilities on girls.
3. Lack of educational facilities especially in rural areas.
4. Historical and traditional factors; for centuries together female education was neglected and hence tradition bound people came to believe that education of women is not worthy of any serious consideration.
5. Economic factors especially in terms of grinding poverty and hunger is probably the most influential in adversely affecting female participation in higher education.
6. Orthodox attitude of parents to send their girls for attaining higher education.

Policy intervention towards equality and social justice at higher education level: From time to time the Government of India has launched a number of schemes and programmes for the purposes of enhancing the participation of deprived classes in higher education. The Government has it mandatory for all these institutions to provide 15% reservations to schedule castes (SCs), 7.5% reservation to schedule tribes (STs). In addition, the Central Government has provided for 27% reservation to other backward classes (OBCs) in all centrally funded institutions of higher learning (Agarwal, 2006).

The SC/ST students who secure admission in the notified institutions are given scholarships to meet the requirements for full tuition fees, living expenses, books and stationery. The scholarships once awarded continue till the completion of the courses, subject to satisfactory performance. Under the 'Book Bank Scheme' for SC and ST students pursuing Medical, Engineering, Agriculture, veterinary, polytechnics, law, chartered accountancy, and bio-science courses are provided books at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The Government of India also provides 17 overseas scholarships each year to the meritorious SC and ST students who wish to pursue higher studies abroad. The Government also committed to provide increased financial assistance to institutions located in border, hilly, remote and educationally backward areas. The central government is also going to provide increased support to institutions with large percentage of SC, ST, OBC, girls and minority population. Besides the government is also committed to build more hostels for the students belonging to underprivileged sections of the society (Prakesh, 2008).

Positive Discrimination: A constitution may indicate the direction in which we are to move; but the social structure will decide how far we are able to move at what pace. As would be seen from the forgoing the pace at which the different disadvantage sections are having access to higher education leave a lot to be desired. This is despite the myriad affirmative action and positive discrimination towards SC/ST and OBCs. Several studies have shown that only the elites among the SC&ST have benefitted significantly from the positive discrimination policy of the Government (Sundar, 2015).

Human resource development programmes to ensure equity in higher education: In spite of the significant progress made during the past few years, Indian *higher education* is still plagued with several challenges, i.e. relatively low gross enrollment ratio, inequitable access to higher education by caste, community, geography, gender and lack of high quality research and educational institutions, resulting in sub-optimal outcomes (Joseph, 2013).

The twelfth plan recognizes these challenges and proposes several initiatives around six focus areas to address them.

- Expansion: augmenting capacity in existing institutions.
- Equity: creating targeted schemes for backward and minorities
- Excellence: building excellence through research and innovation, faculty development and internationalization.
- Governance: enhancing institutional autonomy and transparency.
- Funding: Increasing public and private funding and linking them to outcomes.
- Implementation and monitoring: Improving coordination across ministries and agencies (Joseph, 2013).

Twelfth five year plan (2012-17) in relation to equity and inclusion: The objective of the 12th five year plan (2012-17) in the sphere of equity should be to eliminate gender disparities and to significantly reduce urban -rural, inter-regional and inter- social group disparities. This will call for a much larger facilitative and promotional role for the central and state governments as well as the private sector in higher towards the hitherto marginalized sections of the society .Thus the major emphasis of the 12th five year plan should be on promoting inclusiveness so as to accommodate more students from marginalized sections of the society. Thus the prime focus of the 12th five year plan should be on promoting inclusiveness so as to accommodate more students from marginalized sections into the ambit of higher education in India (Fahmeeda, 2013).

Central initiative for inclusive education: In the twelfth five year plan a new scheme called Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abiyan (RUSA) was launched which seeks to promote equity, access, and excellence in state higher education system. This scheme supports upgrading autonomous colleges to universities, clustering colleges to form a university ,setting up of new professional colleges in unserved and underserved areas and providing grant to colleges and universities to help them improve their infrastructure(12th FYP, 2012).

Suggestions and recommendations: few suggestions and recommendations are put forth for the successful implementation of various strategies to redress equity related issues in the higher education system, they are as follows;

- While access to qualitative professional higher education needs to be further expanded at the same time equity must be ensured by extending financial and academic support to poor and marginalized sections of the society (Joseph, 2013).
- To provide Need Based Job óOriented Courses all round Development of personality is the purpose of education there shall be industry academia collaboration. But the present day education is neither imparting true knowledge of life and nor improving the talent of a student by which one can achieve laurels /glory in the field one is interested in (Nagraja, 2013).
- There must be a fee concession; regular scholarships as well as education loan must be provided at right time to all students including schedule castes and schedule tribes to complete their courses successfully (Joseph, 2013).
- Effective measures will have to be adapted to mobile resources for higher education.
- The Equal Opportunities Cells (EOCS) in the universities and colleges should work with the (IQAC) to monitor the social diversity in the composition of the institution (Najraja, 2103).
- The UGC should monitor the performance of the equity parameters through its standing committees (Joseph, 2013).
- The career counseling and redressal grievance cells should be established and made operational for schedule castes, schedule tribes and women in every higher education institution (Shalini , 2013).
- Establishment of a National Monitoring Cell (NMC) under University Grants Commission (UGC) (Joseph, 2013).
- Optimizing the existing institutions and creating new facilities, more so in backward areas to make higher education more inclusive.

- The pace of affirmative action ought to be accelerated to ensure larger participation of SCs, STs, women and minority students in progressive disciplines.

Conclusion: The paper presents the development and present scenario of higher education in India with a prior focus on the inclusive higher education and equity issues. As a country India has made tremendous strides in terms of enrollment in higher education since independence cutting across caste, gender, ethnicity and religion. However there is asymmetry between male and female, majority and minorities in terms of their relative access to higher education despite affirmative action.

This is not unsurprising given the historic nature of such deprivation in respect of SC/ST& women; alienation of tribal s, segregation of schedule castes and ingrained bias towards women. How the inclusive higher education is a product of social context .The interrelation between hierarchical social structure ,the economic inequalities and gender inequality and have been reflected as an obstacle to inclusive higher education in india. Despite low gross enrollment ratio for the schedule castes ,schedule tribes and other backward classes and women ,several policy initiatives have been taken by the Ministry of Human Resource Development and in the 12th five year plan to promote inclusiveness so as to accommodate more students from marginalized sections with higher education in Indian context .This will have a good prospect for Indian by establishing it as the world capital of rich human resource with motto that should read as ÷including the excluded, giving the best to the leastö.

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