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APPRAISAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN EDUCATIONALLY BACKWARD DISTRICTS OF MAHARASHTRA

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Abstract:-India has the largest higher education system as the nation holds majority of its young population who are pursuing their education in colleges and universities. However, in spite of the significant progress made during the past few years, India's higher education sector is still plagued with several challenges. No doubt, the Gross Enrolment Ratio has increased in the last two decades which has also enhanced the quality and transparency in the higher education. Maharashtra state is considered to be educationally, culturally and industrially advanced state but it too shows the traits of educational backwardness in certain districts. In the postglobalization era, in the present times, certain districts are educationally weak and backward which invoke special measures. These districts, thus, attract the concerns of many educationists, academia and government to trace the reasons and causes of the backwardness in terms of higher education. The present paper aims to highlight the status of higher education in educationally backward districts of Maharashtra. The colleges in these districts avail grants and other financial assistance from UGC and the state government. But do these colleges get special attention from these bodies? The UGC is taking special efforts in the educationally backward districts to wipe off the blot on them by taking initiatives through opening model colleges in every district, for which, both UGC and the state government provide financial assistance. Further, the state governments and the affiliated universities in collaboration will monitor the academic growth and financial expenses made by these colleges.

Keywords: educationally backward districts, CPI, financial assistance, GER.

INTRODUCTION :

Higher education in India accommodates majority of younger generation in the institutions catering education. There are more than 45000 degree and diploma institutions in the country with approximately 25.9 million students enrolled for education. The last decade exhibits high growth with enrollment of students increasing at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 10.8% and institutions at a CAGR of 9%. The private sector plays a pivotal role in this growth, accounting for 64% of the total number of institutions and 59% of enrollment in the country, as compared to 43% and 33%, respectively, a decade ago. In the educational policies under the Five Year Plans, the government of India has given necessary thrust. It is evident in the Eleventh Plan period; viz 2007–2012; the nation achieved a Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of 17.9%, up from 12.3% at the beginning of the Plan period. This Five Plan also shows that many legal actions are taken during this period, including the introduction and growth of the Higher Education and Research Bill, the Educational Tribunal Bill and the Foreign Educational Institutions Bill. These corrective measures are introduced to enhance transparency and quality in higher education. The past few years also showcase a significant progress. But, it is still plagued with several challenges. For instance, it indicates relatively low GER, inequitable access to higher education by community, gender inequality and geographical, demographical unequal distribution of population, lack of qualitative research and under developed education institutions, mismanagement in educational institutes which result in sub-optimal results. These arrays of causes are instrumental for educational backwardness in higher education in our nation.

UGC and the government of India through its Ministry of Human Resource Development have surveyed these challenges which certain areas in the country face. Through the Twelfth Plan these challenges are pinpointed, and also several suggestions are made. They are:

Expansion:The existing institutions which have established their educational identity should be given a room to augment their capacities.

Equity: Keeping in view the under-developed educational growth of the backward communities and minorities certain schemes should be evolved to achieve target. This will also bring these educational institutions on par with the other institutions.

Excellence:The educationally backward area should build excellence through research and innovation, faculty development, and internationalization. This will bring academic stability and confidence in the personnel.

Governance:It will also lead to enhance institutional autonomy and transparency in educational administration.

Funding:The financial assistance that is availed from the government, UGC and also from the general public in the form of donations should be channelized in order to increase the results and outcomes from such institutions. This linking will bring corporate relationship between the institutes and the people.

Implementation and monitoring: Almost every venture lacks its pace and vigor which it has in the initial stage. As time passes there are many lacuna traced. Hence, coordination and monitoring on the activities, progress and activities in such educationally backward but specially targeted colleges is required. This improves coordination across ministries and agencies that are connected and concerned with higher education and the policy-making regarding higher education.

The last two decades exhibit a massive increase in Gross Enrolment Ratio. Also, the present educational scenario shows enhancement in the quality and transparency in the higher education. Still, in the twenty-first century some districts lack basic educational set up. On the basis of the GER these districts are labeled as educationally backward. The present paper aims to highlight the status of higher education in educationally backward districts as well as the challenges faced by the higher educational institution in the said areas of Maharashtra. It will trace the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of higher education in educationally backward districts of Maharashtra.

EDUCATIONALLY BACKWARD DISTRICT:

In the period of postglobalization all districts should be given equal attention and scope by the apex bodies like the UGC and the HRD ministry of government of India in collaboration with the state government and the local general public. Further, the educationally backward districts require special care and cure. UGC, therefore, identifies educationally backward districts by applying certain indicators during X plan. For this, UGC adopts overall literacy rates as the single indicator for disbursement of funds under the educationally backward areas scheme. Districts having literacy rates below the national average such as 65.4 per cent were identified as educationally backward. Accordingly, the number of such districts, as per the Census 2001, was 374 for the country. Mainly three sources of educational statistics on higher education are used as the parameters, namely Selected Educational Statistics (SES), various rounds of National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) and the Census of India. The Census of India is the only source which covers the entire population and also provides enrolment data at the district level for higher education. The educationally backward districts have been identified as those with GER below the national average of 12.4. On the basis of this norm 374 districts out of 593, as per the design of 2001 census have been identified as educationally backward districts.

Therefore, it becomes a necessity to see the definition of educationally backward district. The concept is traced in "The Orissa Gazette Extraordinary" which defines educationally backward district according to the Section 7 Sub-Section 4 of Orissa Education (Amendment) Act, 1994 Educationally Backward District is "a district where rate of literacy is less than 50% of the total population of the district as per Census of 1991." (The Orissa Gazette Extraordinary: 200:02) The idea is further expanded in the definition given by The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) which was formed in the following year. This definition is more specific which throws light upon the micro level of population splitting it into Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and female literacy rates. It is termed as Educationally Backward Blocks. The definition envelops: Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) defined on a composite criteria of blocks with a rural female literacy rate below the national average (46.13%: Census 2001) and gender gap in literacy higher than the national average (21.59%: Census 2001). Blocks of districts which have at least 5% SC/ ST population and SC/ ST female literacy rate below 10% and also, in selected urban slums. (The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL): 2003: 4)

Further, the Eleventh Five Year Plan traces the need to increase the access to higher education, especially, in the educationally backward districts. A committee of eminent educationists appointed by UGC has submitted a detailed report envisaging the establishment of a Model College in each of the 374 educationally backward districts all over the country. Therefore, "Higher Education in India Strategies and Schemes during Eleventh Plan Period

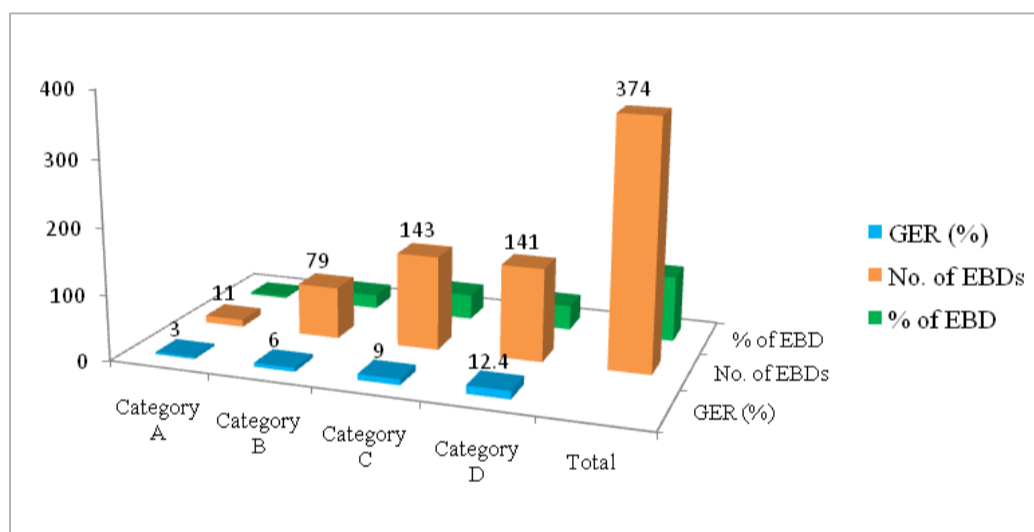
(2007-2012) for Universities and Colleges” states:

The main objective of the Scheme is to enhance the access to degree courses in educationally backward districts of the country, so as to achieve expansion in higher education with inclusion, equity and quality. The Scheme is essentially a motivational mechanism for State Governments to uplift under-served districts educationally by providing appropriate financial assistance. (Higher Education in India Strategies and Schemes during Eleventh Plan Period (2007-2012) for Universities and Colleges: UGC 2011: P. 24).

Consequently, one requires to purview the educationally backward districts in the nation. There are 374 districts which have been identified as educationally backward districts and categorized by the UGC. Following table and figure showcase the category wise position of educationally backward districts:

| Category | Gross Enrollment Ratio (%) | No. of Educationally Backward Districts | % to total no. of Districts to total EBD |
|----------|----------------------------|---|--|
| A. | Upto 3.00 | 11 | 02.94 |
| B. | 3.01 to 6.00 | 79 | 21.12 |
| C. | 6.01 to 9.00 | 143 | 38.23 |
| D. | 9.01 to 12.40 | 141 | 37.71 |

(Source: Prof.S.P. Thyagarajan, UGC, Expert Committee, Report, 2008. Pp. 21-30)



(Source: Prof.S.P. Thyagarajan, UGC, Expert Committee, Report, 2008. Pp. 21-30)

As per the above table it is observed that in Category-A 02.94%, B 21.12%, C 38.23% and D 37.71% districts are educationally backward districts. In order to facilitate phase-wise prioritization plan of establishing the Model Colleges in the said educationally backward districts. Due to limited yearly financial allocation, to Government of India for this project a scientific approach of using CPI (College Population Index) as the parameter is suggested. Thus, financial assistance is provided in three phases. In Phase-I 86 educationally backward districts are selected with CPI below 4.0; Phase II 114 educationally backward districts are selected with the CPI range of 4.01-8.0 and Phase III 174 educationally backward districts are selected with CPI range of 8.01-12.40, which is lower than national GER.

A number of programmes and schemes initiated by the Government have led to considerable increase in admission to higher education. These include setting up of Model Degree Colleges in 374 educationally backward districts, 16 Central Universities, 08 Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), 07 Indian Institute of Management (IIMs), 10 National Institute of Technology (NITs). Also, there are schemes for scholarships and fellowships for socially deprived classes. Even special programmes are evolved for women, for instance, Girls' Hostels and Single Girl Child Scholarships, Quality Improvement initiatives of University Grants Commission and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). Further, interest subsidy to economically backward students on educational loans and National Mission on Education through IC&T are other initiatives to improve access to higher education which have been coined by the UGC and the government of India.

Subsequently, with the accord of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, the UGC has evolved an innovative scheme for the 374 educationally backward districts of the country by supporting the

Model Colleges set up in these districts through appropriate financial assistance. The scheme shall be called the scheme for providing financial assistance to New Model Colleges in the said districts. According to the guidelines issued by UGC for implementing the scheme for providing financial assistance to new model colleges in educationally backward districts, the college has to fulfill certain conditions. The committee under the chairmanship of Prof. S. P. Thyagarajan, UGC Committee Report states in its Executive Summary the following conditions for the educationally backward districts:

1. The College has to be established under the new initiative of the Planning Commission and the Government of India pertaining to new degree colleges to be set up during the XI Plan period, on or after 1st January, 2008, that is after the National Development Council approved the new initiative and located in educationally backward districts, where the GER is less than the national average.
2. The State Government concerned shall acquire and allot adequate land to set up the Model College. A location which does not have a college within a radius of 10 kilometers is to be given preference.
3. The college shall preferably be a constituent unit of a University which is covered under Section 12B of the UGC Act or it shall have to be permanently or temporarily affiliated to a University, covered under Section 12 B of the UGC Act.
4. The college shall be receiving Plan and/or Non-Plan grant from the State Government and/or Central Government or State/ Central Government funded Bodies on continuous basis.
5. The State Government shall furnish an undertaking that two-thirds of the non-recurring expenditure and the entire recurring expenditure shall be borne by it, and that it shall make provision for future appreciation in capital expenditure.
6. The affiliating University shall undertake that the funds provided to the college shall be utilized properly for the development of infrastructure. (UGC: Notification 03/09/2009: 02)

Further, the committee makes certain suggestions to uplift the present position of educational scenario in the educationally backward districts. They are of the opinion that the said districts should set up one Model College which will initially require a non-recurring expenditure of at least Rs.8 crore and recurring expenditure of Rs.1.5 crore per annum out of Rs.1.0 crore per annum towards salaries and Rs.0.5 crore per annum towards maintenance. The assistance from the Central Government through the UGC shall be limited to 1/3rd of the capital cost with a ceiling of Rs. 2.67 crore per college, and the balance has to be met by the State Government of the concerned states. Further, the state government will provide the necessary land and the entire recurring expenditure. The state government will also take care of the future appreciation in capital expenditure but in special category states ratio of financial assistance will be 50% of UGC and 50% of concerned State Government in respect of Capital expenditure. The budgetary requirements for each is projected that the total financial requirement for the entire scheme of establishing the 374 'Model Colleges' across the country during the XI Plan period would be Rs.2992.00 crores as onetime non-recurring budget and Rs.561.00 crores per annum under the recurring budget, based on the projection of Rs.8.00 crores per college as the nonrecurring cost and Rs.1.50 crores per annum per college under the recurring expenses required for salaries & hiring charges.

Maharashtra:

The state of Maharashtra is educationally, culturally, technologically and scientifically advanced. Prior to Independence, the scenario of higher education in Maharashtra was much satisfactory as compared to other states of India. Higher education can be viewed as the most significant contributor to the growth and development of mankind. Further, higher education provides training for students for research career. Here, higher education caters a mechanism for qualified scientists and researchers who would continuously develop the frontiers of knowledge in their areas of specialization which, in turn, facilitate the human race and the generations to follow. Also, higher education propagates an efficient management of teaching provisions that are essential for teaching all the disciplines at variant levels.

Many educationists strongly believe that higher education is the base of educational institutions which impart education. Thus, higher education institutions focus on efficient management of teaching-learning provisions by developing the quality of teaching, enabling the students for better future. But, unfortunately in Maharashtra 07 districts have been categorized as educationally backward districts. Higher educational institution of educationally backward districts in Maharashtra are facing the difficulties regarding insufficient funding, inadequate infrastructure, unskilled human resources, non-availability of books and other study materials, lack of technical advancements and lack of administrative skills and no willingness of trained administrative staff due to the tribal and hilly area. On the contrary, the urban and cosmopolitan regions showcase abundance of these resources.

The following table throws light upon the educationally backward districts of Maharashtra:

| Sr. No. | Districts | College - Population Index (CPI) (college per lakh population in 18-23 age) | Number of colleges 2003-2004 | Average enrolment per college (Actual) | GER As per 2001 (%) |
|---------|------------|---|------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| 1) | Hingoli | 6 | 6 | 16758 | 11.7 |
| 2) | Raigad | 14.3 | 36 | 7010 | 10.9 |
| 3) | Ratnagiri | 18 | 31 | 5566 | 8 |
| 4) | Jalna | 18.3 | 30 | 5476 | 11.4 |
| 5) | Sindhudurg | 18.6 | 17 | 5363 | 10.2 |
| 6) | Buldana | 19.3 | 47 | 5190 | 12.1 |
| 7) | Gadchiroli | 27.3 | 28 | 3657 | 10.8 |

(UGC.: Notification 03/09/2009 Guidelines for implementing the Scheme for providing financial assistance to New Model Colleges in Educationally Backward Districts (EBDs): Annexure-I Pp. 6-15: p. 11.)

The information stated above brings to light that among the seven districts mentioned in the table Hingoli is the weakest district compared to other districts in terms of CPI, whereas Ratnagiri is weaker district in terms of GER. Further, the committee recommends that three phases are to be prepared according to College Population Index in the educationally backward districts. The following table exhibits that number of Educationally Backward Districts of the state in which maximum financial assistance from the UGC and government bodies goes to:

| State | No. of EBDs | | | |
|----------------|-------------|----------|-----------|-------|
| | Phase-I | Phase-II | Phase-III | Total |
| Uttar Pradesh | 17 | 13 | 09 | 39 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 03 | 10 | 15 | 28 |
| Rajasthan | 12 | 09 | 07 | 28 |
| Bihar | 12 | 08 | 05 | 25 |
| West Bengal | 08 | 08 | 01 | 17 |
| Tamil Nadu | 04 | 07 | 12 | 23 |
| Gujarat | 01 | 07 | 09 | 17 |
| Orissa | 02 | 02 | 14 | 18 |
| Assam | -- | 02 | 09 | 11 |
| Karnataka | -- | 01 | 18 | 19 |
| Andhra Pradesh | -- | -- | 11 | 11 |
| Maharashtra | -- | 01 | 06 | 07 |

(Prof.S.P.Thyagarajan, UGC, Expert Committee, Report, 2008. Pp. 21-30)

CONCLUSION:

The information stated above indicates the scenario of higher education in different states all over the nation. The status of Maharashtra, compared to other states is positive and optimistic. One can also visualize that this scenario can no longer be prevailing, and it can be settled very soon in near future. Of course, the reasons behind these can be the geographical unevenness and the sociopolitical set ups in the said area. Also, it indicates that the financial assistance under the Scheme of Establishment of Model College in the backward districts of Maharashtra will be getting in the Phase-II and III. Further, it signals that for developing Model College in educationally backward district state of Maharashtra will be very late compared to other big and equally developed states which are in the vicinity of Maharashtra.

SUGGESTIONS:

Inferences can be drawn on the basis of the information and observations, such as instead of implementation of scheme of establishment of Model College in educationally backward districts of states by CPI phase wise, the said scheme can be it can be enforced by inception of at least one college for each state. Further, the educationists may allot colleges to each state phase-wise taking into consideration the gradual growth indicated by the states and ultimately by the educationally backward districts. This will facilitate every state to avail financial assistance from the UGC and also from the governing bodies. Also, it will smoothen the evaluation of each district and its educational development. Subsequently, the UGC can focus on the said colleges and measure whether a state or district is following the parameters effectively or not. Also, it will be possible for the UGC to cater financial assistance to every deprived factor at a time. On the other hand monitoring by the state governments and the affiliated universities can be done easily as they are the linkages between the said colleges and the UGC.

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