Abstract
The massification of Indian higher education is accompanied by a proliferation of private universities. The relaxation of several national policies has reduced the proportion of students from historically marginalized groups, while maintaining the dominance of higher caste and class students from the Hindu majority. With privatization, there is a need for stronger equity policies to avoid perpetuating the privilege and status of elite and powerful groups.

Privatization and Unequal Access in India

Vishal Jamkar and Christopher Johnstone

India is the second largest higher education system in the world, with about 800 universities and nearly 40,000 colleges attended by 35 million students. It took India more than 55 years to move from an elite model of higher education to a mass model, and this growth shows no sign of slowing down. As an example, India's gross enrollment rate (GER) grew from 1.5 percent in 1961 to 5.9 percent in 1991, and further to 27 percent in 2017. As India's higher education continues to massify, several key features are emerging in the sector: greater diversity in the course offering, especially by engineering colleges and polytechnic institutes, which have begun to offer more applied science courses; the emergence of private universities and colleges to meet increasing demand; and growth

in access of students from traditionally marginalized or minoritized groups in India, such as those labeled Scheduled Caste (SC) (also known as *Dalit*, formerly "Untouchables"), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Class (OBC), as well as from Muslim communities, a religious minority in India. Despite increases in access, however, higher education enrollment is still dominated by higher caste and class students from the Hindu majority.

Privatization and Inclusion

In contemporary Indian higher education, two main narratives and approaches have emerged over the past few decades. In the 1970s and 1980s, higher education was inclusive in terms of socioeconomic representation. Both public and government-aided private universities offered affordable tuition fees, providing hostels, scholarships, fee exemptions, books, and reserved seats for a targeted number of SC, ST, and OBC students, as well as for women.

However, since the early 1980s, the Indian government's support of pro-poor policies such as academic and hostel fee waivers and scholarships has dwindled, and government support to public universities and aided private institutes has stagnated. Both central and state governments have enacted policies giving financial autonomy to private institutions to mobilize resources without government underwriting, also allowing policy autonomy. Privatization continued to increase in the 2000s. At that time, the Indian judiciary also played a pivotal role in allowing private institutions to raise their own funds and eliminating institutional reservation quotas aimed to increase enrollment of SC, ST, and OBC students.

While public support for marginalized and minoritized communities has weakened over the past several decades, privatization has simultaneously increased overall enrollment. Data from the National Sample Survey indicates that from 1995 to 2014, the share of postsecondary students in private unaided institutes increased by more than four times, from 7.1 percent to 32.7 percent, while enrollment in public institutions decreased significantly, from 57.5 to 41.4 percent. According to the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE), there were more than 35,000 colleges in 2015, out of which more than 22,000 were private unaided, 5,000 received private aid, and nearly 8,000 were government funded. At present, nearly 78 percent of colleges are private, and these colleges enroll 67 percent of Indian students.

Privatization and Equity

The massification of India's higher education has been carried forward primarily through the proliferation of unaided private institutions.

The massification of India's higher education has been carried forward primarily through the proliferation of unaided private institutions. During this period, SC, ST, and OBC students have been jeopardized in two instances. First, the supreme court ruling that these institutions need not abide by reservation quotas has led to an equity dilemma as the higher education sector continues to grow: India's affirmative action policies meant to redress historic injustices now only apply to a minority of institutions. Second, gradual shifts in scholarship, fee waiver, hostel fee waiver, and loan policies has limited the choices of lower-income students, reducing their opportunities for affordable private education.

Massification and privatization appear to have brought about an increase in enrollment among all groups, but mostly among those of higher castes. Private, unaided universities located in tier-1 and tier-2 cities in India are increasingly making education available largely to urban and rich students and are not required to make it affordable to students from poorer backgrounds, nor to abide by affirmative action policies. Further, under the auspices of the human resource development ministry, premier public institutes such as the Indian Institute of Management have been allowed to do away with reservations for PhD programs by leveraging meritocracy and "quality of education" arguments. In these same institutions, faculty demographics reinforce stratifications of access and mobility. According to the AISHE report of 2017–2018 released by the ministry, for example, 56.8 percent of teaching staff were from the "general" (majority) category, 8.6 percent were labeled SC (compared to 15 percent of the general population), and only 2.27 percent of faculty positions are held by those labeled ST (compared to 7.5 percent of the general population). These disparities may have a reproductive effect on admissions into institutions and may impact on how equity is envisioned in academic programs.

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Conclusions

The massification and privatization of universities and colleges in India has in general led to a wider range of options within higher education. Over the past several decades, the gross enrollment ratio has increased for a variety of groups, yet enrollment disparities still exist. Massification has increased choices, but in an unregulated way. Relaxation of fee caps, removal of government support grants for housing and fees, and a lack of affirmative action protection in private universities mean that enrollment disparities may grow. The location and the fee structure of private universities and colleges have disproportionately increased opportunities for rich and higher caste students. The elimination of mandatory reservations in private universities has also reduced the flow of students from historically marginalized groups and Muslims students. As private higher education strengthens its hold in India, policy makers and private institutions need to identify diversity as a target for social responsibility and social good. Failure to do so will reinforce the social stratification that has existed in India for millennia. ◢