

# RUSA: Our Nation's Dream

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**Abstract** Development of a knowledge economy is a prerequisite for the advancement of a society and a nation, at large. Though access and equity is important in education, it is quality of education that should be considered paramount. The Government of India put many steps to promote higher education after independence to provide the best education to its citizens. But even today, the higher education system as a whole is faced with many challenges. With relation to higher education in India, the introduction of RUSA (Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan) is one such flagship initiative which has emphasized upon access and quality. It is an endeavour towards providing better quality higher education in India. The scheme seems to address the most pertinent questions of Indian Higher Education, but for fulfilling our nation's dream, its successful implementation is also required. The paper highlights the challenges present in higher education, various recommendations and RUSA's strategies for achieving our goals.

**Keywords:** RUSA, higher education, challenges, recommendations, strategies

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## 1. Introduction

"Live as if you were to die tomorrow and learn as if you were to live forever"

--- Mahatma Gandhi

Education is considered as the important tool for the intellectual, social, moral, spiritual development of the people. But "education could not be considered in isolation or planned in a vacuum. It has to be used as a powerful instrument of social, economic and political change and will, therefore, have to be related to the long-term national aspirations, the programmes of national development on which the country is engaged and the difficult short-term problems it is called upon to face" (Kothari Commission, 1964-66) [4]. 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, an exponential increase in the number of institutions and a quantum jump in the level of public funding. The increase however has not been commensurate with the growth of the population and its diverse needs. [4]

The policy for the development of higher education in India has been mainly governed by the "National Policy on Education" of 1986 (as modified in 1992) and its Programme of Action adopted in 1992. The 1986 policy and its Programme of Action of 1992 were based on two landmark reports namely, the "University Education Commission Report" of 1948-49 (popularly known as the Radhakrishnan Commission Report), and the "Education Commission Report" of 1964-66, (popularly known as the Kothari Commission Report). These two reports laid down the basic framework for the National Policy of 1986 for higher education in the country. The Radhakrishnan

Commission on University Education (1948-49) had enumerated essential goals for development of higher education in India. [1] The commission eloquently articulated the reforms needed in the education sphere in the following words: "The most important and urgent reform needed in education is to transform it, to endeavor to relate it to the life, needs and aspirations of the people and thereby make it the powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of the national goals. For this purpose, education should be developed so as to increase productivity, achieve social and national integration, accelerate the process of modernization and cultivate social, moral and spiritual values." [4] The National Policy on Higher Education (1986) translated the vision of the Radhakrishnan Commission and the Kothari Commission into an actionable policy by setting five main goals for higher education, as enumerated below:

- **Access:** Greater access requires an enhancement of the education institutional capacity of the higher education sector to provide opportunities to all those who deserve and desire higher education.
- **Equity:** Equity involves fair access of the poor and the socially disadvantaged groups to higher education.
- **Quality and Excellence:** Involve provision of education in accordance with accepted standards so that students receive available knowledge of the highest standard that helps them to enhance their human resource capabilities.
- **Relevance:** Involves promotion of education so as to develop human resources keeping pace with the changing economic, social and cultural development of the country; and

- **Value Based Education:** Involves inculcating basic moral values among the youth.

The Action Plan of 1992 included schemes and programs that were directed towards the expansion of intake capacity in general, and with respect to the disadvantaged groups such as the poor, SCs, STs, minorities, girls, physically challenged persons, and those in the educationally backward regions, in particular. The schemes/programs were designed to improve quality by strengthening academic and physical infrastructure, in order to promote excellence in those institutions which had exhibited potential for excellence, and to develop curriculum to inculcate right values among the youth. [1]

An analysis of the past five year plans indicates that, there have been continuous efforts to strengthen the base by developing infrastructure, improving the quality through several programs and schemes, introducing reforms in content and evaluation and encouraging creation of new knowledge through research. The focus of Five-Year Plan was on infrastructure development; the VI Plan onwards the focus shifted to consolidation and quality improvement. The VII Plan laid emphasis on research and academic developments. It was from this plan onwards that the development of centers of excellence and area study programs got special attention. From the VIII Plan onward, the need for differential funding was recognized, it was envisaged that the developing departments would be provided necessary funds to bring up their facilities and activities to an optimum level for their teaching and general research programs. The IX Plan aimed at gearing the system of higher education to meet the challenges arising out of the major social, economic and technological changes. The focus of the X Plan was on quality and relevance of higher education, research and development, management in financing and the use of the new information and communication technologies. The X Plan provided the basis for higher education in the 21st century. The XI Plan laid renewed emphasis on higher education and the three targets of broadening access, making higher education inclusive and promoting improvements in quality. During the XI Plan Period, various legislative actions were taken, including the introducing of the Higher Education and Research Bill, the Educational Tribunal Bill and the Foreign Educational Institutions Bill to enhance transparency and quality in this sector. The XII Plan recognizes these challenges and proposes several initiatives around six focus areas to address them:

- **Equity:** Creating targeted schemes for backward and minority communities.
- **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 co-ordination across ministries and agencies.

However, in spite of the significant progress made during the past few years, India's higher education still suffers many challenges.[9]

## 2. Challenges in Higher Education

Today, the higher education system as a whole is faced with many challenges such as financing and management, access, equity, relevance and reorientation of policies and programmes for laying emphasis on values, ethics and quality of higher education together with the assessment of institutions and their accreditation. These issues are of vital importance for the country, since higher education is the most powerful tool to build a knowledge-based society for the future. The enormity of the challenge of providing equal opportunities for quality higher education to an ever-growing number of students is also a historic opportunity for correcting sectoral and social imbalances, reinvigorating institutions, crossing international benchmarks of excellence and extending the frontiers of knowledge. [3]

Recognizing this requirement, as well as the basic fact that institutions of higher learning have to perform multiple roles like creating new knowledge, acquiring new capabilities and producing an intelligent human resource pool, the Indian higher education system has to brace itself to address global challenges by channelizing teaching, research and extension activities, and maintaining the right balance between need and demand. [5]

The proportion of our population, in the relevant age group, that enters the world of higher education is only 10% (2004-05). Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is only 19.4%; this means that only a fraction of the population in the age group of 18-23 years is enrolled in higher education institutions. In addition to very low access to higher education in general, there are wide disparities between various social groups. Although number of universities and colleges has increased, it still remains inadequate to meet the present demand. There are large disparities in enrolment rates across state, urban and rural areas, sex, caste and income. Inter-state disparity – 47.9% in Delhi verses 9% in Assam. Urban-rural divide – 30% in urban areas verses 11.1% in rural areas. Gender disparity – 16.5% for female verses 20.9% of males. Differences across communities – 14.8% for OBC, 11.6% for SCs, 7.7% for STs and 9.6% for Muslims. Given these myriad challenges, a drastic change is required in the approach that has traditionally been adopted for the development of higher education in the country. [2]

Higher education needs to be viewed as a long-term social investment for the promotion of economic growth, cultural development, social cohesion, equity and justice. In order to meet the XII Plan aim of inclusive growth and to ensure genuine endogenous and sustainable development along with social justice and equity, the higher education sector has to play a pivotal role, especially in generating research-based knowledge and developing a critical mass of skilled and educated personnel. Within this philosophical paradigm, some of the issues pertaining to the higher education system have been identified that need to be squarely addressed for the balanced development of higher education in India. The globalized era has necessitated the inculcation of competitive spirit at all levels. This can be achieved only by bringing quality of highest standards to every sphere of work. [9]

At present, the world-class institutions in India are mainly limited in number. Most of the Indian colleges and universities lack in high end research facilities. Research in higher education institutions is at its lowest ebb. According to University Grants Commission, India needs 1500 more universities with adequate research facilities by the end of the year 2015, in order to compete in the global market. Large vacancies in faculty positions and poor faculty thereof, low student enrolment rate, increasing educated unemployment, weakening of student motivation, declining research standards, unmotivated students, gender disparities are the basic challenges facing higher education in India today. [6]

Therefore, the quality of higher education has become a major concern today. Needs and expectations of society are changing very fast and the quality of higher education needs to be sustained at the desired level. The quality of higher education rests on the quality of all its facets, be it faculty, staff, students, or infrastructure. As such, all policies, systems and processes should be clearly directed towards attaining improvement in all the relevant facets for an overall rise in the quality of education. [4]

The XII Plan has kept the above concerns in mind and called for measures that provide higher education to a larger number of students while ensuring equal opportunities for all sections of society and maintaining focus on quality. The XII Plan deviates from the previous plans by suggesting some strategic shifts in the approach towards higher education. Given these strategic shifts and goals talked about in the XII Plan, there is a need to develop a policy that gives concrete shape to this much needed holistic plan for the development of higher education in India. There has been a proposal for a new centrally sponsored umbrella scheme to address the needs of the higher education sector which will look in detail at the issues of access, equity and excellence in the Indian higher education system.[9]

### 3. Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)

Keeping in view the recommendations of the Planning Commission, the need for reforms in the State Higher Education sector, using Central funds in a strategic to ensure holistic planning at the State level and enhancement of allocations for the state institution, a new Centrally Sponsored Scheme is proposed. The Scheme would be spread over the two plan period (XII and XIII), and would be an over arching scheme for funding the State Universities and Colleges in order to achieve the aim of equity, access and excellence. The scheme is called the Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA). [9] The scheme has the following salient features:

- It is an umbrella mission mode project scheme that would subsume other existing scheme in the sector
- The Central funding would flow from MHRD to institutions, through the State Councils of Higher Education
- The funding to States would be made on the basis of critical appraisal of the State Plans for Higher Education. The Plans would describe each State's

strategy to address issues of equity, access and excellence in higher education

- All funding under the RUSA would be norm based and future grants would be outcome dependent. Certain academic, administrative and governance reforms will be a precondition for receiving funding under RUSA.

The key objectives of RUSA are to improve access, equity and quality in higher education through planned development of higher education at the state level. Such planning will include creating new academic institutions, expanding and upgrading the existing ones, developing institutions that are self-reliant in terms of quality education, professionally managed, and characterized by greater inclination towards research and provide students with education that is relevant to them as well the nation as a whole.[2]

### 4. The Approach to RUSA

The project will require the project institutions to implement academic and nonacademic reforms for their self-conceived development programmes that focus on quality and relevance, excellence, resource mobilization, greater institutional autonomy with accountability, research and equity. The project will lay major emphasis on monitoring and evaluation. The primary responsibility of monitoring will lie with the institutions themselves. The management structure at the institutional level i.e. the Board of Governors (BoG) will monitor the progress of institutional projects on a regular basis and provide guidance for improving the performance of the institutions in project implementation. The information from project institutions will be collected through a scalable web-based Management Information System (MIS). State governments will also regularly monitor and evaluate the progress of institutions. The Project Appraisal Board (PAB) at the national level in MHRD will review the project annually. The monitoring will be based on action plans prepared by each project institution and achievements made with respect to a set of norms, which are defined in the Institutional Development Plans. The monitoring will focus on implementation of reforms by institutions, achievements in project activities under different components, procurement of resources and services, utilization of financial allocations and achievements in faculty and staff development and management development activities.[2]

### 5. Goal of RUSA

The objectives of RUSA would be to achieve the target of GER of 32% by the end of XIII Plan, which the central Government has set for itself. Government of India aims to improve the quality of State Universities and colleges and enhance their existing capacities so that they become dynamic, demand-driven, quality conscious, efficient and forward looking and responsive to rapid economic and technological developments occurring at the local, state, national and international levels. The salient objectives of the scheme can be enumerated as follows [7]:

- Improve the overall quality of existing state institutions by ensuring that all institutions conform to prescribed norms and standards and adopt accreditation as a mandatory quality assurance framework.
- Usher transformative reforms in the state higher education system by creating a facilitating institutional structure for planning and monitoring at the state level, promoting autonomy in State Universities and improving governance in institutions.
- Ensure academic and examination reforms in the higher educational institutions.
- Enable conversion of some of the universities into research universities at par with the best in the world.
- Create opportunities for states to undertake reforms in the affiliation system in
- Order to ensure that the reforms and resource requirements of affiliated colleges are adequately met.
- Ensure adequate availability of quality faculty in all higher educational institutions and ensure capacity building at all levels of employment.
- Create an enabling atmosphere in the higher educational institutions to devote themselves to research and innovations.
- Expand the institutional base by creating additional capacity in existing institutions and establishing new institutions, in order to achieve enrolment targets.
- Correct regional imbalances in access to higher education by facilitating access to high quality institutions in urban & semi-urban areas, creating opportunities for students from rural areas to get access to better quality institutions and setting up institutions in un-served & underserved areas.
- Improve equity in higher education by providing adequate opportunities of higher education to SC/STs and socially and educationally backward classes; promote inclusion of women, minorities, and differently-abled persons.

## 6. Scope of RUSA

All State Universities and colleges (both 12B and 2(f) compliant and non-12B and non- 2(f)) from all states and Union Territories (UTs) across the country would be eligible to be covered under RUSA. Subject to eligibility, an estimated 306 state universities and 850099 colleges will be covered under this initiative to improve the learning outcomes and employability of graduates and to scale-up research, development and innovations. The project will also support these institutions to improve their policy, academic and management practices. RUSA will fund the institutions under a few key components. The yardstick for deciding the quantum of funds for the states and institution will be the norms that will reflect the key result areas (access, equity and excellence), in addition to other monitoring and capacity building functions. The State Higher Education Councils will be the key institution at the state level to channelize resources to the institutions from the state budget. [3]

Strategic funding of state institutions must ensure that the issues of quality and access are addressed in an equitable manner. This would entail encouraging the states to prepare State Higher Education Plan duly keeping the following aspects in mind:

- Spatial and regional planning after due mapping
- Programme and discipline planning
- Mandatory accreditation and quality improvement
- Reforms – governance and academic
- Infrastructure saturation
- Review of the affiliation system
- Transparent and norm-based funding
- Outcome-based reimbursements
- Faculty planning
- Equity interventions
- Focus on research and innovation

RUSA will be implemented through the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) of the Government of India as a “Centrally Sponsored Scheme” with matching contribution from the state governments and Union Territories (UTs). [2]

A set of eligibility criteria for states will be enforced to achieve a high and sustained impact of the project. The criteria will seek to give the states and project institutions adequate decision-making powers that will enable and encourage them to deliver quality education and undertake research and innovation in an efficient manner. The primary endeavor is to transform the governments’ traditional role of input control into a role of focusing on outcomes, and incentivizing improvements in higher education.[1]

## 7. RUSA’s Strategies for Fulfilling Our Nation’s Dream

The project will lay major emphasis on monitoring and evaluation. The primary responsibility of monitoring will lie with the institutions themselves. The management structure at the institutional level i.e. the Board of Governor (BOG) will monitor the progress of institutional projects on a regular basis and provide guidance for improving the performance of the institutions in project implementation. The information from project institutions will be collected through a scalable web based Management Information System (MIS). [7]

RUSA envisages a higher education system that has a greater participation of all stakeholders, where the institutions are responsible for their quality not just to the regulatory authorities but also to the students, parents and society. A policy of full disclosure and clean governance are the first steps towards establishing such a system of higher education. Autonomy is the sine qua non for quality and accountability. The Radha-Krishnan Commission, Kothari Commission, National Knowledge Commission and Yash Pal Commission have also stressed the need for universities to be autonomous entities. RUSA will aim to operate in such a way the greater autonomy of institutions and states in terms of decision-making is facilitated. [7]

The levels of autonomy in the higher education system spans institutional administration including the Vice-

chancellor, Registrar, Finance Officer, Controller of Examination, Governing Bodies of the University, Department of the Universities, Teachers and Students. Universities should be visualized as an integrated Community in which the teachers are, as it were, 'senior scholars', the students are 'junior scholars' and the administration is a service agency to both. Good teaching departments could be considered for being granted the status of Autonomous Departments within the Universities setup. RUSA has suggested the role of teachers in the faculty are not just to execute the dictates of the higher authorities but also to make his/her personal intellectual contribution to the advancement of the goals and concerns for which the universities stand. [6]

RUSA stated that faculty should be recruited purely on the basis of merit and not on any other consideration.

In creation of any development or expansion plans, both States as well as institutions must keep in mind the guidance of equity-based development. Any growth in the higher education sector must create equal opportunities for women, disadvantaged classes and the differently-disabled. [8]

States will be encouraged to promote research and innovation in their institutions.

To promote and incentivize research, funding of research through the UGC should be on the pattern of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). It should be focused and outcome-oriented. A part of the infrastructure (one-time) funding for research purposes received by the universities should be converted into recurring grants for research. An Inter-University Centre (IUC) for informal knowledge systems pertaining to cultures, communities, heritages, endangered languages, etc. should be set up by the UGC at the national level. An Innovative Incubator should be established to create the necessary linkages between the State University, relevant local/national industries, research labs/Institutions, civil society and the government. The funding for such initiatives on creating clusters and incubators be realized through Public Private Partnership. Every State University should enhance the relationship between universities and industries for the scientific advancement as well as for developing quality workforce. [8]

RUSA suggested that an "Internal Quality Assurance Cell" will maintain an annual database of individual and institutional performance. Performance appraisal of teachers may be initiated based on Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with each faculty member. In respect of research and innovations RUSA says, the following needs to be done-

- Earmarking of budget allocation for research and innovations for individual industries.
- The State must ensure that the faculty positions are filled in a phased manner. State must also present a coherent action plan to fill up all the vacant positions in a time bound manner. Not more than 15% of the faculty positions can remain vacant at any State.
- Mandatory accreditation in India's Higher Education sector would enable to become a part of the global quality assurance system. Hence all institutions eligible for funding under RUSA would require to be accredited or have applied for accreditation.

- More than 70% of the universities in India have a large number of self-financing colleges. In India there is absence of any regulatory mechanism so these colleges do not follow the government laid down reservation policy both in the student admission process and in the faculty selection process. An effective regulatory mechanism must be drawn up to be followed in all such institutions. [8]

Large autonomous colleges can be encouraged to develop into institutions.

RUSA suggested that there is a need to develop more authority to the universities in the areas of academic, finance and human resources areas. The universities should be recognized as experts in academic matters and be given the authority to take all academic decisions including those related to curriculum and examinations. In the areas of finance, the universities could be given autonomy to manage their own budgets including sourcing their own funds and being allowed to keep them subject to well-defined policy and reporting parameters. [2]

In the areas of human resources, the proposal is that universities should be allowed to select and recruit their own staff (both academic and non-academic). [2]

RUSA suggested that for the integration of continuous and end-of-semester evaluation, the weight-age assigned to internal evaluation may range from 25 to 40 percent. It will be useful if universities try to go beyond 'marks' and 'divisions' and in keeping with the global trend assign, Cumulative Grade Point Score (CGPS) which would place students into overlapping board bands. The CGPS may be based on a 5-point or 10-point scale and it could vary from institution to institution. [1]

RUSA has come with several good features so it can be said that it will fulfill our nation's dream. It is good to make accreditation mandatory for all higher educational institutions. In view of the large number of colleges affiliated to various universities, establishing a state-level accreditation agency would be a good idea to cater to the needs of accreditation. [3]

It is also a good feature that not more than 15% of the faculty positions can remain vacant at any time in the state. If any State has more than 15% faculty positions remaining vacant by the end of the first year of RUSA, it may lose the entitlement for any further grants. Sectoral reforms as proposed in the scheme mainly focus on providing greater autonomy to universities and at the same time gradual withdrawal of the state from decision making in University affairs. It is also a welcome proposal. Semester system is mandatory for all the institutions of higher education. The implementation of semester system is to be completed within three years in all the State Universities. Semester system at all levels of higher education, no doubt, is the need of the hour. [9]

The most important strategic change under the scheme is, it does not only cover higher education institutions coming under 12B and 2f but also those institutions not so covered. Another important aspect worth mentioning is that the continuity of funds to higher education institutions is based on evaluation of work and utilization of funds already provided. Thus wastage of funds will be reduced to minimum. [2]

With these features RUSA scheme looks promising in the draft form. But its effectiveness will depend on its

successful implementation. RUSA scheme gives a concrete shape to our vision of development of higher education in India. This realization will definitely follow after its successful implementation. It's good that Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) has taken initiatives to improve higher education in the country by designing its objectives on quality education. [6]

## 8. Conclusion

RUSA is considered as one of the affirmative step which aims to change the Indian Higher Education Landscape radically. Besides routine monitoring of schemes, there is pressing need to evaluate and integrate recommendations from various Reports commissioned by a variety of Committees of the UGC, the MHRD and by independent researchers to ensure a more comprehensive evaluation of various dimensions of higher education in India, including equity in access, in the quality of education and in attainment. [9]

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