

## The crisis in India's higher education: An analysis of the recent student protests



(Image

source: <https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=student+protests+in+universities+india&FORM=HDRSC2>

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## Lead Essay

### **The crisis in higher education: An analysis of the recent student protests**

#### **Introduction**

In the recent times, institutes of higher education across the country have turned into grounds of protests against the current government's policies. Undermining the autonomy and interference in the governance in these institutes. While the education sector overall has seen a steady decline in funds, its repercussions are more vividly discernible in the universities across the country. Protests have ranged from on issues relating to imposition of dress codes, attendance regulation and to withdrawal of scholarships, all of which are seen as a direct assault on the right to education and autonomy of educational institutes. In Central University of Orissa, Koraput University, classes have been suspended indefinitely after student protests pressing for their 60-point charter of demands including appointment of permanent faculty and health care facilities remained inconclusive. In Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), withdrawal and suspension of financial aid to students have left the 4 campuses across the country in agitation. There is a common thread which connects these varied protests across universities in India has led to agitation by students in all the four campuses located in different parts of the country. Meanwhile Jawaharlal Nehru University is witnessing protests against imposition of attendance norms and stifling of dissent within the campus. In another shocking move, the Kerala High Court judgment criminalised student political activity in the campus claiming it to be against constitutional ethos. Such an order has serious implications not only for the lives of students on campuses but for India's democracy in general. All these protests and agitation by students bring to light the increasing privatisation, lack of diversity and erosion of principles of social justice and affirmative action in the education sector in the country.,

#### **Government policies and budgeting**

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley presented the last full budget of the NDA government on 1st February 2018, it was termed as a progressive budget aimed at reforming and restructuring the social sectors. Despite this, the budget allocation for education was Rs 85,010 crore, only 4% higher than the previous year. The previous budget and implementation of schemes for education under this government have witnessed a similar cursory approach. Reiterating the importance of India's demographic dividend and the urgent need to make education more accessible even in the remote parts of the country, public spending on education was to be raised to 6% of the GDP. But the budget for education has remained stagnant or even declined. In higher education it is most visible in decisions like discontinuation of non-NET fellowship for PhD scholars and a general reduction in the overall budget for Post Matric scholarships (PMS), which creates a considerable void in the field of research since without economic security, it becomes difficult for scholars to continue with research. The government's claims of working towards "inclusive growth" and that of greater access to education for the underprivileged communities is directly contradicted by the data on the ministry's website which reveals that the number of scholarships granted has dropped drastically.

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Table – 1

Year	Budget	Actual Achievement	Targeted Beneficiaries
2014-15	1128 crores	74.96 lakh	30 lakh
2015-16	906.22 lakh	10.78 lakh	51.78 lakh
2016-17	584.90 crore	31.4 lakh	30 lakh
2017-18	63.13 crore (until June)	3,69,549	30 lakh

Source: [www.indiabudget.gov.in](http://www.indiabudget.gov.in)

The central government has withheld finances to the Ministry of Social Justice and which would then fulfill GoI–PMS obligations. As on 8 February 2018, the arrears reported by the Ministry of Social Justice Empowerment for the GoI–PMS for Scheduled Castes category were to the tune of Rs 6,824.51 crore (Rajya Sabha 2018). These arrears are based on claims made by GoI–PMS students from across different states. The states with the highest arrears reported are Tamil Nadu (Rs 1,547.56 crore), Uttar Pradesh (Rs 1,490.30 crore), Maharashtra (Rs 1,433.92 crore), and Punjab (Rs 835.24 crore). Despite this deficit, in the 2018–19 budget, the planned budgetary expenditure allocated by the central government for GoI–PMS students belonging to SC category was a paltry Rs 3,000 crore.<sup>1</sup> This amount was a reduction from the previous allocation of Rs 3,347.99 crore in 2017–18.

The funding has to be sufficient to provide for all eligible students from class 10 onwards. But as the data reveals, this is hardly a priority with the government and makes a mockery of the outcomes claimed by the current central government for this scheme—“increase in number of students receiving scholarship and passing rate of them in post matric education”. This is directly reflected in the steady lowering of funds allocated by the state to higher education institutes. At TISS, these issues appear in myriad forms. There was the suspension of the OBC scholarship in 2015, then there has been a considerable fee hike which has made prospective students from vulnerable socioeconomic backgrounds wary about applying in TISS. The data compiled during 2011 to 2015 indicates that most states including Maharashtra have failed to release the scholarship money, putting the burden directly on the institute. The usual defaulters causing agony to the students are states like Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. With acute shortage of funds and diversion of scholarship money, institutes have lost the ability to maintain its autonomy and provide a diverse and inclusive educational space to the students.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>[www.indiabudget.gov.in](http://www.indiabudget.gov.in)

<sup>2</sup><http://www.epw.in/engage/article/tiss-students-strike-privatisation-education-threatens-social-justice>

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Poor budgeting and prioritizing of higher education is one aspect that restricts and curtails the equitable access of education in universities and derails its functioning. The other equally crucial aspect are the policies which directly or indirectly seeks to impose and promote a culture in the universities conducive to the ideologies of the ruling government and curtails freedom and autonomy of the institutes. As a result, angry, even violent student protests have become a common feature in Indian universities. In April last year, Panjab University saw massive protests against a meteoric annual fee hike, surpassing hundred percent in many courses. In Orissa Central University, the students' demands of permanent faculty and better equipped university campus resulted in the University being shut indefinitely. The government has frequently resorted to legal action to stifle these protests and also accused the protestors of sedition for questioning government policies and opposing the administration. Instead of bringing issues to the negotiations table, the government and the administration has frequently undermined the rights of the students and have sought to suppress any form of activism.<sup>3</sup> In August 2017, the state government had issued an order directing Jadavpur University to make students' unions apolitical and empower a teacher at respective universities to handle union funds. The government had proposed that instead of students' unions, state colleges and universities will have student council, modeled on the St. Xavier's College system. During the Allahabad University students' protests in 2016 against the government's decision to keep only online options for the tests for post graduate admissions, the VC drew flak from BJP leaders over his handling of a students' agitation and his stance against political interference in running the University.

### Impact on the lives of students

The ongoing student strike at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, in the wake of reduced funding, withdrawal of scholarship for students from marginalised backgrounds and disproportionate increase in fees raises important questions about the impact of the government's new policies on the lives of students and their education. The withdrawal of scholarships directly impacts the most disadvantaged communities, mainly the SC/STs. The GoI-PMS scheme is a centrally funded scheme for post-matric students from SC, ST, and Non-Creamy layer-OBC (NC-OBC) backgrounds. The primary beneficiaries of these financial aid schemes are the minorities (especially Muslims) and those belonging to the SC/ST community who continuously face biases in universities, which though not reflected on paper, are present in the hierarchical and majoritarian mindset of different university administrations.

In a 2013 MHRD report, it was pointed out that only 11 out of 100 Muslims in India take up higher education while only a handful of students from the SC/ST community complete higher education. Majority of these students are dependent on scholarships and financial aid from the government to complete their education. These scholarships are 100% centrally funded scheme, where money from the centre is provided to students through their respective state governments, so that these students can pay for their higher education. Till 2014, this amount was directly provided to the institute from the state governments. Since then, however, with the introduction of the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system, this amount was to be sent to the bank accounts of students. Due to deficit in the institute without central funding to cover the loss, many of these scholarships

<sup>3</sup><http://www.firstpost.com/india/erosion-of-public-universities-autonomy-is-education-on-the-way-to-become-a-privilege-in-india-3591119.html>

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have been retracted over the years or fees have been hiked to an exorbitant amount, making education almost inaccessible to several students from the disadvantaged communities. TISS has also cancelled courses on inclusive policy making including a course on Women's Studies and Study of Social Exclusion. Therefore with this current structure of governance and funding, there are two levels of exclusion- choice of courses and financial deprivation. With the Prime Minister claiming that the government is paving the path for a more inclusive society, it is ironic that the education system seeks to exclude several students on grounds on financial inequity.

Several teachers and students have come together in solidarity to condemn the new attendance policy in JNU that has been introduced by the administration, citing it as irrational and against the spirit of the University. The justification given by the administration was that compulsory attendance is part of the culture at the Indian Institutes of Technology and that Jawaharlal Nehru University should adopt this system too since it promotes effective learning and ensures attendance of students in classes. Students and a large number of teachers also said that they would fight for their academic freedom by taking to the streets to force the administration to withdraw the new rules.<sup>4</sup> Enforcing a compulsory attendance policy is seen as giving way to a bureaucratic process rather than ensuring robust infrastructure and environment for producing scholarship. It sends the contradictory message that university systems should adapt to new government directives, while discouraging creativity and innovation at the same time.

However, instead of attempting to bolster the status of the departments of social sciences that are in a perilous state in India because of declining government funding, political support has been withdrawn to varsities like Jawaharlal Nehru University that are focused on serious research in social sciences. This means that the resources of these institutions are inadequate when compared with those of science and technology research institutes in the country and subsequently are devalued by the market based economy. Throughout all these rules and policies, it is not only the student who suffers from this 'educational apartheid' but also the prospect of courses which are as crucial to the development of society as any other course in the field of technology.<sup>5</sup>

### Conclusion

The growing protests across universities in India is symptomatic of the declining government funding of institutes of higher education in general and courses in humanities in particular. It is noteworthy that most of the students who are leading and participating in the protests are from humanities, hence it is not surprising that the Government is targeting humanities and social science as a discipline across the country. In the interest of the students and for an inclusive system of education, the hurdles faced by the university system in India should be urgently addressed. The social polarization that higher education is facing today can be traced to the problems in our society, split by divergences of skills, social capital and access to work.<sup>6</sup> These

<sup>4</sup><https://thewire.in/education/fuss-attendance-view-jnu>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.epw.in/engage/article/tiss-students-strike-privatisation-education-threatens-social-justice>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.firstpost.com/india/erosion-of-public-universities-autonomy-is-education-on-the-way-to-become-a-privilege-in-india-3591119.html>

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agitations raise critical questions about our current education system- how accessible are colleges and universities for the marginalized who have limited financial resources to support their education? How supportive are they for students in non technical courses and are students being forced to opt for market driven courses? Most importantly, it calls for an introspection of the role of UGC and the government in day to day running and administration of public universities and the degree to which the government can determine courses and their content.

**Prepared by: Aadrita Das**

## Headline

### **Smart Cities, other flagship Modi projects starved for cash, says report**

**(Bloomberg, *The Times of India*, March 20, 2018)**

The 22<sup>nd</sup> report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Urban Development (2017-18) on Demand for Grants (2018-19) has revealed that the Government's six top infrastructure initiatives spent on average just 21 per cent, or \$1.2 billion, of the \$5.6 billion allocated. The Smart Cities programme, used just 1.8 per cent of the funds released to it, or just \$28 million of a dedicated \$1.5 billion, while other programs such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Swachh Bharat, used less than 30 per cent of the available funds. The government however claims that \$3.7 billion worth of projects have been "completed or started."

Read More: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/smart-cities-other-flagship-government-projects-starved-for-cash-says-report/articleshow/63376512.cms>

Date Accessed: 20.03.2018



## Economy

### Find new ways to generate revenue: CAG to Railways

(ET Bureau, *The Economic Times*, March 14, 2018)

In one of its reports tabled in the Parliament on March 13, the CAG recommended that the Indian Railways should look into innovative ways for revenue generation and closely monitor its expenditure. The report said that the Railways should revisit the passenger and other coaching tariffs so as to recover the cost of operations in a phased manner and reduce its losses in its core activities. "The fixation of passenger fare and freight charges should be based on the cost involved so that it brings both rationality and flexibility in pricing, considering the financial health of railways and the current market scenario. There is hardly any justification for not fully recovering the cost of passenger services in case of AC classes," the report noted.

Read more: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/railways/find-new-ways-to-generate-revenue-cag-to-railways/articleshow/63293400.cms>

Date Accessed: 19.03.2018

### Paul Krugman says lack of jobs may hit India's rapid economic growth

(*Business Today*, March 18, 2018)

Nobel Laureate Paul Krugman has praised India's economic growth saying the country made rapid economic progress during the last 30 years but warned lack of jobs and slowing manufacturing sector could derail the growth story of the world's fastest growing economy. Another concern for India is high economic inequality, amid rapid economic progress, resulting in uneven distribution of wealth, according to Krugman. "India achieved as much economic progress in the (last) 30 years as the Great Britain did in 150 years. It is a very rapid space of transformation....why does there still seem to be visible poverty in India?," Krugman said on Saturday addressing the summit of a media group in New Delhi. "Lack of manufacturing could be a major hurdle as India doesn't have the jobs," he said.

Read More: <https://www.businesstoday.in/current/economy-politics/paul-krugman-on-indian-economy-lack-of-jobs-india-economic-growth/story/272853.html>

Date Accessed: 18.03.2018

## Governance and Development

### *POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE*

#### **Experts call BJP Using the Guillotine to Pass Finance Bill Without Discussion 'Inappropriate'**

(Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar, *The Wire*, March 14, 2018)

Several constitutional experts and opposition parties have criticised the Government for passing the Finance Bill and Appropriation Bill in the Lok Sabha with a voice vote after Speaker Sumitra Mahajan applied the guillotine under which a fixed time is allotted for a discussion for each ministry and all outstanding demands are put to voice vote once that time has lapsed. P.D.T. Achary, former secretary general of Lok Sabha, said, "This is a very bad thing which has happened. The Finance Bill is a very important bill which contains all the financial provisions which the government has made in this year's Budget and the discussion on it used to give a lot of time to the opposition to speak and to move their amendments. Earlier, about eight or ten hours used to be allotted for the discussion and voting on the bill."

Read more: <https://thewire.in/government/bjp-guillotine-finance-bill-without-discussion-inappropriate>

Date Accessed: 19.03.2018

### *HEALTH*

#### **16% Indian Women Don't Get Pregnancy Care—Nearly Half Because Husband/Family Did Not Think It Necessary**

(Gayathri Balagopal, *Indiaspend*, March 19, 2018)

An analysis of the latest National Family Health Survey 2015-16 (NFHS-4) data reveals that more than one in seven Indian women did not receive antenatal care during their last pregnancy – nearly half of them because their husband or family did not think it was necessary or did not allow it. Only 16.7% women in rural India received full antenatal care—at least four ANC visits, at least one tetanus toxoid injection, and iron and folic acid tablets or syrup taken for 100 or more days—about half as many as in urban areas (31.1%), NFHS-4 data show. The World Health Organization recommends that all pregnant women receive at least four ANC visits, and that the first such visit should be in the first trimester of pregnancy.

Read more: <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/16-indian-women-dont-get-pregnancy-care-nearly-half-because-husbandfamily-did-not-think-it-necessary-93453>

Date Accessed: 19.03.2018

### *DEFENCE*

#### **Indian Army low on ammunition and supplies, but Nirmala Sitharaman insists vice chiefs given enough power to solve problem**

(Pallavi Rebbapragada, *Firstpost*, March 18, 2018)

A CAG Audit Report on Ammunition Management in Army presented on 8 May, 2015 states: "In disregard of the approved authorisation of 40 (I) days, AHQ procured ammunition based on the basis of Bottom Line or Minimum Acceptable Risk Level (MARL) requirements which averaged to 20 (I) days i.e. 50 percent of the War Wastage Reserve that is intended to meet the requirements for the expected duration of war." Two years later, Punjab chief minister Capt. Amarinder Singh said that we need 42 squadrons of Air Force for a collision with Pakistan and China but we have only around 21 or 22: Of which seven squadrons are

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obsolete. He went on to share that as many as 66 regiments of the army didn't have ammunition and were using practice ammunition that has been lying around for far too long. However, Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman when asked to address Amarinder's concerns regarding the preparedness of the armed forces said, "Is India war ready? "I am glad to say we have addressed the issue and have enough ammunition for 10(I) or ten days of intensive war. The vice chiefs have been given enough power and enough financial limits have also been sanctioned".

Read More: <http://www.firstpost.com/india/indian-army-low-on-ammunition-and-supplies-but-nirmala-sitharaman-insists-vice-chiefs-given-enough-power-to-solve-problem-4395103.html>

Date Accessed: 18.03.2018

### LAW AND JUSTICE

#### India's legal system 'expensive', 'prone to delays': President

PTI, Times of India, March 17, 2018

Delivering the 3rd Foundation Day lecture at the National Law University, President Ram Nath Kovind on Saturday voiced concern over India's legal system, and said it has a reputation for being "expensive" and is "prone to delays". "Our legal system has a reputation for being expensive and for being prone to delays. The use and abuse of the instrument of adjournments is often done by advocates who see adjournment as a tactic to slow down the proceedings, rather than a response to a genuine emergency," he said, adding that it adds to the cost of justice for the litigant. The President also called for simplification of legal rules and enhancement of legal literacy.

Read More: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/indias-legal-system-expensive-prone-to-delays-president/articleshow/63348093.cms>

Date Accessed: 18.03.2018

### EDUCATION

#### Indian education sector needs holistic relook: Experts

(PTI, *Economic Times*, March 18, 2018)

Speaking at the sixth Global Education and Skills Forum (GESF) in Dubai, the experts suggested that India needs to have a comprehensive relook at its education sector to prepare its youth which comprise over 50 per cent of the 1.3 billion population for the future and called for a shift in the policy to meet the challenges of the changing times. "A relook at the Indian education sector is inevitable given that the current system was developed in the pre-Independence era for just five per cent of the population and that too for clerical roles, with no room for creativity or promoting social reorganisation," said Aditya Nataraj, Founder director Kaivalya Education Foundation, a social change organisation working in the field of education. While Kavita Sanghvi, Principal MET Rishikul Vidyalaya, pointed out that the biggest challenge before policymakers was to bring on par all three tiers of schools state boards, national and international education providers.

Read more:

[http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/63352334.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cpst](http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/63352334.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cpst)

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