INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION - GS II MAINS

Q. The Indian higher education system poses a threat to the rising aspiring young population. Discuss the challenges faced by it and bring out the measures to revamp our higher education system. (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *The hyperpoliticisation of Indian higher education*

What's in the news?

- A recent discussion revolves around the politicization of higher education in India and emphasizes the urgent need for substantial reforms.

Current Status of the Higher Education System in India:

1. Student Enrolment:

- As per the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-22, the enrolment in higher education institutes stands at 4.33 crore, indicating a significant increase from previous years.
- The number of women enrolled has risen to 2.07 crore, marking a 32% jump since 2014-15.
- Notably, the proportion of women enrolled is highest at the postgraduate level (55.4%).

2. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Gender Parity Index (GPI):

- The estimated GER for the age group 18-23 years is 28.4% in India.
- The GPI stands at 1.01 at the all-India level, showcasing gender parity.

3. Discipline-wise Enrolment:

- Bachelor of Arts (BA) programs dominate undergraduate enrolment (34.2%), followed by science, commerce, and engineering.
- Social science stream leads postgraduate enrolment, with 10.8 lakh students enrolled.
- Engineering has the highest enrollment at the PhD level, followed by science and social sciences.

4. Primacy of Government Institutions:

- Despite comprising only 58.6% of all universities, government universities attract 73.7% of all students.
- State public universities hold the largest share of enrollment among government-owned universities, accounting for around 31%.

Major Challenges in the Indian Higher Education System:

1. Inequitable Access and Low GER:

- Persistent disparities in access based on socio-economic background, gender, and geography.
- GER, while improving, remains below the global average.

2. Politicization and Lack of Autonomy:

- Concerns about political interference in institutions' affairs, hindering autonomy and innovation.

3. Limited Funding:
- Reduced budget allocations and low investment in research and development compared to global standards.

4. Shortage of Faculty and Brain Drain:
- Vacant teaching positions and talent migration to other countries or sectors due to better opportunities.

5. Inadequate Industry-Academia Collaboration:
- Lack of effective partnerships leading to a skill gap and unmet industry demands.

6. Uneven Regional Development:
- Disparities in the quality and accessibility of higher education across different states and regions.

Government Initiatives Related to Higher Education:

1. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:
- Aims to revamp the education system, emphasizing multidisciplinary learning, skill development, and research and innovation.
- Proposes increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio to 50% by 2035.

2. Institutions of Eminence (IoE) Scheme:
- Launched in 2018, granting complete autonomy to 20 selected institutions.

3. National Credit Framework:
- Integrates training and skill development into the education system, with credits stored digitally for accessibility.

4. Revamped Accreditation and Ranking Systems:
- Initiatives like NIRF and revamped NAAC ensure quality standards among institutions.

5. Digital Initiatives:
- Platforms like SWAYAM and the National Digital Library of India offer online courses and educational resources.

6. Study in India Program:
- Aims to attract international students to study in India through scholarships and streamlined admission processes.

7. Foreign Institutions in India:
- Regulations allowing foreign universities to establish branch campuses in India, enhancing international collaboration.

8. SHE under INSPIRE:
- Offers scholarships to attract students to pursue basic and natural sciences at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Measures to Revamp Higher Education System in India:

1. Redefining the Role of Universities:
- Shifting focus to practical skill development, social responsibility, and civic engagement.
- Transforming institutions into skill generators rather than degree issuers.

2. Open Education Resources (OER) Initiatives:
- Enhancing access to educational resources through platforms like the National Digital Library of India.

3. Entrepreneurship and Innovation Centers:
- Establishing centers to foster innovation and support student entrepreneurship.

4. Transnational Education Partnerships:
- Promoting collaborations with international universities to enhance global exposure and competitiveness.

5. Dual Study Programs:
- Implementing programs combining theoretical learning with practical training.

6. Competency-based Credentialing and Blockchain Certificates:
- Adopting systems to recognize and validate skills acquired through diverse learning pathways, leveraging blockchain technology for transparency and trust.