

## **Rashtriya Uchcharat Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA): Goals and Challenges in the Growth of Higher Education.**

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### **Abstract**

*Higher education plays an important role in the growth and development of a nation. It inculcates the higher standards of conduct, behaviour and integrity of personality in the members of the society. After the successful implementations of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha (RMSA) in the primary and secondary levels of education respectively for overall development of education system in India, a centrally sponsored scheme known as Rashtriya Uchcharat Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) was launched by the Govt. of India. The need of the RUSA was to improve the access, equity and excellence in the higher education system and to compete with fast global changes. Rashtriya Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) will have a completely new approach towards funding higher education in state universities and colleges. It is based on key principles of performance-based funding, incentivising well performing institutions and decision making through clearly defined norms, which will establish and rely upon a management information system to gather the essential information from institutions. RUSA will aim to provide greater autonomy to universities as well as colleges and have a sharper focus on equity-based development and improvement in teaching-learning quality and research. The present study aims to examine the need of RUSA in the higher educational institutions as well as to present an overview on the objectives and principles of RUSA. The objective of the study is also to know the different components and provisions of RUSA, besides the major challenges to overcome. The paper takes the form of an exploratory study and is based on the data available in the various published papers, journals, websites and reports of UGC, AICTE, MHRD etc.*

**Keywords:** Access, Equity, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), Higher Education System.

### **Introduction**

The success of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) laid a strong foundation for primary and secondary education in India, which led to an increase in demand for higher education. However, the sphere of higher education had not yet witnessed any concerted effort for improvement of access or quality. Over the years, there has been an unprecedented expansion in number of institutions and volume of students in the country. To take advantage of the demographic dividend, there was a need for a concerted effort which would improve the quality and relevance of higher education and result in an educated and productive workforce. The XII Plan (2012-17) argued for a holistic approach to higher education with renewed focus on improving the quality of state institutions, together with addressing the issue of access & equity. A strategic shift was needed in several critical areas ranging from issues of access and equity to teaching-learning process, research, governance, funding and monitoring; which could connect funding streams to specific outcomes & desired impact. Planning Commission recommended strategic utilization of central funds to ensure comprehensive and optimum planning at the state level.

In lieu of above, a new overarching centrally sponsored scheme for funding state level institutions was proposed called Rashtriya Uchcharat Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA). It is an umbrella scheme to be operated in mission mode over the two plan periods (XII & XIII Plan), which seeks to mainly improve overall quality of existing state higher educational institutions. The scheme is implemented through a set of bodies with clearly defined roles and functions at the national, state and institutional level. The allocation of funds under RUSA is based on well-defined norms & parameters and linked to academic, administrative and governance reforms. Future grants would be performance based and outcome dependent. The reforms initiated under RUSA would build a self-sustaining momentum that would push for greater accountability and autonomy of state institutions and impress

upon them the need to improve the quality of education. There are 316 states public universities and 13,024 colleges that can be covered under RUSA. The funding will be provided in the (centre : state) ratio of 90:10 for north-eastern states & J&K, 75:25 for other special category states (Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand) and 65:35 for other states and UT's. Funding will be available to private government-aided institutions also, subject to meeting certain pre-conditions, for permitted activities based on laid down norms and parameters.

#### **Present status of higher education in India**

The higher education system in India at present is at a transition stage. A stage where changes have taken place for good and more transformations in thoughts and processes are desired. Higher education system in any nation today seeks a relook. The world is being slowly but steadily turned into a global village. Synchronisation and harmony among the global universities across the globe can create sync throughout, wherein the nurturing of the young minds may be accustomed to the changes desired. Another aspect which is very important today is the concept of blended learning. It is just the next step to the previous idea of creating a harmonization of higher education across the globe. Students from all over the world will be benefited from the expertise of the renowned academicians. The harmony may create a balance in learning and research thereafter. For India however, the problem is deep-rooted and a higher education reform is the need of the hour. The demand for higher education and the magnitude of planned reforms over the next ten years in India will provide the largest opportunity in the world for international higher education institutions and education businesses.

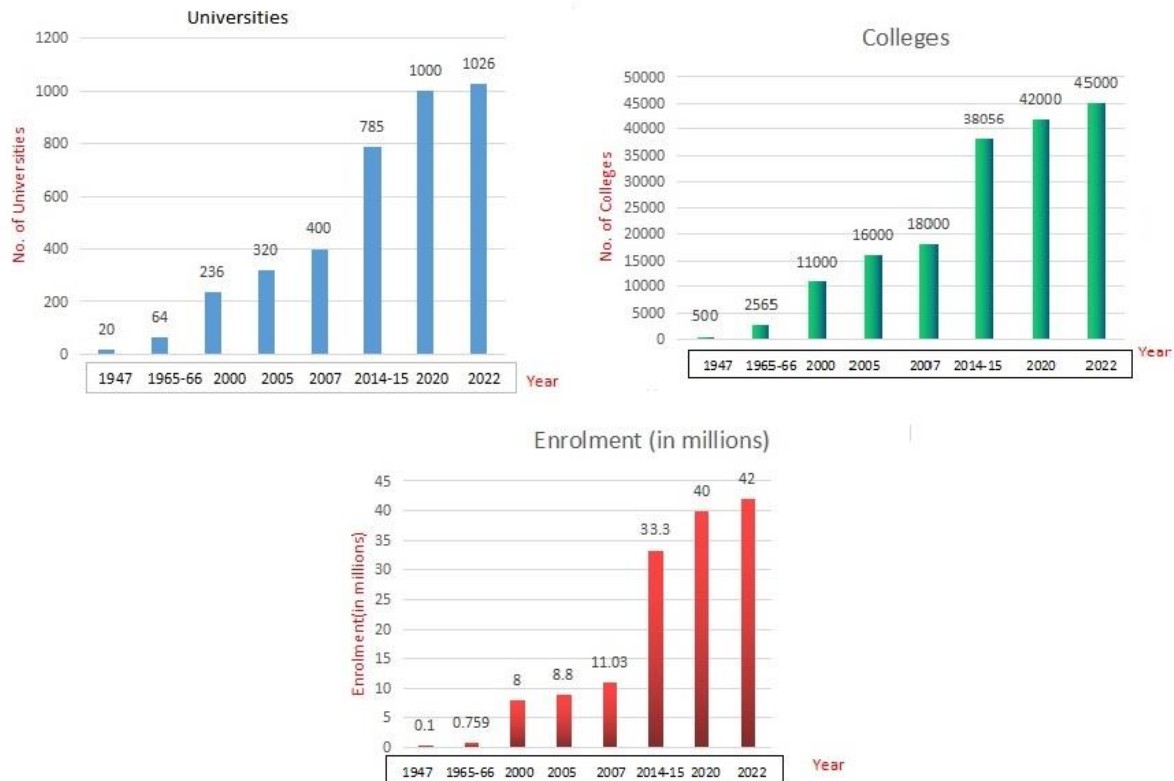
India's higher education system is world's third largest system after USA and China and it is the biggest in South-East Asia. As of 2020, India has over 1000 universities, with a break up of 54 central universities, 416 state universities, 125 deemed universities, 361 private universities and 159 institutes of national importance which include AAIMS, IIMS, IITs, IISERs, IITs and NITs among others. The expansion of higher education in India since independence is shown in the table 1. given below:

**Table 1.Expansion of higher education in India.**

Year	Universities	Colleges	Enrolment (in millions)
1947	20	500	0.1
1965-66	64	2565	0.759
2000	236	11000	8
2005	320	16000	8.8
2007	400	18000	11.03
2014-15	785	38056	33.3
2020	1000	42000	40
2022	1026	45000	42

**Source: E.C Report, pp 538-540; University news 54(26).**

**Figure 1. Graphical representation of increase in universities, colleges and enrolment in higher education.**



Despite significant progress over the last ten years (Figure 1.), Indian higher education is facing a lot of challenges. As per “All India Survey on Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2010-11” the higher education system in India suffers from many shortcomings. These are:

01. Only a small fraction of population between the age group of 18-23 is enrolled in higher education institutions as the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is only 18.8%.
02. Wide disparities between various social groups like SCs, STs, and OBCs are falling below average GER.
03. There is also gender inequality, GER for males is 20.9% while as for females it is only 16.5%.
04. There is also difference in quality of institutions and enrolment between rural and urban areas and between developed states and under developed ones.
05. Issues in universities arising from affiliation, resulting in administrative burden on universities.
06. Governance issues in universities such as lack of appropriate structures and limited autonomy.
07. Financial constraints in higher education, particularly for state level institutions.
08. Lack of clear regulatory framework for private sector participation in higher education.
09. Significant levels of faculty vacancies in institutes and inadequate research opportunities.
10. Varying quality of education provided in institutions with inadequate focus on research in higher education and low employability and skills of graduates.
11. Very few institutes get regularly accredited and lack adequate infrastructure and equipment.

Looking at the innumerable challenges, a radical change is required in the traditionally adopted approach for the development of higher education in country.

#### Objectives of the study

- I. To study the need for RUSA .
- II. To study the main objectives and principles of RUSA .

**III.** To study the components and provisions of RUSA.

**IV.** To study the major challenges for RUSA

### **Research Methodology**

The present research work takes the form of an exploratory study and is mainly based upon the data obtained from research journals, magazines, published articles, RUSA documents as well as websites of UGC, MHRD and AICTE etc. All these sources of data were used to get the appropriate relevant information.

### **Findings of the study:**

#### **I. Need for Rastriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA):**

State universities catering to large number of students face severe constraints in terms of access to finances, particularly in comparison to central institutions. Also state government support to state institutions being inadequate, the resources are spread thinly over an increasing numbers of institutions. Though the state universities get some funds from the central government through university grants commission (UGC), however these funds are not for the entire state university system. UGC is not allowed to channelize funds through the state government or any organization other than educational institution, making it impossible for it to fund any planning and expansion activity of state level higher education. There is a severe need for vision and planning for development of higher education focusing on the state as the basic unit. This planning can be done by an autonomous body that can raise and allocate funds from state as well as central government for higher education and also explore options of revenue generation through research, consulting private and industry partnership.

Without access to adequate funds, affiliated institutions have become an alternative source of finance for universities, through their affiliation fees. Further, the increasing numbers of affiliated institutions also had a negative impact in terms of quality of education as well as added administrative burden for universities. It has also resulted in reduced autonomy of affiliated institutions with respect to aspects such as teaching, curriculum development and research.

A best solution was to create an alternate way of providing funding to a large number of institutions and channelize funds through a body that ensures cohesive and integrated planning at the state level. Therefore the need of the hour was to ensure that all colleges and universities must receive requisite state and central support in order to achieve required efficiency and infrastructure. Keeping in view such objectives, the need for reforms in state higher education sector using central funds in a strategic manner a new centrally sponsored scheme by the name of Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) was proposed. This scheme would spread over two plan period i.e. XIIth & XIIIth and would be an overarching scheme for funding the state universities and colleges to achieve the aim of equity, access and excellence.

#### **II. Objectives of RUSA:**

The central objective of RUSA was to achieve the target of GER of 30% by the end of XIIIth plan. The other objectives of the scheme can be enumerated as follows:

- i.** Improving the overall quality of existing state higher educational institutions by ensuring conformity to prescribed norms and standards and adoption of accreditation as a mandatory quality assurance framework.
- ii.** Correct regional imbalances in access to higher education through high quality institutions in rural and semi-urban areas as well as creating opportunities for students from rural areas to get access to better quality institutions.
- iii.** Setting up of higher education institutions in un-served and underserved areas.
- iv.** Improve equity in higher education by providing adequate opportunities to socially deprived communities; promote inclusion of women, minorities, SC/ST and OBCs as well as differently-abled persons.
- v.** Ensure adequate availability of quality faculty in all higher educational institutions and ensure capacity building at all levels.
- vi.** Create an enabling atmosphere in higher educational institutions to devote themselves to research and innovation.

- vii. Usher transformative reforms in the state higher educational 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.
- viii. Ensure academic and examination reforms in the higher educational institutions.
- ix. Enable conversion of some of the universities into research universities at par with the best in the world.
- x. 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.
- xi. Expand the institutional base by creating additional capacity in existing institutions and establishing new institutions in order to achieve enrolment targets.

### **III. Principles of RUSA:**

RUSA is based on certain important guiding principles. These principles constitute the foundational premise and all the decisions taken under the scheme must be guided by them. The states are expected to keep these principles as guiding posts while formulating their state higher education plans and developing their strategies. These principles are:

#### **01. Focus on Quality and Research**

The RUSA focuses on better quality of state higher education institutions. The aim is to achieve mass access to higher education with high quality standards. States must ensure that all their institutions adopt NAAC accreditation as the mandatory quality assurance framework, and simultaneously seek to upgrade the overall academic quality by implementing reforms. They will be encouraged to promote research and innovation in their institutions. Since research focus can be judged both from input efforts and outcome indicators, the SHEPS are expected to have a balanced appreciation of both aspects. States and institutions are expected to honestly declare their present status in this area and outline specific strategies for improvement, including the use of information and communications technologies (ICT). There is a need to improve resource allocation for universities to enable good quality research and innovation. Criteria such as the number of research publications, impact factors of journals in which papers are published, citations, the amount of research funding attracted, etc., should be considered for faculty promotions.

#### **02. Norm-based and Outcome-dependent Funding**

The fundamental principle around which RUSA is designed is that funding under it is norm based and future grants are outcome dependent. The central funding is strategic and based on state higher education plans (SHEPs), which serve as a benchmark against which the performance of a state and its institutions is graded. Future funding is provided on the basis of past achievements and utilization of funds submitted to Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD).

#### **03. Incentivizing and Disincentivizing**

RUSA incentivizes and disincentivizes state actions. Not only is compliance to rules, regulations and fulfilment of norms supported by incentives, but non-performance or non-fulfilment of prerequisites and norms invites reduced allocations for states and institutions. This is intended to make the scheme not only demand driven, but also competitive. States and institutions are encouraged to compete with each other in order to reap the benefits of competition-based formulaic grants.

#### **04. Apolitical Decision Making**

Another basic principle of RUSA is that the decision making is done in an unbiased, apolitical and professional manner, on the basis of the SHEPs and the performance of the states on the predefined parameters. The process of decision making and its result are transparent and the methods impartial. It is expected that the states would also be as unbiased, apolitical and professional while planning and ushering governance reforms at their level. In order to effectively implement these reforms, the selection of leadership positions in state universities should take into account the imperatives of merit and performance

#### **05. Autonomy**

Autonomy is an indispensable condition for quality and accountability. RUSA emphasises on greater autonomy for institutions in terms of decision making. The institutions will have full freedom to plan specific interventions depending on their special needs and requirements. Some of the key areas where there is need for enforcement of university autonomy are as follows:

- i. **Revisiting the acts:** There is a need to revisit the acts of various state universities to see if there are some clauses detrimental to their autonomy.
- ii. **Streamlining the recruitment process:** Universities must have the autonomy to recruit the most competent faculty as per laid-down procedures and purely on the basis of merit.
- iii. **Membership of governing bodies:** A university is administered by its senior functionaries under the guidance of its statutory bodies such as the executive committee, syndicate, senate, etc. The persons to be nominated to these bodies must have specialized knowledge in the relevant disciplines and should not have conflict of interests in so far as decision making in the university is concerned. These bodies should predominantly consist of members from academic background.
- iv. **Institutional leadership:** It is the duty of the Vice Chancellor to safeguard the autonomy of the university. The increasing trend of appointing civil servants as heads of educational institutions needs to be reviewed. Special RUSA orientation programmes or conferences on the management of universities should be organized to enable the Vice Chancellors, Directors, Pro-Vice Chancellors, Deans and Heads of Departments to hone their management skills.

#### **06. Disclosure-based Governance:**

Disclosure based governance must be followed by institutions with regard to their decisions and outcomes. RUSA focuses on 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 the society. A policy of full disclosure and clean governance is the first step towards establishing such a system of higher education.

#### **07. Equity-based development:**

Equity-based development initiatives must form an essential part of any development or expansion plans, both at the state and institution levels. Any growth in the higher education sector must create equal opportunities for women, disadvantaged classes and the differently abled. Also, development must have a greater focus on serving the rural and tribal areas.

#### **IV. Components of RUSA:**

The main focus of the RUSA is to provide the strategic funding of state institutions so as to ensure that issues of access, equity and quality are addressed in an equitable manner with the state as a composite unit of planning. The following are the main components of RUSA that capture the key action and funding areas that must be pursued for the fulfilment of the targets:

- i. New Universities.
- ii. Up gradation of existing autonomous colleges to Universities.
- iii. Conversion of colleges to Cluster Universities.
- iv. Infrastructure grants to Universities.
- v. New Model Colleges (General).
- vi. Upgradation of existing degree colleges to model colleges.
- vii. New Colleges (Professional).
- viii. Infrastructure grants to colleges.
- ix. Research, innovation and quality improvement.
- x. Equity initiatives.
- xi. Faculty Recruitment Support.
- xii. Faculty improvements.
- xiii. Research Universities.
- xiv. Vocationalisation of Higher Education.
- xv. Leadership Development of Educational Administrators.
- xvi. Institutional restructuring & reforms.
- xvii. Capacity building & preparation, Data collection & planning.
- xviii. Management Information System.

The components of RUSA would be achieved through need based and customized equity interventions, quality improvement programs, and obtain mandatory accreditation. Faculty issues would be addressed through creation of new posts, filling of existing posts by full time faculty and faculty improvement programmes. Equity interventions are also being built into the scheme. The following components would address the equity issues in a more holistic and integrated manner,

thereby making a significant impact on the enrolment of deprived and marginalized sections of the society:

- i. Girls hostels and girls toilets
- ii. New hostels wherein 50% of capacity would be used for SC/ST and socially and educationally backward classes.
- iii. Converting existing buildings into fully disabled friendly environments (e.g. providing ramps, tactile pathways).
- iv. Special facilities/equipment's for the disabled (e.g. computers, lab equipment's).
- v. Model Colleges in each district.
- vi. Special innovative programmes for focus groups and open and distance learning (ODL) strategies.

#### **V. Provisions of RUSA:**

##### **A. RUSA provisions for academics:**

- i. Consolidating and developing through capacity addition, usage of ICT and distance learning.
- ii. Model Colleges in each district and integration of various equity schemes currently in place.
- iii. States ensure faculty positions are filled in a phased manner.
- iv. Proactive steps for faculty recruitment and development.
- v. Credit Based Credit System across higher educational institutions.
- vi. Reform in admission process, curriculum development and examination process.
- vii. Provision of research and innovation grants/funds.
- viii. Support for state endeavours' to create Research Universities.

##### **B. RUSA provisions for governance:**

- i. Reforms at state level and institutional level including 'Accountability Framework' for universities.
- ii. Provision for greater academic, financial and administrative autonomy for universities.
- iii. Limit on colleges affiliated to a university and creation of College Cluster Universities.
- iv. Funding to non 12B and 2(f) institutions as well.
- v. Funding through State Councils- norm and performance based.
- vi. Infrastructure up gradation of existing institutions with focus on quality and equity.

##### **C. RUSA provisions for quality improvement:**

- i. Three-tier institutional structure to monitor progress and implementation of reforms.
- ii. All institutions to be linked to a web-based Management Information System (MIS).
- iii. Creation of state level accreditation agencies.
- iv. Requirement of mandatory accreditation for HEI's.
- v. Establishment of appropriate regulatory framework to set quality standards.
- vi. Creation of enabling conditions to attract investments - aim to mobilize 50% of the state contribution through private participation.

#### **VI. Major challenges for RUSA:**

Most important task for RUSA is improvement in access, equity and quality across India. In other words, homogeneous improvement in all the three areas i.e. access, equity and quality in the higher education institutions of India would be a key challenge for RUSA. Parts of India which is in the nascent stages of higher education may only be able to work on access and equity, while quality improvement may take some more time to be visible. Reaching out to rural India and socially and educationally backward class maybe also be another challenge.

According to the structure of the scheme co-ordination between RUSA Mission Authority and State Higher Education Council (SHEC) is proposed, which may also be a difficult task. A Management Information System (MIS) is proposed for all co-ordination between National, State and Institutional level. During the initial years, it would be a challenge to train and align each individual to comply and feed information into MIS system. Besides above challenges there also exists many issues before RUSA in its different components like providing adequate infrastructure to all the higher educational institutions, removing the faculty crunch, providing complete autonomy and governance to institutions as well as the issues related to research, funding and monitoring mechanism.

## Conclusion

RUSA introduces a significant strategic shift in the approach towards developing the higher education system, by focusing on state level institutions which have been neglected over the years in relation to centrally funded institutions. It seeks to introduce measures such as performance and norm based funding as well as governance and academic reforms at the institutional and state levels to address some of the challenges in higher education in India. If implemented swiftly and efficiently, RUSA can be a turning point for the Indian higher education system as it seeks to achieve higher enrolment rates and address access, equity and quality related concerns.

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