

# GENERAL ESSAY 2020

## Need of the Hour is Affordable Education

If India seeks to become a knowledge economy, enjoy the fruits of demographic dividend, and create responsible citizens, it will need to make education accessible to more people, across classes, castes, regions, religions and gender. Unless a nation is educated, it can not innovate and expand the economy in a modern way to address its own and the global needs. There are many socio-economic challenges like poverty, inequality, hunger, productivity, diseases etc. that can only be remedied by education and science. The path to education is to make to affordable and accessible. Economic deprivation should not hinder the ability of students to access education. Many from marginalised groups cannot pay for expensive education, but have the right to be educated, and access opportunities. While university administrations have the right to review fees at periodic intervals, in consultation with students, it is important to preserve the principle of providing affordable education to all those who seek it. The roots of the student unrest in the country lie in the expensive education at all levels. This has thrown up a larger debate on whether higher education should be subsidised or not. An analysis of the recently released (2017-18) National Statistical Organisation (NSO) data shows that despite years of economic progress, there remain an overwhelming number of poor people who cannot afford expensive education in India. Only 10.6% of the population, aged above 15 years, have successfully completed a graduate degree. This proportion is only 5.7% in rural India and is 8.3% among women. Another NSSO survey, the Periodic Labour Force Survey (2017-18), confirms the common belief that social and economic disadvantages perpetuate educational inequalities. Education is also crucial for the richness of democracy that requires civic participation and empowerment. Exercise of rights needs information and education. So does the right to do business and practise profession. India can not afford to lag behind in scientific advancement

and material prosperity the key to them lying with education. While government can not bear the burden of education entirely on its own, it should take care of the educational needs of the have-nots. Not only make the education at the primary level free, as it does now, but the higher education should be subsidised. That is only the first step. The quality also should be impressive so that the expected multiplier in the form of value addition through science, technology and economic growth and inclusive society result from it. For women, education should be not only free but there should be conditional cash transfers as well as educating a woman means educating an entire family as the future of health, education, productivity and so on depends on **the mother in the family.**

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