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Har Ghar Tiranga

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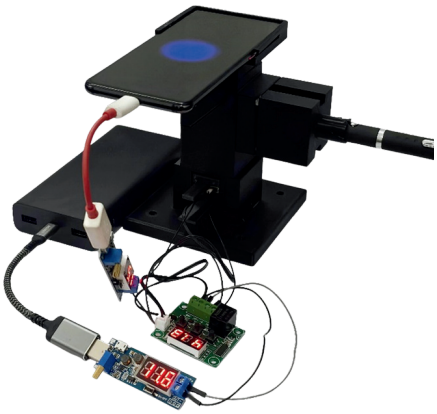
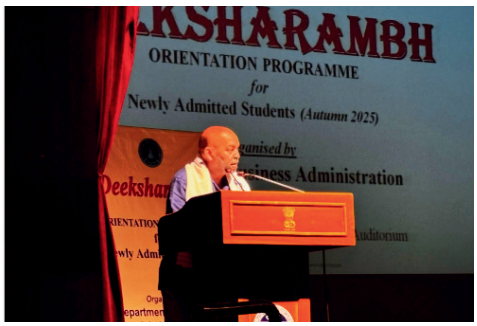


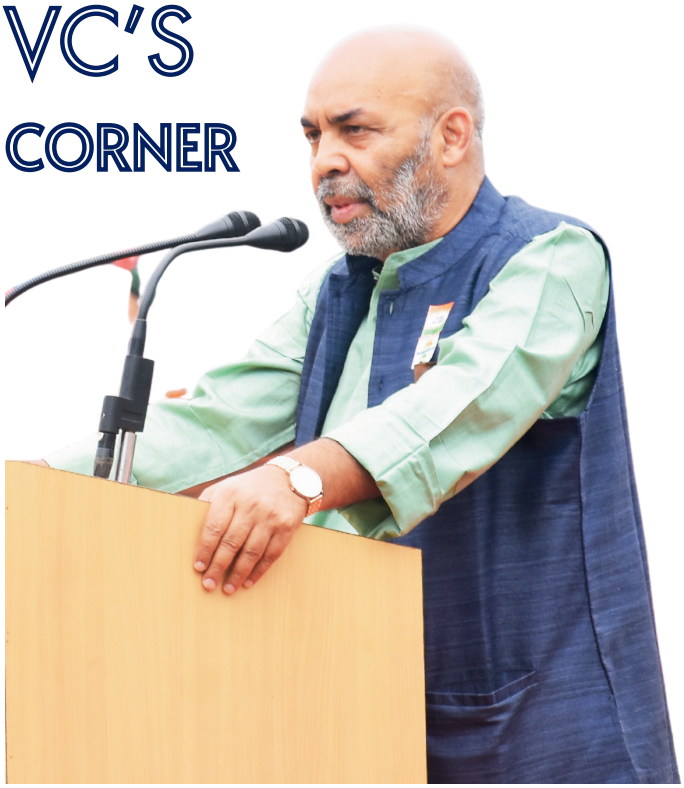
An affordable and portable device to detect Tuberculosis (TB) using a smartphone developed by Researchers at Tezpur University

Students participating at the 79th Independence Day Celebration



Vice Chancellor Prof Shambhu Nath Singh addressing students during orientation Program

VC'S CORNER



It gives me immense pride to present the August 2025 edition of our University Newsletter. This edition reflects the dedication, creativity, and achievements of our students, faculty, and staff who continue to uphold the University's mission of achieving excellence in education, research, and social responsibility.

From path-breaking innovations like the development of a low-cost device for TB detection, to leading critical national discussions on equity in higher education, our University community is setting benchmarks of impact and inclusivity. The recognition of our faculty by prestigious organizations, successful hosting of national events such as *National Space Day*, and the continuous strengthening of industry-academia collaborations reaffirm our collective commitment to innovation and service to society.

As we celebrate these accomplishments, I call upon every member of the Tezpur University family to continue striving for academic excellence, nurture values of equity and inclusiveness, and contribute meaningfully

Prof Shambhu Nath Singh

EDITORIAL

The Autumn academic session has brought in new hopes, aspirations and an youthful vibrancy to the TU campus again with entry of the fresh batches of students eager to develop a lifelong connect with the Alma Mater that would change the way they would think and contribute intellectually towards an ever-changing world. Along with it, the society would also be benefitting from their fresh ideas to be put into practice. From these upcoming youths, we shall be expecting path-breaking research, administrative officials, professionals of high repute and integrity and more so 'perfect human beings' that is always in short supply ever for the society. A notable aspect of this academic session has been the launch of two new undergraduate programmes of study in Sociology and Linguistics and Language Technology which are expected to provide adequate training to the 'young ignited minds' in their respective fields for future development of the society. In this system also we can see the reflection of the universal truth of the world – newer developments making way for older and matured ones. That is the cycle of new students replacing older ones in the pursuit of knowledge and thereby finally contributing to the society at large. Further, it is heartening to see several efforts among the students – in a collaborative way for creating awareness by various means – street play, poster, song and poetry competition etc. for making the campus Ragging-free. The idea is to make the newer generation feel at home and be comfortable in the campus like it is their second home. We are confident that the legacy of teaching-learning in the most beneficial and optimal manner possible shall be carried over by this great Institution in the near as well as distant future by setting high standards for all to follow. And to ensure strong value addition efforts to continue forever in the most refined way.

Tezpur University Researchers Develop Low-Cost Device for TUBERCULOSIS Detection

A team of researchers from Tezpur University has developed an affordable and portable device to detect Tuberculosis (TB) using a smartphone. This new tool, developed by Prof. Pabitra Nath of Department of Physics and his team, is specially designed for use in rural and remote areas where advanced medical facilities are not easily available.

The new device stands out because it does not need any chemicals or dyes and uses the natural glow (autofluorescence) of TB bacteria for detection. The device has a built-in heating system to improve test accuracy and can be operated using a smartphone. Most importantly it is cost effective as it costs under ₹25,000 and weighs less than 300 grams and hence easily portable. This makes it a perfect fit for places with limited healthcare infrastructure.

Currently, TB is a major public health issue in India. Early and accurate diagnosis is crucial to stop its spread. The World Health Organization and India's National TB Elimination Program currently recommends LED fluorescence microscopy as the gold standard for TB screening. The standard testing method recommended by the World Health Organization needs expensive machines and trained technicians, which are not available in many rural areas. The new device from Tezpur University can solve this problem by making TB testing simpler and more accessible.

"While LED-FM offers higher sensitivity than conventional optical microscopy, it has several drawbacks. It depends on costly equipment, chemical staining agents likeauramine-O, and trained personnel for sample preparation and interpretation. Furthermore, its reliance on laboratory infrastructure makes it impractical in many rural settings', Prof Nath said.

"The device developed by the TU researchers leverages the principle of autofluorescence, a natural property of certain microbial cells, including Mycobacterium tuberculosis (mTB) cells, that emit fluorescence signal when excited by specific wavelength of light. The team's key innovation lies in the integration of a heating element within the sensor system. By raising the temperature of the bacterial

The team has already filed a patent for the device (Indian Patent Application No. 202431035472), and their findings have been published in the international journal Biosensors and Bioelectronics.

Congratulating the team, Prof. Shambhu Nath Singh, Vice Chancellor of the University said that this innovation has the potential to make a big impact in the fight against TB, especially in rural areas.

National Space Day Observed

The Department of Physics, Tezpur University, in collaboration with the North Eastern Space Applications Centre (NESAC) on 05th August, 2025 organized the National Space Day Celebrations on campus. The event was part of a series of state-level programmes being held across the country to mark the second National Space Day.

India made history by successfully soft-landing the Chandrayaan-3 Vikram lander on the Moon's South Polar Region on August 23, 2023. In recognition of this milestone, the Government of India declared August 23 as National Space Day (NSpD). The Department of Space is celebrating the occasion across the country with a range of outreach activities during July–August 2024.

Dr. Koteshwar Rao C., Scientist at the U R Rao Satellite Centre (URSC), Bengaluru, graced the occasion as the Guest of Honour. He delivered an engaging lecture on "Indian Moon Missions," highlighting India's achievements in lunar exploration, including the success of the Chandrayaan missions.

Dr. Arup Borgohain, Scientist-SF at NESAC, delivered a lecture on "Societal Applications of Space Technology," focusing on the role of space-based solutions in development and governance.

> ***"August 23, 2023***
> ***The day Chandrayaan-3's Vikram lander touched down on the Moon's South Pole — a giant leap for India, forever marked as our National Space Day"***

Prof. R. R. Hoque, Dean of Academic Affairs, addressed the gathering and emphasized the importance of science education and technological innovation in realising India's vision of becoming a developed nation.

Prof. G. A. Ahmed, Coordinator of the National Space Day Celebration Committee, briefed the audience on the various initiatives undertaken by the University to promote space awareness among students.

In addition to the popular science lectures by senior scientists, the day-long programme featured a quiz competition on Space Technology, a space exhibition, and an audio-visual show, aimed at engaging students and sparking their interest in space science. Around 200 selected students from schools and colleges across the region participated in the event.

Prof. Shambhu Nath Singh, Vice Chancellor of Tezpur University, congratulated the organizers for their efforts in promoting space science in the region.

The CRSI Bronze Medal is awarded to young researchers who have demonstrated excellence in any area of Chemistry. The award will be formally presented at the upcoming National Symposium in Chemistry, where medalists are invited to deliver a lecture on their research work.

Dr. Das brings a wealth of academic and research experience to Tezpur University. With a solid foundation in organic synthesis, his current research focuses on developing innovative methodologies for diversity- and target-oriented syntheses. He earned his Ph.D. from CSIR–Central Drug Research Institute, Lucknow, and Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His international research experience includes serving as a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at Bar-Ilan University, Israel and later as a Research Professor at Korea University, Seoul.

Prof. Shambhu Nath Singh, Vice Chancellor of Tezpur University, congratulated Dr. Das on this remarkable achievement and encouraged the academic fraternity to pursue more groundbreaking research in the years ahead.

Chemical Research Society of India honours TU faculty

Tezpur University's Dr. Sajal Kumar Das, Assistant Professor, Department of Chemical Sciences, has been selected to receive the Chemical Research Society of India (CRSI) Bronze Medal for 2026. This prestigious recognition from CRSI—an eminent organization founded by Bharat Ratna Prof. C. N. R. Rao—honors Indian researchers who have made significant contributions to the field of Chemistry at various levels.

Tezpur University Leads Key Session on Promoting Equity in Higher Education

Tezpur University played a crucial role as the coordinating institution for formulating a roadmap on "Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions – Fostering an Inclusive and Equitable Environment" during the Vice Chancellors' (VC) Conference recently convened in Kevadia, Gujarat. The conference, organized by the Ministry of Education , from July 10-11, 2025, was attended by Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, Hon'ble Union Minister of Education, Dr. Sukanta Majumdar, Hon'ble Minister of State for Education, senior officials from the Ministry of Education, Vice Chancellors of Central Universities (CU), and senior officials from the University Grants Commission.

The conference covered key aspects of higher education—teaching/learning, research, and governance—across ten thematic sessions. Based on these sessions, all central universities were divided into ten groups. Tezpur University led the fifth group, with Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University , Maulana Azad National Urdu University , Central Tribal University of Andhra Pradesh , and Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, as participant universities. The other lead universities were University of Delhi , University of Hyderabad ,IGNOU ,CU Punjab , Central Sanskrit University, Delhi , BHU , AMU , Jawaharlal Nehru University , and CU Rajasthan.

Tezpur University's session was led by Vice Chancellor Prof. Shambhu Nath Singh. He focused on factors hindering equity in higher education and highlighted transformative initiatives aimed at bridging existing gaps. The discussion also explored suggestive approaches to further advance this critical goal.

It is worth noting that Tezpur University was the only university from the Northeastern region to lead a presentation at the Vice Chancellors' Conference.

Prof. Singh further elaborated that the concept of equity in higher education encompasses three interconnected dimensions: Equity of Access, Equity of Participation and Experience, and Equity of Outcomes. Despite commendable strides in expanding the higher education system, India continues to face deep-seated inequalities across geographical, social, economic, and gender lines, he further remarked.

The Vice Chancellors' Conference is organized annually by the Ministry of Education to brainstorm on various issues.

(The presentation of Vice Chancellor Professor Shambhu Nath Singh is appended in this issue)

NBA Team Reviews B. Tech. Programs of TezpurUniversity

A three-member team headed by Chairman Dr. R.P. Maheshwari, Department of Electrical Engineering, IIT Roorkee, along with Dr. N. Sudhakar Reddy, Principal, SVCE, Tirupati, and Prof. Mainuddin, Head, Department of Electronics & Communication Engineering, Jamia Millia Islamia, visited Tezpur University to assess the extension of National Board of Accreditation (NBA) accreditation for five B.Tech. programmes offered by the University.

The NBA was initially established by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) under Section 10(u) of the AICTE Act in 1994, to assess the qualitative competence of programmes offered by educational institutions — from diploma level to postgraduate degree level — in engineering and technology, management, pharmacy, architecture, and related disciplines approved by AICTE.

For B.Tech. programmes, NBA accreditation signifies quality assurance, outcome-based education, and recognition. NBA-accredited programmes are acknowledged by the Government of India and international bodies under the Washington Accord, enabling global mobility for higher studies and employment.

Prof. Shambhu Nath Singh, Vice-Chancellor of Tezpur University, expressed hope that the five B.Tech. programmes — Civil Engineering, Computer Science and Engineering, Electronics and Communication Engineering, Food Engineering and Technology, and Mechanical Engineering — would secure the NBA "quality seal."

Prof. Sankar Chandra Deka, Dean, School of Engineering, gave a detailed briefing to the visiting team.

ONGC Officials Review Ongoing Projects at Tezpur University

A team of senior officials from Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) visited Tezpur University on 8th August, 2025, to review the functioning of the ONGC-Centre for Petroleum Biotechnology (ONGC-CPBT) housed at the Tezpur University's Department of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology (MBBT).

The ONGC-CPBT was established in 1999 with financial support from ONGC through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Over the years, it has evolved into a permanent centre, undertaking numerous research projects in petroleum biotechnology. The Centre's primary mission is to advance research in this specialized domain while developing a skilled human resource base to serve the energy sector.

The visiting ONGC team was led by Shri Tarun Kumar Mathuria, Executive Director and Basin Manager. He was accompanied by Shri Dibya Jyoti Borah, Chief General Manager, Jorhat Work Centre; Mr. Kuldip Gupta, Deputy General Manager, P.K. Goswami, General Manager and Head, INBIGS and Ms. Venkata Niharika Mangu, Chief Chemist, INBIGS.

During the visit, the team interacted with Prof. Shambhu Nath Singh, Vice Chancellor of the University, alongwith with other TU officials. Prof. Manabendra Mandal, Head, ONGC-CPBT, briefed the delegation about the progress. During the interaction, the ONGC team shared several suggestions to further strengthen the functioning and stressed on timely completion of ongoing works.

Speaking on the occasion, Vice Chancellor Prof. Singh advised that both ONGC and TU should frequently review ongoing projects to track progress and ensure the timely delivery of time-bound projects. Enhanced student internship opportunities and facilitating industry-linked internships to provide hands-on training and exposure were among the items discussed during the meeting.

Independence Day and *Har Ghar Tiranga* Observed

Tezpur University celebrated the 79th Independence Day with great enthusiasm, patriotism, and participation from the entire campus community. The celebrations commenced with the hoisting of the National Flag by the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, followed by the singing of the National Anthem.

As part of the celebrations, the University also organised a series of engaging activities under the 'Har Ghar Tiranga' initiative, which included:

- Rangoli Making Competition showcasing vibrant patriotic designs.
- Quiz Competition on India's history, freedom struggle, and culture.
- Rakhi Making Competition highlighting creativity and tradition.
- Distribution of the National Flag to students, faculty, and staff.
- Tiranga Rally across the campus to spread the message of unity and national pride.

In his address, the Vice-Chancellor extended warm Independence Day greetings to all students, faculty, and staff. He reiterated the University's commitment to nurturing young minds who are not only academically accomplished but also socially responsible and ethically grounded.

The Vice-Chancellor called upon the University community to uphold democratic values, respect diversity, and contribute actively towards building an inclusive, progressive, and self-reliant India. He urged everyone to celebrate the occasion not just through ceremonies but also by renewing their pledge to serve the nation with integrity, innovation, and compassion.

The celebrations concluded with cultural performances, distribution of prizes to competition winners, and a renewed sense of patriotism among all participants.

Official launch of the book "Handbook on Media Laws and Ethics: A Contemporary Approach," co-authored by Dr. Shishir Kumar Singh, an Associate Professor in the department, and Shri Rajesh Upadhyay

Abhibhavak Samvaad

The Department of Mass Communication and Journalism organised 'Abhibhavak Samvaad 2025,' a three-day interactive session for the parents and guardians of newly admitted students during August 11-13, 2025.

The event kicked off with a welcome from the Head of the Department Prof. Abhijit Bora. This was followed by an insightful talk from Programme Coordinator Prof. Joya Chakraborty, who highlighted the critical role the next few years will play in the students' professional lives. Prof. Chandan Kumar Sharma, Dean, School of Humanities & Social Sciences, also presented a set of valuable guidelines on the occasion.

Vice Chancellor Prof. Shambhu Nath Singh addressed the gathering and underlined the need for appropriate affirmative action to realize the dreams of the students and parents. He also officially launched the book "Handbook on Media Laws and Ethics: A Contemporary Approach," co-authored by Dr. Shishir Kumar Singh, an Associate Professor in the department, and Shri Rajesh Upadhyay. During the three days of interaction, notable alumni of the department shared their personal stories, demonstrating how the department's mentorship and rigorous academics led to their success.

Workshop on Applied Econometrics for Researchers

Tezpur University successfully concluded a six-day Interdisciplinary Short-Term Course on "Application of Econometrics in Research: Recent Trends", held from July 14 to 19, 2025. The programme was organized under the UGC-Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Centre (MMTTC) in collaboration with the Department of Commerce, Tezpur University.

More than 30 participants from a wide range of institutions took part in the programme. These included Dibrugarh University, Nagaland University, Rabindranath Tagore University (Hojai), Binnny Yanga Government Women's College (Arunachal Pradesh), Gargaon College, Bikali College, North Bank College, Barbhag College, Bongaigaon College, Bhattadev University, Kaliabor College, and Sonapur College, among others. The diverse representation ensured a rich exchange of ideas and perspectives.

Time Series Regression, Panel Data Models, Regression Diagnostics, and Simultaneous Equation Modeling, with practical sessions using R and SmartPLS

Vice Chancellor, Tezpur University, Prof. Shambhu Nath Singh graced the valedictory session as the Chief Guest. Speaking on the occasion, Prof Singh said that "Proficiency in econometrics is no longer optional—it is essential in today's data-driven academic and research landscape," He also lauded the holistic design of the course, which included not only lectures and hands-on training in econometric software, but also sessions on artificial intelligence tools and mental health well-being.Prof. Sankar Chandra Deka, Dean, School of Engineering, Prof.

"Proficiency in econometrics is no longer optional—it is essential in today's data-driven academic and research landscape,"

Subhrangshu Sekhar Sarkar, Director, Directorate of International Affairs, Dr. Reshma K. Tiwari, Head, Department of Commerce, Dr. Akhilesh Kumar, Director, MMTTC, among others, shared their views on the program.

Resource persons representing University of Lucknow, Gauhati University, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Assam, IIIT Guwahati, Dibrugarh University, Institute of Public Enterprise Hyderabad and from Tezpur University interacted with the participants.

The course curriculum included modules on Time Series Regression, Panel Data Models, Regression Diagnostics, and Simultaneous Equation Modeling, with practical sessions using R and SmartPLS. A paper presentation session and MCQ-based assessments were also integral to the programme structure. Graded e-certificates were issued to those scoring above 50% in overall assessments.

The event was coordinated by Dr. Farah Hussain, Assistant Professor, Department of commerce.

Participants of the Workshop on Applied Econometrics for Researchers

Orientation Program

Tezpur University began the 2025–26 academic year with a focus on fostering student well-being and strengthening trust among the University, its students, and their families. By hosting parallel orientation and parent-interaction programmes, TU underscored the importance of a supportive academic environment where students can thrive both personally and professionally.

At the Department of Business Administration, the MBA Orientation Programme was held at the KBR Auditorium on 11th August, 2025. Vice-Chancellor Prof. Shambhu Nath Singh, in his *Diksharambh* address, urged the students to work hard, remain innovative, and maintain discipline, emphasizing that higher education should not be solely placement-driven but should cultivate curiosity, resilience, and essential life skills.

The programme featured insights from Prof. Chandan Goswami, Dean, School of Management Sciences; Prof. M. K. Sarma, Dean, Research & Development; and Prof. S. S. Sarkar, Director, International Affairs. A distinctive “Feelings of Parents and Guardians” session invited guardians to share their thoughts, reinforcing the University’s belief that strong collaboration between students, parents, and faculty fosters a better learning environment.

TU's Multidisciplinary Research Journal Highlights Critical Contemporary Issues

The July-September issue of Tezpur University's Multidisciplinary Research Journal highlighted researches addressing a wide array of contemporary challenges through a collaborative, cross-disciplinary lens including the flood issue.

Among various research genres, the journal also discussed a multidisciplinary managerial approach to tackle flood to mitigate sufferings of the people during and post-flooding periods.

A number of academicians and researchers belonging to Jawaharlal Nehru University, Central Agricultural University, Assam University, Asian Association of Agricultural Engineering, Manipal Academy of Higher Education and Tezpur University participated in the third edition of the journal released on July 31, 2025.

The Journals also included a focussed discussion on another challenge experienced by the contemporary society, that is, deteriorating mental health. This issue of the journal presents a user platform to address mental health issues while taking care of the dignity and wellbeing of the victims. This is considered as one of the exemplary outcomes of multidisciplinary efforts of researchers belonging to psychiatry and AI domains.

The issue also explores the rich cultural diversity of northeastern India researching the socio-cultural, geographical, and linguistic contexts of a Poumai Naga village in the Senapati district of Manipur.

Prof. Shambhu Nath Singh, Vice-Chancellor of Tezpur University, expressed satisfaction over the maintenance of academic rigour in the journal. He said that the journal was a step toward fulfilling a core aspiration of higher education—the promotion of multidisciplinary research.

Prof. Debendra Chandra Baruah, Dean, School of Multidisciplinary Studies, and Editor-in-Chief of the journal, underlined the importance of collaboration across disciplines in solving real-world problems. He expressed hope that the journal, published from this region, will meaningfully contribute to achieving sustainable development goals through partnerships that transcend academic discourse.

Research Article : Promotion of Equity in HEIs – Fostering an Inclusive and Equitable Environment

(This paper was presented by Prof. Shambhu Nath Singh, Vice Chancellor of Tezpur University, during the Vice Chancellors' Conference held in Kevadia, Gujarat, on July 10, 2025)

Abstract:

This paper discusses the historical factors that have hindered the attainment of equity in higher education institutions (HEIs), as well as the institutional initiatives that have been undertaken to promote it. It highlights transformative initiatives by government and the UGC, which aim to bridge existing gaps in achieving equity. Additionally, the paper proposes suggestive approaches to further advance this goal.

Keywords: **Equity; HEIs; Institutional initiatives; Suggestive recommendations**

1.0 Introduction

An indelible feature of a progressive society is its commitment to providing equitable opportunities for all its citizens, and nowhere is this commitment more critical than in the realm of higher education. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are not merely centres of learning; they are crucibles of social mobility, engines of economic growth, and shapers of national consciousness. For a nation as vast and diverse as India, grappling with centuries-old social hierarchies and profound economic disparities, ensuring equity in higher education is not just a policy objective but a constitutional mandate and a moral imperative. It represents the promise of transcending the circumstances of one's birth through the power of knowledge and skill.

However, the journey towards this ideal is fraught with challenges. While India has made commendable strides in expanding its higher education system in recent decades, the promise of equity remains largely unfulfilled. The landscape is marred by deep-seated inequalities that manifest across geographical, social, economic, and gender lines. The national averages for enrolment and access often mask a grim reality of exclusion and marginalisation, where a student's opportunity to enter, thrive within, and successfully graduate from a university is heavily determined by the intersecting realities of caste, class, region, gender and ability.

2.0 Principles of Equity and Higher Education

The concept of equity is often conflated with equality, but they are fundamentally distinct. Equality implies providing everyone with equal access to resources and opportunities. Alternately,equity is about fairness and justice; it involves providing individuals with the resources and support they need to achieve equal outcomes. It acknowledges that starting points are not the same and that historical and systemic disadvantages require tailored interventions to level the playing field. In the context of higher education, equity can be conceptualised through three interconnected dimensions.

2.1 Equity of Access

Access is the most foundational level of equity, concerned with ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic background, caste, gender, religion, or geographical location, have a fair opportunity to enrol in higher education. Equity of access goes beyond simply creating more university seats. It involves dismantling the barriers that prevent marginalised groups from even reaching the gates of a university. This includes addressing inadequacies in primary and secondary schooling, providing financial support to overcome economic hurdles, and implementing affirmative action policies like reservations to counteract historical disadvantages. A system with equity of access ensures that the demographic profile of students entering higher education mirrors the diversity of the nation's population.

2.2 Equity of Participation and Experience

Once students gain access, the next dimension of equity comes into play i.e., their experience within the institution. Equity of participation means creating an inclusive and supportive campus

environment where all students feel they belong, are respected, and can participate fully in academic and co-curricular life. This involves fostering a campus culture free from discrimination, harassment, and microaggressions. It requires providing robust support systems, such as mentorship programs, counselling services, and academic remediation for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and of different abilities. It also necessitates a diverse faculty profile that is sensitive to the needs of different students and curricular and pedagogic approaches that are sensitive to diverse learning styles and cultural contexts, moving away from a one-size-fits-all model that privileges dominant social groups. Without equity of experience, access becomes a revolving door, where marginalised students enter but are unable to thrive.

2.3 Equity of Outcomes

The final and perhaps most crucial dimension is the equity of outcomes. This principle asserts that a student's background should not predetermine their academic success, graduation rates, or post-graduation opportunities. It means that diverse students from all social groups and abilities should have a comparable chance of successfully completing their degrees, achieving good grades, and securing meaningful employment or further educational opportunities. Measuring equity of outcomes requires looking beyond simple enrolment numbers to analyse completion rates, dropout rates, grade distributions, and employment statistics, all disaggregated by social group. Persistent gaps in these outcomes signal that the system, despite providing access, is failing to provide the necessary support for all students to succeed, thereby perpetuating the very inequalities it is supposed to mitigate.

3.0 Constitutional Provisions

The Indian Constitution provides a robust legal and philosophical foundation for pursuing equity in all spheres of public life, including education. The Preamble itself promises to secure for all its citizens "JUSTICE, social, economic and political" and "EQUALITY of status and of opportunity." Several articles translate this vision into enforceable directives.

- Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws, forming the bedrock of non-discrimination.

Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Crucially, Clauses (4) and (5) of Article 15 empower the state to make special provisions for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens (SEBCs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs), including in matters of admission to educational institutions. This provides the constitutional basis for reservation policies.

Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment, with clauses allowing for reservation in favour of backward classes. This directly impacts faculty recruitment in public HEIs.

Article 46, a Directive Principle of State Policy, explicitly directs the State to "promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation."

These provisions collectively establish that the pursuit of equity is not an act of charity but a constitutional obligation. They legitimise affirmative action not as an exception to the rule of equality, but as a necessary tool to achieve substantive equality for historically disadvantaged communities.

4.0 Existing fault-lines

4.1 Regional Imbalances

One of the most glaring inequities in Indian higher education is the geographical lottery of opportunity. A student's chances of accessing quality higher education are heavily skewed by their state and district of residence. This regional imbalance manifests in several ways.

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) Variation: While the national GER in higher education stood at 28.4% in 2021-22 according to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), this figure conceals vast state-level disparities. States like Tamil Nadu (47%), Delhi (43.3%), and Kerala (39.2%) boast high GERs, indicating wider access. In stark contrast, states like Bihar (17.3%), Assam (18.7%), and Jharkhand (18.6%) lag significantly behind. This means a young person in Bihar has less than half the chance of enrolling in higher education compared to their counterpart in Tamil Nadu. This disparity creates cycles of underdevelopment, as regions with low GER lack the skilled human capital needed for economic growth.

College Density: The availability of institutions is another critical factor. College density, measured as the number of colleges per lakh eligible population

from rural areas often lack the 'cultural capital'—the social skills, confidence, and familiarity with urban norms—that their urban peers take for granted, leading to feelings of alienation and inadequacy.

4.2 GER in Higher Education: A Disaggregated View

A disaggregated look at the Gross Enrolment Ratio provides a stark summary of the prevailing inequities:

- Gender: While the overall GPI is positive (1.05), this is largely driven by state universities and colleges. In elite Institutions of National Importance (INIs), female enrolment is significantly lower, highlighting a quality-access gap for women. Again the data for women enrolling into HEIs differ for different categories of women across class, caste, region and religion reflecting the intersectional nature of gender based inequality.
- Caste: The GER for SCs (26.6%) and STs (20.3%) lags behind the General Category (31.7%) and the national average (28.4%). The GER for STs is particularly low, indicating that ST youth remain the most excluded group from higher education.
- Regional: As discussed, the chasm in GER between states like Tamil Nadu (47%) and Bihar (17.3%) is vast, demonstrating that a student's destiny is tied to their geography. This disparity undermines the very notion of national integration and equal opportunity.

The Government of India is actively engaging with the existing fault-lines with several transformative initiatives.

5.0 Key Challenges in Achieving Equity in HEIs in India

The persistence of these inequities can be attributed to a set of interconnected and systemic challenges.

5.1 Structural and Pipeline Issues: The problem of equity in HEIs begins much earlier. The poor quality and high dropout rates in the school system, especially in rural and tribal areas, mean that the pool of eligible and prepared candidates from marginalised groups is already depleted before they can even apply to college.

5.2 Socio-Cultural Obstacles: Deep-seated prejudices related to caste, gender, and ethnicity create unwelcoming and hostile environments on many campuses. The pressure to conform to dominant upper-caste, urban cultural norms alienates students from diverse backgrounds.

5.3 Institutional Apathy and Implementation Gaps: While policies for equity exist on paper, their implementation is often lax. Institutions frequently fail to fill reserved faculty positions, neglect the proper functioning of SC/ST cells, and lack the will to create genuinely inclusive campus cultures.

5.4 The "Merit" vs. Equity Dichotomy: A significant ideological challenge is the persistent, flawed narrative that pits "merit" against "equity." Reservation and other affirmative action policies are often decried as compromising quality and rewarding mediocrity. This narrative ignores the fact that traditional metrics of merit (like entrance exam scores) are themselves biased, heavily favouring those with cultural and economic capital. It fails to acknowledge that a diverse student body enriches the learning environment for everyone and that equity is a prerequisite for, not an obstacle to, excellence.

5.5 Curriculum and Pedagogical Rigidity: The curriculum in most HEIs is largely Eurocentric and privilege-centric in its orientation, failing to reflect the diverse histories, cultures, and knowledge systems of the Indian populace. Pedagogical methods often rely on rote learning and lectures in English, which disadvantages students with different learning styles and linguistic backgrounds.

5.6 Assumptions of ability: Most HEIs in India continue to function within an ableist paradigm where students with disability struggle to barely manage the system with inadequate or ill-designed infrastructure, resources, curricular and pedagogic materials. The staff and student community is not made sensitive to the different needs and abilities of such students.

6.0 Initiatives by UGC and Government of India

Access to higher education has expanded globally, systemic disparities persist across lines of caste, gender, socio-economic status, geographic location, and disability. Students from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) as outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 continue to face significant barriers that hinder their entry, retention, and success in higher education. The NEP 2020 shifts the paradigm from equality to equity by recognizing that different learners require different

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types of support to thrive. There have been several initiatives of the UGC and Ministry of Education to curbing the barriers and enabling campuses to attain equity. The following are some of the pivotal initiatives which need to be emphasised:

6.1 Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016)

The historical Act defines 'inclusive education' as a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities. 21 Disabilities are included in the RPWD Act 2016. There is 5% reservation in seats in Government and Government aided higher educational institutes for persons with benchmark disabilities. The Act provides for the strengthening of the Office of Chief Commissioner of Persons with Disabilities and the State Commissioners of Disabilities, which will act as regulatory bodies and Grievance Redressal agencies and also monitor the implementation of the Act.

6.2 Accessibility Guidelines and Standards for Higher Education Institutions and Universities, 2022

The parameters for assessment of accessibility in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), UGC has come up with 'Accessibility Guidelines and Standards for Higher Education Institutions and Universities, 2022', This is in accordance with Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016).The guidelines emphasises Access Audit in all universities. The objectives of Access Audit are the following: (i) to ensure that students with disabilities have access to education; (ii) to create an inclusive environment for students with disabilities; and (iii) to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities

6.3 Adoption of Sustainable development goals

In 2015, India adopted goal 4 of SDG. The goal 4 of SDG aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030 (NEP 2020)". NEP 2020 also aims to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at both the school and higher education levels and bring it at par with the developed countries in the world.

6.4 UGC Guidelines to Provide Equitable Opportunity for the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) in the HEIs

(2024).These guidelines are meant to ensure that students belonging to Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) have a safe and secure environment and equitable access to quality education, as specified in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

6.5 UGC Draft Regulations on Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions (February, 2025)

The UGC Draft Regulations on the Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions, released in February 2025, aim to foster an inclusive and discrimination-free academic environment. The primary objective is to eradicate all forms of discrimination within HEIs based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, ensuring that every individual is treated with dignity and respect. These regulations also emphasize the promotion of equity and inclusion, with a focused commitment to uplifting historically marginalized and underrepresented groups, including Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), socially and educationally backward classes, and economically weaker sections. By establishing a framework for fair and just treatment of all stakeholders, the draft regulations seek to make higher education more accessible, equitable, and responsive to the diverse needs of India's population.

6.6 Educational Framework for Global Citizenship in Higher Education, 2021 prepared by UGC stress that all learners to make themselves aware of and understand global issues and to became active promoters of more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable societies.

6.7 PM Vidyalakshmi Scheme

To tackle the problems associated with financial hurdles the government of India came up with the revolutionary PM Vidyalakshmi Scheme. This scheme provides for a single-window electronic platform for students to access information and apply for educational loans and government scholarships. The Vidyalakshmi portal enhances access by simplifying the search and application process for financial aid. It brings transparency and centralises information, which is particularly beneficial for students from rural areas with limited access to information. Also, it reduces bureaucratic hurdles and empowers students to compare and choose from various loan and scholarship options.

The scheme is to provide financial assistance to outstanding students pursuing higher education at reputed institutions as per the NIRF rankings. The scheme facilitates .

collateral-free, guarantor-free loans to cover tuition and associated expenses. Additional provisions include a 75% credit guarantee for loans up to ₹7.5 lakh, along with a 3% interest subvention for students from families with an annual income of up to ₹8 lakh.

Universities have already appointed a dedicated nodal officer to facilitate easy implementation of the scheme. Also, universities have given much effort to take the scheme closer to the prospective beneficiaries.

However, there must have a follow-up mechanism put in place. For students from the most vulnerable backgrounds, the prospect of taking on significant debt can be as much of a barrier as the lack of funds itself, creating a debt trap that perpetuates inter-generational inequality. Therefore, HEIs must constantly monitor the beneficiaries of PM Vidyalakshmi Scheme so that they make good use of the support and come out successfully from the programme of study and make a living.

Also, in a phased manner, the reach of PM Vidyalakshmi Scheme may be widened so that students of universities ranking below the top 100 may avail this much awaited scheme.

6.8 One Nation One Subscription (ONOS)

The One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) scheme is a visionary step toward creating a research-intensive, inclusive, and digitally empowered academic environment in India. By addressing the long-standing challenges of unequal access and fragmented subscriptions, ONOS paves the way for a more unified and knowledge-rich society. As India strives to achieve the ambitious goals of Viksit Bharat @ 2047, ONOS will play a foundational role in ensuring that no researcher or student is left behind in the pursuit of knowledge.

The coverage of ONOS provides centralized access to over 13,000 journals from 30 leading international publishers, covering a wide range of disciplines including STEM, Medicine, Social Sciences, Humanities, Law, and Finance. The initiative benefits an estimated to ~20 million across India's higher education and research landscape. However, to maximize the impact of ONOS, several steps are recommended:

1. Expand the scheme with "Database" coverage at the present phase or in the next phase as per the following:

· Bibliographic databases: Scopus, Web of Science
· Statistical databases: IndiaStat, EPWRF
· Regional language databases: NotNUL Hindi
· Legal databases: Manupatra, SCC Online
· Thesis repositories: ProQuest Dissertations & Theses

2. Training and Awareness Programs: Conduct regular workshops and webinars by publishers to train students and faculty in using the resources effectively.

3. Digital infrastructure could be an issue which may be handled by respective universities locally. While digital access would increase, excessive exposure to short-form content and algorithm-driven distractions has created new forms of academic inequality. Students with disciplined digital habits outperform others. HEIs must incorporate digital wellness modules, establish 'tech-free zones' and educate students on media self-regulation to bridge these emerging cognitive divides.

4. Monitoring and Feedback: Regular audits and user feedback mechanisms should be in place to assess usage and resource impact.

6.9 Addressing Disparities through PM-USHA Scheme and Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERU)

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 acknowledges these deep-seated disparities and proposes structural reforms to address them. The provision for Multiple Entry and Exit offers flexibility and supports re-entry, particularly benefiting dropouts and disadvantaged communities.

Two key initiatives aim to tackle regional and disciplinary imbalances: the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA) and the creation of Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs).

PM-USHA, a revamped version of the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), aims to improve the quality of state-run higher education institutions. The scheme focuses on providing strategic funding to states based on performance and need, with a specific focus on improving GER, quality, and equity in underserved regions. By directing funds towards improving infrastructure, faculty recruitment, and accreditation in states with low GER and college density, PM-USHA has the potential to mitigate regional imbalances. It incentivises states to develop a more equitable distribution of quality institutions, bringing higher education closer to aspiring students in remote and rural areas.

Several PM-USHA activities are designed to ensure equity in higher education by addressing the diverse needs of marginalized and underrepresented groups.
The use of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and online platforms like SWAYAM and MOOCs extends access to learners in remote areas, working individuals, and non-traditional students. Digital nodal centres help in digitizing academic content and delivering quality digital education to underserved populations. Offering courses in Indian languages reduces language barriers, thereby enhancing inclusivity for excluded groups. Embedding the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) in the curriculum further supports inclusive education by integrating indigenous perspectives. Bridge courses are tailored to assist students from socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) in transitioning smoothly into mainstream academics. Additionally, the construction of hostels and toilet facilities, particularly for women, transgender, and disabled students, removes infrastructural barriers to participation and retention. The introduction and expansion of STEM courses aim to increase availability and inclusivity in high-demand fields, while specific encouragement of girls' participation in STEM helps address gender disparities in technical and scientific education.
The concept of MERUs, envisioned as models of best multidisciplinary education at par with IITs and IIMs, also holds promise for equity. The goal is to establish at least one such university in or near every district. If implemented in spirit, this would decentralise excellence and create high-quality, accessible options for students across the country, reducing the intense and inequitable competition for a handful of premier institutions. By fostering interdisciplinary studies, MERUs can also break down rigid disciplinary hierarchies that often align with social hierarchies, offering more holistic and flexible learning pathways for all students.

7.0 Suggestive Strategic Framework for Equity in HEIs

Addressing the deep-rooted challenges requires a comprehensive, multi-level strategy that moves from national policy to the individual classroom.

7.1Macro Level (National Policy)

· Data-Driven Policy: Policymaking must be guided by robust, disaggregated data. An annual "Equity in Higher Education" report, going beyond GER to track completion rates, learning outcomes, and post-graduation success for different social groups, should be published. This will help identify specific gaps and tailor interventions.

7.2 Targeted Funding: Funding mechanisms like PM-USHA should be strengthened and made more targeted. States with the lowest GER and college density, particularly in tribal and remote areas, should receive weighted, preferential funding to build new, high-quality institutions.

· Regulatory Oversight: Regulatory bodies like the UGC must enforce equity-related mandates more strictly. This includes auditing the implementation of reservation in both student admissions and faculty recruitment, the functioning of grievance cells, and the provision of support services for marginalised students. A key policy intervention at this level is the "One Nation One Subscription" (ONOS) initiative. ONOS aims to provides an equal footing for all learners, directly addressing regional and institutional resource disparities.

7.3 Meso Level (Institutional Policy and Culture)

· **Institutional Leadership:** The Vice-Chancellor and other senior administrators must champion the cause of equity. Their commitment should be reflected in the institution's vision, strategic plans, and resource allocation.

· Empowering Structures: Institutions must establish and empower bodies looking at Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. SC/ST/OBC cells and gender sensitisation committees must be active, well-funded, and have the authority to act on complaints.

· Campus Culture: Fostering an inclusive culture requires proactive effort. This includes regular sensitisation workshops for all students, staff, and faculty on issues of caste, gender, and diversity; celebrating diverse cultural festivals; and promoting student-led diversity initiatives.

7.4 Micro Level (Classroom and Student Support)

· Inclusive Pedagogy: Faculty should be trained in inclusive teaching methods that cater to diverse learning styles. This includes using multilingual explanations where appropriate, incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum, and using varied assessment tools beyond traditional exams.

· Student Support Services: Institutions must provide comprehensive support. This includes a mandatory induction/bridge program for all first-year students to ease their transition, dedicated academic writing

a Curriculum Reform: The curriculum needs to be decolonised and democratised. It should incorporate the contributions, histories, and perspectives of marginalised communities, including Dalit and "Janajati" thinkers, feminist scholars, and regional knowledge systems. More so, to realise the objectives of the NEP 2020, the HEIs may have special focus on the National Credit Framework (NCrF) and the National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF). These frameworks support the standardization of learning outcomes, credit portability, recognition of prior learning and student mobility. Institutional implementation of NCrF and NHEQF helps integrate vocational, academic and experiential learning, thereby ensuring equitable progression for diverse learners, including dropouts, working professionals and students from socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Equity of outcomes is hindered by non-standardized evaluation practices. HEIs often face inconsistencies in internal assessments, grade inflation and subjective grading. To ensure fairness, rubric-based evaluation, moderated grading, project-based assessments and academic audits should be institutionalized. These reforms help ensure that academic scores truly reflect student understanding and ability.

8.0 Recommendations for Institutional and Policy Action

Building on the strategic framework, the following concrete actions are recommended:

8.1 As a State Policy

· Promote Geographical Equity: Aggressively fund the establishment of new, high-quality state universities and MERUs in the 100 most educationally backward districts of the country.

· Strengthen Public Universities: Reverse the trend of defunding public higher education. A strong, affordable, and high-quality public university system is the most effective engine of equity.

· Monitor and audit institutional compliance and Enforce penalties for non-compliance.

· Integrate equity into rankings and accreditation in order to create a competitive ecosystem in achieving equity in higher education.

· Create environment for the private enterprise to support higher education by offering scholarships to the disadvantaged section of the society and giving for infrastructure in the disadvantaged regions and rural areas.

8.2 For Institutions (HEIs):

· Mandatorily, establish Equal Opportunity Cells (EOC)/Centres of inclusive development with accountability. Appoint a cultural officer who would be responsible for overseeing all equity and inclusion initiatives across the institution. Institutions should explore creating 'Student Equity Committees' with representation from diverse backgrounds to advise on inclusion policies, grievance mechanisms and campus climate. Student participation would fosters accountability and cultural sensitivity.

· Implement the Right of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 by practical support such as assistive technologies, screen readers, accessible learning platforms, and trained faculty. Institutions should explore appointing disability coordinators and develop campus-wide accessibility plans.

· Include mandatory foundational course (Value added course (VAC)): Introduce a mandatory foundational course for all incoming undergraduate students on the Indian Constitution, social justice, gender sensitivity, and anti-discrimination laws.

· Develop inclusive curriculum and pedagogy by designing and delivering educational content and teaching methods that are accessible and engaging for all students, regardless of their background, learning style, or abilities.

· Implement a Robust Mentorship Program: Create a structured mentorship program that pairs senior students and faculty members with incoming students, with special attention given to students from marginalised backgrounds.

· Adopt a Zero-Tolerance Policy for Discrimination: Publicise and strictly enforce a zero-tolerance policy against any form of caste, gender, or religious discrimination, with a clear and confidential reporting mechanism and swift, transparent disciplinary action.

· Create Vernacular Support: Establish resource centres that provide academic materials, tutorials, and language support in major Indian languages to help students from vernacular backgrounds bridge the English language gap.

· Ensure strict compliance of anti-ragging committees, gender sensitization committees, students' appeal committees, and

· Maintain and publish equity data. Universities should establish Equity Dashboards and define KPIs such as dropout rates, completion rates, and placement data disaggregated by gender, caste,

region and ability. Regular equity audits and student satisfaction surveys should inform strategic planning.

9.0 Some Best Practices

While challenges are immense, several institutions have pioneered practices that offer a glimpse of what is possible:

· Tezpur university has a dedicated cultural officer, a centre for inclusive development and has been pioneer to set up an affirmative action cell. The university "mentor-mentee" regime wherein every student has an assigned mentor for any kind of support to the students. The mentor-mentee interactions and evaluated every semester end. The university also maintains a sustained effort to connect with school going students through outreach of dedicated teachers.

· Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) has digital boards to aware students about institutional support mechanisms like the ONOS related benefits and access.

· Jawaharlal Nehru University's (JNU) Deprivation Points Model: For decades, JNU used a unique admission policy that awarded "deprivation points" to students based on their regional background (coming from backward districts), gender (for female students), and economic status. This was a sophisticated model of affirmative action that went beyond caste and successfully created one of the most diverse and inclusive student bodies in the country. Though it has been diluted, it remains a powerful example of an equity-focused admission process.

Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) is known for its strong commitment to social justice, which is reflected in its curriculum, campus culture, and robust support systems for students from marginalised backgrounds, including financial aid and sensitisation programs.

· Delhi University has bridge courses for 1st year UG Programmes and foundation courses in the IITs

- Some private universities (e.g., Ashoka University) have implemented comprehensive need-based financial aid programs, where admissions are delinked from the ability to pay. They cover tuition, accommodation, and living expenses for a significant portion of their students, demonstrating that private players can also contribute to equity.
- Several universities run outreach programs in nearby rural and underprivileged areas, providing tutoring and guidance to school students to help them aspire to and prepare for higher education, thus strengthening the pipeline.
- Equal opportunity cells and gender champions initiatives by the UGC.
- Active anti-ragging cells and anti-ragging hoardings in all campuses.

10.0 Conclusions

The journey from the formal equality of access to the substantive equity of experience and success is long and arduous. The shadows of caste, the tyranny of geography, and the barriers of class and language continue to circumscribe the destinies of countless students. Achieving true equity requires a fundamental shift in mindset—from viewing equity as a matter of compliance or a charitable concession to recognising it as a cornerstone of institutional excellence and national progress. It demands an unwavering political will to enforce constitutional mandates, a courageous institutional leadership to challenge a discriminatory status quo, and a compassionate academic community to create classrooms that nurture rather than alienate. Initiatives like PM-USHA, ONOS, and the PM Vidyalakshmi scheme are revolutionary and transformative initiatives towards providing with a fair play ecosystem in higher education, which must be implemented in letter and spirit to achieve the objectives. The path forward lies in building a system that judges students not by the circumstances of their birth but by the content of their character and the potential of their minds. It means creating universities that are not just islands of excellence for the privileged few, but vibrant, inclusive spaces that reflect the magnificent diversity of India itself. In doing so, India will not only redeem its constitutional promise but also unlock the full creative and intellectual potential of all its people and to realise Vikshit Bharat by 2047, our equitable campuses will have to contribute in a greater way.

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