Towards Inclusive Education: A Case Study of IGNOU

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Abstract: Towards the end of the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007 -2012), India catered to about 20 per cent of those in the age group 17 to 24 years. However, to achieve the threshold level of about 30 per cent by 2020, and address concerns that perpetuate inequalities in opportunities to higher education, the Government of India (GoI) formulated positive discrimination policies. Establishment of Open Universities in general and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in particular was one such positive step in this direction. Since 1987, IGNOU has been striving for inclusive education and reach to all groups to meet their educational needs. As a result of its dedicated efforts, at the end of 2012, it had reached 639 out of 659 districts in the country, including those in the red corridor (with a large concentration of Naxalite and Maoist extremists) passing through the States of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha, and West Bengal. IGNOU has been successfully imparting education and training to the socially, economically, physically and/or geographically disadvantaged, in addition to women, minorities and jail inmates. Our results show that participation of rural women is particularly encouraging in all programmes but the dropout rate of these groups is rather high and the success rate comparatively low.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Castes (OBCs), Socially Marginalised Groups

Introduction

With about 17 million students, 634 universities and 33,023 colleges, the Higher Education (HE) system in India catered to about 19.4 per cent of the eligible youth in the age group 17 to 24 years towards the end of Eleventh Five Year Plan Period (2007–2011) (UGC, 2012). Another 10 million students were attending polytechnics and other certificate/diploma level programmes (MHRD, 2012). (The number of universities and colleges increased subsequently to 700 and 35,539 (MHRD, 2013), respectively, with similar growth in the number of students.) According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), India will have 116 million workers in the age group 20-24 years by 2020, as compared to China's 94 million. And the average age in India at that time is expected to be 29 years as against 40 years in USA, 46 years in Japan and 47 years in Europe (MHRD, 2013; p. xiii). To be able to reap the benefits of demographic dividend, initiatives such as inclusive education is important since age structure rather than the size of the population should play a more pivotal role.

In India, democratisation of higher education is quite challenging due to a complex milieu characterised by multiple identities: social status (caste), gender (female), geographical location (rural, remote, slum), religion (minorities), region (North-East, tribal, economically and educationally backward) and disability. These groups have historically remained on the periphery of educational development even in free India. They comprise large numbers in absolute terms and there is a need

now more than ever before to bring all marginalized groups within the fold of higher education. As such, 'inclusion' is not a new concept. Social inclusion has been deliberated on in many debates around injustice and inequality prevalent in various societies. For integration of physically challenged students with their non-challenged peers, expressions such as special education, mainstreaming, integration and flexible education have evolved in a more value-oriented nomenclature of 'inclusive education' (Erwin, 1993) as it is 'responsive to diverse needs and circumstances of learners and gives appropriate weight to the abilities, skills and knowledge they bring to the teaching-learning process' (MHRD, 2008, p. 10). However, confining the domain of inclusiveness to the particular group of physical disability is in our view not quite justified because disadvantage in any form limits the scope of growth and sustainable development of an individual. It is therefore important to create an inclusive environment for all, irrespective of the nature of disadvantage.

In India, hierarchies of castes, economic status, gender relations and cultural diversities deeply influence issues related to access and equity in education (MHRD, 2008, p. 9). Inclusive education is an engine of social cohesion (FEFC, 1997, pp. 8-9) as widespread alienation poses a threat to the stability of society (Fryer, 1997). Through inclusive education, one strives to bring learners from under-represented communities into the fold of higher education. To this end, every institution needs to review its processes and structures. Our findings show that learners coming from disadvantaged and underprivileged sections of society can be served more effectively provided they have easy and equitable access to open and distance learning (ODL) environments because availability is not necessarily availability. Our findings are based on the analysis of institutional learners' data.

The Open and Distance Learning System

The ODL system in India, in its initial incarnation as correspondence education, was pioneered by the University of Delhi 'as a second opportunity' provision. Enthused by its success, the Education Commission (1964-66) recommended that the provision of part-time and own-time education should be extended as widely as possible without being unnecessarily concerned about quality. It was appreciated by everyone, since opportunities to get higher education at a low cost were extended to all without spatial and temporal barriers. However, this educational innovation failed to realise its true potential for varied reasons and serious concerns were raised about the quality of processes and products, as well as the effectiveness and efficiency of training methods and techniques (Panda, Venkaiah, Garg, & Puranik, 2006). By 1980, the second opportunity motivated learners were relegated as 'poor cousins' of their full-time peers and distance educators began search for a way out. This heralded the beginning of the Open Era in the country in 1982 (Prasad & Venkaiah, 2005).

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), established in 1985 with jurisdiction over the entire country, began by offering a Diploma in Distance Education and Diploma in Management in 1987 to 4,528 working professionals. The spread, scope and offer of programmes evolved with time and so has the learner demography. Starting from a predominantly working population, now about 50 per cent of fresh school pass outs enrol in IGNOU's programmes. One of the basic reasons for the success of IGNOU has been that it practiced the ethos of collaboration, sharing and partnership in all operations all along. From curriculum design, planning and development of study materials (in print and e-media) to delivery of education and learner support, IGNOU continues to utilise existing infrastructure and the services of acknowledged experts in conventional higher education and research institutions, industry, the corporate world and civil society on a part-time basis to provide

Face-to-Face (F2F) contact. (Some aberrations crept into the system with time due to politico-bureaucratic interference for activating very ordinary institutions as student support centres, lack of enthusiasm in the university faculty for revising and upgrading learning materials, misplaced priorities, lack of quality and lack of direction from the management.)

IGNOU's March Towards Inclusive Education

Following recommendations of the New Education Policy–1986 and Programme of Action–1992, IGNOU led the way towards Inclusive Education (Swamy, 2011). In the 10th Plan Period (2001–2006), IGNOU's collaboration with regional, national and international developmental agencies reached an enviable height, and it began to practice public-private partnership. In the 11th Plan Period (2007-2011); controversial initiatives, such as on-campus teaching, were taken and the university could not see the forest for the trees.

India has 29 States and six Union Territories (UTs), in addition to the National Capital Region (NCR), Delhi. These are spread over 659 districts. Of these, about 60 per cent were declared educationally backward by the University Grants Commission in 2007-2008 (UGC, 2007). Therefore, a serious challenge confronting IGNOU in promoting inclusive education was to reach out to people living in such areas. Obviously F2F institutions could not be established there for lack of resources (financial and trained human capital.) In this paper, we have discussed the efforts made, strategies evolved and techniques used by IGNOU towards inclusive higher education. The institutional data has been analysed in two parts: 2007–2012 (end of the Eleventh Plan Period) and 2013–2015. While the former part captures efforts and facilitates comparison with reliable national data and statistics available in the public domain, the latter part helps us to know the latest status of reach at IGNOU.

The cumulative enrolments, certifications made and number of programmes on offer for the years 2007–2015 are shown in Figure 1. As may be noted, enrolments as well as certifications made have grown with time. However, the number of programmes grew exponentially in the period 2007–2012 but there was drastic reduction subsequently, because F2F teaching on campus and programmes offered by private as well as public partners under MOUs were discontinued in 2012–2015 after a considerable debate about openness in and mandate of the university (Basu, 2011; Panda, 2011; IGNOU, 2012). (The university has recently revived some of the programmes under MOUs with publically funded institutions.) From this discussion, we can say with some degree of confidence that IGNOU has succeeded in its mandate to provide inclusive higher education to the deprived and isolated groups. However, its outreach can improve further following the value added approach advocated by Garg, Ghosh, & Khare (2013).
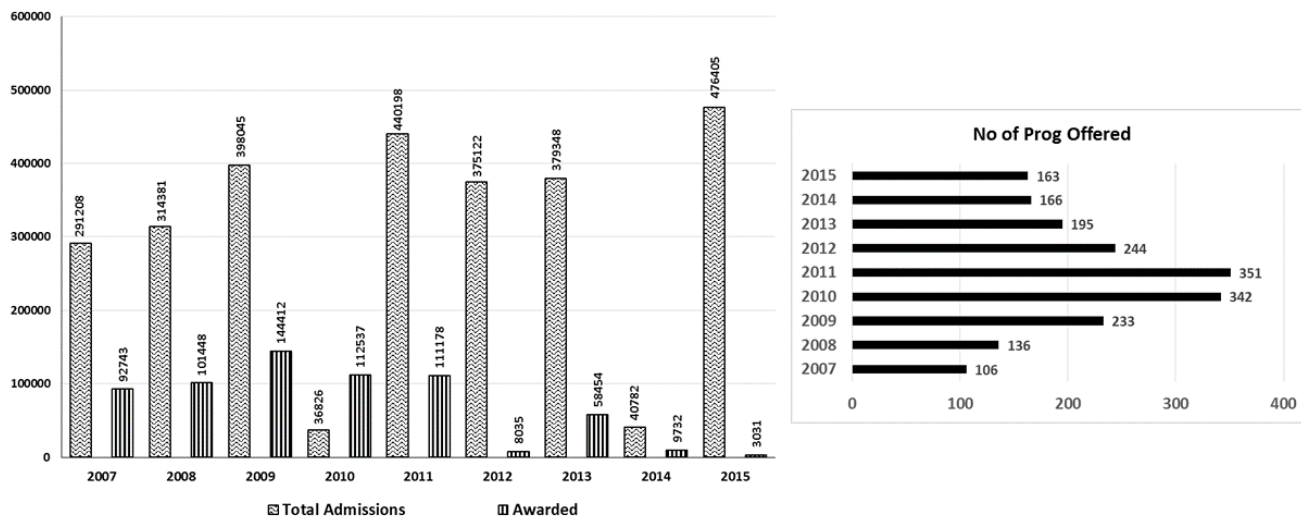
Figure 1: Cumulative enrolments, certifications made and number of programmes on offer by IGNOU

By December 2012, IGNOU had ensured its presence in all but 20 districts in five States (Chhattisgarh: 7 out of 27 districts; Punjab: 2 out of 22 districts; Rajasthan: 2 out of 33 districts; Tripura: 4 out of 8 districts, and Uttar Pradesh: 4 out of 75 districts) and one UT (Dadra and Nagar Haveli through Study Centres/Programme Centres/ Skill Development Centres functioning under any one of its 58 Regional Centres (S.K. Mohapatra, Personal Communication, July 12, 2012). It is important to mention that:

- Even in areas like Gadchirolli (Maharashtra), Baster (Chhattisgarh) and Koraput (Odisha), which come under Maoist dominated tribal belts, IGNOU has been offering skill-oriented programmes and the learners got regular jobs soon after certification (P. Sivaswaroop, Personal Communication, October 16, 2014).

- Many of our students, including jail inmates, have completed their programmes of study in the minimum time and have been offered assured placements in government jobs (P. Sivaswaroop, Personal Communication, October 16, 2014).

- In addition to the North-Eastern States, which have predominantly Scheduled Tribe (ST) population, IGNOU has significant presence in districts with large Scheduled Caste (SC) population.

- IGNOU increased its presence in the insurgency-hit State of Jammu and Kashmir as well.

To support these global conclusions, it would be worthwhile to compare IGNOU's reach based on microscopic data with national statistics. According to the Census – 2011:

- The rural population in India was 68.85 per cent (Census, 2011a).

- Females formed 48.5 per cent of our population.

- Minorities accounted for about 20 per cent of total population and about 15 per cent of them were Muslims.

- SCs, STs and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) respectively formed 16.2 per cent, 8.2 per cent (Census, 2011b) and around 40.94 per cent of our population (*Times of India*, 2007).

- About 2.2 per cent of our population was challenged with different disabilities (Census, 2011c).

Though visual disability was most prevalent in every state, loco-motor problems and autism were fast emerging as leading disabilities (*Times of India,* June 30, 2014). In some states, these accounted for up to 50 per cent of the challenged population and some experts attributed these to development and the fast pace of life.

The national averages of Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for various groups towards the end of Eleventh Plan were as given below:

- The participation of SCs, STs and OBCs in higher education was respectively 12.5 per cent, 4.2 per cent and 31.7 per cent (AISHE, 2012, p. 10), which was less than the respective proportions of their population in the country. As per National Knowledge Commission Report, the gross enrolment ratio for Scheduled Tribes (STs), Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) was 6.57, 6.52 and 8.77 respectively, much lower than the all India figure of 11 (National Knowledge Commission, 2006).
- The overall enrolment was 18.8 per cent (male - 20.9, female - 16.5) (AISHE, 2012, p. 1).
- There was vast rural-urban disparity - rural: 7 per cent against 68 per cent population and urban: 23 per cent against 32 per cent (Konwar & Chakraborty, 2013).
- Women's enrolment in higher education, which was less than 10% of the total enrolment on the eve of Independence, rose to 41.5% in the academic year 2010-11. Out of 16.75 million students enrolled in higher education in 2010-11, almost 7.049 million were women (Nair, 2012).
- Differently-abled group: less than 0.5 per cent (research report by NCPEPD (2003): status of mainstream education of differently-abled students in India is available at http://ncpedp.org/Education).
- Minorities: 4.5 per cent from Muslim minorities and 2.1 per cent from other minorities (AISHE, 2012, p. 10).
- Out of the total enrolment reported, enrolment under distance mode of education was about 17 per cent. (MHRD, 2012, p. 69).

IGNOU has been playing a pro-active role in providing higher education opportunities for all with considerable success. We here present details for the socially marginalized, females, differently-abled and minority groups.

Socially Marginalized Groups

In Table 1, we have shown the data for SCs, STs and OBCs enrolled in IGNOU in the period under reference (2007 – 15). We note that:

- Average enrolment of SCs, STs and OBCs in the 11th Five Year Plan were 9.09 per cent, 10.41 per cent and 20.59 per cent, respectively.
- The growth rate dropped marginally for STs but increased for OBCs after 2012.

Table 1: Admission Data for Marginalized Groups in all Programmes of IGNOU

Year	Total	Data not Available	Category					
			SC	%SC	ST	%ST	OBC	%OBC
2007-2012	2187214	92700	190440	9.09	218087	10.41	431332	20.59
2013	379348	3148	33916	9.02	38513	10.24	85809	22.81
2014	407820	1405	39674	9.76	40552	9.98	91561	22.53
2015	476405	822	48684	10.24	43962	9.24	105841	22.26
Total	1263573	5375	122274	9.72	123027	9.78	283211	22.51

As such, participation of SCs and OBCs as a whole in IGNOU programmes is below their respective national average. It is partly because of increased provisions for higher education in F2F mode for these groups. Also it seems that they are yet not fully convinced about the acceptability of the ODL system. Though IGNOU follows Government of India reservation policy wherever the number of seats is limited by national regulating agencies, more affirmative action in the form of seeking relaxation of numbers would be advisable over and above the fee waiver to reach out to these groups and contribute to national priorities of "Development for all". Moreover, to facilitate learning, IGNOU will do better by relaxing conditions on Study Centre infrastructure and educational qualifications of academic counsellors in educationally backward districts, while appointing them even for conventional programmes for about five years after the activation of a programme (Agarwal & Ghosh, 2014).

A closer examination of the data for STs shows that their enrolment in IGNOU is almost double the national average. This is a very positive indicator of the acceptability of IGNOU and its inclusive approach as a viable option for higher education. In fact, the educational mode and techniques used by IGNOU are better suited for learners in the North-East because of its geography and sparse population. Moreover, being a national university gives confidence to learners. A differential analysis of the marginalised group was made keeping in view their marital status, rural-urban settings, religious affiliations and employment. These are given in Tables 2(a) to 2(d).

Table 2(a): Distribution by Marital Status

Year	Marital Status								
	Total SC	Married SC	% Married SC	Total ST	Married ST	% Married ST	Total OBC	Married OBC	% Married OBC
2007-2012	190440	107962	56.69	218087	114673	52.58	431332	250904	58.17
2013	33916	21502	63.40	38513	24191	62.81	85809	50171	58.47
2014	39674	22985	57.93	40552	25833	63.70	91561	49273	53.81
2105	48684	26288	54.00	43962	27894	63.45	105841	55688	52.61
Total	122274	70775	57.88	123027	77918	63.33	283211	155132	54.78

Table 2(b): Distribution by Area

Year	Total SC	Rural SCs	%Rural SCs	Tribal SCs	% Tribal SCs	Total STs	Rural STs	%Rural STs	Tribal STs	% Tribal STs	Total OBCs	Rural OBCs	%Rural OBCs	Tribal OBCs	% Tribal OBCs
						Area-Wise Distribution									
2007-2012	190440	66167	45.48	2852	2.31	218087	52939	47.53	46577	25.35	431332	196216	53.39	4350	1.05
2013	33916	15527	45.78	563	1.66	38513	15088	39.18	14182	36.82	85809	48919	57.01	1038	1.21
2014	39674	18674	47.07	650	1.64	40552	17738	43.74	12252	30.21	91561	52058	56.86	1155	1.26
2015	48684	21821	44.82	618	1.27	43962	19803	45.05	11465	26.08	105841	57678	54.49	965	0.91
Total/Avr	122274	56022	45.89	1831	1.52	123027	52629	42.65	37899	31.04	283211	158655	56.12	3158	1.13

Note: available around 2.07% SC, 27.75% ST & 0.89% OBC data not and not considered while calculating percentages.

Table 2(c): Distribution by Religion

Year	% Muslim SCs	% Muslim STs	% Muslim OBCs	% Christian SCs	% Christian STs	% Christian OBCs	% Sikh SCs	% Sikh STs	% Sikh OBCs
	Distribution by Religion								
Average (2007-2012)	1.84	10.05	11.56	1.35	40.11	3.03	2.54	0.31	0.86
2013	2.32	15.11	15.79	0.83	0.83	1.45	1.20	0.03	0.59
2014	2.49	3.40	12.43	1.32	1.32	4.11	1.30	0.05	0.57
2015	2.27	3.56	12.01	1.32	1.32	3.56	1.07	0.05	0.57
Average	2.36	7.35	13.41	1.16	1.16	3.04	1.19	0.04	0.58

Table 2(d): Employment Status

Year	Total SC	No. of Employed SC	Employed SC (%)	Total ST	Employed ST	Employed ST (%)	Total OBC	Employed OBC	Employed OBC (%)
	Employment Status								
2007-2012	190440	46864	30.30	218087	25902	18.70	431332	119429	33.02
2013	33916	8568	25.26	38513	9721	25.24	85809	21277	24.80
2014	39674	11310	28.51	40552	10783	26.59	91561	33156	36.21
2015	48684	12760	26.21	43962	9937	22.60	105841	34009	32.13
Total/Avr	122274	32638	26.66	123027	30441	24.81	283211	88442	31.05

Note: around 1.72% SC, ST and OBC data not available.

On closely examining the data, we note that:

- Every alternate learner in the socially deprived group is married, implying that mature learners opt for the ODL system. However, except STs, the percentage of married learners has gone down successively in the period 2013 – 2015, implying positive correlation of education with mature decision making.

- Almost half of the learners from the groups under reference come from the rural areas but the percentages of tribal SC and tribal OBC students in IGNOU are fairly low. Moreover, the average percentage has changed from 2.31 and 1.05 to 1.52 and 1.13, respectively, before and

after 2012. However, the situation in respect of tribal STs is significantly different: more than 40% of all STs are rural and 25 - 31% are tribal. It means that unlike tribal STs, IGNOU has not created good impact among tribal SCs and OBCs in rural areas and the significance of education for sustainable development by these groups is yet to be realized. A spin-off effect of these efforts could be a literacy induced drop in Maoist insurgency areas, leading to societal development and saving precious human lives as well as resources.

- In terms of religion, the average percentages of SCs, STs and OBCs that had enrolled in IGNOU till 2012 were respectively 1.84, 10.05 and 11.56 among Muslims, 1.35, 40.11 and 3.03 among Christians and 2.54, 0.31 and 0.86 among Sikhs. In the period 2013 - 2015, these changed respectively to 2.36, 7.35 and 13.41 among Muslims, 1.16, 1.16 and 3.04 among Christians and 1.19, 0.04 and 0.58 among Sikhs. The high enrollment of Christian STs is essentially from the North-Eastern States and signifies that IGNOU has made inroads in the region. However, in respect of other groups, the success is rather limited and needs greater thrust.

- As far as number of employed learners is concerned, the trend is fluctuating for every category. However, one out of four employed SCs and STs and one out of three employed OBCs join IGNOU.

Proceeding further, we now examine the success of the university in the inclusion of marginalized groups through its academic programmes at different levels.

Analysis of Socially Marginalised Groups by Programmes

The programmes offered by IGNOU have been put in four categories depending on their levels: Certificate (CERT), Diploma (DIP), Undergraduate (GD), and Postgraduate (PGD). In Tables 3(a) to 3(d), we have presented the number of students who joined IGNOU in the period 2007 – 2015 from marginalised groups.

Table 3(a): Certificate Level Programmes

Year	Total	Data not Available	Category					
			SC	%SC	ST	%ST	OBC	% OBC
2007-2012	162819	9400	13984	9.19	12622	7.94	27239	18.44
2013	17315	32	1404	8.12	602	3.48	4000	23.14
2014	23986	163	2618	10.99	956	4.01	6412	26.92
2015	25530	38	2718	10.66	1176	4.61	7238	28.39
Total/Avr	66831	233	6740	9.93%	2734	4.04%	17650	26.15

Table 3(b): Diploma Programmes

Year	Total	Data not Available	Category					
			SC	%SC	ST	%ST	OBC	% OBC
2007-2012	367184	53582	30727	9.63	63977	19.17	62150	19.84
2013	26424	249	1797	6.87	6205	23.71	4794	18.32
2014	30087	14	2305	7.66	6032	20.06	6436	21.40
2015	30575	171	2375	7.81	3083	10.14	6615	21.76
Total/Avr	87086	434	6477	7.45	15320	17.97	17845	20.49

Table 3(c): Undergraduate Programmes

Year	Total	Data not Available	Category					
			SC	%SC	ST	%ST	OBC	% OBC
2007-2012	831519	16672	79250	9.64	68689	8.40	192987	23.11
2013	174636	1190	17988	10.37	15500	8.94	46423	26.77
2014	186642	712	20165	10.85	16143	8.68	46162	24.83
2015	221160	562	24767	11.23	20022	9.08	52984	24.02
Total/Avr	582438	2464	62920	10.81	51665	8.90	145569	25.20

Table 3(d): Post-graduate Programmes

Year	Total	Data not Available	Category					
			SC	%SC	ST	%ST	OBC	% OBC
2007-2012	586870	10785	42510	7.63	39824	6.74	104765	17.94
2013	127937	1336	9115	7.20	10813	8.54	24292	19.19
2014	135950	409	10981	8.10	13017	9.60	25971	19.16
2015	172900	54	15375	8.90	15992	9.25	33156	19.18
Total/Avr	436787	1799	35471	8.07	39822	9.13	83419	19.18

We note that:

- The average percentage of learners from SC, ST and OBC groups in certificate programmes were respectively 9.19, 7.94 and 18.44 at the end of 11th Plan and 9.93, 4.04 and 26.15 for the period 2013-2015. On comparing this data with that given in Table 1 for respective groups, we note that for SCs and OBCs, the percentage level of enrolment is almost the same as their overall average in IGNOU. It shows that the programmes offered by IGNOU cater to their interest. However, in the case of STs, the enrolment is almost half of their overall average. It implies that STs are less interested in pursuing enabling/non-employment generating programmes.
- On average, 9.63% SCs, 19.17% STs and 19.84% OBCs enrolled diploma programmes in the 11th Five Year Plan, whereas the corresponding figures for the period 2013 - 2015 are 7.45%, 17.97% and 20.49%, respectively. It may be seen from Table 3(b) that, in absolute terms, more learners enrol in diploma programmes than certificate programmes. However, the percentage

of SCs and OBCs enrolled in the period 2013 – 2015 in diploma programmes was less than that in certificate programmes. This is somewhat anomalous.

- The total number of learners enrolled from SC, ST and OBC groups in undergraduate programmes in the period 2013 – 2015 were 79,250 (9.64 per cent), 68,689 (8.40%) and 192,987 (23.11%), respectively. As may be noted, for the period 2013 – 2015, the increase in enrolment of UG programmes in absolute terms was fivefold in certificate and 2.4 times in diploma programmes. This is quite expected because in India, the first degree is the minimum eligibility for getting a job anywhere.

- In post-graduate programmes, 42,510 (7.63%), 39,824 (6.74%) and 104,765 (17.94%) students enrolled from SC, ST and OBC groups, respectively in the period 2007-12. In the period 2013 – 2015, there is a slight increase in SC and OBC enrolment. However, a quantum jump is witnessed for STs. This signifies significant development in the growth trajectory of IGNOU towards inclusive education.

A detailed analysis of all PG enrolments shows that, notwithstanding dwindling numbers in MBA, MCA and teacher education programmes, the growth has become possible essentially due to increase in numbers in and acceptability of PG programmes in the humanities and social sciences.

Differently-abled Learners

The distribution of differently-abled learners across various academic programmes is shown in Table 4. As may be noted, this group also exhibits a pattern similar to that of socially marginalized groups insofar as enrolment in certificate and diploma vis-à-vis first degree and post-graduation degree is concerned. Moreover, the overall numbers as well as the percentage is dismally low compared to their national average in the population. It means that in spite of establishing a National Centre for Disability Studies, IGNOU has not been able to penetrate the physically-challenged group. It would, therefore, be advisable to involve the Rehabilitation Council of India to renew collaborative efforts and approach national/international agencies to augment teaching-learning tools so that more effective training can be imparted. It is unfortunate that in 2013, the university discontinued UG programmes in sign language sponsored by the Ministry of Social Justice, GoI. It is time to proactively retrieve sign language and add programmes in braille using emerging technologies, because the ODL mode is most suited for this group.

Table 4: Distribution of Differently-abled by Programmes

YEAR	Total Admissions	Differently-abled						
		Total PH Students	% PH Students	AWR/ FOUD PREP	CERT	DIP	GD	PGD
2007-2012	2187214	11819	0.54	742	394	695	5353	4635
2013	379348	1646	0.43	71	34	51	1159	331
2014	407820	2006	0.49	70	33	56	1533	314
2015	476405	1323	0.28	37	31	69	848	338
Total/Avr	1263573	4975	0.40	178	98	176	3540	983

AWR: Awareness Programmes; FOUD: Foundation Courses; PREP: Preparatory Programme; CERT: Certificate Programmes; DIP: Diplomas; GD: Graduate Degrees; PGD: Postgraduate Degrees

Jail Inmates

A very innovative initiative was taken by IGNOU when it began to enrol jail inmates all over the country in its liberal education programmes. The guiding principle was to provide them an opportunity to reform through education rather than by bringing them to justice. The distribution of jail inmates by level is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Distribution of Jail Inmates by Programmes

YEAR	Total Admissions	Jail Inmates						
		Total Inmates	% Jail Inmates	AWR/ FOUD PREP	CERT	DIP	GD	PGD
2007-2012	2187214	7772	0.33	4954	1171	152	1237	258
2013	379348	11251	2.97	6722	3157	103	1143	126
2014	407820	11224	2.75	7636	2237	152	966	233
2015	476405	10822	2.27	7209	1869	120	1406	218
Total/Avr	1263573	33297	2.66	21567	7263	375	3515	577

AWR: Awareness Programmes; FOUD: Foundation Courses; PREP: Preparatory Programme; CERT: Certificate Programmes; DIP: Diplomas; GD: Graduate Degrees; PGD: Postgraduate Degrees

As may be noted:

- The absolute number of learners enrolled at different levels from this category is comparatively low. This is in spite of the fact that many of IGNOU Regional Centres have pursued it with vigour.

- Comparatively enrolment is more evident in awareness/preparatory, certificate and undergraduate degree programmes. Moreover, the experiences are reported to be extremely encouraging. The Nagpur Regional Centre has reported vast success; nine of its learners, one of whom has been given the death penalty, enrolled from Nagpur Central jail and Amravati Central jail have received their Masters degrees on the first attempt. Better still, some of them also got job offers, strengthening the resolve of the University to promote inclusive education with greater enthusiasm. This initiative will begin to contribute significantly if the University starts offering skill-oriented programmes, so that when they come out after completing their jail sentences they can earn their livelihood honorably using the skills so acquired.

Minorities

In India, every fifth Indian belongs to one of the minority communities. While Christians, Sikhs and Jains are fairly well placed in educational statistics, the situation is alarming in the case of Muslims. The number of total learners in different programmes of IGNOU from the minorities was 202,631 (8.59 per cent) at the end of the 11th Plan. Moreover, the majority of them preferred the degree programmes of IGNOU; about 73 per cent of them were pursuing either UG or PG degree programmes: Graduate (73,860; 36.4 per cent) and Post-Graduate (74,383; 36.74 per cent), as shown in Table 6. A similar trend is observed in the period 2013-15.

To make this analysis more interesting and suggest concrete measures suited for specific categories falling under the broad group of minorities, we tried to obtain differential data for this group. However, researchers discovered that the university did not ask learners to specify their religion and,

thus, the required data for different sub-categories of minorities could not be obtained. Nevertheless, IGNOU will do better by devising special provisions to reach out to the Muslim community with customized programmes suited to their skill sets/regional requirements. It would therefore be worthwhile to open Special Study Centres in Muslim majority regions to offer awareness/vocational programmes.

Table 6: Distribution of Minorities by Programmes

YEAR	Total Admissions	Minority Status						
		Total Minority	% Minority Students	AWR/ FOUD PREP	CERT	DIP	GD	PGD
2007-12	2187214	202631	8.59	24279	13347	16762	73860	74383
2013	379348	59985	15.81	5473	1973	3791	22956	25792
2014	407820	62862	15.41	4199	2961	5404	23890	26408
2015	476405	65283	13.70	3480	3367	4678	26571	27187
Total/Avr	1263573	188130	14.98	13152	8301	13873	73417	79387

Women

According to Census - 2011, females constituted 48.5 per cent of our population but their enrolment in higher education was about 41.5 per cent. As such, the ODL system is most suited to educate them since learning materials become available at their doorstep and attending counselling is optional. To know how far this expectation has been fulfilled by IGNOU, in Table 7(a) we have presented women enrollment according to their marital, employment, geographical and religious status in various programmes of IGNOU. We note that:

- In the period 2007-12, 38.65 per cent women enrolled in all programmes of IGNOU. This was less than their proportion in the national population but compared favourably with that in higher education. Almost every alternate enrolled woman is married, one-out-of-six are employed and one-out-of-three are from rural areas. However, the enrolment of tribal women and religious minorities is proportional to their average in national population.
- In the period 2013–15, their total enrolment increased to 45.47 per cent.

The fact that a large proportion of employed and rural women are enrolling in IGNOU programmes is a positive indicator of IGNOU's inclusive reach. We expect this trend to continue in future for all ODL institutions as well, with minor variations.

Table 7(a): Enrollment of Women by Marital, Employment, Area and Religious Status

YEAR	Total	Females		% Married	% Employed	Distribution by Area		Distribution by Religion		
		Total	%			% Rural Women	% Tribal Women	% Muslim Women	% Christian Women	% Sikh Women
2007-2012	2187214	855111	38.65	59.44	16.82	33.27	3.46	8.11	1.49	1.38
2013	379348	168952	44.54	63.48	22.01	35.80	4.89	14.95	1.19	1.57
2014	407820	185477	45.48	59.43	24.84	36.79	4.03	10.55	1.09	1.49
2015	476405	221051	46.40	56.01	22.34	34.80	3.19	10.65	0.91	1.50
Total/Avr	1263573	575480	45.47	59.64	23.06	35.80	4.04	12.05	1.06	1.52

Table 7(b): Enrollment of Women by Programmes

YEAR	Total Women	Level of Academic Programme									
		AWR/ FOUD PREP	%	CERTIF	%	DIPLOM	%	GD	%	PGD	%
2007-2012	855111	85932	10.23	71275	8.85	124760	14.87	305893	35.45	267251	30.59
2013	168952	10878	6.44	7197	4.26	11935	7.06	69916	41.38	69026	40.86
2014	185477	9318	5.02	12845	6.93	13962	7.53	74752	40.30	74600	40.22
2015	221051	7566	3.42	13918	6.30	15289	6.92	86183	38.99	98095	44.38
Total/Avr	575480	27762	4.96	33960	5.83	41186	7.17	230851	40.22	241721	41.82

The enrolment of women according to programme for the period under consideration is shown in Table 7(b). As may be seen, while enrolment decreased in the awareness, certificate and diploma programmes after 2012, there was significant increase in undergraduate and post-graduate programmes. (The increase in PG has been comparatively more than that at the UG level.) It shows that IGNOU is seen by married, employed and rural mature women desirous of pursuing higher education as a credible option.

Performance Analysis

Just as fire is the test of gold so retention, success rate and employability of learners are the surest tests of effectiveness of the inclusive reach of an institution. In the context of IGNOU, performance of learners in different programmes has been reported in the past (Khare et al, 2004; Panda et al, 2004; Sadhwani et al, 2007; Sanghai and Garg, 2009; Mishra et al, 2009). The findings of these researchers show that success rates depend on the motivation of learners for joining a programme and vary from 15–95 per cent. However, no study has so far been reported on the retention (and success) rates, specifically with regard to inclusivity considerations. We now present our findings on the performance of various disadvantaged groups under consideration (Table 8(a) to (e)). We note that success rates of:

- Socially marginalised learners in the period 2007-2012 were in the range 24–29 per cent. The corresponding data for 2013 onwards shows a steep fall, which is quite surprising.

- Differently-abled learners were particularly high for the UG programme. Moreover, they registered an increase in all programmes, except UG, after 2012.
- Jail inmates were fairly low but their rate should be viewed as a positive step in the right direction.
- Minorities and females in the period 2007-2012 were in the range 2–14 per cent for different programmes. Though these are below the average success rates, it may be likened to ice-breaking, as far as these groups are concerned.

Table 8(a): Socially Marginalized Groups

YEAR	Total SC	Awarded	%	Total ST	Awarded	%	Total OBC	Awarded	%
2007-2012	190440	47944	25.64	218087	68011	28.88	431332	106881	23.97
2013	33916	5787	17.06	38513	5977	15.52	85809	18786	21.89
2014	39674	934	2.35	40552	407	1.00	91561	2432	2.66
2015	48684	379	0.78	43962	107	0.24	105841	755	0.71
Total/Avr	122274	7100	6.73	123027	6491	5.59	283211	21973	8.42

Table 8(b): Differently-abled Students

YEAR	Differently-abled Students									
	Total Students	Total Awarded	CERT	%age	DIPL	%age	GRAD	%age	MAST	%age
2007-2012	11819	3284	172	5.17	230	6.08	2502	76.19	412	12.56
2013	1646	663	13	1.96	13	1.96	596	89.89	41	6.18
2014	2006	21	8	38.10	11	52.38	2	9.52	-	-
2015	1323	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total/Avr	7797	684	21	20.03	24	27.17	598	49.71	41	3.09%

Table 8(c): Jail Inmates

YEAR	Jail Inmates		
	Total Students	Total Awarded	%age
2007-2012	7772	199	2.56
2013	11251	324	2.88
2014	11224	317	2.82
2015	10822	113	1.04
Total/Avr	33297	754	2.25

Table 8(d): Minorities

YEAR	Programme								
	Total Learners	CERT	% age	DIP	% age	GD	%age	PGD	% age
2007-2012	202631	3217	2.11	6013	2.74	15478	14.18	26858	12.09
2013	59985	571	0.95	1260	2.10	4310	7.19	4365	7.28
2014	62862	792	1.26	316	0.50	44	0.07	13	0.02
2015	65283	288	0.44	--- Data not Available ---					
Total/Avr	188130	1651	0.88	1576	0.87	4354	2.42	4378	2.43

Table 8(e): Females

YEAR	Female Learners in Programmes								
	Total	CERT	% age	DIP	% age	GD	% age	PGD	% age
2007-2012	855111	20794	2.68	29019	7.65	56335	10.93	58367	10.01
2013	168952	2353	1.39	3388	2.01	15205	9.00	11338	6.71
2014	185477	3702	2.00	1358	0.73	353	0.19	58	0.03
2015	221051	2001	0.91		0.00		0.00		0.00
Total/Avr	575480	8056	1.43	4746	0.91	15558	3.06	11396	2.25

Conclusion

IGNOU has succeeded in its mandate to democratize higher education and is on the verge of reaching the last mile. It is hoped that with multimedia instructional technology, IGNOU should increase its presence to almost all districts in the country. Our analysis shows that more learners enrolled in diploma and UG degree programmes. However, PG programmes have witnessed spectacular growth in recent years. The participation of rural women is particularly encouraging, highlighting the suitability of the ODL system for inclusion of this group. With more judicious use of ICTs and customised programmes suited to the skills/requirements of different groups, IGNOU can reach a larger cross section of the Indian population.

While one may be justifiably optimistic about the reach of IGNOU, the same cannot be said about the success and retentivity of learners. The studies reported so far suggest that the motivation of learners for joining a programme determines their performance rate. Low success rates in a programme suggest that the university should pay greater attention to the quality of learning materials through internal audits, learner support services and uniformity in evaluation.

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