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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Making Scholarships Integral to India's Academic Culture

THE HINDU

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Making Scholarships Integral to India's Academic Culture

The Hindu 10 April 2026 **GS2**

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INTERVIEW ANGLE



"India's GER in higher education is 29.5% — how can scholarships alone bridge the access gap given structural barriers of awareness, geography, and social norms?"

India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education stands at a mere 29.5% — far below the global average of 40% and the aspiration of a Viksit Bharat. While the NEP 2020 targets a GER of 50% by 2035, infrastructure expansion alone cannot close this gap. The missing lever, The Hindu argues, is scholarships — but not as currently practised.

THE PROBLEM WITH INDIA'S SCHOLARSHIP ECOSYSTEM

India has a sprawling array of scholarship schemes — Central Sector Scheme of Scholarships, Prime Minister's Scholarship Scheme, National Fellowship schemes for SC/ST/OBC students, and dozens of state-level programmes. Yet their penetration remains limited by:

- **Awareness gaps:** A majority of first-generation college students from rural and low-income families are unaware of available scholarships
- **Single-year structures:** Most scholarships cover one year, creating uncertainty and dropout risk for multi-year programmes
- **Application complexity:** Cumbersome documentation requirements (income certificates, caste certificates, bank accounts) create bureaucratic barriers for the most vulnerable
- **Disproportionate concentration:** Scholarships disproportionately benefit students who have already cleared competitive entrance examinations — those who least need financial support

THE EDITORIAL'S PRESCRIPTIONS

The Hindu argues for a structural transformation:

1. Multi-Year Commitments

Scholarships must cover full programme duration — not just the first year. A student admitted to a 4-year B.Tech programme needs financial certainty across all four years to avoid mid-course dropout driven by family financial pressure.

2. Sector-Linked Awards

Scholarships should be strategically aligned with India's human capital priorities: AI and data science, healthcare (nursing, paramedics, public health), green technology, and semiconductor engineering. Rather than generic merit-cum-means awards, these domain-specific scholarships would simultaneously address India's skill gaps and provide targeted financial access.

3. Corporate and Philanthropic Tax Incentives

India's corporate scholarship landscape is fragmented and CSR-driven rather than strategically designed. The editorial advocates for enhanced tax deductions (beyond Section 80G) for companies that create endowed scholarship funds at universities — mimicking models in the US and UK where university endowments fund generations of scholars.

4. Scholarships as Cultural Norm

The deepest challenge is *normative* — in India, education investment is predominantly seen as a family's private responsibility. Scholarships are viewed as charity, not entitlement. Changing this requires sustained public communication that reframes scholarships as a social contract: the state and society invest in bright, deserving students in exchange for their contribution to national development.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS2 (Governance): Education access, GER targets, scholarship schemes, NEP 2020 implementation.

GS1 (Society): Educational inequality, first-generation college students, social mobility.

Key data for Mains:

- India's GER in higher education: 29.5% (2024); NEP target: 50% by 2035
- Total universities in India: ~1,100+ (2024); Number of enrolments: ~4.3 crore
- Central Sector Scholarship: ₹10,000–₹20,000 per year (for top 0.1% of students in each stream)
- PM YASASVI: Scholarships for OBC/EBC/DNT students (Std IX–XII and UG level)

Scholarships must evolve from one-time financial patches to multi-year, sector-linked, endowment-backed commitments that become a cultural norm in Indian academia.

GER 29.5% (India) vs 40% global average; NEP target: 50% by 2035

Gross Enrolment Ratio, NEP 2020, scholarship ecosystem, first-generation learners, human capital investment

“Education is the great equaliser — but only if access to it is not itself unequal” — discuss India’s scholarship gaps in this context

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