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Higher Education Going Online

The Challenges in India

Sujin Babu | Ram Ramaswamy

HIGHER EDUCATION GOING ONLINE: THE CHALLENGES IN INDIA

Sujin Babu and Ram Ramaswamy



INDIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
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Contents

<u>Preface</u>	5
<u>The Impact of the Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 on the Education Sector in India, <i>Sudakshina Gupta</i></u>	15
<u>COVID-19 and Learning History, <i>Marilyn Gracey Augustine</i></u>	23
<u>How COVID-19 has Redefined Education in India, <i>Ambili Thomas</i></u>	27
<u>After the Pandemic: The Precarious Classroom, <i>Usha Raman</i></u>	31
<u>'New' Directions in Higher Education in India after COVID-19? <i>Jyotsna Jha</i></u>	37
<u>Education made Remote: Concerns on Digitally Mediated Education in Pandemic Times, <i>Aarushie Sharma</i></u>	43
<u>COVID-19 Risks Deepening Existing Disparities in Indian Educational Institutions, <i>V Madhurima</i></u>	53
<u>The COVID-19 Pandemic and Mathematics at JNU, <i>Riddhi Shah</i></u>	57
<u>The Impact of COVID-19 on Education at AMU, <i>Qudsia Tahseen</i></u>	63
<u>Post-COVID Higher Education – A Perspective, <i>Sandeep Sen</i></u>	71

How COVID-19 has Redefined Education in India

Ambili Thomas

Department of Political Science, Providence Women's College,
Kozhikode 673009

Universities and colleges around the globe have been forced to go online overnight with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Education was till now largely treading the conventional path compared to other sectors. Some premier institutions had been offering courses online, but it was restricted in numbers, both of learners and courses. Teachers and students were unprepared to deal with this sudden shift, and the process of introducing EduTech (a general term for education technology) all of a sudden and on such large a scale has created unnecessary confusion as well. Even those teachers who were not in favour of online teaching were now under pressure to go online and were forced to adapt the new mode of teaching without enough training and orientation, neither in the use of technology nor in dealing with online classes.

This sudden shift to online classes has exposed the digital divide that exists among our students, something I was not aware of until I introduced my students to online teaching. I was under the impression that most students in the class owned a smart phone as well as a computer. For the majority of the students, although listening to online lectures was possible with a smartphone, doing assignments or tests online was difficult without a desktop or laptop at home. It came as an eye opener to me that out of the 110 students in my class, less than 50% students had a smartphone. Many of them depended on smartphones borrowed from either parents or relatives. A second issue was the urban-rural divide in digital connectivity. If not having access to the smartphones and computers is one problem faced by underprivileged students, students belonging to rural areas facing erratic networks problems and are doubly underprivileged.

I teach in a women's college in Kozhikode in Kerala. We have students from both urban and rural areas of Kozhikode as well as nearby districts.