

## Broadcasting the Future: CEC's Role in India's Digital Education Revolution

Harendra Singh\*

### The Logic of Scale in Indian Higher Education

India's higher education system ranks among the world's largest, with over 1,100 universities, more than 42,000 colleges, and a student body exceeding 40 million (AISHE, 2023). This vast and diverse ecosystem faces significant challenges: disparities in infrastructure, wide linguistic and cultural diversity, and ongoing shortages of qualified teachers in many regions. In this context, the "logic of scale" is crucial for developing sustainable solutions. Democratizing higher education in India demands not only quality assurance but also delivery models capable of reaching millions of learners—across both rural and urban landscapes—simultaneously.

Broadcast technologies, often dismissed as relics of the analog era, acquire renewed relevance within this framework. Unlike broadband-based platforms, which are constrained by uneven internet penetration and bandwidth reliability, broadcast modes such as satellite television can reach virtually every household with a dish and television set. This universality ensures that the marginal cost of serving additional learners is negligible, making it a strategic infrastructure for equity and inclusion (CEC, 2025). Educational broadcasting, therefore, does not merely supplement digital platforms but forms the foundational "first-mile" access layer for mass higher education in India.

The Consortium for Educational Communication (CEC), established in 1993 as an Inter-University Centre of the University Grants Commission (UGC), was conceived with this logic in mind. It was tasked with leveraging broadcast and emerging information and communication technologies (ICTs) to serve higher education. Over three decades, CEC has functioned as both a technology enabler and a content orchestrator, expanding its mandate from televised lectures to massive open online courses (MOOCs), from single-channel broadcasting to a bouquet of 24×7 Direct-to-Home (DTH) channels, and from stand-alone programs to integrated credit-bearing systems aligned with national policy (CEC, 2025; SWAYAM, 2025).

The introduction of EDUSAT in 2004 further reinforced this trajectory. As India's first satellite dedicated to education, EDUSAT marked the transition from one-way transmission to two-way interactive classrooms, enabling students in remote districts to engage with university lectures and discussions in real time (ISRO, 2005). This infrastructural leap illustrated how scale and interactivity could coexist, laying the foundation for hybrid education models that continue to evolve in the 2020s.

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