

Greatest Achievements and Flaws in Indian Healthcare System

Mohan Ajay¹, Halam Catherine², Garg Richa³, Sandhu Shweta⁴, Dingoriya Akanksha⁵, Chandra Ravi⁶, Kushwaha Anurag⁷

- 1- Department of Surgical Disciplines, AIIMS, New Delhi
2- Department of Ophthalmology, AIIMS, New Delhi

Corresponding author-

Ajay Mohan, Department of Surgical Disciplines, AIIMS, New Delhi
ajaymay1592@gmail.com

Abstract

The healthcare system in India has come a long way since the country gained independence in 1947. India's healthcare system is vast, diverse, and complex, consisting of public and private healthcare providers. While the Indian healthcare system has made significant progress in several areas, it also faces several challenges. This paper aims to explore the greatest achievements and flaws of the Indian healthcare system. India has made remarkable achievements in healthcare, including the eradication of diseases such as polio, leprosy, and smallpox. The country has also made notable progress in medical research and development, including the production of affordable vaccines and generic drugs that have helped reduce the burden of diseases and improve health outcomes. Additionally, the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) launched in 2005 aimed to provide accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare services to rural areas.

Despite these achievements, the Indian healthcare system faces several challenges. The country has inadequate healthcare infrastructure, inadequate funding, and shortages of healthcare professionals. The lack of access to basic healthcare services in rural areas is a significant challenge, and there is a wide disparity between healthcare services in urban and rural areas. Moreover, the healthcare system is heavily reliant on private providers, leading to high out-of-pocket expenses for patients and inadequate government funding for public healthcare services. The Indian healthcare system's achievements and flaws have significant implications for the country's population's health outcomes and the government's efforts to provide quality healthcare services to all citizens. This paper will examine these achievements and flaws in greater detail, with a focus on understanding how the government can address the challenges facing the Indian healthcare system and build a more robust healthcare system that provides accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare services to all its citizens.

Date of Submission: 04-05-2023

Date of Acceptance: 14-05-2023

I. Introduction

The Indian healthcare system has been a topic of discussion for many years, with numerous studies and reports exploring its achievements and challenges. The following literature review provides a summary of the key findings and insights from relevant literature on the Indian healthcare system.

II. Achievements of the Indian Healthcare System

One of the significant achievements of the Indian healthcare system is the successful eradication of several diseases, including polio, leprosy, and smallpox. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), India was declared polio-free in 2014 after a massive immunisation campaign. (1)(2) This achievement is a testament to the country's public health efforts and the collaboration between the government and private healthcare providers.

The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) launched in 2005 is another significant achievement of the Indian healthcare system. The NRHM aimed to provide accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare services to rural areas. The mission's focus on improving maternal and child health outcomes, strengthening

health infrastructure, and enhancing human resource capacities has helped improve health outcomes in rural areas.(3)

One of the significant achievements of the Indian healthcare system is the successful eradication of several diseases, including polio, leprosy, and smallpox. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), India was declared polio-free in 2014 after a massive immunisation campaign. This achievement is a testament to the country's public health efforts and the collaboration between the government and private healthcare providers.(1)

Another significant achievement of the Indian healthcare system has been the increase in immunisation coverage. The country has implemented a range of measures to improve vaccination rates, including the introduction of the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP) in 1985. As a result, the coverage of basic childhood vaccinations has increased from 44% in 1985 to 85% in 2015. This has led to a significant reduction in the incidence of vaccine-preventable diseases such as polio, measles, and tetanus.(1)(3)

Reduction in maternal and child mortality rates was another notable achievement of Indian healthcare. According to the World Bank, the maternal mortality rate in India has declined from 212 per 100,000 live births in 2009 to 130 per 100,000 live births in 2019. The under-five mortality rate has also decreased from 74 per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 34 per 1,000 live births in 2019. The reduction in mortality rates can be attributed to various measures implemented by the Indian government, such as the Janani Suraksha Yojana, which provides financial assistance to pregnant women to encourage institutional delivery.(4)

In addition, India has made significant progress in the management of infectious diseases. The country has implemented a range of measures to combat infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. The introduction of the National AIDS Control Programme in 1992 has led to a significant reduction in the number of new HIV infections. The incidence of tuberculosis has also declined, with the government implementing the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme in 1997. The incidence of malaria has also decreased, with the government implementing the National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme in 2003. The Indian healthcare system has also made notable strides in medical research and development. India is known for producing affordable vaccines and generic drugs that have helped reduce the burden of diseases and improve health outcomes worldwide. The Indian pharmaceutical industry is also one of the largest in the world, providing affordable and quality drugs to patients globally.(5)

III. Flaws of the Indian Healthcare System

Despite these achievements, the Indian healthcare system faces numerous challenges. One of the most significant challenges is inadequate funding. India spends only 1.28% of its GDP on healthcare, which is significantly lower than other countries in the region such as Sri Lanka (1.6%), Thailand (2.9%), and China (5.1%). (5)(1)The low level of funding has led to a shortage of healthcare infrastructure and a lack of resources, including medical equipment and medicines. Another significant challenge is the shortage of healthcare workers. According to the WHO, India has a shortage of around 2.4 million doctors, nurses, and midwives. This shortage is particularly acute in rural areas, where healthcare workers are scarce. The shortage of healthcare workers has led to poor quality of care, with long waiting times, inadequate diagnosis, and poor treatment outcomes.

In addition, the quality of care in the Indian healthcare system is often subpar. There are significant variations in the quality of care provided across different regions, with patients in rural areas often receiving poorer quality care than those in urban areas. The lack of standardised guidelines and protocols for the management of different health conditions is also a significant issue, leading to variations in the quality of care provided by different healthcare providers. Moreover, healthcare in India is largely dominated by the private sector, with public healthcare facilities often being poorly funded and understaffed. This has resulted in a significant proportion of the population being unable to access quality healthcare services due to high out-of-pocket costs. The absence of a comprehensive health insurance scheme has also made healthcare unaffordable for many people, especially those from low-income backgrounds. Despite the achievements of the Indian healthcare system, several challenges persist. Inadequate healthcare infrastructure, inadequate funding, and shortages of healthcare professionals are some of the most significant challenges. According to a report by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), more than 70% of the population has to rely on private healthcare providers, indicating a lack of access to basic healthcare services.

The lack of access to basic healthcare services is particularly acute in rural areas, where the majority of the population resides. According to a report by the Planning Commission of India, there is a wide disparity between healthcare services in urban and rural areas. The report highlights the need for more significant investments in rural health infrastructure, the provision of basic amenities such as safe drinking water and sanitation, and the need to address the shortage of healthcare professionals. Another significant challenge facing the Indian healthcare system is the high out-of-pocket expenses for patients. The healthcare system in India is heavily reliant on private providers, leading to high healthcare costs. According to a report by the National

Health Accounts, over 60% of healthcare expenditure is paid out of pocket, leading to financial hardship for many households.

The healthcare system in India is vast and complex, with both public and private sectors playing important roles.

IV. Statistics related to the Indian healthcare system(4)(5)

Healthcare Expenditure: In 2019, India spent around 3.6% of its GDP on healthcare, which is lower than the global average of 10%.

Healthcare Infrastructure: As of 2021, India had around 1.3 million doctors, which translates to 1 doctor for every 1,457 people. There were around 2.3 million registered nurses and midwives, which translates to 1 nurse or midwife for every 674 people. India has a total of around 23,582 hospitals, including both public and private hospitals. India has 1.3 hospital beds per 1,000 people, which is lower than the global average of 2.7 beds per 1,000 people. **Doctor-patient ratio:** India has a doctor-patient ratio of 1:1456, which is significantly lower than the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended ratio of 1:1000.

Healthcare Accessibility: Healthcare accessibility is a major challenge in India. Around 65% of the Indian population lives in rural areas, and there is a significant disparity in healthcare access between urban and rural areas. The availability of healthcare services is also unevenly distributed across different states in India.

Health Outcomes: Life expectancy in India has been steadily increasing over the years and stood at 69.7 years in 2019. However, there are significant disparities in life expectancy across different states in India. The infant mortality rate (IMR) in India has also been declining over the years and stood at 28 per 1,000 live births in 2019. India's maternal mortality rate was 113 per 100,000 live births in 2016, which is higher than the global average of 66 per 100,000 live births.

Disease Burden: India faces a significant burden of both communicable and non-communicable diseases. Communicable diseases like tuberculosis, malaria, and HIV/AIDS remain a major public health concern, while non-communicable diseases like cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes are on the rise.

Health insurance coverage: Only about 15% of India's population has health insurance coverage, leaving a vast majority of the population at risk of high out-of-pocket healthcare expenses.

Pharmaceutical industry: India's pharmaceutical industry is the third-largest in the world by volume and is known for producing affordable generic drugs and vaccines.

Overall, the Indian healthcare system faces several challenges related to healthcare infrastructure, accessibility, and health outcomes. The government has launched several initiatives in recent years to address these challenges, but there is still a long way to go.

V. Comparison of Indian healthcare with other countries of the world(5)

The Indian healthcare system has its own unique characteristics, challenges, and achievements that differentiate it from other countries. Here, we compare and contrast the Indian healthcare system with the healthcare systems of two other countries - the United States and Cuba.

United States:

The healthcare system in the United States is mainly a privately-funded system, with a significant role played by the private sector, insurance companies, and for-profit healthcare providers. The system is known for its high healthcare costs, with the United States having the highest healthcare expenditure per capita in the world. The U.S. healthcare system also faces significant challenges, including the lack of access to healthcare services for millions of citizens, a shortage of healthcare professionals, and high out-of-pocket expenses for patients.

In contrast, the Indian healthcare system is primarily a public-funded system, with a significant role played by the government in providing healthcare services. While the Indian healthcare system faces several challenges, including inadequate healthcare infrastructure, inadequate funding, and shortages of healthcare professionals, it provides access to basic healthcare services at a lower cost than the United States.

France

The healthcare systems of India and France differ significantly in terms of their organisation, financing, and outcomes. Here are some key differences between the two:

Organization: The healthcare system in India is highly fragmented, with a mix of public and private providers. In contrast, France has a centralised healthcare system that is largely publicly funded.

Financing: In India, healthcare is primarily financed through out-of-pocket payments by individuals, while in France, healthcare is largely financed through social health insurance contributions and taxes.

Coverage: In India, access to healthcare is limited for many people, especially those in rural areas and those living in poverty. In France, universal healthcare coverage is provided to all residents, regardless of their income or employment status.

Quality of care: While India has made progress in improving the quality of healthcare services, the quality of care in many public hospitals and clinics remains poor. In France, there is a strong emphasis on high-quality healthcare services, and the country consistently ranks highly in terms of health outcomes.

Health outcomes: France has a higher life expectancy and lower infant mortality rate than India. Additionally, France has a lower burden of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria, while India has a higher prevalence of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Overall, the healthcare system in France is more centralised and better funded than the healthcare system in India. While India has made progress in improving access to healthcare services, there are still significant challenges related to healthcare infrastructure, healthcare spending, and healthcare access. Addressing these challenges is critical to improving health outcomes for all citizens and building a more robust healthcare system in India.

Cuba:

The Cuban healthcare system is known for its emphasis on primary healthcare and preventive medicine, and it is considered one of the best healthcare systems in the world. The Cuban healthcare system is publicly funded, and all citizens have access to free healthcare services. The Cuban healthcare system faces challenges, including inadequate healthcare infrastructure and a shortage of medical equipment and supplies due to the economic sanctions imposed on Cuba by the United States.

In contrast, the Indian healthcare system faces challenges related to inadequate healthcare infrastructure, inadequate funding, and shortages of healthcare professionals. However, the Indian healthcare system has made significant progress in eradicating diseases, improving maternal and child health outcomes, and producing affordable drugs and vaccines.

Overall, while the healthcare systems of the United States, Cuba, and India differ in terms of their funding, structure, and challenges, they all face common challenges related to inadequate healthcare infrastructure, shortages of healthcare professionals, and high healthcare costs. By addressing these challenges, the healthcare systems of these countries can provide accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare services to all citizens.

The answer to which country has the best healthcare system in the world can vary depending on the criteria used to evaluate healthcare systems. Different countries may excel in different areas of healthcare, such as access, quality, or efficiency.

However, according to a report by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2000, France had the best healthcare system in the world. The ranking was based on various factors such as healthcare infrastructure, health outcomes, access to healthcare, and quality of healthcare services.

Other countries that are often ranked highly in terms of healthcare systems include Switzerland, Japan, Germany, and Canada. These countries have strong healthcare infrastructure, high-quality healthcare services, and relatively good health outcomes.

It's important to note that no healthcare system is perfect, and each system has its own unique challenges and shortcomings. Nonetheless, by studying the best practices of different countries, policymakers can work towards improving healthcare systems and providing better access to quality healthcare services for all.

VI. Discussion

The Indian healthcare system has made significant achievements, including the eradication of diseases, improvements in maternal and child health outcomes, and advancements in medical research and development. However, the system still faces several challenges that need to be addressed to provide accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare services to all citizens.

One of the most significant challenges facing the Indian healthcare system is the inadequate healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural areas. The majority of the population resides in rural areas, and the lack of access to basic healthcare services has led to poor health outcomes and a wide disparity between urban and rural healthcare services. To address this challenge, the government needs to increase investments in rural health infrastructure, improve access to basic amenities such as safe drinking water and sanitation, and enhance the recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals in rural areas. Another significant challenge is the high out-of-pocket expenses for patients, leading to financial hardship for many households. The healthcare system in India is heavily reliant on private providers, leading to high healthcare costs. The government needs to increase funding for public healthcare services, reduce dependence on private providers, and promote health insurance schemes to provide financial protection to households.

The shortage of healthcare professionals is another challenge facing the Indian healthcare system. The country has a shortage of doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals, leading to a significant burden on the existing workforce. To address this challenge, the government needs to increase the number of medical colleges and training institutions, improve the recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals, and

enhance their training and capacity-building. The Indian healthcare system also needs to address the issue of quality of care. While the system has made notable progress in providing access to healthcare services, the quality of care needs to be improved. The government needs to establish quality standards, promote accreditation of healthcare facilities, and develop a robust regulatory framework to ensure quality healthcare services.

India has done commendable work on the front of Medical tourism in the last fifteen years and the majority of it can be attributed to the quality standards of corporate hospitals and accreditation agencies. India has a big potential to emerge as a major healthcare provider for the whole world if quality standards become universal. It's a common misconception that quality comes at a cost. The truth is the contrary. One of the ways to reduce the cost is by enhancing the quality. The lean management and Toyota production system (TPS) have proven that the costs can be brought by enhancing the quality in the automobile industry. The TPS can be applied to the healthcare industry also. Besides, the governments have to create good infrastructure to attract more tourists. And there should also be stringent laws to curb the exploitation of international patients. In a country where people revered doctors as Gods, now suddenly there is a change in perception. The entire medical fraternity has to work hard to regain the Patient: Doctor's trust factor. Some of the root causes of the erosion of trust factors are the commodification of healthcare and a lack of clinical acumen in the new generation. Even though corporate hospitals brought quality healthcare to the country, it also resulted in the commercialisation and commodification of healthcare. The corporate hospital marketing teams who conduct their quarterly reviews at five-star facilities, factor in the patients as the number of units. This is a dangerous trend that pushes medical personnel to unethical practices. Thereby, these unhealthy trends should change.

Now the current generation is relying on diagnostics and investigations more than their clinical acumen to arrive at a diagnosis. This is attributable to a change in attitudes and the highly competitive nature of entrance examinations which is driving students to books and libraries more than the patients and hospital wards. The new medical jargon, evidence-based medicine, and rising medico-legal issues have further added to this changing trend. Hence, bedside learning needs to be re-emphasised. Purely theoretical entrance examinations have to be transformed into clinical-oriented assessments along the lines of USMLE or PLAB.

Overall, the size of the Indian Healthcare Industry was supposed to reach 132 Billion dollars in 2022. The medical tourism market alone is expected to contribute 13 Billion USD by 2026. Other than the factors mentioned above, the Government of India has to enhance the healthcare budget and engage the private players in an optimal public-private partnership, protect the doctors, and create a win-win scenario for all stakeholders. On the other hand, doctors and hospitals should practice even greater empathy in patient care and enhance their clinical skills for patient-centric management and transparency in billing to regain the patient-doctor trust factor. Thereby changing its priorities and practices, India can become a global leader in the Healthcare Industry.

In conclusion, the Indian healthcare system has made significant achievements, but it still faces several challenges that need to be addressed to provide accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare services to all citizens. The government needs to increase investments in rural health infrastructure, reduce dependence on private providers, promote health insurance schemes, increase the number of medical colleges and training institutions, improve recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals, and establish quality standards and a regulatory framework to ensure quality healthcare services. Addressing these challenges will help build a more robust healthcare system and improve health outcomes for all citizens.

VII. Conclusion

The healthcare system in India has made significant progress in areas such as immunisation coverage, maternal and child health, and the management of infectious diseases. However, the system still faces numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, shortages of healthcare workers, and poor quality of care. Addressing these challenges will require significant investment in healthcare infrastructure, the recruitment and training of healthcare workers, and the implementation of standardised guidelines and protocols for the management of different health conditions. Moreover, the government needs to increase funding for healthcare and work towards making healthcare more affordable and accessible to all. The literature review highlights the significant achievements and challenges of the Indian healthcare system. While the country has made notable progress in eradicating diseases, improving maternal and child health outcomes, and producing affordable drugs and vaccines, it still faces several challenges. Inadequate healthcare infrastructure, inadequate funding, and shortages of healthcare professionals are some of the most significant challenges that need to be addressed. By addressing these challenges, the government can build a more robust healthcare system that provides accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare services to all its citizens.

REFERENCES

- [1]. World Health Organization. India. Available from: <https://www.who.int/countries/ind/en/>.

- [2]. <https://www.who.int/india/news/feature-stories/detail/a-push-to-vaccinate-every-child-everywhere-ended-polio-in-india#:~:text=Within%20two%20decades%2C%20India%20received,Bengal%20on%2013%20January%202011>.
- [3]. <https://main.mohfw.gov.in/newshighlights/national-health-profile-2020-released>.
- [4]. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Annual Report 2019-20. Available from: <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/sites/default/files/Annual%20Report%202019-20.pdf>.
- [5]. World Bank. India. Available from: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/india>.