Technology and Equitable Education in India

India faces the challenge of harnessing technology to provide equitable education, particularly for the underprivileged. While digital solutions hold immense promise, a clear roadmap is needed to ensure that technology benefits those who need it most. The digital revolution, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has seen increased smartphone use in rural households, but its impact on education remains uneven.

by OJAANK IAS

Smartphone Penetration in Rural India

Rising Ownership

In 2018, 36% of rural households had smartphones. By 2022, this had risen to over 74%, and ASER 2024 indicates further growth to 84%.

Individual Access

The proportion of 14-16 year olds owning smartphones has increased from 19% to about 31% within a year, indicating greater individual access.

Smartphone Use During the Pandemic

1 **Text and Videos**

Smartphones primarily served as carriers of texts, worksheets, and videos, substituting for textbooks during the pandemic.

2 **Virtual Training**

Virtual training sessions became common, enhancing digital skills that have largely sustained even after the pandemic.

3 **AI Excitement**

As the pandemic faded, a new excitement began to build around artificial intelligence (AI) and its potential applications.

The Promise of Open Education

Mothers' Education

Over 40% of schoolchildren's mothers have less than a class five education, highlighting the need to educate mothers to support children's learning.

Investment in Mothers

Educating mothers is an investment India should make to accelerate and strengthen the education of children, creating a ripple effect.

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Technology's Unfulfilled Promise

Computer Revolution

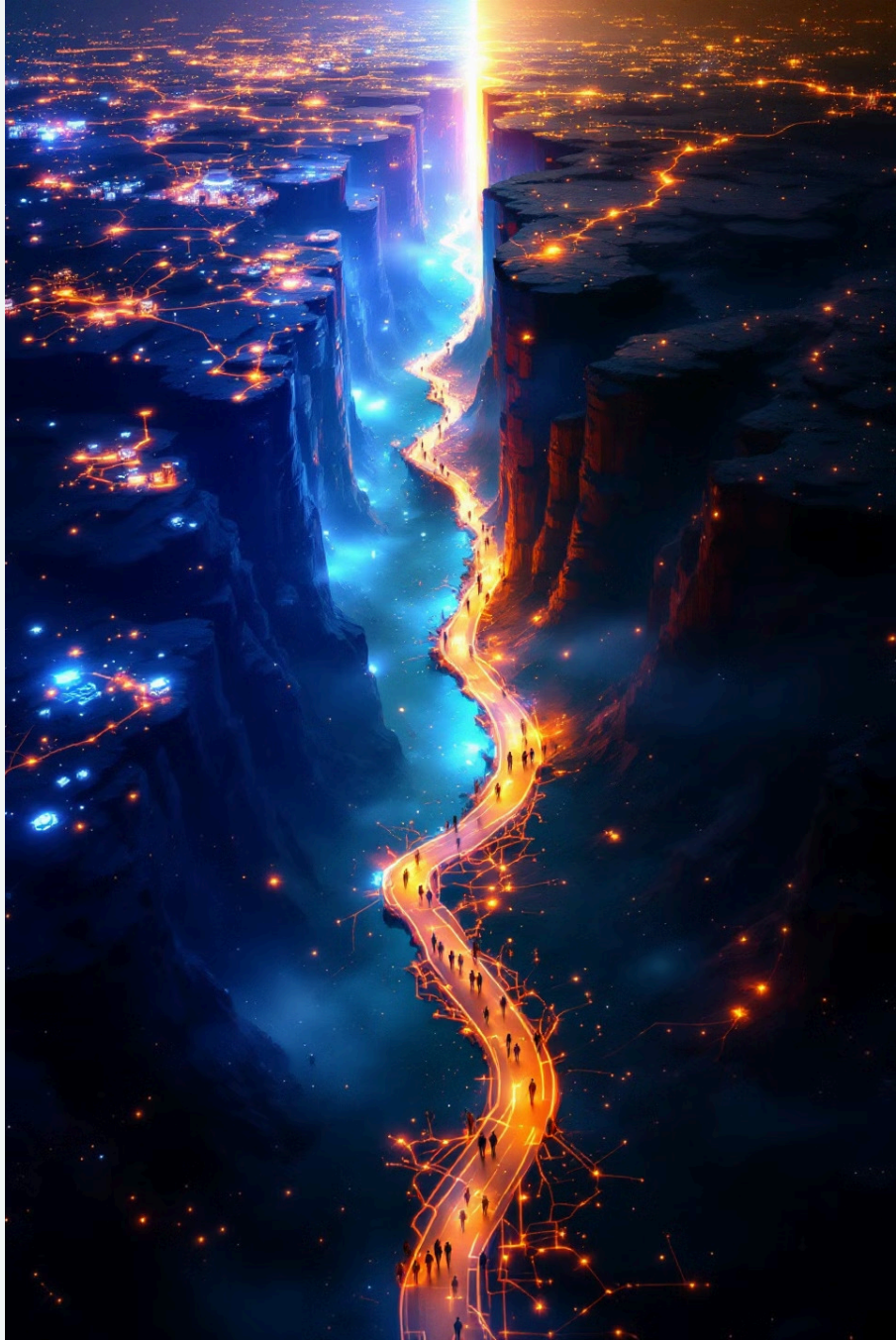
The computer revolution brought hope but didn't fully deliver on equitable education due to affordability issues.

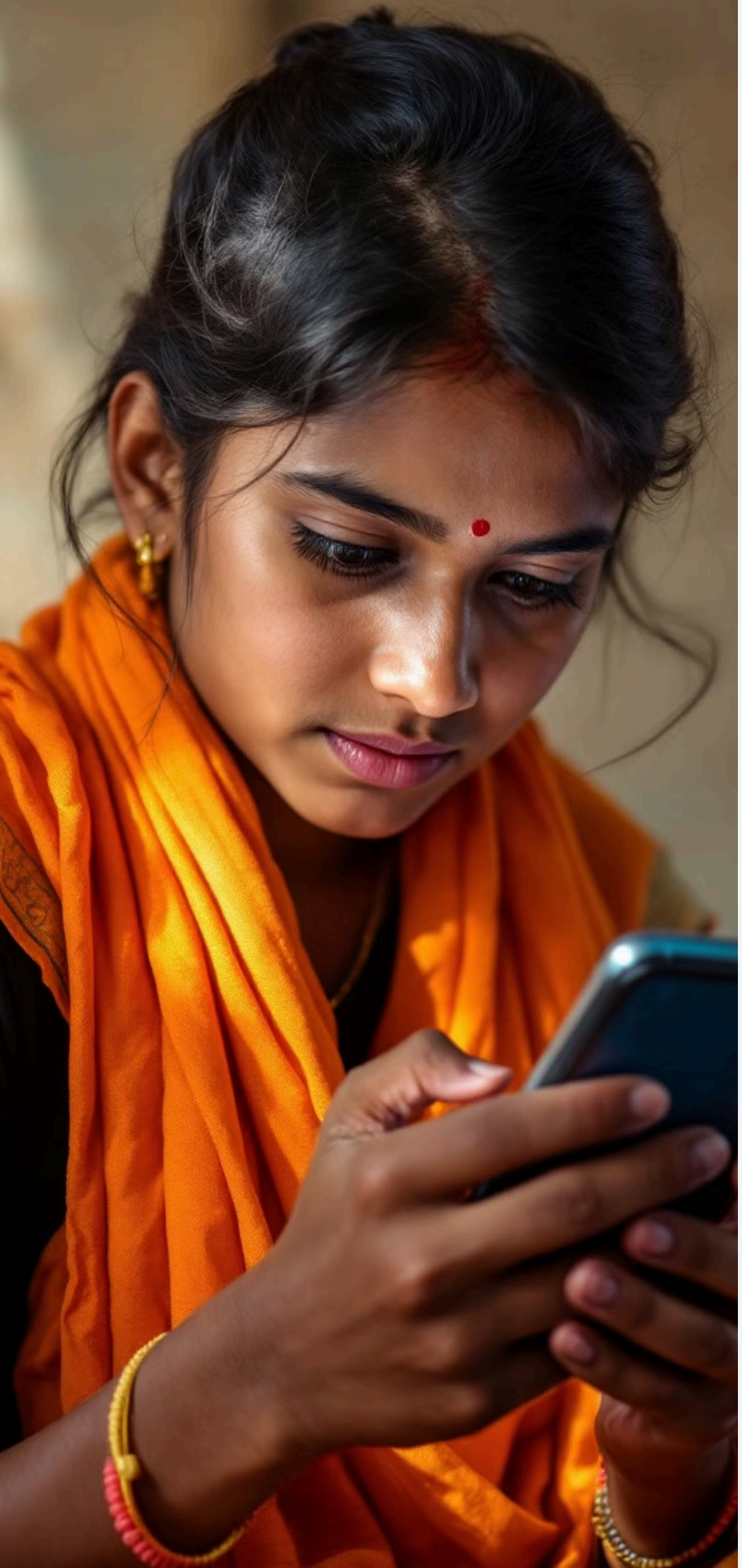
Internet Revolution

The Internet revolution faced similar challenges, with the privileged benefiting more than the underprivileged.

Mobile Revolution

The mobile revolution is now underway, but equitable access remains a concern despite increasing smartphone availability.





Hardware Availability and Language Barriers

1

Hardware Accessibility

Availability of individually owned smartphones is becoming less of a constraint, with most rural households having access.

2

Language Solutions

Language is no longer a major impediment, as writing and translation in local languages are now easily possible.

3

Access to Tools

All the tools needed for learning are accessible, provided one knows what to access, where, and how to navigate them.

The Role of Schools and Community Learning

1

School Access

Access to schools is complete, but attendance remains a problem due to varied schooling choices in villages.

2

Community Chaos

The chaotic situation at the village level, with children attending different schools or none, affects the quality of learning.

3

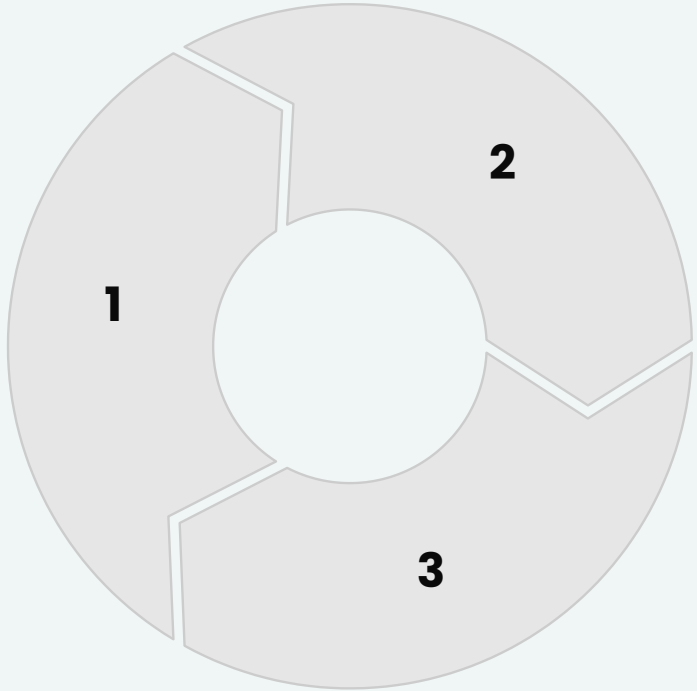
Broadcast Learning

Learning programs broadcast from central points can organize group learning, creating new school models.

Education as an Integrating Factor

Civilization Systems

Historically, education systems varied across civilizations due to differences in time, space, culture, and technology.



Integration by Science

The age of empires and colonialism started integrating civilizations, and today, countries are integrated by science and technology.

Education's Role

Education serves as an integrating factor, but so does profit, influencing the accessibility of technological innovations.

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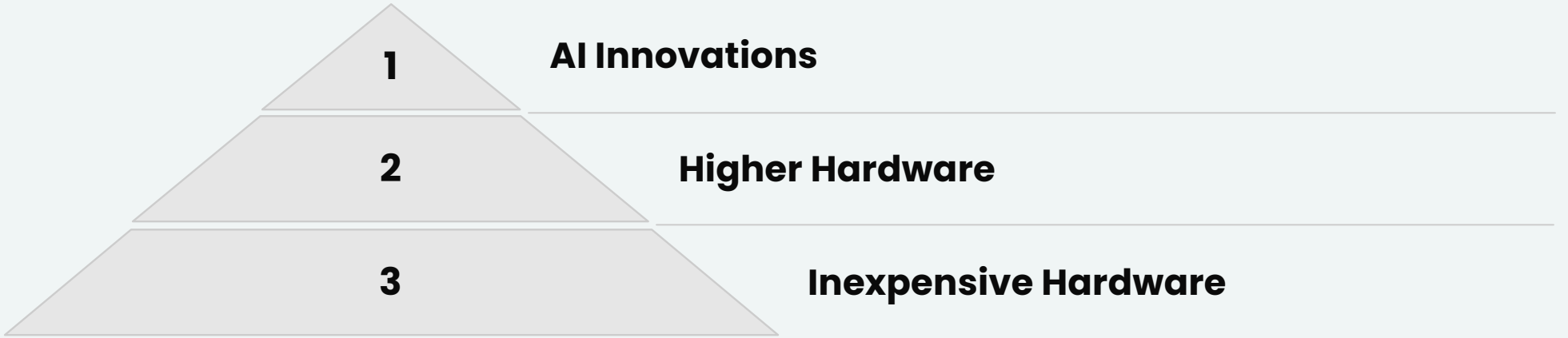
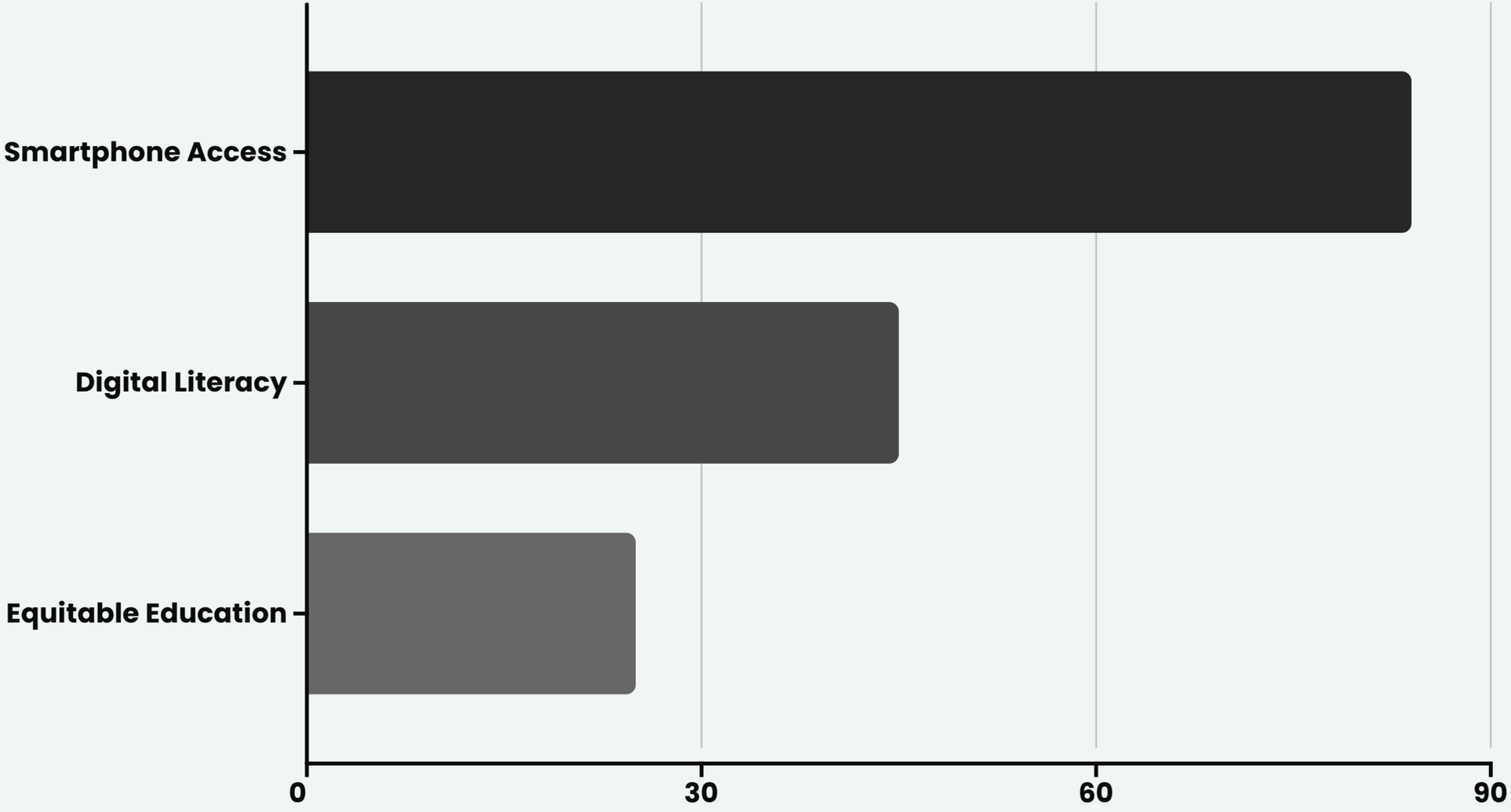


While hardware has become inexpensive, AI innovations require higher-order hardware, raising questions about universal access. The need for a higher order and bigger hardware is growing with the innovations of AI. Will philanthropic investments be enough to help universalise the innovations that could revolutionise education?

The Need for a National Roadmap



India needs a roadmap to harness technology for the benefit of those who need it most. The chart shows the current state of smartphone access, digital literacy, and equitable education.

Key Takeaways and Next Steps

Equitable Access

Ensure equitable access to technology and digital resources for all, especially the underprivileged.

Digital Literacy

Promote digital literacy among students, teachers, and parents to maximize the benefits of technology.

National Roadmap

Develop a national roadmap that integrates technology into education to bridge the digital divide.

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