

# **Higher Education *and* Open Distance Learning Trajectory in India**

*Reflections of an Insider*

**V.S. Prasad**



**Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University  
Hyderabad**



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## Higher Education and Open Distance Learning Trajectory in India: Reflections of an Insider

By Prof. V.S. Prasad

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (Dr. BRAOU), formerly known as Andhra Pradesh Open University, was set up on 26th August 1982 through an Act of the A.P. State Legislature (APOU Act 1982). Dr. BRAOU is the first Open University in India that started the democratisation of higher education in India providing opportunities of access to quality higher education to all sections of society to meet the changing individual and social needs. All the programmes offered by the University are recognised by the University Grants Commission, New Delhi. The motto of the University is “Education for All”. Find more about the university at <https://braou.ac.in/>

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**Dedicated to**

***Late Prof. G. Ram Reddy and Prof. Ram Takwale***

Founders and Doyens of Open University System in India

Who inspired and guided my academic life



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## Foreword

Prof. V.S. Prasad's Book on *Higher Education and Open Distance Learning Trajectory in India: Reflections of an Insider* comes at a time when the efficacy of ODL for quality higher education, professional qualifications and research is being debated across the country. Matters are further complicated due to the phenomenal growth of technology which has blurred the distinctions between ODL and campus provision and is rapidly changing the ways in which we deliver higher education.

This collection of lectures and papers by Prof. Prasad chronicle the development of higher education, ODL and quality assurance in India over the years. This book encapsulates the expertise, experience and wisdom that Prof. Prasad is respected for not just in India but across the Commonwealth. In fact, in 2004, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) conferred the prestigious award of Honorary Fellow on Prof. Prasad for his outstanding contributions to quality assurance and ODL for human resource development. He was recognised for combining 'academic insight with clear-headed and pragmatic administrative capabilities' – qualities that underpinned his successful institution building. He has worked to provide access to quality higher education over his entire career.

Prof. Prasad's work is closely aligned with that of COL. COL's mission is to support governments and institutions to use ODL and technologies to expand access to education and training. COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development. Learning must lead to economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation.

India is a young country where the number of young people of 15-34 years has increased in the last thirty years. The median age of the Indian population is about 27 years. This young population needs opportunities for livelihoods. However, the unemployment figures for the youth, are high. How can we provide learning that leads to more livelihoods opportunities for our large population of young people? The Govt. of India, while focusing on world class

universities has also increased its emphasis on vocational and professional education and set a target of training five million apprentices by 2020. ODL can make substantial contributions to achieving both quality higher education and skilling and reskilling our youth for livelihoods at scale.

Even though distance education has been established for decades it continues to struggle with the crisis of credibility. What has been the performance of open universities in the Commonwealth? The output rate of 27 open universities during 2016 shows a great variation in results—from 2% to 39%. How can we increase success rates? Research shows that 80% dropouts can happen due to non-completion of assignments. As we know from Holmberg, two-way communication and feedback, strengthen learning. Studies have indicated that instant feedback and keeping the learners engaged can contribute to maintaining high levels of motivation. What does it take to institutionalise these insights?

This residual negative perception from the days of indifferent correspondence education continues to haunt ODL—and a range of stakeholders including parents and students remain skeptical. ODL institutions have always tried to establish the parity of esteem with campus universities and it is for this reason that the ODL institutions were largely responsible for initiating the quality assurance movement in India. Prof. Prasad has been at the forefront of educational quality in both ODL and campus institutions. He critically analyses the QA practices in India and concludes that we need a culture of quality in our institutions. What would this mean? Fundamentally creating a ‘culture of care’ for each one of our learners—providing a high quality learning experience leading to positive outcomes for both the individual and society.

Technology has brought about a convergence of ODL and campus institutions. Going forward all institutions will need to pay targeted attention to three areas: one, embrace lifelong learning and strengthen our outreach function to open up education to wider constituencies especially the unreached; two, inspire and mobilise staff to contribute to research and development; and three, develop need-based courses, which open up opportunities for livelihoods. All

these strategies would contribute to a higher education system that produces global citizens who make our society safe for women, contribute to national development and ensure that we conserve our environment.

Prof. Prasad's book forces us to think about the larger issues which confront our society today. The essays highlight the potential of how ODL can help us achieve access, equity, quality while at the same time reducing costs. What is of especial significance is that the book is being released as an Open Educational Resource. This is very much in line with Prof Prasad's social justice agenda. By offering his intellectual property as a free resource, Prof. Prasad is practising what many others are still in the process of preaching. I commend this book to everyone interested in the policy and practice of educational development in India.

June 16, 2018

**Prof. Asha Kanwar**  
*President and CEO,*  
*Commonwealth of Learning, Canada.*

# Preface

**D**r. B.R Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU), the first Open University in India is launching the Open Educational Resource Repository (OERR) on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2018 on the death anniversary of Prof. G. Ram Reddy, the founding Vice-Chancellor of the University. It is a happy coincidence that we are launching this programme with the publication of the work of Prof. V.S. Prasad, a student of Prof. G. Ram Reddy and also my teacher and former Vice Chancellor of this University. The University is committed to the OER philosophy of open access to educational resources to realise Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s social transformative vision of education. The University has developed the OER policy to encourage staff and students of the University to use OER/MOOCs as a platform extensively and also to contribute to the development of OER/MOOCs to expand the frontiers of higher education through the distance mode.

I am sure the lectures and articles of Prof. V.S. Prasad, titled “**Higher Education and Open Distance Learning Trajectory in India: Reflections of an Insider**”, will be useful to all for gaining a deeper understanding of issues in higher education, Open Distance Learning and quality assurance. Particularly this work will be useful to teaching faculty, resource persons, scholars and students of the University to appreciate the goals, processes and expected outcomes of ODL. The range of experiences of Prof. Prasad are presented in his reflections as an insider, which may help all of us to appreciate the dynamics of the ODL system.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to Prof. V.S. Prasad, for permitting the University to publish his work under OERR of the University. I express my appreciation to Prof.C.Venkataiah, Registrar of the University, for joining me in persuading Prof. Prasad to agree to publish his works and also for effectively monitoring the execution of the project. Prof. G. Ram Reddy Academy of Distance Education (GRADE), a research unit of the University is the nodal agency for the operationalisation of OERR. Prof. (Mrs.) G. Pushpa Chakrapani has ably coordinated all the activities. I express my appreciation of her work. Many other colleagues of the University have actively participated in launching OERR by the University. My sincere thanks are due to all of them for their consistent efforts and co-operation in this memorable event of launching OERR of the University.

**Prof. K. Seetharama Rao**

Vice – Chancellor

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University

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**M**any people directly or indirectly provided valuable support to make this book possible. Prof. K. Seetharama Rao, Vice Chancellor and Prof. C. Venkataiah, Registrar, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University have initiated this project of the publication of my lectures and articles under OER scheme of the University and ensured its successful execution. I am thankful to both of them. I am thankful to the organizers of my lectures, editors of the books and the journal which published my articles, providing an opportunity to express my ideas and for permitting to publish the same. My colleagues at the institutions I worked at, participants in the lectures I delivered and my friends with whom I interacted contributed to my perspectives and reflections on higher education. This book is an expression of my gratitude to all of them.

Prof. Asha Kanwar wrote a perceptive foreword, adding value to the book. I am grateful to her for this intellectual support. I am thankful to Sir John Daniel; Prof. Gajaraj Dhanarajan; Prof. Ram Takwale; Prof. G. Haragopal; Prof. B.P. Sabale; Prof. V. Venkaiah; Dr. Sanjaya Mishra for their valuable reflections on the book. They are a great source of inspiration and encouragement to me.

Dr. Sanjaya Mishra, my young colleague and friend has provided valuable professional support from design to conclusion. I am greatly obliged to him. Prof. B.P. Sabale and Prof. V. Venkaiah are a constant sources of support to me in many ways. I am thankful to them. I am obliged to Prof. C. Pushpa Ramakrishna for her suggestions and language editing. Dr. G. Srinivas, Dr. P. Krishna Rao, Dr. U. Subba Rao, Prof. G. Pushpa Chakrapani, Mr. S. Narasimhulu, Mr. D. Vasanth Rao, Mr. Sridhar helped me in different ways. Thanks to all of them. I am specially thankful to Dr. P. Venu Gopal Reddy, PRO of the University for all his help in the publication of this book. I express my appreciation to Karshak Print Solutions, Hyderabad for bringing out this volume.

Special thanks to my family: Mrs. V. Vijayasree, Uma, Aparna, Prakash, Hindon, Kiran, Swetha, Dhiren and Nandini for their support and appreciation of my work.

**V.S. Prasad**



## Introduction

‘To be or not to be’ was my dilemma. By nature and habit, I am more comfortable with reading and listening than in writing and speaking. For a long time, I self-debated on the desirability of making my lectures/ writings on higher education, open distance learning and quality assurance available to the larger public by publishing them. I have been a humble practitioner, not an active researcher in these areas. Fortunately, I had the opportunity of working in higher education institutions, both conventional and open, public and private, colleges and universities, national and international, in various capacities for more than four decades. It helped me to gain a broader and deeper knowledge of the higher education system. As a student of public administration, my professional knowledge of public institutions also is useful to appreciate the dynamics of institutional structures, processes and behaviour. The lectures and articles included in this publication are the reflections of an insider on the trajectory of higher education, open distance learning and quality assurance.

My choice of experiences and their meanings are influenced by my world view of education. To me education is an important instrument in the construction and reconstruction of society for sustainable development, based on the principles of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. This world of view of mine is shaped by influences of my father’s engagement in left politics in my formative years, student politics in my college days, close association with many socially-committed persons in my academic career and the opportunity to work under the leadership of many eminent persons in the field of higher education and open distance learning. For a person coming from a small village, from a middle class farming community, it is a great opportunity provided by this society. I am a product of this system, made in Indian government schools and colleges. I consider myself ‘just an adequate person’ – conscientious, cautious, methodical and task oriented – the essential requirement being to make a difference



in any given work (I may be excused for my immodesty). I feel that it is my social responsibility to share my experiences and understanding of educational institutions working with the larger society, to contribute to the emergence of a more informed society on education. The Open Educational Resources (OER) provide the best opportunity for this purpose. The OER, non-licensed educational resources freely available to all, is a significant development in the field of education in 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is based on the philosophical assumption of knowledge as a common wealth of the society. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar advocated the same philosophy of education in his own unique way. The Open University, named after him, is appropriately taking many initiatives including the launch of Open Educational Resources Repository (OERR) to take forward the OER movement. I am happy to be a part of this university OER movement, by putting my publication as a first piece in the OER repository of the university. I am sure that the free and open access of this material will be useful, particularly to students, the academic community and other resource persons engaged in Open University activities, as a foundation material in areas of higher education, open distance learning and quality assurance.

Two qualifiers are in order. **Firstly**, there is an element of repetition in the materials. This may be inevitable in this type of collected work of lectures and articles. These lectures and articles were delivered / written at different points of time on related themes as standalone pieces. In publications of the academic world, it is not unusual for repetition in this type of work. **Secondly**, many ideas, observations and suggestions made in the book may not always be new or innovative. We might have come across many of them in the writings of many experts on education, sometime put in a better way also. But every one of us would have one's own way of arranging things, prioritizing concerns and ordering ideas based on our own framework. As we know, even though everyone plays the game with the same ball and with the same rules, each plays in his/her own way. I have shared my reflections as a participant observer of the system in my own way.

## Higher Education

The trajectory of higher education since independence is a mix of achievements and failures. The higher education objective of providing inclusive

quality education to all is critically examined in this section. The inclusiveness includes; inclusiveness in goals, access, processes and outcomes. The narrowness of goals of education, focusing on one dimension of employability is a matter of concern. Kothari Commission on education (1964-66) rightly has emphasized the multi-dimensionality of goals of education, which include: development of human resources for building a national economy; instrument for further social and national integration; instrument for political education to make students responsible citizens of a democratic secular and egalitarian society and building character and personality of students. These are equally valid for the present day education system. Socrates considered that the purpose of education was to develop the four virtues of wisdom, courage, justice and temperance. Dr B.R. Ambedkar expected education to result in *Pragna* (Understanding), *Karuna* (Compassion), and *Samatha* (Equality). During the last 25 years, particularly after initiation of the structural adjustment programme in 1991, the central focus of higher education is more to meet the market needs of human resources, than to develop the student critical abilities to question existing knowledge, to explore the new knowledge and relate knowledge to existing reality. The spread of private higher education institutions added to this narrowness of higher education goals. There is a need to refocus on the multiple goals of higher education as a liberating and democratizing activity. These multiple goals may be the benchmarks of access, processes and outcomes assessment.

During the last 70 years after independence, commendable achievements have been made in providing access to large numbers, including women and weaker sections. Still, there is a need to make efforts to provide more access to weaker sections particularly to Scheduled Tribes and Muslim minorities. Inclusive access has a meaning only when the processes are made inclusive. There are disturbing reports of alienation of students from weaker sections in Indian University campuses, in extreme cases leading to suicides. A wag remarked that a visit to an Indian University campuses reminds him of a visit to old '*Zamindaries*' (fiefdom of landlords in pre-independent India) or visit to 'disturbed areas'. The university which is expected to play an important role in changing the world outside also reflects in some ways the world inside. The creation of an egalitarian learning environment only makes the process of learning meaningful and joyful. The inclusiveness in outcomes mostly depends on the

competencies and commitment of academic staff and efficiency and effectiveness of the governance system. Serious observers of higher education express concerns about the missing “academic impulses” in the teaching faculty in general (with many honourable exceptions). It is disturbing to note a new ‘*matalibi*’ academic culture of looking at things from what is there in it for me, unmindful of high expectations of society from the teaching community. Privatization of intellect is a serious concern. Most of the time the academic world is lost in internal bickering and power games, may be because these are low risk games of politics. No institution can rise above the level of its teachers. The inclusive world view of the teaching community and their professional competence and commitment are critical to achieve the inclusive outcomes in higher education. The flexibility of the governance system is another critical variable in achieving the desired outcomes. The lack of autonomy and rigidity of structures are not conducive for the effective working of institutions engaged in generating creative ideas for a new society. Some of these issues and ideas are discussed in more detail in the fourth chapter of the section on higher education.

## **Open Distance Learning**

Open distance learning, a generic expression for the technology mediated teaching and learning, expressed in popular usage by different terms like distance education, open learning, open education, flexible learning, e-learning, digital learning etc., with shades of different meanings, has ushered in new era in education. It is a system of education to provide ‘space to space-less’ in higher education. The goal posts of ODL include: increasing access to quality education; providing flexible system of learning mediated by technology; upgradation of knowledge skills and competencies of working population and lifelong learning / continuous learning opportunities for life enrichment and creation of a knowledge society. The trajectory of around fifty five years of correspondence education and thirty five years of Open University system is inspiring for some achievements and disturbing for some undesirable trends. The successful trajectory of a system is from use to better use and to best use. The failed trajectory is from use to misuse to disuse. ODL represents both these trends. The slow growth rate in ODL enrolments and low social esteem of ODL institutions are matters of concern. From time to time policy directions are issued from above, based on which the operational systems in ODL were

developed, over the years. An integrated policy is yet to be framed for this activity. There is still no consensus among the academic community, policy makers and the regulatory authorities on the types of programmes to be launched by ODL institutions. The regulatory systems and quality assessment systems are still in an evolving stage. The regulatory systems are more control oriented than facilitation oriented. The regulatory system is based on the philosophy of ‘because we say so’.

In the 80s the Open University system came into operation mainly to overcome the rigidities of the conventional system and to design a new flexible university system that provided education to large number. They also expected to engage in research and development activities in ODL and engage in innovation in pedagogy and delivery of education. The open universities are still in search of designing appropriate institutional structures and processes to achieve these objectives. The new Open University model for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is yet to evolve. Some suggestions are made here on the guiding principles of 21<sup>st</sup> century Open University. The paradox of the system is that, ODL which is expected to contribute to empowering and transforming the society is struggling to empower and transform itself. Some of these issues are discussed and commented upon in the section on open distance learning.

## **Quality Assurance**

Quality assurance – the systems and processes in place to ensure quality - is the one of the critical concerns in higher education and ODL in India. The massification, increasing global competition, market orientation and concerns of relevance have made quality the defining element of education. Earlier the focus of the policy makers in higher education and ODL was on expansion, then on quality. The flaw in this approach had been recognized and now the focus is on expansion *with* quality. The main objective of quality assurance is to make higher education goals and processes relevant to the needs of the individual and society. This is reflected in the definition of quality as ‘fitness of purpose’ and ‘fitness for purpose’.

Quality assessment, an integral part of quality assurance, is considered an important way of continuous improvement and accountability of educational institutions. In India many initiatives were taken for the establishment of external quality agencies in the 1990s. The Indian way of external quality assessment is

characterized by the location of EQAs in the public domain at national level and quality accreditation in terms of grades. Initially the assessment by EQAs was meant for quality improvement. Now the results of assessment are taken as the basis for many decisions to incentivize the institutions to achieve excellence. The Indian way of quality assurance, quality assessment of ODL institutions and programmes, quality of open educational resources and synergy of roles of stakeholders are discussed in detail in this section. The concerns of quality assurance include: a) wide diversity in the quality of higher education and low averages of quality with large standard deviation; b) small percentage of institutions being assessed by NAAC; c) reliability of assessment methodologies and grading systems adopted by EQAs; d) development of instrument and mechanism for quality assessment of programmes and institutions of ODL, OER/MOOCs; e) alignment of roles of stakeholders in quality assurance; f) strengthening of internal institutional arrangements for quality assurance and g) development of a national institutional mechanism for recognition, regulation and coordination of external EQAs. These aspects and other related practices in quality assurance are discussed in more detail in this section on quality assurance.

## The Argument

The book is an argument, not a prescription. A few prescriptions in this book are only extensions of the argument. The argument advocated in this book is that **‘education is a social process and has social objectives’**. This is the central focus of all the twelve pieces in this volume. The challenge addressed is how to make higher education and open distance learning a socially- relevant process, particularly in the context of a wide disconnect between **Dharma** (expected role) and **Karma** (actual performance). The quality debate should be located as a response to this challenge. From this perspective higher education, including open distance learning, has the objective of preparing the youth to face the challenges of life, including making a living and providing lifelong learning opportunities to lead a meaningful life in a knowledge society. The appropriateness of the structures and the operational dynamics of the systems and processes are discussed in more detail in different chapters. I am looking for robust institutions as answers to many, if not all, problems in higher education. I hope these ‘reflections of an insider’ will further trigger the debate and discussion on the current state of higher education, open distance learning and the quality assurance system.

## Section A: Higher Education

In this section on higher education four essays are included. These are Memorial Lectures delivered from 2012-2017 at different Indian Universities. The main focus of discussion in this section is on the nature, concerns and directions of higher education in India since independence. Today the context for the higher education system can be described as the ‘best of times’ and the ‘worst of times’. The new social realities are pulling the system in different directions, leading to many contradictions. The system is at the crossroads. The issues of the right direction for the system to meet its ‘social *dharma*’ are analysed here. Institution-building issues and the critical role of leadership are discussed. The four chapters included in this section, their focus and context is briefly outlined below.

### **CHAPTER-1: Higher Education in India at the Crossroads: Search for Alternatives**

Higher education is at the crossroads. The seven decades journey of higher education in India after independence is influenced by a trajectory of diverse social forces, national and international. The system is moving very fast in different directions. In this chapter the direction and concerns of higher education are discussed in the context of the Indian Constitutional vision and framework. The appropriateness of the growth is critically examined and the need to search for alternate paths is emphasised. This chapter is a revised and updated version of the first Prof. R.S. Rao Memorial Lecture delivered at Hyderabad in 2012.

### **CHAPTER-2: Institution Building in Higher Education: Challenges of Leadership**

Leadership plays a critical role in institutional building. Many experts in higher education opine that the crisis in higher education in India is mainly the crisis of leadership. The Universities, though they are considered as different from bureaucratic and commercial organisations, have not been managed differently. Indian higher education needs new models of governance to realise their social goals. Here the ‘idea centric leadership’ plays a critical role in leading change.

The focus of this chapter is on issues of governance and challenges of leadership. This chapter is a revised version of Dr. K. Jayashanker Memorial Lecture delivered at Kakatiya University, Warangal in 2015.

### **CHAPTER-3: New Realities in Higher Education: Challenges and Prospects**

Education is a social process and context specific. We are living in a world of unprecedented changes which affect all aspects of life including education. The democratic context and the rising expectations of people from higher education pose many challenges for the internal processes of the system. In this chapter the ‘new realities’ of higher education and resultant challenges and expected outcomes are discussed. This chapter is a revised version of the Peter Drucker Memorial Lecture, delivered at RVR & JC College of Engineering, Nagarjuna University, in 2015.

### **CHAPTER-4: Are the Universities Performing their Social *Dharma*?**

The focus of this chapter is on the relevance of university education. A University is a social organisation. Social *Dharma* refers to the social purpose and social duty of universities. Today, the human capital view of education is driving higher education. There is a need to integrate this view with the view of higher education as a social, democratic and ethical asset. The larger idea of education as an integral component of human development is being diluted by the narrow focus of education for developing a skilled workforce. The chapter discusses the developments in higher education from the framework of social *Dharma* and advocates an eclectic approach. The role of universities in reengineering the development of new State of Telangana is discussed in this chapter. This chapter is a revised version of the Prof. B. Janardhan Rao Memorial Lecture delivered at Kakatiya University, Warangal in 2016.



# 1

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## Higher Education in India at Crossroads : Search for Alternatives

*“The Enlightenment idea of education was captured in the image of education as laying down a string that students follow in their own ways, developing their creativity and independence of mind”*

*- Noam Chomsky*

### Frame for Understanding Higher Education

No problem can ever be encountered, evaluated or resolved in a vacuum. We require an analytical frame to describe and analyse what is happening in higher education. A framework is necessary to get an idea about what questions need to be asked, what methods are appropriate when attempting to answer the questions, and how answers might be interpreted. It is quite possible that different people may look at the higher education scenario from their own lens. It is desirable to have a shared frame i.e., a shared way of looking at things to identify the concerns and desirable collective actions. Indian Constitution maybe taken as an appropriate frame to understand higher education. In a Constitutional governance scheme of India, the purpose, processes and outcomes of higher education should be in consonance with the vision and provisions of the Indian Constitution. The **Preamble** of the Constitution of India sets the social vision of India in its resolution ‘to constitute India into a sovereign, socialist, secular democratic republic and to secure to all its citizens **Justice**, social economic and political; **Liberty**, of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; **Equality** of status and opportunity and to promote among them all **Fraternity** assuring the dignity of

the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation'. This vision of society should also be the vision of higher education. We must be able to draw the goals of education from this Constitutional vision. When we say that education has twin objectives of 'for living' and 'for making a living', they should be mediated by the Constitutional vision of society. The type of living and the ways of making a living is to be answered by this Constitutional vision. In addition, the structure and processes of higher education should take note of the relevant Constitutional provisions which sets the basic operational framework of all Institutions in a democracy. Particular mention may be made of six features which have particular bearing on education. **Firstly**, in the establishment of educational institution, the object should not be to make a profit in as much as education is essentially charitable in nature. (Supreme Court Judgment in T.M.A. Pai, Foundation and others Vs State of Karnataka and others, Oct. 2002). **Secondly**, education is recognized as a fundamental right under Article 21 of Right to Life. **Thirdly**, the State can make special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. (Art 15(4) of the Constitution). **Fourthly**, linguistic and religious minorities have Rights to establish and administer educational institutions (under Articles 29 & 30). **Fifthly**, State has the power and responsibility to take steps to maintain standards and excellence in education. **Sixthly**, the education is in the Concurrent list (after the 42<sup>nd</sup> amendment to the Constitution, 1976), with Centre and States having jurisdiction.

The Constitutional vision and important Constitutional provisions and Supreme Court judgments mentioned above have operational implications for the higher education system. These are:

- The promotion of an egalitarian society is the goal of education
- Education is a fundamental right of citizens and the state has the responsibility to provide education to all.
- Education is a public good and educational institutions cannot be established for profit. Private higher education institutions may be established as charitable/ service activities.
- Reservations to socially and educationally backward classes and SCs and STs may be made as a special provision to ensure equality of opportunities.

- Linguistic and religious minorities have Rights to establish and administer higher education institutions. Cultural pluralism is recognized.
- The State has the responsibility to maintain standards and excellence in higher education.
- Education is in the concurrent list, with both the Centre and the State having shared responsibilities and jurisdiction on education.

## **Higher Education Scenario in India**

India has always accorded high importance to education. The world's first university was established in Takshashila in 700 B.C. The University of Nalanda or the Nalanda Mahavira as it was called at the time of establishment in 4th century BC was one of the first great universities in the world. In spite of high Vedic, Buddhist and Islamic traditions of education in ancient India, the beginnings of modern higher education are generally traced to the establishment of three universities in Calcutta (Kolkata), Bombay (Mumbai) and Madras (Chennai) in 1857. These were initially examination bodies and all the 27 colleges in operation at that time were affiliated to these universities on the London University model. Later these universities became centres of teaching and research. During the colonial period the higher education system was created and promoted mainly to serve human resource requirement of the colonial administration.

The higher education system we inherited at the time of independence is mainly an elitist and small system. There were only 20 universities, 591 colleges and 2,28,881 students at the time of independence. The literacy rate in 1951 was only 16.7 percent and the GER in higher education was only 0.7 percent. Access was limited to the middle classes and richer sections of society and women were less than 10 percent. English was the medium of instruction in universities and colleges, except in Osmania University (1917) where Urdu was the medium of instruction till 1948. The system was primarily a State-led system with publicly funded universities and colleges along with Christian missionary and other philanthropic institutions. Education was considered a 'public good' and its role in economic and social development was emphasised. The primary focus was on general education. The liberal education in humanities, social sciences, commerce and science dominated the education scene with a few technical and professional education institutions. The colleges were affiliated to universities. The universities and affiliated colleges were the only two types of educational institutions. Universities were assigned the dual role of centres of learning

and research and regulatory bodies for maintaining the standards of affiliated colleges. The colleges were mainly meant for dissemination of education.

## **Huge, Diverse and Inclusive System**

The Indian higher education has undergone unprecedented growth, especially during the last two decades. It is a huge system with 857 university-level institutions, around 41 thousand colleges, 33 million students and 1.4 million teachers. The gross enrolment ratio is 24.3 percent. There are wide variations in the GER in different States and regions. The student population is increasingly becoming inclusive with 47 percent women, 13.44 percent Scheduled Castes, 4.8 percent Scheduled Tribes, 33.1 percent other Backward Castes and 6 percent minorities. While 85 percent of students are in undergraduate programmes, around 10 percent are in postgraduate programmes and less than 1 percent are in research programmes. Around 70 percent of students are in general education programmes in Arts, Science and Commerce streams and 30 percent are pursuing professional programmes. The institutional diversities have made the system very complex. There are five types of universities and university level institutions i.e., Central Universities, State Universities, Private Universities, Deemed Universities and Institutions of National Importance with degree-awarding powers. Though most of the universities are multi-faculty, a large number of single faculty/ domain centric universities have also been established particularly during the last two decades. Different types of affiliated colleges which include government, aided, and private colleges and a large number of stand-alone institutions are offering higher education degree, diploma and certificate programmes. Some of the colleges are given an autonomous status and the status of colleges with potential for excellence. Large size in numbers and diversity in institutional arrangements are the distinct features of the growth in higher education after independence. It is estimated that everyday 7 or 8 new institutions are added to the pool of institutions. In spite of this impressive growth, the GER is still below the international average and much below the developed countries' average. The access to weaker sections is not in proportion to their size of population, particularly in the case of Scheduled Tribes and Minorities. The growth of institutions is unplanned and differentiation in terms of size is another feature of the higher education system. There are wide differences in the number of colleges affiliated to universities. There are a total of 278 affiliating universities; of them 16 universities have

more than 500 colleges affiliated to them. There are wide variations in the student enrolment and number of programmes offered by colleges. Around 40 percent of colleges run only single programmes. A little over 20 percent of colleges have less than 100 enrolment, and 63 percent of colleges have an enrolment of less than 500. The optimality of size of colleges and universities and their rationalisation need to be addressed. The Institutional diversity had also resulted in the emergence of a highly differential and pyramidal structure with a small number of resource-rich elite institutions at the top and a large number of resource starved, average and below average institutions at the bottom. (Most of the data for this section is from MHRD Annual Report 2015-16 and AIU University News, January 30 – February 05, 2017).

## **Affiliating System**

Affiliation is form of recognition given to colleges by the university to conduct examinations and award degrees to the students admitted to colleges for education. This system was introduced in 1857, by three universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, mainly to maintain uniformity in standards and to ensure the credibility of degrees. The same system is continuing, may be with minor changes, even after 160 years. The system is modelled on London University of UK. Interestingly, London University had changed that system in 1858 itself, one year after the system was introduced in India. It is paradoxical that most of the governance structures of our academic institutions have not changed much from what we inherited from the British. Many Commissions and Committees have examined the affiliating system and made many recommendations from total abolition of the system to radical transformations to reducing the number of affiliated colleges to a university. It is an interesting case where everyone is agreeing on the need for reform but not much is happening on the ground. There are many reasons for this situation may be we want reforms but are not sure how to go about the process. May be we are used to it and the system is serving some useful purpose and alternatives suggested are no better and over a period of time the system has developed its own vested interests, keeping it alive. We observe that many affiliating universities have a vested interest in keeping the affiliating system in place as it is being used by them for resources mobilisation and also for enjoying the suzerainty. The original purpose of university affiliation which was to maintain the standards of education provided by colleges is not taken seriously by

many universities. In the Indian context, the affiliating system has a relevance, provided appropriate systems and processes are developed to ensure healthy relationships between colleges and universities. The critical problem is not how many colleges are affiliated to a university, but it is more a concern of appreciating the philosophy of partnership and designing appropriate managerial and academic systems of relationships. Universities should respect the autonomy of colleges and colleges should fulfil their academic responsibilities as prescribed by universities. This may be an ideal situation. However disturbing the ground situation may be, we must set an ideal goal and continuously work to realise that vision.

## **The Concerns**

Philip Altbach, expert on international higher education, commented that “India is a world class country without world class higher education”. The paradox is that we have many in the list of the 100 world is richest persons, but not even one in the list of 100 best universities in the world. The deep crisis of higher education is acknowledged by both admirers of the present model and critics who are looking for alternatives. Some of the concerns are:

### **Limited and Unequal Access**

Even though there is an impressive increase in higher education opportunities since independence, they are still below the requirements of a developing country. The 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2012-2017) aims to increase GER to 30 percent. It requires additional admission of 7 to 8 million students and mostly they must be from the lower middle class and other weaker sections and from backward regions and rural areas. It requires considerable investment in public sector and qualified faculty and other learning resources. Here some questions need particular attention. **Firstly**, the present limited access is also characterized by multiple and graded inequalities. The GER among SC, ST, Minorities, and Women is low compared to national average. There are also rural- urban, regional and sectoral disparities. Equity in education cannot achieved merely by enhancing their enrolment; it is also about enhancing their presence in the centres of excellence and taking care of their post admission needs. The dropout rates among SC, ST, and Minorities are also higher compared to averages. Reservations may be enabling access to education to weaker-sections, but are not adequately addressing the equality in processes

and equality in outcomes. **Secondly**, the State is unwilling to spend more on education and is looking for private participation and public-private participation models to address the requirements of expansion. But are the private providers interested in providing educational opportunities to hitherto marginalized sections? Do they have sufficient incentives to engage in education of tribes and people in rural areas? The expansion strategies should take note of these ground realities. **Thirdly**, may be for different reasons the economy is not able to absorb the present output of higher education. The further expansion of higher education should take care of the capacity of the economy to provide meaningful opportunities to the educated workforce. The capital intensive development approaches may not be able to absorb the increased output of the higher education. **Fourthly**, the unplanned expansion may result in low quality. There is a need for systematic planning and effective measures for the development of human resources required for expansion. The new entrants to higher education, particularly the first generation of learners may require remedial education to enable them to cope with the competition. The expansion should not result in dilution of standards and excellence.

### **The Question of Relevance**

Training of humans as a productive force and acting as an important instrument to produce change are considered two important functions of education (RS Rao in 'On Education'). The failure of our higher education system to effectively discharge these two functions is obvious. Many studies pointed the skill deficiency of higher education products. Most of the students coming out of educational institutions with impressive grades and qualifications do not possess useful skills for any activity and they are considered as unemployable. This is true not only of 70 percent of students pursuing liberal education, but equally applicable to professional education. The analytical and problem solving abilities of liberal education students and application skills of professional students are not adequately developed in our higher education system. This raises the question of relevance. R.S.Rao emphasizing the importance of education to equip the human being with fund of knowledge to face the uncertainties that exist in real life situation, felt that our education system is moving from unknown to unknown. May be we are learning to express our ignorance in scientific terms. The mismatch between knowledge and qualifications is a serious concern of higher education.



Another dimension of relevance is the limitations in the transformative role of education. Education is an enabling factor, not only for economic development, but for human freedom by inspiring people for collective action for human freedom. We have a long tradition of educated middle class, the products of British higher education working for India's independence. In post independent India, many universities and colleges were centres of radical politics aimed at social transformation. 'Study and struggle' influenced many young minds. In recent years we find a shift in institutional and student concerns. The Institutional practices are more market driven and student orientation is more carrier driven and identity driven. R.S.Rao felt that the objective of filtering and pricing out become predominant of the education system, leaving out the creative and constructive role of education. Lack of importance given to humanities and social sciences in the university system is a symptom of the narrow view of purposes of education. The focus of education for holistic development of human personality is missing.

### **Uneven Quality and Lack of Excellence**

The relevance question leads to concerns for quality and excellence. Massification of education, increasing competitiveness in the field, demand-supply mismatch, failure of self-regulation by the system and market orientation are some of the factors for increasing focus on quality and excellence in higher education. We have a system of external assessment and accreditation of Universities and Colleges by public agencies like NAAC, NBA, DEC and others. We have a serious situation of unevenness in the quality of our higher education institutions. We have some good institutions, comparable to the best in the world and a large number of average and below average institutions. In a three point grading of A, B, C by National Assessment and Accreditation (NAAC), around 10 per cent of institutions come under A category, around 30 per cent under B category and around 60 per cent under C category. This unevenness in quality is mainly a great disadvantage to the students from weaker sections. Their access to institutions of excellence is very limited. This is resulting in increasing inequalities in education. Quality is a function of (i) clearly stated vision and mission; (ii) committed and competent faculty; (iii) motivated learners; (iv) innovative teaching-learning practices; (v) sufficient infrastructure and learning resources (vi) effective governance system and; (vii) continuous improvement. There are wide variations in all these

matters. The failure of internal assurance systems within the institutions is the concern of quality in higher education. Lack of professional and performance orientation of teaching community and low learning motivation of students is commented upon by many observers of the system. It is estimated that more than 40 per cent of the faculty positions are vacant in many universities and colleges. How can we ensure quality in this context?

### **Private Higher Education for Profit**

There is a phenomenal growth of private higher education institutions particularly during the last two decades. There are around 267 private universities constituting 35 percent of universities. Around 80 percent of colleges in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are private colleges, mostly unaided. Around 90 percent of professional education institutions are in the private sector. The process of privatisation is a world-wide phenomenon, mainly influenced by neo-liberal policies. There are different types of private institutions. In the colonial period and in the early post-independent period private institutions were supported by philanthropy, religious and social organisations. Today the private sector is dominated by profit making educational entrepreneurs of all types. On the positive side, the private sector has played an important role in increasing the access to higher education, may be mostly to those who can afford to pay. The negative role of unhealthy business practices by some of the private institutions is a serious social problem. These institutions focus on developing 'obedient production units' which may not serve the larger goals of education in a democratic society. Considering the Indian scenario, there is a need for co-existence of public and private sectors in higher education, with public sector in commanding heights as a pace-setter. The private sector, as a form of community participation in education can play a very important supportive role. Prof V.C. Kulandai Swamy rightly observed that 'if there is honesty and efficiency at the levels where approvals are granted and performance is monitored, all will be well'. What is needed as a prerequisite is a well-defined and positive policy announcement encompassing colleges and universities in the private sector and providing clear guidelines on establishment and maintenance of these institutions. Making private education a 'public good' is a challenging transformative task in higher education.

## **Commercialization of ODL**

Open and distance learning (ODL) is considered as an alternative form of education suitable for developing countries to enhance access to higher education. Andhra Pradesh is the first state to establish Open University in 1982 followed by Indira Gandhi Open University at the national level in 1985. There are 17 open universities in the country with a total of enrolment of around 4 million students. The system is mainly designed to increase access and provide flexibility to the learner. The technology is to be extensively used for education and training. Unfortunately market values have overtaken this mode of education. The private sector has entered in a big way to make money, sacrificing quality. Even public institutions are using this mode to mobilize resources and to make profits. These practices of ODL have compromised with the quality of higher education, raising questions on the desirability of this mode of education. This is an example of bad use of a good practice.

## **Low Public Expenditure on Higher Education**

Public expenditure on higher education has increased remarkably in India during the post independent period from 0.64 percent in 1951-52 to 3.85 percent of GDP in 2009-10. However, the growth has not been impressive or adequate if one examines the expenditures in real prices and per student. Many Committees and Commissions including earlier national policies of 1968 and 1986/92 had recommended 6 percent of GDP as per the norm for the national outlay on education. However the actual expenditure never exceeded 4 percent in education and never more than 1.5 percent in higher education. Inadequacy in availability and inequity in the distribution of public resources within the system are the two distinct features of public expenditure in higher education. The unwillingness of government to spend more on public education makes the system uncompetitive in a highly competitive world and deprives good educational opportunities to poor who are mostly depending on public institutions for higher education.

The UGC annual budget allocation hovers around 4500 crores without much change during last three years. A large chunk of the UGC grant goes to 40 central universities with very little going to state universities and colleges. Only around 10 thousand colleges out of 40 thousand colleges are eligible for central

assistance. Many new state universities are also not eligible for central assistance, because of not fulfilling the conditions set by the UGC. The HRD Ministry has initiated a scheme of Rashtriya Uchchar Siksha Abhiyan (RUSA) for governance reforms and performance-based funding to state universities and colleges on 65:35 ratio. In practice, many state governments are not effectively able to use RUSA funds because of the 35 percent contribution to be made by them. The government is also expecting the public universities to raise their own resources and become self-sufficient. Failure of many public institutions to make optimum utilisation of resources is another side of the problem. Though unstated, the government is gradually withdrawing from direct funding of higher education, leaving the field to the private sector. All this is leading to more in-egalitarian higher education system resulting in new inequalities and new conflicts in the society.

### **Ineffective Regulation and Monitoring of the System**

The State has a responsibility to regulate and monitor the system for maintenance of standards and excellence. Very elaborate structures were created for regulation of higher education system. There are more than 13 national level councils with overlapping authorities to regulate different sectors of higher education. There are always problems in regulating self-regulating and autonomous institutions like Universities. From a public accountability perspective, the state has a responsibility to regulate the behaviour of autonomous institutions particularly when they have ineffective internal self-regulatory systems. Indian universities and colleges are not known for having effective internal self-regulating systems.

Developing appropriate regulatory mechanisms for ensuring flexibility, autonomy and accountability of higher education institutions is a challenging task. Many observers of higher education in India have commented on the rigidity and ineffectiveness of regulatory systems and the rent seeking nature of state activities. There are many suggestions made by many Committees and Commissions, particularly Gnanam Committee, National Knowledge Commission and Yashpal Committee which deserve serious consideration. Presently, the Government of India is examining the feasibility of establishing a single regulatory authority for higher and technical education.

## **Are We Moving / Going in the Right Direction?**

It is said that 'if we don't know where we are going then all roads lead to the destination'. In charting the higher education journey since independence, we are in that situation. We are certainly moving, sometimes very fast in different directions, forward and backward. Seven decades of higher education in India has many achievements. Massive expansion of the system, more inclusive opportunities to women and other weaker sections, development of human resources, expansion of knowledge, providing opportunities for upward mobility, raising expectations of people and providing space for democratic struggles are some of the commendable achievements of the system. The system has also many limitations. Poor quality of education, lack of employable skills and employment opportunities, failure to develop social sensibilities among the educated, failure to develop ethical and moral leadership to manage institutions, inequalities in access to educational opportunities, skewed distribution of public resources among the educational institutions, pyramidal structure, new inequalities in society and narrowing vision of university are some of them. The system is also bogged down with many internal governance problems. The narrow caste, religious, regional and ideological cleavages within the institutional life are dissipating their energies. Against this backdrop the unimaginative and uninspiring academic leadership is adding its might to the crisis in higher education. There are many contradictions between stated objectives and ground practices. There is a need for clear policy direction and efficient execution of policies.

## **Alternate Way Forward**

The alternate way forward is to advocate for an egalitarian model with more active role for state, academics and students. The State should not only provide more funds, but also play an active role in resolving contradictions in their multiple initiatives. Structural arrangements are necessary to adequately address inequalities in access, processes and outcomes. The equality and quality concerns are to be balanced. The regulatory and monitoring systems should be more fair and transparent. Ensuring the private sector serves the public interest is a challenging task. Public sector shaping the rules of the game and private sector effectively complementing the public purpose will be an ideal situation. Autonomy with accountability is a prerequisite to regenerate the systems. The loss of autonomy of universities is very obvious. The

bureaucratization of the governance system is not conducive for the creative role of higher education. Shared governance system is part of the democratization of higher education. Here the academic community has a critical role. The field situation of the attitudes and behaviour of the academic community is not inspiring. The observers of the field are of the opinion that positive academic impulses are missing in the behavioural responses of most academics. The commitment and competence of academic staff is a critical factor in the excellence of the academic institution. There are four types of combinations of variables of competence and commitment. These are: (a) committed and competent; (b) committed but not competent; (c) competent but not committed; and (d) neither committed nor competent. We have a mix of these in all the institutions. Successful institutions are those with more committed and competent staff. Students also have a very important role in making the system relevant to their individual needs and to the social needs. They should be active participants in the creation of knowledge and use of knowledge for life and living.

## **Concluding Observations**

It is one thing to diagnose the problems and another to find and implement the solutions. Education is too serious a matter to be left to educationists alone. The strengths and limitations of higher education are a product of its social system. Education at one level is a product of the context and at another level is a way to change its context. We have to understand the dialectical relationship between society and education. We have to look at things with a pragmatic eye and continue to engage in strengthening the positives in the system and limiting the impact of negatives on the system, with the realisation that educational transformation is linked to social transformation. Machiavelli has rightly commented on the difficulties in bringing in a new order of things. There is a need to evolve national consensus on the broad contours of the higher education system and actively involve all stake holders in the execution of policies and programmes.

# 2

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## **Institution Building in Higher Education : Challenges of Leadership**

*“Efficiency is doing things right: effectiveness is doing the right things”*

**- Peter Drucker**

### **Institution-building in Higher Education**

**I**nstitutions are generally understood to be ‘the formal bounded framework of rules, roles and identities’. Universities and Colleges are the two broad organisational forms of higher education institutions in India. These institutions play a very important role in nation building. Jawaharlal Nehru rightly observes: “If universities discharge their duty adequately, then it is well with the nation and people”. Institution-building is a process of development of beliefs, paradigms, codes, cultures, and knowledge appropriate to rules, roles and identities. Building of universities is a complex and difficult task not fully understood and appreciated by many. Pratap Bhanu Mehta writing on universities humorously and aptly remarked that: “Building of universities is understood by some as construction of buildings for universities”. Here the institution-building is used as an explanatory variable to understand the various factors that affect the performance of an institution and the impact that performance has on broader outcomes. The focus of discussion is on public universities, particularly on the challenges of leadership in institution building.



## **Challenges of Leadership**

Leadership is a process of leading change. The Vice Chancellor, the academic and administrative head of the University is expected to lead the change. The Indian Universities are in perpetual crisis. Many of them are characterised by unfulfilled greatness i.e., their potential is not fully realised. This crisis is partly a reflection of the crisis of leadership. Some of the challenges of leadership are discussed below.

## **Coping with the Changing Context**

At the time of independence, the higher education system was largely an elitist and small system. It was primarily a state led system with focus on general education. Education was considered a public good. Today, it is a huge and diverse system with market forces mostly influencing the agenda of higher education.

The huge size and diversity, commercialisation, narrow focus of vision and mission with more emphasis on technical skills and employable programmes to the detriment of other dimensions of learning, loss of autonomy, ineffective governance systems, insufficient resources, depletion of permanent staff and widespread malpractices are some of the serious concerns of our university system. Maintenance of order has become a primary activity of university administration. Lack of trust between administration, teachers and students is resulting in adversarial conflict. Personal abuse has become a form of protest. Academic impulses are missing in the academic community. Academics are held together more by common grievances rather than by common goals. Ambition for power and perks and misuse of identity politics are distracting the energies of the academic community leaving little room for institution-building. There is an increasing dependence on external forces to maintain internal peace. This naturally leads to loss of autonomy. The running of a university is becoming more a law and order activity resulting in the government looking for a “tough” Vice Chancellor. In this process the purpose of the university as a centre of learning and knowledge creation may be lost. It needs a serious reflection, particularly on the part of teachers and students. Serious observers of campus disturbances rightly observe that: “the students are not the cause for problems but they are the victims of problems”. The leader has to have the contextual intelligence. This

refers to the ability of the leader to understand the macro and micro level factors that are at play during a given period of time.

## **Choice of Right Leader**

The Reports of many Commissions and Committees on higher education starting with Radhakrishna Commission have highlighted the important role of Vice Chancellor in maintaining the quality and relevance of universities. Kothari Commission observes: “A Vice Chancellor is one who stands for the commitment of the university to scholarship and pursuit of truth. A Vice Chancellor should be a person with vision and have qualities of academic leadership with ability for administration. He should command high respect among all sections of society” (Kothari Commissions, 1964-66).

During the initial years of independence there were only a few universities and men of eminence from various walks of life were appointed as Vice Chancellors. With the massive expansion of the system, raising expectations of academics for positions and increasing politicisation of appointments, the choice of right persons is becoming more and more difficult. What type of person should be appointed as a Vice Chancellor is a million dollar question. There are diverse views and different systems of appointment of Vice Chancellors in Indian Universities.

Amanda H. Goodall in his article on “Why Socrates should be in the Boardroom in Research Universities”, discusses the question of relationship of university performance and leadership and has drawn a number of conclusions based on a study of 100 universities throughout the world. The conclusions reached by the author could be summarized as follows: (i) the best Universities in the world are led by more established scholars; (ii) the scholar-leaders are considered to be more credible leaders in Universities, commanding greater respect from their academic peers. (iii) setting an organisation’s academic standards is a significant part of the function of the Vice-Chancellor and hence one should expect the standard bearer to first bear that standard. (iv) a leader, who is an established scholar, signals the institution’s priorities, internally to its faculties and externally to potential new academic recruits, students, alumni, donors and the media. (v) since scholarship cannot be viewed as a proxy for either management experience or leadership skills, an expert leader must also have expertise in areas other than scholarship.

(Quoted in Supreme Court judgement in Kalyani Mathivant versus K.V. Jayaraj and others, March 11, 2015.)

University Grants Commission has formulated regulations on minimum conditions for appointment of Vice Chancellors in 2010. These regulations are not uniformly followed in the country and are the subject of Court disputes. In a recent judgment of Supreme Court in March 2015 the court upheld the right of the state government to formulate its own regulations on appointment of Vice Chancellors (Supreme Court judgement in Kalyani Mathivant versus K.V. Jayaraj and others, March 11, 2015). The centre and states are following different rules and procedures for appointment of Vice Chancellors (see K. Sudha Rao and Mithilesh Kumar Singh, Appointment of Vice Chancellor: Rules, Procedures and Intentions, [www.aserf.org.in](http://www.aserf.org.in)). Telangana, a new State in India formed in 2014 is engaged in evolving its own system of appointment of Vice Chancellors. In a democracy it is natural for a political system to have a say in the appointment of Vice Chancellors. Increasingly the political system, irrespective of parties in power, is looking for persons of “committed eminence” for appointment as Vice Chancellors. Balancing the socio-political factors and institutional requirements is a challenging political choice. The more disturbing situation is the absence of regular Vice Chancellor for long periods of time at many Central and State Universities. Lack of a succession plan is crippling the university administration.

## **What is to be Done?**

In the context of new realities of higher education, the institution-building in higher education may have to focus on many critical issues, some of which are mentioned below.

## **Public Reasoning on Crises Situation**

The current situation is alarming and needs the immediate attention of all stakeholders to transform the situation. In a way, the attempt at transformation is an intellectual journey from symptoms to causes; from causes to remedies and from remedies to actions. There is a need for convergence of this intellectual journey among all the external and internal stakeholders in higher education. To transform this situation we need three forms of understanding. (a) Critique of the way things are; (b) Vision of how they should be; and (c) Theory of change

about how to move from one to the other. In most cases our understanding is beginning and ending in the first stage only. In this context it is refreshing to note the critical response by Academics for Creative Reforms (a group of teachers of central universities) on “What is to be done about Indian Universities” (EPW June 13, 2015). It is a considered response to recent policies and direction issued by University Grants Commission. There is a need for more public reasoning activities of this type where problems are identified and discussed with alternative solutions.

## **Vision of Transformation**

There is a need to re-emphasise the public good aspect of higher education. Strengthening of public higher education institutions with more resources, autonomy in operations and accountability for results is necessary. The university as a space for equal opportunity; a space for critical training; and a space for acquiring professional competencies should be recognised. Emphasizing the multiple purposes of education, Ken Robinson identified the four purposes of education as **i. Economic**-should enable people to be economically responsible and independent; **ii. Cultural**- should enable students to understand and appreciate their own culture and to respect the diversity of others; **iii. Social**- should enable young people to become active and compassionate citizens; and **iv. Personal**-should enable young people to engage with the world within them as well as the world around them. The challenge for the university is to develop appropriate programmes, curriculum and pedagogy to achieve the multiple purposes of university education.

## **Effective Governance**

Governance, as a process of realisation of public goals is critical in institution-building. The collegiate model of governance is not in place in many institutions. The academics who are expected to play an effective role in the administration in the collegiate model are becoming more prone to bureaucratic behaviour than traditional administrators. The participatory element in self-governance is mostly absent. The internal structures of self-governance like Boards of Managements, Academic Councils, Planning Boards and School Boards are not constituted fully in most institutions and are mostly ineffective. The emergence

of person-centric leadership in the system is also partly the result of a failure of the collective mechanisms. The collective activity is also resulting in more friction in the institution, may be because of loss of purpose of these bodies. In some institutions there are attempts to follow the corporate governance model which focuses on leadership from above and management by the results. The university system may have to develop its own eclectic form of governance by drawing the best elements of collegiate, corporate and bureaucratic models. The continuous assessment of performance, target-based project approaches, and extensive use of technology for efficiency and transparency may improve the quality of governance. Ineffective governance may also result in loss of autonomy. There are many instances of misuse of autonomy by Vice Chancellors. Misuse of autonomy delegitimises the autonomy and increases the government control. In this process the universities which were considered at one time as 'state within a state' are becoming units of the state education department. Failure of self-governance and the political systems unwillingness to accept 'limits to power' are equally responsible for loss of university autonomy. The external regulatory systems are not effective in checking the malpractices in the education system. The regulatory systems themselves are charged of many malpractices. Integrity, transparency and timely action are essential attributes of an effective regulatory system. Monitoring of performance is more important than meddling in day-to-day operations. The higher education system in India is the most ineffectively over-regulated system. All these need critical reflection and corrective action.

## Tempered Radicals as Leaders

The first priority is the timely appointment of regular Vice Chancellors in all universities. The follow-up question is what type of leaders are to be appointed. All of us may have different answers depending on our own understanding of the requirements. APJ Abdul Kalam, has identified four qualities of leadership: **i. Vision, ii. Passion, iii. Integrity and iv. Courage.** To me **professional competences** and **sincerity of purpose** are the two essential requirements of a leader to be an effective institution-builder. Professional competence includes domain knowledge, team building and effective communication abilities. Sincerity of purpose include integrity, trust and knowledge of self. There are many role models who symbolised these qualities and showed by example the leader's role in institution- building. The public image of the leader is very

important to develop internal and external support systems. The position is to be considered as an opportunity for institution building. The institution-builder should be a task-oriented leader. By nature the leaders should be a **‘tempered-radicals’**. The tempered-radicals are those who want to succeed in their organisations, yet want to live by their values and identities, even if they are somewhat at odds with the dominant culture of their organisation. To put it differently, the leader should have pragmatic intelligence - the mental ability to cope with challenges and opportunities of their position.

## **Concluding Observations**

Institutions, as forms of social organizations are critical to realise the vision and mission of higher education. The structure, process and behaviour of people in educational organizations shapes their future. Structure with properly-defined roles, responsibilities and relationships, appropriate processes to operationalise the activities and behaviours based on trust, fairness and personal responsibility are essential for efficient and effective functioning of higher education institutions. Lack of these things result in governance deficit. The ground situation in higher education is not inspiring. Here leadership plays a very important role to set things right and take the institution forward to meet the new goals. It is possible only with the right person being in the right place.

# 3

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## **New Realities in Higher Education Challenges and Prospects**

*“It was the best times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness....”*

**- Charles Dickens**

### **New Realities of Higher Education**

**E**ducation is a social process. The continuity and change in education systems of different nations is a reflection of their different pasts, contemporary situations and future hopes. From *Gurukula* to Modern Systems of Education in our society is a reflection of our past, present social context and our future hopes. Added to this there is the context of ‘global village’ and developments in ‘knowledge technologies’. To understand the new realities of higher education, we may benchmark the broad features of higher education at the time of independence and identify the elements of change as new realities of education.

### **Broad Features of Higher Education at the Time of Independence**

Some of the distinct features of higher education at the time of Independence, (1947) are:

- A. *Mostly an elitist and small system***
- B. *Primarily a State led system***
- C. *The primary focus was on general education***

- D. An affiliating system*
- E. Education is considered a “public good”*

## **Broad Features of Today’s Higher Education System**

During the last seven decades after independence, many far-reaching changes are observed in the field of higher education, triggered by new national and international realities. There are many changes and some continuity. Some of the significant trends of change are:

- A. From exclusion to inclusion*
- B. From teaching centric to learning centric*
- C. From fixed space and time to anywhere and anytime*
- D. From primarily state- centric activity to market centric activity*
- E. From primary classroom mediated form to technology mediated form*
- F. From education to life to education for making a living*
- G. From nation-centric activity to a global activity.*

## **Challenges and Prospects**

There is a continuity and change in these transformations. These changes are in different stages in different institutions and in different parts of the country. The context is diverse and complex, and every generalisation has many exceptions. As an analytical frame for understanding, some challenges and prospects are identified for critical appreciation of these new realities. Some of these include:

## **Huge Size and Diversity**

The Indian higher education system has undergone unprecedented growth especially during the last two decades. India has the largest number of educational institutions and is the third largest system in the world in terms of student enrolment. Total degree granting institutions are around 900 which include Central



Universities (47) public state universities (384), private state universities (303), private and public deemed universities (123), institutions of national importance (50) and institutions established under state legislature (05). There are around 40 thousand colleges affiliated to state and central universities. The total estimated student enrolment is around 35 million with around 1.4 million teachers. The gross enrolment ratio (GER) is estimated at around 24 percent in 2017. In spite of this impressive expansion in numbers, access to higher education is still low compared to the world average GER of 28 percent and developed countries' average of 60 to 90 percent. The Government of India has set itself a target of making GER 30 percent by 2020. Making primary education a fundamental right and the target of universal secondary education may also result in a greater demand for higher education. How to ensure the required quantitative expansion of higher education without compromising on quality is a challenging task. The expansion in higher education is a classic example of unplanned growth. The growth in management and engineering education is the best example of unplanned growth. There are around 4000 management schools and around same number of engineering colleges in the country. Most of them do not have qualified and competent faculty and a proper learning landscape. The expansion is mostly unplanned and is a short sighted response to market opportunities (particularly in professional education) without taking enough care of faculty availability, resources for learning infrastructure and the economy's absorbing capacity of outputs of education. There is also a social justice deficit in this expansion with lower representation to SC, ST, Minorities and Rural target groups compared to their percentages in population. We may be happy at the prospect of increasing availability of human resource in science, technology and professional areas with the expansion of educational opportunities in these areas. But we are equally concerned about the poor quality of these resources and the graded inequalities in opportunities.

## **Private Higher Education**

An important feature of the very high rate of growth of higher education experienced in India particularly since the beginning of the 1990s, is the alarming growth of private higher education. The size of the private sector is about twice that of the public sector in terms of number of institutions and student enrolments.

(Jandhyala B.G Tilak, Private Higher Education in India, Economic and Political Weekly, December 2014). In professional education like Management, Engineering, Pharmacy, the private sector occupies more than 90 percent of space. There are different forms of privatisation. It may not be proper to paint all the private sector education with the same brush. There are community sponsored private institutions as a social service activity. There are philanthropy oriented private institutions, though their numbers are decreasing in recent years. There are a large number of private institutions mostly established during the last two decades, operating as profit making ventures. They result in commercialisation and commoditisation of education which is the negation of philosophy of education as a civilizing activity. It is observed that most of the Educational Trusts are not trust worthy. The commercialisation and profit orientation is also resulting in the promotion of many corrupt practices in higher education. The equity principle, the foundation of an education system in a democracy is also compromised. The public-private partnership, though a desirable form in principle, in many cases is used as a cover for private use of public funds. We have Christian Missionary educational institutions, Ramakrishna Mission educational institutions, Tata institutions, Siddardha and JKC institutions in this part of the country and many other examples of commendable educational service providers in the private sector. We may have to draw a distinction between the private sector and the commercial sector and a further distinction between community participation and family ownership of educational institutions. Even in capitalist countries education is not generally used for capital accumulation. Ensuring public good through private education is a challenging task. Recognising the important role played by the private sector in enhancing educational opportunities, more public debate on the role of private sector in education is necessary to understand the different dimensions of the problem from multiple perspectives.

## Relevance

Education to **lead a life** and to **make a living** are considered the twin objectives of education. Many experts in education are critical of the present education system in general because it is not able to satisfactorily fulfil these two objectives. In India we have many more serious problems. We are neither able to produce the best minds nor the best hands through our education. The education commissions and committees from the first Education

Commission under the Chairmanship of S.Radhakrishnan to the latest Yashpal Committee emphasised the broader objectives of education and universities. S.Radhakrishnan, in the first Education Commission Report (1948-49) observed: “Education not only makes students intellectually competent and professionally skilful, but also civilized in emotions and refined in purpose”. Yashpal Committee (2009) discussing the idea of universities observed: “It is a unique space which covers the entire universe of knowledge. It is a place where creative minds converge, interact with each other and construct vision of new realities. Established norms of truth are challenged in the pursuit of knowledge”. In today’s market-dominated economy and society these broader goals of education are not given enough importance. Now the relevance of education is reduced to employability. The pendulum is moving from education for life to education to make a living. Here also a huge deficit is observed. Many studies focus on the un-employability of our graduates. The focus should be on an integrated view of the purpose of education i.e., to develop employable competencies and civilization competencies. This is a common concern of educational systems in developed and developing countries.

Recognising the skill deficiency in higher education Government of India created a separate Ministry for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. The MHRD and UGC has initiated a number of measures for skill development. American Community Colleges 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Outcomes Project identified 21<sup>st</sup> century skills like: **Communication skills** (reading, writing, speaking listening); **Computation skills** (understanding and applying mathematical concepts and reasoning, analysing and using numerical data); **Community skills** (citizenship; appreciation of diversity and pluralism; local, community, global, and environmental awareness); **Critical thinking and problem-solving skills** (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, decision making, creative thinking); **Information management skills** (collecting, analysing, and organizing information from a variety of sources); **Interpersonal skills** (teamwork, relationship management, conflict resolution, workplace skills); **Personal skills** (ability to understand and manage self, management of change, learning to learn, personal responsibility, aesthetic responsiveness, wellness); **Technology skills** (computer literacy, Internet skills, retrieving and managing information via technology) which are to be the focus of 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education. Are our educational institutions designing our teaching – learning processes to develop these skills? May be some of them are doing 80.

Paying a left handed compliment to American Business school education, Russell L. Ackoff of Warton has this to say: The principal achievements of business education are: **First** to equip students with a vocabulary that enables them to talk authoritatively about subjects they did not understand. **Second** to give students the ability to withstand any amount of disconfirming evidence. **Third** to give students a ticket of admission to a job where they can learn something about management. If somebody thinks these observations are also true of most of Indian Business Schools, it may be difficult to disagree.

## ICT in Higher Education

Mind-boggling developments are taking place in knowledge technologies. The open and distance learning systems are extensively used for enhancing access; for enabling flexibility in teaching-learning; for enrichment of learning and for lifelong learning and continuous up-gradation of skills and competencies. For large countries like India and China, e- learning and other ODL technologies are considered appropriate to skill development and up-gradation of the skills of millions of workforce. Khan Academy e-learning courses are widely used in America for enrichment of school education in science and mathematics. The Open Educational Resources (OER), the e-learning educational resources which are freely available to all on the net - based on the philosophy of knowledge as a common wealth - is a development of fundamental significance in the world of education. The best institutions in the world like MIT and British Open University are making available to all free of cost their educational materials under creative commons network. Learning resources of some of the best Business Schools are available to all on net. The internet becomes a great source of learning, challenging the traditional monopoly of teacher as the only source of knowledge. There is a paradigm shift in higher education. The major shift has been from an **instructional paradigm to learning paradigm**. In the instructional paradigm teacher is the ‘sage on the stage’; and primary source of knowledge transferring it to students; whereas in the learning paradigm the teacher facilitates the learning process as a ‘guide on the side’. In this transformation from instructional paradigm to learning paradigm where do we locate Indian higher education institutions and what steps are needed for this transformation are the critical questions to address.

Another important development in e-learning is Massive Open Online Courses, popularly known as MOOCs. A prestigious institution like Stanford University is offering MOOCs on Artificial Intelligence free of charge and open to all who are interested in enriching their knowledge. In India UGC and MHRD are taking many initiatives in offering MOOCs to increase access to higher education and address educational needs of a learning society. The students can use this opportunity by enrolling in relevant programmes as add on facility. This provides then a great opportunity to broaden their knowledge in areas, where traditional learning programmes may not be able to accommodate.

## **Regulatory Framework**

In the constitutional scheme of things education is in the concurrent list with centre and states having shared jurisdiction. The complexity of this system has resulted in multiple regulatory agencies of centre and state being entrusted with the responsibilities of regulating higher education. In this process the self-governing and self-regulated nature of higher education is forgotten and university autonomy is mostly compromised. Many critical observers point out the contradictory trends of over regulation and ineffective regulation. We are moving from a liberal tradition of an instruction being permitted to do everything unless restricted, to an autocratic tradition where everything is restricted unless permitted to be done. Regulatory systems have an important function of ensuring accountability, legality and fairness of operations. In practice, many times regulatory practices are used as rent-seeking activities and are very subjective in nature. The failure of politicians to realise the limits to power, and the narrow power orientation of bureaucracy, coupled with ineffective internal self-regulation mechanisms within the institutions and unscrupulous operations of some educational operators is making the whole system of regulation of higher education very complex and inflexible. Putting in place well designed performance assessment systems, transparency in operations, freedom in operations with accountability for results and fairness, transparency and accountability of regulatory agencies are some of the measures suggested by many commissions on education. Respect for the principle of autonomy by regulatory authorities and respect for the principle of accountability by institutions is necessary for a healthy higher education system.

## **Governance**

Governance, a process of execution of common goals, is critical to the realisation of the vision and mission of higher education. The educational institutions administration as self-governing institutions is based on principles of democratic governance. The leadership, the systems, processes and behaviours are critical for the effective functioning of higher education institutions. Many studies on governance of higher education institutions have brought out the leadership deficit, and ineffective functioning of decision-making bodies like Boards of Management, Academic Councils and Departmental Councils. In many institutions the bodies with full composition are not in place. In a large number of universities in the country regular Vice-Chancellors are not in position. Many Universities are facing charges of internal corruption. The internal systems are accused of bureaucratic maladies and lack of participatory culture and democratic eco-system. The affiliating system is treated more as a resource mobilization and control activity by the Universities, than as a system to support and guide the colleges to provide quality education. Identity politics dominate institutional life. The academic impulses are missing in the institutional life of most of the institutions. Democratic governance is the need of the hour in the higher education system.

## **Quality Concerns**

Quality is one of the major concerns of higher education in India. Failure to find place in the top world universities ranking is often mentioned as a reflection of poor quality. Another serious concern is the low average quality of a large number of institutions and wide diversity in quality. Many experts in the field of management education are of the view that of around 4000 management schools not more than 10 percent can be categorised as 'good quality' institutions. In the 90s the external assessment and accreditation system was introduced to assess quality as a process of ensuring and promoting standard practices. This is also a recognition of the failure of internal system of quality assurance. Many institutions are not voluntarily opting for external assessment for various reasons. Now the UGC has made it a compulsory requirement. The question of who is responsible for the quality of higher education is still not properly answered. The institutions – universities and colleges must take the primary responsibility, with a supportive role by government, employers and other

stakeholders in education. Within the institution the management, faculty and students have their roles in assuring quality. The facilitating roles of management, the operational responsibility of faculty, the feedback of students are critical to the quality of education. Effective internal systems only sustain and promote the quality in higher education. Professionally competent staff is a critical factor in quality.

I understand that in some management schools in India are using films like “Three Idiots” for critical reflections on learning processes. Amir Khan, Actor and Hero in the film “Three Idiots” has these pieces of advice to students (as reported in the press): **one** believe in yourself and don’t let a GPA, performance review or promotion in a job define you. There is more to life than these things - your family, your friends, your internal desires and goals - and grades you get in dealing with each of these areas will define you as a person. **Two**, don’t judge others too quickly, **lastly**, don’t take yourself too seriously.

## Concluding Observations

Charles Dickens aptly captures the spirit of the modern times when he holds that, “**It was the best of time and it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness**”. How do we make sense of such an age? It is here that education plays a very important role. Education as an enlightening experience should help us in making meaning of the complex realities of our time. In identifying the learning outcomes of education the broader objectives of education should be kept in view. What outcomes we can create in the world with the outcomes we have achieved through our learning is the critical text of the relevance of higher education.



# 4

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## **Are the Universities Performing their Social *Dharma*?**

*“The University stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for the adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for the onward march of human race towards even higher objectives. If the universities discharge their duty adequately, then it is well with the nation and the people”.*

**- Jawaharlal Nehru**

### **The Context**

In recent times the Universities are in the news, mostly for negative reasons. These include at one end failure to find a respectable place in the world rankings and un-employability of graduates and at another end sedition charges against students for anti-national activities, suicides of students on allegations of campus discrimination and many more. The recent UNESCO Report observes that ‘India is 50 years behind in achieving its educational goals’. Sensitive souls are selectively disturbed, depending on their social inclinations, by these events and reports. The common inclination is to agree that the present state of higher education is disturbing. The system’s uneven, disorderly and direction-less growth has resulted in a deep crisis in higher education.

### **Social *Dharma* as a Framework**

How do we understand the nature of the crisis in higher education? There are varied responses based on diverse social perspectives. The social churning that is taking place in Indian society during the last seven decades after independence has an impact on developments in the university system.



The emerging heterogeneous nature of student population in the earlier relatively homogeneous space of universities, increasing role of private institutions particularly in professional education and neo-liberal economic policies are greatly influencing the nature and functioning of universities.

What is the purpose of education today is a critical question. The answer to this differs from time to time, place to place and even person to person. There is an element of confusion and contradictions in the goals of education. Mahatma Gandhi said, ‘The real difficulty is people have no idea about what education really is. We assess the value of education in the same manner as we assess the value of land or of shares in the stock exchange market. We want to provide only such education as would enable the student to earn more. We hardly give any thought to the improvement of character of the educated’. Mahatma Gandhi, like Swami Vivekananda and many others focused on the character-building role of education. Social *dharma* of universities raises the question of the role of universities in India’s social, economic, political and cultural development. The Government of India currently is in the process of development of the “National Education Policy”. The main thrust of this policy will be “to devise effective strategies to address divergent challenges for the growth of education in India and realising the potential of the country’s demographic dividend” (Draft National Education Policy 2016). The social *dharma* of universities may provide a framework to assess the relevance of the new education policy to universities.

### **Social *Dharma*: National Development Perspective**

The Social purpose of education is changing over time. During the colonial period the main purpose had been to create a cadre of clerks and officials to run the colonial state. In post-colonial India the civilizational and transformative role of universities is emphasised. The values of the freedom struggle and the Constitutional vision of an egalitarian society have influenced the vision of educational goals. Jawaharlal Nehru’s characterisation of a university as standing for reason, humanism, and adventure of ideas and advancement of human knowledge represents the post-colonial vision of Indian Universities. Nehru further added that, ‘if universities discharge their duty adequately, then it is well with the nation and the people’ (Convocation address delivered at Allahabad University 1947).

S. Radhakrishnan reflected upon the national development vision of education when he said, ‘education should not only make students intellectually competent and professionally skilled but also civilized in emotions and refined in purpose’. The Kothari Commission (1964-66) recommendations emphasised the crucial role of education in national development. The libertarian concept of education advocates the pluralism and democracy in university operations. Education is considered a ‘public good’ and it is the social responsibility of the state to provide education to all. The intrinsic and instrumental value of education is recognised. In this perspective autonomy of university is considered an essential requirement to pursue truth and ‘speak truth to power’. In this perspective ‘public intellectuals’ have an important role and place in the university life as ‘autonomous thinkers’ and ‘advocates of social justice’. Student engagement in social issues should be an integral part of the university’s role in nation building.

### **Social *Dharma*: Individual Development Perspective**

The journey towards the purpose of education is not smooth. Many factors have contributed to the shift in the focus of purpose of education. Structural adjustment policies of early the 90s based on neo-liberal ideological foundations impacted the goals and processes of education. There is a shift from the ‘public good’ perspective to ‘private good’ perspective and the emphasis is on the instrumental role of education. In this ideological shift the self is central.

Today the dominant view of purpose of education is ‘to train people for jobs’. Increasingly the emphasis in education is towards vocational and skill development. The universities are mainly judged by success of trainees coming out of it in getting good placements in the job market. Since the placements in the job market are hierarchically ordered, the universities are also hierarchically ordered. That is the reason for the importance of world rankings and assessment grades. These are viewed by some as a part of marketing of their products in education. The market forces are mostly influencing the agenda of universities. The phenomenal growth of private universities in recent years is partly a response to the market needs. These private universities are mostly focusing on marketable subjects, with little attention to humanities and social sciences.

In this framework there is little scope for engagement of students or staff in public affairs. In the best of times their focus may be on acquiring competencies

to climb the ladder of success, perceived in terms of aspirational goals of making more money. Public intellectuals have limited space in this type of university system as the focus of education is more to train the students for jobs.

## **An Eclectic Approach**

An eclectic approach of selecting the best values and practices can contribute to the individual and national development. The purpose of education is to contribute to produce students / graduates who are a) intellectually competent b) socially sensitive, c) morally upright and d) spiritually oriented.

The public and private sectors may have to co-exist and play complementary and supportive roles in the education sector. In the present context we cannot do away totally with the private sector. The challenge is to synergise the social concerns of public sector and operational efficiency of private sector in educational practices. Synergy of practices should be attempted in critical areas of higher education like inclusiveness, quality and governance. Some of these concerns are reflected in the vision of the draft National Education Policy 2016, presented for national discussion (Some Inputs for Draft National Education Policy 2016, HRD). To quote, ‘The National Education Policy (NEP) 2016 envisions a credible and high- performing education system capable of ensuring inclusive quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all and producing students/graduates equipped with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are required to lead a productive life, participate in the country’s development process, respond to the requirements of the fast changing ever globalising, knowledge-based economy and society’. The goals of education set in the vision statement include:

- Inclusive quality education
- Lifelong learning opportunities
- Acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to lead a productive life
- Participating in the country’s development process
- Responding to the requirements of the fast changing ever-globalising knowledge based economy and society, and
- Establishing a credible and high performing system.

The goals seemingly do not have any objections to make, but the devil is in operational details. Let me briefly reflect on some operational aspects of three critical areas in higher education i.e., inclusiveness, quality and governance.

## **Inclusiveness**

The Indian Constitutional vision envisions promotion of an egalitarian society as the goal of education. Inclusiveness is an important element of the processes of an education to realise the egalitarian vision. The dimension of inclusiveness comprised inclusive access, inclusive programme and inclusive eco-systems. Even today the socially disadvantaged communities are not sufficiently present in student and faculty positions in higher education institutions. They are more poorly represented in private sector. The private sector may have to give serious attention to make their systems more inclusive. Technology can be used to increase access of the disadvantaged to education. The University is a place for the study of a universe, which includes the natural and social world. All branches of knowledge should find a respectable place in the programmes and curriculum of universities. Along with professional programmes, social sciences and humanities should find a respectable place in all universities. In recent years we find a healthy trend, in many reputed public and private professional educational institutions and universities, of integrating humanities and social science programmes in their professional and vocational programmes. Inclusive study should integrate education for 'earning to live' and 'learning to live'. The study programmes should aim to develop intellectual competencies and social sensitivities of students. The focus on interdisciplinary programmes and policies like Choice Based Credit System are welcome developments in the direction of inclusive programmes to realise inclusive goals of education.

The heterogeneity of student population and diverse ideological orientation of students and staff is a fact of campus life. Creating an inclusive eco-system for free expression of ideas and self-dignity of students, particularly those coming from socially disadvantaged sections of society is necessary. Discrimination is a fact of our social life and universities are no exception. Universities have a special responsibility to work against discriminatory practices in all their operations. The UGC has framed regulations against discrimination in campuses to be followed by all universities. The problem is that most of the universities do not have any well designed systems to implement

these regulations. The inclusive eco- system of the education institution is a pre-requisite to realise the vision of inclusiveness in education.

## Quality Concerns

Quality is one of the critical concerns of higher education. Nature of quality deficit, systems of quality assessment, ways of quality improvement and sustenance are the major concerns of quality. There are elitist concerns and mass concerns of quality deficit in higher education. Failure to find a place in world ranking is more an elitist concern. The mass concern is more about uneven quality and poor quality of education in many state universities, private colleges and colleges in rural areas. The skill deficit and social deficit of graduates is the another concern. All these need a critical reflection to find solutions.

Since 1994, NAAC and NBA have been engaged in quality assessment of higher education institutions and programmes respectively. The system is evolving and needs critical reflection to find out whether right things are assessed and whether things are measured rightly in assessing the quality. Quality measurement is a contentious issue with genuine apprehensions. Marketization of education has also resulted in the creeping of many undesirable practices in assessment and grading. Quality improvement objectives of assessment are side-lined by the craze for grades for various reasons. The present assessment systems followed by different assessment agencies need a thorough re-examination taking note of the changing context of education and international best practices.

Quality deficit is a result of collective failure of all stakeholders in higher education. The State and other external players may have to share the major responsibility for staff, resource and regulatory system deficits. Internal players like institutional leadership, staff and students have to own major responsibility for deficits in day-to-day operations. Role alignment of leadership, staff, students and techno-structure is necessary to ensure institutional quality. Failure of leadership, lack of work culture among staff and lack of seriousness among students for hard work are the concerns of the system adversely commented upon by many educationists. Andre Beteille opined that the 'academic impulse' is missing in many campuses of universities. He further felt that academic life is vitiated by identity politics. Information and communication technologies can play an important role in enriching the quality

of education and transforming the nature of educational operations. Open Educational Resources (OER) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) will enable the free access to wider knowledge resources. It is necessary to realise that the quality is to be nourished and it is a function of both resources and attitudes.

## **Governance Concerns**

Putting in place a credible high performing system is critical to the realisation of objectives of a university. There is a shift in university administration from Weberian administrative design which focuses on structures and procedures to governance design which focuses on results, networking and participation. Leadership and regulatory systems are critical in the governance of universities. The identification of the right leaders to lead the universities is a challenging task. Availability and acceptability are difficult conditions to satisfy. In the context of loose structures and weak traditions in universities, the leader becomes central in governance. The academic reputation and administrative skills of the Vice-Chancellor and his/her team are critical in the performance of the university. Conflict management is becoming a major task of the Vice Chancellor. The abuse is increasingly becoming a form of protest, making thick skin a requirement for Vice Chancellorship. We hope that this is only a passing phase and there is a need to engage in 'public reasoning' on mechanisms to ensure internal peace in campuses. Martin Luther King Jr's maxim that, 'peace is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of justice' is to be taken note of by all Vice Chancellors. The Vice Chancellor and his team has an important role in ensuring the presence of justice in campuses.

Vincent Ostrom interpreted the study of public administration as the study of how people operate in practice. As a student of public administration, I take interest in the study of how people operate in practice in institutions. I am amazed at the paradox of high thoughts and low behaviour in university life. Disengagement with 'public voice and private choice' of academic world is very disturbing. To be an effective leader one has to be true to himself and operate with sincerity of purpose and practical wisdom.

Regulatory system is another important variable in the effective governance system. Many perceptive observers on higher education feel that our education system is ineffectively over regulated. This is a paradox. It is

over regulated in many forms of micro-management regulations and at the same time the regulations are mostly ineffective in ensuring a credible and performing system. The regulatory system is mostly ineffective in making the private institutions adhere to the requirements of public purpose. In the context of massive expansion of the private sector, world over, John Daniel rightly notes that “today’s challenge of education regulator is to make private institutions to serve the public purpose”. Unfortunately the regulatory systems are becoming more person centric and their credibility is not high. The regulators have a dual role of facilitating good performance and controlling mal-performance. The distinction is to be made by the regulator and here the enlightened wisdom of political leadership who control the regulatory system plays a critical role. The political and academic world together should collectively develop new governance structures of universities preserving autonomy in a transparent and accountable manner.

## **Universities’ Social Dharma in the Context of Telangana State**

There is a view of education as an activity in which students and teachers are jointly engaged on behalf of the people of a society (Prabhat Patnaik, 2007). Staff and students of Telangana universities have played a decisive role in the struggle for separate statehood for Telangana. Now the universities in Telangana have a responsibility to make their contribution in designing and operationalising the development strategies of new the state. C.D. Deshmukh, first Chairman of University Grants Commission rightly observes that ‘the state is the instrument of the society’s will and the university should be the mind and conscience of society’. Before embarking on playing a larger social role, the universities should set their house in order by appointing academic staff in vacant positions, strengthening academic infrastructure, mobilising necessary financial resources and streamlining administrative structures and processes. In its problems and concerns every university is unique. Some are as old as 100 years and some others are very recently established. Every university needs to develop a status paper on its present condition and a strategy document on its future plan. The Telangana State Council of Higher Education can develop a template for the status paper and strategy document to be prepared by all



universities in the state. In the working of state universities the support and guidance of the state government makes all the difference. The state government policy of free education from KG to PG is a commendable initiative. Under this scheme the state should take all steps to further strengthen state universities. A few suggestions for more detailed consideration and action are:

- Gross enrolment ratio in higher education in Telangana is less than national average. There is a need to augment student numbers in universities and establish more universities. To reduce the affiliation burden of present affiliating universities and to increase access to higher education, particularly for students from rural areas and weaker sections.
- The universities may focus on developing technology enabled teaching-learning systems for upgradation of skills of working population and for lifelong education of all citizens. New technologies have the potential to revolutionise the educational processes. The universities in Telangana should make special efforts to learn from international best practices in application of technologies in education.
- The universities may identify the human resource needs of the state and design appropriate programmes and curriculum to produce competent human resources. The TSCHHE may identify universities for establishment of centres of excellence in different areas of development.
- As a part of their social responsibility the universities may deeply engage in developing alternative strategies and ideas to address people's problems. Universities should provide free space for debate and discussion to carry forward the values which guided the struggle for separate statehood and for the establishment of an egalitarian society.

## **Concluding Observations**

In the present phase of neo-liberal policies, the social role of higher education is narrowed down to development of human resources to meet the market needs. There is a need to re-emphasise and refocus on the broader goals of higher education as an instrument of social transformation. Ambedkar's vision of education as a great driving force for social transformation and social mobility needs re-emphasis. Universities reforming their social *dharma* only justifies the public investment and the public trust in universities.



## Section B: Open Distance Learning

**T**his section on **Open Distance Learning (ODL)**, has four chapters; lectures and articles from edited books and an article from a journal, on different aspects of ODL. The establishment of the first correspondence institute in 1962 in Delhi University and the first Open University in 1982 in Andhra Pradesh, heralded a new era in higher education in India. In this section the major policy concerns of public policies on ODL, the disconnect between the ideal and practice in Indian distance learning and the guiding principles for the way forward of open universities in 21<sup>st</sup> century are discussed. The normative frame of ICT policy in Indian Universities is presented as a guide to universities to develop their institution-specific ICT policy. The focus and context of four chapters included in this section is briefly mentioned below.

### **CHAPTER-5: Distance Higher Education in India: The Policy Perspective**

Open learning as a philosophy and distance education as a mode is a response to the challenges faced by higher education in India in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Public policy - intent of the government to do or not to do – is an important source to understand the dynamics of the developments in open learning and distance education. The National Policy on Education 1986 states that ‘the future thrust will be in the direction of open and distance learning’. The main focus of discussion in this chapter is on the policy perspective of distance higher education in India. This chapter is a revised and updated version of an article ‘Open Learning and Distance Education: Policy and Development’ in Sudha Rao (ed.), Educational Policies in India, NIEPA, 2002.

### **CHAPTER-6: Open University of 21st Century: Guiding Principles**

The fast changing context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs new institutional frameworks for all public institutions, including educational institutions, to meet the needs of the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world. The Open University is an important form of ODL, mostly developed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Open University is evolving and it may take a

different shape in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The focus of this chapter is on the guiding principle of the Open University structure and process in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is a normative exercise. The earlier version of this chapter was published in Abraham George (ed.,) Higher Education in India, Authors Press, New Delhi, 2013.

### **CHAPTER-7: Open Universities in India: The Way Forward**

The Open University system in India is passing through a critical phase of transformation to meet the new challenges of the education scenario in the context of global changes and advent of new technologies. The focus of this chapter is to discuss the way forward for open universities in India to make them more efficient and effective institutions of social change. This chapter is a revised version of the Foundation Day lecture delivered at Uttarakhand Open University (UOU), Uttarakhand State, India in 2017.

### **CHAPTER-8: ICT Policy in Indian Universities**

In this digital era, information and communication technology (ICT) plays a critical role in the life of universities. Their application in teaching- learning, student assessment, student engagement and governance are critical to the effective functioning of Indian Universities. This is an attempt to develop a policy framework for Indian Universities to use ICT effectively in all university activities. The earlier version of this paper: Information and Communication Technology Policy in Indian Universities was published in University News, Association of Indian Universities, August, 03-09, 2015.

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## Distance Higher Education in India The Policy Perspective

*“It is my considered opinion that a comprehensive study of strengths and weaknesses of the system, the present stage of development and the future vision must be made by a high power Commission and a report must be made available for guiding the future course of development of distance education in India, especially in view of the explosion of opportunities ushered in by the technological revolution and the knowledge space developed by the convergence of ICT and Learning”.*

**- V.C. Kulandaiswamy**

### A New Stage in the Education

Every society evolves its own forms of education. Evolution of forms of education from **Gurukula** to Virtual education is the reflection of social transformation. Choosing the type of education also means choosing the type of society. The developments in the middle of last century in India are a reflection of the democratic urge to expand educational opportunities to large numbers by using technology. This resulted in the form of education, popularly known as distance education – a technology mediated form of education. The emergence of this form of education in the middle of the sixties in India has ushered in a new stage in the evolution of education. Earlier, this form was known as Correspondence Education throughout the world. The focus of this chapter is to discuss the policy perspective on distance higher education, to understand the expectations of the policy makers and the practices of distance higher education in India.

## **The Beginnings: Kothari Committee, 1961**

After independence in 1947, peoples' expectations in all fields, including education rose higher. The Indian Five Year plans recognised the need for increasing opportunities for higher education in the formal as well as the non-formal system. A reference is made in the First Five Year plan to provide facilities of private study through correspondence courses and radio talks organised as far as possible by various universities, and allowing students to take the various examinations privately (GOI, 1951). For a decade nothing much happened as a follow up to these policy guidelines. In the Third Five Year plan the problem of meeting the demand for higher education was considered and the planers recommended "the provision in the plan for expansion of facilities for higher education, proposals for evening colleges, correspondence courses and the award of external degrees (GOI 1961).

The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) the highest policy making body in India for education, recommended the constitution of an expert committee to study the introduction of correspondence education in India (CABE-1961). Accordingly, the Ministry of Education GOI, constituted a Committee under the Chairmanship of Prof. D.S. Kothari, the then Chairman UGC, to formulate proposals for the establishment of correspondence education in India. The Committee after due examination of need for expanding educational opportunities at the tertiary level, observed that the correspondence course is: "a step designed to expand and equalise educational opportunity, as it aimed at providing additional opportunities for several thousand students who wished to continue their education and the persons who had been denied these facilities and were in full-time employment or were for other reasons prevented from availing themselves of facilities at college (GOI, 1963)".

## **National Policy on Education, 1968**

Another important policy development is the recommendations of National Policy on Education, 1968, based on the positive recommendations of Education Commission (1964-66) headed by Prof. D.S. Kothari. The Education Commission expressed the view that the pilot project at Delhi University was a success and recommended the expansion of correspondence education by universities and also suggested offering correspondence programmes by

Government development departments as extension education programmes. Endorsing the recommendations of Education Commission, the National Education Policy States:

“Part-time education and correspondence courses should be developed on a large scale at the university stage. Such facilities should also be developed for secondary school students, for teachers and for agricultural, industrial and other workers. Education through part-time and correspondence course should be given the same status as full-time education. Such facilities will smoothen transition from school to work, promote the cause of education and provide opportunities to the large number of people who have the desire to educate themselves further but cannot do so on a full-time basis”. National Education Policy, 1968 also visualised the expanded role to correspondence education and emphasised the parity between correspondence and conventional classroom based education. The sixties and seventies were the periods of considerable expansion of correspondence education in the country.

## **The Open Universities: A New Era**

The 980s marked the beginning of the open university system in India. The first proposal for the establishment of an open university was made in the early seventies. Government of India appointed a Working Group in 1971 with G. Pardhasarthi the then Vice-Chancellor of Jawarharlal Nehru University as Chairman to examine the feasibility of establishing an open university in India. The Group favourably recommended the establishment of an open university under the Act of Parliament. Not much follow up action was taken by Government on these recommendations. In 1982 a Committee to enquire into the working of the Central Universities, appointed by University Grants Commission under the Chairmanship of Dr. (Mrs.) Madhuri R. Shah also recommended the establishment of a National Open University. In this background of national discussion on open university, Andhra Pradesh Government took the initiative to establish a state level open university and appointed a Committee under the chairmanship of Prof. G. Ram Reddy the then Vice Chancellor of Osmania University, to prepare a report for the establishment of a State level public open university. Based on the committee report the government of Andhra Pradesh established the first open university on 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1982. Positively reacting to the experience of the first State open university, government of

India established the National Open University on September 20, 1985 and named it after late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as “India Gandhi National Open University”. The main emphasis of the university is ‘to bring higher education within the reach of all’.

Prof. G. Ram Reddy, the then Vice Chancellor of Andhra Pradesh open university was appointed as the first vice-chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University. Prof. G. Ram Reddy has the rare distinction of heading the first two open universities in India.

### **National Education Policy, 1986**

The National Education Policy 1986 and the Programme of Action, 1992 have attached considerable importance to role of distance education and strengthening of IGNOU to meet the educational needs of India. The policy document under open university and distance learning mentions the following policy initiatives:

The open learning system has been initiated in order to augment opportunities for higher education, as an instrument of democratising education and to make it a lifelong process. The flexibility and innovativeness of the open learning system are particularly suited to the diverse requirements of the citizens of our country, including those who had joined the vocational stream.

The Indira Gandhi National Open University, established in 1985 in fulfilment of these objectives, will be strengthened. It would also provide support to establishment of open universities in the states.

The IGNOU which was entrusted with the responsibility of coordination and maintenance of standards in distance education established Distance Education Council (DEC) in 1991. The programme of action 1992 made many important action proposals on the role of DEC to strengthen distance education system in India. The CABE Committee on distance education, 1995, examined the working of distance education and made detailed recommendations on the goals, processes and expected outcomes of the system. Its recommendations include the establishment of an open university in each of the states and sharing of courses developed by any institutions by all open universities (CABE Committee on Distance Education, 1995). In the

last decade of last century we find unprecedented expansion of distance education enrolments in dual mode universities and the establishment of many state open universities.

### **National Knowledge Commission, 2007**

The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was constituted on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2005 as a high level advisory body to the Prime Minister of India. The Commission advocated radical reforms of the system of open and distance education (ODE) to achieve the objectives of expansion, inclusion and excellence in higher education. The Commission also expressed concerns about quality and insufficient recognition of the potential of ODE. The NKC constituted a Working Group comprised distinguished experts in this field, chaired by Prof. Ram Takwale, former Vice Chancellor, IGNOU to study the working of ODE and make recommendation to make it more effective. Based on the inputs provided by the working group and consultations with stakeholders, the NKC recommended the following reforms:

- Create a national ICT infrastructure for networking ODE institutions
- Set up a National Education Foundation to develop web-based common open resources
- Establish a credit bank to effect transition to a course credit system
- Establish a National Education Testing service for assessing ODE students
- Facilitate convergence with conventional universities
- Set up a research foundation to support research activity in ODE
- Overhaul training programmes for educators
- Increase access for learners with special needs
- Create a new standing committee for regulation of ODE
- Develop a system for quality assessment.

The NKC has taken a broader view of the role of ODE in the knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination and strongly recommended strengthening of institutional structures, synergy with the conventional systems, extensive use of technology and ensuring the quality of the system to

enable ODE to play a more significant role in the future knowledge society (NKC, 2007).

### **Draft National ODL Policy, 2009**

The government of India for the first time came out with a draft National Policy on ODL on August 28, 2009. Some of the important policy decisions identified by the draft policy are:

- ODL to be regulated by the standing committee of the National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER), when established;
- Programme approval to be made mandatory with penal provisions for violators;
- Franchising of ODL not to be permitted by any institution, whether public or private;
- Offer of programmes through distance mode should be allowed only for subjects for which there are required departments and faculties prior to offer of the programmes;
- Mandatory use of ICTs to deliver programmes and management of the student and university affairs;
- Optimal use of e-learning contents for delivery/ offering programmes through distance and to enable student-teacher and student-student interactions;
- Distance education shall focus on providing opportunity of education to people at educationally disadvantaged situations such as living in remote and rural areas, adults with no or limited access to education of their choice etc.;
- Establishment of a credit bank and credit transfer system;
- Convergence of the face to face mode teaching departments of conventional universities with their distance education directorates/ correspondence course wings to bridge gaps, if any;
- Reputed foreign education providers to offer programmes subject to following legal requirements;



- Creation of favourable environment for research on ODL;
- Encourage training and orientation for teachers and administrators of ODL systems;
- Create national ICT infrastructure for ODL; and
- Provide opportunities for learners with disabilities and senior citizens.

While the regulatory provisions mentioned within the policy were given in detail, and some of those could be debated, the above policy directions were very positive. However, after the initial discussions, the policy could not be finalised (Sanjay Mishra, 2014).

## **Distance Education Reforms Committee, 2011**

The Ministry of Human Resource Development, GOI constituted a committee in August 2010, under the Chairmanship of Prof. N.R. Madhava Menon, ‘to look into the various aspects of distance education in terms of the overall coordination and determination of standards in the programmes of study through distance mode and resolve issues of functional jurisdiction between three regulatory bodies (UGC, AICTE and DEC) in distance education related matters (MHRD, August, 2010). The Committee after having extended discussions with stakeholders in distance education and examinations of present legal framework of the structured arrangements prepared a detailed report and submitted the same in August 2011. The Committee is popularly known as Madhava Menon Committee, The Committee appreciated the significant contribution of distance mode for, providing opportunities of learning to those who do not have direct access to classroom teaching; providing opportunities to working professionals to enhance their qualifications and skills and exploiting the potentials of ICT in the teaching learning. The Committee has also noted many limitations of the system, particularly quality deficit and domain conflicts. The recommendations of the Committee include the following:

- It is necessary for a well-regulated expansion of open and distance learning (ODL) system to help fulfil the aspirations of the seekers of knowledge and skills by enhancing opportunities at affordable cost for the benefit of all those who have the desire to educate themselves further but cannot do so on a full time basis.

- Every conventional university and institution including technical and professional ones should be encouraged to switch over to a dual mode of imparting education by offering ODL programmes in addition to conventional programmes so that the already available infrastructure can be used more effectively. The conventional universities should offer through distance mode only programmes offered through conventional mode by them and must ensure parity of programmes offered through both modes.
- Technical and professional programmes may be offered through distance mode by putting in place effective regulatory mechanism for maintenance of quality and credibility.
- An independent Regulatory Authority, called Distance Education Council of India (DEC) may be established by an act of parliament to take the responsibility for regulation of distance mode of education. As an interim measure the Distance Education Council of IGNOU, be shifted from IGNOU to UGC, to overcome the conflict of interest in roles of open university and regulatory authority. The committee has also suggested changes in the IGNOU act and prepared a model Act for the establishment of DEC.

Government of India selectively acting on the recommendation of the committee shifted the DEC from IGNOU to UGC in December 2012. From then onwards it is working as a Distance Education Bureau of UGC. Not much progress has been made in the creation of independent regulatory authority for distance mode of education.

The legal framework on ODE suggested by the Committee became one of the contentious issues. The basic approach of the dual role of IGNOU as Open University and also a coordinating and standards maintenance agency was not properly appreciated by many in the distance education community and policy makers. We are more familiar with the patterns of different agencies for execution and regulation. In combining these roles the conflict of roles is focused more than the advantages of the regulatory role being balanced with the operational experiences. The limitations of DEC to act as an independent regulator, free from the control of IGNOU also added to the popular perception of role conflict of a university and a regulator. The critical question is not where you locate the regulatory agency of distance education, but what its structure and ways and means of functioning are.

## **Draft National Education Policy, 2016**

The Government of India, since 2015 is engaged in the development of new National Education Policy. In 2016 the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India has made public a document under the title “Some Inputs for Draft National Education Policy 2016” for public discussion. The section on ‘Open and Distance Learning / MOOCs’ has made the following observations:

- i) An autonomous body, responsive for the promotion, coordination, regulation and maintenance of standards in the ODL/MOOCs system, will be set up. It will prepare norms, standards and guidelines for systematic development and regulation of ODL/MOOCs. It will also develop a mechanism for recognition, transfer and accumulation of credits earned through MOOCs and award and recognition of degrees.
- ii) All institutions offering courses and programmes in ODL/MOOCs mode will develop and standardize programmes based on the national and local needs as per the norms and standards prescribed by the autonomous body referred to in para-1 so as to facilitate recognition and accumulation of credits towards the award of degree.
- iii) A quality assurance mechanism for accreditation of all universities/ institutions offering ODL /MOOCs will be put in place to ensure quality, promote innovation and reshape and modernise the ODL/ MOOCs courses and programmes.
- iv) Learner support services will be institutionalised by all ODL institutions and will include hosting courseware, repositories, Open Educational Resources (OERs), MOOCs 24X7 help desk services, tutoring and counselling services, conduct of webinars, discussion forums, webcasting, library facility, virtual labs, e-learning modules, delivering of online programmes, providing assignments and timely feedback of performance, online examinations, declaration of results, redressal of grievances, etc.,

## **UGC-ODL Regulations 2017**

After taking responsibility for regulations of ODL system in the country in December 2012, the UGC has framed detailed regulations for recognition and maintenance of standards in ODL, in June 2017. (UGC, open and distance learning Regulations 2017). A very comprehensive set of regulations were

formulated for recognition of higher educational institutions for offering open and distance learning programmes. The regulations contain many commendable features like; comprehensive guidelines for quality assurance, assessment and internal systems of quality assurance, clear guidelines for academic processes and quality of learning materials, guidelines for the work of teachers, academic counsellors and other staff in ODL institutions, territorial jurisdiction of ODL institutions, study centre establishment, facilities and counsellors qualifications, use of technology and ICT in ODL operations. (Nageswar Rao, 2017).

However, there are some limitations in these regulations. The regulations have not taken note of diversity in ODL institutions and operations. A very restricted view is taken on the establishment of study centres by limiting them to only recognized higher education institutions. The amendment made to these regulations in 2018, further restricts the offering of ODL programmes by conventional universities, by putting a condition that only universities accredited by NAAC with 3.26 CGPA in a 4 point scale can offer ODL programmes. While it is necessary to place conditions to be fulfilled by conventional universities to get eligibility to offer ODL programmes, particularly in the context of many conventional universities looking at ODL programmes as resource mobilisation activities, without concern for quality, but putting the NAAC, CGPA score as a pre-condition may not be a rational approach for this purpose. The UGC may have to develop more appropriate criteria for this purpose. There are many genuine apprehensions of the regulations, resulting in micro-management of ODL system by an external agency which may not be conclusive for ODL system to become a flexible system of education. There are a large number of standalone institutions in the country not affiliated to any university which are enrolling large number of students and offering diverse programmes through ODL mode. These are outside the frame of UGC regulations.

## **Need for National ODL Policy**

Many experts in ODL strongly advocate for a National ODL Policy to bring clarity to the place and role of ODL in higher education system. This is necessary particularly in the context of a lack of shared vision and understanding about the ODL system among policy makers and practitioners. Added to this new development in online technologies like MOOCs and OER and the possibilities

of offering to any one, any-time and at any place education by using digital mode make it imperative to have a new national ODL policy (Kulandaiswamy, 2005). Sanjaya Mishra, very convincingly, argued for the need to develop a National ODL policy and provided a detailed scheme of objectives and the design for the new ODL policy (Mishra, 2014) we hope that the proposed New National Education Policy to be in place in 2018 will set a clear policy direction and a regulations system for ODL.

## **Concluding Observations**

More than five decades of the journey of distance higher education in India is a journey of progression in numbers, may be regression in quality and credibility. Starting with 112 students in BA first year correspondence course in university of Delhi in 1962, the numbers reached to around four million with 17 open universities and around 200 dual mode and stand- alone institutions offering ODE programmes in 2017 (AISHE, 2016-17). It is a remarkable achievement. The ODE system provided opportunities to large numbers who could not study in the classroom mode for various reasons. It is a boon particularly for weaker sections who cannot afford full-time education and for the working population who need flexible forms of learning. There is also another side to the story. Quality has become a major concern of ODL programmes. The democratic drive has mostly guided the early expansion of ODE. It is paradoxical that a system originally designed to extend higher education opportunities to sections who cannot afford fulltime education, is being used to mobilizing resources to meet the part expenditure of full-time education.

Today the system is more driven by commercial interests or resource mobilisation for other university activities or to become a self-financing institution, rather to increase access to quality education to weaker sections. In this process the social objectives of public policies in ODL are compromised. Added to this there is lot ambiguity in the roles of multiple regulatory agencies in distance higher education. The polycentric regulatory systems are resulting in many domain conflicts, leading to another paradoxical situation of over regulation and ineffective regulation. There is an urgent need to have a national policy on ODL to resolve many paradoxes in current ODL policies and practices, without losing sight of the fundamental objective of the system to provide “space to the space-less” in higher education.

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## Open University of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Guiding Principles

*“The difficulty lies not in the new ideas, but in escaping from old ones...”*  
- John Maynard Keynes

### Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is broadly characterised by globalised, competitive, technology and knowledge-driven societies. These features influence the nature of all sectors of society including education. In the twenty first century education will play a more critical role in the life of individuals, society and nation. Knowledge will be a more sought after currency of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Open Distance Learning (ODL) known by different names is essentially a flexible form of education in terms of the time and space dimensions of learning. The Open University is an important organizational form of ODL mostly developed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Open University system is evolving and it may take a different shape in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Here an attempt is made to identify the guiding principles of Open University in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a normative frame.

### Guiding Principles

The guiding principles of Open University structure and processes are detailed below. Under each principle two core elements are identified, for further elaboration of the principle.

## **Flexible Entry (Learners)**

### ***Multi-point entry and exit for all***

The teaching and learning in an Open University is learner-centric. As the learners are typically adult and have social, family and job responsibilities, it is necessary to have flexibility in terms of choice of courses and programmes and entry and exit facilities to suit their needs. So, ideally a learner should be able to take admission at any time into programme and after completing some courses, should be able to exit with appropriate credits without completing a full programme of study, with the option to join back at a later date to earn the full degree. Thus, a cumulative credit earned certification scheme is an important aspect. Flexibility being the hallmark of the system, it facilitates collaboration amongst national and international institutions to offer joint degree programmes, and also provide opportunities for dual degree programmes for students of Open University and other collaborating partners. So, a student in a conventional university should be able to study some courses of the Open University, and get a degree from there; and a student of the Open University should be able to take some courses of the other University to complete his/her study here. Thus, the system urges a credit transfer mechanism in place of seamless mobility of learners across the systems.

### ***Recognition of prior learning***

Recognition of prior learning is important to provide access to post-secondary education to a large number of people in a society where there is low gross enrolment rate in higher education. The Open University should provide a route to higher degree to those people who have special knowledge in a particular area/vocational/craft, but do not have a formal degree/certificate. A system to recognize their prior learning/experience for certification and equivalence plays a great role in increasing access to higher education to everyone with or without formal qualifications based on National Qualifications Framework.

## **Capacity Building (Learning Programmes)**

### ***Increased Access to learning opportunities***

This is the hallmark of any Open University. It provides increased access to learning opportunities to all people. The use of technology also plays a



significant role in enhancing access to quality education. There is a huge demand for quality education, as the capacities of the conventional face-to-face system of education are limited. The Open University not only taps this opportunity created by the limitations of the conventional system of education, but also builds activities surrounding the unused potentials of the system to provide alternate access to learning opportunities.

### ***Programmes for skill up-gradation and professional development***

The objectives of the Open University in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be to provide employable skills, and upgrade the quality of human resources in a country. Thus, it is important that the Open University becomes part of the national policy on life-long learning. It is said that knowledge in any discipline is doubling in every five years. It is estimated that by 2020 knowledge will double in every 73 days. In such a situation re-skilling of existing human resources is the only solution, and Open University can do that effectively without making the staff move from the workplace.

## **Open Educational Resources (Learning Materials)**

### ***Adaptation and use of Open Educational Resources***

Creation of learning materials has been one of the largest activities of the Open Universities. Most of the Open Universities depend primarily on the printed learning materials with additional support of audio/video and other electronic learning materials. Usually, the institution, which develops a particular material, enjoys the exclusive right over the use of the same because of the copyright regime. There is an alternative system that has emerged in the recent past, and is becoming more and more popular. It is the use of Open Educational Resources (OER). What it means is that the material produced is not bound by usual notions of copyright, but follow another system where the creator of the resource declares the nature and extent of free use. A huge amount of literature in all subjects is now available as OER on the World Wide Web (WWW), and Open Universities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can take advantage of this to not only reduce the development time of the learning materials, but also to reduce cost. These OERs are available in multimedia formats such as audio, video and interactive multimedia. So, the Open University of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may follow an OER strategy to create, store and distribute multimedia learning resources online, as well as offline.



### ***User-generated content***

Normally, the teaching and learning tradition the world over has been an information transmission model, where the teacher injects some information into the minds of the learners. Information reproduced by the learner becomes the measure of learning outcomes. However, the Open University of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brings in a paradigm change in this approach of teaching- learning to promote construction of learning within individual learners. So, every learner creates his/her own knowledge about the society, environment and day-to-day life. Knowledge and learning is constructed natively through engagement in the society, and not just in the four walls of the classrooms. With the emergence of the Web 2.0, this is possible as the concept of user- generated content has become popular. The information infrastructure of the Open University of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should allow the learners to create content as projects, and as demonstration of their learning outcomes that can be used as learning resource in the next year or for the learner of another course/programme. For example, in a teacher education course, the materials developed by the learners can be used by teachers across all the secondary schools in a country, if these materials are made available in OER format by the Open University.

### **ICT Blended System (Learner Services Delivery)**

***Social software approach (use of blogs, wikis, apps, podcasts, social networks etc.)***

As mentioned earlier, the teaching and learning in the Open University of 21<sup>st</sup> century believes in social construction of knowledge, and for this the university should use latest Information and Communication Technologies for delivery of its learning services. The use of social software such as blogs, wikis, podcasts and social networks would create a digital learning environment where learners are engaged in networked learning. They actually learn in a virtual social network and share all the passion of learning in a conventional educational environment. The social networking systems enable the learners to be creative individuals, who are independently thinking and interactive. The system can also be used as a mechanism to show evidence of student learning in a course / programme.

### ***Technology enabled student services***

The use of ICT in the Open University should centre around the student services, including information dissemination, learning and assessment of learning. So, the Open University of the 21<sup>st</sup> century depends on Interactive Voice Response system (IVRS), Call Centres, Learning Management Systems, Online Query Management Systems, Social Networks etc., to provide technology enabled learner services. From the service point of view, the customer is the king in the market. He/She wants personalized and customised services. Our traditional systems of education are not capable of providing such a choice, as courses and programmes are not designed like cakes and pizzas. But, with the use of technology and relational database management systems, it is possible to provide flexible options to the learners to create their own curricular/courses/programmes using a bouquet of learning objects available as OER. It is also possible to record the interaction of the learner with the university and the learning resources in the learning management system and online learner management system like the call centre services.

### **Learning Outcomes Assessment**

#### ***(Learning Evaluation) Self-assessment based on assignments***

The assessment of learning outcomes for certification in the Open University also recognize the importance of self-assessment. However, self- assessment is used as a self-teaching tool rather than assessment per se. It has the potential to make the learner independent and self-directed. The concept of self-assessment also makes the learner more aware of his/her competencies, and facilitates on-demand certification of skills and competencies. Continuous assessment is a tool for learning improvement and certification is the validation of competencies of learners.

#### ***Outcomes Based Assessment***

Assessment of learning and certification is one of the major activities of a University. In fact, the University was more of a standard certifying body in earlier times, and later become a centre of teaching and research. Open Universities have also followed the traditional pattern of assessment to maintain parity as well as sanctity of the evaluation process. However, in the process, the system could not become authentic, as pen and paper tests dominated the

assessment practice. The new age thinking is on assessing the real tasks and thus, the assessment tasks should be real, project-based, demonstrable, and evidence-based. In the evidence-based approach the learners are informed of the competencies to be acquired and the related evidences in rubric to provide suitable performance grading. Thus, a learner is expected to keep a record of all learning activities and tasks performed by him/her in a systematic manner to showcase improvement in learning over a period of time. With the use of technology, the portfolio can be prepared in digital form, and made accessible on the Internet to enable prospective employers to choose candidates with appropriate learning abilities. This process is often described as outcomes based assessment.

### **Lean and Networked Arrangement (Structure)**

#### ***The “critical staff” to manage, facilitate and Coordinate the Activities***

The major success of Open Universities around the world comes from its cost-effectiveness achieved through lean staff strengths. Open Universities are managed and run by a core team of teachers and support staff. Teachers in open universities are mostly coordinators and facilitators of successful learning of the students. So, they develop programmes with the help of external experts, and deliver it to the target group with the support of teachers working in other institutions. With the use of technology, it is now possible to have this as a core feature of the Open University, as it leads to cost- effectiveness. Thus, it is important that the Open University follows a contractual arrangement so that performance assessment of the staff can be done appropriately, and compensation paid accordingly. The hiring of services from other agencies creates a competitive atmosphere provided there is objectivity in contract assignment, performance and review.

#### ***The “Project” / ‘Programme’ based outsourcing***

All academic activities in the Open University centre around courses and programmes developed by its core faculty with the help of external course writers and curriculum experts. So, it follows the ‘outsourcing model’ for the products though developed internally. This can be further expanded to outsource both the programme and its related delivery as product and services, respectively. Thus, while a programme can be brought from another Open University, and adapted to provide the teaching-learning services, it is also possible to develop

a programme internally and outsource the delivery to another institution with adequate quality assurance measures.

## **Public-Private-Community Partnerships (Shared Responsibility)**

### ***Partnerships and Collaborations***

Most Open Universities depend on partnership and collaboration for their activities. It is a management strategy to reduce cost, recurring expenditure, and thereby increase access by investing the resources saved through such collaborative practices. The nature of partnership and collaboration depends on the understanding achieved between the agencies and the Open Universities. It may cover aspects of student enrolment, design, development and delivery of programmes and governance. The collaborating partners could be government agencies, private entities, the civil society and Non-Governmental organizations.

### ***Community participation***

The community which the Open University serves plays a significant role as a critic as well as a supporter of its activities. Thus, the community checks the needs and relevance of the programmes on offer. The community needs and the relevance should guide the activities of open universities. Another significant development is the possibility of community-based decision-making through the use of web-based technologies. Thus, the use of a collaborative system, where the community of learners, guide, decide and develop policies for the betterment of the system is becoming common. Most of the activities in the Open University are collaborative processes, and therefore using a community-based decision making system would facilitate greater participation of the stakeholders, and make all operations transparent.

## **Self-Sustainability (Financial Resources) *Sustainable sources of income***

For running any enterprise, regular supply of financial resource is essential. Public universities mostly depend on government resources. However, one of the main reasons why many Governments have promoted the use of distance

education is its low dependence on Government resources, as the system offers a cost-effective means of reaching large numbers of the population. The cost of a programme is determined by the life of the courses and the expected enrolment over a specified period of time. Thus, 'economies of scale' decide the low cost of programmes in the Open Universities. Due to sharing of resources, the overhead cost also becomes less. However, research shows, that in spite of low programme development cost in Open Universities, the expenditure in delivery of programmes takes a major chunk of the budget. In order to remain cost-effective, the delivery cost needs to be controlled. Though the system is cost-effective, there is need to offer different types of programmes in a planned manner to make the Open University self-sustainable. While dependence on the government resources is a must for developmental activities, the recurring expenditure should be covered from the internal resources of the University such as fees, sale of books, license fees, donations etc.

### ***Optimum Utilization of Resources***

One of the important ways to optimize available resource is by sharing. So, instead of creating infrastructure and duplicating resources, the un-utilized potentials of existing resources should be utilized to reduce cost of operations. For example, using the conventional educational institutions' infrastructure to operate in the evening, and on the weekends to provide tutoring services to the learners of Open University will result in optimum utilisation of available resources. Similarly, the distance learners can use available public libraries to maximize their access to libraries. A group of institutions can also create infrastructure in a consortia mode to share and reduce cost. Sharing is a corollary to sustainability, and it should be looked into from the perspectives of optimum utilisation of resources.

### **Management by Results (Governance)**

#### ***Clearly-defined processes and outcomes***

Results –based management is the new age mantra of organizations- both profit and not-for-profit. In order to manage the system by results, it is essential that the Open University is clear in its operational objectives and processes. Thus, the management system demands that all processes are clearly process-documented, and there is a written agreed policy on all areas of operations.

When actions are taken on sound policies and principles, based on clearly laid-down processes, the assessment of the results can be done effectively. In order to perform its mandatory role, in a results-based approach, the Open University must get full autonomy, function within the principles of participatory governance, and act as per its own agreed principles and policies. However, the autonomy also brings in the issue of accountability. The Open University as a corporate body should be responsible to all its stakeholders, and particularly to the community through the national laws. To make the system accountable, it is important that specific targets are fixed and the progress is monitored from time to time in a transparent manner by independent agencies.

### ***Participatory Governance***

Universities are generally known for collegial decision-making. They are organizations, where the professoriate decides and controls the processes of educational transactions. In Open Universities, it may not be possible to allow the individual professor to decide all the programme transactions. In this system it is the team and the institution which takes this responsibility. Governance of the Open University is thus, based on participatory decision-making in all its activities, be it curriculum planning, programme implementation or policy development.

### **Global Competition (Quality Assurance)**

#### ***Global Qualifications Framework and Standards***

Quality assurance of the processes and products are highly important in the context of global competition. For the students of the Open University to get acceptance in the global competitive market, it is essential that the University follows curricular frameworks adopted by the international community. This is necessary in the case of professional and skill oriented courses. In the liberalized global economy, it is necessary that students of the Open Universities are not only absorbed in the national job market, but also equip themselves with competencies to compete for employment abroad. This is possible only when the Open University adopts qualification standards acceptable to the world community.

### ***Quality Assessment and Accreditation***

Quality assurance should be recognized as a mechanism for continuous improvement. It is not just a mechanism to assure the stakeholders that the processes and products of the Open University meet some standards, but is also a system through which the Open University reaches newer heights and excellence. A quality assurance mechanism in place allows continuous improvement by analysis and critical reflection. Most open universities adhere to quality assurance processes in their material production, while the delivery aspect is not taken care of in the same manner. As the delivery mechanism is equally important, establishing quality service benchmarks and student charters on the service front are welcome measures which should be emphasised.

In order to maintain quality and parity of the distance learning system with the conventional face-to-face systems, there is a need to have accreditation by independent agencies at the national and international level. It is also important that the accreditation system should be based on maintenance of the same standards for both face-to-face and distance education system. Otherwise, there always remains the question of parity in the minds of the stakeholders, especially the employers. Apart from national accreditation system, it is desirable for the Open Universities to subject themselves to international/regional accreditation systems to establish their reputation for quality.

### **Concluding Observations**

The ten guiding principles and their corresponding twenty core elements identified above can be categorized into two major groups: academic sub-system and administrative sub-system. These guiding principles and core elements of Open University have to be understood in the specific context of intersecting imperatives of the national educational system. The challenge is to contextualize these features to match the needs of a particular country. The traditional ideal of “think globally and act locally” may have to be replaced with practical requirement of “think locally and act globally”. The twenty first century Open University may have to be designed to serve local needs with the capacity to act globally, by contextualizing the guiding principles.

# 7

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## Open Universities in India The Way Forward

*“Open Universities have thrown open to all the ivory towers  
of Higher Education”*

**- G. Ram Reddy**

### Frame for Understanding the Way Forward

**T**he way forward is a normative question. It requires an analytical frame to appreciate its appropriateness and relevance. No problem can ever be encountered, evaluated or resolved in a vacuum. The pathways of future are to be decided based on current realities of the system and expected goal-posts of the system. Broad international and national goals of education provide the basic framework for the future directions of the system. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN) set the goal of education as: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030” (Goal 4). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2016 envisions “a credible and high-performing education system capable of ensuring inclusive quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all and producing students/graduates equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are required to lead a productive life, participate in the country’s development process, respond to the requirements of the fast-changing, ever globalising, knowledge-based economy and society”. (Some Inputs for Draft National Educational Policy, 2016, MHRD). From observations of experts in the field and pronouncements of policy makers we may broadly infer the four main goals of open and distance learning system as (a) increasing access to inclusive quality education; (b)



providing a flexible system of teaching and learning mediated by technology; (c) upgradation of knowledge, skills and competencies of working population; and (d) lifelong learning / continuous learning opportunities for life enrichment and to create a knowledge society. These may form the four goal-posts of open universities. The structure, processes and outcomes of open universities (OUs) may be examined for their effectiveness in realising these four broad goals of the system. Learner- centeredness, the defining element of the open-university system, should be the benchmark of all operations of open universities.

### **Some of the questions to be addressed are:**

- Are policies and practices of Open Universities (OUs) resulting in inclusive access to education?
- Are programmes of OUs relevant to the development needs of the society? We can also ask here whose development? Whose needs?
- Are OUs flexible enough to meet the needs of diverse groups of learners?
- Are OUs efficiently and effectively using technology in teaching- learning, student engagement and governance?
- Is the teaching-learning system of OUs effective in importing knowledge, skills and competencies?
- Is the governance model of OUs capable of achieving expected outcomes?
- Do OUs have effective institutional embedded systems for performance assessment and continuous improvement?

The reflections on these and such other questions is a part of the institution building process. The neo-institutional theory emphasises the cognitive aspects of the institutions' beliefs, paradigms, codes, cultures and knowledge embedded within the institutions as major contributing factors in institution building.

### **A Small System with High Expectations**

Open University, one of the institutional forms of open and distance learning, has a history of thirty five years in India. The first Open University, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, earlier known as Andhra Pradesh Open University was established in 1982, heralding a new era in ODL. This was followed by

the establishment of IGNOU in 1985 and other Open Universities in several States, latest being the Odisha State Open University in 2015. Today there are 17 Open Universities in India; one National Open University (Indira Gandhi National Open University, 1985) fourteen State Public Open Universities (BRAOU, 1982; VMOU, 1987; NOU, 1987; YCMOU, 1989; MPBOU, 1991; BAOU, 1994; KSOU, 1996; NSOU, 1997; UPRTOU, 1999; TNOU, 2002; PSSOU, 2005; UOU, 2005; KKHSOU, 2006; OSOU, 2015) and two State Private Universities (The Global Open University, Nagaland 2006; Venkateshwara Open University, Arunachal Pradesh, 2012), (See Appendix –A for more details). India has the largest number of open universities among the in commonwealth countries, may be the largest number in any one country in world. There are around 30 open universities in the commonwealth countries and around 70 open universities in the world. This is a small system in India with around 1.8 million annual enrolment, compared to a huge conventional system of around 885 universities/ university level institutes with an annual enrolment of around 28.5 million students (Annual Report 2015-2016, UGC).

The Open Universities in India are offering around 1200 programmes at research, post-graduate, graduate, diploma and certificate level in areas including Arts, Social Sciences, Sciences, Commerce and Management, Technology, Legal studies, Health Sciences, Agriculture and Information and Communication Technologies. Around 55 percent of students in OUs are enrolled in under-graduate programmes, 25 percent in post-graduate programmes and 20 percent in Diploma and Certificate programmes, in comparison with 85 percent of students in conventional system enrolled in under-graduate and 12 percent in post-graduate programmes and 2 percent in diploma and certificate programme and around 1 percent in research programmes. The research programmes enrolment in OUs is only on 0.01 percent. Most of the students, 60 to 80 percent are from weaker sections of society SC, ST and OBC categories. The teaching-learning is mostly transacted by self-learning materials in print, supported by audio-video materials, digital materials and online materials in both local and English languages. Technology based and face-to-face academic guidance and other support services are provided to the students through the regional centres and study centres by engaging thousands of part-time resource persons. The 15 public open universities have only around 900 full-time teaching staff, some of the OUs have as small as 7 or 8 staff members only. For most of the academic

work like learning materials preparation and student support services, OUs engage part-time resource persons mostly from conventional universities. The OU system is a self-financing system, with 75 to 80 percent of income from student fees. The governance system is mostly similar to that of conventional university governance system with Vice –Chancellors as the academic and administrative heads supported by other governing authorities and functionaries. (Most of the data for this section is from the: Report Status of the State Open Universities in India, CEMCA, 2015; Open Universities in the Commonwealth: At A Glance, COL, 2017).

## **Achievements and Concerns**

Establishment of dedicated single mode open universities heralded a new era in the field of higher education in India. The open universities, have brought credibility and legitimacy to the open and distance learning system in the country. Now ODL has become an integral part of the education system. The system is providing educational opportunities to many sections of people, particularly disadvantaged sections who were earlier denied formal higher education for various reasons. The open admission policy has helped many, without formal required prior qualifications to acquire higher education. The categories of people like housewives, differently-abled persons, prisoners, working people, senior citizens are able to overcome time and space constraints and pursue higher education at their own pace. The flexibility of the system is a boon to these categories of people. The use of regional languages as a medium of education by OUs has made students from rural areas comfortable with their learning process. The use of multiple media and ICT have enriched the learning process. In science education, technical education, agriculture education and in skill development some OUs have made significant contributions of reaching large numbers of learners through the ODL mode. The learning resources development by OUs are a significant addition to the knowledge resources in higher education. These are extensively used by different sections of the society including training institutions, conventional university students and those appearing for competitive examinations. The cost effectiveness of the system has made the policy-makers enthusiastic about the system and the low student unit have costs attracted the learners. Most of the OUs which are in the public domain are self-sufficient in operational expenditure. In these days of resource crunch in higher education, the self-sustaining nature of the system gives it a

sense of sustainability. The structural flexibility and effective use of knowledge resources available in the society are a distinct feature of OUs enabling them to serve a large number of students with a small number of faculty.

Though the overall achievements of the system are commendable, there is a feeling that the system has not yet fully realised its full potential. Before reaching the peak, somewhere the fall started. Even though the growth rate in student enrolment is higher than the conventional system growth rate, it is still far away from reaching the goal of 20 percent enrolment in higher education. To many prospective learners, it is still a second choice. In spite of sincere efforts and some progress in the use of multimedia in teaching-learning, the dominant medium continues to be the print medium and student support is mostly through face-to face counselling by regional and study centres. In the use of technology there is a wide gap in the expression of intentions and the reality. In most of the OUs general education degree programmes are more popular, than skill and professional programmes in terms of student enrolments. The mechanisms for assessment of quality of processes and outcomes are very weak and mostly ineffective. The governance systems are struggling to cope with the ‘common cold’ administrative problems like timely supply of learning materials and conduct of examinations on schedule. There are cases of misuse of resources and non-conformance of regulations by some universities. In an extreme case the University Grants Commission (UGC) refused permission for admission to the Karnataka State Open University, since last two years resulting in huge loss of public resources and inconvenience to a large number of present and prospective students. Similarly, absence of a national policy on distance learning has resulted in abruptly stopping engineering and technical programmes through distance learning by All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and research programmes by UGC. Many open universities, including the national open university are affected by this decision.

## **The Way Forward: Seven Steps**

We have to look at things with an eye of hope, based on a realistic understanding of our strengths and weaknesses. We have to build the institutions on their strengths and continuously strive to reduce the impact of their limitations. Some of the limitations are a result of the larger system and some are due to internal working of the system. There is disconnect between

the speed of social change and the institution's capacity to cope with these changes. This is particularly evident in the new innovations in technologies and capacities of the OUs to adapt them to their requirements. Most of the time, there are internal faculty and staff issues that are the centre of discourse in the open universities. Rather than focusing on the social role of the OUs and discussion on how to make the learner central to the activities, many OUs largely focus on routine discourses that are not necessarily the core values of a university or an open system. Considering the challenges faced by the OUs, the following seven steps are suggested to move forward.

*i. Setting the New Agenda*

Open University is a congruence of two philosophical foundations of openness and university. The openness, as famously put by Lord Crowther, First Chancellor of UKOU, stands for "open to people, places, methods and ideas". University stands for community of scholars and students engaged in the pursuit of knowledge of the universe. The knowledge related functions of the university include knowledge-creation, knowledge- dissemination, knowledge-application, knowledge-preservation, and knowledge certification. Open University is not merely an institutional form of a particular mode of delivery of education, but a new knowledge system combining the concepts of openness and university. The vision and mission of open universities should reflect the openness and broad vision of a university. The 80s open universities started with great enthusiasm for open policies in admission, influenced by the UKOU model. In recent times we find many limitations and restrictions on open admission policies, may be because of unfavourable responses from many quarters. The OUs as universities have mainly focused on knowledge-dissemination and knowledge-certification functions, ignoring other knowledge related functions like creation of new knowledge and application of knowledge. The desire to make them cost-effective may be forcing them to neglect the broader functions of a university. The new realities in education like massification of education, competitive and globalised nature of systems, increasing role of technology, and increasing role of market forces in education need to be taken note of by open universities in designing their policies, programmes, practices and structures.

The OUs may have to make special efforts to mainstream the ignored target groups located in remote, rural and hilly areas. Some of the OUs in other commonwealth countries are offering programmes at multi-levels including

school level and multi-mode including face-to-face modes. To expand the scope of operations and to make them more relevant to the context and to make optimum use of resources, the OUs also may have to explore the feasibility of making them more inclusive in levels and modes. The basic principle of designing programmes and courses in OUs is to focus on the learner or the target group. In most cases, OUs have just become like any other university, certifying degrees and therefore, it is important to go back to the basics and set a new agenda for them.

## *ii. Building Institutional Capacities*

It is said that in the conventional system the teacher teaches and in distance education the institution teaches. Institutional capacity building or developing institutional ability to achieve its goals is a critical factor in OU systems. It refers to the capacity building of all the three important internal players in the system i.e., management, staff and students. In the OUs, there is no clarity on the academic staff structures and roles. Different OUs are following different patterns. There should be critical discussion and policy decisions on the essential and desirable patterns of academic staff requirements and their roles in OUs. The multiple roles of academic staff and extensive interface and inter dependence of academic, professional and administrative staff in teaching-learning of OUs and the importance of student support services should be fully recognised in evolving staffing patterns.

In the digital age the old administrative models of tight, vertical, linear organisation must yield place to new horizontal and system models. The COL is advocating Results Based Management (RBM) model, Project Approach and extensive use of ICT in governance. Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 16) strongly advocate 'effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels' for realisation of sustainable development goals. Putting in place the right type of persons in leadership position is an essential requirement for institution building. Training of staff and leadership at all levels in the use of new technologies and new forms of governance is needed for organisational development. Institutions should encourage innovations and learning from others to build the institutional capacity. The leadership has an important role in scouting and attracting talent and creating an eco- knowledge system for motivating the staff to give their best to the institution. Prof. G. Ram Reddy, founder Vice – Chancellor of the first two Open Universities in the country, is known for his

abilities of identifying and nurturing the talent and inspiring the staff to work in teams for collective institutional goals. Therefore, building institutional capacity is related to the vision of the leaders, and building leadership to take forward the institutional goals in the rank and file of the organisation.

### ***iii. Developing Technology Infrastructure***

National Knowledge Commission (2007) strongly recommended creating ICT infrastructure for networking all ODL institutions in India. Since then Government of India has taken many E-learning development initiatives, which include National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL); National Mission on Education through ICT (NME- ICT); SWAYAM; Sakshat, Ekalavya; National Science Digital Library; e- PG Pathashala; Consortium of Educational Communications (CEC); and others. The HRD Ministry is encouraging open universities to adopt Open Educational Resources (OER) and have released all the materials created under NME-ICT as OER. The SWAYAM platform is used for offering many Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and the UGC regulation allows that up to 20% courses can be taken up for qualifications. While OUs are supposed to be leading in the use of ICTs, many of them are in different stages in the participation and use of e-learning in their teaching-learning. There is a need for putting in place more robust and dynamic systems of ICT at all OUs with adequate staff and resources.

### ***iv. Adapting New Approaches to Teaching and Learning***

The OUs may have to adapt unconventional approaches for design and delivery of programmes to meet the challenges of imparting education and training to diverse and dispersed learner groups. There are suggestions to adopt trans-model pedagogy depending on learners learning environment, access to technology, learning abilities etc. Print materials, CDs, online resources, video tracks and/ or various combinations of them may have to be used. Multiple modes have to be used in support services also. The guiding principle is to create an effective learning environment by providing technology mediated interactive learning processes. The challenge is to address the criticism that distance education is a contradiction in terms as distance and education cannot go together. On the other hand, conventional universities today are now using technology used by OUs to offer their programmes on campuses. So, using technology to teach asynchronously is a legitimate



pedagogical practice that has resulted in the ‘death of distance’. The OUs need to revisit their instructional design models and take note of programme specificities, learner specificities and institutional preparedness in designing new models without being fixed to the existing models. The OER and MOOCs have far reaching implications to design innovative models in ODL system. Specialised content development agencies are active in the field of OER and MOOC, which can be adapted by the OUs to offer relevant programmes needed by the student population. OUs need to keep their eyes and mind open and adapt innovative pedagogies to make them relevant to changing needs of new learners.

#### ***v. Engaging Learner Support***

The rhetoric of learner-centric system of ODL becomes a reality mostly through its learner support systems. The absence of direct interface with teachers is to be supplemented by a system of student support services provided through face-to-face and/or technology mediated services. The OUs have set up a wide network of regional centres and study centres, to provide student support services. Most of these centres were established in host institutions except a few OUs which have their own regional centres. The human resources available in host institutions are used on contract basis, by paying suitable honorarium, to provide support services to learners. It is a dependency model, considered an appropriate academic model to provide guidance to self-learners. The study centres are also used as examination centres of OUs. In recent years there are wide spread allegations of all types corrupt practices at the study centres. The UGC as a regulating authority has taken note of these allegations and has developed detailed regulations for the establishment and working of study centres. The OUs were permitted to open study centres in their jurisdiction only. In the context of availability of new technologies, British Open University has developed a strategy to reorganise its Regional Centre activities and is providing most services directly to home and is centralising the management of support services. While the study centres are still relevant to provide face-to-face and counselling, hands on experience and personal services, it is time to rethink the current model of support services provided to distance learners by using available ICTs effectively. Many specialised agencies are also in operation in the field, providing tutorial services and conducting free tutorial services under the open tutorial system. The social media is also extensively used by some OUs for support services. The OUs should revisit their systems of support



services to make them more flexible, need based and technology-enabled direct to home services. The learner support in OUs should be based on the principles of engagement, two-way interaction and building the sense of community and belongingness amongst the learners.

#### ***vi. Encouraging Quality***

Systems and processes to assure quality are critical to the efficacy of OU system. There is a world of difference between ‘access to education’ and ‘access to quality education’. The OUs certainly deserve credit for increasing the access to education. The same cannot be said with confidence about access to *quality education*. *The learning resources of OUs, particularly of IGNOU*, developed in early days of the institution, had high credentials for their quality. Have they also resulted in producing quality graduates? The answer is a mixture of yes and no. The UGC has rightly emphasised the primacy of quality in the ODL system and framed detailed regulations to ensure quality (UGC Open and Distance Learning Regulations 2017). Self-assessment, the world over is considered as the best form of performance assessment and improvement. The COL has developed an instrument for this purpose called COL-RIM. The UOU, YCMOU and KKHSOU have used this instrument for self-assessment of performance. External assessment is made compulsory to all higher educational institutions by UGC in 2012 and NAAC is expected to undertake the responsibility of assessment of OUs. The development of an external assessment instrument is in process. The OUs need to develop their own system of performance assessment and continuous improvement to win the confidence of learners and society on the credibility of their operations. It is important for the OUs to demonstrate their quality explicitly and therefore need to develop their own measures of performance indicators to know how best they are performing. Quality needs to be encouraged at all levels of activities and setting benchmark for all tasks is important.

#### ***vii. Regulations for Sustainable Development***

Regulations are an integral part of a public systems management. Since 2012, the UGC is entrusted with the responsibility to regulate the ODL system to ensure the quality and standards in the system. Earlier the DEC of IGNOU was entrusted with the regulatory function of ODL institutions. The system of regulation of ODL is still in the evolving process with many proposals including the establishment of an independent National Distance Education Council.

The UGC in 2017 has framed ODL regulations which are to be followed by all ODL institutions including OUs. These regulations were framed in the background of wide spread public criticism of misuse of the system by many ODL institutions for commercial purposes.

There are many restrictive and micro-management provisions in the current ODL regulations. The conventional universities are given freedom in the choice of general education programmes, without prior approval of UGC which is denied to open universities. The system of individual ODL programmes approval by UGC, takes away the flexibility and autonomy of Open Universities which is an essential requirement for their effective functioning as ‘Universities’. The restrictions imposed on opening of study centres have not taken note of the need for diverse systems in providing support services keeping in view the specificities of programmes and learners. It is a case of freedom misused, freedom lost. There is a trust deficit in the system. The creativity lies in developing regulatory systems to check the misuse of the system without affecting the autonomy of the system. Three Year Action Agenda 2017-18 to 2019-20, developed by *NITI Aayog* in April 2017 has this to say: ‘We should introduce a system of regulation that focuses on information disclosure and governance rather than micro- management of universities. This requires an overhaul of the UGC as a regulatory system and a rationalisation of the role of professional councils.’ The *NITI Aayog* is also suggesting a tiered system of Universities with graded system of regulation. The OUs need to strengthen their systems of self-regulations through disclosures, declarations and reports and prepare themselves to be part of the proposed graded system of regulations.

## **Concluding Observations**

While the seven steps proposed here are critical to the way forward for OUs in India, these are possible only with effective ODL leadership, which is convinced of the values of ‘openness’ and ‘university’ for national development. India has produced many ODL leaders in the past, who shaped the growth and development of ODL in the country and also contributed to international developments. The need of the time is to create new structures and systems appropriate to changing needs, reinvigorate the existing ones, think about things in a practical way and make sensible decisions to move forward to make the Open Universities, agents of sustainable development. In a way this the ‘common sense approach’, may be the best approach.

## Appendix – A Open Universities in India

S. No.	Name of the University	Year of Estd.	Main
<b>A</b>	<b>National Open University</b>		
1	Indira Gandhi National Open University(IGNOU)	1985	New Delhi
<b>B</b>	<b>State Public Universities</b>		
2	Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU)	1982	Hyderabad
3	Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University (VMOU)	1987	Kota
4	Nalanda Open University (NOU)	1987	Patna
5	Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra OpenUniversity (YCMOU)	1989	Nashik
6	Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University	1991	Bhopal
7	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University(BOU)	1994	Ahmedabad
8	Karnataka State Open University (KSOU)	1996	Mysore
9	Netaji Subash Open University (NSOU)	1997	Kolkata
10	Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University (UPRTOU)	1999	Allahabad
11	Tamilnadu Open University (TOU)	2002	Chennai
12	Uttarkhand Open University (UOU)	2005	Haldwani
13	Pandith Sundarlal Sharma (Open) University(PSSOU)	2005	Bilaspur
14	Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University (KKHSOU)	2006	Guwahati
15	Odisha State Open University (OOU)	2015	Sambalpur
<b>C</b>	<b>State Private Universities</b>		
16	The Global Open University (GOU)	2006	Nagaland
17	Venkateshwara Open University (VOU)	2012	Arunachal Pradesh

*(Source: Open universities in the commonwealth: At a Glance, COL, 2017 and UGC website 2018)*

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## ICT Policy in Indian Universities

*“Education systems followed by institutions are undergoing a radical change due to extensive application of ICT. ...Development of new paradigm in using ICT is to develop demand-driven, need-based education and a learning system that helps learners to link learning with working and developing through lifelong learning”*

**- Ram Takwale**

### Introduction

**W**e are living in a digital era. The educational systems and processes are greatly influenced by the incredibly rapid technological changes. The regulatory and assessment agencies in higher education in India are insisting on all higher education institutions - universities and colleges - to integrate information and communication technologies (ICTs) in all their educational and administrative operations. Every University is expected to have a policy for appropriate and effective use of ICTs. While many universities are using ICT in different ways, they are not very clear about policy issues related to ICTs. There is some ambiguity among the senior university administrators on the meaning of policy and its elements in the context of application of ICT. Considering that a policy is intent to deliver certain services or course of action within the framework of a set of guiding principles, it is important that universities articulate how they want to deploy ICTs to improve the quality of teaching, learning, and research; improve visibility of activities, courses, programmes and research. At a time when Facebook and Twitter are being used by the learners (who are digital natives) regularly, it is necessary for the universities to remain connected with their learners and other stakeholders

outside the boundary of the university. This paper is an attempt to outline some salient points that universities may consider while developing an ICT policy, and is based on my involvement with the development of ICT policy of two Indian Universities. Based on these experiences and my earlier interactions with universities for quality assurance, the issues are identified to provide a format that can serve as a model.

## Policy Framework for ICT

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is an umbrella term that encompasses all communication technologies such as internet and other digital media that provide access to information and knowledge and are used for communication. The Information and Communication Technology Policy (ICT Policy) is an expression of broad intent and plan of action to use ICT effectively in all university activities. The ICT Policy Framework (Fig.1), will help the universities in strategic planning, change management, learning process development, and in enhancing administrative efficiency and optimising learning experiences.

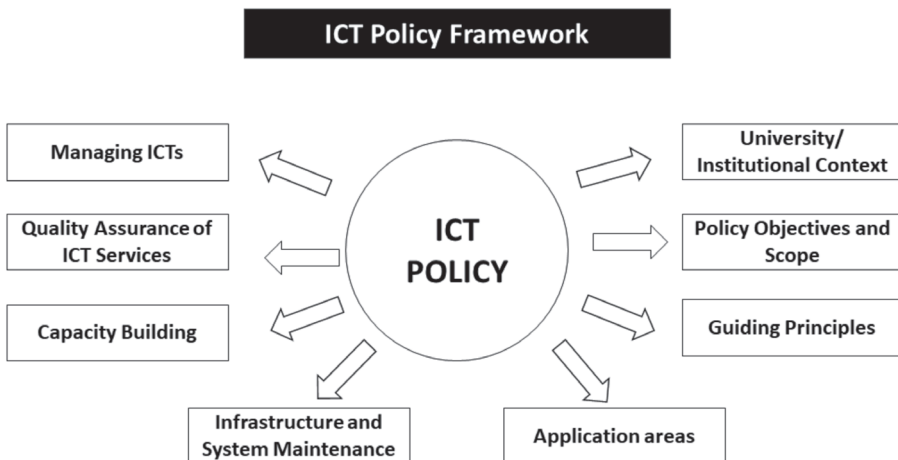


Fig. 1: ICT Policy Framework in Universities

It is also important for a policy to clearly define the terms used in the policy statement. Some of the often used terms that need clarification are: Students (who receives access to the ICT provisions, and the differences between different categories of students), Staff (who constitute full-time, part-time, consultants,

etc. and the services are accessible to them), Teachers (who is a teacher in the university? Will teachers in the affiliated colleges be considered within this definition?) ICT (what constitute ICT and what are not included in the policy?). It is important to consider all possible technical terms as well for clarification in the policy to avoid different interpretation by the stakeholders. The ICT Policy components are being discussed in the subsequent paragraphs under respective subheadings.

## **Institutional Context**

Every university is unique and is in a different stage of development. Depending on their specific requirements and abilities the institutions have to identify the phases of application of ICT. A critical appreciation of institutional context, goals and preparedness is a first step in the preparation of ICT policy. Especially the context of ICT policy will be different in an affiliating university than in a residential single campus university. It will also be different in a university offering courses at a distance, such as open universities.

## **Policy Objectives and Scope**

In the overall context of national goals of higher education the institutions should develop institutional goals of ICT application. Here we are looking for clear identification of purposes to be served with the application of ICT. The four Es of Indian higher education, viz., Expansion, Equity, Excellence and Employability may provide broad purposes of ICT application in the universities. Keeping in view the institutional context, the area specific objectives need to be outlined to help in delineating the scope of the policy. Developing specific objective statements within the policy is essential to use the policy as a monitoring and evaluation tool after a span of time, say, to know whether the milestones are achieved or the ICT policy is having any impact as envisaged.

## **Guiding Principles**

The guiding principles should be identified as a means to assess the appropriateness of ICT practices. In preparing the ICT policy for a University, the following guiding principles may be used as a template:

- **Access:** Provide universal access to teaching, learning and research information to its stakeholders using ICTs and also access to University services to stakeholders using ICTs.
- **Cost – effectiveness:** Application of ICTs to improve economy in the practice of the University. The University will use ICTs to reduce operation costs and improve teaching, learning and research quality.
- **Efficiency and Effectiveness:** Use of ICTs to increase the University's efficiency in delivery of services and improve effectiveness in achieving the expected outcomes of the University.
- **Relevance:** Improve relevance of the learning experiences of the students at the University, and continuously use and adopt relevant ICTs for the University.
- **Transparency:** Use ICTs to foster openness in the University system management and delivery of services to the stakeholders.
- **Privacy:** Use of ICTs within the University to protect individual privacy as per the applicable law.
- **Accountability:** ICT application in the University shall improve accountability of the system for its operation.

## Areas of Application

The areas of ICT applications include system management, research, teaching-learning, student evaluation, support services, community engagement, and student data management. In all these areas institutions many have to identify stages of application. Most of the institutions are more comfortable in using ICT for institutional data management than using for teaching-learning activities. The ICT to optimize the learning experiences has a great potential. The ICT policy may articulate how research will be fostered though providing high speed data access to researchers, and by creating an open access repository for sharing research outputs to the largest community. For teaching-learning, the policy may look at different ways of using ICTs, including use of technologies in the classroom, as well as providing access to learning resources and platforms from outside the classroom using the Internet. The open educational resources (OER) available on Internet provide great opportunities to institutions to enrich their teaching-learning and research activities.

It is also important to articulate how ICTs will be used for student evaluation and engagement, especially how the learners will be made aware of their responsibilities and how to ensure safety on the net and how users are responsible for protection of their own rights and that of the reputation of the University.

## **Infrastructure Resources and Maintenance**

No policy will be implemented in practice if adequate infrastructure and human resources are not deployed. This essentially means the policy is backed-up by adequate financial resources to support relevant departments to implement the policy. The ICT policy should clearly address the ICT requirement based on institutional goals and areas of ICT applications. The systems of maintenance and upgradation are equally important. Many universities which provide funds for creation of infrastructure are not allocating sufficient funds and human resources for maintenance and up-gradation of systems. It is a pathetic scene to see in some public universities hundreds of computers in a badly-managed condition. Most of the time, the initial euphoria of ICT deployment is not supported with adequate funds to update hardware and software to maintain the infrastructure. There is also a need to keep updating the staff skills for managing ICTs, as technology keeps changing. If ICT staff is not provided opportunities to update and grow, they would move to other areas of ICT applications in the industry resulting in lack of competent ICT staff in educational institutions. The policy should clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities as a principle of maintaining the system 24x7 with the least down time.

## **Capacity Building**

ICT policy needs to be backed up with opportunities to help the stakeholders to improve their capacities to make use of the ICT resources optimally. It is important not only to inform new students about the rules and regulations related to ICTs, it is necessary to upgrade students and teachers about new updates around technology use for teaching and learning. One of the implications of availability of free information on net is the easy way of copy and pasting from the net followed by many students for assignments and project work. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the institution to train the students to use available information appropriately providing reference and citation. For



example, the Jawaharlal Nehru University is doing this through its library service activities. Also, it is important for everyone to know about appropriate use of social media, and the ICT policy may identify areas where the University will provide support to its stakeholders, and how often such activities will be organized. The staff managing ICT also need up-gradation of their skills from time to time, and therefore capacity building for ICT is an important aspect of the policy.

## **Quality Assurance**

The quality - Fitness for purpose- of ICT applications is very critical to achieve the expected outcomes. International agencies like the Commonwealth of Learning, and its regional office in Delhi - the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) are engaged in developing guidelines and parameters for quality assurance of e-learning and how best to use ICTs. The quality policy for ICT should emphasize the best practices for running of the system, as well as its use for the specific purpose. For example, the policy should articulate how requests for ICTs use and complaints are handled, including the time for response, etc. Establishment of a service desk to provide telephonic support is also a quality assurance measure to support the ICT policy. The institutions may identify the area-specific ICT quality parameters and put in place a system for application of these quality parameters.

## **ICT Policy Management**

The ICT policy should be integrated in the overall institutional development plan and sufficient resources should be allocated in the university budget. The policy management should ensure the integrity, security and legitimate application of ICT. The university ICT policy should include a mechanism for capacity building of academic, administrative and professional staff to effectively use ICT in all university operations.

A dedicated unit for ICT application in the university is necessary to effectively implement the ICT policy. It is desirable to have ICT policy management committee with head of the institution as Chairman and heads of important functional units as members with head the ICT dedicated unit as convener to coordinate, guide and monitor the ICT policy implementation.

## **Concluding Observations**

While we can develop a template based on the issues identified before, it is for the university to discuss and contextualize the issues to articulate their own policy. While the commitment of higher levels to policy is necessary, it may not be a sufficient condition for successful implementation. Therefore, policy development should be a consultative process in the university, preceded and followed by several capacity building activities to sensitize the users, and emphasize the rights and responsibilities of using university networks and technology resources. A policy approach to ICT use in the university will be useful to assess the infrastructural requirements to provide world-class teaching and learning, and allow learners to responsibly use the information around the world to optimize their learning.

## Section C- Quality Assurance

In this section on **quality assurance** four essays are included; two public lectures and two essays from edited volumes. The focus of this section is on systems and processes to ensure quality in higher education in the context of massification, liberalisation and privatisation. The Indian experience of quality assurance through assessment and accreditation is critically examined. The ODL institutions for quality assurance and the lessons from those experiences are described. The open educational resources (OER) have the potential to revolutionise the access to knowledge. The quality of OER is critical to their relevance of open access. A normative institutional framework is suggested to ensure the quality of OER based learning materials. The focus and context of the four chapters included in this section is briefly described below.

### **CHAPTER-9: Quality Assessment in Higher Education: The Indian Way**

Quality, broadly, defined as ‘fitness for purpose’ is the defining element of higher education in today’s competitive globalised world. Every country is addressing the concerns of quality in its own way. The focus of this chapter is on critical description of India’s quality assurance measures in higher education with particular reference to systems of assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions. This chapter is a revised and enlarged version of the article “Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Developing Country Perspective and Experience” in Terance W. Bigakar and Deane E Newbnea (eds.) 2009. Higher Education in Asia/Pacific, Palgrave.

### **CHAPTER-10: Quality Assurance of Distance Education**

Distance education variously known as open distance learning, technology-mediated learning, distributed-learning, resources-based learning, online learning, e-learning, blended learning and such other nomenclature with different

shades of meaning is an important philosophy and a form of learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The quality is one of the critical concerns of the distance education. The focus of this chapter is on narration of quality initiatives of some open distance learning institutions in India and lessons drawn from that experience. This chapter is a revised version of the article “Quality Assurance of Distance Education” in Suresh Garg et.al (eds.) 2006, Four Decades of Distance Education, Viva Book private limited, New Delhi.

### **CHAPTER-11: Quality Assurance of OER: The Institutional Framework**

In this age of democracy, knowledge is considered as the Common wealth of humanity. The open educational resources (OER) – the educational materials that are freely accessed – are the product of the common ownership view of knowledge. In the field of education and learning the OER have the potential to bring revolutionary changes in the teaching- learning practices. The focus of this chapter is on institutional framework to ensure the quality of OER. This chapter is a revised version of the keynote address delivered at International Conference on OER organised by Wawasan Open University, Penang Malaysia in 2017.

### **CHAPTER-12: Towards Synergy of Quality Assurance**

Quality assurance is a collective function of multiple stakeholders in education. The stakeholders include students, staff, management, government, regulatory agencies, assessment agencies, international agencies, employers, parents and the society at large. Sometimes different stakeholders are looking at quality with different perspectives. There is a need for all stakeholders to work in tandem to ensure quality in higher education. This calls for synergy between individual and institutional efforts to address the problem of quality deficit in higher education. The focus of the chapter is on discussion about nature of quality deficit and the need for proper alignment of roles of stakeholders to improve the quality of higher education. This chapter is a revised version of the public lecture delivered at Krishna University, Machilipatnam, Andhra Pradesh in 2015, which was also included in V. Venkaiah (ed.), Higher Education in India, New Realities and Challenges, Krishna University, Machilipatnam, 2015.

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## Quality Assessment in Higher Education : The Indian Way

*“The philosophy of NAAC is ameliorative and enabling rather than punitive or judgemental, so that all constituencies of institutions of higher learning are empowered to maximise their resources, opportunities and capabilities”*

**- Arun Nigavekar**

### Introduction

Quality assessment, a process of evaluating the institution’s performance against the goals and set standards, by external assessment agencies, is the order of the day in higher education across the world. In India this process was initiated in 1994, with the establishment of National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) by University Grants Commission (UGC) to assess the institutional performance of higher education institutions and National Board of Accreditation (NBA) by All India Council for Technology Education (AICTE) to assess the quality of technical education programmes. In 1996, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) established Accreditation Board (AB) to accredit higher education and institutions and programmes in different branches of agriculture and allied sciences including agricultural engineering and veterinary sciences. The Distance Education Council (DEC) of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was also engaged in assessment of distance education institutions and programmes till 2012. Now this function is transferred to UGC and the NAAC is entrusted with the responsibility of external assessment of distance education institutions and programmes. The Quality Council of India (QCI) was set up by Government of India in collaboration

with Indian industry in 1967 to establish an accreditation structure in the country and to spread quality movement in India. From 2015, the MHRD, GOI has put in place a system of National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) for ranking of higher education institutions.

The two distinct features of the Indian way of quality assessment in higher education are: i. All the agencies are in public domain and ii. They operate as national level agencies. The NAAC has the distinction of quality assessment and accreditation of around 7500 institutions which include 350 universities and around 7200 colleges, during the last over two decades. It is a world record in assessment by external agencies. The NAAC has also adopted a unique way of grading of institutions based on institutional scores. Gallileo's observation of 'measure what is measurable and make measurable what is not so' greatly influenced the NAAC policy makers approach to quality assessment. It is realized that measurement is necessary to understand the level of performance and understanding is necessary to change and improve the quality. The NAAC has greatly influenced the assessment model in Indian higher education. The NAAC institutional assessment has become a central focal point in the Indian assessment system. In this chapter the Indian way refers to the NAAC way. Based on my own experience of working at NAAC (2003 to 2008) I have reflected on the NAAC experience and made a few suggestions for the way forward.

## **External Quality Agency**

Traditionally, quality has been an internal concern of institutions and academies. The external systems of licensing and regulation have been more concerned about ensuring that the minimum requirements are met and system aberrations are addressed. Providing quality education is considered the domain of academics and institutions, and any external agency's activities have been looked upon as interference in the academic autonomy of institutions. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was an increasing realization of the limitations of this approach. It was realized that the quality of education is a serious concern of the society as a whole and cannot be totally left to the whims and fancies of academics and educational institutions. Employability has also become an important outcome parameter of education. Public accountability of educational institutions has drawn the attention of all the stakeholders in education to quality questions. The NAAC was established in this background as an External Quality

Agency (EQA). The expected NAAC role and its relationship with the higher education institution is guided by following four central recognitions. These are:

- quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves;
- the academic autonomy, identity, and integrity of the institutions are to be respected;
- the assessment standards are subject to consultation with stakeholders; and
- the aim of external assessment is to contribute both to quality improvement and accountability.

### **NAAC as External Quality Agency**

The NAAC, as an external quality agency has a vision ‘to make quality the defining element of higher education in India through a combination of self and external quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance initiatives’. The NAAC assessment model is grounded on the five core values of higher education: i. Contribution to national development ii. Fostering global competencies among students, iii. Inculcating a value system among students, iv. Promoting the use of technology, v. Quest for excellence. These values are the basic framework to identify the parameters of assessment of quality. Like many other EQAs, the NAAC follows four a stage approach in assessment of higher education institutions as follows:

- Identification of predetermined criteria for assessment
- Preparation of self-study report by institutions
- Peer team onsite visit and data validation and verification
- Decision on Accreditation

### **NAAC Assessment Methodology**

The NAAC assessment is an evidence-based system of assessment on nationally evolved criteria and the institution’s self-assessment report. This is the broad pattern followed by most of EQAs in the world. The NAAC is

continuously engaged in formulating and re-formulating its assessment methodologies in consultation with stakeholders. The present methodology which came into operation from July 2017 is fourth model adopted by NAAC since 1994. Initially NAAC adopted the two-point scale of accredited / not-accredited. Soon it moved to star grading (5 star, 4 star, 3 star, 2 star and 1 star) of institutions on institutional scores on a 100 point scale, measured on 10 parameters. In 2002 the grading pattern was reviewed and a nine-point letter grading system (A++, A+, A, B++, B+, B, C++, C+, C) was adopted based on seven criteria. In 2007, after reviewing the experience of the nine-point letter grading, realising the difficulties in making finer distinctions in quantitative measurement of quality, has grouped them under a three-point letter grading of A, B, C. In July 2017 after critical review of more than two decades of experience and taking note of national and international developments, a new assessment and accreditation framework was developed.

## Revised Assessment and Accreditation Framework

The revised framework is a paradigm shift in assessment methodology aimed at developing a more ‘robust, objective, transparent, scalable and ICT enabled system’ (NAAC, 2017). The important features of the change are:

- From qualitative peer judgement to data based quantitative indicator evaluation with increased objectivity and transparency
- Towards extensive use of ICT confirming scalability and robustness
- In terms of simplification of the process drastic reduction in number of questions, size of the report, visit days, and so on
- Introducing the pre-qualifier for peer team visit, as 30% of the system generated score
- Introducing *System Generated Scores* (SGS) with a combination of online evaluation (about 70%) and peer judgment (about 30%)
- In introducing the element of *third party validation* of data
- In providing appropriate differences in the metrics, weightages and benchmarks for universities, autonomous colleges and affiliated/ constituent colleges



- In revising several metrics to bring in enhanced participation of students and alumni in the assessment process.

The seven criteria, identified in 2002, with minor modifications continue to be the basis for assessment of institutions in the model of 2017. These are: 1. Curricular Aspects, 2. Teaching-Learning and Evaluation, 3. Research, Innovation and Extensions, 4. Infrastructure and Learning Resources, 5. Student Support and Progression, 6. Governance, Leadership and Management, 7. Institutional values and Best Practices. Under each criteria key indicators, Quantitative and qualitative metrics were identified. Measurement scores were distributed among key aspects on a 1000 point scale, to measure the quality and grade the institutions on a seven point scale (A++, A+, A, B++, B+, B, and C).

The exercise of continuous revision of NAAC assessment methodology during the last two and a half decade is a reflection of the dynamic nature of the assessment process and also shows the openness of NAAC for self-improvement. It also indicates the unsettled nature of quality assessment methodologies. The revised assessment process put in place in 2017 has attempted to address many concerns in assessment like subjectivity of peer teams, transparency in operation and scalability (NAAC Manuals, 2017). Still the problem of 'one size fits for all' approach needs to be addressed. The new process is a more complex process involving more stages of operations and more agencies in making measuring quality oriented. The institutions may find it difficult to understand the quantitative metrics and also the differences between quantitative and qualitative metrics, making the third party data validation and verification process a difficult task. Addressing the problem of 'optical illusion' of peer teams should not result in 'data illusion'. A wag remarked that the new process is a great re-employment opportunity for retired academics and consultants and advisors. May be some of these are unintended consequence of the change process and one hopes that the NAAC will address these problems in course of time.

## **The Impact of External Quality Agencies**

A critical review of the history of operations of External Quality Agencies in India shows that they have passed through the initial phase of resistance, and there is now increasing acceptance of EQA activities. However, in spite of

acceptance of the EQA system by many, there are a few institutions, including some very prestigious institutions that are still reluctant to opt for external assessment. Some of them suffer from the complex of “we are the best, who can judge us”; others may feel uncomfortable about their performance and are afraid of subjecting themselves to external scrutiny. Institutional accreditation by NAAC was voluntary, till 2012 and thereafter UGC made it compulsory.

The EQA agency activities have created a positive impact on the higher education system. It is clear that they have generated more interest and concerns about quality assurance among the stakeholders of higher education and have created a better understanding of quality assurance among HEIs. The EQA actions have triggered quality assurance activities in many of the Higher Education Institutions and through them have helped in the creation of an institutional database of accredited higher education institutions. One important and positive effect has been the performance data of institutions available to other funding and regulatory agencies to take some of their decisions based on the assessment outcomes. And overall, the work of EQAs have provided useful policy inputs to different agencies on quality aspects of higher education institutions.

## **The Lessons of Experience**

We may broadly draw some lessons from the experience of Indian EQA agencies, particularly the NAAC experience. In India, the government plays a critical role in regulating the higher education system. All the EQAs in India are in the public domain. The role of private players in assessment is still looked down upon with suspicion. Professional associations are not very active in quality assessment. Government oversight and involvement is also required to make assessment a consequential activity. The reach of the external assessment agency mostly depends on public policies in education. At present the external assessment in India is mostly a state-driven activity.

The involvement of academia is critical to the acceptance of the external assessment activity. There is some apprehension within the academia about the effects of external assessment. The EQA is perceived as a threat to the autonomy of educational institutions. Some even consider the “quality hype” as a part of developed countries’ strategies to establish hegemony over the education

systems of developing countries. Academics are generally uncomfortable with the managerial perspectives and market language of quality. Much of the conflict and confusion in discussion about EQAs relates to the built-in-tension between accountability concerns and the improvement agenda. The NAAC, realizing the importance of active involvement of academia, has taken measures to create an intensive dialogue with academics on different perspectives of quality and to actively engage them in operationalizing the external quality system. This has created a positive image of NAAC and other external quality assessment systems over time.

The existence of internal quality assurance systems and processes within the higher education institution is a precondition for the successful operation of an external quality assurance system. Institutions identified as “A” Grade by NAAC have a common feature of having well- developed internal systems of quality assurance. The one-time external assessment activity will be of relevance only in a situation of well-developed internal quality mechanisms. The NAAC activity has also triggered in the establishment of internal systems of quality assurance in institutions. The NAAC clearly demonstrates the two-way relationship of internal and external quality assessment system, that is, one strengthening the other.

The credibility of the operations of EQAs is crucial to the effectiveness of external assessment. The EQAs operations and management system, as a role model of quality, is critical to the legitimacy of its operations. The transparency of the process brings more accountability and reliability to its operations. The NAAC puts all its systems, processes, and decisions on the Web for public information; it also collects Web-based feedback on its operations. The revised assessment system of 2017 has taken many new initiatives to make the assessment system objective and transparent.

## **The Agenda for the Future**

Very few Indian higher education institutions finding a place in the global ranking has become a major concern of policy makers in education. The initial ameliorative and enabling role of NAAC is extended and many judgements in higher education are made based on NAAC grades. The NAAC grading is linked to many aspects in higher education including recognition of autonomous colleges, identification of universities of eminence and graded autonomy to institutions. All these decisions are of critical importance in higher education,

making the NAAC process subject to more scrutiny and criticism. Many are skeptical of rewarding institutions based on NAAC grades. Is the NAAC grade a reliable tool to assess the multi-dimensionality of institutional quality, is a question begging a clear answer. In the absence of any other criterion this criteria is used is the official response to this question. The academic world faces the challenge of finding alternative and more reliable criteria for performance assessment of institutions. Recognising the need to relook at external agencies assessment methodologies the Draft National Education Policy, 2016, has this to say on this matter:

- An expert committee will be constituted to study the systems of accreditation in place internationally. It will draw from the experiences of some of the best practices followed by countries having well-performing systems and will suggest restructuring of NAAC and NAB as well as redefining methodologies, parameters and criteria.
- Evaluation/ Accreditation details of each institution will be available to the general public through a dedicated website, to enable students and other stakeholders to make informed choices.

## **Concluding Observations**

There is an increasing engagement with the question of quality education. In the context of increasing role of service sector in national economy, quality education becomes a critical factor for the nation's competitive advantage in a global context. During the last two decades or more the NAAC has acquired rich experience in assessment and accreditation. We may have to build the future model of external assessment by drawing proper lessons from this experience. In future the NAAC may only focus on assessment and accreditation of universities and university level institutions and research and development activities in quality assurance, leaving assessment of colleges and programmes to other EQAs. The mechanism for establishing multiple agencies for institutional assessment of colleges and for programme assessment, needs the immediate attention of policy makers. The Indian way of quality assessment needs critical re-examination to make it a more reliable instrument to assess quality.

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## Quality Assurance of Distance Education

*“Open education broke open the iron triangle of access, cost and quality that had constrained education throughout history and had created the insidious assumption, still prevalent today, that in education you cannot have quality without exclusivity”*

**- Sir John Daniel**

**D**istance Education (DE) variously known as open learning, distance learning, flexible learning, distributed learning, online learning, e-learning, resource-based learning, technology-mediated learning and such other nomenclature, with different shades of meaning and also used interchangeably has come to stay as an important philosophy and form of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In India around 12 percent of tertiary learners are getting their education through the distance mode. In the coming years, the educational planners are hopeful of increasing this number to 20 percent. This is an indication of the important place distance education has come to occupy in India’s education and human resource development efforts. At the same time, there is insufficient public understanding of distance education functions and awareness about concerns regarding its quality assurance. Even though distance education systems and practices greatly vary and are context-specific, the experts in the field consider quality assurance as the common priority.

Every age has its defining elements, which describe the purpose and nature of social processes of that age. It is generally assumed that tradition is the defining element of ancient society; religion is the defining element of the medieval society; reason is the defining element of modern society; and quality is the defining element of the knowledge society. Quality, in terms of fitness for

purpose, excellence, perfection, standards, value for money, consistency, transformation and relevance, defines in different ways different dimensions. Quality makes the knowledge relevant to social and individual needs. Quality education enables the societies to address many of its problems. Without quality the education may become a big social problem. In this chapter, we reflect on this important problem. The approach is more of an insider's experience and concerns, than a scholarly analysis of the system. The author, with his more than two decades of experience in various-capacities in open universities and agencies engaged in institutional assessment and accreditation in India, has presented the operational picture of quality assurance contexts, practices and lessons with a hope that it will generate further discussion and action. The term, 'Distance Education' (DE), is used in this paper as a generic description of activities of open universities and distance education/ correspondence course institutes of conventional universities.

## Education as Quality

Education, a process of creation, preservation and dissemination of knowledge, and development of skills and attitudes is an important element and basis of a knowledge society. The quality of the knowledge society depends on the quality of education. The Chinese philosopher Confucius considered that the goal of education was to produce men of quality who combined competence with virtue. From this perspective, we may consider education as quality. Quality as fitness of purpose defines the goals of education and provides answers to the 'what' of education; quality as excellence and standards in performance defines the processes of education; quality as value for money provides benchmarks for the output of education and quality as a transformation gives us the indicators to judge the outputs of education. In this sense, we may say that education is quality. This is equally applicable to distance education.

As such, open learning has its genesis in mainstream face-to-face classroom based conventional education. But, the experience of about four decades of practice of distance education in India has brought forth two distinguishing features which deserve particular mention in the context of this discussion on quality. **Firstly**, the beginnings and early growth of DE systems in India were mainly motivated by access concerns. In the 1960s and 1970s, many students

who could not get admission in conventional institutions opted for distance learning. Policy makers also opted for encouraging distance education as a less costly option. As a result, large enrolment was considered a goal and an achievement of DE institutions. Quality did not get the attention it deserved and this attitude made it a second option. **Secondly**, in the context of structural readjustment in the 1990s where higher education was treated more as a private than public good, DE institutions began focusing more on surplus generation or profit-making practices in their operations. During the last decade many more international players have begun operating in the DE field in India. Most of them are guided by the profit motive. As a result, quality has been a casualty and many unhealthy practices by DE institutions have been observed. There is another paradoxical development. Some of the prestigious institutions, known for their provision of high quality conventional education, are also being accused of providing low quality Distance Education. The paradox is that the surplus resources generated by providing low quality Distance Education are used for the provision of high quality conventional programmes! It is alleged that some of the dual mode universities are using the distance mode programmes more to generate surplus resources to subsidize and strengthen their conventional education programmes. Some of these trends and developments have resulted in a strong expression of public concern about the quality of Distance Education in India.

## Quality Assurance Initiatives

The Distance Education Council (DEC), a statutory body of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, was entrusted with the responsibility of co-ordination and maintenance of standards in Distance Education in India (in 2013 this body was shifted to UGC). The DEC has taken many initiatives for quality assurance in collaboration with national agencies like National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), National Board of Assessment (NBA), Indian Nursing Council (INC), National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). Some of these are: (a) development of norms and guidelines for development and delivery of programmes in DE; (b) development of norms and guidelines for assessment and accreditation of DE institutions; (c) development support for promotion of quality; (d) development of database on the system operations; (e) publication of quality promotion materials; (f) encouragement for resource sharing



through a common pool of best materials; (g) training support for development of human resources and transformation of materials into self-instructional format; and (h) support for research on quality assurance.

The University Grants Commission (UGC), the apex body of higher education in India, also has initiated many measures for the maintenance of standards in DE systems. Considering that there is a kind of mass proliferation of off-campus study centres with sub-standard facilities and inadequate attention to the quality of education imparted, the UGC, in consultation with the DEC, has formulated regulations for “Franchising of Higher Education Through Off-campus Study Centres: UGC Norms”. The UGC norms spell out in detail the regulations for the delivery mode, the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), and the organization and governance systems of off-campus study centres. The other national professional bodies like the AICTE and the NCTE have formulated detailed norms and regulations for offering professional programmes in engineering, management, pharmacy, architecture, teacher education, etc. through the distance mode in collaboration with DEC. Under these initiatives, expert committees of collaborative institutions visit the DE Centres for on-the-spot assessment. The NAAC, under MoU with the DEC has developed the instrument for assessment and accreditation of distance education institutions. The NAAC has brought out a number of publications on quality higher education which are equally relevant to distance education. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has formulated guidelines for the operations of off-shore educational institutions in India.

The brief account given above shows that there are attempts to put in place the framework of quality assurance in India for distance education. Many agencies like the MHRD, DEC, UGC, AICTE, NAAC, NCTE and other professional agencies are involved in this process. Here, four concerns deserve special mention. **Firstly**, there is lack of clarity about the role of the multiple agencies involved in this process. There are even overlapping areas of influence with the result that co-ordination among them is a cause of some concern. **Secondly**, many institutions feel that they are burdened with regulations by too many bodies and some try to play one against the other to escape responsibility. **Thirdly**, the enabling systems, structures and processes are too weak to implement the norms and regulations of quality assurance formulated by regulatory and professional bodies. The guidelines and regulations seem to

be mere expressions of good intentions but formulated without paying sufficient attention to the operational framework required for the realization of the intentions. **Fourthly**, the regulatory framework is considered rigid and unrealistic, lacking the flexibility to adapt to the diversity of local contexts and emerging concerns. As Philip Crosby put it: “Quality has to be caused, not controlled”. It is understood that the MHRD is apprised of some of these concerns and is contemplating to establish Distance Education Council as an independent authority (in 2013 it was shifted from Indira Gandhi National Open University to UGC as a transitory organization) to act as a national all-encompassing coordinating and quality assurance agency vested with authority to regulate all institutions engaged in delivery of distance education in all its varied forms and formats, including satellite supported interaction and online offer.

## Some Lessons

The Indian distance education system can be described as ‘one system, many models’. There is a great variation in the quality assurance policies, systems and practices of these institutions. At one end of the spectrum, we have Indira Gandhi National Open University with commendable quality systems and practices. Some state open universities have also developed quality learning materials and put in place practices of quality assurance. At the other end of the spectrum, many conventional institutions are offering sub-standard distance education programmes with large enrolments by franchising delivery. Many foreign and Indian institutions are also offering on-line education and training programmes. Mechanisms to ensure the quality of these programmes are yet to be developed. In this varied situation, drawing any lessons of experience will always have exceptions. In this section, some conclusions, based on author’s feel of the situation, are presented to focus on broad trends which require close attention and action to ensure the quality of distance education in India. Some of these are:

The Indian higher education setting shows that the DE is a response to the challenges of access and equity to quality education. The availability of the huge human resources and physical infrastructure in the conventional system, through partnerships for resource-sharing has contributed significantly to rapid strides of DE. Many Open Universities and DE centres of conventional universities are able to provide higher education to millions with the optimum use of human

resources and the infrastructure of the higher education system in the country. The Indira Gandhi National Open University serves its more than 1.3 million cumulative student population, with 350 thousand annual intake, by 300 full-time and 35,000 part-time academic staff from the conventional system through 1300 study centres. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, with small full-time faculty of 75, is admitting more than 100 thousand students annually in different programmes. This is true of many other state open universities and correspondence course institutions. These practices have implications for quality concerns. The quality of distance education is partly determined by the quality of conventional higher education in the country due to the reliance on counsellors, lesson writers and examiners who come from the conventional system. Therefore, the quality of distance education operations is partly a reflection of the quality of higher education system in the country as well.

Large enrolments in distance education programmes are not matched by requisite efforts for quality. In spite of John Daniel's convincing argument of iron triangle, consisting of the vectors of access, costs and quality, as the success formula for open and distance learning, Indian DE institutions are not able to come out of the trap of inverse relationship of numbers and quality. In the academic community, there is a strong feeling that large numbers are affecting quality maintenance adversely. This is partly a result of their prejudices and partly because of their experiences. John Daniel (2004) has explained in many of his works, how educational technology can help in ensuring the quality of distance education systems. In India, due to financial and other constraints, the use of educational technology, across the board, has been very limited to make a positive difference to quality. The extensive use of educational technology in teaching-learning, support services and system management will facilitate more interactivity, better connectivity and greater efficiency, resulting in higher quality of distance education. We are adopting alternative modes of education without effectively integrating alternative technologies required for that. We need to re-engineer the learning environment for quality education.

The sustainability of quality operations requires institutionalization of quality. The institutionalization of quality processes in DE institutions is very weak. The quality concerns are flowing more from above and are not uniformly spread. The quality of operations is a reflection of individual initiatives and efforts, than

an institutional response. In such situations, sustainability becomes difficult. The open universities like Indira Gandhi National Open University, and a few other state universities, have well- defined systems and procedures for different activities of distance education operations like design and development of learning materials; student support services; student-evaluation and management operations etc. But the same cannot be said of operations of all state open universities and distance education centers of dual mode universities. To enhance sustainability, the institutionalization of quality operations needs to be strengthened comprehensively. Every DE institution has to be encouraged and supported to create its own internal quality assurance structures and processes to ensure the quality of operations. Management of any large system requires an efficient governance system. Leadership plays a very important role in institutionalizing a flexible, open and responsive governance system which is *sine quo non* of quality.

The drive for quality is not strong enough among a large number of staff of DE institutions. There is a passive response to quality initiatives. As Aristotle said, “The sustainability of quality is possible only when quality becomes a habit.” Quality is an attitude of mind. How to internalize quality as a value among all the staff of the DE institutions is a major concern. Incentives for quality and disincentives for lack of quality may have to be thought of. More attention has to be paid to strengthening staff development programmes. IGNOU and a few other state open universities have taken many initiatives in staff development activities. More concerted efforts by all DE institutions needed to build are institutional capabilities in quality assurance.

The assessment and accreditation activities of the DEC, NAAC and other agencies are in the initial stages of development and their initiatives are yet to create the desired level of impact. There is a need to seriously consider the role these bodies could play in ensuring acceptable levels of quality in DE programmes, especially in ensuring comparability of quality and standards of programmes offered by dual mode universities and many private and international providers. The assessment and accreditation processes should help in bringing more transparency into the operations of DE institutions. In the context of the profit-making operations of DE institutions, the transparency of operations may result in more public pressure to maintain standards. More dissemination of information on the activities of DE institutions to all stakeholders will play a positive role in sustaining quality.

Most of the stakeholders (learners, parents, administrators and practitioners) are more interested in the timely conduct of examinations and the award of degrees on time. The concern of a large number of students is to get the degree/certificate, without much pressure for quality of the system. The nature and orientation of students is a critical factor in the quality of education. The DE institutions, in their desire to admit large numbers for various reasons, appear to overlook the desire to provide quality education, and are at times not able to ensure minimum competency levels of admitted students. This leads to low success rate and high drop-out rate, reflecting on the quality of the system.

In India, the research studies on quality assurance in distance education have not been of a high enough standard, in spite of commendable research studies from STRIDE (IGNOU), GRADE (BRAOU) and a few other institutions. Research studies can provide useful inputs to quality assurance. There is need for more action-research studies into different aspects of quality assurance which can be used as inputs for quality improvement of operations.

## Concluding Observations

The quality of education is mainly the function of motivated students, committed staff, good infrastructure and efficient governance systems. This is true of all modes and all levels of education. The distance education context in India is a complex phenomenon of co-existence of different operational systems in terms of ownership systems, management practices, teaching-learning practices, delivery systems and programme focus, all functioning under the generic description of distance education. In such a context, any set of general observations will have a few exceptions. The best examples of quality assurance/measurements of IGNOU and a few other DE institutions deserves wider dissemination and adoption. There are enough guidelines/benchmarks for quality assurance of distance education developed by international and national agencies. The challenge is in the implementation. How do we make quality a '**habit of mind**' and '**habit of action**' which are close to heart is the critical concern of all those engaged in distance education. Capacity building in quality assurance across the board of distance education institutions is the only answer to these concerns.

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## Quality Assurance of OER The Institutional Framework

*“Institutions whether they are education providers or accrediting agencies of academic provisions invariably will apply a different lens from those of advocates, producers or consumers of OER. Their views will be shaped by both their traditions of what higher education is and what it should be, to serve its expected roles and responsibilities as a social service to citizens”.*

**- Gajaraj Dhanarajan**

### The Context

**E**ducation is a social practice. The changing teaching – learning practices are the products of historical contexts and changing social, economic and political systems. The Open Educational Resources (OER) i.e., the educational materials that may be freely accessed, reused, modified and shared, are the products of our times. We are living in the age of democracy. The beginning of the OER movement is primarily motivated by the democratic ideal that knowledge is the common wealth of humankind and should be freely shared. John Dewey’s discourse on ‘Democracy and Education’ interface is reflected in current times in the form of citizen-centric polity promoting learner-centric education. The revolutionary developments in information and communication technologies has enabled us to have greater reliance on open resources-based learning. The concept of Open Educational Resources (OER) was originally coined during the UNESCO forum on open courseware for Higher Education in Developing countries held in 2002. I had the privilege of attending this conference. After

10 years in 2012, UNESCO organised the world congress on OER which resulted in the Paris Declaration on OER. The Paris declaration sets 6 promotional goals of OER as: 1. Promotion of lifelong learning, 2. Contribute to social inclusion, 3. Promotion of gender equity, 4. Education for special needs, 5. Improving cost efficiency and 6. Improving quality of teaching learning. In this context the quality of educational resources that reside in public domain is one of our major concerns.

## The Focus

Quality, as **fitness of purpose** and **fitness for purpose**, defines the relevance of OER. These two dimensions of quality i.e., goals and objectives of quality reflected in the expression of quality as **fitness of purpose** and inputs, processes and expected outcomes of quality reflected in the expression of quality as **fitness for purpose** captures the totality of quality concerns of OER. The institutional frameworks at two levels i.e., internal institutional systems of quality assurance and external systems of quality assessment of OER quality, play an important role in realising different dimensions of OER quality. The discussion in this presentation mainly focuses on these different dimensions of quality and appropriateness of varied institutional arrangements for ensuring and assessing quality. At the end some questions are raised for discussion. This is a presentation of a *reflective professional* having varied work experiences in Indian Open Universities and Indian National Quality Assessment and Accreditation Agency.

## Quality as Fitness of Purpose

The two critical questions in quality assessment are: are we identifying the right aspects for quality assessment? and are we assessing quality in the right ways? These questions are equally relevant to OER quality. The questions are to be answered based on the broad goals and processes of OER. The OER is expected to: transform educational practices by adopting open learning architecture; liberalise and democratise knowledge; combine formal and informal learning; combine development and sharing of knowledge resources; provide access to quality learning resources by external validation as all resources are shared and possibility for feedback is opened; and enable the change of educational culture more than mere resource availability. These objectives and processes can be used as benchmarks for the OER quality assessment.



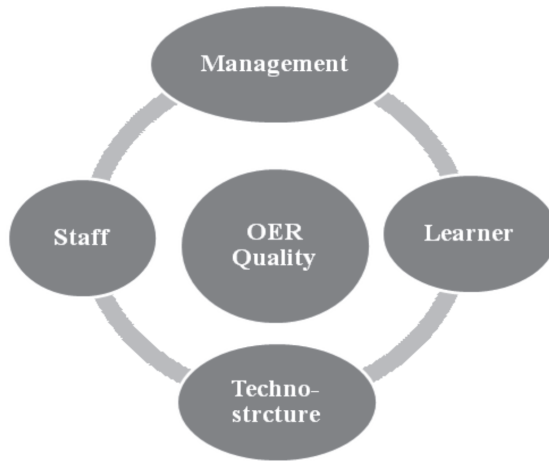
## **Quality as Fitness for Purpose**

Here the focus is on quality of processes and expected outcomes. Serious concerns have been expressed about the quality of OER materials and their pedagogical adequacy. The OER quality guidelines should take note of variations in the use of OER and differences in the perspectives of those who develop and use them to teach; those who use them to learn and those who make them available. There are only a few specific quality OER assurance processes in place. In recent years many agencies are engaged in the development of OER quality guidelines. The COL and CEMCA are actively engaged in the process of development of guidelines. The CEMCA sponsored “Quality Assurance Guidelines for Open Education Resources: TIPS Framework”, developed by Paul Kawachi provides a review of quality frameworks and suggests a framework covering pedagogical quality (teaching), content materials quality (information), product and formats quality (presentation), and technical and technology quality (systems). The open learning architecture makes the development of OER quality guidelines a complex process and something different from industrialised architecture. The OER quality guidelines should address the need for synergization of perspectives of multiple OER stakeholders. The ethical framework of guidelines is to be based on social ethics of OER. The individualised rights perspective of ethics is to be balanced with social responsibility of the academic world.

## **Internal Institutional Framework**

Internal Institutional frameworks are critical to the operationalization of quality practices. OER literature indicates many gaps in the institutional policies and practices. Gajaraj Dhanarajan and David Porter edited a volume of COL “Open Educational Resources: An Asian Perspective” provides an overview of OER Policies and Practices in Asia. In to-days world, the universities are increasingly becoming amoeba type creations moving in all directions and in all time frames at once. This needs very fluid institutional frameworks for aligning the roles of all important players, particularly management, staff and students. Quality is mainly a function of alignment of roles of management, staff and students with the assistance of techno- structure, as represented below.





**Fig. 2: Quality as Alignment of Roles**

The quality practices should be able to align the facilitating and monitoring roles of management, academic role of staff and learning functions of learners. In this context the OPAL “The Open Educational Practice Matrix” is useful to position the individual organisation quality frameworks according to the uptake of OER and maturity of institutions. Here the challenge is contextualising the open educational practices. The internal quality assurance systems may have to follow logical frameworks of structuring the main elements in the OER project highlighting logical linkages between activities and expected results. The internal quality systems must put in place the process of self-evaluation of practices of using and developing OER. The capacity building of learner is critical to the quality of OER. The main focus of the internal institutional structures should be on this capacity building of the learner i.e., ability of the learner to make sense of what is relevant and what is not relevant for his/her learning.

## **External OER Quality Assessment**

External assessment of quality is considered one of the objective and effective ways of continuous improvement of quality. This mechanism may be considered a way of establishing credibility and accountability of open educational practices. Designing appropriate quality procedures by external agencies for OER quality is a daunting task. The formal hierarchical procedures of peer reviews and external assessment may not be appropriate for external assessment of OER. The external agencies may focus on the strengths and appropriateness of internal

performance assessment system. The extent of incorporation of user and developers evaluation tools into OER materials is equally important. The triggering effect of external quality assessment is more significant than the regulatory function. The OER use is more a self-directed activity and the quality agency's role is to make self-direction a meaningful activity.

## Questions for Discussion

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is making commendable efforts in collaboration with UNESCO in disseminating useful knowledge about OER and providing effective and inclusive education by designing OER for the diverse needs of students. Along with many other works, guidelines for Open Education Resources (OER) in higher education developed by COL provide action guidelines to governments, higher education institutions, academic staff, student bodies and quality assurance and recognition bodies for effective use of OER. (see web:www.col.org). The Government of India is actively engaged through many individuals of MHRD and UGC, in promoting OER use in higher education. In spite of availability of a large number of works on OER, many in the academic world still are not clear about the processes of OER and their consequences to the field of education, some of the questions which need more critical reflection are:

- How can self-assessment of quality of OER materials be designed?
- How can internal institutional frameworks for assessing, promoting and sustaining OER quality be developed?
- How can knowledge architecture integrating individual rights approach and social responsibility approach of academic world be built?
- How can the institutional maturity level to participate in OER projects be assessed? How suitable is the OPAL Matrix for Asian contexts?
- How can OER quality guidelines and contextualized without losing sense of purpose?
- How can quality guidelines in OER material as a self-regulatory process be embodied?
- What is an appropriate design for external assessment of quality of OER?
- Can a crowd-source external assessment be acceptable in the academic world?

- How can technology use and appropriate use of meta-data assist in retrieving quality OER?
- How can the privatisation and commercialisation of higher education be reconciled with common ownership of knowledge under OER.

## **Concluding Observations**

Open Educational Resources (OER) open available educational resources for use by educators and students has the potential to transform our education process and outcomes. It all depends how we use them and also participate in their creation. Initially, the process started as an initiative of developed countries and international agencies. Making them relevant to address the educational needs of developing countries is a challenging task. Appreciation of the philosophy of knowledge as a common wealth for humanity by all stakeholders, ensuring quality of open resources and creating institutional structures and processes to effectively use OER are some of the essential pre-requisites for the successful use and development of OER. Practitioners' stories on integrating OER in educational practice are very useful. We have to draw ideas from experience and act on ideas.

## Towards Synergy of Quality Assurance

*“None of us is as smart as all of us”*

- Warren Bennis

### The Theme

Quality deficit is the defining feature of the huge, diverse and complex higher education system in India. Quality is a function of multiple stakeholders in higher education i.e. students, staff, management, government, regulatory agencies assessment agencies, international agencies, employers, parents and society at large. Many agencies like universities, colleges, central and state government departments, multiple regulatory councils, University Grants Commission, State Councils of Higher Education, quality assessment and accreditation agencies are engaged in various quality assurance activities with varied powers and responsibilities. This is a feature of a complex system which requires a combination of multiple levels and diverse types of organizations that may have overlapping realms of responsibility and functional capacities. Vincent Ostrom, American Political scientist describes it as ‘polycentric governance’ system of modern societies. In this polycentric system it is difficult to get a satisfying and agreeable answer to a question of who is responsible for quality deficit in Indian higher education. We have a tendency at individual and institutional levels to blame others for the problems. Some writers describe this as ‘not me’ syndrome. The fact is that all the stakeholders in higher education and all the institutions associated with the quality assurance have to share the responsibility for quality deficit, may be in different proportions in different contexts. This understanding of collective responsibility for quality deficit may change our appreciation of the problem from ‘not me’ to ‘I too’

syndrome. This positive change in attitude should lead to synergy of individual and institutional efforts in quality assurance. Synergy here refers to interaction and cooperation of two or more agencies to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects. It is more than cooperation and coordination. It is the convergence of combined efforts to produce results which are greater than the sum of individual efforts as a result of creative cooperation. Stephan R. Coovey listed synergy as one of the seven habits of highly successful people. In the context of multiple agencies' role in quality assurance the synergy of their role is critical in addressing the concerns of quality assurance.

### **Nature of Quality Deficit**

Indian higher education from quality perspective is characterised by 'islands of excellence' and a 'sea of mediocrity'. The employability of its products and neglect of the nation-building role of education are the major concerns of relevance of higher education. From the perspectives of their focus and orientation the concerns may be categorized as elite concerns and democratic concerns.

Any discussion on quality in higher education in India invariably leads to the concern of absence of a place in a first 100 or 200 or 300 or 500 world class universities in world rankings of universities by different agencies. We have some islands of excellence like IITs, IIMs, NIITs, ISTs and some reputed colleges. The elite concern is on expanding these islands of excellence. These institutions of excellence are expected to provide human resources for the emerging economy, act as role models in higher education and build the brand image of Indian higher education. These are all laudable goals. But will this elite system contribute to the up-gradation of the sea of mediocrity? The experience is not promising. These institutions of excellence may be providing education to about 5 to 10 percent of students in higher education. The rest of the 90 to 95 percent are studying in institutions which are part of 'the sea of mediocrity'. How to reduce the breadth and depth of the sea of mediocrity is the serious concern of higher education. That is called a democratic concern of quality i.e. the concern related to the quality of vast numbers. Today our major concern is low average of quality and high standard deviation in quality. It is the concern about the 90 percent allocation of funds and attention of policy makers to

institutions addressing needs of 10 percent students. The elite concerns should not result in a new caste system in higher education. The democratic demand is to make quality and excellence across the board as the focus of public policies and programmes of quality assurance in higher education.

Another concern of quality is about the purpose or outcome of higher education. Series concerns are expressed about the employability of products of higher education. Quality as fitness of purpose is viewed as development of skills and competencies required for emerging national and international markets. Some critical observers of the education scene characterise it as a marketization of higher education, oblivious of larger nation-building goals of higher education. The transformative role of education and development of critical thinking is not given enough importance in designing academic programmes. There are differences among academics about the content of programmes. Some focus on education for making a living and others emphasise the equal importance of education for living i.e. civic learning.

## **The Response: Towards Synergy**

The challenge to all involved in higher education is to synergise the divergent views, different approaches and roles of multiple institutions. Synergy as a process may help in converging divergent views and approaches to realise the common good. The synergy may include a) the synergy of multiple goals of higher education, b) the synergy of roles of multiple agencies and c) the synergy of external and internal quality assurance systems. Let me elaborate these elements in some detail.

### **Synergy of Multiple Goals of Higher Education**

In today's context higher education is very important for the development of human resources for growth and for social transformation. The skills and competencies to engage in productive activities, the cognitive abilities to understand social problems and development of social sensitivities are equally important in education. This integrated view of purpose of education is emphasized by the Radhakrishnan Commission on Higher Education (1948-49). To quote: "University should be a place for providing a student with an opportunity for all round well-proportioned education for effective living and citizenship in addition to preparation for calling". This vision is missing in the

present day system of higher education. Many experts in the field of education express concern about the commoditisation of higher education. Professor Prabhat Patnayak strongly voiced these concerns when he said: ‘instead of being imbued with the task of nation building, the educational system now gets charged with the responsibility of producing commodities for the international market; instead of being organised as having a social role, education is now seen as producing self-obsessed individuals, it’s worth assessed in terms of the exchange value commanded by these individuals in the market’. The synergy of employment and social sensitivity goals of education is an organisational and pedagogic challenge. Integrating social sciences and humanities modules in job-oriented professional programmes is one response suggested to overcome the lopsided nature of knowledge in professional education. Many IITs and IIMs have a strong presence of social science and humanities in their system and are making attempts to integrate civic learning in their professional programmes. The application orientation to the knowledge in social sciences and humanities is attempted by some universities to make social sciences and humanities relevant to make a living. The lack of rigour in teaching-learning of social sciences resulting in their failure to develop critical faculties and socio-political consciousness is a cause of concern. Professor Sukhadev Thorat strongly advocates for reorientation of higher education to meet the needs of social diversity and a democratic and just society. The progressive thinking on education looks at education as a process of reconstruction of society and the universities’ role is to teach students to question the existing knowledge, to explore new knowledge on relate knowledge to existing reality. For them this is the essence of quality education.

There is a mismatch between qualifications and competencies in our higher education. This is true in professional programmes also. A large majority of parents and students are looking for employment opportunities or for making a living through educational qualifications. For many it is also an opportunity for social mobility and comfortable living. The social reformers are emphasizing the transformative role of higher education. These are not mutually exclusive goals. The creative development of programmes, curriculum and pedagogy may synergise apparently diverse multiple goals into socially-relevant higher education.

## **Synergy of Polycentric System**

The complex system of higher education in India, is in the process of transformation from elite system to mass system to Universal system. Education is in the concurrent list with roles for Central and State Government. The University Grants Commission and around 13 other councils are engaged in coordination and maintenance of standards in different fields of higher education at national level. Many State level agencies are engaged in regulatory functions. We have an affiliating system which defines the relations between colleges and universities. The vertical and horizontal coordination with checks and balances and clearly defined roles is a challenge in polycentric governance. The universities and colleges must be able to navigate with all the agencies and maintain standards in education. The presence of a large number of private players has brought new dimensions to the regulatory system. The ineffectively over-regulated system is not able to effectively promote and monitor quality assurance of a large number of colleges in private sector. The regulatory system is not effective in preventing the commercialisation of higher education. The challenge is to make private education 'public good'. During the 12<sup>th</sup> Plan (2012-2017), MHRD, Government of India has taken a new initiative of *Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan*, popularly known as RUSA for strengthening State level universities and colleges with more funding and many governance reforms. The emphasis of RUSA is on professional management of higher education at institutional levels with performance based funding and support. RUSA emphasizes on de-politicisation of higher education governance. It is refreshing to hear this when many politicians are considering academic institutions as power centres and see them as valuable sources of patronage. How effectively these ideas will be translated into action is to be seen. The HRD Ministry, a political and administrating unit of Central Government assuming many functions of University Grants Commission, a non-political expert body in higher education at the national level and advocating de-politicisation of process at a State level is a paradox; may be one of the many paradoxes in our system.

## **Synergy of External and Internal Quality Assurance System**

The social and academic imperatives of massification of higher education and global competitive context has resulted in emergence of system of external



assessment. In India we have a few external quality assurance agencies in higher education like National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC is established by UGC in 1994), National Board of Accreditation (established by AICTE in 1994) and Agricultural Board (AB established by ICRA in 2002). From 2013 UGC made external assessment compulsory to ensure the quality of higher education institutions. The external assessment is mainly a process of independent peer assessment by a professional body to improve the quality and ensure the accountability of institutions. The criteria-based performance assessment by third party is expected to bring objectivity and credibility to the assessment process. Even though there are different views on making it compulsory, there is a broad consensus on the desirability of external assessment for improving the quality of higher education institutions. To assess a large number of institutions there are proposals to establish multiple assessment agencies by UGC. The NAAC is also proposing to establish regional centres and RUSA had suggested the establishment of State level quality assurance agencies for assessment of colleges in their respective states. Measurement of quality is a difficult task. Identification of the right things to measure and identification of right ways of measurement are the twin challenges of all quality assessment agencies in education. In 2017, the NAAC has revised its assessment methodology and made it a more quantitative instrument of quality assessment.

There is a need for synergy of external quality assurance agencies activities with internal quality assurance system of institutions. Quality Assurance is primarily the responsibility of institutions. The systems and processes of quality assurance within the institution should be aligned with the criteria and process of external agencies. Within the institution there should be synergy of roles of management, staff and students- three constituents of the system. The facilitating role of management the teaching role of academic staff and learning role of students need to be synergized. The strength of the internal structure is defined by the relations among these constituent parts of the structure. The self-assessment by the institutions is the best way of ensuring quality. The three stage process of a) current scenario; b) preferred scenario and c) action strategies is suggested for self- assessment. The periodic external assessment with continuous assessment by internal systems alone can sustain the quality of education. We are happy many universities and colleges are ensuring the establishment of internal quality assurance cells for enhancing and sustaining quality. Quality is a multi-factored phenomena and NAAC has been advocating

‘seven steps to quality’ paradigm as a minimal requirement to ensure the quality of education. If “QUALITY” is an acronym, each letter epitomizes a step in quality assurance. These are: **Q**uest for excellence; **U**nderstanding the concept; **A**ction orientation; **L**earner centric approach; **I**nnovation for change; **T**raining to build competencies and **Y**ear –round activity. The Commonwealth of Learning is encouraging all higher education institutions in Commonwealth Countries to adapt review and improve a model as a low cost, low stakes and self-directed internal quality improvement model. It is popularly called COLRIM.

### **Attributes of Good Higher Education Institutions**

Philip G. Altbach discussing world class universities said “everyone wants one, no one knows what it is, and no one knows how to get one’. It is a true of description of a good higher education institution. The IITs and IIMs, NIITs are generally considered as the institutions of excellence in Indian Higher Education. What are the broad features of these institutions which made them distinct in the system? Some of the distant elements of these institutions are:

- i) Publicity funded institutions
- ii) Mostly outside the traditional university system
- iii) Have more resources and infrastructure
- iv) Able to attract talented teachers
- v) Students with high achievement levels are admitted
- vi) More academic autonomy and facilities to staff
- vii) Less political interference.

Why cannot these features be extended across-the-board of higher education institutions? What is coming in the way? Is it a lack of vision, lack of political will, lack of academic leadership or any other? We talk about autonomous colleges; why not autonomy to all colleges. We talk about universities and colleges of excellence, why not excellence, of all universities and colleges. These are all value based concerns and questions. Even if we accept pyramidal structure as a universal phenomenon of higher education system across the nations of different ideological persuasions, we are not unjust in demanding minimum standards and facilities in all higher education

institutions. From the minimalist perspective the generic attributes of a good higher education institution may include:

- A clearly stated vision, mission and values
- Student admissions based on comprehensive merit representing diverse social groups
- Staff with academic distinction and commitment to profession
- Development of programmes, curriculum and pedagogy for making a living and for living in a diverse and democratic society
- Student assessment to ensure reliable assessment of learning outcomes
- Social engagement to build community – university interface as a part of universities institutional and social responsibility.
- Research and development to engage in production of application oriented knowledge in collaboration with industry, service sector and community.
- Sufficient infrastructure to meet the teaching-learning and administrative requirements with application of modern technologies in all its operations.
- Flexible and networked governance system and idea-centric leadership balancing professional management and academic autonomy
- Embedded quality assurance system for continuous improvement and rejuvenation
- Use of technology to enrich learning experiences and improve the systems efficiency.

The right alignment of these elements will make the institution a good higher education institution

## **Concluding Observations**

We are passing through unusual times in higher education. We have to look at things with an eye of hope and act with a sense of purpose. Nothing has ever been achieved without passion and collective effort. Mutual trust and understanding is necessary for collective effort. We must continuously struggle to overcome our own limitations to become an effective partner in a team work. Psychologists observe a very interesting human tendency of locating our limitations in situational factors and other limitations in their personalities. We are all a mix of personal factors and contextual features. We have to work together for excellence in higher education; a social necessity for a democratic and just society.

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## Reflections on the Book

This work epitomizes the experiential wisdom of a person who has had fair exposure to conventional education as a teacher and intimately associated with distance education and quality assessment. It reflects on overall quality of working of the system and system of quality assessment. It is full of insights with social concern and institutional commitment. It is very unusual that an insider critically reflections on his own experiences with an urge to improve the system. There are flashes which can be very useful to the policy makers, lessons to educational administrators, and knowledge to the student learners. It is a very rich and useful contribution to the ongoing debates on education in general and more so to the world of distance learning and quality assessment.

**Prof. G. Haragopal**

*Visiting Professor, NLSIU, Bengaluru.*

*Former Professor of Political Science, University of Hyderabad.*

Prof Prasad's book is a timely intervention in the current debate on Indian higher education. He deserves compliments for this impressive collection of his articles and lectures, distilling his experiences. I congratulate him for his very valuable contribution to the understanding of internal dynamics of higher education system, particularly open distance learning and quality assurance.

**Prof. B.P. Sabale**

*Former Vice-Chancellor, YCMOU, Nashik, Maharashtra.*

This collection of learned lectures and articles focuses in an introspective appraisal on certain key issues having a bearing on the course of higher education in India in the post-independence period. This book has behind it five decades of cogitation and unbiased critical evaluation of a passionate teacher and able administrator. Prof. Prasad expresses his strong belief that unless we bring about reforms in the formal structures and institutional policies, the transformation of higher education as envisaged in the Constitution cannot be accomplished. I am sure that this book will be outlook-shaping and of great value to every teacher, researcher, and administrator working in the higher education sector.

**Prof. V. Venkaiah**

*Director, Centre for Education Technology and Learning Sciences, RGUKT, AP.*

*Former Professor of Management, Dr. BRAOU, Hyderabad.*

*Former Vice Chancellor, Krishna University, AP.*

This book is a treasure of ideas on knowledge as a collective social product, democratization of learning, access to knowledge resources and opportunities, and managing quality in higher education in India. Prof. Prasad's inspirational thoughts in the book help us question the status quo as he presents a commonsense approach to complex problems. This will serve as a key resource for anyone interested in higher education and open and distance learning in India since Prof. Prasad brings in critical social perspective to the table in an increasingly market-oriented world of education.

**Dr. Sanjaya Mishra**

*Education Specialist: eLearning, Commonwealth of Learning, Canada.*

Professor Prasad distills the accumulated wisdom of his five decades of outstanding service to India as a teacher and institutional leader in this highly readable book. His masterly account of the trajectory of Indian higher education reflects his unrivalled knowledge of its open universities and the challenge of quality assurance in a wider university system in 'perpetual crisis'. Acute analyses and revealing reflections are imbued with consistent good sense and a deeply humane grasp of the fundamental aims of higher education. By taking the modern approach of publishing it as an Open Educational Resource, Professor Prasad has ensured that this book will have the huge readership that it deserves.

**Sir John Daniel**

*Vice-Chancellor, UK Open University, 1990-2001.*

*Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO, 2001-2004.*

*President, Commonwealth of Learning, 2004-2012.*

Prof. Prasad has vast experience of working and developing open learning systems in India. His deep understanding of ODL, quality assurance and higher education is reflected in this book. Prof. Prasad has rightly identified quality as the defining element of education system of digital age. The trajectory of education and human development requires a vehicle of the age, linking learning and development. The digital and mobile technologies are the social engines of progress in digital age. The book serves as a good learning resource for development of modern knowledge society and its education system.

**Prof. Ram Takwale**

*Senior Mentor, MKCL, Pune, Maharashtra.*

*Former Vice Chancellor, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi.*

A thoughtful compilation of 12 essays by a scholar who is among a group of thought-leaders who have been guiding education in India during the last three decades. Prof. Prasad's essays covering the three main strands of Higher Education, Open Distance Learning and Quality Assurance provides a deep insight of, especially HE in India through the eyes of an insider. I recommend this set of reflections to all those who have an interest in or engaged with HE in India.

**Prof. Gajaraj Dhanarajan**

*Former President, Commonwealth of Learning, Canada.*



Prof. V.S. Prasad (1943) is a former Professor of Public Administration at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad. He held many institutional leadership positions in higher education including Vice Chancellor (Acting), Indira Gandhi National Open University; Vice Chancellor, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University and Director, National Assessment and Accreditation Council. He is known for his contributions to open distance learning and quality assurance.

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