

CRISIS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Dr. K. N. RAJ

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CRISIS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

DR. K. N. RAJ



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Patel Memorial Lectures

'Patel Memorial Lectures' are an annual broadcast feature of All India Radio in memory of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who played a great role in India's freedom movement and was free India's first Minister for Information and Broadcasting.

• Each year, an eminent person, specialist in a particular branch of knowledge, presents through the lectures the results of his study and experience for the benefit of the general public. The lectures are designed to contribute to the existing knowledge on a given subject and promote awareness of contemporary problems.

Over the years, the lectures have become almost a national institution and are looked upon as a highly valued intellectual contribution to Indian life and thought.

The two lectures on the theme "Crisis of Higher Education in India", brought together in the present publication for wider audiences, were delivered by Dr. K. N. Raj on 14th and 15th December, 1970.

THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF THE CRISIS

WHEN one speaks of a crisis in higher education one ought to be able to say what precisely is its nature and what has caused it. Most persons who have had anything to do with higher education in India (even as parents) are likely to agree—almost intuitively—that it is in a state of crisis. But what the crisis is identified with or attributed to is not always very clear. Sometimes it appears to be associated with student unrest in the universities, sometimes with graduate unemployment in the country; and, if one were to go by the pronouncements of Ministers of Education, the crisis would seem to be largely a financial one.

Undoubtedly all these are problems that concern and affect higher education in one way or another. But it does not follow that they are necessarily responsible for the present state of higher education in India. They could be the effect rather than the cause of the malaise in higher education. They could also be the symptoms of a crisis in the economy or in the society at large, and not necessarily of a crisis rooted in the system of higher education as such. The nature of the crisis affecting higher education can therefore be understood only if one identifies what precisely is wrong with it now and takes that as the starting point of one's further enquiry.

Clearly, what is above all wrong with higher education in India now is that a very large segment of it has ceased to be higher education in any meaningful sense of the term. Indeed the purposes it serves can, to a large extent, be met equally well by proper school education.

This is fairly widely recognized—even though it is perhaps not often stated in these terms. The need for restoring to

higher education the role and the standards appropriate to it is also frequently stressed. Yet those who are in charge of higher education and have the power to make and change policies in this sphere, are apparently unable to do anything sufficiently effective to make a perceptible difference to the situation.

Over-crowding

In a proximate sense the main reason for this apparent helplessness has been the rapid growth in the number of students enrolled for higher education in the course of the last two decades. From a little over a quarter million in the early fifties the total enrolment for degree courses alone has risen to over two million in the current academic year. (If the enrolments for pde-university courses and diplomas and in the intermediate colleges are all included the total is probably in the neighbourhood of three million today.)

Even the rate of growth of the enrolments for higher education appears to have been rising over time. Between 1950-51 and 1964-65, the average rate of increase was about ten per cent per annum; since then it has gone up to nearly thirteen per cent per annum.

These rates of increase are well above the requirements of the country—even if one were to make very liberal assumptions in estimating the requirements of personnel with higher education. One such estimate was made only about four years ago by the Education Commission appointed by the Government of India.

It was assumed in this exercise that the national income of the country would grow at the rate over $6\frac{1}{2}$ per cent per annum. A related assumption was that, as output increased in each sector of commodity production, the educated manpower employed would need to grow at the same proportionate rate. This meant for instance that, since the output of factory establishments was expected to grow at the rate of nearly twelve per cent per annum in the following two decades, the needs of educated manpower in this sector would also grow at that rate.

For certain types of services requiring specialized skill the estimates were based on norms which again presumed a rapid rate of development. In the case of medical services, for instance, the position in 1966 was that there were on the average 5,500 persons to every doctor; it was assumed that the development programme in this sphere would require having one doctor for every 3,000 persons by 1975 and one for every 2,000 persons by 1985.

On these and similar assumptions the total enrolment in higher education appropriate to the requirements of the country was estimated at 2.2 million in 1975-76 and about 4.2 million in 1985-86. Since the total enrolment in higher education in 1965-66 was only about 1.1 million, what was implicit in the estimate of future requirements was a doubling of this level within a decade and approximately a further doubling in the following decade.

The Education Commission, one should add, had preferred to go by estimates of requirements which assumed high rate of economic growth. This approach was based on a consideration which it explicitly stated, namely that "the risk involved in over-estimation is comparatively less than in under-estimation"; and that "it is less harmful to have some surplus trained personnel on hand for some time rather than hold up the progress of agriculture or industry for lack of such personnel".

Nevertheless, the inference the Commission drew from its estimates of requirements was that higher education could not be allowed to expand at the rate it had during the period 1950—65. This is what it said:

"In the first three five year plans a policy of open door access has been in operation in courses in arts and commerce in most of the affiliated colleges. A stage has, however, now been reached when the policy of selective admissions will have to be extended to all sectors and institutions of higher education. If the present rate of expansion (at 10 per cent per year) is assumed to continue for the next 20 years, the

total enrolments in higher education would be between seven and eight million by 1985-86 or more than twice the estimated requirements of manpower for national development. An economy like ours can neither have the funds to expand higher education on this scale nor the capacity to find suitable employment for the millions of graduates who would come annually out of the educational system at this level of enrolment".

The rate of growth recorded by the Indian economy since 1965 has been actually closer to four per cent per annum than the $6\frac{1}{2}$ per cent rate assumed in the estimates of the Education Commission. At the same time the rate of expansion of higher education, instead of being lowered, has gone up from the earlier level of ten per cent per annum to around thirteen per cent per annum in the last few years. The level of enrolment which the Commission thought would be appropriate to the national requirements in 1975-76 has therefore been very nearly reached already in 1970-71. Indeed, if the present trends continue the total enrolment in higher education might be more than twice the national requirements by the middle of the 'seventies—a situation which the Education Commission had feared might develop only a decade later.

One must expect both graduate unemployment and the financial constraints on higher education to increase rapidly under these conditions. Of the former there is already enough evidence. The number of graduates registered with the Employment Exchanges has increased by nearly $2\frac{1}{2}$ times over the three years between the end of 1966 and the end of 1969; together with post-graduates they amounted to nearly a quarter million at the beginning of 1970. Of the financial constraints the Union Minister of Education spoke only a fortnight ago when he referred to the paucity of funds standing in the way of the development and promotion of higher education. Indeed the Minister felt compelled to appeal to the Rajya Sabha to

impress upon his colleagues in the Cabinet the need for sufficient funds being made available for the purpose. He added—perhaps too optimistically—that such pressure would work when the Annual Plan was under discussion.

Aimless Secondary Education

The reasons for the continuously growing demand for higher education are not difficult to understand. Secondary education is heavily subsidized and has even been made free in some States. Consequently enrolments at the level of secondary education have been growing at a rapid rate—doubling almost every six to seven years. Only one out of eight students thus enrolled is in vocational schools, unlike for instance in Germany and Japan where two out of every three students enrolled for secondary education are in vocational schools. The products of secondary education have therefore faced increasing difficulties in finding suitable employment—which is reflected in the long periods they are generally compelled to wait before being absorbed. Proceeding to higher education is for them both a way of not remaining idle and of improving their prospects of employment.

The available data do show that the incidence of unemployment and its duration are lower among graduates than among matriculates. Since higher education is also subsidized the additional costs involved in opting for this alternative are not very high—particularly for those who can otherwise afford to wait. The widespread urge to secure a degree—a phenomenon noticed and commented upon by many—is therefore not irrational at all from the point of view of the individuals concerned.

What strikes one as irrational is that secondary and higher education should not only be expanded but subsidized in the way they are today, unrelated to any clear social or economic purpose. Such a policy could have been justified if free and compulsory elementary education had already been achieved and expansion at the higher levels was to provide opportunities for more advanced study to the more meritorious among those

who have completed such education. This however is not the case.

One educational goal clearly laid down in the Indian Constitution was that free and compulsory elementary education should be provided to all children by 1960. But enrolments at this level have in fact not come up to the extent required. The rate of drop-outs has proved to be so high at this stage of education that, out of every 100 children who begin their journey up the educational ladder, hardly 50 complete the five years of primary education; and only about 20 clear the further three years needed to secure elementary education.

More than two decades after the attainment of Independence only about a third of the population is therefore literate. The literacy rate is now rising at the rate of less than one per cent per annum, so that unless the pace is accelerated a literacy rate of even 70 per cent seems unlikely to be achieved within the remaining three decades of this century. The progress of literacy in several parts of the country such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Orissa has been even poorer than indicated by the national average.

Viewed against this background it is somewhat incongruous that the total expenditure on higher education has been nearly of the same magnitude as the total expenditure on primary education. Education as a whole absorbs about three per cent of the national income; this has been divided roughly equally between primary, secondary and higher education, each appropriating around one per cent of the national income.

Over-subsidization

Still more difficult to justify is the extent of subsidization of higher education and the manner in which it is done. In the aggregate, more than 60 per cent of the expenditure on higher education is met out of Government funds. But there are variations from State to State and even as between universities. The extent of subsidization is generally higher in

the case of universities and other institutions of higher education financed by the Central Government. Among those financed by the State Governments, the highest rates of subsidy—70 per cent and more—are found in Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh; in States such as Kerala, Gujarat and Maharashtra, Government covers only about 40 per cent (or a little more) of the total expenditure on higher education.

Generally it is in those States where primary and secondary education has advanced most that the rate of subsidization of higher education is relatively low—presumably because primary and secondary education absorbs most of the available funds. On the other hand, where the progress at these lower levels of education has not been very great, the financial constraints on subsidization of higher education are less severe. The differences evident in the rates of subsidization of higher education reflect therefore the pressures to which the financing agencies concerned are subject to rather than any principles of educational development as such.

Moreover, in all cases, it is the institutions concerned that are subsidized—on a block grant or some other basis—and not so much the individual students who deserve to be assisted for their higher education. Scholarships, stipends and other financial aids are of course given by or through these institutions to selected students; but the expenditure so incurred is only about one-eighth of the total outlay on higher education today. The aid given is also usually quite inadequate for students to maintain themselves unless they can supplement it with support from their own families or elsewhere.

Higher education in India is still largely an urban facility. Only about one-eighth of the total enrolment for higher education is in rural areas, and the institutions in which they are enrolled account for only about one-twelfth of the total expenditure on higher education in the country. Even in the urban sector the bulk of those who seek higher education come

from income groups belonging to the top decile of the population. Subsidization of higher education in the manner in which it is done today in India means therefore in effect mainly a kind of blanket subsidization of a small and relatively better-off segment of the society.

Questions of equity apart, the mode and scale of subsidization has had two effects. One has been to induce a faster rate of growth of enrolments at this level than is otherwise likely to have taken place. In several parts of the country the fees charged for higher education have remained unchanged for decades and the rising costs have been almost wholly covered by the subsidies from Government. Higher education has therefore become almost free for those who are in a position to meet the other related expenses.

The other effect has been to encourage in this sphere, particularly in the last decade, a kind of entrepreneurship with little commitment to the goals of higher education. Where the rate of subsidy is high, and the rest of the expenditure can be almost wholly covered by fees collected from students, a college can be started and run with very little exertion on the part of the sponsors. In Delhi, 95 per cent of the excess expenditure of a college on all approved items over its income from fees is met by the University Grants Commission. The sponsoring body—whether it is a private agency or a local authority—needs therefore to cover only a very small fraction of the total expenditure on running a college. Naturally there is no dearth of entrepreneurs for starting colleges with an eye on the patronage and influence they can exercise through their control over them.

Though the extent of subsidy is not as high elsewhere the position is not very different in several other parts of the country where liberal grants-in-aid are given by State Governments to colleges. The main qualification required of the promoters of higher education under these conditions is only that they have the contacts for securing the necessary financial and other support from the powers that be.

Where the rate of subsidy is not so high some adjustments are called for. These are usually made in the fees charged from students and in the teacher-student ratios maintained. Thus the annual fee for under-graduate education ranges all the way from less than Rs. 100 per student in the colleges in Rajasthan to well over Rs. 300 per student in Bombay. The average number of students assigned to a teacher also varies from as low as 12 in some areas to more than twice that figure in others.

The Plight of Teachers

The tendency in most cases has been to keep the salary paid to teachers as low as possible. Until recently the salary grade for college teachers in many parts of the country was no higher than Rs. 250—500 per month, and it was still lower in some cases. The University Grants Commission recommended a few years ago a minimum grade of Rs. 300—600 per month for college teachers throughout the country. But it was not mandatory and many colleges were not financially in a position to offer this higher grade without additional governmental assistance. It was only after the Central Government agreed to meet, for a period of five years, 80 per cent of the extra expenditure incurred on this account that the grade has come to be generally accepted.

Some colleges do offer higher emoluments to the teachers. But in the generality of cases this is only because the terms of grant received by them allow for such higher grades. In Delhi, one of the items of expenditure by colleges which qualify for grant from the University Grants Commission is on salaries to their teachers fixed on the same grade as for those appointed in University Departments. All college teachers enjoy therefore the higher grade of Rs. 400—950 per month; one-fourth of the total number of teachers in each college can also be placed on the still higher grade of Rs. 700—1,250 (which is available, elsewhere in India, only to Readers appointed in University Departments). Government colleges in some States also offer higher grades to their teachers than the minimum

recommended by the University Grants Commission. Apart from these exceptions, and a few solitary cases where colleges have raised additional resources independently to be able to pay higher salaries to their staff, college teachers are still quite poorly paid.

The subjects for which instruction is made available by most colleges are also determined largely by financial considerations. Those subjects are usually preferred in which a lower ratio of teachers to students can be maintained and the other facilities to be provided are not very large. The continued growth of Arts colleges—when their products have even greater difficulty in finding employment than others—has been largely due to this consideration.

The role of most of the entrepreneurs of higher education at the level at which it has expanded most rapidly in recent years has therefore been in practice to increase student enrolments as much as possible in order to raise more income from fees; recruit the minimum number of teachers required at the lowest permissible scales of pay; create pressures for securing the maximum possible governmental assistance; and somehow or the other balance the budgets of the institutions concerned. Higher education has thus been organized largely as an industry, and the more unscrupulous promoters of it have even made profits from it.

Vulnerable to Pressures

All this has usually a decisive impact at the higher levels of decision-making and administration in the universities. For both the representatives of college managements and of teachers secure representation in the various bodies of the universities of which they form a part. Changes in the structure and content of courses are therefore usually resisted if they call for more appointments at the college level than the managements are prepared to make or if much more effort is required on the part of the existing staff. If any teaching is organized at the university level—as is generally done for post-graduate courses—the principle of representation has to be usually given

considerable weight irrespective of academic considerations. The various sectional interests involved have to be taken into account also when examiners are appointed by universities and sometimes even when the results of the examinations are declared.

Universities as organized now are in fact highly vulnerable to pressures of various kinds. The representation given to colleges, the system of elections (on however limited a scale) to the more important decision-making bodies, and direct dependence on Government grants are all potential instruments for gaining influence and exerting pressure within universities. It is not surprising therefore that, when teachers and students are also free to participate in political activity, universities get affected very quickly by all the under-currents and conflicts in the society of which they are a part. One of the major problems now is that, while political forces are able to gain entry very easily, the universities do not have the means for effectively coping with them.

Under these conditions growth in size beyond a point becomes a particularly serious handicap. Not only are there few economies of scale to be gained by such expansion but diseconomies set in through their greater vulnerability to pressures from outside and from within. This has become a major problem for many Indian universities. For over 30 of them have student enrolments of more than 20,000 each, and about half of these universities have more than 40,000 students each.

Medium of Instruction

The growing tendencies towards regionalism in the country have also had serious effects on higher education. These tendencies are generally expressed in demands relating to the medium of instruction. Some of these demands are based on sound educational principles and are wholly justifiable; but in their most extreme form they usually indicate either ignorance of the minimum requirements of higher education or

inward-looking chauvinism of a kind that places considerations of a parochial character above these requirements. In practice both have been in evidence.

More specifically the problem arises when instruction at the post-graduate level is sought to be given in the regional languages. For most of the relevant literature with which students at this level of education ought to be familiar is usually not available in any of the regional languages. It is true that comprehension is much easier in the mother tongue, and that the necessary literature could grow over a period of time. But when the body of literature a student is exposed to at even the post-graduate level is severely restricted by language barriers the content of higher education becomes very diluted. Since the products of such education are later absorbed as the teachers of the succeeding generations the damage done is more long-lasting than is generally assumed.

The usual answer to these objections is that English (or some other foreign language) will be taught as a "library language" and that students will be required to familiarize themselves with the more advanced literature in the subject through this language. In principle this is unobjectionable, particularly if the "library language" is taught intensively from an early stage of schooling and the students have therefore no difficulties of comprehension through this language.

In practice, however, the experience has been very different. Once the regional language is accepted as the medium of education upto the highest level the teaching of all other languages is neglected, and both teachers and students confine themselves largely to the literature available in the regional language. The three-language formula which was once accepted in principle as an integral part of educational policy has already been reduced in effect to a one-language formula in many parts of the country.

The use of the regional language itself gives protection, to those who advocate it, from closer scrutiny of standards by

others elsewhere. Many vested interests consequently develop in the field of higher education. Competition from teachers outside the region is shut out and a market is assured for even very inferior books in the regional languages. The process of deterioration is therefore not easily reversible.

The case for enforcing the regional languages as the media of instruction at the highest levels of education has sometimes been made on grounds of "anti-elitism". The elite classes remain intact however for the simple reason that there has been no revolutionary change in the economic or social system; indeed they have grown in numbers and in influence. What happens therefore in practice is that, even while the regional languages are prescribed as the medium for the "masses", various arrangements are made by the upper strata of society to prepare their own children for higher education in a different medium. Even Education Ministers who promote with enthusiasm the adoption of regional languages at all levels are usually guilty of such practice of double standards.

The result, as one might expect, is a kind of dualism in the field of higher education. Standards are maintained at acceptable levels in a few institutions which do not shift to the regional languages; but are allowed to fall precipitously, almost without any check, in the vast majority of them which do. What is objectionable here is not that higher standards are maintained in some institutions but that the language policy enforced should handicap the others. This makes it difficult for students educated wholly in a regional medium to compete with those who are given a broader foundation in one or more of the languages needed for higher education. It prevents most of them from securing the benefits of study in institutions which are able to maintain higher standards.

Mania for Degrees

These are essentially the reasons why a large segment of higher education in India has become a caricature of what higher education is supposed to be. If it continues to survive and there is still a growing demand for it the explanation is

to be found largely in the employment situation in the country. For apart from the education imparted—which is not of much value—formal higher education leads to the award of degrees which are believed to be useful for securing employment. It is true that when graduate unemployment increases rapidly, as has happened in the last few years, the usefulness of degrees as a passport to employment gets diminished; but, in the absence of alternatives, not only does the demand for degrees continue to grow but higher degrees are sought in order to gain a competitive edge over those with lower degrees.

It is as if an industry set up to produce soap issues along with each carton a lottery ticket, so that even after there is no need for the soap produced, the demand for it grows on account of the customers' interest in the lottery! What makes it even worse in the case of higher education is that the social and political pressure which both the customers and those running this industry are able to generate has led to a system of subsidization that cannot be justified on grounds of either equity or efficiency.

In Other Countries

The crisis of higher education in India today is therefore of a very different character from the crisis that institutions of higher education elsewhere are faced with. Student unrest is of course common to both; but here too it is only superficially so, for there are some very important differences in the underlying reasons and motivations as well as in the ways in which they manifest themselves. In India the educational structure has become wholly unbalanced and largely unrelated to the needs of the society; the problems of higher education arise mainly from this fact. This is not the case in the more developed countries where a strong foundation of primary and secondary education was laid first, and higher education has grown in response to needs and continues to be closely related to them. Nor has the system of higher education rotted from the inside and led to deterioration in standards in the way it has in India.

What is surprising is that, faced with phenomena of the kind that have been amply in evidence in the last few years, the tendency in India has been not to go into the root causes and make appropriate changes in educational policy but to find a way out by securing more financial resources in support of present policies. The case for such additional allocations is sometimes made on the ground that rapidly developing countries like Japan and the Soviet Union devote seven per cent and more of their national income to education.

It is seldom mentioned however that, until the 1930's, the share of education was not allowed to exceed three per cent of the national income of Japan. For several decades more than two-thirds of the total educational expenditure in Japan in this sphere was on primary education and less than one-sixth devoted to higher education. The Soviet Union achieved universal elementary education in a short period through a crash programme, but has still followed a more rigorous policy of selective admissions for higher education than almost any other country.

In fact, the high and rising share of investment in education in these and other developed countries reflects essentially their need for more skilled and highly specialized personnel on account of the changes brought about by rapid technological progress. India faces a very different situation—characterized by scarcity of resources, mass illiteracy, and large-scale and growing unemployment among those who have had higher education. To adopt educational policies and programmes in India through reasoning based on partial analogies with those adopted in the more advanced countries is therefore wholly irrational.

What is called for are policies and programmes which recognize the overall resource constraints within which educational progress has to be achieved in India—not just the social and political pressures exerted by certain strata of society to gain advantage over others—and ensure that such resources as

can be raised for the purpose are used in a manner that does not violate elementary principles of equity and efficiency. The lines along which such re-orientation could be attempted, and more particularly the changes needed in the field of higher education, will be the subject-matter of the second lecture in this series.

A PROGRAMME OF RE-ORIENTATION

IN ATTEMPTING any reform of higher education in India there are some basic considerations that have to be borne in mind. One of them is the overall constraint imposed by resource availability. Usually this is expressed as a particular percentage of national income that can or should be devoted to education. But this is misleading because it gives the impression of a ceiling that can be somehow determined independently of the educational policies followed.

Actually the two are inter-related. If one of the tenets of policy is that education at all levels should be wholly or largely subsidized, the resource ceiling will be set mainly by the amount that the Central and State Governments can set apart for education from their own budget. But if this is not the case, and the urge for education could be used as an instrument for raising additional resources, the budgetary constraints need not be so severe. It is important to bear this in mind particularly in the context of higher education since a large part of the demand for it comes from the relatively well-off sections of society. ✓

Priority to Primary Education

A second and very relevant consideration is the priority which primary education should have in any programme of development. One could justify this both on grounds of equity and its potential contribution through increased productivity at the levels where it is most needed. In a country in which more than three-fourths of the labour force is engaged in agriculture and small-scale industry it is difficult to conceive any kind of broad-based economic advance based on necessary and acceptable technological changes without this population having the minimal advantages of literacy.

Primary education can however be effectively expanded only if it is tied up with provision of mid-day lunch to children—particularly to those belonging to the lower income groups. Otherwise, as experience in India has shown, the rate of drop-outs becomes very high. A large part of the available resources will therefore have to be set apart for primary education—though the extent of Government subsidy can perhaps be reduced somewhat if through local bodies (like the Zila Parishads) some of the necessary resources can be raised by an appropriate system of local levies.

Vocational Slant

The third consideration to be borne in mind is that the intensity of the demand for higher education today arises largely from the difficulties which those who have had only secondary education face in finding employment. The pressure on higher education cannot therefore be reduced significantly unless the content of education at this lower level is given a much stronger vocational bias.

Vocational education can become useful and effective in dealing with the problem only if it is tied up with opportunities for industrial training on an adequate scale. This could be done through legislation—as has been done in the United Kingdom—by imposing a progressive levy on all industrial establishments for financing such training, making it obligatory on their part to organize some of it, and compensating them according to specified rates.

It will of course be necessary also to increase employment opportunities—particularly opportunities for employment in small enterprises—to absorb those who are given vocational education at the secondary school stage. The larger manufacturing industries do not usually find it profitable to produce all or even most of the components they need for production. So they would have every incentive to let smaller enterprises produce many of the components if only they are assured of an adequate supply according to the specifications laid down by them. The extent to which such decentralization of production has been carried in countries like Japan has many obvious lessons for India. If vocational training at the school level

is tied up with training in industrial establishments, the scope for diverting a high proportion of the products of secondary education to highly productive employment is therefore considerable.

Link with National Development

All this means that no programme for dealing with the problems of higher education can make a significant difference unless it is linked with the development programme as a whole and with the policies adopted in respect of education at the lower levels. It is the lack of educational planning of this kind that has contributed more than anything else to the present state of higher education. If such planning is not done, the contradictions between the educational policies followed and the needs of the society will continue to be reflected in high rates of drop-out at the level of primary education, acute unemployment among those who have had only secondary education, and further accentuation of all the characteristics associated with the crisis in higher education.

Assuming however that a recasting of educational policies linked with the overall development programme is feasible one needs to consider what specific changes need to be made in the system of higher education in India to lift it from the morass into which it has been sinking. Needless to say one has to be realistic and take into account the relevant social and political considerations; on the other hand one cannot shirk going into the fundamentals of the system since the problems are quite deep-rooted and cannot be overcome without making major changes in the organisation, content and mode of financing of higher education.

Types of Universities

Let us consider first the organization of higher education. The time has come to ask whether and to what extent universities as they are now structured can cope with the problems that have to be faced in the sphere of higher education. Conceptually, universities are usually divided into three types: the affiliating, the unitary and the federal. Each has its own characteristics, and India has experimented with all of them in

varying degrees. One would therefore do well to see what lessons can be drawn from its experience to date.

A purely affiliating university is one that does not organize teaching directly and confines itself mainly to prescribing courses of study, organizing examinations and awarding degrees. The teaching is done wholly in the colleges which affiliate themselves to the university. Insofar as the university has an academic staff of its own, its function is only to help in designing the courses, supervise the conduct of examinations and guide such research activity as the university is able to organize. Since all the teaching is done within colleges and the university is in effect mainly an examining body, the optimal size of an affiliating university can be fairly large; on the other hand the quality of the education imparted will depend very much on the resources available to each college and how well the teaching is organized within it.

In contrast, a unitary university is one that is directly responsible for both teaching and conducting examinations at all levels. For convenience the university may choose to have part of the teaching organized within colleges, but they would be colleges belonging to the university and wholly managed by it. Naturally the responsibilities of the unitary university are very much greater than of an affiliating university. It cannot therefore afford to grow large in terms of student enrolment and teaching staff if it is to function reasonably efficiently.

A federal university stands in an intermediate position. The constituent colleges need not belong to the university—in fact they usually do not—and may enjoy therefore considerable autonomy. At the same time the university has collective teaching functions. For carrying out these functions, however, the university can draw upon its own teachers and those belonging to the colleges.

To the extent that colleges manage their own affairs the responsibilities of the university within a federal structure are

less than when it is of the unitary type. On the other hand, the autonomy of the colleges can itself create problems for the university, particularly if too many of them are given constituent status in an indiscriminate fashion. The colleges could gain more control over the university than is desirable and, as often happens in federal structures, the tail may start wagging the dog. Like the unitary university a federal university has also therefore to be very careful about its size; in addition it has to be extremely watchful about the character and composition of the constituent units.

It will be evident from this brief analysis of different possible university structures that higher education of quality is better organized within universities of the unitary or federal type. For with the pooling of teaching resources which they make possible more specialization can be promoted. On the other hand they can become unmanageable units once they grow beyond a certain size. If a large student enrolment cannot be prevented, an affiliating university would therefore perhaps be more suitable from the organizational point of view.

In India there are now hardly any pure affiliating or federal universities. For almost all affiliating universities have assumed some teaching functions at the post-graduate level; on the other hand, federal universities have been progressively shedding their teaching responsibilities and letting the constituent colleges organize a large part of the teaching—particularly at the under-graduate level—with their own teachers. Even some unitary universities have been changing their character by affiliating private colleges and letting them organize part of the teaching. In fact most Indian universities have become such mixed types that the situation is now very confused and the old labels given to them have almost lost all meaning.

Though most of these developments have taken place in response to various needs and pressures of a compelling nature, the results of the adjustments made show only too well the limitations of an *ad hoc* approach to basic issues of

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organization in higher education. For instance, affiliating universities that have assumed post-graduate teaching have not succeeded in raising standards perceptibly at this level—except in a very few cases where they have succeeded to a limited degree in pooling the teaching resources available. Indeed, in many affiliating universities, the standards of post-graduate instruction independently organized in some reputed colleges are higher than in the universities of which they are parts.

Moreover, when the total student enrolment and the number of colleges involved are allowed to grow very large, affiliating universities cease to be useful even for giving guidance in the framing of courses and arranging examinations. Adaptation of courses from time to time and experimentation with new methods of teaching become difficult because the necessary adjustments would have to be made in all colleges; many of them may not be prepared for such adjustments. The result is usually that, while the majority which prefers the *status quo* determines the policies of the university, the minority of colleges that might be willing and anxious to change with the times is also put into a strait-jacket from which there is no easy escape. The massive scale on which examinations have to be arranged by affiliating universities introduces further problems—till examinations too cease to have much meaning and become even quite undependable.

Federal universities that have transferred progressively their teaching functions to the colleges, without changing the structure of rights and obligations following from their federal constitution, have also been caught in serious contradictions. For in respect of the under-graduate courses for which teaching responsibility is usually shifted to the colleges the role of the universities is then not much more than of an examining body. Student enrolments at this level and the number of colleges catering to under-graduate education are therefore allowed to grow—usually under pressure—very much as in affiliating universities.

Transfer of teaching at the under-graduate level to colleges is in itself wholly rational when student enrolment grows. The standards maintained in some of the colleges could be even higher than those which the university might be able to maintain if it organized instruction for large numbers at this level on a centralized basis.

One result however of expansion at the under-graduate level is that the university gets engulfed very soon in routine problems, such as maintaining records and organizing examinations on a massive scale for under-graduate students. In fact, once the under-graduate enrolment assumes large dimensions, the consequences are the same as in affiliating universities.

In addition, within a federal structure, the university has usually greater responsibilities in respect of colleges, even though they are allowed to enjoy considerable autonomy. When the number of colleges increases beyond a point, the university therefore tends to get drowned in various managerial and semi-political problems. The time and energy of even those appointed for specialized teaching and research at the post-graduate level are then taken up for handling such problems.

Universities—however they are structured and by whatever nomenclature they are identified—cannot serve the purposes for which they are set up once considerations of size related to functions are ignored. This is precisely what has happened in India. Some affiliating universities—such as the Calcutta University—have today an enrolment of nearly 200,000; no university can possibly survive when the numbers involved grow to such dimensions. Even the Delhi University, which was structured largely on federal lines—and designed to have no more than about 10,000 students—has a total enrolment now of well over 75,000.

All this works to the detriment of the purposes for which a federal university is set up and affects adversely both its organizational efficiency and academic standards. The same

is naturally the outcome in unitary universities if their character is allowed to be changed by the pressure of numbers.

Indeed the experience of the Delhi University in the last few years shows how tragically a university conceived along federal lines and has been able to maintain relatively high academic standards can get strangled by being compelled to grow beyond the size optimal to its structure and functions. Growth in the demand for higher education in this region was inevitable, as the population of Delhi has grown from around one million to nearly 4½ million in the course of the last two decades. Repeated requests for starting another university to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding city have however been turned down. Even a suggestion made last year that the Delhi University might be permitted to have a separate campus with an infra-structure of its own did not find acceptance. Apparently the pressures involved are of a kind that does not permit flexibility of the kind needed to save standards of higher education.

Two Autonomous Structures

The situation can perhaps be saved now only if the entire system of higher education through universities is reviewed afresh. In particular, a clear distinction needs to be drawn between under-graduate and post-graduate education, and at least some institutions in each category should be enabled to maintain standards appropriate to these levels of education.

At the under-graduate level this is perhaps best done through a system of autonomous colleges. Thus colleges that have earned a reputation for maintaining high standards might be permitted to frame courses, organize instruction and issue degrees on their own. In effect they would have the status of what are now called "deemed-to-be universities". Such recognition might be given by the University Grants Commission, irrespective of the location of the colleges concerned. Along with the status so given the Commission might provide special assistance to these colleges for specific purposes.

If the criteria adopted and the procedures followed for such recognition being given are clearly laid down, the system could provide considerable incentive to colleges in general to raise standards. Moreover, the system would give considerable scope also for flexibility and experimentation in under-graduate education.

At the post-graduate level the University Grants Commission has already made a start along these lines by giving recognition as Centres of Advanced Study to promising departments in various universities. There are now about 30 such Centres of Advanced Study—almost all of which have thereby been enabled to progress more rapidly than they could otherwise have. The additional expenditure on account of these Centres of Advanced Study is still less than Rs. 1 crore per annum.

The concept of these Centres can be expanded and made to promote the requirements of higher education in a more integrated fashion if the organization of post-graduate education within universities is itself modified. Thus if post-graduate education is organized through more or less autonomous Schools—consisting of two or more departments teaching subjects that are closely inter-related—such Schools could be recognized as Centres of Advanced Study and not merely as isolated departments in particular subjects.

Properly organized, such Schools could not only promote greater cohesion and sense of belonging among teachers and students than are found today within university faculties and departments but encourage the development of inter-disciplinary work among them. In order to ensure that each School has adequate autonomy the universities might even set up separate academic and executive decision-making bodies for each of them. Much greater representation could then be given to teachers and students on these bodies, and the method of election for selecting representatives kept to the minimum. One further advantage of this would be that the universities can function in a much more decentralized fashion conducive to greater efficiency, and protect their academic activities from

the kind of political and other pressures that are otherwise exercised through centralized control at a few key points.

More Universities Needed

With a clear distinction drawn between under-graduate and post-graduate education, the organization of each university at the higher level could also be split into two parts. The part concerned with under-graduate education would primarily deal with problems such as specification of admission regulations and conduct of examinations for the colleges that are affiliated to the university; for dealing with these problems the university could have wholly separate decision-making bodies and a separate administrative apparatus. The relationship of this part of the university structure to the colleges would be similar to that existing today in affiliating universities. The other part concerned with post-graduate education could be entrusted with such residual decision-making and administrative responsibilities as need attention after all the basic functions of designing courses, organizing teaching and conducting examinations are left to the constituent Schools.

✓ As a rule, no university should still be permitted or compelled to carry on enrolment of more than 25,000 students at the under-graduate level. Since the overhead expenses involved in setting up universities which are obliged to perform the functions required at this level of education are not likely to be very large, more universities could be established for this purpose without creating any major problems. Another way of meeting the situation might be by permitting universities to organize quasi-independent campuses for the purpose with a separate administrative structure for each of them.

✓ Similarly, at the post-graduate level, no university should have an enrolment of much more than 10,000 students. They could be divided up among seven or more Schools—with an enrolment of not more than 1,000 students in each case.

Once universities and colleges in all parts of the country are re-organized along these lines the framework will have been established within which the most effective use of the available

teaching resources becomes possible at each level of higher education. The stage will also then be set for making various experiments both in the content of courses and in the methods of teaching and examination.

It is true that the position in under-graduate colleges which are not given an autonomous status will not change very substantially. But the deadweight that most of the colleges belonging to this category in effect constitute will at least be prevented from dragging down the more promising among them. They will also not be able to exercise—to the same extent they do now within the existing organizational structure of universities—the kind of pressures at the level of post-graduate education that have proved so detrimental to the maintenance and raising of standards at this level in most universities.

Selective Subsidy

If higher education is re-organized along these lines it will also become possible to make subsidization of higher education much more purposive than it is today. The aim should be to make colleges, other than those which are given autonomous status, wholly self-supporting over a period of time. A high proportion of the Government funds so saved could then be used for giving generous scholarships and other financial aids to the more meritorious students selected by appropriate tests and to such other specified categories of students as are thought to deserve similar assistance.

If some part of the funds is set apart for assistance to the non-autonomous colleges, they should be made available for only specific reasons and for limited periods—such as when institutions of higher education need to be started in backward areas, when vocational education requiring such assistance is introduced at the under-graduate level, or if it is thought that some colleges have shown enough commitment to the goals of higher education, that with some additional assistance for a specified period they could make the grade for selection as autonomous colleges. Perhaps one could also consider extending limited assistance to colleges for specified purposes in the first two or three years after they are started.

This means naturally that all colleges will have to be given the freedom to charge higher fees in order to meet their expenditure. However, there need be no objection to this provided the more meritorious and deserving students are given adequate financial assistance by the Government and the minimum salary grades and other terms of work and service for teachers are clearly laid down and enforced. Indeed this is the way in which additional finance can and should be raised for making higher education less of a burden on public funds and more resources can be made available for primary education.

Actually, one need not object even to the practice of capitation fees which some institutions set up for higher education have been accused of adopting. It is more important that this practice is brought into the open—not allowed to remain and flourish underground as is often the case now. For when students belonging to the upper strata of society are denied admission to institutions of higher education, what usually happens is that either under-the-counter payments are made to secure admission or pressure is mounted by them to open more institutions of higher education at public expense. Pressure of this kind has been responsible to a large extent for the rapid growth of heavily-subsidized higher education in recent years. In fact, even medical education—which is very costly—has been expanded under such pressure at public expense despite growing evidence of surplus personnel and serious under-employment in the medical profession.

Suitable legislation will of course have to be passed in order to provide adequate safeguards in regard to the scale and use of funds raised through capitation fees and the like. Thus one might consider fixing a ceiling on the percentage of the students enrolled on whom capitation fees can be charged; making it obligatory to admit all others strictly on merit; and also stipulating by law that in all such institutions which adopt these practices to raise funds, meritorious and otherwise deserving students adding up in number to a specified percen-

tage of the total student enrolment should be provided education and all related amenities on a wholly subsidized basis. This is one way in which, given the existing social and economic system, the upper-income groups could be made to subsidize the higher education of those belonging to the lower income groups and not be permitted to exploit them indirectly as they do now.

Within the kind of framework outlined here it would be the responsibility of the University Grants Commission to select Autonomous Colleges and Centres of Advanced Study; offer an adequate number of scholarships for students chosen on an all-India basis to enable them to take advantage of the facilities offered in these selected institutions (or elsewhere if they so choose); and give discriminating support to other universities for specific purposes and limited periods. The State Governments would be responsible for providing all other support that the universities and colleges located in their respective regions need to be given; they would also have to introduce such legislation as is needed to control the management and financing of private colleges.

Open University

The University Grants Commission might also set up an Open University to supplement the facilities offered by colleges and universities. Such a university would provide instruction mainly through courses given over the radio but supplemented, where necessary, by assistance through correspondence courses and short contact programmes organized during vacation periods. It should be possible for such a university to build up in a short period a library of tape-recorded lectures given by the best persons available for each subject; have them translated into regional languages where necessary; and thus offer at relatively low cost the kind of guidance and help for higher education which students with adequate academic motivation and maturity could benefit from.

• If such facilities are supplemented by opportunities to appear for university examinations as "private candidates", *i.e.*, without the candidates having to go through a formal process of education in a college, it should be possible for them to secure higher education while in employment. It will become more and more important as time goes on to treat higher education in this way as a process of continuing education rather than as something that has to be necessarily completed at a particular stage of one's life.

Re-organization of higher education along these lines will help not only to mobilize more resources for higher education—without cutting into the resources available for the lower levels of education—but to introduce much more equity and efficiency in the use of such resources as are available. Standards of higher education can be thereby raised where the prospects are most promising, and opportunities to benefit from it can be made available to the most deserving students. By making the internal organization of universities much more decentralized than it is now one could hope that political forces are contained more effectively and prevented from making serious inroads into higher education.

Through the financial assistance given to selected institutions and students by the University Grants Commission it might also be possible to neutralize at least partially the parochial tendencies that have been growing in this field. For the present trends in higher education pose no less of a threat to national integration today than the trends in evidence in other spheres; they do need to be counter-acted.

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He was a member of the Economists' Panel, Planning Commission, 1955-57; Visiting Professor at John Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1958; Visiting Fellow, Nuffield College, Oxford University, 1960; Member, Expert Committee on Employment, International Labour Organisation, 1960; Chairman, Committee on Planning and Distribution of Steel, Ministry of Steel and Heavy Industries, 1962-63; Member of the Group of Experts on International Monetary Issues and the Developing Countries, UNCTAD, 1965; Visiting Lecturer, Economic Development Institute, World Bank, 1967-68; Member, Committee of Experts on Unemployment Estimates, Planning Commission, 1968 to date; Member, Cabinet Advisory Committee on Science and Technology, Government of India, 1968 to date; Member, U.N. Committee on Development Planning (for the Second Development Decade), 1969 to date.

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