

## RELEVANCE OF AUTONOMY IN PROGRESSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION



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### Short Profile

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### ABSTRACT:

India's Higher Education system is third largest system in the world, next to the United States & China. Higher education establishments are the primary producers of the knowledge that is to be transmitted to students, organizations & society. So they exist not only to instruct and educate but also to provide the main facilities & to give professional and

technical education for their students and to contribute positively to the progress of their country, but in the Post-Independence Period, there was an increased demand for enrolments, participation and democratisation. The problem of how to administer efficiently, operate fairly and govern wisely, therefore, became acute. Autonomy coupled with decentralisation of powers and responsibilities is essential to run universities affairs democratically. Autonomy of higher education does not mean either independence from social objectives or isolation from social change. It comes into existence by legislation and maintains itself and acquires the physical facilities for its functioning largely through the aid of public fund. This paper reveals the meaning of autonomy in higher education, minimum requirements and purpose of autonomy in higher education. It also describes the problems which are faced by university to maintain autonomy.

### KEYWORDS

*Autonomy, Freedom, Higher Education.*

## INTRODUCTION:

India's Higher Education system is third largest system in the world, next to the United States & China. It is seen as a major instrument for socialization of the young individuals, do new innovations & researches and prepare professionals like Doctors, Professors, Engineers etc. In later half of the 20th century, rapid social change was required and the role of higher education in the service of the nation was emphasised. With this changing environment of society, there is a special need of competent & experienced individual in the society. To fulfil these requirements Indian higher education system has expanded at a fast pace by adding nearly 20,000 colleges and more than 8 million students in a decade from 2000- 01 to 2010-11. As of 2011, India has 42 central universities, 275 state universities, 130 deemed universities, 90 private universities, 5 institutions established and functioning under the State Act and 33 institutes of national importance.

The entire process of higher education has to be a concerted national effort. It has to be an action oriented system which enthuses our youth to build up confidence in our future development with specific social objectives to sustain. Area specific response and requirements have to be integrated in our exercise to determine and maintain standards uniformly in pockets of diverse nature and socio cultural needs despite plurality of approaches. But at the present time higher education has become most complex of modern organisations and therefore one of the most difficult to administer. In the post –independence period there was an increased demand for enrolments, participation and democratisation. The problem of how to administer efficiently, operate fairly and govern wisely, therefore, became acute. The universities in India were in turmoil, trying to experiment with new academic ideas within the available model. This attempt was absurd and any piecemeal solution approach failed to establish any form of stable governance in the university. Higher education became ungovernable and is nearly on its way to obsolescence.

Autonomy coupled with decentralisation of powers and responsibilities is essential to run university affairs democratically. That's why in 7th plan the UGC came forward in a big way with an encouraging proposal for the establishment of 500 autonomous colleges to implement its concern for grant of autonomy to education institutions in accordance with the National Policy on Education (1986), in order to:

- ▲ Reduce the load on the university system;
- ▲ Decentralize academic administration;
- ▲ Give freedom to prescribe rules of admission, determine courses of study, method of teaching and evaluation.

## MEANING OF AUTONOMY

Etymologically, Autonomy means 'self norms'.

Autonomy is government of an organisation by persons most deeply affected by the organisation, in the best interest of the organisation and with minimum interference from other agencies. So, autonomy is understood to mean 'self-governance' or functional freedom without any fetters and it implies 'management by internals' without any outside interference and checks.

## AUTONOMY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Autonomy of higher education is given the freedom to be a norm to itself, a freedom for self-governance. It is a freedom for assuming responsibility for itself. Thus freedom for self-governance is given at two levels:

- ▲ At the University level where the college is free to determine its policies and programmes;
- ▲ At the Individual level where the teacher is given the freedom to learn and the freedom to teach. This means the teacher is given the operational freedom to develop and innovate different methods and styles of teaching, research, testing and evaluation.

Our university system which owes its lineage to the British pattern of universities leans heavily on the ideals which maintain highest standards of academic growth guaranteed through autonomy. The first Committee on 'Model Act for Universities', appointed by the Ministry of Education (1964) stated in its report 'Autonomy for a university is not a matter of fundamental right, as it were, but is a condition for its efficient functioning and for enabling it to achieve the true ideals and aims of a university. A university needs autonomy if it is to discharge properly its functions and obligations to society and play an effective part in the development and progress of the country'.

The basic philosophy is that a person or group which is free and autonomous is more efficient than a person or a group which is controlled. Of course, the person or the group has to be responsible and accountable for its actions, but there is no interference in the day-to-day functioning of the individual or the group. This basic philosophy is similar to one which states that a free market economy will lead to greater productivity, than a controlled economy, and that democracy leads to greater creativity, than a dictatorship.

Kothari Commission (1964-66) in the context of autonomous colleges spoke of granting autonomous status to outstanding colleges to enhance their capacity to improve themselves markedly. Dr. P.B.Gajendragadkar (1971) in his report of the Committee on Governance of Universities pointed out that, "in order that the University may perform their functions properly, their autonomy should be scrupulously respected by the legislatures and the executive.....".

Autonomy envisages a two-pronged liberation: Firstly, liberating the universities from the burden of conducting examinations for lacks of students and the certification of the same. This obsession with examination deters the universities from fulfilling their sacred responsibilities of teaching, learning and research and giving academic and administrative leadership in the higher educational field.

Secondly, Autonomy is also to liberate the colleges from the excessive, minute and sometimes oppressive control of the universities and allow them necessary freedom to chalk out their plan of action including course, curriculum and examination management, of course subject to the overall supervision and control of the university.

With education as an instrument of Social Change, the teachers in the universities have to act as creative craftsmen to shape and facilitate this change and consolidate human resource in the country. The teachers' social contributions in all their academic programmes that the universities implement, gets reflected in the shape of acceptance or rejection of their products. Incidentally this is also the indication of level of efficiency of our universities. The courses that are prescribed, the manner in which these are taught and the conduct of the teachers- all have a social impact and bearing. The society in a democratic set up responds to their worthiness in a befitting way. It is in this context that the autonomy in action draws attention.

There is no doubt that a certain measure of freedom is required in a democratic set up to ensure the pursuit of higher learning and for the maintenance of academic standards within the framework of social objectives.

The pioneer universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were established as autonomous institutions. Not only they have continued to be autonomous institutions of higher learning, their example has encouraged the government to persist in this policy of establishing more and more autonomous institutions in the country. Yet the concept of autonomy as applied in the case of institutions of higher learning has been far from neat and Gajendragadkar Committee had to make certain observations about the use of the academic autonomy to clarify the situation.

## PURPOSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AUTONOMY

Autonomy of higher education is based on long experience that the universities can properly undertake the work expected of them by the community which supports them only if they have freedom of choice and of action. This does not exempt them from public interest and criticism, nor does it mean that their policies should not be under review by themselves, and by others.

One of the more important areas of higher education autonomy is in the selection of staff and students. Although pay scales and, under certain circumstances, conditions of employment may require government approval, the individuals appointed to posts, even at the highest level, are ultimately a matter for the university Council alone. Student numbers are determined by government on the advice of the UGC, but the acceptance or rejection of applicants for places is entirely a matter for the institutions.

Another aspect of higher education autonomy lies in the determination of curricula and the setting of standards. Although choices will necessarily depend upon prior educational achievement at school and upon employers' and professional bodies' needs and expectations of graduates, and there will be financial limitations in some disciplines, responsibility for what is taught and how well it is taught lies with the universities.

Universities can react to society's needs by the provision of new courses or the modification of existing ones much more effectively through their own network of contacts (including lay members of governing bodies and alumni) than through inflexible official channels concerned with manpower planning.

According to these aspects we can divide the purpose of higher education autonomy into three parts:

- ✦ Academic purpose of autonomy is the freedom to decide academic issues like curriculum, instructional material, pedagogy, techniques of students' evaluation.
- ✦ Administrative purpose of autonomy is the freedom to institution to manage its own affairs with regard to administration. It is the freedom to manage the affairs in such a way that it stimulates and encourages initiative and development of individuals working in the institutions and thereby of the institution itself.
- ✦ Financial purpose of autonomy is the freedom to the institution to utilize the financial resources at its disposal in a prudent way keeping in view its priorities. Autonomy and accountability are two sides of the same coin.

## MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AUTONOMY

It is necessary to identify the prerequisites of functional autonomy without which one cannot expect the colleges to perform the task assigned to them. It is also necessary to establish a broad consensus on what should be regarded as the minimal requirement of autonomy in the college system.

To lie in the category of autonomous body, every university or college has ensured that:

- ▲ It will admit students as per a pre determined schedule, only on the basis of objective, transparent and credible criteria.
- ▲ It will lie down and, from time to time, update syllabi and curricula, keeping in view the general levels of competence of students at the entry point and the conceptual comprehension, methodological skills and factual information which they must acquire to obtain employment commensurate with their degrees.
- ▲ Class and course were proceeds according to a given time table.
- ▲ Appraisal of the levels of achievements of students vis-a-vis the pre requisites laid down in the syllabi, etc. would be undertaken well in time through processes which would demonstrably preclude favouritism and corruption.
- ▲ The grading awarded to examinees would be such as to command credibility among monitoring and funding agencies, other institutions and employers.
- ▲ An environment for learning would be created which would ensure that the general body of students would become actively involved with the pursuit of knowledge, so that there would be very little 'wastage and stagnation'.
- ▲ The composition of the staff and of the student body and the general environment would discourage inbreeding the parochialism, and ensure that personnel at all ;levels felt accountable for the performance of their duties in a responsible position.
- ▲ There is adherence to reasonable norms in the matter of optimal utilisation of staff, equipment and infrastructure, professional encouragement, financial discipline and grievance redressed.
- ▲ Along with these requirements complete autonomy of universities raises the question of financing the college education.

## PROBLEMS OR HIGHER EDUCATION AUTONOMY

Some of the important functions of the Universities, amongst the multiplicity of functions in the modern complex world, are teaching, research and extension which would mean involving into direct contact with the community at large.

Kothari Commission on Education in its report as early as 1966 says " The proper sphere of university autonomy lies in the selection of students, the appointment and promotion of teachers and the determination of courses of study, methods of teaching and the selection of areas and problems of research".

It has again rightly been observed by the Kothari commission that "University autonomy cannot become real and effective unless adequate provision is made to meet the financial requirements of universities and colleges".

One of the major problems is that autonomy within the Higher Education is generally disturbed. Since the university cannot function in isolation because of its obligations and responsibilities to the nation and to the mankind as a whole, the running of university affairs cannot be left solely to the

academic community. Because of their relationship to social needs, it is incumbent on them to accept the involvement of non-academic persons vis-a-vis the university governance. In such a democratic organisation the universities have to function with a great skill and an imagination so that such attitudes and conventions are developed which would not only maintain the university autonomy but also do justice to the valid claims of society.

Political interference in the higher education autonomy is also a major problem to maintain autonomy. In our country university autonomy has been threatened much more by political interference than by government interference. One method of determining university autonomy is through appointment of 'convenient' persons as Vice- Chancellors.

Since the Vice-Chancellor is a key person in the university, the ruling political party can have a great deal of influence in the university through him. The result is that the university becomes a political arena where supporters and opponents of the ruling party fight their battles.

When politics enters through one gate of university, autonomy leaves from the other gate of the university. Peace in the academic campus is disturbed and there is no climate for academic pursuits. University autonomy becomes meaningless under their conditions.

Another method through which the state governments manage to control the universities is by means of making posts of registrars, deputy registrars and even assistant registrars as transferable within the state. These officers of the universities run regularly to state secretariats to get their transfers to convenient locations. For this the officers care more for the bureaucrats and the politicians than for the vice chancellors and the academicians.

With these powers, the bureaucrats and the quality since manipulate appointments of professors and readers and sometimes they stoop low enough to manipulate universities result and corruption prevails in the university system. The politicians consider universities as centres of political influence rather than as centres of learning.

## CONCLUSION

It is observed that autonomy in the higher education is not something legal or of a statutory nature but an ethical necessity for the furtherance of academic matters. These observations indicate that autonomy cannot be claimed as a matter of right. It is to be viewed as something falling in the category of non-physical infrastructure, necessary for furtherance of the cause of higher education.

The necessary representation of the non-academic on various decision making bodies of the Universities should be to the extent of only presenting and imposing the wider interests of society as a whole. So where autonomy means independence in thought and action at different levels in a university, it enjoins upon it a greater responsibility in a democratic set up to act with greater restraint so as to be open to social audit, public scrutiny and a more sustainable participative management. The whole set of responsibilities in providing academic leadership and administrative competence get linked to social aspirations in the exercise of autonomy.

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