I.P. Desai Memorial Lecture: 10

# THE CRISIS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Justice Desai, Ghanshyam, Dr. Lobo, faculty and staff of the Centre for Social Studies and friends. I must first record my gratitude to the Centre for this opportunity to pay my respects and offer my tribute to Prof. I.P. Desai. He was a concerned social scientist, a pragmatic thinker, a diligent scholar, an imaginative and sensitive researcher, a wise mentor, a true friend and above all a fine human being. When I started my career as a researcher at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in 1964, more than thirty years ago, it was as a professional assistant to the two member team of Prof. I.P. Desai and Prof. M.S. Gore who had then undertaken to co-ordinate, for the Education Commission, a national study on Education and Modernization. This study marked the launching of the Sociology of Education in India. With a rare generosity and largeness of heart, the duo co-opted me as the third member of their team. Subsequently, we continued to work closely together until Prof. Desai passed away. The relationship that has developed over the course of those years is very special to me. It remains one of the richest elements of my life. I miss Prof. Desai very much and today pay my respects to him with deep affection and respect.

**A Call For Public Initiative and Action**

I have chosen to speak on the Crisis in Higher Education partly because the issue belongs within the field in which I worked with Prof. Desai. But an equally or perhaps more important reason for my choice of this theme is that I believe that it is urgently necessary that we, as people who care about and are concerned about higher education understand the crisis and do something about it. We have left too much to the Government. We have seen the crisis coming but have done very little to halt it. Earlier, during the pre-independence period, there was plenty of public initiative in higher education, plenty of willingness to take responsibility and to act. It was because of this initiative that we were able to persuade the British to establish the first three Universities in the country in 1857. The British were never very enthusiastic about advancing our facilities for higher education but public spirited Indians kept pushing, and the rulers yielded whatever little they did. Later, when

nationalists like Tagore, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Maharishi Karve felt the need to provide nationalist higher education in the country, they took the initiative to set up institutions for the purpose. We need to take the same kind of responsibility now.

As I just said, we have left everything to the government since independence. But from what I have seen during the course of six years of my experience as a vice-chancellor, and from what I now see as member of the State Planning Board of Maharashtra and Chairperson of its Committee on Education, neither the State Government nor the Central Government are likely to be able to do much to pull higher education out of the mess it is in. We must help ourselves. This Centre was set up to serve public interest and to research and deliberate on social issues. Prof. Desai, in whose memory we are meeting today was deeply committed to applying social science to the understanding and the resolution of social issues. This lecture was preceded by a dialogue on Social Justice and Social Transformation. What better forum could there be for me to make a plea for public initiative and action on behalf of higher education?

**THE CRISIS**

That there is a severe crisis in higher education does not have to be argued or proved. It is visible from many directions. The simplest view comes from newspaper reports. One continuously reads about leakage of examination papers, errors in the papers set, failure to conduct examinations on time, the open sale of examination papers and relevant answers prior to the examination for which they are meant, mass copying - often with the collaboration of invigilators, teachers and parents, and violence against invigilators who refuse to join the racket. There are reports about the extensive practice of hiking up marks on payment of consideration and about the sale of diplomas and degrees. Newspapers report ragging beyond human endurance at some of the apex institutions of higher education in the country. They also report suicides. Finally, they talk about protests and strikes by students, faculty and other employees when attempts to bring discipline to the system are made.

From within the system, one hears each category of participants speak about their own distinctive experience of the crisis. For instance faculty talk about frequent delays in payment of salaries, and about lack of opportunities or facilities for research. They freely mention that continued scholarship is irrelevant since promotion to higher posts is

primarily by seniority. One discovers that they have no control, either over defining the syllabi they teach, or over the assessment of their students. Probably because of this, they have very little enthusiasm about fresh knowledge in the subjects that they teach. College Principals in turn, grumble that most teachers take their professional responsibilities in a spirit unworthy of committed scholars, that they count their professional obligations in terms of the number of hours of teaching done, that they refuse to take anything beyond the set teaching load, that they resent frequent upgrading of syllabi, because it means extra work for them, that they refuse to examine and assess examination papers as they do not consider this task a "part of their job". Finally, students seem to have the most to complain about, starting with the uncertainty of admission to courses and institutions of their choice and being forced to accept whatever is available, to complaints that academic terms do not commence on schedule, that they are frequently interrupted, that the quality of teaching is poor, that library and laboratory facilities are inadequate, that teachers do not complete the syllabi, that assessment and evaluation are erratic and can be "fixed"….

**Deeper Problems and Paradoxes**

All these, and other anomalies that are visible are symptoms of much deeper, less visible problems and paradoxes. Among the most critical of these are : the unmanageably large size of the system; the much too rapid and relentless pace of its growth; the paucity of resources to sustain this growth; the challenge to keep pace with the advance of knowledge and technology in the world and to provide at the same time, knowledge and technology relevant and appropriate to the country as a developing society; the contradictions involved in implementing the policy of reservations; political pressure; and finally State control through an insensitive, inflexible bureaucracy. We will look at some of these problems briefly.

**Unwieldy Growth and Limited Resources**

Today, India with six million students has the second largest university system in the world. The USA with 14 million students has the largest. Higher education in India has grown phenomenally since independence. Between 1951 and 1961, the first decade of independence, there was a 81.48 percent growth in enrolment. In 1961-71, it went up further to 108 percent. By 1971-81, it had come down to 29 percent. Through the decade of the nineties, it seems to

have stabilized here. But, stretched to breaking point, even this level of growth is far beyond what the system can carry and bear.

Meanwhile, resources for higher education are continuously shrinking. In the First Five Year Plan, the expenditure on higher education accounted for 9 percent of the total budget on education. In the Second Plan, it went up to 22 percent and until the Fifth Plan, it ranged between 22 percent and 25 percent. It dropped to 18 percent in the Sixth Plan, 14 percent in the Seventh Plan and to an all time low of 8 percent in the Eighth Plan. We do not know what the situation in the Ninth Plan will be. But, considering the emphasis that is now being placed on primary school education it is doubtful that allocations will go up.

**Wastage**

Accentuating the effects of this resource crunch, is the problem of wastage. At least partly, wastage occurs because most of the funding comes from the State or the Central Governments. Grants are hedged in by rules and regulations that are so inflexible that they discourage the small economies and initiatives that are so critical to optimising returns from investments made….

More serious wastage accrues from the fact that most of the enrolment in higher education is for certificate oriented, first degrees in Arts (40 percent), Commerce (20 percent) or Basic Science (20 percent) which are useful only to the extent that they mark levels of certification for employment at the clerical level or the level of technical assistance. They also serve as preparatory courses for admission to professional courses, and for further specialization for those who go on to the Master's or Doctoral level. But, less than 20 percent of all those who are enrolled for graduate degrees in Arts, Commerce and Science are likely to go on either for professional education or for more specialized education in the courses that they have studied for their degrees. Thus, for the major part these degrees are basically a passport to employment in fields wherein the substance of what is learnt during the course of the three years leading up to the degree is largely unutilisable. Because they are highly certificate oriented, these degrees do not make for good liberal education either. Very little of what is acquired by students in the course of these degrees is substantively relevant to the growth of the country's economy, its social or political development.

Aware that what they study is not likely to be of much use in the work that they will eventually take up, and that the degree certificate is

all that really matters, most students enroled for graduate degrees in Arts, Commerce and General Science are indifferent to and apathetic about what they learn. As a result, barely 50 percent of those who appear for the final degree examinations in these fields each year pass the examinations. In any case, a large percentage of those who pass remain unemployed or under employed.

Yet as the demand for higher education grows, it is into this sector, which is the cheapest to operate and the simplest to administer, that the growth is accommodated. The only way out of this predicament would be to curtail numbers and to restructure the Arts, Commerce and General Science degrees so as to make them more meaningful. Both solutions have proved to be difficult to implement. As far back as 1953, when the University Grants commission was established, its first Chairperson had warned against the excessive expansion of higher education and advised that the system be kept to a manageable size. Subsequently, several commissions and committees on higher education have given the same advice. But there has been no firm effort in that direction. Similarly, it has often been suggested that, in order to restore value to the degree, it would be useful to discontinue the practice of making the degree a requirement in jobs for which the degree is not really relevant. But this is not being done.

**Vested Interests**

Many vested interests are responsible for this situation. Among the most powerful of these are the vested interests of politicians. Having discovered that the establishment of a college brings prestige, power and popularity, and is one of the surest means of securing the support of an electorate, they push for expansion. Together, a University and the State Government carry authority to grant final permission for the establishment of - a new college. Thus in principle both are in a position to resist the establishment of new colleges if they are convinced that expansion is likely to be counter productive. But in practice, they have almost invariably been unable to withstand pressure exercised by determined politicians.

The second major vested interest in the expansion of higher education is that of those who invest in colleges as commercial propositions. In the pre-independence era, investment in the ownership and management of institutions for higher education in India was made by missionaries who considered this activity to be an instrument for the promotion of their religious philosophy and values, by caste and

community organizations interested in providing their youth opportunities for advance, or by socially committed citizens and idealists who served higher education because they considered it their social responsibility to do so. The new investors in education are an altogether different category. Most of them start colleges because they are a lucrative business.

In this connection, it is important to recognize that the Government's financial investment in education is very large today. At the time that the country acquired independence, the government's share of expenditure on higher education accounted for about 58 percent of the total. Today, it accounts for at least 88 percent, and for 98 percent according to some estimates. The massive increase in government funding has come with many controls and with an extensive bureaucratisation of practices and procedures. It is also unfortunately accompanied by political pressures and interference. Persons and organisations inspired by a mission or by a sense of idealism find that, together the bureaucratisation of education and political interference, have created a situation in which they are unable to function. Discouraged because they do not have the freedom they require to provide education of the kind and the quality they would like to, they are moving away. Their place is being taken by a new breed of entrepreneurs, motivated, as indicated above, either by the desire for political power or by commercial interests. It suits them that degree level education has grown to be certificate oriented. It is much easier to manage colleges that do not have to account for substance or for academic rigour.

There are many ways in which this category of college managers, who have now come to be known as education barons, push growth. It would be pertinent to illustrate with reference to one of my personal experiences as a vice-chancellor, as follows:

The number of students a college is allowed to admit is set by the university to which the college is affiliated. Arrangements for the examinations to be conducted by the university are designed on the basis of numbers thus set. However, colleges frequently admit students in excess of the assigned number and inform the university about excess numbers only at the point at which the students are required to be presented for examinations. In a three year degree course this is as late as three years from the point of admission of the student. Technically, such admissions are irregular and therefore invalid. The university has the right to refuse to accept these students for

examinations because they are in excess of the number allocated to the college. But the management of the colleges use political pressure to force the university to accept them. Students protest, and go on strike. And eventually, if and when the matter goes to a court of law, the court almost invariably asks the university to accept the students for examinations on the ground that students should not be made to suffer for a wrong that the management of the college has done.

During the course of my six year tenure as vice chancellor, there were three cases of this nature. Aware of court judgements I ruled that the students be accepted for the examinations, but moved the Executive Council of my university to take firm disciplinary action by imposing a stiff fine on the colleges that resorted to this practice. I was able to get this done. But in the process I discovered that my objection to the flouting of university norms was somewhat isolated. Although the Executive Council stood by me, their resentment at the violation of norms was not as strong as I would have expected it to have been...

Since the government does not resist growth as it should do if it is really concerned about the mounting deterioration of quality, one cannot but conclude that it too has a vested interest in allowing such poor quality education to grow. Observations made by sociologists commenting upon the expansion of higher education in the USA are pertinent to understanding the attitude of our government. They point out that young people in the USA step out of high school with unrealistically high job aspirations. When these are not met they enter University to "better their employment prospects". By the time they graduate they are not necessarily equipped for better jobs, but they become more realistic about their employment prospects and are willing to accept what is available. Thus, universities, according to these sociologists, perform "a cooling off function", that is valuable to society from the point of view of containing aspirations that would otherwise explode into a dangerous discontent.

In much the same fashion universities in our country contain the unemployment of the high school educated. The demand for enrolment in higher education would not be so large if employment was available to the young on completion of the SSC or HSC examination. Because it is not, students reach out to university education in the hope that it will improve their chances of employment. Many years ago, Prof. Amrik Singh had remarked that universities perform a "baby sitting function". Other commentators have referred to the university as a parking place for the unemployed. It is possible that the government permits the

expansion of higher education because it needs a parking place for unemployed high school graduates. Moreover there is an additional bonus. The expansion of higher education creates an image of development and growth. This too is valuable for the government.

**The Relationship Between Expansion and Economic Growth**

Although the vested interests and consequence pressures for the expansion of higher education as discussed above can be understood, a major issue remains unresolved. Bodies like the World Bank firmly state that the expansion of higher education is good for the economy. One interprets this to mean that with the expansion of education there will be more jobs and better opportunities for self-employment. This interpretation seems to be supported when it is pointed out to us that whereas barely 6 percent of the population in the relevant age group gets higher education in India as much as 25 percent of the population in the relevant age group is at Universities in the developed countries of Europe and more than 70 per cent in North America. The underlying assumption seems to be that if we increase our enrolment in higher education our economy will grow. Our experience has been quite different . We find that economic growth has not kept pace with the expansion of higher education in our country. In fact we seem to have reached a point where the expansion must be curbed.

As we try to locate the truth between this experience and what bodies like the World Bank advise and claim we begin to decipher the complex relationship between higher education and economic growth. It begins to be clear that the expansion of higher education will lead to economic growth only if, and when, this expansion substantively provides for the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are needed, and are pertinent to growth. In India this has happened only to a limited extent.

**The Gap Between What the System Provides and What the Country Needs**

Within the limited time available to us, it is not possible to amplify this statement, to explain how and why there is a gap between what the system of higher education provides and what the economy needs. But basically, this gap is a consequence of the fact, that the expansion of higher education in our country has been closely modelled after higher education in developed societies. It almost exclusively focusses on providing technical, technological and professional

education appropriate to a fairly sophisticated level of industrialization and technological advance. It does not address the sectors of the economy that are not yet industrilized or not even on the threshold of technological advance . The underlying assumption seems to be that the needs of this sector will automatically be served. This assumption has proved to be incorrect and damaging.

To an extent, the decision to provide the country with higher education suited to a high level of technology and industrialization has paid off. Today, the country is not only self-sufficient for its needs for technologically trained personnel but the products of our universities - particularly of the new apex institutions, such as Institutes of Technology and Management - are able to compete successfully for jobs in the international market. However, even as we celebrate this success we are beginning to realize that we have made a mistake in not taking cognizance of the fact that the mass of people in our country continue to live by traditional occupations and use traditional knowledge, skills and technologies handed down through generations and that their needs, which are distinctive and different, must also be met.

In operational terms, this means that to stimulate economic development from the bottom up higher education must be geared to understanding the traditional knowledge, skills and technologies being used in agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, traditional medicine, in crafts such as pottery, textiles, leather work, the manufacture of jewellery etc. It should be charged with the task of developing ways and means of advancing this knowledge and technology and lifting these occupations to fit into a modernizing economy. Post middle school and post high school education, and for that matter even post primary school education must offer a rich array of courses designed to enable the mass of people to advance even as they follow the traditional occupations in which they work. This is not being done.

**The Development of Relevant Knowledge, Skills and Technologies**

The problem is that it is university educated people in the country who are responsible for designing courses relevant to grass roots level development, and they are completely distanced from and out of touch with life and work of the masses. They are therefore unable to develop courses that are relevant to the masses.

The task of developing knowledge, skills, technologies and modernization relevant to the advance of traditional occupations has been successfully addressed by some of the NGOs involved in

development. They have explored into indigenous knowledge, techniques and skills and conducted research relevant to the advance of traditional occupations in farming, fishing, horticulture, the manufacture of textiles, to the improvement of basic services such as the provision of health care, housing, legal aid, and management of water and sanitation. They have found ways of communicating with the masses and of disseminating appropriate knowledge and skills to them. One way of making higher education more useful and relevant to grass roots level development would be to draw upon what these NGOs have done, and to develop relevant degree diploma and certificate level course to be offered at universities, and at the high schools and higher secondary school levels. Provision of these courses at the high school and higher secondary school level will make these levels productive and help reduce the pressure for admission to universities. Our society is so heavily burdened with the notion that such courses are of a lower status than "academic" degree courses, that the shift will be difficult. But a beginning must be made. In fact if the system of higher education begins to thus respond to the ongoing needs of society it will be emergized from within and become meaningful and relevant to the country's social and economic development and growth.

**The Cultivation of a New Ethos**

A firm effort must similarly be made to change the general ethos of higher education in our country. Here again, we have carried on with what we inherited from colonial times, without making the changes necessary to ensure that our universities are fit to serve an independent nation. The ethos of Indian universities during the British period belonged with the culture of a subject colony and the requirements of colonial rule. There was an emphasis on absorbing knowledge, without attention to building knowledge and to advancing its applications. There was very little concern for developing capabilities for critical analysis, creative thinking, experimentation, exploration, for testing of concepts.... and for a range of other skills characteristic of mature and well developed systems of higher education. The neglect of these capabilities was further accentuated by the fact that there were hardly any facilities for post graduate education and practically none for research. At the new apex institutions such as IITs and IIMs there is some conscious effort to provide for the cultivation of these qualities. But this effort has never really been firm and extensive enough to transform the culture of our universities.

Or again, during colonial times, neither students nor faculty regarded Indian universities as fully adequate institutions capable of providing for the full range and highest level of education. For this, students were expected to go abroad, to universities in Britain. Although Indian universities now offer courses far in advance of what was available in pre independence India, the tendency to look up to universities in Europe and North America for advanced and up to date education continues. Even the prestigious IITs and IIMs tend to lean on "collaborations" with foreign universities, and continue to leave their students with the feeling that for an advanced education in the discipline chosen one must go abroad. This continued dependency is unfortunate and needs to be removed.

**World Crisis**

The problems faced in higher education in India are by no means unique. In fact they are world-wide. Most countries are faced with massive increases in the size of their student populations. They too have to measure up to the ideals of equality and social justice in and through education. They have to keep pace with the phenomenal growth of knowledge and technology around the world even as they ensure that the courses and syllabi they offer are practical and relevant to employment. Several countries have conducted sophisticated reviews of their systems of higher education and made careful deliberations with reference to these challenges. For instance, the Robbins Report in Great Britain, the report of the Wissenschaftsrat in Germany and the colossal encyclopaedia on relevant issues produced by Carnegie Commission on Higher Education in the United States. But answers to the problems that plague higher education around the world have only partially been found.

Although there is thus a global crises in higher education, the Indian experience suggests that in developing countries the problems are far more complex than in the developed countries. For, in addition to the problems which they share with the developed countries, the developing societies have to cope with a series of problems that are derived from their earlier situation as dependent and subject colonies. I have already referred to some of these problems. There are many others. For instance, these societies have had to bridge the gap between the kind and level of higher education their systems offered at the point that they gained independence, and higher education available in the developed world. Simultaneously, they have had to keep pace

with the advances in knowledge and technology in the developed world. They have had to do this by building up the highly inadequate systems of higher education left behind by their colonizers. In cases where the colonizers have left nothing they have had to start from scratch. The funds available for the purpose have been extremely poor and continuously limited by other competing demands of development. These include the servicing of literacy, primary school education, basic health, housing and the eradication of poverty. Finally, they have to function in uncertain, often explosive, economic and political environments, wherein politicians, and even governments, employ and exploit the system to serve their own vested interests. A recent World Bank publication discusses the problems of higher education in developing societies with factual details and sensitivity. As one looks at these facts and figures in this publication one realizes that in a sense, the crisis of higher education in India illustrates the course that higher education in any developing society is likely to take - viz that the initial faith in education as an instrument of development is severely shaken as problems surface and the system gets caught up in its own structural inadequacies, even as it is battered by external pressures.

**Reform, Restructuring and The Inner Logic**

There have been many efforts to reform and restructure the system of higher education in India in order to resolve the problems with which it is faced. But as a 1991 study, which brings a team of scholars and administrators with intimate and extensive experience of the system to think together clearly concludes, these efforts have had very limited success.

Trying to understand why efforts to reform and restructure the system have failed, I have found it useful to use an analytical frame suggested by Sir Eric Ashby, the well-known thinker on higher education. According to him, there are three main environmental factors that influence higher education in any society. The first of these is customer demand. The second is manpower need. And the third is the influence or pressure exercised by the patrons viz. those who own, manage and finance education. Ashby further points out that when forces in the social environment press for change in a higher education system, they are likely to encounter two kinds of resistance. First, the inertia of the system to any change. This Ashby believes is often a virtue, as systems do need some stability to cope with the often capricious forces of demand, manpower needs and patrons influence. The second source of

resistance, which he considers even more valuable, is the belief in the purpose of the system which is held by those who are engaged in it. In this connection, he points out that a system of higher education has its own objectives and articles of faith. The demands that society makes on the system are resisted by the system if they conflict with these objectives and articles of faith. Ashby labels these two sources of resistance "the inner logic" of the system and states that the inner logic of the system does for the system of higher education what genes do for a biological system : it preserves its identity, it is a built in gyroscope -

**Forces That Discourage Quality**

The points made by Ashby are extremely valuable to understanding the source of the crisis in higher education in our country today. The essence of the crisis as we experience it is that university education has become heavily examination and certificate oriented, that there is very little intellectual or academic rigor in teaching or in learning, and that there is no commitment to the advancement of knowledge, skills and capabilities relevant to the country's development. Looking at these features of the crisis with reference to the three environmental forces that Ashby mentions, we can see that the customer demand is not particularly conducive to quality education as students press for certificate oriented courses. As regards the second force that Ashby mentions, viz the market, as observed earlier sixty to seventy percent of all university graduates viz those who take degrees in Arts, Commerce and Science, take these degrees only because it is necessary to have a degree certificate to enter clerical, supervisory level jobs. The market employing these graduates is indifferent to the substantive content of these degrees. This is a powerful force in encouraging expansion without substance or quality. Finally, as regards the third force viz patrons, we have seen how management and politicians as well as the state have vested interests in the expansion of higher education without regard for quality.

If all these environmental forces, viz customer demand, market and patron pressure are driving the system of higher education away from quality on to certificate oriented education what kind of influence we may ask does the inner logic of the system wield? As mentioned at the outset, the universities that were set up by the British in India in the middle of the nineteenth century were designed to serve the limited knowledge and capability needs of a British colony. They were not designed to be apex centres of learning, responsible for the

advancement of knowledge. They were not equipped for research. They were not even equipped for post graduate education. Substance and quality were never the core concerns of these Universities. Thus the inner logic of the system of higher education which we have inherited from the British is not of a character to resist the environmental forces that press for certificate oriented education.

**A Basic Difference**

When we compare this situation with the situation of higher education in some of the developed countries faced like we are, with pressures towards the massification of education; we find that there is a basic difference, both in the direction in which the three environmental forces pull, and in what the inner logic of the system asserts. In the developed countries today environmental forces do pull institutions of higher education to serve knowledge and skill needs in areas formerly outside the orbit of higher education. For instance Britain has been pressed into granting university status to Polytechnics. Similarly, in the United States disciplines and courses that once stood outside the orbit of university education are steadily making their way into universities. But while this happens, there is, simultaneously, a firm obligation to ensure that the substantive content and quality of these courses is such as to serve real needs, that they are anchored into occupations that are relevant to society. Moreover, the inner logic of the university system pulls to ensure that in terms of substance and quality the new courses gain the weight required to legitimize their admission to University status. Similarly, throughout Europe, Austrialia and North America there are demands to equalize opportunities for higher education and to provide access to sectors of the population hitherto excluded from higher education . But the expectation and the assumption is that they will be truly and meaningfully educated.

**Universities As Cultural Transplants**

Perhaps this is a consequence of the fact that universities in these countries have risen from the native soil, and although they have been elite, and elitist institutions, distanced from the masses their roots reach deep into the life of the people. It is probably also related to the fact that these universities have been serving sovereign autonomous societies which have been free to advance. In contrast, universities in developing societies are alien institutions, grafted on to these societies by colonial rulers, to serve the limited needs of their commerce and

governance. Often, as in India, they have also explicitly been assigned the task of distancing an influential section of the native population from its own roots and culture so as to cultivate a loyal elite culturally conditioned to belong away from the people and with the rulers.

Faced with these realities, one has to recognize that amongst other things, the crisis of higher education in our country is partly a consequence of the fact that the institutions through which higher education functions are colonial transplants which never took enough root deep enough to reach into native soil. Consequently they have never really acquired an inner logic that belongs with and serves this soil. Thus battered and burdened with customer demands, market forces and vested patron interests that interfere with its functioning as an institution responsible for the dissemination, cultivation and advancement of knowledge, technologies, skills and other capabilities relevant to the dynamics of a post-colonial society, the system does not really have an inner strength with which to withstand the onslaught.

**Possible Measures**

It would be presumptuous to try to offer solutions to this situation, particularly in view of the fact that the efforts that have been made so far have not been rewarded with much success. However, some steps could be taken. First and foremost there should be a concerted and massive move to delink jobs from degrees in situations where the content of the degree is not really relevant to the job for which the degree is required. Second the system should be freed from the dead wood and weight of constraining service conditions, administrative practices, procedures, rules and regulations and allowed space to creatively respond to the needs of society. As mentioned earlier, Government controls on higher education, including well-intentioned supervision and monitoring by bodies such as the University Grants' Commission have become counter productive. They tend to drive away people with sound values and commitments to education and leave the field open for those who do not mind sacrificing quality and relevance as long as their vested interests are served. To an extent, higher education can be liberated from government controls without any radical changes in the existing framework. But ultimately it is necessary to carefully examine the relationship between the State and higher education, so as to make way for alternate, more independent structures. Even the basic requirement that universities must be established by statute needs to be reviewed and revised.

**Privatization**

Privatization will inevitably figure prominently in any consideration of more independent structures. We already have a measure of privatization, and there is considerable talk of drawing industry and the corporate sector to share the burden of higher education with the government. But the concepts of privatization and of sharing the burden need to advance far ahead of where they stand at present. Currently, privatization and sharing are basically conceived in terms of sharing costs or the financial burden. Privatization in the sense of freedom from control over academic programmes, modes of organizing teaching and research, and liberalization in several other ways has not yet been accepted. On the contrary, wherever privatization has been allowed or even encouraged, it has been pinned down by rules and regulations that restrict creative advance and pin private bodies down to sharing the obligations of the State. For instance, private ventures in higher education are required to share in the obligation to provide low cost higher education "affordable to all", or the obligation to honour and serve the policy of reservations. Moves to free and full privatization are haunted by fear of commercialization. The possibility that privatization may in fact help to fight the corrupt commercialization that is rampant today is not given adequate consideration. The time has come to take the risks involved and to liberalise higher education. And, if liberalization is to be given an honest chance, it must not be implemented half heartedly. It is necessary to allow market forces free play with the conviction that this will restore quality and excellence.

Speaking of market forces, so far we have as focussed upon the fact that the market in our country presses for an empty certificate oriented education. However, since independence, a powerful sector that demands high quality professional education has also been in operation. This sector of the market is being served by institutions like the IIMs and IITs. It also depends heavily on foreign educated Indians. As the market demand for reliably qualified personnel grows, there will be greater and greater willingness to pay for quality education. Student loans and other relevant services will emerge. Thus an efficiently operated private sector should be able to attract a large share of students who now go abroad for education. In this connection, it is important to recognize that whereas formerly students went abroad after taking their first degree in the country, there is now an increasing trend, among parents who can afford to do so, to send their children abroad

immediately on completion of secondary school. Good private institutions of higher education should be able to intercept and absorb this flow.

The fear that those who cannot afford to pay will suffer if privatization is permitted is justified. But the interests of such students can be protected. Deserving students can be supported by scholarships. Moreover institutions financed by the government could concentrate on providing quality education at "affordable" costs. At these institutions, those who can afford to pay could be charged higher fees. What I am proposing is higher education with two sectors - the private unaided and the government aided. The market for higher education in the country is large enough to accommodate both sectors.

**Extending and Legitimizing the Contribution of Non-formal Educators**

Finally, it would be advisable to encourage NGOs who are already engaged in development related research and education to extend their activities. Wherever appropriate it would be useful to give full recognition to their research and to the courses they offer by according them parity with what the formal system provides. Of-course, this recognition will have to be very carefully administered. For, although it is well-intentioned in that it is meant to protect quality and standards, the process of "recognition", in our system of higher education has deteriorated into unhealthy licensing.

Simultaneously universities could be firmly encouraged to draw upon the work that NGO's have done to develop courses. Here there are two challenging tasks. First to develop courses that can be offered by the universities to their own students for graduate and post-graduate degrees. Second to get their different departments to develop courses that can be offered by schools as well as by non-formal education programmes at the primary school, middle school, high school and higher secondary school levels. This will give a fresh lift and much needed substance to the country's efforts to vocationalize education at these levels. It will at the same time energize universities.

**Difficult But Not Impossible**

The moves suggested are difficult, but not impossible. Under colonial rule we, as a people, moved firmly and determinedly to get the British to establish universities in India and to provide us with European education. To a large extent, we were successful in our effort. Few

other colonies British, American, Belgian or French were able to achieve the advances in higher education that India did as a British colony. We need to put in the same kind of determined effort on behalf of higher education now that we did then. The resolution of the crisis in higher education in our country depends on how soon and how effectively we move.

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