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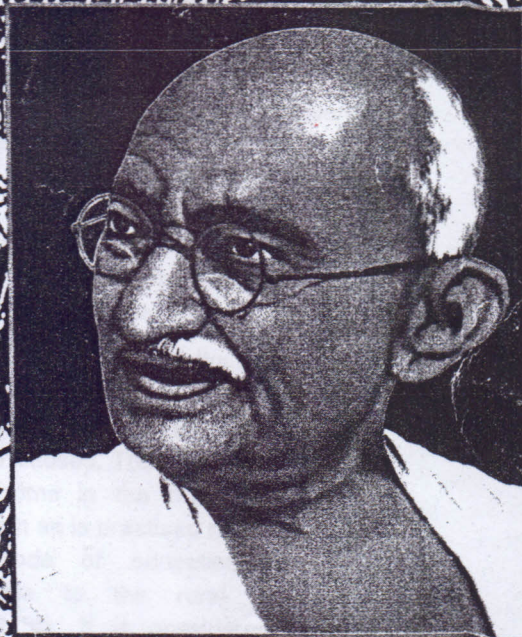
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WONDER WORLD

OPEN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

M.Selvam and V.Ramasamy &

The formal system of higher education in India is not within the reach of the larger sections of the people. It fails to meet their requirements in full. Further, infrastructural facilities do not exist adequately in several colleges/universities; there has been a quantitative expansion of colleges and universities and also expansion in number of students enrolled year by year. Even then demand for higher education is not met with fully. It is true because the persons benefited by higher education have been estimated to be just 1.2% of the total population, but the steady growth in population is at the rate of about 2.1% per annum in India. From this, it is clear that it is not possible by the formal system to provide higher education to all the people.

Under these circumstances, it had become necessary to identify a suitable mode of education which would meet the demand and fulfill the educational requirements. The U.G.C. for the purpose, constituted a committee under the chairmanship of Dr.D.S.Kothari which recommended instituting correspondence education in the country. Later on, the concept of open university system was stressed by educational planners.

Share of distance education

In India, we have two types of distance education system, viz, correspondence/distance education and open university education. The terms correspondence education and distance education are used synonymously. It is a known fact that the rapid strides in distance education in India are due partly to the failure of the formal system.

As on today, there are five open universities of which IGNOU is at the

National level and others are at the level of States viz. in Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Bihar. Besides, 49 conventional universities are also offering courses under correspondence stream and open university systems. The share of distance education in the total enrollment which was 11.5% in 1992 is expected to rise to 16.5% by the end of 8th Plan.

Status of rural masses

Both formal and non-formal system of education do not serve the rural masses, particularly the rural women to the extent it is really required. In support of this inference, the research report on Correspondence Course/Distance Education in India covering 1989-90 recommended that special efforts be made to reach people in remote rural and tribal areas and to attract larger number of women and backward sections of society.

Regarding open university, it is pertinent to mention the findings of a study of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University which has shown that;

(i) the enrollment of students from urban areas is around 70% and from rural areas around 30%, and

(ii) women constitute only about 30% of the total enrollment among whom good numbers are house-wives.

This is likely the case with all distance education institutions including open university system. It is, therefore, necessary to evolve a flexible system convenient, to the rural masses particularly women in the present context.

Limitations

Distance education institutions are offering both correspondence courses and open university scheme of

learning. In the case of correspondence course, the candidates are admitted only based on their "Basic or Qualifying Degree". Candidates who acquired degree from formal system are eligible to pursue their higher studies. Formal systems are urban oriented; urban people are the major beneficiaries. There is discrimination among urban and rural with regard to contact seminar classes and study centre; contact classes are organised in established centres of learning which are invariably in urban areas. Similarly, the study centers are established mostly in urban localities. Thus, distance education extends educational opportunities to the same target groups which the conventional also system does.

With regard to open university system, candidates are admitted in two schemes; based on "Eligibility Test" and "Basic or Qualifying Degree". All the candidates who seek admission are not admitted but only those who have passed the eligibility test.

The reasons why the rural masses do not pursue higher studies are economic and distance factors, besides other causes. These problems are not overcome in the distance education system as is practised now. Therefore, a mode of education particularly suitable to the rural masses is inevitable. It is considered that the mode of education would provide the much needed flexibility in the entry requirements and in the curriculum, of the open university system.

Open university system - a solution

It is always desirable to make use of the existing system before thinking about a new system. Of the two systems, i.e., correspondence course and open university system, the latter is more flexible at the entry point and

does not have an inherent dependence on the regular system. It is autonomous in nature. Regarding the open university system, Dharia feels that this mode of education is the solution to many of the present day problems in non-formal mode of higher education. Open universities will be successful if they offer solution to the social problems. Further, it will be more relevant to have an idea of the open university system in foreign countries.

In Pakistan, the Allama Iqbal Open University provides facilities for women students to learn without the need to leave their homes. If this is practised by Indian open universities, the mobility of people from rural to urban areas will be avoided; Indian poor need not spend more on education. As a step ahead, in Thailand, Sukhothari Thammathisat open university was established with a view to reach the remotest area in the country. From this it is clear that open university system can be utilised for the benefit of the rural people if a suitable change is made in the present practice. In India open university system is at the early stage of development. Therefore, necessary changes can be made right now.

Open university system - service to the rural masses.

One of the objectives of open university system is to realise equal educational opportunities for higher education for a larger segment of the population. As discussed earlier, larger segment of the population in India is living in rural areas. Therefore, open university system has to be redesigned for the masses particularly rural; it should be service-oriented and should not be mixed up with economic viability as in the case of correspondence education.

The feasibility and practicability of open university system for the benefit of the rural masses are:

- * Open learning system should be rural-oriented as opposed to its present urban bias. It should enable the rural learner to learn at his own pace and place. For no reasons the rural learner should have the necessity to go over to far off urban centre to attend contact classes. Therefore, the driving force of the open university system must be towards "Education at the Door Steps of the Rural Learner".

- * Open university system should be redesigned for the masses particularly for the benefit of the socially and historically disadvantaged sections of rural India viz., the deprived class and the women folk.

- * All possible steps are to be initiated to conduct research to identify appropriate media of education for rural masses. In order to fulfil this need a Research and Development cell is to be created so as to study this aspect and improve measures.

- * The trend is that openness is prevailing only upto admission in open university system and afterwards, both administrators and students do not come out far from the traditional practice of higher learning. (Class room teaching, attendance etc.) This should be changed.

- * At present under the open universities/correspondence courses, libraries have been established at their head quarters/regional head quarters/study centres. It would be useful if more number of libraries are established in rural areas with provision for more number of seats.

- * In addition, mobile libraries will enable the rural learners to have easy access to study materials.

- * Regional head office/study centres of university located in urban/areas are to be shifted to the villages. The appropriate location of regional head office/study centres/libraries in the villages shall be the school; so that

awareness about the scope of higher learning among the villagers will improve.

- * In each study centre, mass media equipments like audio-video cassettes, T.V, radio, teleconference etc., must be made available. Necessary provision should be made to issue audio/visual materials. It provides educational opportunities to remote areas where formal education is scarce.

- * Establishment of study centres and the conduct of contact classes at rural areas will be highly economical to rural masses; compared to formal system it provides education for all irrespective of disparities - social, cultural and economic.

- * There shall be "Mobile Counselling Service" and "Rural Student Support Service" for the benefit of rural learner.

- * To run the contact classes at villages where guest faculty (University/college teachers) may not be available, teachers must be brought from the cities/town not minding the expenses connected therewith.

- * We have thought about "Rural Banks", "Rural Health Volunteers" etc., but not "Higher Education for Rural India". So, Government should focus on this concept.

- * It is clear that without basic education and full involvement of the rural people, no real development of India could take place. Therefore, open university should also offer certificate/diploma courses in basic or general education, family improvement education, community improvement education, occupational education, labour education etc.

- * All courses should be offered in regional languages. This is absolutely necessary because in Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University, 80% of students opted for Telugu medium in their studies.

* Informative programmes should form part of open learning system. They are news bulletins, economic data, political events, cultural social messages etc. At present IGNOU is adopting such programmes.

* All programmes implemented in Open University System should be revised periodically to enable them to stay current.

* The services of the unemployed graduates in the rural areas may be made use of after giving them sufficient training.

* A sound monitoring system should be developed to continuously assess the working of the system so as to check lapses, and improve remedial measures.

Government commitment

Of course to extend service to the rural areas, it involves a lot of expenditure. But, it is a Constitutional obligation on the part of the Government to provide education to

all by 2000 A.D. In India, illiteracy rate has been increasing year by year. Further, the share of fund allocation for education in the Five Year Plans has consistently declined over successive Plan periods. It is necessary to note that the First Plan saw 7.5% of the total outlay going to education. But over the periods the amount actually spent came up to only 3.6%. It is totally against the target of 6% allocation laid down by the Kothari commission. Both the central and State Governments have already expressed their inability to allocate sufficient funds for education and advised the university/college for self mobilisation of funds.

It is well known that the Government fails to allocate the recommended 6% of GDP for education. So, it is very difficult to achieve the target of providing education to all by 2000 A.D. At the same time, Government can't escape from its Constitutional responsibilities. Therefore, it is felt that the Government

can discharge its obligation to some extent in collaboration with active:

a) participation of service organisations in education;

b) participation of the rich in the sphere of education providing heavy tax benefits;

c) participation of industry, factors in education by making them adopt institutions of higher education in rural areas.

Besides, the Government can take the necessary steps to start factories, industries, colleges etc., only in rural areas, so that the drain of the elite from the villages can be avoided while at the same time improving the rural educational map of India. Open University system if suitably reoriented with the perspective of helping rural India educationally, it will go a long way in shaping the country life socially, culturally and economically. □

Distance Education, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli - 620 024 and Periyar EVR College, Tiruchirrapalli - 620 023

ECOLOGY OF THE ANCIENT PAST

1. Upanishadic Ecology

The Universe is the creation of Supreme Power meant for the benefit of all

Individual species must therefore learn to enjoy its benefits

By forming a part of the system in close relationship with other species

Let not any one specie encroach upon the others rights - (Ishavasya Upanishad)

Science or not, Ecology is known to India from the days of the Upanishads.

Do we not share the earth with millions of other living beings? Just as we human beings make up for one species, there are 5 to 30 million other species. Plants, trees, crops, animals, birds and even micro-organisms too small to be seen with naked eye form

the other species. India alone has 125,000 recorded species. All these are connected together in one vast complex-web. That is the web of life. They constitute biological diversity or bio-diversity. It is this bio-diversity which are hidden in the lines of Vallalar who said: "I languish at the mere sight of languishing crops".

2. Ecology of the Ramayana

1949 saw a great event. The book "A Sand County Almanac" was published by the Oxford University Press. Its author, Aldo Leopold died one year earlier in 1948. So, it was a posthumous publication. The book gave mankind "Conservation Ethics". Leopold pleaded for a new morality to govern man's dealings with nature. His words remind us of our culture and philosophy. He said: "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we

see land as a commodity to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect".

Sage Valmiki tells us that Sita Devi was found as a child in a box by king Janaka while he was ploughing the land. The King gave her the name Sita and looked upon her as the child of mother earth. Sita came from the earth and in the end goes back to the earth. Her sons Lava and Kusa represent nature and agriculture. Lava means Love - i.e., Love nature. Kusa means Kusa grass which represents agriculture. Man needs both Lava and Kusa. The word Love in English is a derivation of Lava. We have to love our fellow beings, fellow animals, fellow creatures, plants, trees and crops. To-day western scientists have created what is called ecology. What is ecology. It means Love of man and his surroundings. □