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HISTORICITY & DEVELOPMENT OF OPEN UNIVERSITY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

India has long history of organized education system. The “Gurukul” is one of them and oldest system of education on earth in which learners came and stay in teacher’s house for learning or may told that Gurukuls were traditional Hindu residential schools of learning. But it has limitation that only Brahmin and Kshatriya communities were taught in these Gurukul, a conventional education system. Due to this rigidity an open learning come in existence with the first learner of this system, “Eklavya”. The advent of Buddhism & Jainism brought fundamental changes in access to education with their democratic character. The 1st millennium and the few centuries preceding it saw the flourishing of higher education at Nalanda, Takshashila, Ujjain & Vikramshila University. Not only this, the records show that education was widespread in 18th Century, with schools in temple, mosque etc and at open space in most regions of country even in interior village also.

INTRODUCTION:

India has long history of organized education system. The “Gurukul” is one of them and oldest system of education on earth in which learners came and stay in teacher’s house for learning or may told that Gurukuls were traditional Hindu residential schools of learning. But it has limitation that only Brahmin and Kshatriya communities were taught in these Gurukul, a conventional education system. Due to this rigidity an open learning come in existence with the first learner of this system, “Eklavya”. The advent of Buddhism & Jainism brought fundamental changes in access to education with their democratic character. The 1st millennium and the few centuries preceding it saw the flourishing of higher education at Nalanda, Takshashila, Ujjain & Vikramshila University. Not only this, the records show that education was widespread in 18th Century, with schools in temple, mosque etc and at open space in most regions of country even in interior village also.

Education was the tool for transformation of the masses into an important resource for national development. Thus emerged the concept of inclusivism and the idea of education for all, and gradually the concept of lifelong learning was born.

Growth:

All new nations made concerted efforts to expand their education base by replicating the model left behind by their rulers. In Agrarian Society, Education was considered an Art, an ornament, an embellishment, an unattainable luxury reserved for the elite; in the industrial society it became craft oriented. In the 19th century, the educational revolution was driven by a radical shift from family centric production to manufacturing and industrial organization, rapid urbanization and social mobility. In this process, the home, the workplace, community life and the church lost many of their earlier functions in the educational system. Education became institutionalized and the conventional system of education was born. University the pursuit of knowledge for the benefit & use of society was looked upon as the ivory towers of knowledge meant for the white collar workers and vocational education for the blue collar workers. With the progress of democracy, literacy and mass education became more essential for increasing participation in the political & economic systems. In spite of expansion of the education sector the educational requirements of the masses could not be achieved. In India with the expanding base at the elementary & secondary education levels due to increase in population & awareness towards education, the demand of higher education had increased. Therefore, realized the imperative need of distance education to provide access to higher education to all those deprived section of the society that could not avail of it earlier, the UGC suggested in its report for evening colleges, correspondence courses and award of external degrees should be considered. The Planning commission took serious note of such a need and in its third Five Year Plan mentioned the need for the introduction of correspondence education in the country. In the light of observation of Planning Commission the Central Advisory Board on education recommended the setting up of an expert committee under the chairmanship of Dr. D. S. Kothari, the then chairman of UGC, to look into the proposal of introducing correspondence courses. The expert committee recommended the institution of correspondence courses in view of the greater flexibility, economic viability and innovative methods of imparting education. The committee also suggested that correspondence courses in India should be administered by the Universities only and in the first instance by one university, viz. the University of Delhi as a pilot project. Thus was born in

1962 the University of Delhi's school of correspondence courses & continuing education. So Distance education in the form of correspondence education was introduced to overcome the limitations of the conventional system. Thus the ivory towers were thrown open to take care of the overflow from the conventional system. The opportunity of access, affordability and convenience offered by distance education system has contributed to its increasing popularity & growth by introduction of correspondence courses in several conventional universities. But again Distance Education system was a teacher-centred model, an extension of the conventional system and firmly perched on the conventional turf from where it began. It was plagued by the rigidities of the conventional system. The only flexibility was with regard to the larger no. of seats. Education was still out of the reach of the marginalized and the disadvantaged. Not only this, a few of the correspondence institutions were doing yeomen service, the remaining suffered from several weaknesses i.e.:- lack of competent & adequate staff, poor quality of study materials, too much reliance on the printed material & less use of latest communication technology, delay in dispatch of study material, rigidities in the courses offered as the formal system, lack of library & laboratory facilities, poor standard of evaluation & checking of assignment etc. Therefore, their growth & working was haphazard, leaving much to be desired.

Above all, most of these correspondence course institutes were considered as revenue generating centres rather than those catering to the new approach to education. This disposition of the conventional universities left little scope for experimentation & innovation and acted as a dampener to the adoption of modern education technology.

In view of these deficiencies, the open education system was introduced in the country not at once, but after a lot of research, seminar & on several committee recommendation.

Major Events:

The idea of an Open University was first mooted by J. C. Stobart, an Educationist and historian, in 1926, when he wrote a memo for the British Broadcasting Corporation advocating a "Wireless University". The World's 1st Open University was established in 1969 in UK and India was one of the 1st countries to apply its mind to the concept of an Open University soon after the UK. In Dec. 1970, a seminar organized by ministry of education & social welfare in collaboration with Ministry of information & Broadcasting and UGC as part of a programme for the observance of "International Education Year". Inaugurating the seminar, Prof. V.K.R.V. Rao, the then Education Minister mooted the idea of establishing an Open University in India and observed ".... It must cover not only the comparatively limited number of university students, but should cover drop outs from school at various points, the neo-literates and eventually all adults who desire to avail these programmes of continuing education The new interesting programmes of instruction, based on modern science-oriented educational technology for students of higher education studying in Open University should make available to this much larger body of population which remains outside the so called university system" The seminar strongly recommended the establishment of an Open University. The working group appointed by the Govt. of India with Mr. G. Parthasarathy, the then VC of JNU, as its chairman to look at the feasibility for setting up an Open University in India. Taking the experiences of UK Open University, the group in its report had rightly stated; "In a situation of this type, where the expansion of enrollment in higher education has to continue at a terrific pace and where available resources in terms of men & money are limited, the obvious situation, if proper standards are to be maintained and the demand for higher education from different sections of the people is to be met, is to adopt the open university system

with its provision of part time or own time basis ...". Thus the committee highly recommended the establishment of an Open University in 1975. Unfortunately no tangible action was taken on the recommendations for about a decade. In 1982 the committee to enquire into the working of the central universities was appointed by the UGC under the chairpersonship of Dr.(Mrs.) Madhuri R. Shah and reopened the issue once again by reiterating the Parthasarathy committee recommendation of creation of a National Open University without any further delay. The National level debate on an Open University stimulated thinking on the subject in various states too. In Andhra Pradesh, proposals were made to start an Open University in 1978 but there was no progress. While these efforts were on, the Govt. of Andhra Pradesh in 1982 decided to establish an Open University and on 26th August 1982 established the 1st Open University in India, The Andhra Pradesh Open University (now renamed as the Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University - BRAOU) by an Act of the state legislature.

With the establishment of BRAOU, interest at the national level increased rapidly to establish a national distance learning institution of quality which would cater to the needs of higher education in India as a whole and on 5th January, 1985, the then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi announced that a National Open University was to be established so on 20th September, 1985 the Indira Gandhi National Open University came into existence by an Act of Parliament (IGNOU, 1985) not only for promotion of distance learning but also as a coordinating body/Apex body. After that, about 13 states in India established their own State Open University.

The Open University is one of the greatest educational achievements of the 21st century that introduced a learner-centred approach to education which is more suited to serve the needs of post-industrial society. Millions have been able to advance their careers and enrich their lives by studying with an open university. Thus Open Universities are best suited for meeting the 21st century's demands of creation of knowledge in new emerging areas, providing skill development in all possible sectors through innovative teaching practices, flexibility with regard to entry & exit, opening the doors to even those who are unable to gain a place in the conventional system; providing freedom in choice of courses by allowing unusual combinations of study that were unheard of in the past & are still not possible in conventional university. Also Open University have introduced innovative methods in education by promoting the use of technology & academic rigour through quality self-learning materials, which has made them rich store houses of information covering a variety of disciplines.

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