

Autonomy of Teacher Training Institutions

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Teacher education in present scenario is facing enormous challenges. In such a situation there is a need to revisit our policies and programmes with a view of making them deal effectively with the emerging realities. Simultaneously, we need to understand that development can best be ensured by freeing the teacher training systems of unnecessary control and regulation and withdrawing avoidable state intervention. The debate on autonomy of higher education institutions is finally taking concrete shape and a consensus is being developed on the issue among the prominent educationists.

The concept of autonomy is based on the philosophy that freedom brings responsibility. The word “autonomy” has come from ancient Greek term “autonomia” which is constituted by “auto” means self and “nomos” means law (one who gives oneself own law) (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/trivia). Thus autonomy implies freedom from control or influence of another or other. It is a concept found in moral, political bioethical philosophy within this context, it refers to the capacity of a rational individual to make an informed, un-coerced decision and often used as the basis for determining moral responsibility for one’s actions. On the line of same philosophy, one of the CAGE (Central Advisory Board of Education) committees was constituted on the subject of “Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions” under the chairmanship of Kanti Biswas, Hon’ble Minister of Education, Government of West Bengal. The terms of reference of the committee included –

- a) To suggest measures for enhancing the autonomy of higher education institutions, especially those with potential of excellence.
- b) To institutionalize regulatory provisions for promoting autonomy and accountability of higher education institutions. (Report of CAGE Committee on Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions, 2005).

Among the higher education institutions, it is need not to say that teacher training institutions stand apart from the mob, since the product of these institutes not only have to decide their own professional area but also have a greater impact on the disposition and direction of the society. In such institutions the hand and minds which will shape up the future of the nation are being trained, thus the importance of much debated autonomy in the case of these institutions increases with greater multitude. But the bitter truth is that there is no training college in the country which can boast of autonomy in its day-to-day working. While teacher education at secondary level is under the academic control of universities, in many states, Department of Education

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also exercises control over these institutions which are made to serve two masters. The result is that the scope and nature of their activities are greatly restricted. Both the controlling agencies do not provide practical training and are content with guiding developments by means of pamphlets, circulars and official papers. The training institutions as a result, are administered and controlled by a mixture of advice and bullying (Gupta & Patni, 1984).

Wide discrepancies exist among different states with regards to methods, syllabi and evaluation procedures followed in the teacher training institutions. As a result of these, no uniform standard of competency could be applied overall to the teachers in the country. However all teacher training institutions in the country suffer from lack of provisions and feedback. Above all there is inertia and resistance in the system to so much deviation from the well-trodden path that unless some drastic steps are taken to improve the condition, the picture cannot be changed. Consequently among the several alternatives, the issue of autonomy has well-emerged and attracted the attention of the world academia.

The concept of autonomy is not solely new to our education system. Let us have a retrospect of teacher training programmes and the issue of autonomy in India.

Retrospect

The need of some sort of teacher training in this country has been felt since ancient times. If we look up the ancient texts it is obvious, one could not become a teacher unless he had high qualities of head and heart. However there were no teacher training institutions exclusively meant for preparing the teachers. As it was commonly believed that with the grasp of knowledge, one could simultaneously arrive at the knowledge of the techniques of teachings. This system of preparation of teachers continued till the advent of the British system of education in the land.

After the British came to India, education took western orientation. In the early schools established by the British, the teachers were Englishmen. Since in England the training of teachers did not start till the end of the nineteenth century, such training was not considered necessary for teachers in India. (Lipkin, 1970). "The Monitorial System" was the only indigenous method of providing training to prospective teachers. In this system more learned students taught the less learned ones. This system was noted by Dr. Bell, the Presidency Chaplain, in Madras. (Uday Shankar, 1984). After that some training requirement was felt essential for Indian teachers. In 1854 the Wood's Despatch advocated the establishment of normal schools in order to ensure adequate supply of teachers. The Hunter Commission in 1882 recommended that the professional training of teachers be carried out in the best high schools under the guidance of school head masters. A second method advocated was through an examination in the principles and practice of teaching. In 1899, the State of Bombay instituted the secondary teachers' certificate examination. In 1904, Lord Curzon laid stress on the training of secondary teachers. The Government of India's Resolutions of 1904 and 1913 and the Calcutta University Commission's recommendations, however, did hasten the pace of the progress towards teacher's training. The Hartog Committee,

in 1929 recommended further raise in the general educational standard of primary teachers. After 1937, the Basic Education Movement brought about an important change in the school curricula when the emphasis on bookish learning was replaced by education geared to social needs and adjustment to life situation. The syllabi for teacher training were also changed considerably to enable teachers to play their role in the changing schools. (Uday Shanker 1984)

Before independence there were three types of training institutions:

1. Normal schools or primary training schools for primary teachers admitting trainees after middle standard examinations.
2. Secondary training schools for middle school teachers admitting trainees after matriculation.
3. Training colleges for high school teachers admitting trainees after a degree.

After Independence it was realized that the training of teachers had suffered during the British rule in both quantity and quality. In the schools a large number of untrained teachers were employed. Further in 1950, when our country adopted the Directive Principle of Universal Primary Education which afterwards by 86th constitutional amendment became Fundamental Right, the need of teacher to cope with the increasing enrolments in the school was seriously felt, which highly encouraged the establishment of teacher training institutions. There has been a great spurt in the number of institutions for the training of elementary as well as secondary school teachers. The qualitative expansion has not been in commensuration with the quantitative improvements. The rapidity with which the institutions multiplied at the cost of quality resulted in a chaotic situation which has persisted till today. The teacher training institutions are believed to be the centers of excellence and are supposed to be achieving excellence in three things, namely in teaching and learning, discovery and engagement. But the fact remains that there are only a few institutions which are known to have achieved excellence in the genuine sense. And there are those institutions that have embraced and institutionalized autonomy in the truest sense. It is amply evident from the history of global higher education that the issue of autonomy is crucial for the growth and development of higher education and that there is an umbilical relationship between autonomy and excellence. Autonomy has been a subject of discourse in the reports of commissions and committee set up from time to time, since Independence, to review the system of education and to initiate the needed reforms and innovations.

The Secondary Education Commission (1952) reviewed secondary education in the country and recommended that all training colleges should be affiliated to universities to maintain proper standard and that graduate training degree should be awarded by universities (Report of Secondary Education Commission, Government of India). Another Education Commission led by D.S Kothari (1964-66), emphasized that the universities should be governed by one overriding consideration i.e. their commitment in all fields of knowledge. This concept of university led the Commission to

emphasize the need of university autonomy without which it is nearly impossible to translate the vision of a university into reality. (Ved Prakash, 2011)

According to the report of the Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education in the first decade of the 21st century, "... a university is a place where new ideas germinate, strike roots and grows tall. It is a unique space which covers the entire universe of knowledge. It is a place where creative minds converge, interact with each other, challenge the established notion of truth and construct visions of new realities". In order to implement the idea of a university, as described above, it has to be an autonomous space in the discharge of its academic commitment. According to the UGC Committee towards new Educational Management, autonomy broadly emphasizes the freedom to function to achieve academic excellence and to administer the institution through its own rules and regulations. Autonomy should percolate down to the various organs of the university system. The Education Commission (1964-66) prefaces its deliberations by making a distinction between institutional autonomy and academic freedom of the institutions. It stated that teachers need to exercise their academic freedom in good measures, enthusiastically and wisely (Report of Education Commission, Ministry of Education, New Delhi, 1964-66). While institutional autonomy lies principally in the fields viz. selection of students, appointment and promotion of teachers, determination of the courses of studies, pedagogy, assessment, areas of research and use of resource.

The present system of teacher education in India has come under adverse criticism in recent years even though it has seldom been subjected to critical analysis as separate and important sector of education. It is so because it did not receive the priority which it should have received at the hands of policy planners in the country. The system of teacher education therefore, needs an overhauling. A fresh conceptualization is thoroughly needed to deviate it from the existing practices, and before we give up the existing system we should be very clear about its defects and the merits of new system of academically autonomous institutions.

Flaws in the Existing System

The following areas of teacher education in the present scenario are suffering from several discrepancies.

Distortions of Affiliation and Accreditation System:

It was the model of London that was adopted for Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, the first Indian universities. The system suited to Indian context at that time, as there were already many colleges in different parts of the country started by different voluntary agencies. The universities gave recognitions for the work that the colleges were doing in and helped to standardize it which in a slightly modified way is even going on today. Thus it is obvious that there are some resemblances between the university system and the prevailing systems at Oxford and Cambridge. In both systems the university prescribes syllabi centrally and the examinations are external (Abraham, 2011).

British universities have an advantage compared to Indian affiliating universities. That is university headquarters and all the colleges are in the same place, making for easy interaction among teachers of the various colleges and university functionaries. Secondly central facilities like libraries and laboratories are within the reach of all the colleges. This type of effort was introduced by Sir Maurice Gayer and was implemented in the form of University of Delhi in 1924. However in India, the colleges affiliated to a university are generally in faraway places. In spite of these handicaps, Indian Universities did function satisfactorily in the initial years. When the number of colleges grew into thousands, then new universities with more than hundred colleges under them were established. (Abraham, 2011). Thus the System of affiliation has lost its relevance in its rigid sense. This has not only led to distortions in the learning process but has created enormous social problems in the ways of corruption, terror and violence in the conduct of examination. They have encouraged impersonalization of teaching.

As far as accreditation is concerned, it was being felt since a long time and eventually even today is a reality that the teacher training institutions, as is generally noted do not observe rules and regulations laid by the agencies like the state university or their own management. There is also fear of trying innovations or new experiments believed to interfere with the set routine and lowering of pass percentages. In order to maintain standards of teacher education and to check the mushroom growth of sub-standard training institutions, the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has been established in the country. However it has not been successful in controlling the flaws in the accreditation and regulation of teacher training institutions and due to its limited scope and activities the Council has failed to register the necessary impact on the system of teacher education.

The Curriculum: Another weakness that developed is related to course of study and syllabi. The curriculum of teacher training in the colonial countries is heavily influenced by the metropolitan model. Though much progress have been made since Independence in developing new curricula to meet the contemporary needs, many countries still rely on the material and textbooks designed for teachers in alien countries. The apprenticeship model of training, inherent both in the college and the pupil teacher system still survives. Such a model encourages the view that teaching is a craft learned merely by imitating experienced practitioners. It fits uneasily with modern idea that teaching skills can be improved by innovative experiments and problem solving (Dove, 1986). It is very clear that there is no "Indianized" teacher education in our country. All changes are based on foreign models. The methods and techniques which were developed in the foreign countries are being included in the syllabi at the B.Ed and M.Ed levels. These methods and techniques are not applicable to the Indian school situations (Portia, 1984). Thus the revision and modernization of syllabi and program is the need of the hour.

It has almost become a common phenomenon in the modern days to introduce changes in the system of education in quick succession. The main problem of the training colleges is with respect of the implementation of such changes. At the same time, these reforms in education are not properly accepted but are becoming targets of severe criticism by the public as well as by the educationists, social reformers, politicians etc. Modern education system is criticized as artificial and impracticable without any relevance to the public or society and any amount of change that is introduced is somehow, becoming unsuitable (Mathur, 1984). This may be explained on the ground that these reforms are not implemented properly at various levels of education for which they are designed to suit the changing times and changing needs of the people; and that these reforms are not based on sound principles of curriculum change and curriculum reconstruction. Thus it is implied that the system needs to be thoroughly revamped to suit the changing trends of education.

Admission and Training Process:

The admission processes differ from state to state in India. To remove the malpractices in admission in many states, the government has framed the admission policies from time to time. The official interference in determining the admission policies is growing. The official interference in other aspects of teacher training institutions is obvious. Its Consequences are reflected in late examinations, late admissions, less teaching, more and more marks.

Evaluation:

Examinations became unmanageably massive propositions involving malpractices, corruption and even violence. With the enormous numbers of students and examinations, and the changed work culture of the persons involved, it became impossible for the universities to hold examinations and declare results in time. There were instances of examination being delayed by a year or a year and half, and students lost valuable time.

Our examinations are also not adequate for the evaluation of quality in higher education. They are mostly only tests of memory and the capacity to reproduce what one has learned. The questions and answers required are not such as would test creative and critical ability. The questions have become stereotyped and students have come to feel that it would be sufficient to read up the appropriate stuff from guide-books three or four weeks before examinations. There is little incentive for them to go deep into the subjects and investigate their foundations and ramifications.

Gains under Autonomy

Now this is the time to make the discussed autonomy a reality. As the Constitution of India believes in the individuality and dignity of all persons and their right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. We are driven by the dream of a free society when political, social and economic freedom reigns. Thus in the favour of institutional autonomy the argument of Parth J. Shah can be well illustrated when he says, "My argument (to them) is that each computer manufacturer is free to decide how many

parallel serial, USB ports he wants on his products. Despite full autonomy, all computers have similar configurations. Similarly even though each college would be free, to determine its syllabus, most of them will have very similar syllabi, with minor differences on emphasis." (www.ccsindia.org) In other words in institutional autonomy the institutions should have right to decide what to teach, how to teach and whom to teach and which other way should not be considered to bring any anomaly in the education system.

Autonomous institutions represent a radical departure from the existing structure of the university system in India and students even in higher education do not enjoy any academic freedom because of the prevailing affiliating system. First of all the teacher training institution should be made free from such down-trodden affiliation system. There should be separate provision for the teacher training institutions to be well equipped with the necessary facilities. Since autonomy of these institutions goes hand-in-hand with its accountability, the delegation and devaluation of power and authority concomitant with its responsibility should flow not only from the external environment to the institutions but should be given at different levels within the teacher institution itself. The CABE advocated that there should be a charter of responsibility and devolution and delegation of authority defined for different levels within the university system and both should be monitored together (Report of the CABE Committee on autonomy of Higher Education institutions, 2005).

As far as the problem of accreditation arises it should be resolved by the rejuvenation of NCTE. NCTE should have its sub-offices in each state and should accredit the teacher training institution on the basis of quality of staff and infrastructure. The teacher training institutions should be free from the university system. These training institutions should be encouraged by the apex regulatory and statutory bodies to subject themselves for external accreditation periodically through advocacy and system of incentives and recognition. The University Education Commission (1948) felt very strongly that the training staff in the training colleges should have teaching experiences in the school so that they become aware of the day-to-day problems of school. The Commission wrote that it should be condition of recognition of all training departments and training colleges that not less than a named proportion of the staff should have school teaching experience. No one really could be a lecturer or professor in education unless he had started by teaching in a school (University Education Commission Report 1949, p.215). This should be also considered in the accreditation of training institutions.

The freedom from unnecessary affiliation constraints will be helpful in mitigation of corruption prevailing in the system in which the money-powered hands have paralyzed the entire system and will lead the training institutions to mould the students according to the current vocational demand as well as professional efficiency

The provision of entrance examinations should be abolished entirely or it should be left on the institutions to decide their own parameter. It may be a composite index of a suitable combination of scores obtained both in the entrance test and in the qualifying examinations for admission as well academic performance, extra-curricular activities, interviews etc. This will make the institutions accountable for their own performance and they cannot blame the entrance examination system for the low standard or criteria for selection of poor entrants. This will enhance the sense of accountability and consequently the overall teaching-learning productivity and institutions should make their output performance public to enhance accountability.

As far as the concern of practice teaching, it should be organized in collaboration with selected co-operating schools those should be given special recognition and grant. To reduce the isolation of schools from training institutions, good teachers in the selected schools should be evolved through practice teaching and they should be brought in these institutions for in-service or refresher course. Even some exchange of the staff members between the schools and training institutions can be made possible.

There should be efforts made for the establishment of a co-ordination mechanism among institutions of similar nature in the field of teacher education. This need not be considered as interference in the autonomy of an individual university or institutions. For instance an overarching council of the teacher education institutions including central universities etc. may represent a higher level of collective decision-making and also may aim at avoiding duplication of efforts and wasteful expenditure. Implementation of the decisions of the "co-ordination council" of all such institutions should not be construed as infringement of its autonomy but an input to enhancing its excellence.

The autonomous institutions should aim at switching over to complete internal evaluation of students over a period of time with individual teacher having full autonomy in evaluation matters. There should be a mix of internal and external evaluation. In the internal evaluation, the activities like participation in seminars, discussions, quiz sessions and written work like essays, terms papers, library work, projects etc. can be included. This is something which is done with difficulty in the centralized system. In fact taking these things into account makes both the students and the teachers take their responsibilities seriously. The final evaluation of practice teaching should be done by members of the panel appointed by the NCTE at state level. The final examination should be conducted at national level on the lines of National Eligibility Test, in which an unbiased assessment of the trainees can be ensured.

Conclusion

Thus it is obvious that teacher training institutions need vital changes and many improvements. Autonomy of a teacher training institution provides it an opportunity to improve the quality of education and help in creating a teacher who has a clear concept of a whole man. Autonomous institutions should enjoy autonomy in framing

its courses of studies, devising its method of evaluation and its principles for admission of students. Autonomy enables an academic atmosphere in which trainees become free from the so called stereotyped training programmes and are encouraged to think clearly, critically and creatively and be able to express them effectively. This will not only lead to the academic independence as well as excellence, but will also encourage the introduction of innovations in order to improve the standard of education.

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