OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING IN INDIA

Reflections on Practices and Future Perspectives

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Open Access Book

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By Prof. V.S. Prasad

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (Dr. BRAOU), formerly known as Andhra Pradesh Open University, was set up on 26th August 1982 through an Act of the A.P. State Legislature (APOU Act 1982). Dr. BRAOU is the first Open University in India that started the democratisation of higher education in India providing opportunities of access to quality higher education to all sections of society to meet the changing individual and social needs. All the programmes offered by the University are recognised by the University Grants Commission, New Delhi. The motto of the University is "Education for All". Find more about the university at https://braou.ac.in/

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Dedicated to
All those who believe in and work to make Open Distance
Learning, an effective and inclusive public service.

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Preface

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University, the first Open University in India has established Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA) to promote, coordinate and monitor academic and administrative related quality assurance in the University. As part of its promotional activity of development of educational and training resources, we are happy to bring out a collection of articles of our former Vice-Chancellor and my Teacher Prof. V.S. Prasad on Open Distance Learning in the form of a book. Earlier also in 2018, we brought out a volume of articles on "Higher Education and Open Distance Learning - Trajectory in India". These are also available as Open Educational Resources in our University's OER platform.

The present book titled "Open Distance Learning in India: Reflections on Practices and Future Perspectives" by Prof. V.S. Prasad is a compendium of six articles. The introduction to the book by the author, "A Just Adequate Person's Life in ODL" is an introspection of his long association and reflections of his experiences about the different academic leadership roles he played but I consider it as a ready reckoner for the success of educational administrators who work with 'sincerity of purpose". The second one written by him in the context of 'NEP-2020" with title "National Educational Policy 2020-Perspectives on Open Distance Learning" focuses from the point of view ODL, identifies the gaps in NEP-2020. He is right in his analysis that though some mention is made about online learning in ODL Programmes in NEP 2020 but it did not provide any impetus to Distance Education. Hence, he succinctly emphasizes the need for adoption of institution centric reforms based on technology driven 'Atma Nirbhar' Model. The third article "Open Universities in India: The Challenges of Our Times" is in fact an extension of second one which focuses on the challenges to ODL and the need for restructuring of its governance systems in consonance with the basic premises of NEP-2020. He suggests the need for changes in regulatory frame work of Higher Education Institutions to maintain a balance between 'culture of authority' vs 'flexibility' and 'autonomy of Institutions', by way of resilience built into the system by good teaching - learning strategies and with good internal governance. He says 'strategizing for future is

possible' with Reform Perform-Transform and to ensure it he suggests for an Institutionalized Development Plan (IDP).

The fourth one, "Reimaging Indian Open University System for the Digital Age: Managerial Perspective" is a reflection of an administrator's point of view, looks institutional policy frame-works of Open Universities with an emphasis on the need for re-engineering them in the changing context. It focuses on the need for initiating quality assurance measures with right mindset of motivated personnel for reimaging the future with adoption of technology and professional management of the institution. The fifth one "India's First Open University in Transition: Need for Reorganizing the Future Together" emphasizes on the need for transformation of ODL institutions in the contexts of Covid-19 and adoption of appropriate strategies for their survival in post-Covid scenario, through intelligent actions. The last article, "Four decades of India's First Open University: Through the Past into the Future" traces the brief trajectory of the University focusing on the important milestones/tipping points that helped the institution to be what it is today. Since, Prof. Prasad associated himself with Dr.BRAOU right from its inception and worked with its founder Vice-Chancellor Prof.G.Ram Reddy is a witness to the various phases of development of the University and its contributions to education system through its innovative practices in reaching out to the unreached or marginalized sections of society.

The changing contexts require changing frameworks, but this should not deter the University from reaching its goal, the author avers. For this, the author suggests designing of relevant programmes and by ensuring accessibility to learners, which requires capacity building initiatives of the institutions.

All along the book, the author's approach is positivist and action oriented. He is aware of the emerging contexts and the pit falls that the ODL systems are facing, but his last experience instigates his fellow practitioners to transit to transform, to re-imagine and to arise to the emerging challenges through "Intelligent action". This volume showcases not only the authors perspective but also allows us to understand the evolution, the trappings and the transformative action that the ODL Institutions require and therefore is

special significance to Dr.BRAOU. Prof.V.S.Prasad as former Vice-Chancellor of Dr.BRAOU and an educationist par excellence has indeed helped us to rethink and re-imagine the future of ODL institutions in general and particularly Dr.BRAOU. We thank him profusely for permitting to publish his collection of articles.

It's a happy occasion for us to publish the works of Prof.V.S.Prasad, which I consider more useful to all those who are involved in ODL & DOL and understand the journey of Dr.BRAOU. I express my appreciation to Prof.Ghanta Chakrapani, Director Academic, Dr.A.V.R.N.Reddy, Registrar, Prof.P.Madhusudhan Reddy, Director, CIQA and Dr.P.Venugopal Reddy, PRO for taking various initiatives in publishing the work and Prof.Ch.Venkataiah, former Registrar for co-ordinating the work with the author.

(K.SEETHARAMA RAO)
Vice-Chancellor, Dr.BRAOU

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Open Distance Learning (ODL) as a mode of education has had the chequered history of more than six decades in Indian higher education. Starting as a part-time correspondence education in Delhi University in 1962, it has evolved over a periods of time as Open Distance Learning, known by different names at different periods of time. In 1962, Delhi University started correspondence education to provide higher education opportunities to working population on part-time study basis and to meet the growing demand for higher education. In the next two decades, many Conventional Universities have started correspondence education programmes, both to meet the demand for higher education and to generate resources to meet the expenditure on their face-to-face programmes. The printed learning materials substituted the classroom activity. In the first two decades, the expansion of ODL system through the activities of conventional universities was impressive, but quality became causality. At this stage, the establishment of first Open University in 1982 in the then Andhra Pradesh State, was a historical milestone in the ODL in India. The dedicated institution for ODL, known as Open University, modelled on British Open University, has heralded a new phase in ODL in India. The system became a multi-mode form of distance education with the use of print and non-print learning resources combined with systematic academic counselling services and integration of face-to-face component wherever necessary. The Open University era, has extended the scope and reach of ODL in India. Next forty years from 1982, the Open Universities (OUs), now numbering 19 have played an important role in providing flexible inclusive system of quality higher education mediated by various forms of technology. The conventional Universities also, mainly influenced by OUs model, have transformed their correspondence mode to ODL mode, making it multi-mode form of distance education. As of now (June 2023) the ODL system is playing a significant role in the provision of higher education with an annual enrolment of around 11 to 12 percent in higher education.

The ODL trajectory in India has both positive and negative dimensions representing the diverse context of institutional operations. The positive trajectory of use, more use and better use and the negative trajectory of use, misuse and disuse are a part of ODL life in India. The first National Policy on Education 1968, emphasised the importance of part time correspondence education to provide educational opportunities to those who could not pursue full time education for various reasons. This commendable objective has taken back seat and many conventional universities used correspondence education to generate resources for its conventional system. The Open Universities have tried to correct this practice and are only partially successful. The ODL, which started as a state supported activity, transformed as self-financing activity to resource generation activity. The cost effectiveness is ensured more through cost cutting practices, resulting in poor quality learning resources and support services. After passing through many periods of doubt as a legitimate academic activity, the system in its OU phase has established reputation as a credible form of education. The COVID-19 has necessitated and strengthened people's belief in the efficacy of ODL as a form of education, a positive result of the tragic virus.

The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) developed in the context of new realities and new challenges, recognised the important role of ODL and online education in improving access and inclusion in higher education. The NEP 2020 expects all institutions to have an option to run ODL and online education along with classroom based education. The policy emphasises extensive use of technology and the importance of quality. The Government of India has a proposal to establish National Digital University for promotion of Online Education. The NEP 2020 is focusing on synergy of modes of education and transfer of credits with Academic Bank of Credits. These are very positive developments from the future perspectives of ODL. The technology developments like Artificial Intelligence (AI), ChatGPT, BARD, Macfine learning and many other developments have far reaching implications for the development and use of learning resources, student services and student assessment systems in ODL. There is a need to relook and redesign the ODL institutional policies, structures and processes.

Technology as a tool can provide right solution, only when we ask right questions. Right questions depend on our understanding of right purpose of ODL. Our challenge is to reimagine the purpose of ODL to locate its 'New Dharma" (new goals) with 'New Karma' (appropriate actions).

Against this background, the present volume is a collection of lectures and essays by the author presenting the reflections on policies, practices and future perspectives in the historical context of change over time. The lectures were mostly delivered at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU) and the focus is on critical view of experiences of Open Universities (OUs). The experiences were examined from the broad perspective of public purpose of ODL system and efficacy of its practices.

The first chapter 'A Just Adequate Person's Life in ODL' , is a personal account of author's life in ODL. The two decades of experience in ODL in different capacities is narrated in the background of my social life and experience of conventional system. The lessons of institution building drawn from my life experience are presented as guides for young generation engaged in ODL activities. The defining feature of my life experience is summarised in just three words: 'sincerity of purpose'.

The second chapter 'National Education Policy 2020: Perspectives on Open Distance Learning' is the revised version of Foundation Day Lecture 2020, delivered at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University. The chapter has a discussion on ODL in earlier policies of 1968 and 1986. The first policy focused on correspondence education and second policy has focused on Open Universities. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) focus was on online education and extensive use of technology in education. The chapter discusses on the NEP 2020, suggestions on synergy of modes, importance of quality in ODL and need for transformation of regulatory system.

The third chapter 'Open Universities in India: The Challenges of Our Times' is the revised version of Prof. G. Ram Reddy Memorial Lecture 2021, delivered at Indira Gandhi National Open University. The chapter examines the challenges faced by OU system in the context of changing

external educational scenario. The internal system is looked from its capacity to respond to the changing environment. Some strategies are suggested for effective realisation of foundational goals and values of OU system.

The fourth chapter 'Reimagining Indian Open University System for the Digital Age: Managerial Perspective' is the revised version of the article co-authored with Prof. V. Venkaiah published in Reimagining Indian Universities, edited by Pankaj Mittal and Sistla Rama Devi Pani 2020, published by Association of Indian Universities, New Delhi. The chapter examines the historical trajectory and policy framework of ODL from the managerial perspective. After discussing the need to reengineer the institutional framework, the reimagination agenda is suggested.

The fifth chapter 'Indian First Open University in Transition: Need for Reimagining the Future Together' is the revised version of the special lecture delivered at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, organised by Centre for Internal Quality Assurance. The focus of the chapter is on quality assurance measures and action points for the sustainable future of the University. These are generic suggestions for improvements in five focus areas of admissions; programmes; teaching-learning and evaluation strategies; learner support system and system management.

The sixth chapter 'Four Decades of India's First Open University: Through the Past Into the Future' is the revised version of Prof. G. Ram Reddy Memorial Lecture2022, delivered at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University. We look back to past to understand the present and plan for the future. The four decades of experience of first Open University is examined from my subjective experiences, with reflective question of why. The land marks in the institutional history, significant contributions and a few suggestions for the future are presented in this chapter.

I am aware that there is an element of repetition of ideas and action proposals in these chapters, because in a way the lectures and essays are the stand alone pieces. May be repetition is useful to reinforce the ideas and suggestions for strengthening of ODL system. The idea of putting all these pieces in one book form is to make them available at one place to 'reimagine our experiences' and engage in 'intelligent action'.

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A Just Adequate Person's Life in ODL

"We don't learn from experience..... We learn from reflecting on experience".

- John Dewey

Introduction

This is the trajectory of my life in Open Distance Learning (ODL). I consider myself a 'just adequate person' - a person who is fair and morally conscious of his actions with good enough capabilities to undertake the assigned work. This is my self-perception, which may or may not match with others' perception of me. Everyone has a sense of self and looks at the world, knowingly or unknowingly, from that perception only.

I have had the privilege of working for over two decades in ODL institutions in India, in various capacities from 1983 to 2003. In this chapter I have made an attempt to critically look at my experiences in ODL with a focus on structure – action interplay of events from the vintage perspective of a practitioner in distance education. In this exercise I am influenced by Socratic observation of 'an unexamined life is not worth living'. It is an analytical exercise to draw some meaningful lessons to future generations from my experiences in ODL institution building, avoiding to the possible extent judgements on individuals. It is true that individuals with their capabilities and limitations play an important positive or negative role in institutions' life and sometimes judgement may be necessary to draw

meaningful lessons. The individual story of interactions makes narration more spicy and lively. I have tried to avoid this temptation, as the focus of this essay is to draw some lessons from my experiences which may be of some use to practitioners in ODL. This is how I look at the relevance of life experiences of old generation to young generation.

In this story, I thought it is appropriate to have a brief background of my social life, as the person's reflections are a product of his genetic and social background. My experiences in ODL have three components i.e., experiences at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU), experiences at Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and experiences in international assignments. The writing of this is a learning experience in re-imagination of past experiences from the present perspective and hope they will be of some use to all interested in ODL to appreciate the dynamics of ODL institutions and transformations. Those who feel the experiences of oldies are dated may skip this essay and move forward to other essays.

Social and Educational Background

I was born in 1943 in a small village Mahadevapuram, Khammam district, Telangana State to middle class agrarian parents – Vasireddy Venkatakrishnaiah and Bangaramma and named as Sivalinga Prasad, after my family deity Lord Siva. As a middle-class agrarian family in a dry land area, my family passed through the hardships of rainfall gambles and natural calamities. As the only son, I have had the privilege of protected life, in spite of meagre family means. My mother, an illiterate housewife, true to her traditional role ensured comfortable childhood to me, with many self-denials to her. In spite of limited landholdings, my parents have provided a very liberal home environment to me and to my only sister. I had no memories of any corporal punishment from my parents, though I had some memories of corporal punishment at primary education level. This protected childhood may be one of the reasons for my unpreparedness to put up with any physical discomforts in later life. This unpreparedness for physical discomfort may be one of the causes for my less confident of me and dependent approach in life.

My father was a very enlightened village social activist taking up causes of the weak and the poor in the village. He was a participant in the Telangana armed struggle and remained a member of Communist Party of India throughout his life. His life and activities have greatly influenced my life and my world view from childhood to present day and reason for my association with left politics.

As the village had no school in those days (now it has the Government High School), I had my primary education at my relative's place in another village. After primary education I joined Government High School at Madhira, the then Taluka headquarters, now the Mandal headquarters. This was the only school in Taluka and second in Khammam district established during the Nizam period. The school is five kilometres away from my village and every day I walked around ten kilometres up and down to attend the school. I was a backbencher and an average student in school. Most of my energy was spent and wasted on walking ten kilometres up and down every day, with little energy left for studies. This shows the importance of having a school in the living place to help the young students to concentrate on their studies.

After school education, I joined SR & BGNR College at Khammam (the only College in the district) for Pre-University Course (PUC). I studied Science optional, with usual intention of students in those days to go to Medicine after PUC. It was a shift from Telugu medium school education to English medium college education. I was always weak in English at school level and failed twice in English in PUC. But for my father's strong desire to educate me, I would have been a college dropout at that stage. After completing one year course in three years, I moved from science optional to Arts courses in B.A. It was a right decision to shift to study Economics, Political Science and Public Administration— subjects of interest to me. Interestingly, twice failed student became a class first in 1964 batch of under-graduate programme in our college and class first in post-graduate programme in 1966. It only shows that once failed, may be successful in later years and merit is very context specific. Today in our education system one examination merit is mostly deciding many things in students' life. It is

necessary to reflect on the desirability of marks-centric view of education excellence.

Another important factor which contributed for my continuation of college education at Khammam, was the availability of hostel facility at Khammam to the students coming from rural areas. The Kamma Caste elites of Khammam district established 'Kamma Hostel' to facilitate the college education of rural boys at affordable costs. Boys from all castes were admitted in this hostel and we paid around twenty rupees per month for boarding and lodging. But for this hostel facility, I could not imagine of having college education. At our post-graduation level also Osmania University provided good hostel facilities at affordable costs of around sixty rupees per month in those days. This experience indicates the importance of hostel facilities for the education of students from rural and poor family background.

After completion of under graduation, I joined Osmania University Art College for doing M.A. Public Administration. Along with me, my two classmates and close friends in Khammam College, V. Ranga Rao and H. Prakash Rao also joined in M.A. Public Administration and we stayed together in University B-Hostel. I don't know why most of us from Khammam preferred Public Administration, inspite of simultaneously getting admission in other subjects also. In those days Public Administration was a new subject introduced at Osmania University as a separate subject at Under-graduation and Post-graduation. A friend from Khammam reasoned that our decision was a result of natural inclination of Khammam people for new things and innovations. It may be a sub-regional sentimental explanation but satisfies our egos. This is how false sentiment survives in life. Interestingly in successive three batches of 1963-65, 1964-66 and 1965-67, all toppers in M.A. Public Administration were former students of Khammam College. The credit may be partly should go to good teachers in Khammam College, validating the role of good teachers in the achievement of students.

In 1964-66 batch in our class of 30, many students were from Marathwada region of present Maharashtra State. In those days Osmania University was the only University in Telangana region of the State and favoured choice of

students from old Nizam State, making the University and our class very diverse in nature of student population. Prof. G. Haragopal was my classmate and class leader— now a well-known human rights activist and 'public intellectual'. We were fortunate to have many distinguished teachers in our faculty. Our academic life was enriched by many co-curricular activities in the College and in hostel. After joining post-graduation programme, I moved from active student politics to classroom and library-based activities. My childhood, school and college day's experiences and participation in progressive student politics have shaped my actions and behavioural responses of my later academic life.

Teaching in Conventional System

I had the opportunity of teaching in conventional College and Universities for 16+ years from 1966-83, in various capacities. I started my teaching career as a temporary lecturer in Public Administration at Government College, Adilabad. It was a chance opportunity. After completing my Post-graduation, I was looking for employment and by chance I met a close friend of the then Director, Public Instruction (DPI)—the Head of Collegiate Education in the State. Keeping in view my topper position in Post-graduation, he recommended my name to DPI who was looking for a meritorious candidate willing to work in remote areas. That is how I got my first job as a lecturer, without any political influence. This may be an unusual phenomenon from today's practices. In the same unusual way in 1968, I lost the temporary job at Adilabad, as the Government replaced temporary lecturers with teacher promotees. The two years experience at Adilabad was very enriching in preparing for teaching at college level. Most of the colleagues at this College were very young and hailed from different parts of the State. Dr. K. Jayashanker who later became an ideologue and important leader in Telangana separate statehood movement, was my colleague at the College. Later we worked together at CKM College and Kakatiya University and we remained good friends till his demise in 2011. In those days, college teachers used to enjoy good social respect and we were active in many social events in Adilabad town. During my Adilabad days I got married in 1967 with Suryadevara Vijayasree a valued Sahacheri for last 56 years

effectively managing our home affairs and taking care of our two daughters, enabling me to concentrate on any academic work.

In 1968, I was again looking for a job, having lost the temporary lecturer post. In Warangal a new private College by name Chanda Kanthaiah Memorial Arts and Science College (CKM) was established and have advertised for the recruitment of lecturer posts, including lecturer in Public Administration. Myself and my friend V. Bhaskara Rao, who also lost his temporary lecturer job applied for the post. Even though we did not get the interview call, knowing the interview date, we went to Warangal and requested the management for interview. The District Collector was the president of the College Committee and also the Chairman of Selection Committee. Prof. K. Venkataramaiah, the then Special Officer, PG Centre Warangal was a member of selection committee along with management representatives. My friend V. Bhaskara Rao, fiercely fought with management for interview. We understand that some aspirants from Warangal with the support of management had managed to see that experienced candidates won't get interview call. This is how attempts are made to recruit their own people in private Colleges. The Management finally had to agree to interview us and I was the last candidate to be interviewed. Surprisingly I was selected. I was the beneficiary of the battle fought by my friend V. Bhaskara Rao. Somebody fights for just causes and somebody else may be the beneficiary. This is how life works.

I have worked in CKM College as a lecturer from October 1968 to May 1979 for over a decade. The decade of work at CKM College is life enriching and life changing experience. I have had the privilege of working with distinguished principals and colleagues at CKM College including Dr. K. Jayashanker (Principal) Dr. P. Varavara Rao (lecturer in Telugu and revolutionary writer). The management of the College, under the leadership of successive enlightened District Collectors has set healthy standards in the governance of the College. The College has attracted talented faculty and motivated students. Some of the faculty members later occupied important academic positions in universities. The students were active in left politics and some of them even sacrificed their lives for the causes dear to them. In the higher education history of the state, the CKM College has

set benchmarks in good governance of private College, excellence in teaching-learning, academic and student activism. The ten years in CKM College is a rich learning experience in better understanding of the social purpose of education and role of militant student activism in higher education.

After working for ten years in a private college, I was looking for a teaching position in the University. An opening came in the Department of Public Administration at Kakatiya University, and I was selected as a lecturer and joined the Department in May 1979. It was an interesting coincidence that Prof. K. Venkataramaiah, who selected me as a lecturer at CKM was the Vice Chancellor of the University and Dr. K. Jayashanker who was my Principal at CKM was the Registrar of the University at that time. In addition to my experience and competence, the sympathetic consideration of persons in position helped me in getting the job in-spite of some resistance for my selection from a member of Board of Management on ideological grounds. This gave me an opportunity again to work with my classmates and students as colleagues in the University Department. The Kakatiya University Public Administration Department at that time was considered as one of the best Departments in the country, with significant contributions in teaching and research, particularly in applied research. The curriculum in Public Administrations was made more focused on critical approaches, moving from structural –functional approaches. The faculty members were very active in University and in Warangal social life. The University was the active centre for student struggles on social and political issues. The faculty also were very active in ideology-driven activities. This is in contrast to present day identity driven and power-driven politics among the students and faculty. In those days the Kakatiya University had a brand image for 'Kakatiya Model' of academic life, for some it was a very destructive model and for many of us it was a forward-looking model.

In 1981, I moved to Osmania University as a Reader in Public Administration. At that time Prof. G. Ram Reddy, my teacher, was the Vice Chancellor of the University. Many of my academic positions were a result of merit and 'circumstances'. It was a new experience to teach in the classroom where at one time I sat as a student. Transformation from a learner

to a teacher in the same iconic building of University Arts College is an exciting experience. The campus students at that time were very active in many ideological struggles. The faculty with some exceptions were more research and career oriented. Many distinguished academics in different departments brought academic laurels to the University. In November 1982, Prof. G. Ram Reddy became the Vice Chancellor of newly established Andhra Pradesh Open University. On his invitation I joined in March 1983 on deputation as Reader in Public Administration in Open University, ending my formal assignment in conventional system. In the conventional system I have had the opportunity of working in Government College, Private College and University Colleges. I began my academic life in ODL system with this rich background experience in conventional classroom system. It was a new beginning in academic life and more about it in coming pages.

Academic Life in ODL

I was engaged in a variety of academic and administrative roles in ODL institutions in formal positions from 1983 – 2003. My engagement in ODL is broadly categorized into three institutional experiences i.e., experiences in BRAOU, experiences in IGNOU and international experiences.

Experiences at BRAOU

Establishment of BRAOU in 1982 was a milestone in the history of Indian higher education, throwing open the ivory towers of higher education. My joining this University 1983, after 16+years of experiences in the conventional system was a turning point in my academic career. What prompted me to take this decision? Two factors mainly influenced my decision in those days. One was the invitation of Prof. G. Ram Reddy the then Vice-Chancellor, and my mentor, guide and role model. When you get advice from a person in whom you have trust and confidence you generally suspend your personal judgment and follow the advice. Some friends felt that I have taken a hasty decision in moving from a teaching position to a non-teaching position. The popular impression in those days in the academic world was that teaching takes place only in classroom and in Open University teaching positions are more managerial positions. Unfortunately, even today, inspite of many developments and changes in ways of teaching-learning,

many academics in conventional system and even some in ODL system, feel that teaching means only classroom teaching. In recent times opinions are changing in the post COVID scenario. From the beginning I am convinced that ODL is a method of teaching, appropriate to different categories of learners and teachers have to engage in different forms of teaching, which are equally challenging as that of classroom. The second motivation to join ODL was its innovative and democratic character. I am always driven by a desire to be a part of innovative systems and democratic ideals of the ODL system have greatly enthused me. I have no regrets for my decision in 1983, which provided me with many new exiting opportunities in life.

In the initial years, the first Vice Chancellor of the University has identified and selected a group of academics from different conventional Universities in the state to manage the new system. All of them had rich experience in conventional system and were enthused by the new idea and willing to put up extra effort needed to launch a new venture. This approach and his 'enlightened nepotism' in selecting people resulted in a rich dividend to the system. The group of experienced people with a strong alignment with the purposes of the new institutions made all the difference to the working of the University. Inspite of healthy skepticism and some motivated criticisms, a common feature of the academic world, the Open University by its practices had established its credibility. The University had launched its academic operations within the six months of its establishment, an unusual feature in the history of Open Universities. This is an example of response to criticism by credible performance. Good learning materials were prepared for undergraduate programmes by involving hundreds of eminent academics from conventional systems and from the field of practice. In those days association with Open University in the development of learning resources was viewed as recognition of their worth and an opportunity to disseminate their expertise to a large number of students. In those days it was a love of labour. Now a day's Open Universities (OUs) are finding difficulties in engaging external academics in developing learning resources. The phenomenon of external experts losing enthusiasm in developing learning resources needs closer examination. Maybe the commercialization of higher

education is one contributing factor. The ODL system has to explore alternative ways of developing learning resources. The same is true in the case of learner support services also. Initially, a large number of conventional college lecturers were engaged for tutorial and counselling services to ODL learners. Now most of the college teachers are not available for these services. Even the few available are not enthusiastic and effective in providing tutorial and counseling services to learners. Time is to think of alternative ways.

I have had the privilege of being a member of the initial team of senior academics in the University. I was engaged in multiple roles of learning resources design, development and delivery, provisions of support service and many other managerial services. This was common for most staff in the initial years. In two decades in the University, I had the experience of working as Course Writer, Course Coordinator, Programme Coordinator, Faculty Dean, Director of various functional units, Rector and finally the Vice Chancellor. As of date, I have the distinction of being the only internal faculty member becoming the Vice-Chancellor of the University. I had the opportunity of actively participating in the University's innovative practices and inspiring examples like open admission practices, design and development of programmed learning resources and development of strong network of learner support system. I have had the privilege of working under the guidance and direction of distinguished Vice Chancellors and senior colleagues. From the beginning, I had a special interest in staff capacity development in ODL. The British Council supported many staff capacity development activities in Open Universities in India under its Overseas Development Assistance Programme. Under British Council Fellowship scheme, I visited UK Open University for six weeks in 1984. The British Council supported the constitution of a 'Mobile Training Team' in 1986 with four members, one each from IGNOU, BRAOU, YCMOU and VMOU. I was representing BRAOU in that Team and we were specially trained for one month in University of New England, Australia. These activities show the importance given to staff training and development by newly established OUs.

I served as the Vice Chancellor, BRAOU from October 2001 to August 2003 for about two years. This new role gave me an opportunity to reflect

on our existing policies and practices and reformulate our plans suitably for the emerging knowledge era. For the first time we developed and made explicit the University Vision and Mission statement. The Vision and Mission statement was circulated widely to all the functionaries and was used for goal setting for all activities. To commemorate its twentieth year the University organized decennial celebrations in August 2002. Many conferences were held, and publications were released on that occasion. During my two years period as Vice Chancellor, the University has taken many new initiatives in academic, administrative and student support services area. The initiatives in academic field include revision of learning resources to update the content with recent developments, strengthening the use of technology in teaching learning, academic collaborations with institutions and organization like ICRISAT, NIIT, SETWIN, Reddy Labs and others to innovate and add new courses in enriching and making undergraduate education more skill and technology oriented and employable. Special optional courses were introduced in specialized areas to make the graduates more employable. Special efforts were made for improving the quality of learning materials by creating a Quality Assurance Cell at Prof. G. Ram Reddy Research Academy in Distance Education (GRADE). A number of Quality Manuals and Handbooks were developed for quality assurance in all operations. A major emphasis was given to research and development initiatives by activating GRADE with a senior member of faculty as Executive Director and the inauguration of a separate building to house the Academy.

The University also identified the year 2003 as the 'Year of Learner Services.' All efforts were made to improve services to learners by fixing timelines for delivery of services. Academic calendar was prepared to help the students to prepare their study schedules. Twenty-three Regional Coordination Centres were established for the coordination and monitoring of study centre activities. The University developed the 'Learners Charter' with University and as well as learners responsibilities. For the first time the University has created 'Student Welfare Corpus Fund' for assisting the needy learners for realizing their aspirations for higher education. The University established a 'Learner Service Centre' at the headquarters to

attend to all student grievances. These measures show the importance given to learners by the University, making the claim of the University as learner-centric an authentic claim.

In addition to the normal maintenance functions, the University has made sincere efforts to make administration more effective, transparent and inclusive. All the appointments to tenure posts of senior management were made on the principle of 'fit for purpose'. To ensure better coordination and a participatory approach in decision making a 'Coordination Committee' with all heads of branches was constituted. Regular monthly meetings were held to review and monitor the University activities to achieve the targets and resolve the glitches. I have followed the target oriented 'Team Management' approach in university governance. Transparency is another hallmark of university operations during my service as Vice Chancellor. A document on 'Administration with a Difference' was circulated to all employees as guidance in their actions. Copies of the minutes of Executive Council and other decision-making bodies were kept in the library for perusal by all employees. Speedy clearance of 'backlog' was undertaken during 'file clearance week' and employees volunteered to put in extra hours to achieve set timelines for completion of work. Adhering to schedules in delivery of learning materials, conduct of counseling sessions, holding of examinations and declaration of results are challenges to the governance system in Open Universities. The success of Open University may have to be mainly judged by the efficiency of the delivery systems. The attributes which guided my institutional governance are:

Vision and Mission of the institution

Social Orientation

Professionalism in work

Realistic approach

Academic Orientation

Smart ways of doing things

Accountability in operations

Decisive leadership

Before completing my second year as Vice Chancellor, I was appointed as Director, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), in August 2003, and thus, I resigned as Vice Chancellor and joined NAAC, ending my two decades of formal academic association with the University. The NAAC is a national autonomous organization of University Grants Commission (UGC) established in 1994, with headquarters at Bangalore, for assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions in India. I had the privilege of being its Director for four and a half years. It was a different experience of heading a national agency with broad responsibility of ensuring quality in higher education in India. During my tenure as Director in 2003-2008 we have initiated and actualized many quality assurance activities including new campus development, assessment of large number of universities and colleges, design of new assessment methodologies, development of knowledge resources in quality assurance and many other promotional activities. The focus of activities was on ensuring the autonomy, professionalism, and integrity of NAAC assessment process. Presently the NAAC is engaged in the reform process of its functions, system, and practices to align with the recommendations of National Education Policy 2020.

Experience at IGNOU

I have had the rare opportunity of working at India Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) for a about five years in two phases from June 1995 to July 1997 as Director, Distance Education Council (DEC) and as Pro-Vice Chancellor from December 1998 to June 2001, including as Acting Vice Chancellor for nine months. The IGNOU being the first National Open University in India has the distinction of a national coordination body of distance education in India for more than two decades from 1992 to 2012. The IGNOU Act had a provision for the establishment of DEC for promotion, coordination, and maintenance of standard in distance education in India. It was a unique system designed in the Act of IGNOU entrusting responsibilities of system standards to a university. The IGNOU, established DEC in 1991 and become operational in 1992. This system was designed with the assumption that in comparison to an independent regulation system, a national University with responsibility and experience of operating distance

education system is well suited for promotion, coordination, and maintenance of standards in the system. The assumption is that a regulator with operational experience will be more realistic and effective in performing regulatory functions. From the beginning, there is another point of view which looked at this arrangement as a clash of interest in IGNOU's role as a university and its national regulatory body functions in the context of multiple number of state Open Universities. The dual role of IGNOU, it is assumed, results in clash of interest between IGNOU and other ODL institutions. This opinion prevailed with the policy makers and in December 2012, the DEC functions were transferred to Distance Education Bureau (DEB) of University Grants Commission (UGC).

During the two decades of DEC operations as a part of IGNOU system, the DEC followed a different approach to regulatory role and had undertaken many initiatives to promote and coordinate the ODL activities in India. I had the opportunity of working as its second Director from June 1995 to July 1997, under the enlightened leadership of Prof. Ram G.Takwale, the then Vice Chancellor of the University. He had the experience of the foundation Vice Chancellor of State University in Maharashtra and understood the inherent potential of a national University to guide the state Open Universities and other ODL institutions. We followed the principle of 'leading by example.' Our focus at that time was more on promotion and coordination functions of DEC with a trust in the capacity of ODL institutions for self-regulation. Even if some behaved unworthy of the trust, we believed that the price is worth paying and is less than the costs involved in a rigid regulatory system. The regulatory measures we designed were based on justifications, not authority. The traditional regulatory system expects compliance on the philosophy of 'because we say so'. In an enlightened regulatory system, compliance should be based on justifications. We have also adopted the participatory approach in all DEC activities. Various Working Groups, Committees and Consultation Groups constituted to undertake DEC activities have included state Open Universities Vice Chancellors and senior faculty. This participatory approach helped in creating a feeling of collective ownership of DEC, in the ODL community in India.

During my term as Director DEC, we initiated many activities for promotion of distance education in India. Data bank on Open Universities was developed and widely distributed among ODL institutions as a guide for actions. State wise status reports on ODL were prepared, for Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. The DEC organized a number of meetings of state OU's Vice Chancellors, Directors of Dual Mode ODL institutions and senior management functionaries of State OUs to encourage collaboration among the ODL institutions, particularly among State Open Universities. Realizing the importance of system research in ODL, special efforts were made for promotion of research in OUs. Grants were given to ODL institutions for undertaking major, minor and mini research projects with a focus on 'action research'. Mention may be made of special research grant given to BRAOU for the establishment of GRADE for the promotion of system research in distance education. This was the first of its kind in State Open Universities in India. The DEC had put in place a well-designed development assistance system, initially confined to state Open Universities and later extended to distance education centres of dual mode Universities. The development assistance was provided for development of self-learning materials; conversion of learning materials as self-learning materials; use of information and communication technologies, launching of new professional programmes, strengthening of audio-visual studios, strengthening library and information services. Special unassigned grants were given to State OUs for staff participation in conferences and workshops.

The DEC has initiated many measures for quality improvement. The professional bodies were very critical of lack of quality in professional education through ODL. The DEC developed special Manuals on design, development and delivery of general education and professional education. The Manuals developed include norms and standards in Management Education, Teacher Education, Computer Science Education, Nursing Education and Library Science Education. Special programmes were organized to sensitize all ODL institutions in design, development and delivery of quality learning resources and integration of multi-media in teaching learning. In the ODL system, there is an element of confusion on the roles and workload of teachers. The DEC for the first time has developed, 'Work Norms for Teachers of Open Universities'.

The DEC in collaboration with NAAC has developed self-assessment instrument for assessment and accreditation of ODL institutions and programmes. The institutions were encouraged to use this instrument for their self-assessment and continuous improvement. Now the Open Universities are being accredited by NAAC, based on the instrument developed by NAAC. The IGNOU, by its innovative operations, established a credible system of ODL and it helped the DEC to play its promotional and coordination role very effectively based on example and experience. The same cannot be said of its maintenance of standards functions. Example and guidance by itself may not be a sufficient drive for maintenance of standards, as it is a very complex matter and requires responses at different levels. At one time there was a proposal to create an independent National Distance Education Council for the promotion and maintenance of standards in distance education, which never materialized. Now this function is performed by UGC, as stated earlier. Hope a more appropriate and effective system will be created for maintenance of standards in higher education including ODL. The National Education Policy 2020 has rightly advocated for a 'light but tight' regulatory framework to ensure integrity, transparency, and resource efficiency of the educational system through audit and public disclosure while encouraging innovation and out-of-the-box ideas through autonomy, good governance, and empowerment. It is an inspiring ideal regulatory frame, yet to see the light after three years of policy approval.

My work as a Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC) and Acting Vice Chancellor at IGNOU is a different kind of experience. As Director, DEC my focus was on system coordination and regulator role of IGNOU. As PVC and Acting Vice Chancellor my role was more of a supportive senior functionary role in system management. As PVC I had the privilege of working under the dynamic leadership of Prof. A.W. Khan, the then Vice Chancellor. He was a task-oriented person and gave operational freedom to his team of PVCs to actualize the University mission. Realizing the importance of timelines in delivery systems, he constituted a number of 'Task Teams' to oversee the delivery system. It was a very effective management method, which I used later when I became the Vice Chancellor of BRAOU. During that period, I also had the opportunity to oversee functions of many schools and operational

units including Staff Training and Research Institute in Distance Education (STRIDE). The STRIDE was a unique institution in OU system. Realizing the importance of human resource with specialization in distance education, the University established STRIDE for human resources development and research in distance education. The STRIDE, under the leadership of Prof. B.N. Koul in the initial years, ably supported by a group of very competent staff, made significant contributions for the development of human resources in ODL. Earlier I had the privilege of working as Director in-charge of STRIDE for some time in 1996-97, when I was Director, DEC. At that time, we focused on the development of a series of Handbooks in various functional areas of distance education as a part of system development activities. These Handbooks were widely used by staff of IGNOU and other ODL institutions in their operations.

As acting Vice Chancellor 2000-2001, in addition to maintenance functions which is the main stay of any acting Vice Chancellor, I have spent considerable time and attention on student support activities and staff capacity building activities, the areas of my special interest. The Government of India gave special grant to IGNOU for strengthening regional student support network in North-East India. We established many new centres and strengthened the existing student support centres in North-East, which was a very satisfying activity. We had undertaken many staff capacity building activities, including the implementation of career advancement scheme for staff. We organized in 2000-2001, national and international conference of professional organizations in distance education as a part of IGNOU's promotional and staff capacity building role in distance education. In 2000 we hosted the Annual Conference of Indian Distance Education Association (IDEA), a professional organization of distance educators, led by Prof. K. Murali Manohar, Secretary General of the Organization. The annual Prof. G. Ram Reddy Memorial lecture of IDEA was given by Prof. V.C Kulandaiswamy, on "Reaching the Unreached through Open and Distance Learning', which was widely appreciated. In 2001 we also organized 'Regional Conference of International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) which was inaugurated by Sir John Daniel. These conferences gave opportunities to Indian distance education community to

interact with their international peers. In organizing these conferences at IGNOU we have followed well-established professional standards. In today's academic world, we observe a disturbing trend of many Universities organizing conferences/ seminars/ workshops in casual ways as a part of number game for both organizers and participants; maybe a consequence of quality assessment in terms of numbers.

My experience at IGNOU was an enriching experience of broadening my horizons of ODL and understanding dynamics of institutional functioning at a national level in a multilingual and multicultural context. I had the opportunity of visiting most states in the country, understanding the diverse nature of ODL institutions, student population, faculty capabilities and social expectations. The IGNOU has the distinction of having very distinguished people as Vice Chancellors and very competent staff drawn from different parts of the country. It has an international presence and active participant in international ODL activities. The senior level positions held at IGNOU gave me an opportunity to work with very distinguished national and international professionals in ODL, a satisfying experience.

International Experiences

Work at BRAOU, IGNOU and NAAC provided many opportunities for international interactions and assignments. In 1987, the Commonwealth of Heads of Government established the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources, and technologies. The COL was actively associated with the development of first two Open Universities in India i.e., BRAOU and IGNOU. Many people associated with these Universities have played an important role in the establishment and development of COL in various capacities at different points of time. As a senior faculty member at BRAOU and as a senior management functionary at IGNOU and NAAC, I had the opportunity of associating closely with COL activities in various ways. I had the privilege of interacting with all the Presidents and most of the senior management staff of COL which by itself is a great learning experience. The current President, COL Prof. Asha Kanwar was my colleague at IGNOU. Even after I completed my formal assignments

in Open Universities, I was associated with COL activities as a resource person and member of COL constituted teams. I had the privilege of associating as a member of the COL organized external audit team of University of South Africa. I am one of the few in India to receive the award of "Fellow of Commonwealth of Learning" in recognition of my contribution to ODL in 2004.

In July 2002, I had the opportunity of attending UNESCO 'Forum on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries' held in Paris. . In this Forum the brand name of 'Open Educational Resources' (OER) was coined to denote the sharing of educational resources. It was a landmark decision of the international community, and I am fortunate to be a part of that Forum, sharing my belief that "The Open Courseware concept is based on the philosophical view of knowledge as a collective social product and so it is also desirable to make it a social property." In 2012 UNESCO reiterated this belief in the form of 'Paris Declaration on OER' which was further polished as the 'UNESCO Recommendation on Open Educational Resources' and ratified by Governments of Member Countries in November 2019. The OER has become one of the defining elements of education in today's world.

After leaving my assignment as Vice Chancellor BRAOU in 2003 August, I joined as Director, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and worked in that position until 2008. The NAAC, to realize its vision to make quality the defining element of higher education, collaborated with many international organizations like Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN), COL and many other organizations. The NAAC has taken initiative in establishment of APQN, and I was the first Vice President. The COL actively collaborated with NAAC in the promotional activities of quality assurance in higher education and in ODL. In 2006 in collaboration with COL we published a handbook on 'Quality Assurance in Higher Education: An Introduction', authored by Sanjaya Mishra, presently Director, Education, COL. It was widely distributed and appreciated. For promotion of quality in teacher education, the NAAC in collaboration with COL has developed a Toolkit with the participation of Commonwealth teacher education specialists. This Toolkit was extensively in use in Commonwealth Countries

in teacher education quality assurance training programmes. The NAAC organised many workshops for Commonwealth teacher educators under COL Special Assistance, ably coordinated by Prof. Mohan Menon, the then Education Specialist, COL. The NAAC international collaboration activities helped in sharing international practices in quality assurance and enriching national practices of assessment and accreditation.

In 2008 I was invited by Government of Mauritius to be an advisor to Government to establish Open University in that country. It was a prestigious assignment and recognition of my two decades of experience in ODL, experience as the Executive Head of the national quality assurance agency and association with COL activities. I was in Mauritius from 2009 to 2010 to complete the assignment of developing a design for the establishment of Open University. It was a different experience of converting the experience into an operational design for a new University. Mauritius, as a former British colony, inherited most British traditions of Government and also inherited their own 'letting things happen' approach. Though a beautiful country to live in, with very attractive terms of service, I was not comfortable with their laidback approach and very slow progress of work of establishment of the University. After completing the design and legislative work for the creation of the new Open University, I voluntarily opted out of my assignment six months in advance. This one and a half year experience in creation of a Open University in a small African Country with large Indian origin people was a challenging opportunity to apply my experience and knowledge to create a new University. The Open University of Mauritius finally started operation in 2012.

My international experience of association with COL, UNESCO and Open University establishment activities in Mauritius validated John Dewey's perceptive observation that experience is education. The international exposure at different points of time (I visited more than 20 countries at different points of time as part of my international assignments) helped me in undertaking my national assignments in a more effective way. This is the purpose and meaning of our experiences. Today, universities may have to give more importance to international exposure to their faculty to enrich their capabilities by learning from others. Unfortunately, in the

post-COVID world, universities are discouraging the physical international interactions, an undesirable step from the academic perspective. Hope the Open Universities will be able to use technology more meaningfully to promote more and more meaningful international exposures of its faculty to learn from others, particularly, in the context of internationalization of higher education.

Fulfilling Experience

My life in ODL is a life of fulfilment— a life of purpose and satisfaction. In my two decades of work in ODL institutions, I have had the privilege of associating with many eminent professionals in ODL and in subject areas, and I was fortunate to have their guidance, support and participation in many of my activities. I am grateful to all of them.

I have tried to relate my experiences with the foundational goals of ODL as benchmark. To me, the foundational goal of ODL is 'to provide inclusive quality higher education and lifelong learning to large numbers at affordable costs by extensive use of technology to overcome the limitations of time and space'. There are many institutional experiences in my ODL life negating this broad foundation goal of ODL system. There were petty quarrels, jealousies, and destructive actions in institutional life. Many academics, I observe, have immense capacity to engage in 'small things.' The initial enthusiasm was lost and in later years, many were feeling work as tyranny and leisure as happiness. Motivation to relate to organisational goals is very low and 'each for himself / herself value' is dominating. All these are resulting in systems incompetency and governance deficit. I have avoided narration of these negative features, to focus more on positives in all situations to move forward. The positive lessons from my life experience in institution building include:

- The institutional vision and mission should always guide our effort which brings meaning to our actions and unity in our efforts.

- 'Sincerity of purpose' brings legitimacy to our actions. The institutional leaders are remembered by their nature, not by their specific achievements.

- Justice as a way of giving people what they deserve should guide all our actions.

- Fairness in dealing with things and persons brings credibility and acceptability to our actions.

- Pragmatic idealism and self-critical attitudes help in effective realisation of institutional goals.

- Openness to ideas and flexibility in operations makes the system responsive to changing context.

- Institutional learning helps in continuous improvement of institutional performance.

- Ordinary persons can delivery extra-ordinary things with right alignment of intentions, actions and context.

This narration of my experiences gave me an opportunity to reflect on my own strengths and limitations. I considered my-self an 'organizational personality', with focus on rationality in institutional functions, oblivious of influence of non-rational factors in institutional life. This may be trained in the capacity of Public Administration study. Sometimes my insistence on having my way effected my relations with colleagues. Fortunately, most of my colleagues tolerated this by understanding my sincerity of purpose. Punctuality and adhering to work schedules were my trademarks resulting in many a times inconveniences to colleagues. I have tried to overcome these personal limitations by constant reflection and self-correction. I have aspired for academic administrative positions but never bargained self for positions. My experience shows that the best way to get positions is to prove your worth in the given assignment and aspire for higher positions. Late Prof. G. Ram Reddy and late Prof. Ram Takwale were my role models. Both of them had many common features in their governance model and I call it 'Ram Governance Model'. The main attributes of this model are: sense of purpose, identification and nurturing of talent, recognition and encouragement of performance and networking for institutional development. Giving people what they deserve guided their actions in system management. This was my ideal in governance. Everyone, to be effective,

must have a role model and benchmarks as frame of their performance.

My past experiences continue to give meaning to my present sensations. After joining ODL system I became more of an institutional person, mostly confining my activities to the concerns and interests of the institutions I served. My radical orientations were tempered by institutional interests, and I have tried to work for significant changes in institutions in moderate ways, within the institutional parameters. This is my strength from institutional perspective and a limitation from social perspective of not being able to engage actively in social causes. I have the satisfaction of a just adequate person delivering extraordinary things in institutions, conditioned by situational factors. A colleague asked me at the time of my retirement in the University, how should you be remembered? My response was, I will be very happy if you remember me as one who made 'sincere efforts to make a difference'. The defining feature of my life journey in ODL can be summarized just in three words: 'sincerity of purpose'.

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National Education Policy 2020:
Perspectives on Open Distance Learning

"Public Policy is whatever government chosen to do or even not do"

- Thomas R. Dye

The Theme

Today I propose to reflect on "National Education Policy 2020: Perspectives on Open Distance Learning". After 34 years, a new National Education Policy (NEP) is in place. The policy is a product of churning of more than 4 years from 2015, after Bharatiya Janata Party came to power at Centre in 2014. In 2015, Government constituted a 'Committee for Evolution of the New Education Policy' under the Chairmanship of late Shri T.S.R. Subramanian, former Cabinet Secretary, which submitted its Report in 2016. Based on this Report, the Ministry prepared "Some Inputs for the Draft National Education Policy, 2016". In June 2017 Ministry constituted a Committee to Draft National Education Policy under the Chairmanship of eminent scientist Dr. K. Kasturirangan. The Committee submitted very voluminous (484 pages) Draft National Education Policy in 2019. Mainly based on this report, Union Cabinet has approved National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) on July 29th 2020.

The NEP 2020 is a very significant event in the trajectory of education in India. All of us, in the field of education, should reflect and take note of the transformative agenda of NEP. We are presently in the middle of covid-19

pandemic crisis and all educational institutions are struggling to find their way forward. Most of the educational providers are looking for using Open Distance Learning (ODL) and Online education to overcome the limitation of social distance in providing education. For some of us who are associated with the Open University (OU) system for long and convinced of its relevance, are happy to note the presence of many new found champions of the system. We are known for the swings in our perceptions. In the historical trajectory of Open University system in India, we have passed through the phases of ridicule, resistance, acceptance and appreciation. Now we are in the phase of appreciation and there are high expectations on Online and ODL modes of education. Generally, we use the ODL as an umbrella team for 'all forms of technology mediated self-learning supported by institutions.' Earlier this form was known as Correspondence Education and later as Distance Education and presently as Open Distance Learning, with a broad scope and integration of the elements of open and distance. Online is a teaching-learning form of education, supported and delivered through Internet. The Open University is one of the institutional forms of ODL, others being the dual mode universities and stand-alone institutions. The focus on my presentation is limited to how the new NEP 2020 has perceived the role and place of ODL in the national system of education. Before examining the ODL in new NEP 2020, it may be proper to know the perceptions of ODL in earlier National Education Policies of 1968 and 1986/ 1992.

ODL in Earlier National Policies on Education

The first National Policy on Education was put in place in 1968, based on Kothari Commission (1964-66) recommendations. This policy has a section on "Part-time Education and Correspondence Courses". The policy emphasised the importance of part time education and correspondence education for providing educational opportunities for working population and for those who cannot pursue full time education for various reasons. The policy also clearly mentions that it should be given the same status as full-time education. This policy should be appreciated in the context of Delhi University offering correspondence education from 1962 and Kothari

Commission strong recommendation supporting correspondence education to extend educational opportunities to all deserving disadvantaged. To quote the policy:

> *(13)Part-Time Education and Correspondence Course: Part time education and correspondence course should be developed on a large scale at the university stage. Such facilities should also be developed for secondary school students, for teachers and for agricultural, industrial and other workers. Education through part-time and correspondence courses should be given the same status as full-time education. Such facilities will smoothen transition from school to work, promote the cause of education and provide opportunities to the large number of people who have the desire to educate themselves further but cannot do so on a full-time basis". (From National Policy on Education 1968),*

The second National Policy on Education in 1986/ 1992 has a section on "Open University and Distance Learning". Note the change from first National Policy document focus on 'Part –time Education to Correspondence Education' to second policy document focus on 'Open University and Distance Learning'. Maybe this has to be understood in the context of establishment of first state open university in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh in 1982 and the establishment of National Open University, Indira Gandhi National Open University in 1985. The policy emphasised the importance of open learning system to enhance the opportunities for higher education, as an instrument of democratising education and to make learning a lifelong process. The policy advocated for strengthening of Indira Gandhi National Open University and promotion of establishment of Open Universities in the States. The policy also suggested the strengthening of National Open School and extending open learning facilities at secondary education level in all parts of the country. The policy has also emphasised the use of media and educational technology in education. To quote the policy:

Open University and Distance Learning

S.35 The Open learning system has been initiated in order to augment opportunities for higher education, as an instrument of democratising education and to make it a lifelong process. The flexibility and

innovativeness of the open learning system are particularly suited to the diverse requirements of the citizens of our country, including those who had joined the vocational stream.
S.36 The Indira Gandhi National Open University, established in 1985 in fulfilment of these objectives, will be strengthened. It would also provide support to establishment of open universities in the States.
S.37 The National Open School will be strengthened and open learning facilities extended in a phased manner at the secondary level in all parts of the country. (From National Policy on Education 1986 / 1992)

NEP 2020 on ODL

The NEP 2020 is developed in the context of new realities and new challenges. At this point of time, at higher education level the Open Universities are playing an important role. Through small in number, they have been playing a significant role in bringing more credibility to the ODL mode in education, in extending educational opportunities to large number of socially disadvantaged groups of learners, in developing educational resources in both print and audio-visual forms, in making education cost-effective and affordable and in providing lifelong continuous learning opportunities. After reading 65 pages of new NEP 2020, I get a feeling that the policy has not given sufficient recognition to the contribution and relevance of Open University system. In the NEP 2020 there is no separate section on ODL and no mention of Open University. Interestingly, this policy is titled as National Education Policy 2020, unlike the two previous policies which were titled as National Policy on Education. Is it only a different way of expression or a different focus? We may not be totally out of bounds, if we assume that in earlier times the focus was on national policies on education and now the focus is on development of National Education. Nationalism is the dominant ideological frame of the present regime, and we may have to look at the NEP 2020 from the 'rootedness and pride in India', as stated in the principles of policy. The NEP 2020 envisions "an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower". (NEP 2020, Introduction).

The policy emphasised the important role of ODL and Online education in improving access to equity and inclusion through a range of measures discussed in different sections of the policy. Separate sections were included to detail Technology Use and Integration (section 23) and Online and Digital Education (section 24). The current policy focus is more on Online and digital education and technology integration in education. The focus areas on ODL and Online education in NEP 2020 are:

All Institutions to have option to run ODL and Online Programmes

The policy recognising the importance of ODL and Online programmes to improve access and to provide lifelong learning opportunities, gives option to all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to run ODL and Online programmes, along-with in-class programmes, provided they are accredited to do so. The policy visualises three modes of education i.e., ODL, Online and in-class and prefers blended mode. This may be one of the reasons why there was no mention of OUs in the policy, when discussing about ODL and Online education. In future there may be triple mode institutions offering in-class (face-to-face) ODL (multimedia) and Online (internet based) and dual mode institutions offering in-class and ODL or Online and single mode institutions offering only ODL programmes. The policy preference is for triple mode institutions of top campus based or in-class institutions accredited for ODL, getting encouraged and supported to develop high quality online courses.

Extensive Use of Technology

The policy envisions extensive use of technology to transform educational processes and outcomes at all levels. The policy is highly appreciative of Digital India campaign and various initiatives of MHRD for the application of technologies in education. Recognising the need for a think tank for design and development of proper ways of use and integration of technology to improve multiple aspects of education, the policy has suggested an autonomous body, the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF). The NETF is expected to provide all necessary intellectual and operational

inputs to all higher education institutions for the deployment and use of technology in all aspects of education.

Ensuring Equitable Use of Technology

The policy recognises the digital divide in the country and the limitations in the use of technology and includes many suggestions to overcome them. The policy suggests a number of initiatives for leveraging technology for teaching-learning at all levels from school to higher education. The policy suggests a dedicated unit in the MHRD for the purpose of orchestrating the building of digital infrastructure, content and capacity building.

Quality of ODL and Online Education

The policy emphasises the need for high quality ODL and Online programmes equivalent to that of in-class programmes. The policy strongly advocates the frameworks for quality of ODL including norms, standards and guidelines for systemic development, regulation, and accreditation. The policy clearly articulates the need for parity of esteem to all modes of education by following global standards of education. The policy considers education as a public good and public service and quality education as the right of every child. The policy strongly advocates curbing of commercialisation of education. This has many implications for the current practices of money making through ODL programmes by many public and private HEIs. Presently many institutions are in the field of Online education for profit-making. It is a challenging task for the government to regulate the profit-making activity in education, more particularly in ODL and Online education. Hope the non-commercial view of education provision emphasised in the policy, will be implemented faithfully and quality of ODL and Online education is ensured in reality.

Transforming the Regulatory System

The policy is highly critical of present regulatory system in higher education, stifling the institutional freedom. This is more so in case of ODL institutions. The OUs are subjected to very rigid regulatory practices, to the

extent of making it necessary to have approval to individual programmes to be offered by ODL institutions. The NEP suggests light but tight regulatory framework to ensure integrity, transparency and resource efficiency of the educational system through audit and public disclosure while encouraging innovation and out-of-the–box ideas through autonomy, good governance and empowerment. It is a welcome development. Another welcome feature in the policy is the suggestions for a single regulatory authority for all forms of HEIs and uniform regulatory system for all types of HEIs. Presently ODL institutions are treated differently from conventional universities in matters of regulatory practices. Hope this policy will end this unfair discriminatory treatment of ODL institutions in matters of regulation.

Way Forward to OUs

The policy visualises the new conceptual perception/understanding of higher education institutions i.e., University or a College. The policy suggests phasing out of single stream higher education institutions and conversion of all HEI as multi-disciplinary institutions of Research-intensives Universities, Teaching-intensive Universities and Autonomous Degree Granting Colleges. In this proposed structure of HEI with far reaching implications, we have to visualise the future role of OUs. The NEP 2020 preference is for multi-disciplinary and multi-model HEI. Some of the measures suggested for way forward to OUs are:

Move from Single Mode to Multi Modal

The OUs may have to move from single ODL mode to multi modal Universities offering programmes in ODL, Online and in-class modes. To start with, they may offer programmes in ODL and Online and cautiously move to offer a few in-class innovative, experimental and higher-level programmes. This will help them in enhancing their offerings, enriching learning experiences and flexibility in ways of learning. The OUs should have necessary technology and human resources for this transformation and may have to move in a phased manner appropriate to the context.

Move from Single Media to Multi Media

Presently most OUs are mainly using print material for teaching-learning with audio-visual programmes as supplements. They have to move fast to blended mode of effectively using multi media of print, audio-visual, internet and other new technologies. For this building institutional capacities and developing staff competencies are the essential requirements.

Move from Dependency Model to *Atmanirbhar* Model

The OU have adopted dependency model of using available public resources, academic and infrastructure, to make the system more cost effective. In the changing context, every institution being encouraged to offer ODL and Online programmes, the OUs may find difficulty in drawing services from other institutions. There is a need for OUs becoming *Atmanirbhar* (self-reliant) Universities. They become *Atmanirbhar* in learning resources by extensively using Open Education Resources (OER), Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and other technology resources. They may become *Atmanirbhar* in financial resources by enrolling more students and in administrative matters by accountable performance. *Atmanirbhar* is a relative concept and in no way underplays the role of seamless integration and coordination across all higher education institutions. *Atmanirbhar* emphasises participation in higher education with self-dignity and on equal terms.

Move to Flexible Professional Management Model

The traditional hierarchical, procedure and position centric administrative model may not be suitable for flexible educational institutions like OUs. The OUs should adopt flexible professional management model with a focus on performance and results. In OUs where teaching-learning is a product of collective effort of many units, team-work is critical in the performance of institutions. Differences which are normal in any institutional setting should not become disputes, disrupting the functioning of the institutions. In case of individuals or institutions, performance alone will get the real recognition and the position should be viewed as an opportunity for performance. I have been observing that many OUs are suffering from 'Common Cold'

problems of not providing learning materials on time, not conducting examination on-time, and not declaring results on-time, etc. We have to overcome these problems. The OUs should urgently address the governance deficit issues.

Prepare Institution Centric Reform Agenda

The 15 public Open Universities in India are in different stages of development. Every OU, taking into account its own context, should prepare an Institutional Development Plan (IDP) with a holistic approach of institutional development. The IDP should be a strategic plan for institutional reform agenda. Here, all the stakeholders in the system, in particular the government should play an important role by providing necessary support and guidance in the preparation and execution of IDP. The academic community within the institution and institutional leadership has a critical role in the IDP preparation and implementation. In preparing IDPs the institutions may draw on the valuable knowledge resources development by many experts and agencies, in particular the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and University Grants Commission (UGC).

To Conclude

Enlightened leadership with pragmatic vision, committed and competent staff, appropriate technology, learning resources and infrastructure and flexible professional management are the four pillars of re-imagination of the system. In a systemic view, weakness in any one pillar affects the system as a whole. I have been observing different levels of deficit in these four pillars in many OUs with existential threats to the system.

The NEP 2020, with all its strengths and limitations, provides a broad framework to ODL institutions to move forward to serve the cause of education. The OUs are passing through a critical phase. The NEP 2020 is an opportunity to reflect and change. It is time for action. If we fail to act today, tomorrow we may not be there to act.

* * * * * *

3

Open Universities in India: The Challenges of Our Times

"Open Universities have thrown Open to all the ivory towers of higher education."

- Prof. G. Ram Reddy

The Focus

We are living in a fast-changing world, passing through very critical times. The Open Universities (OUs) in India are in a momentous stage of transformation, influenced by changing times. I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the challenges faced by OU system based on my experiences and expectations. The changing external educational scenario is examined for its impact on OU system. The internal system is looked from its capacity to respond to the changing environment. Some strategies are suggested keeping in view the foundational goals and values of Open University system. It is a subjective reflection based on over two decades of active role in the system and another around two decades of observatory role. Let me also qualify my observations. The 17 OUs in the public sector are not in the same boat, though are in the same storm. The observations and suggestions may not uniformly apply to all.

Changing External Educational Scenario

Institutions are built in the context. The OUs are products of their times. The questions relevant to ask is why the OUs were established in 80s

only, not earlier or later, and why there is not much growth in the number of OUs in present times? Understanding of contextual factors will help us to answer these questions. The critical understanding of changing external educational scenario is necessary to move forward in institution building in ODL. Philip Kotler has outlined three questions necessary to guide the analysis of external environment.

These are:

- What are the important trends in the external environment?
- What are the implications of these trends for the institutions?
- What are the most significant threats and opportunities in the external environment?

Let me focus on a few important developments in external education scenario to understand their implications to ODL in general and OUs in particular. I have identified National Education Policy, 2020 and NITI Aayog strategy for New India @ 75, as two important policy documents having far reaching implications to future of ODL in India. As John Dewey, rightly said, 'working out particular actions and steps to be taken in the reform process is possible only with clarity of social purpose of education and educational aims'. The two public policy documents identified help us in understanding the governmental vision and goals of ODL in India.

National Education Policy 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP 2020), approved by Government of India on July 29, 2020, is an important development in the context of new realities and new challenges. Let me focus on four aspects of policy in relation to ODL having implications for future of OUs. Firstly, the policy recognised the importance of ODL and online education to improve access and to provide lifelong learning opportunities. It has advocated all higher education institutions fulfilling necessary conditions to offer education through all three modes of in-class, ODL and Online. The expectation of policy is that in course of time most Higher Education Institutions (HIEs) may become triple mode institutions and contribute to expand the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) to 50 percent by 2035.The ODL and Online in

future may not be the exclusive domain of OUs or a few dual mode universities. A large number of conventional universities, public and private may enter online education, making it a more competitive activity. The OUs which are in the public sector, operating on public good principles may have to face competition from private sector, which is mostly operating on market principles.

Secondly, the policy has emphasised the need for high quality ODL and Online programmes, equivalent to that of in-class programmes. The policy advocating the need for parity of esteem of all modes of education by following global standards of education, has recommended development of framework of norms, standards and guidelines for system development, regulation and accreditation. The policy, treating education as a 'public good', has recognised quality education as the right of every student. This approach of policy has many implications for current commercial practices of many public and private institutions. The non-commercial view of education emphasised in the policy, needs closer examination of appropriate ways of financing of public institutions like OUs, intended to serve mostly the weaker sections of community who missed educational opportunities earlier or who can't afford full-time education.

Thirdly, the policy envisions an extensive use of digital technology to transform educational process. Conscious of digital divide in the country, the policy has also suggested many steps including the establishment of an autonomous body, the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to provide all necessary intellectual and operational inputs to all higher education institutions for the deployment and use of technology in all aspects of education. Government of India and University Grants Commission (UGC) are taking many commendable initiatives to strengthen e-technology infrastructure. The SWAYAM platform, dedicated broadcast channels, extensive use of Massive Open Online courses (MOOCs), Open Educational Resources (OER) are resulting in new educational environment. The extensive creation of public digital technology infrastructure only can address the problem of digital divide and inequalities in higher education. The question agitating me is the preparedness of our ODL institutions to this changing context of important role of digital technologies in education.

Fourthly, the policy suggests total restructuring of regulatory system in higher education based on 'light but tight' regulatory framework to ensure integrity, transparency and resource efficiency of the educational system, encouraging innovations and out of box ideas through autonomy, good governance and empowerment. The policy suggests a uniform regulatory system for all types of higher education institutions, with Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) as umbrella institution with four independent verticals, viz., National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC), National Accreditation Council (NAC), Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) and General Education Council (GEC) for undertaking multiple regulatory and supportive roles. These structures are yet to be in place, and it is too early to make any comments. The god or devil is in the details of these structures. My hope is that these proposed regulatory structures will not become too centralised and too monolithic, in-appropriate to our diverse higher education system.

Presently UGC–DEB is exercising the regulatory function of distance education institutions with the exception of IGNOU. There is no national policy on ODL in India. The national education policies, Parliament Legislation, the regulations and guidelines issued by the Ministry, UGC and other Regulatory Councils from time to time, constitute the bases for the functioning of ODL institutions. It is time to develop a policy for ODL sector, within the frame of NEP-2020. The NEP-2020 has referred very briefly about ODL, not even once mentioning OUs. The need is to develop the ODL policy which provides a broad frame for the working of all ODL institutions in the country.

Though the present regulations of UGC-DEB have many commendable features, in some respects they are very restrictive, centralising, and discriminatory. The regulations like uniformity in entry qualifications to undergraduate programmes in conventional and ODL institutions and limiting dual mode institutions to offer programmes offered through conventional mode contradicts the foundational values of open admissions and diversity in programme offerings. I have a feeling that the framers of these regulations with all good intentions, are more guided by their desire to ensure parity of esteem of ODL system with that of

conventional system by having uniform system. May be they are also driven by their desire to control the negative trajectory of ODL. In India the trajectory of ODL reflects two broad trends. I call them as negative trajectory and positive trajectory. Negative trajectory refers to 'use to misuse to disuse' and positive trajectory refers to 'use to more use to better use'. The Regulations, looks to me are more responses to control negative trajectory than to encourage the positive trajectory. A balanced approached is needed and there is a need to relook at regulatory system from the perspectives of flexibility and autonomy of institutions. The regulatory frame should be built around the 'culture of justification' than on the 'culture of authority'.

Now let me turn to NITI Aayog to understand national development priorities. NITI Aayog, the Government of India's think tank has developed a 'Strategy for New India @ 75 which include objectives of higher education. The five objectives of higher education are:

- Increase GER to 35 percent

- Make higher education inclusive for most vulnerable groups

- Mandatory accreditation

- Enabling environment for research and innovation

- Improve employability of students.

The OUs have to take note of important features of external scenario in higher education which includes: diversity in nature and demands on higher education; mass enrolment in higher education; increasing competition from private players operating on market norms; less state financial support; sustainability based on self – financing; increasing role of digital technology in teaching learning and administrative systems; quality and performance accountability; centralised systems of regulations; higher expectation of students for employable outcomes, high expectation of society for development of skilled human resources for national development and above all mainstreaming of online and blended learning, mostly a by-product of post-COVID scenario. All these have implications for internal structures and processes of OUs. Let us examine the preparedness of internal structure to respond to challenges of external scenario.

Scanning Internal Scenario

The 17 public open universities are in different stages of development. Every University is a unique institution. Institutional scanning helps in understanding systems capacity to respond to changing context. The OU system, during the last around four decades have made significant contributions which include: bringing more credibility to ODL as a legitimate method of education; more education opportunities to large number of socially disadvantaged learners; availability of educational learning materials, and lifelong learning opportunities. The system has also inherited some systemic concerns which include: focus more on delivery of education than contributing to knowledge creation and extension; dependency on external resources for development of learning materials; mostly print based model; governance and faculty structures mostly modelled on conventional university systems, and lack of professionalism in operations. These systemic strengths and limitations and legacies need to be critically examined to their relevance in a changing context. I am focussing on the internal scanning mainly on the resilience of the system, appropriateness of teaching-learning approaches, and the effectiveness of the governance model to achieve the institutional goals.

Resilience of the System

Resilience of the system refers to system's capacity to protect its central capabilities from disruption caused by adverse events and conditions. The higher education system is moving from supply driven to demand driven, from teacher centric to learner centric to learning centric and from institutional focus to system focus. In this paradigm shift the sustainability of OUs depends on their ability to enrol large numbers. The large enrolments are not only a fulfilment OUs fundamental vision of 'more with less to more', but also a financial necessity of mobilisation of resources to run the system. Unlike the conventional universities, the public open universities are mostly depending on student fee for their operational expenses. There is an overall stagnation in the growth of enrolment in ODL system.During the last five years the enrolment was only around 11 to 12 percent of total enrolment in higher education, though the expectation was to enrol about

30 percent. The restrictions to admission prescribed by UGC-DEB not only strike at the philosophical base of the system, but also its physical base. The OUs should explore the options for more enrolment by focusing on working population and lifelong learning programmes. Focusing on access with success and employability and career advancement focus of its programmes and efficiency in operations may result in increasing enrolments.

The OUs in future may become triple mode universities offering in-class, ODL and Online programmes or dual mode universities offering ODL and Online or single mode universities offering only ODL programmes. Some OUs like IGNOU is now a triple mode university offering research programmes on regular mode and a number of ODL and Online programmes. This makes them comprehensive universities enrolling more students and addressing needs of diverse learners with flexibility to learners to opt from modes of their convenience. The brand 'open' may be still continued as their most programmes will be mainly in ODL and Online and follow the philosophy of openness.

Teaching – Learning Strategies

There is an urgent need to relook at our teaching-learning strategies to enrich the learning process and to ensure the desirable learning outcomes. Presently print learning materials are the major mode of imparting teaching through distance mode. It is also the USP of many Open Universities. Prof. G. Ram Reddy, as a founder Vice-Chancellor of BRAOU and IGNOU has focused on development of best print materials by involving best available academic expertise in the country. The successive leadership has continued that tradition. Even today, IGNOU print materials are the best national educational resource in higher education. In the changing context of Government of India's commitment to the policy of putting them in public domain all educational resources developed with public funds, it is time to move all the materials developed by OUs as Open Educational Resources (OER). It will help students in getting best materials and saving resources by avoiding duplication of materials development. Openness of ODL materials is also a way of addressing resource inequalities in higher education in the country. So, the OER is a social responsibility function of OUs. The

institutions which are putting lot of academic effort in developing learning resources have a genuine apprehension of losing their advantages in student enrolment by sharing the materials. I have a feeling that these are misplaced apprehensions. Today, in the age of digital technology we have to move from print-based systems to mix mode systems. The print material will become the common denominator of the system as text books in a conventional system. Even though the textbooks are commonly available to all teachers and students, the particular teacher's relevance is based on his/her ability to impart meaning to the learning resource. Like that, in future the print materials may be commonly available in OUs, but the systems of learning interactions ensured by use of technology by individual OUs may become the distinct feature of that particular university. The independent learning and interaction learning are two important components of learning. Every Open University may have to particularly focus on enriching interactive component by supplementary didactic text alternatives like work-based source material, case-study material and technology enabled teacher-student interactive system, which may become the USP of a particular open university. In the new era of ODL there will be a paradigm shift from centrality of learning materials to centrality of interactive learning support systems.

The NEP 2020 has strongly advocated for multi-disciplinary and flexibility in programme mix. Some of the open universities, particularly IGNOU has long track record of this approach. The OUs have to take forward this by making the 'Course' as a primary academic unit, with unlimited possibilities of mixing these 'Courses' in multi-disciplinary programmes. To facilitate more innovations in programme offerings, the learning designs of 'Programme Academic Unit', may be further strengthened by drawing members from multiple disciplines. The design adjustments needed in academic structures of OUs may be examined keeping in view the changing context.

Governance System

Governance, a process of exercise of power and allocation of resources for realisation of institutional objectives, is critical in OU system. It is said

that in conventional system the teacher teaches and in distance education institution teaches. Sir Join Daniel has identified administrative logistics as one of the critical factors in ODL, the other two being the learning resources and student support services. The OUs should urgently address the governance deficit issues. Most institutional problems are result of fast changing external context and unchanging internal governance system. New technology applications require new governance arrangements. The traditional, procedure and position centric administrative models may not be suitable for flexible educational institutions like OUs. The OUs should adapt flexible professional management models like Results Based Management (RBM) and logical framework approaches which focuses on logical linkages between intended inputs, planned activities and expected outcomes. Most OUs are suffering from 'Common Cold' problems of not providing learning materials on time, not conducting examinations on time, and not declaring results on time. These are not insurmountable problems, but if not resolved on time, like termite may destroy the institution.

Many critical observers of public institutions in India observe the prevalence of negative mind set of 'nothing can be done' amongst many in the institutions. In the public institutions there will always be 'hard working' and 'hardly working' people. At different points of time the ratios differ, and the leadership has a challenging task of maintaining right balance. Motivating the people, to give their best voluntarily is always a challenging task in public organisations. It is also true that only motivated and competent staff can make a difference to realisation of institutional goals. Ancient Indian philosopher Kautilya advised the king to follow three principles of *Dharma*, Self-interest and *Danda* to motivate the staff to give their best. We may examine the relevance of them in our present context. In this era of '*matalabi* culture' where 'I' is more important than 'we', how to imbibe team spirit and public spirit in our activities is a challenging question. Public discussion of these issues is one of the ways of addressing the problem. In early period of OUs life, I observed a lot of enthusiasm in academic world to make contributions to the development of learning resources, maybe inspired by the ideal of democratisation of higher education. Does this idealism continue in present time? Goal 16 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015-

2030, advocates the necessity of building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions to achieve sustainable development. The OUs may scan their internal governance systems by applying these three commendable principles. This is possible only when our governance focus system moves from Weberian focus on position and authority to New Public Governance focus on collaboration for common good.

Strategize for Future

If the future is not to surprise us, we have to strategize for future. Strategy is bringing future into present. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's commendation of Reform-Perform-Transform is very relevant to all organisations including OUs. These three mantras are institutional survival mantras. Some time back in a Seminar on 'Role of Social Sciences in Nation Building' a participant made profound observation that social sciences are relevant, but not social scientists. I am afraid in the same way tomorrow somebody should not say that ODL and Online education are relevant but not the Open Universities. We should not forget that we are living in the Darwinian world of endless mutation and weeding out of those no longer able to adapt and compete. This applies equally to individuals, institutions, and systems. Not to be set aside in the forward march of nation, we must continuously re-engineer ourselves to be relevant to times. NITI Aayog suggests every institution to develop 15-year vision document, supplemented by 7-year strategy and three-year action plans.NEP2020 expects every institution to make strategic 'Institutional Development Plan' (IDP) on the basis of which institutions may develop initiatives to assess their own progress and reach goals set therein. The IDP need to be prepared with the joint participation of management, institutional leaders, faculty, staff and students. The IDP should be based on hard facts and hard realities. It is not a document of self-praise or even self-criticism but a reflective exercise in 'pragmatic wisdom'. The problems have to be identified correctly and innovative ways to be developed for addressing them. We have overcome the trap of 'Nasiruddin Model' of looking for solutions in our comfort zones, when problems are somewhere else. The past experiences of the system, action research on our experiences and 'Randomised Control Trials'

to assess the effectiveness of proposed actions are some useful steps to have reliable knowledge base to develop the IDP.

A multi-stage approach may be followed in developing the IDP. These are:

- Stage1: Drafting the document by drafting committee of internal and external experts

- Stage2: Consultations with stake holders

- Stage3: Finalisation and approvals of IDP

- Stage4: Implementation of IDP with action points, timelines responsibilities and expected outcomes

- Stage5: Continuous review, modifications and improvements.

A learning organisation, one that is continuously expanding its capacity to create its future can alone prepare a good IDP. The good IDP in turn helps in building institutional competencies and change response capabilities. The IDP preparation is a step in the forward march and proper implementation pathways shall determine its effectiveness.

Concluding Observations

Nothing is permanent including the challenges we are facing. May be we have to look at things with 'pessimism of intellect and optimism of hope' (with respects to Antonio Gramsci). The system direction based on vision and mission is more effective than based on position and authority. Prof. G. Ram Reddy was credited with institution building mindset of listening, crediting and nurturing and known for his 'pragmatic wisdom' in a sense of ability to see the big picture, make quick decisions in context by choosing the most effective action from the possible alternatives. Following his exemplary leadership traditions may help us in coping with modern day challenges. The 'Institutional Development Plan' has to be designed keeping in view the broader goals of building an education system based on foundation values of access, equity, quality, affordability, accountability and openness to produce graduates with skills and competencies which are

personally, professionally and socially useful. May be it is a high dream, but unless you dream high you can't achieve anything. Buddha rightly said:

"What you think, you become

What you feel, you attract

What you imagine, you create".

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4

Reimagining Indian Open University System for the Digital Age: Managerial Perspective

"It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carryout nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things".

- Niccolo Machiavelli

Introduction

We are living in the present with past memories and future hope. The Open University (OU) system is an institutional form of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in India. It is an account of inside-outside reflections of our past memories and future hopes located in the opportunities and challenges of present OU system. We are using ODL as an umbrella term for all forms of technology mediated self- learning supported by institutions. The purpose of ODL is to provide more access to quality education at affordable cost to self-learners mediated by technology. In India ODL is provided broadly by three institutional forms, i.e. Open Universities (dedicated ODL institutions), Dual Mode Universities (conventional universities providing ODL) and Stand Alone Institutions (non-affiliated institutions). The focus of discussion in this paper is the OU system, may be with some general references to ODL system across. Reimagination is examining the alternative possibilities of structures,

processes and behaviour of Indian open universities to enhance their ability to be in the present moment, the moment being characterised as the 'digital age'.

HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY

Establishment of dedicated single mode open universities heralded a new era in higher education system in India. The OU system is around four decades old, the first OU being established in 1982 in integrated state of Andhra Pradesh, followed by a national OU in 1985. There are at present one national OU, 14 state public OUs and two state private OUs. It is a small system in terms of number of universities constituting less than two per cent of total 995 universities/university level institutions in the country. In terms of total enrolment in ODL, during the last five years from 2014 to 2019 it is around 11 to 12 per cent. It is a small system with huge expectations. It may be appropriate to look into the drives for establishment of dedicated OUs to appreciate their original intentions. Their foundational goals/drives include:

- To meet the increasing demand for higher education;

- to provide quality higher education to 'more with less for more' and to reduce the cost of provision of higher education;

- to overcome the limitations of time and space in providing higher education by adopting flexible technology mediated self-learning mode;

- to bring more focus and credibility to distance education by innovations in methods and by offering relevant programmes in diverse fields; and

- to provide lifelong learning/continuous learning opportunities, more particularly to in service people, for skill upgradation and life enrichment programmes to all.

Reflecting on the past experience of functioning of OUs, keeping the foundational goals as assessment markers, we may identify some significant system contributions which include the following:

- The OUs have brought more credibility to the ODL as a legitimate method of education;

- more educational opportunities were provided to a large number of socially disadvantaged groups of learners;

- a large number of educational resources are made available in print and audio- visual forms;

- the higher education provision is made more cost-effective; and

- lifelong learning/continuous learning opportunities were provided for working population for skill upgradation and life enrichment.

The above are some of the notable contributions of the OU system. We have also inherited some systemic concerns which include:

- The OUs are focused more on the 'openness' dimension and less on the 'university' dimension, resulting in the institutions becoming more of agents for delivery of education, not contributing much to knowledge creation and extension.

- To make the system cost-effective, most of the OUs have a very small size of its own internal systems of knowledge resources in terms of small number of full-time teachers. It resulted in making the system a dependent model, may be with some advantages in early phase, and the same becoming a limitation over a period of time.

- The OU system is mainly a print-based distance education system, supplemented by audio-video mode with limited use of internet. This mono- mode is a major limitation in enriching the learning experience of distance learners.

- The governance system of OUs is mostly the prototype of conventional system. The system mostly lacks professionalism in operations resulting in inefficiencies in delivery systems. Leadership deficit is also observed in many institutions.

- The system is ineffectually over regulated.

The present context is a product of past, which includes both positive

and negative aspects. The patterns and trends of the past were identified, with awareness of honorable expectations, to understand the broad features of historical trajectory. In the following sections an attempt is made to address the issues and desired responses from managerial perspective, keeping in view the interest of multiple stakeholders in the system. The present pandemic of Covid-19 has many lessons to take note of in reinvigorating the system. The pandemic has made the ODL a more legitimate and responsive system. It has also resulted in many challenges, mostly in terms of increasing competition, the need to address more divides in the society and raises questions of structural adequacy. In the following sections, multiple concerns are presented by raising relevant questions with the belief that reflective practitioners can address the challenges.

RELOOK AT POLICY FRAMEWORK

Policy in a democratic context is the expression of public will. It sets the goals and the ways of achieving them. Presently, there is no national ODL policy in place. The ODL system is operating on the basis of earlier National Educational Policies (1968, 1986-1992), recommendations of various Committees and Commissions from time to time and HRD Ministry directives and UGC-ODL regulations. Many experts in the field of ODL for long are advocating for a national ODL policy to bring more clarity and direction to the place and role of ODL in higher education. In the context of Covid-19 pandemic, there is an urgent need to critically look at public policies and practices in ODL from their relevance to the 'new realities'. In this regard Commonwealth of Learning has developed very helpful documents to guide the Commonwealth Countries in developing appropriate responses (Commonwealth of Learning, 2020). Despite 60 years of ODL experience in India, shared understanding of ODL philosophy and response to problems are missing among academic community, policy makers and educational administrators. In the present times everyone is advocating the relevance of online and distance education. Those of us who were a part of ODL from the beginning have passed through the phases of ridicule and resistance to distance education. It is nice to hear the loud chorus on virtues of the system. But we are not sure of commitment and understanding of many converts to the basic belief system of ODL. It is necessary to reiterate

the belief system of ODL and emphasise the importance of making it a part of policy framework. The core elements of ODL foundational beliefs/values include:

- It is a public development good for more access to quality and affordable education, not a commercial activity;

- Technology mediated mode of education is a legitimate form of education for certain categories of learners and learning outcomes are more important than modes of education;

- It is a mode of education relevant for all types of programmes;

- Learners should be prepared and motivated for self-learning; and

- Institutions should be structured appropriately for technology mediated form of teaching-learning.

An important aspect which needs look into the policy frame is the relevance of single mode OU system. The OU in India is a historical product of social necessity, mainly influenced by British Open University model. In 80's and 90's policy makers expected one OU in every state. The desire is not realised. There is a stagnation in the growth of number of open universities. During the two decades of 21st century, only six states have established OUs in contrast to exponential growth of conventional universities. There is also an overall stagnation in the growth of enrolment of ODL system during the last five years from 2014-2019 with only around 11 to 12 per cent of total enrolment, though the expectation was to enroll about 30 percent of total enrollment in higher education.

In this discussion on relevance of single mode institutional form of ODL two recent developments are to be noted. In 2019 the government prepared a draft National Educational Policy. It is a voluminous report of 482 pages, which rightly emphasised the importance of ODL mode and made a number of recommendations for strengthening of ODL system, without not even once mentioning OU system. The new policy envisages all the universities and colleges, properly equipped, becoming multimode institutions offering conventional and ODL progammes. Does it convey any signal to the world

of Indian open universities to relook at their role? Second important development in the present context is the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on the nature of educational system in general. Most of the prestigious public and private educational institutions are moving towards blended and online modes of education. The open universities continue to depend mostly on the print mode. The question to be addressed is, can the mostly stagnant OU system face the competition from more resourceful and dynamic public and private conventional university system in the provision of education through ODL?

In the 60 years of historical experience, it is interesting to note that the open universities have emerged as single mode ODL system as a response to the limitations of dual mode system of ODL. In the changed context of synergy of modes, multimode including conventional and distance is emerging as preferential institutional form. This form is popularly called a blended mode. Is it not time for OUs to examine the desirability of becoming multimode universities, without losing their identity as OUs, may be with a different meaning and focus. In the blended mode, 70:30 combination of conventional and distance mode is an internationally preferred ratio. The same may be applied by open universities with 70 per cent distance programmes and 30 percent conventional progammes with same 70 and 30 per cent in modes of delivery of teaching and learning.

The issues need a dispassionate critical examination with open mind. We understand that a few years back IGNOU leadership has made some hasty attempts to make IGNOU a dual mode university which was abandoned by the successive leaderships. This reform became the casualty of predecessor-successor syndrome of successor undoing the work of predecessor. These leadership centric responses cannot ensure the sustainability of institutional reforms. The reforms should be based on well informed judgment and system-based consensus. We feel that the idea of OU becoming multimode is worth examining with open mind. A creative response is the need of the hour.

REENGINEERING THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAME

Re-engineering of institutional framework is necessary to improve the performance of open universities as most of them are suffering from common cold problems of timely provision of study materials, conduct of examinations and declaration of results on time, etc. The management systems are highly hierarchical and rigid. These features may not be peculiar to open universities.

But certainly, the consequences of these features are more adverse in OU system, as teaching-learning in this system is more institution centric. In respect of administrative operations, procedures have precedence over results. In our desire to have equivalence with university status of conventional system, we have acquired some of their negative features with more serious consequences. Paradoxically, in this technology mediated form of education, most of the open universities have very weak techno-structure in place and are burdened with a large number of unprofessional staff at lower levels. Leadership deficit and integrity deficits are observed in many OUs and many of them do not have full time Vice Chancellors for a long period of time.

In our desire to make the OUs cost effective, the system started with small number academic staff depending mostly on outside expertise to develop the learning resources and teaching activities. Initially, it worked well with lot of enthusiasm of outside experts to contribute to the development of learning resources. Over a period of time, for various reasons, it has become difficult to get the services of capable external resource persons to develop the learning resources. The limited academic staff who are used to managerial functions in resource development are finding inadequate to the task of development of learning materials. In most of the OUs, even the limited sanctioned positions are not filled. For example, in Dr BR Ambedkar Open University, the first OU in the country, the sanctioned academic staff strength is 85 and the staff in position in 2020 is only 36. The same may be true of many other open universities as well. In this context of fast developments in the use of new technologies in ODL, we have to look into the competencies of staff in using these technologies.

We have to redesign our human resource development systems to take best from the present staff and to attract the best talent to future positions.

Institutional autonomy is a major concern of OU system in India. The regulatory systems in general are becoming highly centralized, rigid and discriminatory. Instead of following the principles of 'trust, but verify', they are following the principle of 'doubt and verify'. This is true more for the Open University system. There is a need to relook at the regulatory system from perspectives of flexibility and institutional autonomy—the two cardinal principles of effective institutions.

There is a need to relook at academic organisational frame. Presently, it is discipline/faculty centric as is in conventional system. In view of interdisciplinary and interdependent nature of academic functions in OU, 'programme-centric' academic structures may be more appropriate than discipline-based structures. May be within the broad framework of discipline/ faculty / area of studies, 'programme-unit' may be created with operational responsibility for total academic operations of that particular programme. Project Mode or Taskforce Mode may be used for learning resources development and for other specific tasks which provides more flexibility in engaging experts and in completing the tasks on time.

In the context of new national focus on 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India), open universities should strive to become 'Atmanirbhar Universities' in academic, administrative and financial matters. More extensive use of e-learning Open Educational Resources (OER) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) shall make OUs more self-reliant in learning resources. The government of India and University Grants Commission (UGC) are taking a number of commendable initiatives to strengthen e-technology infrastructure and to develop new policy and regulations for online education. The SWAYAM platform and dedicated broadcast channels are very useful to offer online education. More extensive use of new technologies like Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, etc., make the support systems and management systems more self-reliant. The 'social business model' in operations will make the system financially self-reliant. The main focus of re-engineering is to make the open universities as 'Atmanirbhar Universities'.

ASSESSMENT FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Assessment and evaluation of performance are critical to quality assurance. The two forms of assessment, internal and external, reinforce each other contributing to institutional quality improvement and accountability. Open universities are in the process of going through the first cycle of assessment and accreditation, based on the criteria developed by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). The open universities should take seriously this activity as an opportunity to promote 'self-insight' and 'quality assurance mindset'. Essentially, external assessment is a promotional activity of institutional development. The measurement of quality in terms of grade is to inform the institutions their levels of performance. The quality measurement has always been a challenging task of identifying right areas for measurement and identifying right ways of measurement. But unfortunately high stakes are built into the grades of NAAC, with all dangers associated with high stake activities. Some institutions are using NAAC grades for marketing their products, than for institutional development purposes. We hope the OUs to be an exception to this general trend in the system.

The UGC in recent years is emphasising the need for strengthening of internal quality assurance system in the form of every institution having a Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA). It is a welcome measure. The institutions have a primary responsibility for quality and all others have secondary promotional responsibilities. Every OU should have an effectively functional CIQA for continuous quality improvement. There should be institutional flexibility in the structures and functions of CIQA. 'One size fits all' may not be appropriate. The internal quality assurance systems should be examined for their inclusiveness, coherence, accountability, innovation, and effectiveness.

AGENDA FOR REIMAGINING

It is time to develop strength to think differently and do bold things. As Socrates said, "the secret of change is to focus all of our energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new". Building the new is always a

challenging task at any point of history and more so in present times of neoliberal order where 'I' precedes over 'We', making a collective action a difficult task. In spite of difficulties we have to move forward with a Gandhian belief , "we have to be the change we wish to see". In a continuity and change frame, the reimagination agenda should focus on systemic transformation from:

- More of the same programmes to the same groups of learners to more of different programmes to different groups of learners;

- Print mode learning resources to multimode/blended learning resources with appropriate pedagogies;

- Study centre/learner centre centric support to home based support services;

- Procedure oriented bureaucratic systems to results based technology enabled management systems led by enlightened leadership; and

- Dependency model to 'Atmanirbhar Model'.

We are aware that the above mentioned framework is not very new and most in the ODL system may be aware of it. We are repeating them in the pedagogic tradition of reinforcing by repetition and reconfirmation of our commitment by repetition. We are also aware that there is much diversity in institutional context of the 15 public OUs in India, requiring different responses to reimagination agenda. The OUs in India may be grouped into three categories of Stage-1: Beginning, Stage-2: Middle and Stage-3: Advanced, based on their levels of technological and academic preparedness to implement the transformational agenda for digital age operations. OUs need to relook into the great traditions of distance education as a technology-mediated teaching and learning that could embrace the new age Internet-based online learning and provide new models of delivery adopting new approaches. A true distance education, in principle, is also a blended learning opportunity that depended on optional face-to- face contact between student and teacher in the study centre. Reimagination of OU needs understanding of the past as well as current technologies, with a passion for its foundational values and vision for the future. The works of the Commonwealth of

Learning (COL) and other experts in the field of ODL and online learning may be used as benchmarks to assess the preparedness of open universities for digital age teaching-learning.

CONCLUSION

We are advocating reform not because the system became irrelevant but because of its unfulfilled greatness. Enlightened leadership with pragmatic vision; competent and motivated staff; adequate technology infrastructure; and flexible professional management are the four pillars of the OU system. In a systemic view, weakness in any one pillar effects the system as a whole. We have been observing different levels of deficit in these four pillars in many OUs, with existential threats to the system. Every OU may prepare its own 'reform agenda' reflecting its context. It is a time for change, as John Lewis said: "If not now, then when?" Action is Wisdom.

* * * * * *

5

Indian First Open University in Transition: Need for Reimagining the Future Together

"You cannot teach today the same way you did yesterday to prepare students for tomorrow"

- John Dewey

The Focus

The focus of my lecture is 'to reflect and identify the action points for sustainable future of the University'. I look at this as an opportunity to share my experiences and hopes on University's contribution to society. My observations on 'action points' are only suggestive not prescriptive, and they should be taken as a part of a learning organization activity. Let me start with a brief explanation of the terms/concepts used in the title of the lecture, with a belief in the Socratic expression of 'defining the terms is the beginning of the wisdom'. Let us start with Transition – change from one stage of condition to another. The University is in transition from ODL (Open Distance Learning) to ODeL (Open Distance electronic Learning). Reimagination refers to imagine again / a new. Management experts talk about six steps in reimagination i.e., Reflect, Connect, Explore, Choose, Repack and Act. Albert Einstein rightly said; 'Imagination is more important than knowledge'. Future refers that would likely to happen in time to come. Futurologist Wendel Bell has identified

three types of futures i.e., preferable future; probable future and possible future. We have to look at University's future from the perspectives of all three types of futures. The future depends on what we do in the present, said Mahatma Gandhi. Together focuses on actions in unison / collective work with the belief that 'none of us is as smart as all of us'.

To put it simply the focus of my presentation is to 'reimagine the University transition to build its future together'. What is the frame for doing it?

The Frame of Transition

The frame of transition includes the ideal of transition and the process of transition.

The Ideal of Transition

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's social vision of education and Prof. G. Ram Reddy's institution building legacy should be the ideal parameters of reimgination of the future of the University.

Dr. Ambedkar way back in 1930's advocated inclusive quality education for all to ensure social justice. Greatly, influenced by John Dewey's education philosophy, Ambedkar relentlessly worked for democratization of education, the ideal of Open University. UNSDG goal 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all" is a continuation of Dr. Ambedkars' transformative vision of education. National Education Policy 2020 recognizes education as fundamental for developing an equitable and just society.

Prof. G. Ram Reddy as the founder Vice Chancellor of the University laid strong foundations to build an effective, inclusive, and accountable institution to open the ivory towers of education. Identification, nursing and recognition of talent, networking for institutional development, optimum utilization of available educational resources and designing flexible result oriented academic and administrative structures and practices are some of his legacies which have continuous relevance in reimgination of the University for future. Sincerity of purpose and passion to make a difference

tempered by pragmatic wisdom are the guiding values of Prof. Ram Reddys' institutional legacy, which all of us should cherish and practice.

The Process of Transition

In the process of transition, we have to examine the continuity and change and the practicability of change. The fundamental premises of the University should always be kept in mind in the transition process. The fundamental premises are:

- Democratisation of higher education: (includes access with equity; access with quality and access with success)

- Technology mediated form of education:(includes four A-s of technology – accessibility, acceptability; appropriateness and affordability; digital equity and ethical concerns)

- Self – directed learning facilitated by institution: (includes learner-centric system; appropriate support systems and flexibility)

- Lifelong learning for all (includes continuous education; knowledge and skills upgradation; education for well being)

These are dynamic foundation values and needs continuous re-imgination. Any change takes place in the context. In case of University's transition to a new age Open University, the contextual factors to be taken note are:

- Post- COVID / Post- Pandemic world

- Digital age/ Information age

- National Education Policy 2020

- Hands – off approach of Government

Management expert Kotter has suggested eight steps for organizational transformation. These are: 1. Increase urgency, 2. Create a guiding coalition. 3. Get the vision right, 5. Empower action, 6. Create short term wins, 7. Don't let up and 8. Make change stick.

With all our good intentions, we must also be aware of difficulties in bringing changes in public organization. Here, a pragmatic approach is more

useful in realizing the ideal. Perseverance is the mantra. If you cannot achieve the targets, don't change the targets, but change the methods of doing things.

Focus Areas for Reimagination

I have identified five focus areas for reimagination. These are:

- Admissions
- Programmes
- Teaching-learning and Evaluation Strategies
- Learner Support System
- System Management

Technology applications and quality assurance constitute the two running themes of all areas. In each area I have identified three action points which are critical for transition in my perspective. Let me explain them briefly.

Admissions

Firstly, I would like to emphasis the importance of enrolling more students to make it a University at Scale. The University started with 6,231 students in 1983-84, reached peak of 1,91,367 in 2010-11 and is settling down to around 1 lakh and above in recent years. More enrolment of students is not only a fulfillment of its vision of democratization of access but also a necessity for its sustainability and survival. Secondly, the University has to design new strategies to enroll students from new categories of learners, maybe with a more focus on working population in informal/ non-informal sectors looking for opportunities to upgrade their skills and qualifications. A more flexible system of admissions and study may be designed for ensuring more enrolment. The NEP2020, new initiatives like Academic Bank of Credit (ABC), Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Micro-Credential with Course wise registrations may help in opening the doors of Open University to large numbers. Thirdly, the University should also focus on designing appropriate systems for student retention and success. In Open Distance Learning (ODL) the cost of education is low, but because of the low success rates the cost of graduation is very high. The University's credible steps in

increasing the success rate will also enhance its credibility and contribute to more enrolment.

Programmes

Firstly, The University should design, develop, and deliver Programmes resulting in development of life skills and employability, fulfilling two objectives of education i.e., education for living and education for life. The Programmes should result in learners acquiring competencies which are personally, professionally, and socially useful. The University may relook at the present programmes from this perspective and identify new multidisciplinary programmes to meet the changing requirements. More than the domain knowledge, learning abilities is becoming more critical in this VUCA world. Secondly, short duration and add-on courses are in more in demand, particularly to meet the changing work needs of working population. Based on social and market needs University may identify short duration add on courses. My Third, suggestion is that the University should network with more public, private and community organizations to pool the resources for offering programmes.

Teaching – Learning and Evaluation Strategies

Firstly, the University should learn from the experiences of other ODL institutions, national and international, the new approaches in development and adoption of learning resources. More extensive use of Open Educational Resources (OER) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are desirable. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) knowledge resources are very useful to understand world-wide developments in this area. Secondly urgent reforms are necessary in ways of formative and summative ODL learners' evaluation. Here also the COL resources and University Grants Commission recommendations are very useful. The University should explore and put in place the technology enabled evaluation systems appropriate to its capacities and context. Thirdly, as part of its mission of continuing life-long education, the University should be more pro-active in developing learning resources for life-wide learning and making available its learning resources as open learning resources. In the present context of

large recruitment to public services in Telangana, the University may make available as OER some of its learning resources relevant to persons appearing for competitive examinations.

Learner – Support Services

Firstly, an effective learner support services system is one of the defining elements of the Open University system. This makes the Open University system different from Conventional System and one ODL institution different from other ODL institutions. Secondly, in the Post-COVID and digital society, the technology enabled learner support services are becoming more relevant and acceptable. The shift is from group services to individual services. The MOOCs models of services are becoming more popular. The University should explore and put in place more Web Based learner services, with face-to-face and hands-on experiences where necessary. Every programme design should include the appropriate technology-based multi-mode learner support services. The faculty should take the responsibility for designing of appropriate learner support system. Thirdly, there is a need for structural reforms in the management of the learner support system. The distinct future of BRAOU learner support management system is the creation of a separate cadre of Academics for managing learner support system. Initially, till 2002 the University has followed two tier learner support systems with a student services Directorate at Headquarters and Study Centers, mostly one is every 23 districts of integrated Andhra Pradesh. Later from 2002 the University like IGNOU and other OUs, has put in place three tier structure of study centre, Regional Coordination Centers and Headquarters. Presently only a few Regional Coordination Centers (RCCs) are managed by full-time academic and full-time support staff and most others are managed by part-time Coordinators and part-time support staff. In view of the shortage of staff, change in the ways of providing learner support services for optimum utilization of available resources and for having a uniform staffing system the present system needs a relook. To ensure uniform staffing pattern the present academic and support staff working a few RCCs/SCs may be shifted and be posted at Headquarters with redesigning of their functions. The University may develop an appropriate system of integrating the separate academic cadre of student services with faculty, their roles being

appropriately redefined. The RCCs and study centers may be managed by part time staff with effective coordination and monitoring from headquarters with the use of technology tools. The transformation has to be worked out carefully without adversely affecting learners interests and in consultation with all stakeholders.

System Management

Firstly, enhance the institutional and staff capabilities. The STD and GRADE, the training and research units of the University have an important role in capacity building of staff and the institution. Secondly, more flexible technology enabled management systems are necessary to ensure a function centric and results-based governance model. Project mode may be used to execute the schemes. Y.N Harari, reflecting on the changing institutional context rightly observed; "Education in a traditional way is building a structure with strong foundation. Now it is building a tent easily foldable and changeable". Flexibility is the mantra of modern system management. Thirdly, to strategies for future, an Institutional Development Plan (IDP) may be prepared as suggested by NEP 2020. The IDP may include short term, mid-term and long-term plans. The IDP should be based on hard facts and realistic action proposals with timelines for change.

A Few Questions

I would like to raise a few questions for reflection and action. These are:

- How to sustain and increase the enrolment in the University?

- How to design and develop relevant programmes and appropriate teaching-learning and evaluation strategies resulting in learners acquiring attributes personally, professionally and socially useful?

- How to design and put in place effective learner support services?

- How to make the governance system of the university more effective, accountable and inclusive?

- How to strategies for the sustainable development of university in the VUCA world?

The University may constitute Five Task Forces to address these questions and come out with solutions and action plans with time frame for implementation.

To Sum Up

I have a few suggestions emerging from this lecture for the consideration of the University community. These are:

- Designing Integrated role of Faculty by including Teaching – Learning; learner support services; student evaluation; research and extension functions

- Strengthening of Faculties with more staff and techno-resources

- Redeployment of permanent academic staff located in RCCs/ SCs

- Technology enabled individualised interactive direct to home learner support services.

- More flexible and responsive administrative arrangements.

To Conclude

I hope that, this discussion will result in 'reimagination of our experiences' and 'intelligent action'. Let me conclude with a quote from Bertrand Russell. He said:

"With every increase in knowledge and skills wisdom becomes necessary, because every such increase augments our capacities for evil if our purpose is unwise"

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6

Four Decades of India's First Open University: Through the Past into the Future

"Yesterday is but today's memory and tomorrow is today's dream"

- Khalil Gibran

Look Back to Look Forward

We look back to the past to understand the present and plan for the future. The study of institutional history helps us, if properly appreciated, in today's institutional decisions of what to do and what not to do. John Dewey perceptively observes that education is "a process of living through a continuous reconstruction of experiences". Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (here in after referred to as BRAOU or the University) has the rich tradition of action studies on its experiences and on ODL first under the aegis of 'Centre for Evaluation' and later from 2001 by Prof. G. Ram Reddy Research Academy in Distance Education (GRADE). The University has the distinction of having a dedicated unit for evaluation studies on distance education. The University also has another distinction of being the most explored research site on ODL. More than 20 scholars have undertaken research on different aspects of the functioning of the University leading to M.Phil., and Ph.D. degrees. More than a hundred research studies were conducted and a large number of articles on the working of the University were published in journals and presented in

workshops and seminars. These studies provide a rich knowledge resource to draw meaningful lessons from past practices, useful for future actions.

This University to my knowledge is the only Open University in India to undertake a research project on impact study of institutional experiences. The study was sponsored by the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL) on the occasion of Di-Decennial celebration of the University in 2002. My-self and Prof. V. Venkaiah, the then Executive Director, GRADE were the researchers of the project and the study was published by the University in 2005 under the title: "India's First Open University: Experience of Two Decades". The Important parameters considered in the study include: access and equity, flexibility, innovation, quality and relevance. It is worth examining the feasibility of extending this study to four decades experience and impact. The COL may be approached for support to the study as extension of time-series study of institutional impact.

During the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of University in 2007, the 'Centre for Social Empowerment' led by Prof. Ghanta Chakrapani, (present Director, Academic) has brought out success stories of BRAOU learners under the title 'Memu Saitam'. It is a good work of inspiring stories of struggles and extraordinary achievements of learners' inspite of many social disadvantages. The University may continue the publication of 'Success Stories Series' to authenticate its legitimate claims as a 'University with a difference'.

The Focus of the Lecture

Now I have moved from the life of action to life of reflection. Today, in this lecture I propose to reflect on four decades of India's first Open University journey through the past into the future. The focus of discussion includes a brief narration of the trajectory of experiences, the significant contributions and a few observations on the next phase of the University. My focus here is more on events and lessons than on individuals and their contributions. In this long journey of four decades, certainly individuals have made a very significant contribution and deserve all appreciation and gratitude. But in the exercise of learning from experiences, it is more

appropriate to reflect on collective wisdom, collective contributions and maybe also on collective limitations. We are what we are today is because of these collective strengths and limitations. Recognition of this 'collective spirit' is the right way to move forward. Here a qualifier is necessary. These are my subjective reflections. It is quite possible to draw different conclusions from past experiences with different perspectives. I have reflected on the institutional experience from the perspective of realization of basic premises and values of the Open University system. In my understanding the foundational goal of the University is 'to provide inclusive quality higher education and lifelong learning to large numbers at affordable costs, overcoming the limitations of time and space'. We should try to draw meaning of our experience from this broad perspective of foundational goal of the University.

The Trajectory

The four decades of trajectory may be broadly divided into two phases of The Early Years or the First Phase (from 1982 to 1993) and The Campus Years or the Second Phase (from 1994 to Present). The first phase of early years is a period of excitement, experimentation, and uncertainty. During this period, the University functioned from a rented accommodation in Somajiguda and surrounding areas in Hyderabad. The Campus Years of the Second Phase begins in 1994, with the shifting of the University to its own campus in Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad. The Second Phase is the phase of growth, consolidation, and development. Below is a brief overview of important developments in these two phases.

The Early Years (1982-93): The Tipping Points

Let me start the discussion by raising the question of why the first Open University was established in Andhra Pradesh, not in any other state or at the national level. Malcolm Gladwell's 'The Tipping Point' idea, i.e., the moment of threshold or a boiling point resulting in significant social event, may provide a partial answer to this question.

At the national level the idea of starting an Open University has been under consideration since December 1970. It was in that year that the

Ministry of Education has organized a Seminar under the Chairmanship of Prof. D.S. Kothari. Later in 1970s a project report was prepared by a committee under the chairmanship of Mr. G. Parthasarathy. But nothing happened at the National Level till 1985. At the State level in 1978, the then Education Minister Mr. Bhavanam Venkataram, based on discussion with Prof. G. Ram Reddy, the then Vice Chancellor of Osmania University, evinced a keen interest in the concept of Open University. There was a change in the Ministry at the State level in February 1982 and the then Education Minister Mr. Bhavanam Venkataram become the Chief Minister. This was the tipping point for the establishment of Open University in Andhra Pradesh. He was in the position of Chief Minister only for a short period between February to September 1982. During that short period, he has taken all steps for the establishment of Open University with the active academic support of Prof. G. Ram Reddy. The University was inaugurated by the then President of India Mr. Gyani Jail Singh on 26th August at Nagarjuna Sagar. Though the political necessity to find ways of meeting the increasing social demand for higher education, desire to make higher education the cost effective and the example of British Open University in the use of technology for education are the major driving forces for the establishment of first Open University, the tipping point or the threshold moment was the Chief Ministership of Mr. Bhavanam Venkataram. At that time the Chief Minster also decided to locate its headquarters at Nagarjuna Sagar and got it inaugurated at that place.

There was a change in the Ministry in September 1982 and Mr. K. Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy, became the Chief Minister and Prof. G. Ram Reddy was appointed as Vice-Chancellor in November 1982. Prof. G. Ram Reddy could persuade the new Chief Minister on the desirability of making Hyderabad as the University Headquarters in view of better connectivity and the availability of wide range of educational and technological resources. The Government being convinced of the reasons has made Hyderabad, the headquarters of the University. The wise decision of the then Government made a significant difference in the functioning of the University. In India we have examples of many Open Universities facing locational disadvantages, because of political decision on headquarters location. The

tipping point for the change of headquarters of University from Nagarjuna Sagar to Hyderabad was the change of Chief Ministership. That is how we are in Hyderabad today. The wisdom of political masters and the coincidence of many contextual factors contributed to the establishment of first Open University in Andhra Pradesh and its location in Hyderabad. It is the beginning of a new phase in higher education in India.

The University started its operations in November 1982 with the appointment of the first Vice Chancellor on 18th November 1982. Its operations initially started in a private rented building with two persons; Vice Chancellor and his PA brought on deputation from Osmania University. Later in 1983, the University was shifted to a Government building in Somajiguda and started its under-graduate academic programmes of B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. in 1983-84. It is a record in the Open Universities' history that a university could start its academic operations within six months of its establishment. Launching the Science degree programme through distance mode was a bold initiative at that point of time. The University in 1985, first time in ODL system launched a professional programme in Library and Information Science, another bold initiative at that time. In 1993, another professional programme, Master of Business Administration was launched. Initially the University started functioning with a few academic staff, mostly brought on deputation from other Universities and a small number of support staff appointed on contract basis. The staff was initially engaged in multiple tasks, blurring the distinctions of academic and administrative tasks. In later years regular academic and administrative staffs were recruited. Most of the academic staff recruited in the early period had some experience in conventional system, which brought more credibility and experience to the operations of the Open University system.

During the 11 years early phase, the University mostly functioned from rented accommodation in Somajiguda and launched a number of programmes, developed a network of student support services and most importantly designed and developed quality self-learning materials. Large numbers of distinguished academics and practitioners were engaged in the development of self-learning materials and staffs of conventional colleges were engaged in providing learner services. The University tried to reach to

large numbers at minimum costs by extensively using the available educational resources of the conventional system. The internal staff and external resource persons' enthusiasm of participating in a new experiment of democratization of education helped the University to overcome many limitations of physical, financial and human resources. Another significant development in the early years of the University is re-naming of the University as Dr. B.R Ambedkar Open University in 1991, on the occasion of Dr. Ambedkar's birth centenary.

The Campus Years (1994 to Present): The Development Phase

The present campus location and subsequent developments have their own tipping points. Initially, the Government allotted around 120 acres of land at Vanasthalipuram, the outskirts of eastern part of Hyderabad. Prof. C. Narayana Reddy, the then Vice Chancellor and Prof. V. Nagaraja Naidu, the then Registrar have used their contacts with the then Chief Minister Mr. N.T. Rama Rao and others who matter in Government for allotment of the 54 acres of Government land at Jubilee Hills to the University. Prof. C. Narayana Reddy poetically used to say that we have moved the University from 'Vanasthalipuram to Janasthalipuram'. This is another tipping point in the evolving life of the institution. The foundation stone for the new campus was laid by Mr. N.T. Rama Rao on 1st June 1986. It took nearly 8 years for construction of new buildings on the campus. Prof. S. Bashiruddin, the then Vice Chancellor (1992-1995) ably assisted by Er. V. Raghavan, Consultant and technical advisor (retired Chief Engineer R&B, Govt. of AP) and internal engineering team led by Er. B. Lakshmi Prasad, gave a big push to the process of completion of construction of buildings and shifting to the new campus in 1994. The new campus was inaugurated on 31st August 1994 by the then Prime Minister of India Mr. P.V, Narasimha Rao, heralding a new chapter in the life of the University.

The period from 1994 to the present is a period of growth and consolidation. In 1994-1995, the first academic year in the new campus started with the total enrolment of 55,018, an impressive increase in 11 years from 6231 in 1983-1984. Around 15 academic programmes were offered with around 400 regular and contract teaching and non-teaching

staff. Over the periods the enrolment increased and crossed the mark of one lakh (1,28,391) in 2002-2003 becoming a mega Open University (as categorized by Sir John Daniel). Now the COL is advocating mega Universities to become giga Universities. The 2002, as a mark of 20 years of successful functioning, the University has celebrated Di-Decennial celebration. During that period many initiatives were taken for consolidation, quality improvement and streamlining the operating system. In 2002, the University was offering around 30 programmes including post-graduation, professional and research programmes with around 500 academic and administrative staff, both regular and contractual. In 2002-2003, the University has taken many steps to strengthen student support services (SSS) including the creation of 23 Regional Coordination Centres (RCCs), one at every district headquarters. In most of the places the University has constructed its own buildings in Government College Campuses to house the RCCs. The earlier two-tier structure of student support system became a three-tier system with middle tier of RCC playing a very important coordination, monitoring and guidance function of Study Centres under their jurisdiction. This cost-effective structural arrangement of SSS is an innovative arrangement for optimum use of available resources. From the beginning the University is focusing on having a well networked system of learner support services provided through a network of study centres, located in conventional colleges with tutorial and counseling services being provided by conventional college teachers as part-time Academic Counsellors. At present, the University has a network of around 180 Study Centres with about4500 Academic Counsellors providing tutorial services to BRAOU learners.

During the last two decades from 2002 to 2022, the University has launched many new programmes in new areas and entered into collaboration with many agencies to offer new educational programmes to the working population. The Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA) has been in place since 2010 and is engaged in many quality related activities. Earlier the GRADE, under its Quality Assurance Cell has prepared many booklets on quality which are being used by different operating units to improve their quality. In 2017, the University has introduced Choice Based Credit

System (CBCS) and semester system in B.A, B.Com and B.Sc. programmes. The annual enrolment reached the highest number of 1,91,367 in 2010-11 academic year. In current academic year 2022-23, the total enrolment is around 1,15,000 in 41 programmes offered by 5 faculties and 21 Departments. It may be noted that the academic and administrative staff, both permanent and contractual, l have come-downs to around 200. The depletion of human resources is a matter of concern. The total revenueof the University in 2021-22 financial year was around 76 Crores, of which around 84 percent is from student fee, making it a student financed institution. During the same period 40 percent of expenditure was on salaries and pensions and around 60 percent was on learning resources, student services and administration.

During the last three decades after shifting to the new campus, there is an impressive development in the physical infrastructure of the University. In 1994, the new campus has buildings, with built-up areas of two lakhs square feet. During the last 30 years many new buildings were added and now it has a built-up area of around four lakhs square feet. This good infrastructure and beautiful campus with natural boulders in a centrally located place is a great opportunity for the University to become an educational and cultural hub of Hyderabad. The good infrastructure itself can be a good stimulus for future growth of the University.

The Significant Contribution

There are many things, past and present, that make the University proud. These include:

An Inspiring Example

The University through its open mission practices, programmed learning resources, strong network of learner support systems and reliable student evaluation systems became an inspiring example in ODL. The University, through its credible operations has contributed significantly to change the negative image of ODL, a result of unhealthy practices in correspondence education, which is in practice in India from 1962. Many Open Universities established after 1982, including Indira Gandhi National Open University

(1985) have built their institutional systems and practices noting from the experience of first Open University. The University has a visible and credible national and international presence. The COLs close association with this University during the last forty years is an indication of its international reputation. The people associated with this University in various capacities, are playing important roles in national and international ODL institutions in various ways.

Innovative Practices

The University has the distinction of introducing many academic innovations during the last forty years. The University in 1983-84, has made multidisciplinary Foundation Courses in social science, science and languages, compulsory to all Undergraduate students. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is prominently advocating for multidisciplinary education. The University has allowed the students in 1983-84 themselves to have flexible choice of subjects across the disciplines. The NEP 2020 has recommended this system under the scheme of Academic Bank of Credit (ABC). The University has pioneered the offering of science and professional programmes through ODL mode, which are subsequently followed by many other Open Universities and dual mode ODL institutions. Initially there was formidable resistance from the conventional system for offering science programmes in OU mode. Prof. S. Brahmaji Rao, distinguished professor of Chemistry with wide experience in conventional system and good academic reputation, led the team of science faculty in the University and designed and developed a credible system of science teaching through ODL. In subsequent years the University has built multimedia science labs for development of lab kits and virtual labs for science practicals. The COVID-19 phase has legitamised the use of technology in education and NEP-2020 has recommended the use of ODL and online modes of education for providing all types of programmes, validating the initiatives of the University.

Recently (2022) the UGC has advised Universities to engage persons with rich experience in professional areas as 'Professor of Practice' to make the professional programmes more practice oriented. The University

adopted this practice in 1980s itself and engaged reputed practitioners as consultants to design and develop professional programmes. In the 1980s the University has launched Library Science and Public Relations programmes under the guidance of reputed practitioners like Mr. B.P. Shenoy (the then chief librarian of Osmania University) Dr. C.V. Narasimha Reddy, (retired Director, Public Relations, Govt. of AP) and a few others as professors of practice, though not named them as such. The NEP 2020 is strongly advocating for higher education including professional education in mother tongue. The University has started from the beginning offering undergraduate programmes and a few professional programmes in both regional language Telugu and English medium and a few programmes in Urdu medium. The University is also offering a few post-graduate programmes in Telugu medium. The University has also departed from the traditional way of teaching Telugu language at undergraduate level and introduced innovative pedagogy in developing communication skills of students.

The University has developed multimedia self-learning materials in both print and non-print form. The printed learning materials of the University were developed with great care by involving well-reputed academics and practitioners. These learning materials are extensively used by conventional University students and teachers. The University has recently made them available to people appearing for competitive examinations. In this way the University has made a significant contribution to the knowledge resources of the community. The University is also extensively using Audio-Visual programme in teaching-learning from the beginning. The University has the distinction of being the first University to have a dedicated Unit for audio-visual programmes. The All India Radio, Doordarshan, YouTube are being used for providing direct to home learning services. Technology is being used in teaching-learning, student support services, student evaluation and system management. The admissions are made online and web-based learner support services are provided. Digital On-Screen Evaluation System (DOSES) is used for evaluation of answer scripts. The University has put in place the OER policy and OER repository (Braouvidyaghani). The University is also engaged in the development of MOOCs and e-learning portal.

Recognizing the importance of online education, the University has established a dedicated unit 'Centre for Online Learning', for design, development, and delivery of online education. These initiatives indicate that the University is aware of the importance of new media and responding to the changing times. The University from the beginning is focusing on including vocational courses in the curriculum of various programmes. The University in 2016establishedthe, Centre for Skill Development and Career Planning to drive the development of more skill oriented Courses / Programmes with collaborations and partnerships and to provide guidance in career planning.

The University, on the occasion of forty years celebrations has initiated many community engagements / outreach programmes under faculty forums. These include: *Sarvathrika Samajika Vedika* (Social Sciences); *Vanijya Vahini* (Commerce); Science Awareness and Extension (Sciences); *Vignana Vedika* (Education) and Language and Literary Forum (Arts)

Reaching the Unreached

During the last four decades the University has had the distinction of providing access to inclusive quality higher education to large numbers. The University is continuously striving to reach the unreached. The University adopted open admission policy for admissions to undergraduate programmes from the beginning mainly influenced by British Open University example. During the last 38 years (1983 to 2020), under the open admission scheme thousands of students were admitted, who were earlier not qualified for higher education. Those who successfully completed their graduation under this scheme are in important positions in public life, public services and pursuing higher studies. Many other Open Universities and other ODL institutions have followed the example of the first Open University. Unfortunately, this socially useful innovative practice was discontinued by ODL institutions in India on the directions of University Grants Commission (UGC). The UGC in this decision might have been guided by its desire to have parity in admission policy with conventional system. This requirement negates the OUs basic premise of openness to people.

The University has the distinction of providing higher education to a larger number of socially disadvantaged groups. In 2021-2022, academic year out of total annual enrolment of 125,463 students, 86.7 percent belong to SC, ST and OBC groups, 62.9 percent are from rural areas and 45.6 percent are women. Broadly this represents the social group representation in student enrolment during the last five years. This is a commendable achievement. The University is also providing educational opportunities to specially targeted groups like prisoners, security forces, persons with disabilities and transgender learners.

A Few Steps into The Future

The four decades of the University celebration is an opportunity not only to reflect on our experience, but also is an occasion to plan for our future. Deep thinking and planning are necessary to identify the pathways of forward journey. These may include:

Understanding the Changing Context

Understanding the changing context is empowerment. When we are looking to past experiences to understand the present, we should be equally aware of the 'emerging context'. We are living in a world of unprecedented transformations. We should be able to contextualize our experience with national and international development with 'open mind' open-to new ways of looking at things. The University is an institutional learning activity, and the COL is rightly focusing on ODL institutional role in learning for development, leading to economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental conservation.

In the Post COVID-19 and Post NEP 2020, many changes have been taking place in the world of education in India. Technology use has become a more legitimate activity in education. It is a happy development for the Open University system. But a word of caution is also necessary. Y.N. Harari, rightly warns that if we are not clear of purpose of technology use, we may find ourselves more in serving the technology instead of technology serving us. He further, perceptively observes that, 'humans are always far better in inventing tools than in using them wisely'. Experts are rightly warning

the commercial interests of technology firms directing the world of education. Technology can provide right answers only if we understand the education problems and requirements correctly. The Open Universities (OUs) in future may have to compete with the online commercial education platforms and ventures in the provision of online education. Interestingly out of 18 OUs in India, 17 Open Universities are in public sector. In public universities education is a public good and technology is a tool for promotion of public good. The OUs may be caught in the two competing worlds of technology for public good and technology for profit. In addition, the Government is planning to establish 'Digital University'. I am not sure of its implications for the OUs. The world of education is moving from physical space to cyber space. Not everything is going to be good. We must be able to learn and adapt what is good in these developments and also develop skills and capabilities to survive and grow in the new context.

NEP 2020 has suggested a new regulatory framework of 'light but tight' to ensure integrity, transparency and resource efficiency of the educational system. A great ideal, but the ground experience of OUs is different. In many ways the regulatory systems are becoming more centralized and discriminatory to ODL systems. We are in the framework of 'not to do anything unless permitted' in contrast to a liberal frame of 'doing everything unless restricted'. The OUs distinction is its flexibility, and the regulatory parameters are to be tested from their appropriateness to ensure the flexibility of the system. Now the regulatory systems focus is more on ensuring uniformity and accountability. There is a need to ensure balance in multiple goals of regulations, keeping the interest of diverse institutional systems and objectives. The universities have a dual function of adapting to changing conditions and also working for change of circumstances. They are presently mostly struggling to adapt to circumstances and have lost their will and capacity to struggle for change of circumstances.

Access with Success and Relevance of Programmes

The University, as mentioned earlier, has an impressive record in ensuring access to higher education to a large number of socially

disadvantaged groups and special categories of learners. The same cannot be said of successful completion of programmes by them. Out of millions of students enrolled in the last forty years, only 499036 got degrees in last 24 convocations, the latest being held on 06.08.2022. The success rate is very low. Though the ODL is cost-effective from an access perspective, it may be costly from the perspectives of the costs of degrees. Increasing efforts should be made to increase the success rate of students enrolled in University. The focus now has to be shifted from access to access with success. The student's success is viewed as successful completion of programme, leading to award of degrees resulting in student acquiring the knowledge, skills and competencies which are personally, professionally and socially useful. We are not sure whether all our programmes are resulting in student success from this perspective. Programmes relevance is another concern. The University popular programmes are undergraduate programmes in Art, Commerce and Science constituting 80 percent of learners in 2022-23. The University may have to diversify its programmes by adding new age demand driven programmes for employability and livelihoods. The general education programmes may have to be redesigned to make them more employable and life skills development programmes. The University may also offer more short duration and add on courses to upgrade the knowledge and skills of working population. The University, with its rich experience in provision of undergraduate education, may examine the feasibility of offering four-year multidisciplinary Bachelor's programme for the holistic multidisciplinary education. The teaching-learning strategies need to be strengthened by integration of Pedagogy (teacher-centric) Andragogy (learner focused) and Heutagogy (independent learning) and synergy of multiple modes with more flexibility in practices. The learner support services need further strengthening by using new technologies to improve the success rate of learners. More sustainable practices of quality assurance should be put in place to make the system more resilient and socially relevant.

Capacity – Building of Institution and Staff

It is said that in conventional system teacher teaches and in ODL the institution teaches. Institutional efficiency is the defining element of

institutional success in ODL. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2015-2030, Goal 16) advocates the necessity of building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions to achieve the sustainable goals. There is a need to enhance the institutional capacities of OUs to realize their vision and mission. The OUs administrative systems also are suffering from some of the common ailments of Indian administration. Some critics characterize of Indian administration model as '*Khumbakarna* Governance Model' - most of the time sleeping over problems. What we require in ODL is '*Ram* Governance Model' - a model practiced by Prof. G. Ram Reddy and Prof. Ram G. Takwale as Vice Chancellors of Open Universities. This is a tested model in Open University governance. The important features of the model include: leading by example, identifying, nurturing and encouraging talent, enabling and recognizing performance and networking for institutional development. The operating systems, in this model, are driven by integrity, sense of purpose and pragmatic wisdom.

The '*Ram* Governance Model' empowers the staff to contribute their best to the realization of institutional goals. During the last forty years the University has had its quota of internal conflicts, maladjustment of roles, ego clashes and work shirking. These are common ailments of institutions, integral of group activities. The wisdom of leadership lies in converting the clashes over positions and powers to 'constructive conflicts' over institutional development paths. Results base management systems, continuous upgradation of skills and capacities of staff and putting in place systems of performance recognition and rewards may result in staff engagement in constructive institution building activities. Experience shows that if the governance model is good, everything falls in place.

Concluding Observations

Institutional history is the study of change over time, to free from the past burdens and embark on a new path through the culture of innovations. Past experiences should help us to build a more resilient institutional systems and practices appropriate to emerging context. In Indian distance education we have passed through stages of Correspondence Education (1962-1982), Open University / Open Distance Learning (1982 – to present) and entering into the phase of Digital University / Online Learning / Blended Learning. The distinct feature of our system is the co-existence of all forms of distance education in practice. The Open Universities are becoming multimodal increasing convergence between distance and campus learning. In this fast-changing context we have to 'reimagine our experience' and engage in 'intelligent action'. The University has an 'institutional *dharma'* of realization of social transformative vision of education. We have to continuously strive to reduce the gap between our *Dharma* (goals) and our *Karma* (actions). Let us resolve to move forward to realize our *Dharma* with '*Ram* Governance Model'. This is the best way to pay our tributes to Prof. G. Ram Reddy and realize the educational vision of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

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Open Distance Learning (ODL) as a mode of education, has a chequered history of more than six decades in Indian higher education. Started as a part-time correspondence education in Delhi University in 1962, the ODL has taken many forms, evolved over a period of time, as a flexible technology mediated form of education for democratisation of education. The establishment of first Open University in 1982 heralded a new phase in the ODL. It has moved from print based system of correspondence education to multi-mode distance education being offered by dedicated institutions known as Open Universities. Presently the ODL system is playing a significant role in access to higher education with more than 100 Conventional Universities and 19 Open Universities offering hundreds of programmes in varied fields including professional, technical and vocational, with an annual enrolment of 11 to 12 percent in higher education. The system is now passing through major changes with the use of new technologies, with focus on Online Education. The Government of India has a proposal to establish National Digital University. Against this background the present volume, a collection of lectures and essays by Prof. V.S. Prasad, presents the reflections on policies, practices and future perspectives in the historical context of change over time, with a focus on the trajectory of Open Universities, in particular Dr.B.R. Ambedkar Open University, the first Open University in India.

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