

HIGHER EDUCATION: GOVERNANCE FOR EQUITY (SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO MAHARASHTRA)

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Abstract: The actions of the decision-makers need to be accounted and role of every stake holder in the governing framework of higher education revisited in given alarming situation of the system. The governing authorities are responsible for formulating standards in higher education. Some educationist from Higher education institutions require to develop and deploy strategies for implementing academic programs. Universities officers and authority provide leadership in providing access to equal academic opportunities for students under their jurisdictions. The stake holders of the framework must thrive together to create clear vision of higher education in the society. Maharashtra has passed two legislatures, one to bring uniform pattern in the administration of university and second to remove students impediment in offering courses of interest for completing academic programmes and thus scaling education to International level. It is utmost need of the hour, particularly in this stage of industrial revolution to homogenize higher education by enabling the governing framework with Information Communication Technology. This will enhance the performance of the system and empower the available rich potential of youths to realize the demographic dividend by creating much needed human capital for the country.

Introduction: Higher education in Maharashtra, in view of the Government can broadly be categorized as Professional, Agricultural and Non-Agricultural education. Since education is in the concurrent list of our constitution. It is statutorily regulated and controlled by both the Centre and the State. The Centre governs the education system from primary to higher education. The Maharashtra state governs kindergarten, primary and higher education through three distinct departments namely, Department of Women and Child, Department of School education, Department of Higher and Technical education. The state reorganization of Maharashtra could not foresee the educational diversity and likewise prepare the policies to avoid adverse consequences. The various geographical regions were combined on the basis of language and were

consolidated as parts of Maharashtra which form the broad basis of the jurisdictions of the state funded Universities. These regions had a different educational background. The universities from various parts of Maharashtra were administered by implementing provisions of different acts. For the first time Maharashtra University act no 35 of 1994 was passed by the legislation to unify, consolidate and to provide for a unified pattern for the constitution and administration of university and reorganization of higher education in the state. We will be restricting the governance aspect only for Non-Agriculture higher education in Maharashtra.

The main decision makers for higher education in Maharashtra consist of the Central and State government, the state funded and Private Universities, Higher education department, the higher education Institutions and together form the Governing Framework. The role of each entity in the framework can broadly be summarized along with the subject matter associated with each authority. The Government of India, through its Department of Higher Education regulates Non-Agricultural education and has established a governing body namely University Grant Commission, apart from sanctioning of grants to Universities and colleges. UGC regulates the matters related with formulation and maintenance of standards in higher education. The Government of Maharashtra or the Secretariat mainly responsible for formulating Policies for higher education has established two distinct division, one for College education and other division for University education for execution of policy of Higher education. The Universities Officers and various authorities are responsible and accountable for Academic administration for exercising the powers and functions vested by the Universities Act. Academic Authorities are accountable and responsible for exercising the powers as per the provisions of the act and according to the hierarchy. The Academic powers and their functionality are given to the authorities namely, the Board of Studies, Faculty, Board of Deans

and at the top of academic hierarchy the Academic Council. The department of higher education deals with matters related to supervision of universities and Higher education institutions and reporting to Government of Maharashtra. The Higher education institutions are responsible for creation of Infrastructure, finance and education delivery.

Governance in Education: According to Wikipedia the definition of Governance is described as "Governance relates to the process of interaction and decision-making among the actions involved in a collective problem that lead to the creation, reinforcement or reproduction of social norms and Institutions." As Government strongly belief and follow the principles of democracy have adopted these principle for the process of interaction and decision-making throughout the Governing framework. Therefore Maharashtra University act no 35 of 1994 was passed by the legislation to unify, consolidate and to provide for a unified pattern for the constitution and administration of university and reorganization of higher education in the state. Government of Maharashtra after the implementation of Maharashtra University Act 1994 had direct control over the universities in Maharashtra. Thus the decision-making authority comprises of members representing from distinct area having different interests. The matters related with the governance of higher education comprising of the process of interaction and decision-making can be seen from two perspectives i.e. Educational administration and Academic Administration. The present Governing structure can be viewed combinely as the powers vested in the Chairman, UGC in the role of formulation and maintenance of standards. The Secretariat of the State in the role of formulation of policies and Joint Secretaries of zones of university grant commission in role of direct control over the higher education institutions. Director of higher education in the role of fair and just implementation of policies of the state and Vice Chancellor of universities in the role of Academic Administration of university. The President of Institutions or Principals is in the role of Strategic development, deployment of education delivery and the policies of the Governments. The powers vested in the above authorities along with their functionality and responsibilities for ascertaining the pattern of governance for equity in the divisions of department of higher education require to be investigated. The Department of Higher Education implements the policies of the government and for ease of supervision, keeping in view the jurisdiction of the Universities have clubbed all universities into two separate divisions. One

division includes Universities covering areas from Western Maharashtra and other Division includes universities from rest of Maharashtra i.e North Maharashtra, Vidarbha, and Marathwada region of Maharashtra, for the purpose of supervision and monitoring. Here, we want to bring to the notice of readers that the Universities established in the region of rest of Maharashtra have been established after Universities of Western Maharashtra. The real question is whether the students of higher education from Western Maharashtra and Rest of Maharashtra did get equal access to academic opportunities after the implementation uniform pattern of administration of Universities. As mentioned earlier that the university grants commission regulates higher education by formulating standards and Secretariat of state regulates higher education by formulating policies for educational administration has a very week coupling. This fact turns me to make a suggestion that as the Secretariat of the state deals with matter related to college and university education from the perspective of compliances of standards have to undertake process of interactions and decision making of educational standards. The university administration and constitution in the beginning was different for each university in Maharashtra. Each university was implementing the statutes and ordinances passed by that university. The universities were empowered to establish Faculty and the subjects under the Faculty by passing the statutes and ordinances. The position of universities from the rest of Maharashtra reflects that these powers were not exercised by the Universities. This nature of working of the university created academic imbalances among the universities in Maharashtra. This resulted into the existence of uneven courses and the criteria for sanctioning of staff in the higher education institutions and in the universities of Maharashtra. The government of Maharashtra dealing the matter related to college education on the basis of this unevenness could have regulated by directing the university and brought unified pattern for the constitution and administration of university in the state and further restored equity among the universities and colleges particularly from the rest of Maharashtra. This lack of action for a long period which involved collective problem could not be addressed even after the enactment of law. Whether the adopting of the uniform pattern for Universities in the Maharashtra was instrumental in achieving the trust and creditability among the society and particularly in the youth of Maharashtra? This is particularly very important from the point of collation of existing position of higher education and implementation of e-Governance.

Scenario of higher Education in Maharashtra: As a part of Educational administration, Government of Maharashtra and the Universities along with their respective jurisdictions, jointly control colleges and universities education by prescribing guidelines, ordinances, statutes and rules to control the "Entry" and "Exit" points of the Higher education in Maharashtra. The specific matters related to the entry points are the "Permissions" and "Affiliations" for opening New Colleges, Faculty, Subject, Course and lastly Divisions. Similarly, the matter related to Enrollment, Examination and Awarding Degree are dealt with as exit point. The most important input element of the education system is the adequate staff for carrying out the operations for education delivery in the university and college/higher education institutions. The department of higher education on the basis of the strength of students prescribes the strength of staff for each subject/department taught in the college and depending on the strength of all the departments the total staff for respective years in the college. This process of interaction between the department of higher education and the college creates many problems of recruitment because for some years this interaction is purposefully delayed for many years by the department. This has a negative impact on the quality assurance of the colleges as they fail to maintain the teacher student ratio as required by the quality accreditation agency. We also observe that when department undertake the process of determination of staff in the colleges the surplus staff decision is also delayed by the department and issues like over payment is created in the colleges. Here the decision-making in the governing framework needs to be improved to avoid such issues in the higher education institutions. The department of higher education and the university jointly carry out the process of permission and affiliation of the higher education institutions. Government of Maharashtra entirely controls the process of permissions and affiliations of higher education institutions along with the joint control of the department and the university authorities and officers. Here it is pertinent to note that higher education institutions are given permissions and affiliations after completing two steps, first cycle is carried out for obtaining "permission" and second cycle for obtaining "First Time Affiliation". Department of higher education is not involved in the process of yearly continuation of affiliation of institute. The University is totally authorized to grant the continuation of affiliation after following procedure and approval of academic council.

The academic administration and the delivery of educational program are jointly carried out by the

respective university and HEI. The major work of the University is to conduct examination for the students in higher education institution and university. The responsibility to bring reforms in the examination system is with the Board of Examination. The Academic authority of the university together decides by following the hierarchy on the particular content of the course/module, the design of educational program and its curriculum. The Academic functions are delegated to Board of Studies, Faculty, Board of Dean and Academic Council to control, regulate and coordinate the academic matters. The utmost important function of the University is to award Degree to the student and that power is exercised by the Management Council of university as recommended by the academic council and arrange for convocation and conferment. Now if we read jointly the powers and academic functions of the Dean office, the Faculty and the Board of Study, regarding Academic planning, Academic development, Academic policy, Framing of Guidelines, Designing Curricula and developing programme of study for award of Degree, etc, it can be easily conceptualize that the whole autonomy of academic powers and functions are given to the Universities. Therefore the process of interactions and decision making between these academic authorities and sharing this information among the teaching staff become utmost important with regards to the "Teaching, learning and evaluation" process in universities and higher education institutions. This constitutes the core focus of the Academic Management and provides highly coherent instructional system for any university. The UGC in an effort to bring uniform pattern nationwide and among the state funded universities undertook a study of existing curricula particularly with respect to the subject content and its quality offered by different universities. UGC instructed all the universities to implement the curriculum in a time bound manner. The universities in Maharashtra, while adopting the curriculum or in name of autonomy made large variations. The purpose of having unified pattern of academic content and quality however could not be manifested. This is more evident from a decision of Higher and Technical Department dated 18/07/2011 regarding uniform pattern. The Management Council of universities in Maharashtra is authorized to frame statutes and ordinances but need approval from the state for implementation. The decision of approval to such proposals from various universities could not be taken as the nature of all such proposals were different and because of the lawful constraints of uniformity in statute among the universities. This is the main reason behind the uneven distribution of number of subjects and Board

of studies and Faculty among the universities of Maharashtra. There are many reasons of not having uniform pattern among the universities of Maharashtra and India. The qualifications and eligibility of professors are made at par in the country and the academic requirement of students are given equivalence at par in India for entry of any programme of study, but the choice of degree to student, its content and quality at various levels of programme still differ from university to university. Here the role of good Governance is to bring the Authority and Legitimacy to develop coherent, powerful guidelines that are capable of implementing it nationwide.

The higher education institution is bounded by the decisions of the university authority and at the same time to comply the directions from the government and the department of higher education. In the present scenario the directions most urgently required from all the controlling agencies for enhancing the quality and academic environment for supporting the higher education institutions should be on academic matters. The Maharashtra University Act 1994 as per the section 35 established an academic authority namely "Board of College and University Development" responsible to plan development of the university and college, both physical and academic and it shall conduct academic audit of the university departments, institutions, colleges. It shall also plan, monitor, guide and co-ordinate undergraduate and post-graduate academic programme and development of affiliated colleges. The Board of College and University had powers to move the Faculty and Board of Studies. The main aim behind adopting the 1994 Act was to bring Academic uniform pattern throughout Maharashtra. The authority was delegated statutorily for planning, monitoring, guiding colleges for bringing uniformity in undergraduate academic programme. The collective problems were defined for decision-making but the process of academic interactions for building high class higher education institutions was absent due to lack of Governance. Therefore the vital information regarding "Teaching, Learning and Evaluation" was unable to be recorded for initiating the necessary decisions by the Secretariat of Maharashtra. The main object of university and college education is to disseminate knowledge and skills to the youth for empowering. This is accomplished through delivery of academic programme and the main process of doing this is called "Teaching, Learning and Evaluation" process. The colleges complete the delivery of academic programme to the students in three years and then award them degree. The utmost important decision of the Board was to determine the academic

level to be achieved by the student at the end of each year and ways of qualitative student engagements. It was imperative on the part of the authority to specify criteria for evaluation in a way so that the subject expert at the end of teaching and learning process. This would have enabled to analyze the depth of insight gained by the learner and created fair opportunities of learning. Next the collective problem defined is Academic Audit. This is again very important from the perspective of the educational services offered by the universities and the colleges to the students. The educational services can be broaden to increase the student's strength by offering large number of academic programmes to the students. As mentioned above that the universities other than from western Maharashtra were established newly and to start new and state of art academic programme for the students was the academic liability on the academic Authority of universities. The Academic Audit of the newly started academic programme would have enabled the university to attract students from other university jurisdiction.

Implementation of Choice based credit system in Maharashtra: Today Maharashtra Public University Act 2016 has replaced the university Act 1994 from April 2016. The committee members of the act have expressed the necessity of mobilizing our demographic dividend. They want new education system to bring constructive development process which will empower the students of higher education. They wish to transform the present alarming situation of higher education by matching our education system with the international education pattern. University Grant Commission has developed common minimum structure and syllabi for the academic programme. They have formulated a new evaluation system to be replaced with the present system. The present evaluation system obstructs the flexibility for the student who wishes to study the subject course of his choice and interest. They have categorized the courses into three types; core course, Elective course, ability enhancement course. The combination of all the three types of course will constitute the academic programme. This new evaluation system is called "Choice Based Credit System". This system will enable the student to easily migrate to different institutions of his choice and the course of his interest. This is the most interesting part of the new act which promises the student of this era a new higher education pattern which matches the international education pattern. This reform was brought by the university grant commission in the year 2015. The Maharashtra Public University Act 2016, on perusal of sections 5(16),5(76),17(5)(m),33(1)(v), has the provision to prescribe courses of instructions to

implement the policy operative decision regarding the “Choice base credit system”. The Commission has also directed the Secretariat of the State and the Universities to implement the new system. Today, even after the directions of the University Grant Commission, the Secretariat of Maharashtra or the Department of Higher education nor the any authority of universities have directed or guided the higher education institutions regarding the implementation of the system for undergraduate programme that matches the international education pattern.

Conclusion: On considering all the major functions of Governance of Higher education in Maharashtra and our living experience regarding the affectivity of the graduates of Non-Agriculture universities, we can perceive why education system is galloping towards inequality. Governance implies proper exercise of functions and just structures for decision making that support the higher education. The main object of the Maharashtra university act 1994 was to restore uniform pattern among the universities in Maharashtra and the main object of Maharashtra Public University Act 2016 is to bring flexibility according to the interest of choice of the student and mobility of institutions to peruse the course of choice. We can say that it is the demand of the society to restore confidence among the parents and youths and build competency in them by providing the variety courses of choices to every student. The only need of the hour is to restore the democracy to its true meaning. We need to setup proper mechanism of giving feedback and access to information of the education system. This will become possible only if we can expedite the shift from present governance framework to e-Governance system that is by enabling the use of information communication technology in governance

framework for transforming and supporting functions and structures of the system. This will unify the education system with the international education pattern for providing the students in Maharashtra. This pattern will enhance the learning of the student and motivate them to recognize the challenges and dangers and to take step for seeking opportunities globally. This is crucial for formation of human capital to bring the country on the path of economic success.

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