

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The functioning of autonomous colleges

V. Pala Prasada Rao<sup>1</sup> and Digumarti Bhaskara Rao<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jagarlamudi Kuppaswamy Choudary College, Guntur 522006, Andhra Pradesh, India.

<sup>2</sup>RVR College of Education, D-43 (277) S.V.N. Colony, Guntur 522 006, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Accepted 4 January 2012

The college gets separated from the university, though not completely, when it is an autonomous college, which is practice in India. Academic package will become flexible and the decision-making is internalized, changes and updating could be easily carried out, depending on the need as reflected from the feedback taken from alumni, user sectors, among others. Autonomy promotes academic culture unfettered from the shackles of affiliated system. It is, however, baffling to understand the reasons for the aversion for autonomous system as evinced from some quarters of academic circles. Even though many universities directed colleges to go for autonomous system, most of the affiliated colleges have not ventured to embrace autonomy perhaps fearing that it would pose problems of governance. The knowledge has assumed the form of intellectual property and countries imparting high quality education can on their own emerge triumphant and reap the fruits of the new GATT agreement. Indeed, the agreement paved way for the globalization of economy and this likely to lead globalization of higher education. Foreign institutions can thrive when the autonomous institutions lack the vigour and vision. Hence, these institutions should equip themselves to stem in the tide of invasion of foreign universities. It becomes imperative for the autonomous institutions to reflect on the aspects discussed and see for themselves how they can attempt at them by evolving suitable strategies and strive to realize the prescribed targets and avowed objectives of excellence. After the analysis of the findings and discussion, we would, finally, say that the college autonomy as a system is viable and has many advantages. Nevertheless, individuals are an inseparable part of it and, therefore, are the heart of a system. It is upon their shoulders that the success of the system rests. To put it squarely, individuals can either make or mar the system. Like many other good systems, College Autonomy will fail to realize the enshrined objectives if individuals go bankrupt of ideas and are lacking in sincerity of purpose, intellectual dynamism and above all, discipline. If the stakeholders go wrong, then it is not the failure of the system but the collective inadequacy of the individuals. A system prospers or becomes puerile because of the individuals who are the crux of it.

**Key words:** Autonomy, GATT, globalization, Academic package.

## INTRODUCTION

The tertiary education, which follows twelve years of primary and secondary education, is popularly referred to as higher education. A Nation's intellectual dynamism, resourcefulness and economic prosperity rely upon the quality of higher education. In the context of globalization, it is in the full glare of the media and the public. Almost

every week, one comes across articles on it, most of which are highly critical. One of the constant refrains of the articles is how the systemic weaknesses debilitate higher education.

In fact, the present higher education system in India is conceptually a product of the colonial rule. It is clear that the British managed to subvert the system to run an exploitative empire. Naturally, the system is in no way pro-people in the parlance of modern democracy. It is neither generative of employment and empowerment nor conducive to entrepreneurship for business or industry. The crisis in higher education is not, in fact, a constraint of

\*Corresponding author. E-mail:  
[digumartibhaskararao@rediffmail.com](mailto:digumartibhaskararao@rediffmail.com). Tel: +91 949 3333 555,  
+91 99493 99263.

paucity of funds but of anachronistic academic practices. As a system advances, it has to shed its rigidity, increase its adaptability and respond to the emerging trends. Over the years Indian Higher education behaves like a ponderous elephant, which cannot easily change its pace or direction. It defies any change. The affiliating universities, for instance, fail to live up to the expectations of a developing nation in no small measure. Right from the Higher Education Commission (1948 to 1949), all the important commissions like the Education (Kothari), Commission (1964-66), the National Policy on Education (1986), Ramamurthy Committee Report (1990) and the Revised Programme of Action (1992) to list a few but critical ones, were unequivocal to decry affiliating system and suggested that college autonomy is one of the remedies to the evils pestering higher education.

When it comes to an affiliated college, curriculum design, teaching, learning and evaluation are common and are decided by the university. The college has a restricted option of choosing the courses. The affiliated system has been criticized on many counts. To list out a few, it is a legacy of the past, engineered by colonial masters to suit their interests. Barring the three nations in the sub-continent, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, it is not in practice anywhere. However, when a college is granted autonomy it will decide what to and how to teach and evaluate. The college gets separated from the university, though not completely. Academic package will become flexible and the decision-making is internalized, changes and updating could be easily carried out, depending on the need as reflected from the feedback taken from alumni, user sectors, among others. Autonomy promotes academic culture unfettered from the shackles of affiliated system.

It is, however, baffling to understand the reasons for the aversion for autonomous system as evinced from some quarters of academic circles. Even though many universities directed colleges to go for autonomous system, most of the affiliated colleges have not ventured to embrace autonomy perhaps fearing that it would pose problems of governance. However, national assessment and accreditation council (NAAC) has injected a new flow of ideas and enthusiasm into academic fraternity. In a way, it has empowered an accredited college to march ahead and pursue its mission with unflagging zeal. As a result, many colleges have shed their inveterate fear and are willing to opt for autonomy.

It is incumbent on my part to elucidate the reasons for taking up this project. Many colleges are going to switch over to autonomous system and some have many nagging doubts about it. They have misgivings that the UGC scheme of college autonomy is aimed at commercializing higher education, reducing government funding and encouraging only marketable education at the expense of liberal arts and basic sciences. The informed view is that if the government is going to waive aid to autonomous institutions, the possibility of stopping

the aid will also hang over the affiliated colleges like a sword of Damocles. In this context, it may be borne in mind the Human Resource Minister's statement in Lok Sabha who, while dispelling suspicions, clarified that autonomy would enable a college to obtain increased allocation of funds from the UGC for its faculty improvement, functional orientation and overall development. The academicians continue to be sceptical about such a lasting benevolent stand towards funding higher educational institutions. In fact, this is one of the reasons for looking at the college autonomy with an air of suspicion.

Teacher unions are staunch opponents of the scheme. One of us attended a seminar on college autonomy at a college in Guntur, at the end of which all the lecturers with one accord vehemently opposed college autonomy when a proposal was mooted seeking their views. Our experience was no different in another college where the discussion on college autonomy met with a similar fate. All this lends credence that though college autonomy has many feathers in its cap in principle; it suffers from some shortcomings in practice. Furthermore, it can be seen that there is a glaring gap in academic research in the area of functioning of autonomous system. It is in these contexts that I have embarked upon this project to study and unravel various problems and propose some suggestions for the successful functioning of college autonomy.

It goes without saying that college autonomy, as a corrective to the affiliating system, should not degenerate into old wine in an old bottle with a new label. Autonomy for a college implies that the college and its teachers assume responsibility for the academic programmes they provide, for the content and quality of their teaching and for admission and assessment of their students. In order to generate enthusiasm and enlightened awareness and set the scene for college autonomy, workshops and seminars have to be organized to prevail upon the staff and students whose whole-hearted participation is a must for the success of college autonomy. In the same breath, workshops and training programmes need to be organized for the non-teaching staff. Such multi-pronged preparation is indispensable because the institution has to gear up its machinery to perform many of the functions, which the university has hitherto performed. When autonomy is granted, the stakeholders cannot afford to be self-complacent. In order to make it a resounding success, the teaching staff in the main should be keen on updating their pedagogic skills and be collaborative in their academic endeavours. Furthermore, academic audit, constant orientation and periodic overhaul of the system will ensure the successful functioning of college autonomy. When there are glaring loopholes in an affiliating university in terms of syllabi design, conducting examinations and valuation, the public and media are quick to find fault with the system. In a way, they are helpfull in either correcting the erring

individuals or suggesting ways to ameliorate the system. However, such news about an autonomous institution may escape the public or media's attention because it is relatively small. It may peter out without being noticed!

Of the many determinants which pave way for success of autonomous system, collaboratively-structured efforts are of prime importance. The obvious fact is that the inter-personal relationships of the individuals working in an autonomous college are crucial. It is clear that an autonomous system entails collective endeavours, and hence, its success necessitates harmonious inter-personal relationships. Lone individual brilliance, isolated efforts and lack of rapport among the individuals and unhealthy professional rivalry prove to be detrimental and they are bound to tell upon the tenor of the autonomous institution. Herein lays the importance of the principal whose breadth of vision, infallible judgment, unprejudiced assessment of individuals and above all, his qualities of head and heart go a long way in making autonomy a resounding success. It can be rounded off with a touch of certainty that united the system stands, divided it falls.

The onerous task of the project, spanned over a good number of years, has been undertaken to enable the teaching community in particular to have a fair knowledge of many benchmark practices enumerated in the study. It is earnestly hoped that this modest study will cater to the needs of those working in various capacities in autonomous and non-autonomous colleges.

The present study is intended to address the dilemmas and problems being confronted by autonomous colleges at various levels within the institution and outside. However, owing to the constraint of time and meagre resources, the researcher has to confine the study to some specified problems. These had been identified after consulting the academicians of repute and the revised UGC guidelines. Keeping the constraints in mind, a few variables like principals, lecturers and students belonging to various disciplines and colleges have been taken into consideration. A few other variables, the managements of the two colleges, the Dean of College Development Council and the officials of the UGC who are supposed to oversee the functioning of college autonomy, were omitted from the study as they did not return the questionnaires. Two principals, sixty four lecturers and one hundred and thirty students were included in the sample of the study. An open-ended questionnaire was framed for the present study with different statements. Frequencies were used to infer conclusions from the raw data obtained from the principals, the lecturers and the students. Importance is given to solicit pertinent information rather than to stringent research procedures.

## CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The following are the conclusions drawn from the analysis of data. The conclusions follow the discussion

which is aimed at suggesting some remedies to mitigate the major problems of autonomous colleges. These suggestions are inferred from the observations made by the subjects- the principals, the lecturers and the students and various committees and commissions on higher education.

### **The principals, lecturers and most of the students saw the need of starting job-oriented courses**

The principals, lecturers and students have opted for job-oriented and more practical combination of courses which will entail the success both of the students and of the institutions. The ground reality in higher education is that students show some tilt towards those courses which ensures employability and handsome salary packages and many of the traditional courses fail to meet the yardstick. There has been a steep decline in terms of admission and students are not willing to join the streams of sciences, commerce and arts. This has been the trend for long and this precipitates the closure of many sections in the institutions of south India. In consonance with the changing scenario of globalization of education, therefore, the colleges may have to reorient and reshape their policies and programmes to make the instruction more relevant and career-oriented with focus on "quality and excellence" as the UGC has pointed out in its guidelines on college autonomy. It is envisaged that professionally qualified graduates with a sound knowledge of their core subjects and expertise in a skill concerned will have better chances in the sectors of service, industry and other avenues in self-employment. The UGC likes to encourage in introducing career and market-oriented, skill-enhancing courses that will have bright chances of employment and empowerment.

Since autonomous colleges have freedom to design the courses, they are supposed to offer a wide range of career-oriented courses in various related areas. For this purpose, a centre for career-oriented entrepreneurship may be established because it will be a focal point for developing curriculum, resource materials for various programmes and organizing workshops for training the faculty. It also helps in giving support, facilities in training and placement of students. Thus it will assume the responsibility for the implementation and development of employment-oriented courses. Further, students may be facilitated to achieve a minimum level of competencies for moving into the employment market or in self-employment. To realize this objective, some vocational course spanning about one to three years may be integrated with the degree.

Under-graduate students fail to carve out a place for themselves in the world of employment because there is a divorce between general education and vocational education. In this context, it is worthwhile to refer to the Kothari Commission's report which says that there should

not be greater distinction between vocational and general education. The element of vocational education should have some place in general education. National Knowledge Commission (2006) struck the same chord when it says: "The creation of knowledge cannot be directionless. To derive maximum benefits from our intellectual assets, we must apply knowledge in fields like agriculture, industry, health, education, etc., where productivity can be enhanced. Knowledge application is both a goal in itself and a facilitator of progress in these important sectors". This goal can be realized when job-oriented courses are structured into the academic programmes of the autonomous institution. In other words, a judicious combination of vocational and general courses is the panacea to the problem of unemployment which figures prominently when it comes to students pursuing general courses. Such a measure will provide some corrective to the over-academic nature of formal education.

It is a general complaint that students from rural and semi-urban areas are lacking in the soft-skills even though they are quite good at their academics. In order to enhance employability of its wards, the institutions are also supposed to organize bridge courses that impart communication skills and training in personality development. Besides some other important ingredients, these courses include skills for career planning, leadership, assertiveness, interpersonal communications, group communication, comprehension, effective writing, creative writing, decision-making and creative thinking.

### **The post-graduation departments need autonomy**

There is some resentment from some quarters that the university has not given autonomy to post-graduation departments. The academic programmes run by the autonomous colleges may be viewed in totality. If an autonomous college can successfully implement autonomy at U.G. level, it can safely be surmised that the college can competently implement the autonomous scheme at post-graduation level as well. Hence, the university and State Council for Higher Education may not dither in granting autonomy to post-graduation courses too. To qualify for the autonomy at post-graduation level, the colleges may scrupulously follow the UGC rules regarding the qualifications of the faculty, their appointments and pay scales.

### **The principals, the lecturers and the students felt that foolproof system of examination is vital for the success of autonomy**

The foolproof system of examination is very crucial. Since autonomous colleges have to conduct examinations on their own, they should have to be on the alert lest

conducting examinations should become a farce and the credibility of marks would be at stake. Therefore, they should devise ways and means to hold examinations in a foolproof manner. New technologies which would enhance objectivity with little human interference may be used to make the system more reliable and valid.

### **The importance should be given to academic innovations and educational technology**

Even the best of the curricula can be made a dead letter if the teaching is not activity-based. In fact, autonomous college scheme has been viewed as the principal mechanism to ensure enhancement of quality by introducing academic innovations besides weeding out weak and bad colleges which mechanically follow the obsolete traditional courses and practices. It would make a mockery of autonomous system if an autonomous college tinkers its academic programmes and practices merely imitating the programmes of an affiliating university or some other autonomous colleges. This would give a fatal blow to college autonomy. Therefore, innovative practices should be encouraged. The emphasis on teaching should be shifted from verbalism and memorization to learning through purposeful, concrete and realistic situation. For this purpose, the principles of project method should be assimilated in learning situations. A more learner-oriented or enquiry-oriented teaching method should be introduced in the instructional system which enables the learner to engage himself in creative and divergent thinking, problem solving, self-learning and exploring new avenues of communication and productive work.

The importance of audio-visual aids in an autonomous college assumes a great role. The teacher, besides knowing the recent development in his subject, is supposed to keep in touch with the new methods. Even while designing syllabi, the people concerned should bear in mind to suggest the various aids to be used. They accelerate the rate of learning outcome as they have a great appeal. They enable the teacher to teach less and learner to learn more. Hence, education technology may be given its due share to optimize learning process. Focusing on e-learning strategies for diverse needs and learning styles is the need of the hour. The changing pattern of education demands practical-oriented learning. It must be accelerated and broadened by the use of many and varied devices and materials.

The advent of information technology, electronically delivered educational services, real-time television and computer links may prove to make interactive learning possible. The new emerging online Web 2.0 technologies such as web logs, wikis, moodles, folkonomies, m-learning, podcasting, vodcasting, virtual worlds, etc., have become potential educational tools today. Scientific experiments, some of which are expensive, can be

conducted making use of computer-aided technology as these colleges have good computer laboratories. The institutions may make use of simulations, as they are excellent learning tools. The users can negotiate environmental constraints, and witness the effects of changes in variables. The interactive multimedia packages on the internet can simulate complex work experiences through games as critical tools to evaluate the kind of skills that are so often difficult to measure in tests. They underscore the importance of E-teacher.

### **There should be a consortium of autonomous colleges**

It has been found that the colleges in question did not forge any alliance with any other autonomous colleges and this may lead to their virtual academic isolation. In an age of technology and democracy, it is neither desirable nor possible to remain insulated. The institutions should learn to co-operate and collaborate without sacrificing quality. Co-operation and collaboration should lead to mutual enrichment. Hence, the autonomous institutions have to consult some other institution or institutions when a problem crops up. But then, it may be proper to give the exchange some legitimacy that will expedite mutual exchange of information in a smooth and transparent manner. This can be possible when some mechanism is worked out. Hence, there should be networking of autonomous colleges. In fact, the UGC itself has suggested that there should be a consortium of autonomous colleges which will facilitate the exchange of novel ideas, staff, etc. When colleges are passing through initial phases of autonomy, such help would be immensely beneficial.

Autonomous colleges flourish better when they share their experiences and expertise by forming into a consortium. At least colleges under the jurisdiction of a university may organize themselves under one umbrella. Herein lays the crucial role of the university because it can mobilize at least the colleges under its jurisdiction to form a network of autonomous colleges, which have remained so far as islands far flung.

Here, it is pertinent to refer to the Rama Murthy Committee's recommendation that the state governments and the universities should hold regular meetings with the principals of autonomous colleges for co-ordination and resolving issues. Further, such co-ordination facilitates transfer of students from one institution to the other. It is pertinent to observe here that the higher educational institutions are very aggressively active in opening their off-shore campuses and are ready to twin with other institutions in other countries. Very serious competition from foreign institutions looms large on the horizon. One of the ways to tide over the problem is to forge some alliance with the strong institutions and evolve some workable norms to work with them, if possible. Loyola

College, Chennai, for instance, has tackled the challenge by forging tie-ups with universities and renowned organizations to offer educational programmes and to enhance students' employability. In 2006 and 2007 alone it forged MoUs with institutions like London South Bank University, London, Lillie Catholic University, France, (2006) Southerland global services private limited (2007), etc. This calls for qualities like promptitude, intellectual agility and courage and a propensity to take upon challenges.

### **Some lecturers put forward the suggestion that there should be separate orientation courses for lecturers working in autonomous colleges**

Keeping in view of the general academic programmes of the lecturers working in autonomous colleges, academic staff colleges should come forward to orientate lecturers in the new areas because change of syllabi has lately become a very dynamic process. In a sense, monitoring, controlling and improving quality in an educational institution has always been difficult for autonomous colleges. Hence, it is incumbent on the part of academic staff colleges to devise courses for the teachers emphasizing on revised syllabi so that they can handle the classes more effectively. Sometimes a course may be completely restructured. In such a case, failure to orientate the staff may cost dearly. These measures need expertise and special focus. Hence, the autonomous colleges may ponder over entrusting the new responsibility to internal quality assurance cell without waiting for help.

### **The service conditions of the unaided lecturers have to be ameliorated**

It goes without saying the tone and character of life in a country is conditioned largely by the tone and quality of its colleges, which depend primarily upon the quality of teachers. Besides laying stress on their personal traits and educational qualifications, emphasis should also be on their service conditions. A lecturer who is in dire straits may not contribute much to the educational process. Therefore, it is highly imperative that their services should be regularized and salaries be adequately hiked.

Owing to the lackadaisical policies of the state government the number of the unaided lecturers is on the increase. In many of the colleges they have outnumbered aided lecturers. Since the job of an unaided lecturer continues to be temporary, they may leave the college pursuing some lucrative jobs. As a result, college autonomy may get affected because new lecturers take time to grasp the new system and so it is hard to get into the groove. Even these lecturers may go out in search of greener pastures. Hence, there is a need to keep them in

the fold.

It is obligatory on the part of the managements to implement the UGC pay scale if lecturers are qualified as per the norms. It is tantamount to academic apartheid if some enjoy the UGC pay scales and the rest fail to eke out their livelihood. Such an atmosphere is a fertile ground for breeding jealousies and could set off other negative thought processes. The same work and the same pay should be the dictum here. If it is beyond their means the managements may have to see the feasibility of introducing the triple benefit scheme that is, pension-cum-provident fund-cum-insurance as recommended by Indian Education Commission. The UGC and state government may enhance allocation of funds remarkably to those colleges which have implemented such a scheme. No doubt, it is an onerous task entailing financial commitment. The task becomes greater as these aided institutions are service-oriented and may not function like corporate colleges squeezing exorbitant fees from the students. Hence, it is incumbent on the part of the government to vigorously support the aided institutions which are accredited at the A or B levels. Nevertheless, the institutions may initiate measures and strategies to ensure their financial autonomy which has become indispensable in the face of liberalized economic world where the invasion of foreign universities is going to be an awful reality. Institutions which have substantial financial resources and intellectual dynamism to change for the better can only prosper. Devising self-financing courses to raise revenue and putting its infrastructure to optimum use are some of the ways to ensure financial autonomy.

### **The students should not be over-disciplined**

One of the grave charges against internal evaluation, mid-term examinations and other tests is that they are wielded as weapons to discipline students. In order to avoid victimization, the institutions may adopt various strategies like question banks prepared by the external examiners. Even photocopies of the answer papers on some payment may be given to students because transparency increases the reliability of evaluation system. In addition, the grievances appeals committee is geared up to solve the students' grievances with minimal procedural bottlenecks. It is not possible to teach by coercion; the goodwill of the people involved in the system is always essential. It can be ensured by effective teamwork. There should be teamwork between the principal and the staff; lecturers and lecturers; lecturers and students; students and students; and among principal, lecturers and students. Secondly, a suitable programme of co-curricular activities gives the students a sense of social co-operation, makes them self-directing, develops an insight into the boons of order and discipline, heightens the respect for the people in authority thereby

providing fine training in leadership.

True, discipline is the most vital aspect of the college administration; it is the control of behaviour, the subjugation of emotions and action under the direction of a leader in fulfillment of certain aims. Since there has been a considerable reaction against authoritarian discipline, it may be kept in mind that people should be led to discipline themselves. Students should be counselled the value of intrinsic discipline by suitable professionals.

It can be ensured that good traditions, well-planned team-work, unified discipline policy, a suitable programme of co-curricular activities, well-conducted assemblies, personal contact, good college premises, well-furnished library, specialized rooms and a better standard student-supporting services make students profitably busy and keep them away from indiscipline. So discipline emphasized should be of positive and creative type.

The appointment and creative functioning of various joint committees headed by the principal, as the education commission has observed, can generate a spirit of comradeship between teachers and students. It may be kept in mind that autonomy should also percolate to students. Discipline can be maintained if the centre of authority is shifted from the teacher to the entire class. It has been held that democratic type of discipline has a very high educative value because every individual is aware of self-imposed control which is the highest form of discipline. Only academicians of high repute endowed with patience, perseverance and resourcefulness can make it possible.

### **Need-based and job-oriented courses will not lose their value when there is linkage between institution and industry**

It has been held that linkage between industry and institution is of great importance. As long as collegiate education imparts theoretical perspectives and the concept of higher education is reduced only to passing of examinations, the question may not arise. When it comes to the need-based and job-oriented courses, nevertheless, the autonomous colleges may not devise them keeping in mind the local demand. If such is the case, the colleges may go for the courses which have demand in their next immediate environment. Further, there is scope for wider links between the colleges and the world of work in terms of joint research activities, technology transfer, consultancy, sharing of equipment, solving technical problems and development programmes. Continuous relations with the industries can be maintained by inviting their representatives to participate creatively on boards of academic council, executive council and the like. The colleges may be in

touch with some bodies like the science and technology entrepreneurs programme (STEP). In fact, STEP is a good example to show how higher educational institutions could organize the industry-linked programmes.

The aim of a college is to make its students not only knowledgeable but also employable. When the industry is going to introduce modern technology, or make some changes, the college can either add or omit the lessons. Thus providing “wholesome fare” can ensure their employability. When courses are upgraded, restructured and reviewed periodically and when there is no divide between an industry and an institution the relevance of the job-oriented courses will never be lost.

### **Some lectures felt that there should be training for lecturers working in autonomous colleges in syllabus design, curriculum development and testing**

The faculties of autonomous colleges need to spruce up their knowledge continuously because syllabus design is a challenging task calling for pragmatic approach. Ultimately, it is the design of syllabus which bears testimony of the nature and worth of a college. Syllabus should have an international touch about it. In fact, knowledge is getting international with a vengeance. The ripe wisdom of the ancient Greeks was accessed during the renaissance period effected phenomenal changes in the western world bringing material prosperity. The world is dwindling into a tiny place, a global village and hence, there is an urgent need to internationalize the curricula in conformity with the international standards. It is apt to say that international higher education has become a giant industry. Institutions of the developed countries would like to start their academic programmes across the world. The college cannot afford to falter owing to a faulty or out-dated syllabus design. Much discussion should takes place. After keeping abreast of the recent trends and emerging issues, designing relevant syllabus can be possible.

Some lecturers consider the necessity of training programmes encompassing the various needs of autonomous colleges. The areas which need training are syllabus design, teaching methodology, etc. They suggested that among other things, the aforementioned should be taught in refresher courses specially designed for lecturers working in autonomous colleges. The training will not go waste, as it is helpful in designing and restructuring the syllabus and other important things. In addition to them, the UGC may direct state higher educational council and parent University to organize curriculum development programmes for autonomous colleges with suitable resource persons. The colleges may also conduct some seminars or refresher courses at regular intervals bearing in mind the demands of new academic programmes.

If syllabus is designed nonchalantly and testing is conducted in a slipshod manner it would be disastrous to the students. The image of the college ultimately rests on the academic courses being run and programmes being chalked out. So much thought should go into them before finalizing them. It is only with the willing experts of the university departments and others distinguished themselves in their spheres concerned, syllabus can effectively be designed. The restructured syllabus has to be restructured periodically.

### **The principals felt that there was delay of normal assistance by the UGC to autonomous colleges**

Every year the UGC gives normal financial assistance to autonomous colleges to meet their additional and special needs. It has been held that there is an inordinate delay in the release of funds. The delay seems to be unavoidable as the UGC releases the assistance based on the previous year's expenditure incurred by an autonomous college. Since the implementation of some programmes entails huge funds, the commission may see the feasibility of releasing about 75% of the normal assistance of the previous year.

There are no differences between a minority autonomous college and an open-ended autonomous college and among the lecturers and students belonging to various disciplines. The problems being confronted have been spotted the same, and hence no divergence of views among the subjects of the sample.

### **The principals, lecturers and students of the autonomous college held that an autonomous college was better than an affiliated college**

Everyone with one accord agrees that the merits of college autonomy far outweigh those of affiliating system. The reasons for the preference are obvious. Autonomous colleges can creatively experiment and explore the validity of various issues bearing on students' future. Purposeful syllabus designing, continuous internal assessment, changing the academic programmes and bringing in reforms in the whole process of teaching-learning situation in consonance with the changing times are some of the merits of college autonomy.

However, the debatable question is how far the stakeholders in autonomous system strive to realize the ideals of college autonomy. Since they are shouldering all the responsibilities which had long been borne by the university in an apathetic way, they should be active and enterprising in academic pursuits exploiting the optimum utilization of resources available. There must be rapport among the members of staff. If they lack good attributes of head and heart, college autonomy for name's sake does not serve any purpose.

**The workload of the lecturers may be reduced so that they can engage themselves in other academic activities and introduce innovations like projects, surveys and fieldwork and supervise them effectively**

It is noteworthy to see that despite the relative heavy workload the lecturers would not like to back off from college autonomy on that account and this was evidenced from their preference for autonomous system. However, most of the lecturers in the autonomous colleges are grouching about the workload. It is obvious that compared to the lecturers working in an affiliated college, lecturers of an autonomous college have to look after a host of activities besides classroom teaching. These include conducting seminars, correcting the assignments given to the students, conducting the mid semester examinations, continuous evaluation, evaluating the scripts, taking part in various decision making and welfare committees. All these are considered cumbersome and an extra burden. Besides, the summer vacation or other festival vacations have to be drastically narrowed down. Among other reasons, perhaps, the lecturers are not happy because they cannot have leisure for academic pursuits.

The education commission has suggested that conditions of work in educational institutions should be improved so as to enable the teachers to function at the highest level of efficiency. Further, the commission has suggested that non-teaching work, such as co-curricular activities, tutorials, etc., should also be taken into account. The quality and competence of the teachers is appraised more valuable in maintaining high quality education and its contribution to national development. Nothing is more important than providing them with the best possible preparations and creating satisfactory conditions of work. Further, the lecturers in the affiliated colleges shrink back from the autonomous system feeling that they will have to cow down under the burden of work pattern.

Various decisions of the government to woo market forces and World Bank make the institutions shudder at the thought of appointing staff because it entails some financial burden. The burden becomes inevitable, for instance, in the context of the GO. 35 issued by the A.P. government. In a disguised fashion, it puts a virtual ban on filling vacancies. The GO has given a lethal blow to the aided institutions and it is very unlikely that the government will annul it. As Andhra Pradesh has been lauded as a government to initiate reforms right from the former Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, there is every possibility of other states taking its cue. One cannot impose the principles of market economy on every sector inextricably linked to the well-being of people at large. In intermediate education the so-called corporate culture has already set in. It does not let any other institution - government or aided - survive. Paradoxically, it has started devouring even small and relatively gigantic

institutions. There is utter chaos reigning supreme in intermediate education as the state government ruthlessly follows the policy of cutting down expenditure. It is very likely to extend the same policies in the domain of higher education. This kind of bungling of delicate issues has become rampant across the country, more so in Andhra Pradesh. The government's callous treatment becomes more stringent as days pass by as a result of which the managements, the muted spectators, find it difficult to address the problem. These institutions are the result of decades of sustained hard work, intellectual courage and vision of great educationalists and philanthropists. It is ironical to note that while western developed countries are keen on protecting many that come under GATT agreement; our governments do not show such maturity in crucial issues of decision-making. Speaking in the ACTA diamond jubilee celebrations at Bhimavaram, Andhra Pradesh, in July 2007 K.C. Reddy, Chairman of Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education tried to dispel the teachers' doubts when he said that the Council has recommended that aided system be continued as the aided institutions cater to the poorer sections (70% of which include S.C, S.T. and B.C) of society. But there are no visible signs of such measures. If the government follows the same policies, the institutions along with the common man bog down into the mire of problems. Some of the institutions may run on the lines of market economy. But the layman cannot. The government should stop speechifying on the efficacy of the privatization of basic services lest all will incur the wrath of the common man. Live and let live should be the philosophy of any economy.

It is, therefore, reasonable to feel that the government should give freedom for these colleges to fill the vacancies of academic, non-academic and auxiliary nature. It may evolve separate norms of workload for lecturers working in autonomous colleges after taking into account the working pattern of various faculties.

**The autonomous colleges sought more academic, administrative and financial autonomy**

No one can dispute the fact that college autonomy thrives on freedom and self-government. An autonomous institution can charter its way successfully if it is bestowed upon freedom. The UGC and the parent university should, therefore, give autonomous colleges some rope so that they can create congenial atmosphere and academic culture of superior type. There may be, however, some bureaucratic control to ward off certain elements and other narrow-minded people who are clamouring for more autonomy. They may subvert autonomy for their ulterior purposes. Autonomy of this sort will prove to be detrimental to the secular fabric of the country. Nor can autonomy mean the liberty to create financial requirements without making any serious attempts



at raising internal resources. Hence, there should be some bureaucratic control without impinging upon the intrinsic freedom of the institution and without letting the control degenerate into extortionate delay in releasing funds and the consequent autocracy.

Freedom cannot be interpreted as the liberty to follow its ill-conceived plans without any checks and balances. No system can thrive on lack of discipline, which masquerades as autonomy. Efforts should, therefore, be made to find out a golden mean between autonomy and bureaucratic control to ensure the benchmark practices of college autonomy. In this connection, it is pertinent to recollect the recommendations of Education Commission. It says that educated planning should be the right blend of centralization and decentralization. There should be national plans, state plans, and institutional plans and they should fit into each other.

The UGC and the parent university are supposed to see that autonomy should enable a college to enjoy genuine creative freedom to design appropriate academic programmes, teaching strategies and evaluation techniques that are learner-oriented. In the garb of autonomy, the government should not disown its responsibility to withdraw financial support. The rumour has been doing rounds that the Andhra Pradesh government has tacitly come to an understanding with the World Bank to the effect of which it would stop financing the aided institutions in gradual phases. The GO 35 of Andhra Pradesh issued on 27-03-06 corroborates the fact that privatization of higher education is an impending reality. The institutions cannot afford to live in some utopia expecting some benign treatment. The autonomous institutions in particular should swing into action and step up measures that would ensure financial autonomy.

The government is supposed to give a second thought to its plan to withdraw financial support. Such a plan would result in the exorbitant hike in the fee structure. The common man cannot afford the fee. These colleges cater to the needs of economically weaker sections of society. Here it is important to observe that these institutions which are creditably accredited at the "A" level have been performing exceedingly well. The colleges may find it difficult to pool resources to pay salaries to the staff. As a result, the college autonomy may tumble down. It is important to note that autonomy is a joint pursuit involving students, teachers and the management with the active support of the government, parent University and the UGC.

#### **The students felt that a few hours per week should be set apart for library hours**

The Kothari Commission said that the goal of undergraduate education of the first degree is to bring students "to the frontiers of knowledge and threshold of the world of research". It is disheartening to see that the

first-degree colleges do not come up to these standards. As the document challenge of education (1985) points out, a large majority of the "colleges are engaged in mere ritual of teaching." There is little scope for self-study. The students just rely on notes being dictated by their lecturers and guidebooks. No wonder the students lag in communication skills, and have only limited knowledge, information and worldview. Therefore, it is highly imperative to see students visit library or on-line library and to have access to the world of information. Students thus can prepare the notes or material on their own. Here the teachers' role is that of a facilitator making comments, correcting their notes, asking the students to exchange their notes, and monitoring them while they are doing the work. This paradigmatic shift from teacher-centred learning to student-centered learning turns them into autonomous learners.

The autonomous colleges did not implement cafeteria model of choice-based credit system (CBCS). The principals and lecturers did not find fault with it.

The two terms "choice" and "credit" emphasize the interests and aspirations of the learner on the one hand and the demands of the academic system on the other, which the learner has to meet. When a comparison is made between the present system and credit-based curriculum, one can quickly realize where the present system has gone wrong. Here workload is mostly determined on the basis of lecture hours for each course of study. Each lecture is meant to "cover" the syllabus and coaches the learner for an examination. The lecture cannot "challenge" the learner to do the creative work using a student's aptitude and talent. It does not provide for student-work within the schedule. Even written work in the form of assignments, seminar reports, record work, etc., is haphazardly done because the government does not consider it necessary to calculate the workload. When it comes to western countries, the time allotted to lectures is less than that allotted for student work. Furthermore, it is obligatory on the part of autonomous colleges to conform to the UGC Guidelines regarding the implementation of credit system. Nevertheless, while going for credit system, it should be borne in mind that a mere conversion of marks into credits and withholding of student course options do not make a credit system.

#### **Some lecturers and many students felt that the marks/certificates obtained in the autonomous colleges did not carry much weight outside**

An autonomous college worth its salt cannot afford to ignore this sort of criticism. If such is the problem, it should devise ways and means to make its certificates worthy. After ascertaining the veracity of such remarks, measures should be taken to overhaul the internal assessment in particular and the whole system in general with a committee of experts. While working out the modalities of courses, the members of the board of studies are

supposed to bear in mind the local needs and global standards. They should make higher education globally relevant. The yardstick of comparability will be of immense value here. UK's Dearing Committee Report holds that the education offered in any part of the globe ought to be so sound and quality oriented that it is relevant in any other part of the globe. This observation has more relevance in the globalized world.

Hence, the institutions cannot be complacent by showing a high student pass rate. The changing context demands institutions of a new order - dynamic, vibrant, quality-conscious. Then only they can assure the quality of their output. An excellent syllabus may be framed - good students, good library facilities, and proper management of the examination system - but all are in vain if motivated teachers are not around. In an autonomous college much depends on the teachers who are in charge of imparting education to the students. The teachers can easily slip into self-complacency when they lack academic dynamism. They should try to be on par with university teachers in terms of qualifications, achievements and expertise.

An autonomous college as an organization is a sea where people with different backgrounds, skill-sets, academic qualifications and personalities come together. Success cannot be ensured when the individuals work in isolation. This will result in academic inertia. With remarkable perspicacity, therefore, the different individuals should be engaged in the learning process which is a collective endeavour. A successful organization is the one which recognizes the diversity and utilizes it to the optimum level.

### **The co-curricular activities should be given more importance**

Co-curricular activities, it has been held, have not been given their due share in the colleges where generally utmost importance is given to "covering syllabus." The activities are of great magnitude as they cover all facets of development-pattern and ensure harmonious development. Hence, co-curricular activities should be conceived as part and parcel of the curricula. There is no gainsaying the fact that the pursuit of desirable, different interests gives zest for life, broadens one's horizons, supplements and enriches classroom experiences and provides an excellent background for the profitable use of leisure. Not infrequently, such pursuit affects vocational choices besides promoting good physical and mental health. So a variety of wholesome co-curricular activities may be organized and promoted on the college campus.

### **Lecturers belonging to the autonomous colleges felt that students with the aid of lecturers should undertake research projects**

Research should have its due share in the academic

programmes of the college. When its wards pursue higher education strenuously, new ideas germinate which find fertile soil in research. Though research activity may be beyond the capacity of undergraduate students, it is neither impractical nor impossible provided proper training and encouragement are given. In fact, undergraduate students should have a foretaste of research as the Kothari Commission has remarked. At least those students who are keen and have an aptitude for research may be identified so that they can be encouraged to take up some project work. It will be beneficial to both the lecturers and the students as it hones their skills and helps them identify their area of interest at later stage. Above all, a college can carve a niche for itself when it really contributes something to knowledge. Such contribution may be made when its students undertake research with all vigour and verve. It is apt to add here that Loyola College, Chennai, though it is a teaching college, has consistently enhanced its research profile by receiving awards and funding to initiate researches in different departments. Their researches contribute enormously to an effective teaching. It is not out of place to state that they are 17 ongoing projects, the money amounting to Rs. 1,92,59,755/-. This corroborates the need to cultivate an aptitude for research not only by students but by lecturers as well.

College autonomy will be a roaring success when the institutions march ahead with sincerity of purpose to serve the economically backward sections of society. An autonomous institution can make its mark when it offers various scholarships and concessions to bright students to the tune of 50 to 75% depending on their financial viability of its resources. Top rankers may be accommodated under the scholarship scheme and more such schemes can be initiated with the support of new endowments, parent teacher associations, and alumni associations. Such supporting services, and the special schemes like "earn while you learn" are the need of the hour. In the face of inexorable forces of liberalization and globalization, these autonomous colleges of repute at least, to some extent, may shoulder some social responsibility.

To conclude, knowledge has assumed the form of intellectual property and countries imparting high quality education can on their own emerge triumphant and reap the fruits of the new GATT agreement. Indeed, the agreement paved way for the globalization of economy and this likely to lead globalization of higher education. Foreign institutions can thrive when the autonomous institutions lack the vigour and vision. Hence, these institutions should equip themselves to stem in the tide of invasion of foreign universities. It becomes imperative for the autonomous institutions to reflect on the aspects discussed and see for themselves how they can attempt at them by evolving suitable strategies and strive to realize the prescribed targets and avowed objectives of

excellence.

After the analysis of the findings and discussion, we would, finally, say that the college autonomy as a system is viable and has many advantages. Nevertheless, individuals are an inseparable part of it and, therefore, are the heart of a system. It is upon their shoulders that the success of the system rests. To put it squarely, individuals can either make or mar the system. Like many other good systems, college autonomy will fail to realize the enshrined objectives if individuals go bankrupt of ideas and are lacking in sincerity of purpose, intellectual dynamism and above all, discipline. If the stakeholders go wrong, then it is not the failure of the system but the collective inadequacy of the individuals. A system prospers or becomes puerile because of the individuals who are the crux of it.

### Suggestions for further research

Research is a continuous process. Some other relevant areas strike the researcher during the work. In light of the results of the present study, the following research studies may be taken up.

- 1) The sample selected for the present study is not wide enough in its scope. It is, therefore, recommended to take up a detailed study taking a wider sample.
- 2) An investigation may be undertaken to study the roles of other variables like chairpersons of various committees in autonomous colleges.
- 3) Studies may be taken up to identify the role of the U.G.C, State Council of Higher Education, and University in the functioning of college autonomy.
- 4) A comparative study may also be taken between the problems of autonomous colleges of one university with those of others.
- 5) A study confined to the problems of a particular area of college autonomy may yield better results.
- 6) An exclusive study on the functioning of important committees in the main may be undertaken since they have great bearing on the tenor of the college.
- 7) In order to find out the actual progress and strides made in terms of academic innovations, a separate study may be done on the college autonomy being practiced and the affiliating system that was practiced.
- 8) A study may be done in a comprehensive manner, the autonomous practices of our country and those of others in another country or countries.

### REFERENCES

Altbach PGA (2005). Critique of Higher Education. Hindu: Hyderabad, 12 April, 2005. Amrik Singh. "No More Babysitting, Please", Tribune, 1 Jan. 2005.

- Basu AN (1957). Education in Modern India. Calcutta: Orient Book Co.,  
Boyles, Earnest E. (1966), Pragmatism in Education. New York: Harper Collins.
- Bhaskara RD (1996). National Policy on Education, 2 Vols. New Delhi: Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd.
- Bhaskara RD (1997). Education for the 21st Century. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House.
- Best JW (1992). Research in Education, 8ed. New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India Pvt. Ltd.
- Brubacher JS (1961). Modern Philosophies of Education. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hill Inc.
- Cobban AB (1975). The Medieval Universities: Their Development and Organization. London: Methuen.
- Deshmukh KG (1998). "Universities and Higher Education in the 21st Century", University News, Vol.36 No.28.
- Geoffrey (1996). "Audit, Assessment and Academic Autonomy", Higher Education Quarterly. Government of India. Report of the Education Commission (1964-66), New Delhi: Government Printing Press. <http://www.sssindia.org>. View Point Six (A Joint Publication of Centre for Civil Society and Kerala Higher Education Forum). <http://www.ugc.ac.in/financial> Revised Guidelines on the Scheme of Autonomous Colleges (1998) UGC, New Delhi.
- John VV (1976). Freedom to learn: The Challenges of Autonomous Colleges, Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
- Kamala B (1992). Philosophical & Sociological Foundations of Education. Tenth impression. Delhi: Doaba House.
- Kilpatrick WH (1963). Philosophy of Education. New York: Macmillan.
- Kundai SVC (2005). "Reconstruction of Higher Education". Hindu 18 May, 2005.
- Kundu CL, Gupta LC (1993). Autonomous Colleges: Concept and Implementation. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
- Lavakare PJ, Gulati SK (1995). "Exporting Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges", J. Higher Educ., 18.
- Mir Ayoob Alikhan, Rural Students Take Over OU. Deccan Chronicle. Hyderabad, 23, Jan. 2006.
- Neelamegham S (2000). Professional Competency in Higher Education. Delhi. University of Delhi.
- Olivia M (2001). "Quality Enhancement Initiatives in Higher Education". University News, XXXIX, September, 2001.
- Ottoway AKC (1969). Education and Society. London: Routledge & Kegan-Paul.
- Pala Prasada Rao, V. "The Learning Outcome of Weblogs – Some Issues." A Paper presented at International Conference on New and Emerging Technologies in ELT at Loyola College, Chennai, 3-5 August, 2007.
- Power KB (1995). "Higher education in India: Historical Perspective, Present, Status and Outlook for the Future", University News, 33: 6.
- Ramachandra RR (2006). The Crisis in Higher Education. Hindu. Vijayawada, 11, August, 2006.
- Raza M (1991). Higher Education in India. New Delhi: Association of Indian Universities.
- Russell B (1928). Education and the Good Life. New York: Boni and Leverright.
- Saiyidain KG (1969). The Humanist Tradition in Educational Thought. Madison: Denbar.
- Schultze TW (1967). The Economic Value of Education. New York: Harper & Row.
- Seabury P (1981). Bureaucrats and Brain Power: Government regulation of University", Amer. J. Educ., 89: 2. Singh, Avadesh Kumar. "Contextualizing Higher Education in India". University News, XXXXL, August, 2007.
- Sharma MSK (1998). Fundamentals of Educational Research. Meerut : International Publishing House. Sudha Rao, K. "College Autonomy Facts and Impacts": Orientation Programme Reading Material. Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia, 2001.
- Terry M (1971). Teaching for Survival. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Xavier Alphonse. "The Agony and Ecstasy of College Autonomy". Chennai: New Frontiers of Education XXXVIII No.1, January-March, 2003.