

AUTONOMY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF INDIA: TRACING THE ROOTS IN HISTORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

Gulshan Bassan*

Abstract

The modern system of higher education in India and its governance has evolved through a long historical process. Taxila, Nalanda, Vikramshila and Vallabi were the most important seats of higher learning in India. The establishment of three public universities in 1857 in presidencies of Chennai, Kolkata and Bombay marked the evolution of governance of higher education. In pre-independence India, higher education used to be governed by the British government and were never treated as mature autonomous institutions. But after independence, it was realized that university autonomy along with the institutional accountability is the prerequisite for intellectual progress and institutional development. Thus, post-independence many commissions and committees were established in higher education domain specifically from time to time to consider the demand for autonomy

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* Research Scholar, Department of Public Policy and Public Administration, Central University of Jammu, J&k.

and accountability of higher education institutions and recommend the necessary and desirable changes in the constitution, control and functioning of the higher education institutions in India. The present paper will try to trace the roots of autonomy and accountability as reflected in various Acts, commissions and committees, National Policy on Education 1968 and 1986 in post independent India.

Introduction

Higher Education Institutions are the places which provide opportunities and space for creativity, innovation of new knowledge and free thinking and advancement. Therefore, freedom become vital for the overall development of knowledge as well as the institution. But this freedom many a time is questioned by the government and the civil society for accountability of the institution and actors involved in the governance of the institution. Public higher education institutions are mainly funded from the public taxes; thus, it becomes the responsibility of the institution to make themselves accountable and make public whatever decisions they have taken and implemented in the larger interest of the public. When higher education institutions demand institutional autonomy from the government it becomes the responsibility of the government to reassure the taxpayers that these institutions are made accountable. As both autonomy and accountability of higher education go hand in hand, it is imperative to find an appropriate balance between accountability and autonomy (Etomaru, Ujeyo, Luhmya and Kimoga, 2016). There is a general agreement that higher education institutions need freedom from political intervention, overregulation and under governance that undermine their potential in performing the basic functions of teaching, research and invention of new knowledge. But at the same time these institutions need to be accountable for their decisions and actions to the government, society and the institution itself.

Objective

Objectives of the paper are:

1. To explore the concept of autonomy and accountability of higher education institutions.
2. To trace the roots of autonomy and accountability of higher education institutions in independent India.
3. To contribute in the literature of concerned field.

Methodology

The study is exploratory in nature and follows an analytical and descriptive research design. In order to trace the roots of autonomy and accountability document analysis method has been adopted review the various higher education policies, commission and committees established in higher education domain from time to time. Document Analysis is a method which entails finding, appraising (making sense of), selecting and synthesizing data contained in documents. Document analysis yields data excerpts, quotations or entire passages which are structured into major themes, categories and case examples specifically through content analysis. The study has taken recourse of primary and secondary resources for achieving the objectives. Secondary data has been collected from various sources like books, journals, newspaper etc. Primary include reports of the various commissions and committees appointed by government in the domain of higher education governance, National Education Policies and acts of government of India in higher education domain.

Limitation of the Study

The study has confined itself to the autonomy and accountability of public higher education institutions. The committees and commission established in the domain of professional higher education institutions like technical, management, agriculture, medical and technological has not been made the part of the study. Only those reports have been analyzed which deals with the general education institutions. At many places word University has been used interchangeably with higher education institutions in general sense.

Meaning of Autonomy

The term autonomy has been adopted from the Greek words “auto” means self and nomos means “custom” or “law”. Thus, autonomy means self-governance, self-legislation and self-direction based on the capacity of the rational individual to make a rational and unforced decision. Autonomy basically is about a individual’s or group’s, organization’s or institution’s ability to act on his or her own values and interests.

The concept of autonomy has been central to the, Liberal, democratic and humanist thought. Political philosopher Immanuel Kant defines autonomy as the foundation of human dignity and only an autonomous person is able to act according to his or her own will which are prerequisite for rational human action (Finch, n.d). Similarly, an autonomous institution is one which is capable of regulating and managing its own affairs and take its own decisions.

Institutional Autonomy

The institutional autonomy is related with conferring freedom and power to the people involved in decision making, executing and implementing them. Institutional autonomy is required to develop strategy, fully exercise and practice academic freedom self-government and self-direction with regard to internal activities (CEPES, 1992; Fielden 2008 as cited in Etomaro, Ujeyo et al., 2016. p. 2). This also implies freedom from intervention by either the state or any other external agencies in the internal matters of the university, its governance, financial arrangement, the generation of income for its sustainability, recruitment of its staff, admission of students and the freedom to conduct teaching, research and publications (Nokkala&Bacevic, 2014 as cited in Ibid).

Supportive governance structure is a hall mark of successful governance of universities. This can be possible only when universities have autonomy to take decisions of academic and non-academic matters and implement them without any external intervention. Study of the governance structure of the higher education shows that there is no country in the world that can move significantly forward without guaranteeing autonomy to its institution. An autonomous university in principle can only, enacts its own constitution, define its goals and mission and control its finance and recruitment.

Nevertheless, a distinction should be made between the academic autonomy and institutional autonomy. Academic autonomy is related with the freedom an individual academician enjoys in the conduct of his/her teaching or scholarly activities without fear and pressure from the external agency. Thus, it is the freedom to decide what to propose in teaching, techniques of instruction and students' evaluation, pedagogy, research and publications. Whereas, institutional autonomy is the autonomy of the entire university. This institutional autonomy includes in itself the academic autonomy. Along with it there are two more dimensions of autonomy. These are administrative and financial autonomy.

The Administrative autonomy is the freedom of institution to manage the administrative affairs without any external intervention and pressure. It concerns with the freedom of the administrators to manage the affairs of the university in such a way that it stimulates and encourages initiative and development of individuals working and studying in the institutions.

The Financial autonomy is the freedom of the institution to utilize the financial resources at its disposal sensibly and raising the funds from different sources while keeping in view the priorities of the institution.

Institutional autonomy, on the other hand is based upon the argument that the institutions can perform their functions properly only when they have freedom to make decisions and take action. The issue of autonomy gained importance because in the wake of the increase in the number of students, the establishment of large number of higher education institutions, increased diversity in terms of courses, providers of the education and mode of delivery of the education it was getting more harder to govern the system with the centralized powers and continuous intervention from the government and dictates of the regulatory agencies. Without autonomy, higher education institutions cannot contribute fully to achieve the governments' objectives of attaining competitive advantage in the global knowledge economy (Purcell, 2008 as cited in Ibid). However, institutional autonomy should not be considered as absence of external control but rather an instrument of empowering the institution in a responsible way. Thus, it requires finding an appropriate balance between autonomy and accountability.

Meaning of Accountability

Webster's dictionary defines "accountability" as the quality or state of being accountable; an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility for one's own actions. The Macquarie Dictionary (1985) describes it as a concept in which there is liability or responsibility to a person, for an act. The literal meaning of accountability for Day and Klein(1987: Ch1 as cited in Wise, 2010), is for relevant persons to give an explanation what they do, to those to whom they are responsible and whose authority empowers them or gives them the right to demand such explanation. It means that accountability is essentially an informing function which raises the question of who is accountable to whom, for what they are accountable, what are the means and processes for obtaining their accounts and what are the results or outcomes, including sanctions of all this (Mosher,1979: p 236, as cited in Ibid). This means that the concept of accountability involves the two distinct things: *answerability* and *enforcement*. Answerability means obligation of the government, its agencies and the public officials to give the information about their decisions and actions taken and to justify them to the public and their respective organizations and institutions. On the other hand, enforcement means that the public or the institution who seeks accountability can impose penalty on the offending party or remedy contravening behavior. Accountability is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of the public officials or bodies. It ensures that they are performing to their full potential, providing value for their taxed money and instills confidence in the people for their government. It also ensures that the predetermined objectives are being achieved timely and by following the prescribed procedure and thereby contributes to better governance.

Accountability in Education

Accountability in higher education has become a significant issue over the past 2 decades, galvanized by rising cost of education, disappointed retention and graduation rates, unemployability of the graduates at the workplace because they lack expected skills and the question about the learning and value that higher education provides to students (Leveille, 2001). Governments, Parliaments and public are increasingly asking university to justify their use of public resources and account more thoroughly for their teaching and research results. Academic frauds, accreditation scams, and misuse of resources plague the tertiary education system of many developing and transition countries, where corruption is endemic (Salmi, 2009). The term

accountability raises some difficult questions like who is responsible to whom, for what purpose for whose benefit. The pronouns who, whom, and whose represents the agents, principal and the beneficiary respectively. In higher education, coordinating or governing bodies are the agents, power delegating authority is principal and the beneficiaries are ultimately, general public and, more immediately, students, businesses, governments, and social and civic organizations (Burke, n.d).

Autonomy and Accountability in Indian Higher Education:

India, after independence established committees and commission to bring reforms in higher education at different points of time. The reports of these commission and committees became the basis for policy formulation in general and reform in the higher education system in particular.

The modern system of higher education was started in the colonial era. They set the foundation of the centralized governance of higher education. J.N. Koul (1988) writes that the Indian universities were never treated by the British Government as the mature autonomous corporations. In 1857, when for the first three universities were founded, the government retained the control on the composition of the senate which degenerated into assemblies of lawyers, officials and laymen who were rewarded with membership for loyal service to the crown. He further writes that government secured more space for itself in the university governance through the Act of 1904. Government kept the power of nominating the members for internal governance to the Governor General. In 1913, the Government pleaded for the intervention from time to time. The government wrote “under the present conditions and for many years to come, these universities simply cannot stand alone. We do not hesitate to say that if effective powers of the assistance and intervention are not secured for the Governor General in Council, we shall regard it lesser of two evils that the movement should collapse, notwithstanding the grave disappointment and irritation which might ensue” (Koul, 1988). The situation did not change even after decades. The senate and syndicate got politicized; appointments were started influencing on the political and communal considerations.

The first **University Education Commission** was appointed immediately after independence in 1948 to consider and recommend the necessary and desirable changes in the constitution, control and functioning of the universities in India. This Commission identified that the higher education is undoubtedly an obligation of the State but aid given by the State should not be confused with State control over academic policies and practices. It recognized the maintenance of spirit of free enquiry as the pre-requisite for intellectual progress. By advocating the academic freedom, it opined that teachers should be as free to speak on controversial issues like any other citizens of a free country. An atmosphere of freedom is very much essential for developing this 'morality of the mind. While advocating autonomy it further stated that it does not matter how sound the underlying principles are, the development of techniques will take time. The Commission stated that each institution should be autonomous and should have freedom to work out its own programme in its own way. In order to achieve the goals of the education the commission pleaded "Our universities should be released from the control of politics". The commission clearly resisted the unnecessary bureaucratic control and confines it to necessary limits. It stated that advisory, educational and supervisory services can be provided by the government. (Radha krishnan commission, 1962, p. 176). For treating the evils (related to autonomy) of the university, the commission envisaged that right public policy can only be made by giving university the best possible constitution, by wisely choosing the external members of its governing body and then it should be left free from interference (Ibid., p. 405).

While favoring the financial autonomy of the institution, it opined that funds provided by the Central Government should be allocated by keeping in view the needs and merit of each university. It identified that the universities all over the country are under financed and thus inefficient for completing their task. It said "More buildings, more staff, better-paid staff, more scholarships, more facilities for research, more books, more equipment all these are clamant needs" (Ibid., p.354).

In administrative domain, the commission identified that administration of the Indian Universities is unsatisfactory. It found that even in the purely academic matters such as the appointment of examiners and the awarding of degrees their procedure and standards are suspect and such state of things is immeasurably damaging the national prestige (Ibid., p.356). It

recommended that government should concern itself with improving the administrative conditions of the institutions.

Although, the report of the commission was very comprehensive but did not give much stress on accountability. Despite of devoting a full chapter on “Constitution and Control”, it did not concern itself with accountability in any way. The term did not get explicit and implicit mention in the whole document.

As recommended by the University Education Commission, **University Grants Commission (UGC) Act** was passed in 1956. The act remained silent on the issue of autonomy but implicitly tried to establish accountability by making certain provision in the act especially with regard to finance. The act made provision for the central government to make rules to carry out the purpose of act. It asked for making provisions to furnish information from the universities with regard to financial position, standards of teaching and examination maintained therein.

The **Committee for Model Act for Universities** was appointed by the Ministry of Education under the chairmanship of Dr. D.S. Kothari in 1961. It evaluated the organizational structures and gave recommendations regarding the governance of universities. It recommended that for the right development of universities, autonomy of the universities from the external control is very much important. It asked for seeking the participation of the academic communities in the implementation of university programmes. It further recommended that universities should have the authority of appointing teachers and other employees of the university on the recommendation of selection committee.

Next, in the line **Education Commission**, was appointed by the Government of India in 1964 to advise on the national pattern of education and for constructing general principles and policies for the development of education at all stages and in all aspects. The commission while analyzing the issues and implications of the autonomy of the University lost its way in jungle of time-worn clichés and homilies (Koul, 1988). At one place the commission reported that the universities should be governed by commitment to the truth which must be there in all members and there should be some who are completely dominated by it and find in it their real fulfillment

(Education Commission, 1964, p. 326). It seems like there will be others who are comparatively need not be dominated. This ‘other’ probably constitutes the majority. The commission was well aware of the attacks on the autonomy and cited some examples. It began with the distinction between university autonomy and academic freedom.

While favoring the autonomy of the academicians it stated “A teacher should be free to pursue and publish his studies and research; and speak and write about and participate in debates on significant national and international issues. He should receive all facilities and encouragement in his work, teaching, and research, even when his views and approach be in opposition to those of his seniors and the head of his department or faculty” (Ibid). While defining the proper sphere of the university autonomy it identified that there are three principal fields in which university autonomy lies. These are:

1. the selection of students;
2. the appointment and promotion of teachers;
3. the determination of courses of study, methods of teaching, and. The selection of areas and problem of research,

With regard to academic autonomy it said “only an autonomous institution, free from regimentation of ideas and pressure of party politics, can pursue truth fearlessly and build up, in its teachers and students, habits of free thinking and a spirit of enquiry unfettered by the limitations and prejudices of the near and the immediate which is so essential for the development of a free society” (Ibid). The Commission while considering the question of university autonomy recognized that university autonomy works at three levels:

- (1) autonomy within a university, *e.g.*, autonomy of the departments, colleges, teachers and students in relation to the university as a Whole;
- (2) autonomy of a university in relation to the university system as a whole, *e.g.*, the autonomy of one university in relation to another, or in relation to the UGC and the Inter-University Board (IUB); and
- (3) autonomy of the university system as a whole, including the UGC and the IUB, in relation to agencies and influences emanating outside that system, the most important of which are the Central and the State Governments.

The commission gave very little importance to the administrative autonomy and reduced it to the service of the academics. This is clear from its statement “It is necessary to ensure that universities do not become administration or administrator dominated and to keep vigilant in this regard. The dominance, if one is to use that word at all, must be of the academic element, and the principal function of the administration is to serve the academic interests of the university” (Ibid., p.327)

With regard to the financial autonomy, the Commission said that UGC has been established to provide the necessary financial resources to the universities without governmental control or interference. The Commission recognized that the state universities which are dependent on the State funds often feel the lack of freedom. To overcome with this situation, it recommended that State should deal with the universities with understanding and imagination and place adequate financial resources at their disposal. The Commission was clear that “University autonomy cannot become real and effective unless adequate provision is made to meet the financial requirement of universities and colleges” (Ibid., p.330)

On the question of accountability, the Commission did not use the word “accountability” but was clear on stating

As in the case of liberty, the price of autonomy is eternal vigilance by all parties concerned. The universities are established by law and they can have only as much autonomy as the law permits. In the last analysis, therefore, the real custodian of university autonomy is public opinion based on a conviction that autonomous universities, which maintain intellectual integrity in their fearless pursuit of truth, are an indispensable bulwark of democracy and freedom. In creating a strong public opinion in this behalf, the UGC, the IUB and the intelligentsia, who are themselves mostly the alumni of the universities, have an important role to play (Ibid).

This statement shows that accountability is the necessary element if the universities want to enjoy autonomy continuously. It stated that universities should realize that it would be foolish to think that effective autonomy could descend as a gift from the above; it has to be regularly earned and deserved. The Commission further stated

The universities derive their right to autonomy from their dedication to the pursuit and service of truth. Their capacity to resist any illegitimate claims on their autonomy, therefore, will be proportional to their effective performance of this duty and their willing acknowledgement of the legitimate claims on them of the nonacademic authorities. Moreover, as they discharge their intellectual and public obligations effectively and with integrity and contribute to the economic and social progress of the country, they will earn the esteem of society and government and the chances of their being confronted with illegitimate claims and pressures from outside will be diminished (Ibid).

The Commission raised the question of financial accountability, but failed to provide answer to it. The Commission stated “A question of considerable importance is the accountability of universities to the legislature as regards proper utilization of public funds made available to them” (Ibid., p. 333) This practice of presenting audit reports of the universities was taken as the infringement of the university autonomy by the Public Accounts Committee of the Parliament in its 42 report. Thus, in a solution to this complex matter the commission stated that it is still under consideration of the government and the Public Accounts Committee and it will be relevant to produce the observation made by the Committee on Higher Education in United Kingdom in this matter (Ibid., p. 334).

On the basis of recommendations of the Education Commission, **National Policy on Education, 1968** came into existence. This was the smallest policy document comprising of 8 pages and thus did not talked explicitly on the issue of autonomy and accountability. But implicitly it made a mention of academic freedom of teachers to pursue and publish independent studies. It also mentioned that the academic freedom of teachers to speak and write about significant national and international issues should be protected (NPE 1968, P.2). Although 12th Principle (of 17 principle) is related to exclusively University Education it touched neither autonomy nor accountability.

In order to review the prevailing governing conditions of the universities and colleges, Government of India appointed a *Committee on the Governance of Universities and Colleges* under the chairmanship of Dr. P.B. Gajendragadkar in 1971. On the question autonomy the

Committee said that university autonomy has often been misunderstood. While defining the concept of autonomy the committee opined that this concept is neither legal nor constitutional but an ethical and academic concept. It further stated that university autonomy does not advise that universities are a state within State and a law unto themselves. The Committee stated “the claim for autonomy is made by the universities not as a matter of privilege, but on the ground that such an autonomy is a condition precedent if the universities are to discharge their duties and obligations effectively and efficiently as regard to imparting and advancement of knowledge and also making their unique contribution to the life and development of the nation”. (p.10).

On the issue of accountability, the commission maintained its silence and did not use the word as such. The Committee stated that the goal of the university education has dual nature; first is the pursuit of knowledge and attainment of excellence in different disciplines and secondly, the development of sense of ethos which makes the university community conscious of its obligations to the community at large of which it is an important segment. This element of obligation is meant to fix the accountability of the University for its Assigned Task.

The Government of India in 1986 came out with another comprehensive *National Policy on Education 1986* that covered all stages of education including higher education. The policy was revised slightly in 1992 and a revised Programme of Action (POA) was adopted by the parliament. In the section dealing with higher education, the policy referred autonomy of the teaching and research, autonomy of the colleges and departments. “It (university system) should have the freedom and responsibility to innovate in teaching and research. The emphasis on autonomy of colleges and departments, provision of means to interact across boundaries of institutions and funding agencies, better infrastructure, more rationalized funding for research, integration of teaching, search and evaluation, all these reflect this major concern” (NPE, 1986 with PAO, 1992, p.43) The policy did not make justice for the recommendations of the previous committees and commission with regard to autonomy and accountability. In the section dealing with *Management of Education* devoted a small paragraph on autonomy and accountability but failed to make it clear that how autonomy should be promoted and how accountability should be established. It will be clear from the following statement given in the policy document.

Decentralisation, as far as education at higher levels, namely at under-graduate/postgraduate or at the level of polytechnics, technical colleges etc. is concerned, would be required essentially to allow the exercise of initiatives and making of innovations by teachers, students and management with a view to enhancing the relevance and improving the quality of education. In order to make the system work effectively, it will be essential not only to distinguish carefully between roles and responsibilities, but also to define for each of the functions performed, the section or group towards which various authorities will be accountable. In addition, to perform the functions for which accountability has been defined, operational autonomy and the requisite authority and powers for the management of institutions will have to be matched with each other. Rigorous systems of performance audit against practical and objective performance will have to be laid down and enforced through incentives and disincentives.

This statement implies that NPE, 1986 strongly argued that government should take stringent steps to ensure accountability. The NEP and its POA both in 1986 and 1992 dwelt on the mechanism for the coordinated development of higher education at both the state levels and national levels that are capable of holding the sociopolitical and commercial pressure at bay (Mathew, 2015).

Gnanam Committee: Towards New Educational Management was appointed in 1987 and it submitted report in 1990. The committee submitted a comprehensive report on the various issues related to university management. The report emphasized on the establishing sound scientific framework for governance of universities which will make them efficient, result-oriented and averse to politicization. The Committee rightly observed that the management of the universities is different from that of other organizations and hence should be based on the principles of participation, decentralization, autonomy and accountability. Thus, the recommended that in order to avoid political intervention in the appointments of the executive officers, the Committee recommended that appointment of officers like Registrar, Finance Officer & others should be vested with the University and not with the Chancellor/State Government (Ibid., p.17). The Committee while mentioning about accountability stated that everybody in the university community should realize that autonomy and academic freedom does not free them from being accountable. It recommended that accountability should be maintained at all levels.

Accountability of the teachers through the Heads of the Departments/ Deans/ Directors should be to the Vice-Chancellor and various university bodies. The university through the Vice-Chancellor should be accountable to the society (Ibid., p. 8). It recommended for evolving an operational scheme of enforcing the accountability of the teachers and non-teachers. It further envisaged for establishing the system of performance appraisal at all levels and it should be based on the quantifiable norms. It also asked for performance evaluation at least after three years by autonomous bodies comprising of experts. For establishing accountability, it recommended that 'Performance audit' must be instituted within institutions to apprise them of short-comings and possibilities for improvement (Ibid., p.10).

The report talked at length on the governance and management of (university) Higher Education. It gave due weightage to both autonomy and accountability. It can be criticized on one ground that at one place it gave university the power of affiliating to the colleges at the second place it asked for the prior approval of State Governments before doing so.

Ramamurti Committee was appointed in 1990 to review the National Policy on Education, 1986. In the section devoted to higher education, the Committee mentioned certain differences in perception with regard to this perspective. The committee observed that the grant of autonomy is nothing but decentralization of power and it will not completely materialize, until the entire academic community participates in the process. The Committee noticed that envisages of the POA for establishment of autonomous colleges did not get materialize because the programme came under the criticism from the teachers regarding increased work load, arbitrariness on the part of management, likely lack of recognition to the products of these colleges

Thus, the **Ramamurti Committee** did not give new recommendations with regard to autonomy and accountability. The *Government of India* appointed a **CABE Committee** to examine the report of the UGC Committee on '*Alternate Models of Management*' under the chairmanship of Prof. A. Gnanam and to recommend the modalities for implementation of the its recommendations. The Committee which submitted its report in 1992 made wide and detailed discussion on each and every recommendation of the Gnanam Committee Report. While submitting the report, chairman of the Committee Dr. Karshandas Soneri stated that Committee

has consistently taken the view that universities must have autonomy in academic matters as well as in the day to day governance. Further he stated that as universities are mainly financed from the public exchequer and they have to observe norms of public expenditure. Thus, the committee gave due importance to the aspect of greater accountability of the teachers and university officials towards students, parents and society as a whole. The committee also stressed upon the urgent need for decentralization of management in all the three domains of academics, finance and administration. The committee held the strong view that politicization of university campuses should be discouraged.

A **CABE Committee on Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions** was constituted in 2005 which discussed these issues at length and depth. The terms of the reference of the Committee were:

(a) *To suggest measures for enhancing the autonomy of higher education institutions, especially those with potential for excellence.*

(b) *To institutionalize regulatory provisions for promoting autonomy and accountability of higher education institutions.*

The first chapter dealt with The Contextual Framework of the Committee, while the next one gives the overview of the higher education in India. The Committee devoted chapter 3 on the issues under study. The title of the chapter is **Autonomy and Accountability of Higher Education Institutions - A Conceptual Framework**. The Committee started with history of efforts towards autonomy and went on discussing the present situation. The Committee identified some issues related to autonomy like:

- External Controls on autonomous functioning of universities.
- Restrictions on academic autonomy as a consequence of the limitations of university Acts.
- Government's interference on vital issues like appointments of Vice-Chancellor, functioning of the Senate, Executive and Academic Council.
- States' authority over the universities through legislation.
- Wide powers vested in the Chancellors'.
- Appointment of political executives on university bodies.
- Laying down of service conditions.

- Financial aid as a tool to curtail the autonomy of the universities.
- State control on opening of new colleges or grant of affiliation to new colleges.
- Frequent interference of judiciary in matters relating to university affairs.

While establishing the relationship between the autonomy and accountability, the Committee stated “Autonomy is self-regulation providing responsible exercise of decision-making freedom with full commitment for accountability, and not just decentralization of selected powers” (CABE, 2005, p. 21) The Committee assigned this role to the teachers and asked to sought their inconsequential role in any modification in the rules and regulations for promoting autonomy (Ibid., p. 24). The Committee identified some weaknesses which were apparent in the system.

The Committee recommended to follow benchmarks developed by NAAC for autonomy and accountability. It recommended to introduce Academic Audit System which would improve the performance of the teachers/students/administrative staff and the whole institution in a holistic manner and to have a pragmatic view about the status of academic standards of higher education institution.

Further, the report of the committee provided a detailed account of the *Perceptions of Stakeholders on Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions*. The committee recorded that most of the respondents opted for absolute autonomy for achieving excellence. Respondents were the opinion that institutions with proven track of record should be given autonomous status. It was found that institutions have a great deal of financial autonomy in incurring expenditure.

The next chapter dealing with Academic autonomy favored it by realizing its need in the promotion of important values of a good university like creativity, intellectuality, honesty and integrity. These, however, necessitate the freedom to differ from traditional or established authority, freedom of expression and freedom from any kind of fear. “Therefore, the freedom of dissent which happens to be the crux of the academic autonomy should be corner stone of the university system” (Ibid., p.45). The report favored autonomy in the matters of Admission, deciding curricula, syllabus, new courses, examination and evaluation. The accountability for completing and evaluating the entire course on the teacher concerned was recommended. For academic accountability following recommendations were proposed

- Regular academic audit must become a permanent feature of every single autonomous institution.

- Students' feedback should also be one of the vital parameters for academic audit.
- Inter-institutional collaboration cutting across the various sectors of education should be promoted with a view to sharing physical and human resources.

The aspect of Administrative Autonomy was discussed in a separate chapter. It was found that autonomy which varies from state to state and university to university is very limited in scope. It recommended that efforts should be made to enlarge it starting from the selection of the Vice-Chancellors to the academic and administrative staff and constitution and functioning of Courts, Executive and Academic Council etc. The Committee envisaged for the restoration of autonomy by discontinuing the centralized controls, providing freedom to design academic programme and setting up of standards and procedures for student admissions by the institution itself etc. The CAGE committee give revolutionary ideas to bring autonomy in higher education institutions but in the lack of implementation they remained on the paper only.

The issue of autonomy and accountability was again raised in the *National Knowledge Commission 2006-2007*. The commission was constituted in 2005 by the then Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, under the chairmanship of Mr. Sam Pitroda. Recommendations regarding the Higher Education were given in the 'Report to the Nation 2006'. In the section 'Note on Higher Education', the Commission identified some crisis in higher education in India that runs deep. With regard to the issue of governance, the Commission identified that present governance structures which were put in place 50 years ago are not conducive to the changing times and circumstance and the system suffers subversion by vested interests. The Commission found that there is little or not enough transparency and accountability in most of the public institutions and the attribute of it can be given to the lack of or no rewards for performance and no penalties for non-performance. By indicating the flaws in the present governance structure, it stated that at one place the system does not preserve autonomy and at the second place it does not promote accountability. "The autonomy of universities is eroded by interventions from governments and intrusion from the political party" (NKC, 2006-09, p.69). Thus, it recommended that the problem of implicit politicization of the university governance needs to be addressed in a systematic manner both inside and outside the universities (Ibid., p. 66-69). With regard to accountability the Commission stated that it is a critical determinant of quality of higher education. It therefore, envisaged providing accountability to the outside world as well as creation of accountability

within the system. The Commission recommended that accountability should not be confused with the State control. It further stated that institutional mechanisms, based on checks and balances constitute the effective system of accountability. While justifying the accountability, it recommended that empowering students to take decision rather than simply increase the power of the State should be the objective of the accountability (Ibid., p. 69-78).

The issue under study was further raised by **Yashpal Committee, 2009**. Although, it did not elaborate it in the way the previous CABE Committee did but it touched upon the two aspects of autonomy and accountability. The committee identified the issue of Interference in the university functioning. The Committee found that this interference was being made by people having various political and vested interests. The committee stated “It touches all aspects of higher education and involves improper admission of students, pressures in selection of teachers, manipulation in appointment of senior functionaries like vice-chancellors, registrars and deans, purchase of equipment and allotment of construction contracts and so on”. In response to this interference, the Committee envisaged that this should be reduced either by persuasion or exposure by a vigilant society. It stated that attempt in this regard was made by the UGC sometimes ago, to demand administrative and academic audit of higher education institutions which after some time became defunct. While examining the underlying process that influences the functioning of the universities, the Committee referred to the imperatives of the autonomy as recognized by Kothari Commission. This shows that condition remained same even after 43 years. The Committee while justifying the autonomy of the institution stated “It has been proved that wherever the higher educational institutions have a governance system which functions with a high degree of autonomy, their performance have earned national and international respect notwithstanding financial constraints. The absence of any sense of academic and administrative autonomy, introduces a high degree of educational and social distortion” (YPC, 2009, p. 48-49). The Committee identified that in the process of loss of autonomy only private initiative and political intervention cannot be blamed because absence of rigorous resistance from within the academic community played equal role. Socio-political and market forces played role to manipulate and subvert the normative structure of the university.

As recommended by National Knowledge Commission (NKC) and Yash Pal Committee, *National Commission for Higher Education and Research Bill* was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on 28th of December, 2011. The proposed body is regulatory in nature, thus, will be discussed in the next chapter dealing specifically with the role of regulatory authority in maintaining accountability. Nevertheless, among the terms of references given in the preamble of the bill it aimed

(a) to promote autonomy within higher educational institutions and universities;

(b) to promote accountability framework in regulatory systems of higher education sector;

However, certain provisions of the bill impede such autonomy. For instance, requirement of prior permission from NCHER to enroll students. A question is raised that it is given that NCHER will perform functions which are presently performed by UGC, AICTE and NCTE and other bodies, it is not clear how the bill would promote autonomy of higher education institutions.

In November, 2015, MHRD appointed *The Committee for Evolution of the New Education Policy* under the chairmanship of T.S.R Subramanian. It identified that a university cannot be truly autonomous unless it has assured sources of funding. It further stated that standard will improve only when Government feels the need to detach themselves from management control, and empower universities to be financially responsible and academically respectable (p.129). It recommended that full academic freedom needs to be given to the universities and their affiliated colleges to decide their own curriculum, create new courses based on demand and relevance. Finances should become open and transparent. *The underlying principle would be to provide assistance and guidance and mentorship to institutions which wish to improve themselves; to provide full academic and management autonomy to institutions which are at the highest scale; and finally, to weed out institutions which fall below an accepted benchmark of performance* (Subramanian Committee, 2016, p.131-33). But the report did not highlight accountability aspect clearly. In the name of accountability, it recommended the re-enforcement of control exercised by Regulatory Authorities and the Government.

Conclusion

Almost every Committees/Commissions gave importance to the autonomy of the and Gajendagadkar Commission, Rammamurti Committee, Gnanam Committee, started highlighting the need for accountability with autonomy for the better functioning of the institutions of higher education. The issue of accountability got more importance by the Ganaam Committee, CABE Committee on the Autonomy of higher Education, National Knowledge Commission and then Yashpal Committee the reason may be given to the adoption of SAP which asked for making policy reforms and bringing more transparency and accountability in the public/private institutions including Universities and colleges.

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