
Higher Education and Society

Introduction

Educational purposes, content of education, processes by which education is imparted and the institutional system of education are at any point of time, shaped according to the needs, demands and aspirations of the society. Vice versa, society is deeply influenced by the education which is provided for its members. Our discussion in the previous unit has thrown some light on this generative relationship between education and society, with special reference to higher education. In this unit, we will examine the relationship between higher education and some specific aspects of society, for example, higher education and the State, higher education and the economy, etc.

Learning outcomes

In the previous unit, we already discussed the aims of higher education in different historical contexts and how these have kept changing with developments in different sectors of social life. In this unit, we shall discuss the linkages between education and other subsystems within the broader societal system and examine how they influence the aims and role of higher education at a particular point in time. This will be followed by a discussion on the university as a social institution.

After you have read through this unit, you will be able to

- interpret the inter-connectedness among various subsystems in society;
- appreciate the idea that 'university is a social organism' and understand its obligations to the society at large;
- recognize the importance of characteristics like 'autonomy', 'academic freedom' and 'accountability' for higher education institutions in fulfilling their obligation of higher education.

Higher education and other systems

Education has always played an important part in preparing men for life in society and moulding them accordingly, whether directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly. Improvement of the human mind with its potential powers of rational thought and ability to discover knowledge about nature and its laws, to be came regarded as the key to human progress during the enlightenment. Rather than regard the learning of skills and knowledge as a virtuous pastime or merely to carry out important political and civil operations (as in the case of Egyptian Greek and Roman scribes), men of enlightenment

saw cognitive development and the pursuit of knowledge as essential not only for survival, but also for the advancement of society itself. Education in the modern sense, as a formal and deliberate process by which the cultural and normative heritage of a society is transmitted from generation to generation, and through which that heritage is improved through scientific discovery, had its roots in the enlightenment. The precursors of the modern school and university, with their presumed functions relating to progress became established during this period, however, formal institutions for education existed in ancient societies as well. Clearly the development of writing represented a major breakthrough in the development of civilization and the acquisition and use of this important skill was soon institutionalized.

From the beginning, it appears that schools and their skilled products were seen as serving the State and the society as a whole. Even in Greece and Rome where much learning was admired for its own sake, the advantages to the State of an educated citizenry were recognized. Plato, in particular was concerned with education, for only through proper training could the State be assured of a loyal citizenry and talented leaders. Although the nature of relationship between education and society is a subject of debate, Sociologists like Durkheim have argued that changes in society always precede changes in the educational system. Durkheim emphasized that 'educational transformations are always the result and the symptoms of the social transformations in terms of which they are to be explained'. (1977, 166)

Higher education and economy

There has been a close relationship between education and economy in all historical periods. In the days of subsistence economy, or when humans had to struggle to produce just enough food for their consumption, education consisting of traditional knowledge and skills was passed on from generation to generation in an informal manner. When improved production led to the availability of leisure for at least some people, more formal schooling came into existence. Right from that day, the State, such as it was perhaps tribal chiefs reigning through some advisory groups, came to have influence over what was to be taught and how.

Some aspects of relation between education and the economy are quite obvious, for example, small countries with agricultural or plantation economy are not likely to have steel mills or an aircrafts industry and hence they will probably not have education in metallurgy or aeronautics. In India, when the setting up of technical institutions was first proposed at the end of the last century, the colonial Government turned it down saying that there was no industry in the country to absorb the products of such institutions. But, in spite of all this and the fact that the economically advanced countries have all a high level of education available to their people, two tendencies have strongly prevailed for quite some time, and even now there are many who accept these positions. One is that education's role in cultivating the individual is so much emphasized that concern for the social impact of education and hence economic impact is ignored or underplayed. Education for the sake of education, education and educated living in an ivory tower distant from the mundane problems of life, and hence education as a social service provided by the government – it can spare any resources for the purpose – all these views are correlates of each other. The second is that economists like to measure the benefits of education by statistical means and by qualifying the monetary benefits in terms of life-time earning capacity of the individual. This totally ignores the non-monetary benefits, such as social influence by virtue of better education, or the enhanced capacity of society to be master of its own destiny by virtue of education. In the context of Indian education, a clear policy statement in the National Policy on Education (1986) says that education is an investment in the future of the nation. Economic studies are available to show that in the longer run, every rupee spent on education brings greater returns than a rupee invested elsewhere.

The relationship between education and economic growth is like a two-edged sword. There is little doubt that in some contexts education can be an extremely important motor for economic growth. On the other hand education does have limits in what it can do for an economy. Education contributes to economic growth by producing skills and knowledge which promote it and make it possible: on the other hand, economic growth potentially contributes further to educational expansion and efficiency through increases in national productivity, accumulation of capital and savings for reinvestment into the system, and in the improvement of human resources. Improvement of human resources is not limited to the inculcation of skills and knowledge, but includes having attitudes, values, and motives consistent with the goals and methods of development plans. Here education is again inextricably linked with development since it is the major vehicle for bringing about the social and psychological changes, necessary for the improvement of productive labourer.

In the context of globalization, the relationship between economy and education assumes a significant dimension. Because globalization affects employment, it touches upon one of the primary traditional goals of education: preparation for work. Educational institutions will need to reconsider this mission in the light of changing job markets in a new environment (Post Fordist) new skills and the flexibility to adapt to changing job demands and, for that matter, changing jobs during a lifetime, and dealing with an increasingly competitive international labour pool. Yet educational institutions do not limit themselves to preparing students as producers but also help shape consumer attitudes and practices as well, leading to increasing commercialization of the educational environment.

Meanwhile due to changes in the economy since the 1980's resulting in a shift in financing of universities, the university system is undergoing a change. Resultantly, the growing proximity between the corporate sector and the university system, has redefined its role, processes and image. This shift encourages university's support of technological change and private sector development as the dominant guiding vision of future higher education policy. This has the following significant implications for the nature of universities and its role in society:

The changing university agenda

Until now central importance has been given to the production of social knowledge, the creation of curricula to meet academic objectives, the organization of administration to support academic objectives and the pure research base, with the universities response to the private productive sector, the agenda shifts and academic control of agenda wavers.

The commodification of knowledge

Providing a broad focus on the diverse needs of society and developing research which produces knowledge to be socially used to be available to all, has been at the heart of the university's agenda. By contrast the pull to divert knowledge into the market place through the development of marketable products encourages research which is specifically targeted to these ends for knowledge to be exploited through the marketplace, it must be turned into 'the appropriate commodity form, in other words into private property'

Institutional changes

The university - corporate linkages also leads to certain changes within the institutions - chief among them are

- the structures and practices of management within the university are changing in order to accommodate the new agenda:
- the need for a centralized bureaucracy to manage all new offices of technology

transfer, centers of excellence, etc reduces and alters the influence of the academic departmental structures;

The major consequence of this corporate university linkages is the emerging image of the university as a **business corporation** rather than a public social institution.

Self-assessment

1. *Discuss the relationship between education, employment and the economy.*

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2. *How has the image and role of the University changed with recent changes in the economic policies.*

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State, government and higher education

The relationship between the State and higher education can be seen in terms of the **interplay** of the dynamics generated by the **economy, the dominant state bureaucracy and political institutions** and interests. The modern economy, first of all is fuelled by an ever evolving mix of manpower and scientific knowledge and ideally, would require the education system to train and research the appropriate educational products necessary for optimum economic advance. However, **intervening** between the economic dynamic and its potential impact upon education is the central bureaucracy of the State and the political institutions and interests, each with its own identity and concerns. To the best of its ability each interprets and channels the **demands** from the economy in a way which suits the dynamic inherent in its own interests and policy preferences.

What exactly is the nature of the State's interest in higher education? In the view of Halsey and Trow (1971), the State's interest derives from the fact that the universities are a crucial foundation of the economy, have been conceived as integral to a higher education system which supplies, scientific manpower and technological innovation for economic growth and widening opportunities to a rising proportion of the population. They are thus of crucial **political importance** and are in any case pressed into responsibility, or at least responsiveness to the **State as manager of economic growth, and the dispenser of individual opportunity** for participation.

Let us now try to understand why the State needs higher education and therefore why higher education possesses the power that it does?

Higher education offers a unique blend of two resources essential for economic and social development: **knowledge and status**. At the **apex** of the educational hierarchy, higher education makes the decision on how knowledge **should be organized** and what status should be attached to different knowledge areas. Likewise any significant change in the content or boundary of a knowledge area has to be **sanctioned** by higher education if it is to carry lasting weight. Further within higher education, universities act as the **custodians** of the **selection process** through their control of the examination system. Society only accepts that an individual, has acquired a particular body of knowledge if the possession of that knowledge has been certified by an appropriate institution. Not only that, universities also strongly influence the **form and content** of certificates awarded by institutions lower down the educational hierarchy. In effect, they thus define the context in which much individual social mobility takes place. In acquiring the mantle

of university respectability an occupation also gains access to a high status culture which judiciously employed, will enhance its claims to professional respectability.

Besides recognizing that the universities perform a key social function by controlling the individual and occupational mobility for social change, the State also recognizes that the universities also promote particular set of values which it would also like to control. In other words, if the socio-political power of the universities was to be harnessed and directed within an overall policy-framework for higher education, State intervention had to be justified before it could be implemented. For instance, the economic ideology of education is to enable students to become part of the "efficient distribution of human capital and so facilitate linkage, between economic demand and human supply". The rise of the New Right's view of education as a market place where educational products should be bought and sold and where supply and demand should be left to resolve distribution problem has now challenged the right and the duty of State organizations to intervene in higher education.

In the current scenario, relations between the State and the universities can best be described as an attempt on the part of the government to create a managed market financed essentially by public money. Therein the universities are given wide constitutional control over their own affairs while operating within centrally defined and regulated parameters that are managed by funding agencies.

Self-assessment

2. *In what way is higher education important to the State?*

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Higher education and social class structure

Coming as I do from the lowest order of the Hindu society I know what is the value of education. The problem of moving the lower order is deemed to be economic. This is a great mistake. The problem of raising the lower order in India is not to feed them, to clothe them and make them serve the higher order as is the ancient idea of this country. The problem of the lower order is to remove from them that inferiority complex which has stunted their growth and made them slaves to others to create in them the consciousness of the significance of their lives for themselves and for the country, of which they have been cruelly robbed by the existing social order. Nothing can achieve this except the spread of higher education.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

Such was the importance accorded to education by Dr. Ambedkar, the foremost leader of the socially backward classes in India. But, does education fulfil the aspirations of changing the social structure?

Let us now discuss the relationship between education and social classes. We can notice the relationship between education and social and economic class structure from the earliest beginnings of education. In slave societies, slaves were not only deprived of education, but they were also prohibited from entering the system. In feudal society too, education was confined to the gentry whereas only occasionally people belonging to farming families or farm workers received some education but rarely did they reach higher levels of education. The process and content of education corresponded with its social function; it tended to further the interests of the upper classes either by

painting them as the custodians of refinement and culture or allowing notions of caste and class superiority to be popularized. Education did not encourage questioning of social structure or distribution of privilege by making itself more accessible or relevant to the masses. In order to forestall such questioning it adopted an "ivory tower" point of view – i.e. lack of concern for current social, economic or political issues, and concentrating on abstract or "neutral" concepts under the excuse of being non-partisan. In India, the lower castes remained deprived or deficient in education for so long that special provision had to be made in the Constitution to give them "concessions" in education and then in employment. These were not essentially concessions because the handicap of centuries of unfair treatment was being partially rectified.

After the Second World War and the liberation of dozens of countries from colonial dependency, education, started slowly being perceived as a catalyst of social transformation. Efforts by the respective nationalist governments to improve the quantity and quality of education for the socially disadvantaged did not however yield impressive results. Distribution of education continued along lines of caste, class, gender and ethnic inequality. In India, for instance, let us take the case of the Dalits, they got access to education and their access broke the traditional linkage between caste, education and occupation, yet it could only transported them from menial occupations in the caste feudal structure to menial low status, low – paying and low skilled jobs in the modern occupational structures. (Velaskar, 1998) Thus despite impressive gain in improving access, empirical evidence points to education, by and large, continuing to legitimize power structure, social status quo and colonial policies even in post colonial India.

But does this mean that education privileging the elite is something intrinsic to its function? Can education bring about social change? Moving away from viewing the education system to legitimize and reproduce dominant forms of knowledge and skills and its distribution in a manner that conforms to the structures of stratification in an unequal society, is another view of education which opposes the functionalist stance of reproduction and takes into account the resistance and challenges to hegemonic structures by oppressed groups, classes and social movements. In this context, for instance, Padma Velaskar (1994) argues that despite limitations and constraints, the acquisition of higher education by the Dalits has resulted in positive social, political and cultural images which are manifested in a variety of tangible and intangible forms. Therefore, even though education may not contribute to mobility – both social and economic, in a big way, its contributions to positive gains politically and culturally can hardly be overemphasized.

Self-assessment

4. Discuss how, in the Indian context education has influenced social change?

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5. How does education 'privelege the elite'? Give examples from the Indian context.

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Higher education, culture and social integration

As discussed earlier, education, from the point of view of society, is a process of transmission of culture. By culture, here we mean a great deal more than mere art, music or literature. It refers to the total way of life of a society – its knowledge, beliefs,

attitudes, values, skills and behaviour patterns. Education can be considered as the mechanism by which society inducts its members into its ways of life and beliefs. It is partially responsible for the transfer from one generation to the next of society's beliefs, values, sentiments, knowledge and patterns of behaviour. This process of **socialization** is **conservative** in that it perpetuates current cultural patterns and discourages deviation from them. However, ways of life, concepts of decency, and beliefs are not monolithic; they may change with region or historical origin of a group of population; they may also be different for the various classes in the same social groups. The question whether education should endeavour to promote a common culture or help diverse groups to develop their own different cultures is a vexed one, not least in relation to those minority, ethnic groups that are to be found in most societies (Jeffcoats, 1984; Kelley, 1986). Since there is **no unanimity** regarding **what culture is** and therefore what the content of education should be, educational provisions for different social and ethnic groups and a **need for diversity** rather than uniformity of educational provision is called for. It becomes important in a class, poverty, unemployment and disaffection ridden society such as ours, that the content of education is relevant to the lives of its citizens and their 'outside - the school experiences' so that alienation from and rejection of education does not take place.

The other important issue to be considered is that most societies are in a change of flux, technological change in particular brings about changes in the norms, the values, the beliefs and the customs of a society. Rapidity of the social change and the need for people to be equipped to cope with it and even exercise some degree of control over it suggests that education should prepare individuals for the fact of social change itself, to adapt to and to initiate changes in the norms and values of the community.

Thus more recent views have stressed that culture must be seen as the total environment within which an individual develops and learns and which he / she must be helped to come to terms with, to operate effectively in / and to gain some control over it. Individuals learn, it is claimed, by making sense and constructing meaning through interaction with their environment and their culture. The task of education is to help individuals towards this form of learning, to negotiate 'meaning in a manner congruent with the requirements of the culture' (Bruner and Haste, 1987:1). In this sense, culture is viewed as supporting cognitive growth by providing 'cultural amplifiers' through which pupils develop those 'modes of representation', access to public structures through which the meaning of experiences can be not only internalized and understood but also shared. In this kind of analysis, learning is interactive and the relationship between culture and education is two-way.

In recent times education has been under tremendous pressure to ensure social integration. Social integration is considered dependent on a founding system of norms and values shared by the vast majority of a society. Consequently, an appeal is made to educators to make sure (future) members of society embrace and internalize those values. However, in the context of rapidly changing pluralistic societies, the 'shared - values' view of social integration causes problems. An alternative view of social order defines social integration as emergent at the level of the social system and relates it to its individual members through the **dynamics of communication** instead of the status of 'value - endorsement'

As discussed, education cannot contribute to the integration of society by passing on norms and values to the next generation. Rather its contribution should consist of **developing narrative skills** and a **sense of connection** (namely, the ability to reflectively position oneself in a complex and changing environment and the inclination to assume liability for the outcome). **Communication and reflectivity** are the two main components of this kind of narration. Therefore as discussed earlier, the role of education should be an enabling one by imparting the necessary skills.

Stakes and Ladders

Involve Public in Higher Education

By Dipankar Gupta

Today universities in India are beleaguered institutions. They are just about tolerated by the public because they hand out degrees that are often prerequisites for getting salaried jobs, or for getting married. There is little expectation that students will excel in Indian universities, nor are faculty members taken seriously as knowledge producers.

Universities are where one goes to in one's youth with a narrow utilitarian motive, but are otherwise not considered as vibrant public spaces. Though most universities are viewed with disdain by the public, there are some stellar exceptions to this rule. Yet, these universities too get tarred and feathered with the same brush by a very unappreciative public. This is primarily because all universities in India, without exception, have no time to relate to the non-specialised world outside. Consequently, they do not have the public in their corner, which is why they are constantly at the whim of politicians, big and small.

Most Indian universities do not appreciate the importance of linking up with the rest of society in an ongoing fashion. They stand aloof in the belief that the mountain will always come to Mohammed. In the initial years after Independence, when universities enjoyed a certain degree of prestige in the country, teacher activists did not pay attention to the public and instead aimed their guns at politicians. Indeed they won the early rounds, but their isolation from the public is now hurting them.

Politicians have intuitively sensed this and are, therefore, emboldened to impose all manner of outrageous curricula modifications without fearing any public backlash. For universities to be able to function as true centres of higher education, they have to win the public to their side. This does not mean dilution of standards, but rather an elevation of research and teaching programmes that are then meaningfully communicated outside the portals of the university.

Indeed, without an appreciative audience, it is impossible to raise resources for universities. This holds true for both private and public grants. Universities in India have to realise that the public is an important stakeholder. This would fundamentally alter the way institutions of learning are run in this country. Faculties must recognise that their core competence in universities is to advance knowledge through critical research. These advances must be made available to public through lectures, science exhibitions, popular literary festivals, aesthetic displays, and so on.

The community around universities would then feel a sense of belonging with the institution, which, ultimately, is the best guarantor for an unbiased and unprejudiced advance of knowledge. If politicians and their pet projects are to be kept at bay, then the

faculty must demonstrate its competence not only to its peers, but to the public as well. If truth be told, ivory tower intellectuals are not intellectuals at all. Intellectuals that do not have a sense of engagement with their surroundings eventually produce the most ordinary drivel in the most bombastic fashion.

A sense of engagement does not mean identification with political parties either. In fact, this is the most tempting, and also the most dangerous, choice. Once teachers are seduced into taking this option, it makes it easy for politicians to march in through the front door. For academics to pursue their intellectual agenda in a meaningful manner, they must have the public, and not the politician, on their side. But this public can be won if universities are able to communicate their scholarship to them in a meaningful way.

When the public is an important stakeholder of the university system, the university will also devise ways of meeting public expectations, and even raising public aspirations. New courses will be designed keeping in mind the changing needs of the day, and special attention will be given to those who, for one reason or another, cannot make it as regular full-time students. None of these would entail a dilution of standards. They would demand instead greater imagination, and a more profound intellectual engagement with the world around.

Once the public is accepted as a legitimate stakeholder, university teachers and researchers have a solid bulwark to protect them from political predators. Further by accepting that the public has an integral role to play in the intellectual life of the university, there is the constant pressure to upgrade research and teaching standards. Only politicians can trade bad research for patronage and support. The public, in general, is more demanding and fair.

It is true that not every good researcher will have a ready public support base, but the very act of taking collectively the public into confidence on research programmes, and inviting them as students and participants in intellectual gatherings, raises the general appreciation of universities in the society. The valuable real estate on which most universities are situated are eyed hungrily by politicians. One sure way of making all this real estate appear as valid possession is to open the grounds and the buildings to the public when teaching is not taking place.

This is how the university becomes true public property outside the reach of petty politicians. A stakeholder approach to university management recognises that it is not by defying the public and making peace with politicians that institutions of higher learning can prosper. On the other hand, it is only by relying on public goodwill that universities can truly guard its core competencies.

Source: *The Times of India* - 18 September 2003.



Self-assessment

6. *In what way, you, as a teacher, will prepare learners for social integration?*

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University as a social entity

In the preceding discussions, we have seen how the role and functions of higher education have centred around the individual, society and knowledge. The higher educational system, howsoever important it may be, is only one part of the larger socio-economic system. Its students come from various strata of society, with hopes and aspirations related to possibilities of careers and life as a whole in the given society, it draws its financial and administrative support from society, its alumni have to look for employment in the society. This intricate relationship requires the higher educational system to be a living and dynamic entity. If it turns passive and only carries out the orders of those who at any time are at the helm of affairs in society, it will fail in providing positive impulses for changing the society for the better. If the society or government interfere with the natural academic freedom of the university, they deprive themselves of what good the university could have done to them. It has become a cardinal principle in all enlightened societies to respect the academic freedom of university life, in particular freedom of speech and expression, freedom in framing curricula, establishing teaching methods and choosing problems for research.

This relationship between the society and university has however undergone a change. Eric Hobsbawm (1994) has characterized the twentieth century as the age of extremes unable to say what the future holds, though hopeful that it might yet be better than the past. Hobsbawm is clear on two things an era has ended (with the collapse of communism) second, although no one can know how history will unfold, the past is no longer a guide to the future. The same can be said of higher education as can be said for the century as a whole; an era has ended; what has gone before no longer provides a credible model for the future.

As mentioned earlier, universities are undergoing a redefinition of their role and purpose. In the changing context higher education institutions can make themselves relevant to the society by being more flexible and open. Universities engaged in meeting lifelong education needs of people in employment and redefining teaching, learning with the use of new information technology are likely to draw more public support. New ideas, new ways of thinking and learning will help universities to redefine their position vis a vis society. For example helping societies to 'learn their way out' of the problems of the society which sustains them is an important source of university - society linkage. Similarly, although universities are no longer the only players in generating new knowledge through research they still have a vital role in evaluating public policies and in forming multi - disciplinary teams to tackle societal problems.

Therefore freedom is, undoubtedly, required for higher education institutions to discharge their true function in society even in the changing contexts. But no freedom is absolute, freedom of expression and speech has to be within the framework of reason and responsibility. Irrational, emotional or intolerant thoughts could destroy the very fabric of a society. Let us now examine some concepts intrinsic to the university system.

Autonomy

University's freedom to exercise its power to achieve its various goals set by the society or to influence change in society itself is called its **autonomy**. University's autonomy runs parallel to its commitment and responsibility of discharging its social obligation. In other words, university is accountable to the society for its acts of omission and commission. It is in this context we talk of autonomy, academic freedom and accountability. We will explore these linkages further.

When we speak of university autonomy, we mean its right to govern its own affair and particularly its rights to carry out its legitimate activities of teaching and research without interference from any outside authority. Autonomy implies university's **four essential freedoms** – to determine for itself on academic grounds **who may teach, what may be taught, how it should be taught, and who may be admitted** to study. In other words, autonomy means the university or college's power of **decision-making** with regard to **academic programmes and activities**, within financial bounds laid down by Government or by raising funds from interested sources. Only an autonomous institution, free from regimentation of ideas, pressure, or power politics can pursue truth fearlessly and build independent thinking essential for the development of society. There are many other spheres of activities in which universities need autonomy. Some of these are selection of students, appointment and promotion of teachers, determination of curriculum, methods of teaching, research activities, contents of courses, student evaluation, other administrative and financial matters and staff appraisal. **Autonomy** has to be seen as operating at two levels, viz., **external** and **internal**. By external autonomy of a University is meant, university as a corporate entity and its independence in its activities in relation to other institutions in society. Internal autonomy, on the other hand, signifies the autonomy of individual teachers / groups within the University, with their accountability to the academic community at large.

Universities' dependence on public funds makes them increasingly open to scrutiny by the State. It is also interesting to note here that universities tend to face interferences from the government in those times and places where their activities are perceived to be of national importance. In a sense when universities have been least central and important, their autonomy has been safest and this is because institutions that are purely "Ivory Towers" are of little relevance to the society and external authorities are often content to leave them alone.

The autonomous status for higher education institutions, thus, in essence, aims at giving opportunity to the teachers and students to make innovations, utilize their creative talent, improve the standards of teaching, examination and research and quickly respond to social needs.

Academic freedom

Freedom of expression in all its forms, can be justified on two fundamental grounds. For the **individual**, the right to speak and write as one chooses is a **form of liberty** that contributes in important ways to a rich and stimulating life. To be deprived of such liberty is to lose the chance to participate fully in an intellectual exchange that helps to develop one's values to make one's meaning of the world and to exercise those qualities of mind and imagination that are most distinctively human. Beyond its significance to the individual, **freedom of speech** has traditionally been regarded as important to the welfare of society. Throughout history, much progress has occurred, through growth in our understanding of ourselves, our institutions, and the environment we live in. But experience teaches us that major discoveries and advances in knowledge are often highly unsettling and distasteful to the existing order. Only rarely do

individuals have the imagination and intelligence to conceive such ideas and the courage to express them openly. If we wish to stimulate progress, we cannot afford to inhibit such persons by imposing orthodoxies, censorship, and other artificial barriers to creative thought.

Universities should be unreserved in the exercise of this liberty because freedom of expression is critical to their central mission.

While university autonomy relates to the freedom of the university as an institution with certain functions to fulfil, academic freedom is nothing more or less than the professional freedom of the teacher as a member of the university or college where he or she teaches. **Academic freedom** is generally defined as a freedom of members of the academic community, assembled in colleges and universities, which underlies the effective performance of their functions of teaching, learning, practice of the arts and research. Further elaborated, this means that it would be regarded as an infringement of academic freedom for a university to impose any censorship on the utterance of any member of its staff on any subject, whether or not it relates to the field of his expert knowledge and whether or not it deals with religion or politics or it is made in the classroom.

Even though interpretation of what academic freedom is largely depends on subjective values, modified over a period of time. It is however not difficult to offer the following classification as **levels for academic freedom**: (Becher and Kogan, 1985) (Tight 1985)

i) **The personal level**

This level concerns the standard of behaviour and ethics we adopt and develop for ourselves (Passmore 1984). The focus here is both individual and outward looking. It concerns the use which we make of academic freedom, both personally and in consort with others in pursuing understanding and truth, in investigating subjects of interest, in creatively seeking possible solutions to problems and in communicating our findings to others.

ii) **The professional level**

At the professional level, the values embodied are of democratic functioning in the higher education system and the belief that each individual is as worthy of attention and opportunity as any other.

iii) **The institutional level**

Within the institutional value system the concept of the university remains supreme and it is primarily within the institution that personal and professional value systems are expected to come together and be exercised.

iv) **The societal level**

Finally, there are general societal values which influence and cushion the operation of higher education. The values involved here are that a particular view or a set of practices is good / beneficial for society. Societies' values have changed considerably in recent years – from acceptance of higher education as being good for its own sake and emphasizing on long-term benefits, the view now seems to have settled around seeing higher education as an investment seeking an immediate pay-off in terms of outputs like saleable skills, etc. The prevalent societal values constitute an important input of academic freedom.

Each of these four value systems more or less underlie what constitutes academic freedom. The nature of academic freedom accorded depends, on the specific circumstances under consideration; institutional contexts, professional judgements, etc.

In this context, emphasizing on the importance and the sphere where academic freedom is exercised, the Education Commission (1964-66) states, "we would like to emphasize

the freedom of teachers to hold and express their views, however, radical, within the classroom (and outside), provided they are careful to present the different aspects of a problem without confusing teaching with 'propaganda' in favour of their own particular views". In concrete terms it may mean:

- that a teacher cannot be forced to teach something which goes against his / her conscience or his / her concept of truth;
- freedom to hold and express views, however radical provided teaching is not converted to propaganda;
- freedom to speak and write about and participate in debates on significant national / international issues
- facilities and encouragement in his / her work of teaching and research even when his / her views are in opposition to those of his / her authority.

Academic freedom is not to be seen as merely a reflection of society's commitment to free speech as stated earlier, it is a safeguard essential to the aims of the university and to the welfare of those who work within it. Teachers and scholars have a vital stake in continuing to enjoy the liberty to speak and write as they choose, because their lives are entirely devoted to developing and expounding ideas. Universities, in turn, have a **critical interest** in preserving **free expression**, for without that freedom they will be hampered in appointing the most creative scientists and scholars and will suffer from forms of censorship that will jeopardize the search for knowledge and new discoveries that represents their most distinctive contribution.

Obviously, the extent and kinds of academic freedom enjoyed by teachers depends to some extent on social and political realities, and to some extent on **how teachers use these freedoms**. Natural consolidation may be a goal or a task identified by a society for its coherence and progress and therefore any teacher tending to go against it may have to be constrained. Teachers neglecting their duties to teach, learn and research; or those mis-evaluating their students by reason of prejudice, favouritism or sheer neglect; or engaged in disrupting the system by overemphasizing privileges and benefits and underplaying responsibility and duty, may be inviting outside interference in the affairs of educational institutions. If there is **self-discipline**, then **no rules of discipline** would be in evidence; but if there is no such internal constraint then "authority" and "enforcement of discipline" become necessary for universities to play their characteristic role in society, but they call for an immense sense of responsibility on the part of institutions and individuals.

Self-assessment

7. *Why is academic freedom important for the individuals in the university system as well as the society?*

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8. *What, in your opinion, constitutes academic freedom?*

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Relationship between academic freedom and institutional autonomy

Academic freedom and **institutional autonomy** are **closely related**, the distinction between the two concepts is that while academic freedom relates to academics, that is to individuals, institutional autonomy relates to institutions, their employers. Institutional autonomy guarantees academic freedom to some measure but cannot be construed as a sufficient condition. Is academic freedom possible without institutional autonomy? The answer is 'yes' but with reservations. Where institutional autonomy is virtually non-existent, as in centrally controlled institutions, academic freedom is less likely to exist or be maintained. It seems reasonable to conclude that while it is possible to have academic freedom without institutional autonomy, and vice-versa, the two concepts tend to be mutually supporting and it is desirable that both should be encouraged if each is to flourish (Tight, 1990, 123).

Accountability

While **academic freedom** may be assumed as a **privilege** by academics or as a necessary part of their job, this carries with it an inevitable **quid pro quo** in terms of expectation, **responsibility** and **accountability**. There are two levels of responsibility required of academics in their exercise of academic freedom: those internal to academe and those external to it. The **internal responsibilities** involve a due regard for the academic freedom of other academics, the positive encouragement of academic developments and an acceptance of the procedures adopted for safeguarding academic freedom. **External accountability** which may be formal or informal, direct or indirect, is owned to society because society is the major funder of higher education as well as its major beneficiary.

What now, does it mean to be accountable? "To be accountable", is "to be answerable legally or morally for the discharge of some duty, trust or debt". Applied to higher education, this means that higher education should give an account of its performance in terms of the extent of fulfillment of its social expectations and accept responsibility for its failures. It would also mean that society can intervene in the affairs of higher education when the latter fails to discharge its obligations. The question of giving an objective and adequate account of the performance of higher education, making the system or any part of it responsible, and deciding on who should have the right to intervene, are however highly complex issues. In whatever way these issues are decided, the fact remains that higher education should strive to fulfil all its individual and social obligations.

There has long been a **tension** between the demands for **academic freedom** in higher education and the demands of its funders for **accountability**. One thing however has changed in recent times and that is more stringent funding procedures accompanied by specificity in funding arrangements resulting in increased accountability of higher education institutions. It is **difficult to judge** whether the **increased accountability** is **reasonable** or whether it goes too far infringing academic freedom. A system which embodies greater accountability may turn out to be fairer and better able to prevent abuses of academic freedom. Academics are not only in the business of advancing knowledge but should also be concerned with sharing their understanding / discoveries to as many as possible.

For **autonomy** and **accountability** to be functional and meaningful the **government** will have to **provide adequate resources** to higher education for it to **play its role**. It is also required that the **government lifts the bureaucratic pressures** on universities and explores more cost effective and **credible systems of quality, audit, research,**

evaluation, accountability and control. Development of a national system of credit accumulation and transfer flexible enough to incorporate the accreditation of prior learning and of work based learning is also essential in this regard.

As far as the role of universities is concerned, the universities should defend critical basic research and scholarship as both the life blood of the intellect and the hallmark of a civilized society. They should articulate, promote and defend their commitment to democratic values and the responsibility to be engaged directly in major public debates in modern society. **Innovation** for local needs generation of income with local sources needs, to be explored. **Opening up the curriculum** to engage in more **flexible forms** of study exploiting new **information technologies** and developing better mechanisms of strategic planning to anticipate change and define appropriate responses to it is what the universities need to examine to keep themselves relevant.

The society too has a role to play so that universities as accountable institutions can perform better. It has to acknowledge that higher education is part of society and vital to the development and promotion of the cultural and moral values upon which modern society and the quality of people's lives within it ultimately depends. Policies for the university cannot be detached from discussions about how this society should develop and change. There has to be a critical space in the public spheres of modern society where intellectual honesty and ceaseless vigilance about social, economic and political development has to be maintained, free of the patronage of government and other interest groups, universities have a role to play in the context of a democratic society, they are not and never should be arbiters of morality; but they do have a part to play in sharpening up the moral discussions of modernity.

To sum up, autonomy and accountability are the two sides of the same coin. These are complementary to each other. Autonomy without accountability may lead to anarchy. Accountability without autonomy may turn into regimentation. A balance or a "trade off" between the two is necessary – which may depend on prevailing social climate, and which in any case has to evolve through experience.

Self-assessment

9. *Discuss how autonomy and accountability are two sides of the same coin in the university system?*

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Summary

In most modern societies, educational institutions are considered key instruments of social purpose. The relationship between education and other sectors of society is an intrinsic one. Education is considered necessary for both order and progress. On the one hand, education is expected to maintain hallowed traditions: respect for authority, obedience to the law, patriotism and the like. On the other hand, education is expected to promote political, economic and social development and change. Educational systems differ in the extent to which they accommodate wide range of values within society but the educational functions and uses vis-a-vis the society broadly fall under the kind of society we are aiming at. The functions and uses of education alter as societies go through economic, political and social developments. In summary, we have seen that the various parts of society, however they are defined, are integrated with each other.

These parts are not just interdependent – they are coordinated and complementary. Each part supports the working of the other, as well as the society as a whole. The University is a part of the society, yet it is an autonomous social entity by itself. Features such as ‘autonomy’ ‘accountability’ and ‘academic freedom’ give it a unique character and simultaneously, help it in its discharge of obligations, to itself and to the society at large.

Unit-end activities

1. How does education perpetuate inequalities among classes? Think about the members of the teaching community in your college / university. What kinds of people occupy the highest position? How many of them are first generation learners?
2. Make a list of your students in a class. Estimate their socio-economic positions. Compare these positions with such factors as their performance in class, their extra curricular activities and their vocational goals. What function of education is highlighted by this exercise?
3. Read excerpts from John Dewey’s ‘Democracy and Education’ to know his views on education and society.

Points for discussion

1. What do you think of the idea of ‘privatization’ of universities? Discuss the positive and negative features of raising the tuition fees for higher education.
2. Should educators see their role as maintainer of the status quo as far as the social ‘system is concerned’? Discuss.
3. Initiate a discussion among your colleagues on ‘autonomy versus accountability’ with specific reference to your institution. How far is it correct to place autonomy of a university and its accountability in this equation?
4. Discuss how the privilege of academic freedom enables you to discharge your obligations smoothly in your college / university. What would happen in the absence of this freedom?

Suggested readings

Ashby, Eric. (1966) *Universities – British, Indian, African*. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press.

Dreze, Jean and Amartya Sen (1995), *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Omvedt, Gail (1994), *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution” Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*. New Delhi : Sage.

Shills, Edward. (1989) “The Modern University and Liberal Democracy”, *Minerva*. XXVII. (4) Winter.