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Governance of Higher Education: A Study of Evolution of Governance of Higher Education in India

Gulshan Bassan

Research Scholar, Department of Public Policy and Public Administration, Central University of Jammu. E-mail id: gulshanbassan00@gmail.com

Abstract

Governance of higher education is the formal and informal arrangements which enables the institutions to make decisions and take required steps to implement and execute those decisions into actions. The modern system of higher education 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. Post-independence it evolved through different phases and enter into the present system of governance. This paper elucidates how governance of higher education has evolved after independence.

Key words: Governance, Higher Education Institutions, Autonomy, Accountability, etc.

Introduction

The composite Structure of higher education makes it necessary to study how higher education institutions are governed or how they should be governed, who takes the decisions about the programmes to be offered in the colleges and universities, who decides on the matters of running the institutions, what role governments has to play in influencing the behaviours and steering the institutions of higher education, how much autonomy is given to these institutions, how they are made accountable for the actions they take and what is the regulatory framework designed to make them accountable and to insure whether they are moving in the right direction or not, what role the accreditation agencies play in governing structure, how the requirement in academia and administration is done, how the people at the higher authority are appointed. All these issues are significant in the governance of higher education.

Objective

The objectives of the paper is:

1. To explore the concept of governance in general and governance of higher education India in particular.
2. To trace how the governance of higher education in India has evolved since independence till today.
3. To contribute in the literature of concerned field.

Methodology

The study follows a descriptive and analytical research design and a comparative approach to understand how the governance has been transformed since independence till new drafted education policy 2016. This study is meant to probe

various aspects of autonomy and accountability as reflected in the higher education policies, reports and acts from time to time. The study uses Document analysis method to review and compare various higher education policies, reports and acts with reference to the autonomy, accountability and the role of regulatory agencies in enabling autonomy and accountability to higher education institutions. Document Analysis entails finding, selecting, appraising a descriptive and analytical research design and a comparative approach to (making sense of), and synthesizing data contained in documents. Document analysis yields data excerpts, quotations, or entire passages that are then organized into major themes, categories, and case examples specifically through content analysis.

Meaning of Governance

For a relevant discussion on the governance of higher education, it is imperative to comprehend the concept of governance in general. Governance both as a concept and practice has gained much importance and became an area of discussion in academia since last two and half decade. Rooted in the philosophy of neoliberalism, governance originated against the backdrops of bureaucratic and hierarchical structures of decision making which lacked the required efficiency and effectiveness in achieving the targets of development. It was a movement towards pluralization and decentralization of the state into a number of levels that stretch horizontally from civil society and market on the one hand and vertically from the transnational to local self-government institutions on the other (Chandoke, 2003). Thus, government lost its monopoly of being sole agency of discharging the functions of governance and the need for collective, consultative and participative governance become more profound.

Many international organizations and bilateral agencies have developed their own definition of governance. World Bank first of all tried to interpret the term governance in the “manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for government. Governance, in general, has three distinct aspects (a) the form of a political regime (parliamentary or presidential, military or civilian, and authoritarian or democratic); (b) the processes by which authority is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources; and (c) the capacity of governments to design, formulate, and implement policies, and, in general, to discharge governmental functions”. The terms usually describe conditions in a country as a whole. OECD defined it as the concept of governance denotes “the use of political authority and exercise of control in a society in relation to the management of its resources for social and economic development”. Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (1997) by adopting a very specific strategy and policy defined governance as “the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a nation’s affairs at all levels. It is the complex mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and obligations, and mediate their differences”. UNESCO (1997) moved away from the traditional definitions and stressed upon the multiplicity of the actors involved. Thus, it defines governance as “a process whereby citizens’ needs and interests are articulated for the positive social

and economic development of the entire society and in the light of a perceived common good. Governance means more than government: it refers to a political process that encompasses the whole society and contributes to the making of citizens, active contributors to the social contract that binds them together. Their sense of political efficacy is one of the indicators of democratic governance”.

By close analysis of the above definitions, it can be concluded that the term ‘governance’ is used in a multiple way with multiple meanings. There is a general consensus in all the definitions that the governing mechanism was developed to cope with the diverse and dynamic socio-political system with co-ordinate efforts of different actors. This clearly disposed of the traditional state control mechanism and different actors work in coordination with each other like in a system. In this context, system theory has a clear relationship with the governance. System theory talks about the coordinated efforts of each organ in the successful function of every system and subsystem.

Governance of higher education

The theme of governance in the domain of higher education became area of interest for many scholars like Burton Clark who first of all published work on organisation of higher education in 1983. Through this work, the author highlighted different levels of authority within the system and how decisions are made by actors having power and authority to do so (Austin and Jones, 2016). Some scholars have examined governance from the perspective of the system level by analysing the relationship between system and higher education. It is concerned with how does government and higher education institutions interact with each other, how does system make decisions about these institutions. While some other focus on the internal and external structure of the governance and on the various actors who are involved in the governance of higher education. The writings produced by all these scholars increased the understanding about the governance of higher education.

Governance of higher education is the formal and informal arrangements which enable the institutions to make decisions and take necessary steps to implement those decisions into actions. It includes both internal and external governance. External governance defines the relationship of the institution with their supervisors i.e, government and the regulatory bodies whereas internal governance refers to the line of authority within that institution. Internal governance is carried out by the governing structure of the institution which includes Senate, Academic Council, Board of Studies, Research Board, Planning Board, Admission Committee, Dean of different Schools etc. *Education policy analysis (2003)* issued by OECD discussed how education is governed and analysed that governance of higher education consists of complex web of legislative framework that defines the boundaries under which all the formal and informal decisions are taken, the functioning of the institution is described, how these institutions relate to the whole system, how the funds are allocated and how they are accountable for the amount spent, what amount of autonomy will be given to the institution, how formal and informal relationships are made which steer and influence the behaviour. Ian Austin and Glen A. Jones (2016) in

their book *Governance of Higher Education Global Perspective, Theories and Practices* have discussed the three levels of the governance of higher education. First is the *micro level*, which refers basic academic units in the department. Second is the *meso* which at the level of organization. Third is the *macro level* which is the level of higher education system. Government at micro and meso level include the day to day functioning of the university of and how they manage the affairs of the institution by instrument of governance which facilitates decision making authority to ensure desired organizational performance outcomes. At the macro level state supervise to ensure that the higher education is going in the desired directions and achieving predetermined goals. Similarly, Birnbawm (1988) defines the governance as “Structure and process through which institutional participants interact with and influence each other and communicate with the larger environment” (as cited in Powar, 2011).

The above definitions indicate that the governance has no argued scope and it includes various aspects from structural to functional. Of all the aspects, this study deals with two important aspects i.e. Autonomy and Accountability. Autonomy means the freedom to make decisions and take actions in the internal matters of the institution without the external intervention and control. Accountability is the answerability of the actors involved in the governance to the government as the provider of the public tax funds and the society. Autonomy divided is divided into Academic Autonomy, Administrative Autonomy and Financial Autonomy. Similarly accountability is also divided Academic Accountability, Administrative Accountability and Administrative Accountability.

Evolution of higher education in India

The establishment of three public universities in 1857 in presidencies of Chennai, Kolkata and Mumbai marked the evolution of governance of higher education in India. The universities were mainly governing bodies; they served affiliating bodies for local colleges and reports to its local government. The main function of universities was to make arrangement to achieve the goals of its affiliating colleges by designing their curricula, holding examination and awarding degrees (Cornoy and Dossani, 2012). This federal system in the universities was adopted on the pattern of University of London. The government was not interested in governing the higher education through university only, thus 1904 the Indian university Act was passed, which led to the greater involvement of the government in the governance of higher education.

Immediately after independence, a **University Education Commission of 1948** was appointed which was a landmark in the governance of higher education in India. The commission recommended changes in the constitution, control, functioning and jurisdiction of universities in India and their relation with the government. The commission observed that due to lack of appropriate funds, universities are unable to implement reforms. In order to improve this condition, the commission recommended the establishment of UGC to allocate finance to the universities. It pleaded for sharing burden of universities education by the state government. It also recommended the

establishment of national standard regulating agencies. Thus, for the improving the governance of the higher education system, University Grant Commission was established by parliament as a national regulator of standards in 1956.

The establishment of Education Commission/ Kothari Commission marked the next development in the higher education governance. This commission was set to provide the basis for the formulation of national policy on education for India. The objective of the commission was to identify the areas in which reforms were required and recommend measures to work on those areas. For making the universities to attain their goals, the commission recommended the improvements in university administration and organizations. It favoured the grant of autonomous status to the affiliated colleges was under supervision of the university. Not only this, the commission favoured autonomy for university as well as for the departments within the university (Kothari Commission, 1966). After the one year of submitting its report in 1967 the plan for making national policy on education was executed. The National Policy on Education, 1968 came into existence and it took into consideration the recommendations of Education Commission up to a great extent, specifically with regard to school education. In the domain of higher education, the policy made the provisions of funds for establishment of new universities and asked for the promotion of quality and standard of higher education and research. It made the provision for setting up the centre of advanced study. Regulation of admissions was introduced with restricting the number students to be admitted in the universities and colleges in compatible to the laboratories, libraries and other infrastructural facilities and strength of the staff. The grant of funds for higher education was increased (Thorat, 2015).

The enrolment in the universities was increasing due to the increasing numbers of the population. The political climate of the country was also changing. The monopoly of the Congress Party was challenged first time in 9 states, which led to loosening of the power of the centre. It was getting difficult for the States to run the universities all alone thus they involved the outside agencies which failed to contribute in development of the universities productively. The resentment of the students became apparent in the form of violent agitation in campus which showed failure of universities governance (Koul, 1988 p.96). In this backdrop the committee was constituted in 1969 under the chairpersonship Gajendragadkar. The *Committee on the Governance of the Universities* was appointed for identifying the ways to improve the governance of universities. In this direction, commission recommended for reorganizing the structure of universities, functions and powers of the students' bodies. The committee observed that the universities should be sensitive to the changing condition of the societies and must be ready to meet new demands and requirements. The committee considered the demand of the students and faculty for their participation in the academic and administrative affairs of the institutions. The inflexibility or the rigidity of the governance structure produced detrimental results. Thus, the committee highlighted the need to make the universities as autonomous institutions so that they can make new innovations and experiments in the field of

knowledge. It advocated the autonomy of the university community required for internal governance of the institutions. (Gajendragadkar Committee, 1971).

While favouring the autonomy of the universities for making improvements in the governance structure, the Gajendragadkar commission neglected the aspect of the accountability. The accountability aspect was addressed in the document of 1985 "*Challenges of Education: The Policy Perspective*". The document stated, 'There is a general feeling that radical changes are required in the federal system of management in the relationship between various faculties, decision making bodies and VCs'. In order to make universities function properly it said that autonomy can only be strengthened if viable system of accountability of the university and administrative bodies within the universities could be established and proper system of incentives and disincentives could also made on this basis (Matheu A, 2015).

Later in 1986 National Policy on education came into existence with the proposal of making changes in the management structures of the higher education institutions. The policy proposed to "review the management patterns including the structure, roles and responsibility of various university/ bodies in the light of new demands on the university system" (NPE, 1986, 43). The system of affiliation of colleges with universities was criticized for curtailing the autonomy of the colleges. Thus, it was proposed to make provisions in the university acts to enable colleges to become autonomous. By keeping focus on the autonomy in academic, administrative and financial domain it was recommended to frame guidelines and patterns of assistance (Ibid., p. 44). Attainment of these objectives was possible only by securing the involvement of the university and faculty. Autonomous colleges and autonomous departments will play major role in the redesign of courses.

In early 1987, *Gnanam Committee* was appointed after its chairman, Prof. A .Gnanam. After the in-depth study of the various issues related to university management, the committee submitted its report in January 1990. The committee was appointed with objective of developing "*Alternate model of management*". The committee recommended for decentralization of power for the smooth and effective administration of the university affairs. The committee favoured the decentralisation of power to Deans\Heads to make the department powerful instrument for the advancement of knowledge. The ideas of granting autonomy to the college was further reinforced by the committee.

Based on the provision of the policy itself, a "*Committee to Review the National Policy on Education*" was appointed by the Government of India under the chairmanship of Acharya Rammamurty. It was observed by the committee that no visible developments were made even after the implementation of the policy. The Committee observed that "it continued to be governed by the same assumptions, goals and values that governed in the days of the British Raj" (Rammamurty Committee, iv). The committee recorded that the government was still following the "Downward Filtration Theory" which believes that education and culture would certainly flow from the elite to the masses. The education remained tied to textbooks and examinations and did not focus to equip the students with the required skills. The

reason identified was that education was left to the initiative and judgment of the specialists at the desk, controlled and guided by the people who were alien to the socio-economic and political needs of the society (Ibid., vi). The committee proposed for the decentralisation of power and recommended the restructuring of the UGC. It proposed that commission should have regional offices for the disposal of problems in respective regions (Ibid., pp. 194-96).

Further in 1992 a Programme of Action was approved by the Parliament but could not succeed in the established of National Commission for Higher education (NCHE), which was recommended by preceding committees. The different sectors of the Higher Education continued to be governed by respective regulatory bodies (Mathew, 2015) This Issue was again raised by National Knowledge Commission 2006 under the chairmanship of Sam Pitroda. On the issue of governance of higher education commission observed that “there is an acute need for reforms in the structure of Governance of Universities” (NKC,2006, p. 86). The Commission identified lack of autonomy of higher education institutions and the cause was rightly attributed to the political intervention. National Knowledge commission suggested that the VCs should be appointed on the basis of research productivity and peer judgment alone. There should be no direct or indirect intervention by the Government in his selection. It was observed that implicit politicization has made governance of universities exceedingly difficult and much more susceptible to entirely non-academic interventions from outside. This problem needs to be recognized and addressed in a systematic manner not only within universities but also outside, particularly in governments, legislatures and political parties (Ibid., p. 68-69).

The NKC stressed the need to establish an Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE). The proposal of the NKC was carry forwarded by “*The Committee to Advice on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education*” which is popularly known as Yashpal Committee after its chairman. With regard to the governance of higher education it observed that “universities are the most under-governed organization in the society” (YPC, 2009; p. 45). The governance structure is rigid and has not changed with the time. The rules and the regulation of the past era still dominate the system. The decision-making power is still centralized. The involvement of the students and the faculty in most of the policy decisions affecting academics is very low. The committee identified that “there is an urgent need to improve governance by developing expertise in ‘educational management’ and avoid burdening good academics with administrative chores” (Ibid.). It showed the desire of separating academic administration from the overall management of the university. The committee strongly favoured autonomy for improving governance structure of higher education (Ibid., p. 46).

On December 28, 2011 National Commission for Higher Education and Research Bill was introduced in Rajya Sabha by following the recommendations of the NKC and Yashpal Committee. The bill sought to create a new regulatory body for higher education in order to promote autonomy of the higher education institutions and to promote growth of the sector. The bill was referred to the Standing Committee

on Human Resource Development which submitted its report on December 13, 2012. It objected on making NCHER as an over-arching regulator of all disciplines. The Standing Committee suggested that NCHER's role should be that of facilitator and coordinator which will give direction in which higher education should move. (PRS Legislative Research, 2012). But the bill was withdrawn by the parliament in 2014.

Since the National Policy on Education 1986, the education scenario in the country has undergone many changes and thus, in order to address the emerging issues of the contemporary time, a committee was constituted for the *Evolution of the New Education Policy*, in October 2015 under the chairmanship of T.S.R Subramanian. The committee submitted its report on April 30, 2016 and reached at an inescapable conclusion that governance standards at all levels have been poor, to say the least. The committee come up with the open criticism that while nearly every agency or institution at the Centre or in the state talked openly about corruption, political intervention, over regulation and under-governance, no research or regulatory institution or national level statutory bodies attached to the ministry has openly researched these matters, and validated or dismissed these allegations (Ibid., p. 40). The Committee recommended that all aspects in the hierarchy needs to be reviewed to bring about transparency, clear-cut criteria in operations, establishment of open systems, independent outside verification to ensure compliance; and use of Information Technology appropriately to achieve the above (Ibid., p. 41). But the report of the committee was criticised of providing a blurred picture of a big issue. Now the drafted policy is waiting for inputs from different section of the society. In mid-2017, government decided to replace the UGC and AICTE with a new regulatory body called Higher Education Empowerment Regulation Agency (HEERA). But this was not materialised and exactly after one year, the government of India came up with a new announcement of replacing UGC with Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). Now, despite of vehement criticism from some section of the intellectual word, the "Higher Education Commission of India Act, 2018", is under process of legislation.

Conclusion

An analysis of the above-mentioned Commissions and Committees appointed from time to time in the domain of higher education and National Education policies leads us to the conclusion that there remained a problem of top down, centralized, monopolistic system of governance with high level of political intervention which has stifled the uniqueness and diversity resulting in uniform structure and practices. Along with it, the centralised system of governance and political intervention has made higher education a state institution. The centralized governance did not consider the local requirements because of lack of participation by the local people in the decision making which became irrelevant and faced opposition from the academia. This kind of one size fits all approach deteriorated the system of higher education. In order to bring reforms in this system all the committees and commission recommended for granting autonomy to higher education institutions and asked for decentralised

governance and minimum level of political intervention. But their wise words were not always followed in practice.

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