

PRIVATE UNAIDED ENGINEERING COLLEGES- DEVELOPMENT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

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INTRODUCTION :

The growth of any Nation is judged by the development of education specially in the field of Engineering Sciences and Technology. India is no exception to it. Prior to Independence, the facilities available in these fields were few and far from satisfactory. So was the case as regards industrial development. For example, the number of Engineering Colleges was only 8 which increased to 78 in the year, 1993.

After independence in the year 1947, a great visionary, Pandit Jawaharlal Neharu, the first Prime Minister of India, with his vision of building new temples of development, prosperity and progress in the form of various dams, industries, communication system, energy development etc. thought of expanding the technical education, when a number of Engineering Colleges, Regional Engineering Colleges, IIT's and other Institutes came up in fifties and early sixties. As a result, India took rapid strides towards building an industrialised nation, even with an agrarian base which was also sought to be improved.

PRIVATE UNAIDED ENGINEERING COLLEGES :

After Pandit Jawaharlal Neharu i. e. since 1964 to 1983, there was a period of lull in the development of technical education, although in certain states like Karnataka, some activity was noticable due to starting of private unaided engineering colleges. In Maharashtra, for example,

from 1964 to 1983, no engineering college was started nor a seat added to the existing ones, whereas during the same period, number of industries became ten folds and the school leavers at the higher secondary level also increased in the same proportion. Such an imbalance led to numerous problems like inadequate manpower availability, students seeking admission to professional institutes in the neighbouring states with consequential increase in its cost, lost employment opportunities within the state, and so on.

During the year 1983, there were two options available to the Govt. of Maharashtra; one either to open additional colleges or permit the starting of private self-financing unaided Engineering Colleges. In the absence of availability of sufficient funds, the Govt. chose the second option. As a result a large number of such colleges came into existence during that year. This provided much needed outlet to large number of students seeking engineering education and fulfill their aspirations. Apprehensions regarding the unaided engineering colleges were belied by quite a few engineering colleges. Some of them are able to compete with the well established Govt./Govt.- aided Engineering Colleges in terms of infra-structural facilities and academic standards. Some of them have ventured into new areas which were not treaded by others, thus opening new vistas.

PROBLEMS IN THE GROWTH OF PRIVATE ENGINEERING COLLEGES :

The number of private Engineering Colleges kept on increasing every year. Initially, during the first couple of years, with the large number of such colleges having come up, it was thought that there will be a glut. But, the first few batches have been practically absorbed by the industry and other establishments. But, of late, there seems to be no regulation and control, the colleges continue to grow in number, in spite of AICTE being a statutory body with responsibility of controlling and coordinating the growth of technical education on proper lines. Every year, more and more colleges are coming up. These are getting concentrated in three Southern States and Maharashtra. Same old courses are being started without much diversification. Thus there are imbalances of all sorts i.e. continuous increase in the colleges year after year, regional disparity in their growth and lack of new courses in tune with the demand in the new emerging areas.

Another important aspect of these new private colleges is as regards quality and standards. Despite excellent performance of most of the colleges specially those in the urban areas, some of the other colleges have displayed poor standards in terms of the facilities and performance. These are the institutes from rural areas where due to their location, they are unable to attract talented faculty, good quality students etc. It is a vicious circle; lack of quality will mean poor response, poor response will affect the economic viability which in turn will lead to loss of quality. Again, it is a question of concentration of large number of Institutes in a given area. In some cases, the supply exceeds the demand.

AICTE which is supposed to look at the development of the technical education in totality, has been negligent. Even after six years of it's being statutory, it has been very tardy and slow as regards the recognition of the colleges established

much earlier. As a result many problems are to be faced by colleges, the staff and the students. On the contrary, in case of colleges which have yet to see the light of the day, recognition is already granted. What a travesty of justice! Possibly there is no rhyme or rhythm in its functioning. It should overhaul its method of working and be rational. It should be more selective. Based on the merit of each institute with reference to various parameters, it should grant recognition to good institutes at the earliest and encourage them to develop further, whereas stern and decisive action is called for in respect of colleges with poor facilities and bad performance including their closure. With the recent appointment of a full-fledged chairman, it is hoped that AICTE will become more active and effective in performing its role of watchdog of technical education in the country.

AFTERMATH OF SUPREME COURT JUDGEMENT :

The Supreme Court judgement in Mohini Jain's case has created more problems than solving any. The remedy suggested by the Supreme Court is worse than the disease. Except for asserting that as per the constitution higher education is not fundamental right and accepting the fact that the higher professional education has to be cost-based (in the Private sector), there is nothing to commend in the judgement. In fact, it has made the confusion worse confounded. In giving the guidelines, it has possibly exceeded its brief. There is no basis or justification for the dual fee structure. Technical education is not a commodity like sugar which has got dual price structure, one available from the ration shop and the other in the open market. Why one should pay for the education of the other? In which area of natural justice does this philosophy lie ? Again what is the basis of 50 - 50 % division of seats as " free "and " payment " seats ? Does it mean that 50 % of population is very poor and 50 % is very

rich ? Rightly, merit has to be main criteria of selection as also accepted by the apex court, but from where do the top 50 % meritorious students come from, higher income group or lower income group ? Obviously it is the former. Then economically better off students have to pay less fees and those who are poor will have to pay much higher fees. (In Maharashtra it is Rs. 4,000 / - p.a. and Rs. 32,000 / - p.a. respectively). Can the latter afford such higher fees ? In its wake, the Supreme Court guide lines, if implemented by any state, will create still more problems arising out of the admission procedure, non-filling of payment seats resulting in economic non - viability of the colleges, wide disparity of students in the same college for the same course, in terms of academic levels and financial status and so on.

Again two possibilities emerge from the dual fee structure. A " payment " student may get First class or Distinction, in first and subsequent years, where as a " free " students may either fail or get ATKT. Even with better performance, the former will have to pay the higher fees of Rs. 32,000 /- and the latter with a dismal record will continue to pay the lower fee of Rs. 4,000 /-. It is very negation of Supreme Court's accepted principle of merit based admission with lower fees. Similarly, with large differential in the standards of students admitted in an institution for a certain course, it is quite likely that most of the "free" seat students may pass and majority of " payment " seat students may fail to get through the examinations. Obviously, fee collected mostly from " free " seat students, will not be adequate to cover all the expenditure, as the " payment " seat candidates who have failed, will not be paying their fees. In that case how can the institute survive ?

WORKABLE ALTERNATIVE :

The Supreme Court was required to intervene as the people were losing faith

in the private colleges due to some undesirable practices followed by few institutions and the creditability in certain cases was going down. The existing procedure (prior to Supreme Court judgement) in Maharashtra state, was formulated by the Govt. after careful thought. But the implementation has not been above board. It is, therefore, suggested that the existing procedure be maintained and acceptance of donations against the management quota be legalised and the institutions should be required to pass authorised receipts against all payments. There should be strict control by the Govt. at all stages of admissions, right from calling the application forms till the last student is admitted. Any deviation from the procedure laid down should be seriously viewed and appropriate action be taken against the erring institute. Fees as laid down for the Govt. colleges be allowed for backward class and economically weaker sections of the society to an extent of 10 % of the admissions. The rest of the students be charged the same fees annually.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS :

The growth of the technical education should be fully controlled. Manpower requirements be correctly assessed in various areas of development. It is only on this basis, new colleges or/and new courses be allowed to be started. AICTE and University authorities must lay down reasonably desirable norms for infrastructural norms. It is found that some of the norms of AICTE are exorbitant and are not being implemented even in old Govt. or Govt.-aided colleges. These should be made realistic and consistent with the requirements of syllabi of the Universities. Equally important is that these bodies should rigorously try to see that the standards are maintained and quality of education is improved. With large number of Engineering Colleges in the private sector, this is very important.

AICTE must expeditiously take up the process of recognition of the private colleges. Good institutes be encouraged to develop and bad ones should be asked to close down.

It is also necessary that new diversified courses in the emerging areas be started either at the degree level or at master's level as the case may be. Some of the new areas are agro-industries, composite materials, fiber-optics, alternate sources of energy and energy management, bio-medical engineering etc.

Good private colleges be encouraged to start post-graduate courses, possibly with partial aid from the Govt. due to the small numbers of students so as to make them self-sufficient.

Some of the well established engineering colleges in Govt. and private sector be made autonomous and even be accorded deemed University status based on their facilities, performance, capabilities and their willingness to accept such challenges. This will encourage competitive element among the colleges so as to excel in their performance.

