THE UNIVERSITIES AND THE PUBLIC IN INDIA

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I

IN this essay [1] I propose to deal with some of the ways in which public policy, political practice and public opinion in India affect the functioning of the Indian universities. Before doing so, it will be useful to describe some of the peculiarities of the Indian university system.

II

The first three universities in India, those of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, were established in 1858 and one can say that higher education in the modern sense has a history of about a hundred years. In most Western countries the word "university" means generally an institution in which the teachers impart knowledge to the students on both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, carry on research and other learned activity, test the students and award first and higher degrees and diplomas to those who satisfactorily complete their studies. The term "college" is frequently used in the United States to refer to institutions which teach only undergraduates, which award degrees but which have no postgraduate or professional schools. Sometimes the term is used to refer to specialised technological or scientific institutions which award degrees, such as, for example, "medical colleges" or "engineering colleges". In Oxford and Cambridge a college is a more or less autonomous institution of residence and instruction for students and some members of the staff; it is a constituent part of the university and provides only a limited amount and type of the teaching of its students, much of which is done by the university, which has independent powers of appointment. In some other universities a college may be merely the undergraduate division of the university.

In India, however, both these words have a somewhat different meaning. For a long time, indeed up to about 1915, the universities in India confined their activities to laying down syllabi and courses of study in detail, arranging and conducting examinations of the students

[1] Some parts of this essay deal with aspects of higher education in India, which the author has treated in his "Survey of Higher Education in India", prepared for the Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, in the spring of 1962.

and granting degrees and certificates to those who satisfied the examiners. The actual teaching was done in colleges which were affiliated to the universities and which were situated in any part of the large region over which each university had jurisdiction. Because government was almost the sole employer of educated persons in the early stages and in any case the largest employer for a long time after that, only the degrees of the universities which the state had established by statute were recognised. There was thus no chance for non-government collegiate institutions functioning independently and granting their own degrees and certificates, as happens in many other countries, particularly in the United States.

Nonetheless, until about 1910 the Indian universities still had no departments or teachers of their own. Calcutta University was the first to make a departure in this direction. Sir Ashutosh Mukerji, who was its Vice-Chancellor, conceived this plan and obtained several large donations to establish chairs in different subjects (*e.g.*, the Palit and the Ghosh professorships, etc.). The central government, which had its seat in Calcutta at that time, and the government of Bengal were also persuaded to provide funds. In the course of a few years Calcutta University had a number of postgraduate departments in which both teaching and research were conducted. The other universities also gradually followed the same pattern of development; thus what were once exclusively "affiliating" universities became "affiliating and teaching". The teaching, however, was confined to the postgraduate level at the seat of the university, while all undergraduate teaching continued to be done at the affiliated colleges. (Much later, a few of the bigger and better colleges also developed postgraduate departments of their own.)

While this development has been taking place, the number of universities has increased from three in 1858 to about 50 in 1961–62. Although a few of them provide for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, the large majority of universities still confine the work of their own departments to postgraduate teaching and research. They leave undergraduate teaching entirely to the affiliated colleges, which are often situated at long distances from the parent university and have little direct or personal contact with it. There are also a few "unitary and teaching universities" which have no affiliated colleges and resemble the usual type of university in the West. Nonetheless, about 90 per cent. of all undergraduate students in India study in about 1,000 affiliated colleges all over the country.

This arrangement has not usually satisfied observers of the Indian university system. Quite early, efforts were made to change it. In 1902 the government of India appointed a commission to review the progress

of higher education in the country and to make recommendations for its further development. The main recommendations of this commission were: (1) the universities should assume the teaching functions which were characteristic of universities elsewhere, in addition to recognising colleges, taking them into affiliation and holding examinations; (2) greater control over the affiliated colleges should be exercised so as to maintain high standards; (3) postgraduate and research departments should be started.

One of the most drastic proposals for reform was put forward by the Calcutta University Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Michael Sadler, which reported in 1917 on the future development of university education in India and of the Calcutta University in particular. It recommended that (1) a number of "intermediate colleges" should be established, particularly in the smaller towns and cities, where students who had completed their high school course would spend two more years as a preparation for the university degree course proper; (2) the universities should admit students only after they had passed through these intermediate colleges; then they should go through a three year course of studies leading up to the first, *i.e.*, bachelor's degree; (3) new universities should be of the residential and teaching type, *i.e.*, the university should undertake all teaching, both undergraduate and postgraduate, through teachers directly appointed by it and not through the agency of affiliated colleges.

Whatever may be said about the suitability of the recommendations of the Calcutta University Commission on general or theoretical grounds, they could not be put into practice both on account of financial stringency and because the development of higher education in India had gone too far along old lines for it to be directed into the new pattern. A couple of hundred colleges for the teaching of undergraduates had been started during the 60 years following the establishment of the first three universities; it would have been impossible to down-grade all of them into "intermediate colleges" and to compel all degree students to migrate to the seats of the universities for their undergraduate studies. The Calcutta University Commission's scheme might perhaps have raised standards of undergraduate instruction, but would have definitely put a brake on the spread of higher education, such as it was. In fact many educationists characterised the intermediate colleges as nothing more than somewhat more advanced secondary schools and they feared that able and well-qualified teachers would not be ready to join them if they never had the prospect of teaching degree classes. The other possibility would have been, of course, to convert every affiliated college into an independent

institution granting its own degrees (in fact, to adopt the American system) and to let the degrees be judged on their own merits. Somehow this alternative has never appealed either to the public or to the government. People always wanted a stamp of official recognition [2] and there was always the fear that private institutions would lower the standards and give cheap degrees, thus bringing all higher education into contempt. The integrity and impartiality of college teachers and administrators have never been absolutely above suspicion and, since fee receipts were the major source of revenue for them, it was feared that decentralisation of the degree-granting authority would result in a lowering of standards simply for the sake of an increased income.

This peculiar system of statutorily recognised universities and their affiliated colleges has therefore remained a special feature of the structure of higher education in India. There have been some advantages. It has made possible a relatively rapid spread of post-secondary education through the readiness to permit new colleges to be formed even in small towns. Local organisations with modest resources could establish colleges, at least in the faculties of Arts, Science, Commerce, etc., and students were thereby enabled to secure degrees from universities which had higher prestige. On the other hand, the academic evaluation of the degrees of a university has, to some extent, suffered because students in all affiliated colleges, old and new, efficient and inefficient, appeared at the same examinations and received the same degrees.

III

The desire for a certificate or degree from a statutorily established and therefore governmentally recognised institution is deeply ingrained in all classes in India. Every public examination, right from the primary school certificate to the Ph.D., has to be conducted by statutory bodies; they are thereby directly or indirectly connected, through the Department of Education, with the authority of the government of the states or the Union. The argument in favour of this system is that if in a state or region there

[2] At various times during the political movement for liberation, the system of education in India under the British was attacked by political leaders as " un-Indian " or degrading, and several independent schools, colleges and even universities (*e.g.*, in Poona, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, etc.) were started in order to wean away students from the government-recognised institutions. In no case, however, were these " national " institutions able to attract significant numbers of students. The main reason for this was the absence of public recognition either by the state or by statutory universities or other authorities. Thus a student who had received his education in a " national " school could get no employment either in government departments or in educational institutions working under the grant-in-aid code or even in the more important business concerns. He would therefore be forced either to start a small business of his own, which was possible only in a very few cases, or to seek employment in a small business or industry of which also only a very few were in existence.

is a single board or university, legally authorised to examine candidates and award degrees and certificates, authenticity is achieved and uniform and comparable judgements can be formed.

The examination system is very carefully organised and it is uniform in pattern throughout practically all of India. The procedure is roughly the following: the university authorities appoint one or more examiners for each subject or for each paper in a subject depending upon the number of candidates and the nature and number of papers. The examiners draw up a set of questions, which are printed or mimeographed and kept secret until the time of the examination. The set of questions, called the question paper, is handed over to the candidates and they are asked to sit for a definite length of time, usually three hours, under the supervision of an invigilator, and write their answers in the notebook provided by the university. Every precaution is taken to see that they do not cheat.

In order to eliminate any possibility of favouritism based on the candidate's caste, religion, or language, about which there is much contention in public and much apprehension among university authorities, each examinee is given a serial number which he writes on the cover of his answer book for identification. His name does not appear on his examination papers. This is due, firstly, to the fact that some of the examiners are not above suspicion and, secondly, to the need to assure the students and the public that justice is done. The collected answer books are then examined and evaluated by the examiners and in due course the results, *i.e.*, the marks and the class earned by each student, are announced.

With the tremendous increase in the numbers of students in institutions of higher education—now nearly a million—and the relatively small number of universities—about 50—the numbers appearing for the examinations of each university have also become very large. Elaborate administrative arrangements for appointing examiners, for conducting the examinations in dozens of different towns and cities and in several different places in the same city, for seating arrangements, for supervision during the examination, for the printing of the question papers and for keeping them secret, for tabulating and totalling the marks and for declaring the results, have to be made.

This system has many drawbacks. The first and foremost is that teaching in the colleges becomes mechanical and stereotyped. Because students who have studied in many different colleges under many different teachers have to take the same examination, the syllabus for each course ("paper" as it is usually called) has to be drawn up in very great detail. For many "papers", textbooks are prescribed or sometimes even

particular chapters and pages are assigned and examiners and paper-setters receive strict instructions from the university authorities not to go beyond these when drawing up question papers. Even the practical work which students have to carry out for examinations in science subjects has to be laid down in great detail so that students in all affiliated colleges perform the same experiments and, usually, no others. College work is given very little importance and all attention is focused only on the final examination held by an external set of examiners. The teachers must be very careful not to introduce their own individual viewpoints or follow up their own intellectual interests. Very few students go beyond the set syllabus or read any books other than the prescribed textbooks. Indeed, privately produced " notes " and " guides ", giving " likely questions " and their answers, and purchasable in the open market, are preferred to the officially prescribed textbooks. Teachers naturally suffer the ill-effects of this set of arrangements and their teaching becomes routine and lifeless. If a teacher went beyond the syllabus or discussed general aspects rather than the particular items prescribed by the board of studies, no student would pay any attention to him, and if he persisted in his " mad " idea, his classes would soon become empty. This examination system permeates the atmosphere of the universities and colleges in India today, and helps to explain many of their problems. To change it, however, is extremely difficult, not only because of the structure of the universities but because Indian public opinion is so preoccupied with it.

Examinations and the performance of students as announced in the published results have assumed so much importance in the life of the middle class in India that serious consequences follow for the public response towards the universities. It is ordinary practice for the newspapers to print the names or numbers of the successful candidates and sometimes even extra issues are published. It has happened that when the result of a particular examination was rather strict and a larger number of candidates than usual failed, public agitation in the newspapers and on the platform has been known to have taken place as a protest against the " massacre of the innocents ".

Because of the great importance attributed to the examination results, many ill-prepared students resort to unfair means in the examinations. Occasionally there have been cases of candidates who used physical violence against the supervisors who caught some student using unfair means during the course of an examination. Every year universities have to appoint investigation committees to look into the cases of students who have copied their neighbour's answers in the examination hall, have smuggled in books or notes, or otherwise infringed on the regulations. Occasionally some, or even many, candidates refuse to answer a paper

and create disorderly scenes if they think that a question paper is excessively difficult or out of the ordinary. There have been cases of impersonation of candidates, and of persons outside the hall announcing the answers to the questions on a loudspeaker for the benefit of the candidates inside the examination hall.

It cannot be denied that at least in the early days, when the number of colleges and the number of candidates appearing for the examinations were small, the system ensured uniformity, maintained standards and eliminated partiality. The anonymity of the candidates was desirable in order to prevent favouritism, because the name usually discloses not only the religion and the linguistic region but also, in many cases, the caste of the examinee. There is a general apprehension lest the examiner be influenced by such extra-academic considerations.

The kind of general confidence in the impartiality and integrity of the teacher or examiner, which is almost universal in Western society, is absent in Indian society today and it cannot be said that the academic world in India has succeeded in creating that confidence by their record. Cases of disclosure of questions by examiners to some students, of awarding higher marks to undeserving candidates, etc., have not been unknown, and in the kind of divided society in which we live, the Indian system of examinations has, despite the numerous difficulties which attend it, something to recommend it.

Thus, while the condition of Indian society necessitates the examination system in its present form, it should not be overlooked that it has great defects from the educational point of view. First and foremost is the fact that a student's work in the college during the period of study prior to the examination receives no consideration during the final marking. His marks and class are solely based on his performance in the final examination, which is conducted by examiners who are not his teachers. A number of students neglect their studies during a large part of the year, do no systematic work, and still manage to get passing marks or even sometimes good marks in the final examination, by intensive study for a few weeks. Then again, written examinations based on a rigid syllabus tend to force the educational process into a very routine pattern. Furthermore, a host of auxiliary evils, such as the guides, notes, model answers to expected questions already referred to and private coaching classes, which are intended to help the student to pass the examination, diminish the possibility of awakening curiosity and stimulating the motivation to gain a deeper understanding of a subject. Of course, the head of the college has, theoretically, the right to refuse permission to a student who has not carried out his work satisfactorily to appear for the final examination, but very few heads exercise that power.

Like other deviations from a high standard of educational responsibility, the failure to exercise his power to exclude an unsatisfactorily prepared student may be due either to the pressure exerted on the head of the college by influential persons in the community or by the financial supporters of the college or to a mistaken idea of his duties.

The system of determining marks as a percentage of 100 has been taken directly from the practice common in Britain. But nobody who reads answer books by the score can possibly reach a level of accuracy to within one per cent. Many educationists think that all that an examiner can confidently do is to put each candidate into one of four or five broad categories, like excellent, good, fair, adequate or unsatisfactory, which can be designated by letters from A to E. In India, however, not only are marks on a scale of 100 universally awarded, but in many cases they are used as a complete guide to the evaluation of the calibre of a student. Prizes, scholarships, admissions to engineering and medical colleges—everything is decided on the basis of marks and a difference of one per cent. may underlie very important decisions which affect the student's entire future. The general tendency is to regard all examinations, even qualifying examinations, as competitive and all candidates who appear for a certain examination are arranged in an order of merit according to the marks that they secure. In spite of the subjective variations due to different sets of examiners evaluating the answer books of different groups of candidates and many other factors which destroy uniformity, the method persists.

Any suggestion that the judgment of a student's teachers about his work in the college should be given due consideration is opposed on two grounds: (1) loss of uniformity, and (2) possible favouritism. As it is, there is really no uniformity, as the papers of all candidates are not assessed by the same set of examiners. Nobody can reasonably expect that the 50 universities in the country, which conduct scores of examinations, can maintain any kind of uniformity, even though they all recognise each other's examinations and give equivalence to them as a matter of routine practice.

In the case of examinations in science, medicine, engineering, agriculture, etc., there are practical and oral examinations in addition to the written tests, but they are also conducted either exclusively or in association with "external" examiners, *i.e.*, those who were not the teachers of the candidates concerned. In many cases these practical examinations have also become standardised and mechanical because of the insistence on "uniformity". In examinations only those experiments are set for which even the most poorly equipped college has the apparatus or for which a sufficient number of specimens are available. This in turn leads to

a neglect on the part of the students of that part of the practical work during their studies which is not likely to be asked in the examination.

The system has gradually developed in such a way that students who really do not deserve to pass actually manage to do so. The minimum requirement for passing, *viz.*, about 35 per cent., is already very low.[3] But in addition, the question paper usually offers to candidates, even in the highest examinations, a wide range of choice in answering questions. Thus if answering six questions is sufficient for getting full marks, ten or more questions are asked and the students can thus avoid those questions, or the questions on those parts of the syllabus, which they are reluctant or unprepared to tackle. A candidate who has not read the whole range of the subject can often select the necessary number of questions bearing only on that part which he has studied and still do well in the examination. Thus the system of examination leads to selective study even at the level of the master's degree. It is then from among these M.A.s and M.Sc.s that the colleges select their lecturers.

IV

In most countries, perhaps with the exception of the U.S.A., universities depend for their work on resources provided by the government. India is no exception to this.[4] Four universities—Delhi, Aligarh, Banaras and

[3] The broader social and political trends in India are to some extent the cause of the low standards of academic performance. In the old days, students receiving higher education were drawn almost wholly from the upper castes, which had a tradition of learning. In their homes there would be books and newspapers, and political, social and religious questions would be discussed. In the last few decades a rapid expansion at all levels of education has taken place and a large number of students from the lower castes, including the scheduled castes (formerly untouchables), now attend schools and colleges. Their home background is such that they have no tradition of learning. They are often the only persons in their families who are literate and this is proving to be a handicap to them in their competition with their higher caste countrymen.

In my opinion, the rate of expansion of education at all levels has outstripped the supply of properly qualified teachers and the equipment that is needed for the maintenance of proper standards. The salary and conditions of service for teachers were never very attractive and usually only those who were unable to enter other more lucrative professions adopted the teacher's career. But the starting of many new colleges with poor financial resources, inadequate libraries, ill-equipped laboratories and with teachers who barely satisfied the minimum requirements (a second-class master's degree), must bear some of the responsibility for the poor quality of many college graduates.

[4] In pre-independence days non-government colleges used to receive relatively large amounts as donations and endowments from the rich and even from the upper middle class. This is no longer true. For one thing, the number of institutions has increased considerably and what little charity there is, is distributed over a larger field. Also there has been a change of attitude. As the British Indian government was reluctant to sanction large amounts of money for education, it was thought to be necessary for private persons to come forward with financial help. With an Indian government in power, which is keen on educating Indians, this is no longer thought to be urgent. Finally, tax exemption rules also make it difficult for institutions to receive large donations. The tax exemption applies only to donations of Rs. 100,000 or to five per cent. of the total income, whichever is less. It is probable that an industrialist who spends money for research, either in his own laboratories or in a laboratory jointly established by him and his colleagues in the same industry, can claim this as a legitimate expenditure on development and thus

Visva-Bharati—are entirely the financial responsibility of the centre. All other universities are primarily dependent on the financial support of the states in which they are situated. In addition, the University Grants Commission gives grants to all universities out of the sums placed at its disposal by the Union government. In most Western countries the fact that universities are dependent on the state for financial support has usually no connection with their internal academic policies. Thus the universities in many Western countries, including the state universities in the United States, are not subjected to public pressure in academic matters, except in rare instances. In the matter of admissions, syllabi, standards of examinations, etc., the teachers are, by and large, free to take decisions without reference to the politicians, bureaucrats or representatives of the public.

The general public in Western countries has confidence in the integrity and ability of academic persons, there is also a tradition that internal university affairs are the business of the university staff and their governing bodies are not, except in a very general way, the concern of the public at large. It is accepted by almost everybody that rules about admission of students and policies about the maintenance of standards formulated by university men are intended for the good of society as a whole. In India unfortunately the situation is quite different. In the first place there is nothing like the same confidence in the teachers in universities and colleges, and members of the public think it permissible and even necessary to do everything that they can in order to influence the decisions of academic bodies in various matters. (Of course, it must be regretfully admitted that teachers in universities and colleges have not always behaved in such a way as to inspire the kind of confidence that one finds in the West.) Again, in an underdeveloped country, where new hopes and expectations in the minds of people who have had no opportunity for social and economic advancement through education, coupled

reduce his profits by that amount. If, however, the same amount is donated to an educational institution and is above the minimum referred to above, it will be taxed. There is thus no incentive in the tax system for Indian businessmen to help the universities. In some instances, industrialists have preferred to establish independent institutions of research in science and technology rather than direct the stream of their charity towards the universities. The Indian Institute of Science was established in 1911 and handsomely endowed by Mr. J. N. Tata, the then head of the famous house of Tatas. This institution has now over a dozen different sections ranging from chemical technology to internal combustion engines and from aeronautics to theoretical physics. The Shri Ram Institute at Delhi and a few others are in the same category. These institutions have a loose kind of connection with the universities and some of their professors are recognised as guides for the students working for their Ph.D. degrees.

In recent years, industrialists in India have developed and supported another type of research institute. This is a specialised institute for research in problems pertaining to particular industries. There are institutes for jute (Calcutta), cotton textiles (Ahmedabad), silk and art silk (Bombay), and a few others. These institutions are quite independent of the universities.

with the new power obtained through a democratic constitution, the universities and colleges become subject to various kinds of pressures, seldom known in Western countries.

The structure of university government in India lends itself easily to intervention into university affairs by groups and interests beyond the university. It will be helpful therefore to set forth the general outlines of Indian university government.

There is a large deliberative body called the senate or the court, sometimes referred to as "the supreme governing body" in the incorporating acts, usually with the power to sanction the annual budget and to decide questions of major policy. The executive body which is in charge of day-to-day administration is called the executive council or university council or syndicate. This consists partly of non-academic persons elected by the larger body and partly of the teachers in the university and its affiliated colleges elected by the academic council or the faculties or the boards of studies. In most universities the head of the education department of the state or his representative is an *ex-officio* member of the executive authority. The academic council, consisting of the representatives of the teachers, deals with purely academic matters like syllabi, examination procedures and standards, minimum qualifications of teachers, etc. However, most decisions of the academic council require confirmation by the executive council before they are implemented. There are boards of studies for individual subjects or groups of allied subjects, usually consisting of teachers and experts from outside. The boards of studies are then grouped together in faculties, *e.g.*, Arts, Science, Law, Medicine, Technology, etc., and there is a dean at the head of each faculty.

The senate or court in most Indian universities has representatives of the graduates, of various public associations (*e.g.*, municipalities, local boards, chambers of commerce, labour unions, etc.), of teachers including heads of colleges, of large donors and benefactors. The governor of the state, who is usually *ex-officio* chancellor of all universities in a state, has the right to nominate a certain number of members. Heads of some departments of the state government are also *ex-officio* members. The chancellors have ordinarily no direct connection with the routine administration, but they have the power to decide disputes regarding the interpretation of the act or the rules made under it and can veto certain proposals. The governors of the states, according to the Indian constitution, are "constitutional" heads of the state and have therefore to follow the advice of the state cabinet in all matters. Thus the state governments get some measure of control over university affairs, but legally the universities are regarded as autonomous bodies.

The vice-chancellor is the chief executive officer of the university and

is the chairman of both the executive and academic councils and also of the senate or court. With a few exceptions, the vice-chancellors of all Indian universities are full time salaried officers. They are either appointed by the chancellors or are elected by the senates or courts. In the case of some universities there is provision to restrict the election or appointment to a panel of names prepared by a small committee. Most vice-chancellors are not academic persons but are prominent individuals from other fields like politics, law, business, etc. Under the vice-chancellor is the whole administrative machinery, with a registrar at the top. In some universities, where the vice-chancellor is an honorary officer, there may be a full time rector or pro-vice-chancellor, who deputises for him and exercises such of his powers as are delegated to him.

The problem of how much authority in the administrative and policy-making fields in a university should be exercised by persons from other fields, *i.e.*, those not directly concerned with education as teachers, has been a subject of discussion in India. Initially of course the universities were dominated to a large extent by non-academic persons including government officials. Even now, though direct control has passed from the hands of government officials, representatives of the public and persons prominent in other fields do exercise considerable influence through the senate or the syndicate. Teachers have maintained that education is their business and that they should be entrusted with the conduct of the affairs of a university. Non-teachers have countered that as the public foots the bill and also sends its children to the universities, their representatives must have a say in the matter. The dominant interpretation of the constitutions of most universities in India inclines towards the latter view to a large extent. Generally, however, purely academic matters are left to the teachers, but even there, the executive authority has a deciding voice in those cases where financial considerations are involved. Thus the creation of new departments or teaching posts or the expansion of existing departments requires the sanction of bodies which have a substantial non-academic membership.

In such matters as the language to be used in instruction or the raising of entrance requirements to higher education, the non-academic elements in university bodies are in a position to influence the final decisions. The introduction of Hindi and/or the regional language as a language of instruction in place of English or in addition to English in several universities has been generally attributed to the demands made by non-academic members of university bodies.

Thus, although the typical constitution of the Indian university is entirely compatible with the most far-reaching attainment of university autonomy, it also allows for the possibility of decisions which have no

good academic grounds and which can in fact be very disruptive of academic work.

The constitutional safeguards of academic autonomy are rather less strong in the affiliated colleges. A very large number of the affiliated colleges are conducted by non-government agencies like caste associations, religious organisations and *ad hoc* bodies formed by educators, philanthropists and local notabilities. Their financial position is usually very straitened although they usually obtain annual and capital grants from governments.

(These " private colleges " usually teach courses in arts, commerce, humanities and pure science. Colleges teaching technical and professional courses, engineering, agriculture, technology, medicine, are, with rare exception, conducted only by government, because it alone can command the necessary resources.)

Thus both the " privately " conducted colleges and the governmentally supported colleges and universities are vulnerable to intrusions from outside. Public pressure on universities is exercised, as we have already indicated, from the very moment a new college seeks affiliation. Typically, an association in a small town draws up a scheme for starting a new college and submits it to the university. Usually the scheme suffers from many inadequacies in accommodation, teaching staff, equipment, books in the library, etc. The inquiry committee appointed by the university lays down conditions to be fulfilled by the sponsors of the new college before affiliation will be granted. When the report comes up for consideration before the university bodies, these requirements are often watered down. In some cases permission is granted for the first admission of students even when proper provision has not been made—the date for compliance with the requirements having been postponed. In most states, the final power of affiliation rests with the state government and the university can merely submit its recommendation on the matter. Thus it is possible for influential local people, who may belong to the party in power or may be members of the legislature, to exert pressure on the state Department of Education. One can say without much exaggeration that in many cases the newer colleges, which are deficient in many respects, could not have come into existence without the aid of considerable political pressure originating outside the university.

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pressure usually does not arise. Almost everybody who fulfills the minimum requirements gets admitted, since the number of affiliated colleges is continuously increasing, keeping pace with the growing number of students who complete their secondary education and seek higher education in these branches of study. Except in the case of unitary teaching universities, the admission of students for undergraduate study is dealt with primarily by the authorities conducting affiliated colleges, the universities only laying down the minimum qualifications for admission of students. Now, in the case of non-professional and non-technical colleges, these authorities are mostly voluntary local organisations and when and if the need arises, the local people are in a position to influence them. In some instances, the university authorities have to be persuaded to allow colleges to admit more than the permitted number of students; this also usually does not prove to be very difficult because the universities are unlikely to resist.

Public pressure for the admission of students becomes really serious in connection with engineering, medical and other professional courses. This is because everybody recognises that persons with qualifications in these fields have vastly better economic opportunities and secondly because the number of available places is very much smaller than the number of applicants with the minimum qualifications. Since most of these professional colleges are conducted by government, it is therefore the state Minister of Education who either becomes the target of the pressure from the public or himself formulates admission policies which are not based purely on academic considerations.

In the years just after independence, the heads of these colleges were given considerable latitude in the matter of admission. Gradually, however, the Minister of Education in the state was increasingly pressed, by interested individuals and groups, to intervene in the admission procedure of the colleges.

This pressure must be viewed in the historical context of Indian society. After the advent of the British and the introduction of the Western type of education, the castes and communities which took advantage of the new opportunities were those that already had a tradition of learning and study. These were, generally, the Brahmans, the Kayasthas and a few others. Other castes, with rare exceptions, did not aspire to modern education, nor were the opportunities for them plentiful. In any case at the time of independence the spread of education was very uneven and the state governments, who on account of universal adult suffrage were now under severe pressure from the backward castes and rural populations, tried by various means to make it easy for persons belonging to these groups to gain entrance into institutions of higher education,

particularly those offering technical and professional courses. The number of available places being limited, this naturally resulted in the exclusion of many better qualified students and secured admissions of the less qualified. According to a provision in the Indian constitution, a certain proportion, usually 10 per cent., of the places have to be reserved for the "scheduled castes" (former untouchables) and scheduled tribes (the aborigines). But for the remaining seats the competition was very keen. The educationally advanced castes naturally insisted that all the non-reserved seats be filled on the basis of merit only. The educationally backward castes, however, urged that such a procedure would perpetuate the present state of affairs since the backward castes could not hold their own in competition with those who had a head start over them. The proponents of an extension of the caste-criterion of admission argued that adherence to the principle of merit would militate against the goal of an integrated casteless society.

The governments of some states recognised the importance of educational standards and threw open the non-reserved places to competition by merit, helping the educationally backward castes by stipends, free studentships, etc. Some other state governments, however, named a large number of castes in addition to those recognised by the constitution as backward or very backward and reserved a large number of places in professional colleges for them. This left only a very few places for open competition on the basis of merit. In one state, Mysore, the situation became so blatant that the guardians of some students belonging to the advanced castes, who had been refused admission to a state medical college, in spite of the fact that less qualified students of the backward castes had been admitted, decided to go to the Supreme Court to test the validity of the procedures adopted by the Mysore state. The Supreme Court, in its judgment, declared unconstitutional the procedures adopted by the Mysore state, according to which, in addition to the statutory reservations for the scheduled castes and tribes, further large reservations had been made for castes which the state government had designated to be backward. The state was ordered to admit the wards of the petitioners. This may result, perhaps next year, in the establishment of merit as the criterion for non-reserved places.

The foregoing is one example of public pressure exerted on the affiliated colleges—both governmental and private. Since the colleges teach only the courses prescribed by the universities and do not conduct the final examinations, the universities are under pressure with respect to the various matters which fall within their jurisdiction.

The universities lay down, for example, the requirements for admission. It is not unusual therefore to find members of university senates

and courts advocating the inclusion of non-academic subjects like drawing, typewriting, music, dancing, homemaking, etc., among the subjects in which a candidate for admission must pass on an equal footing with, say, mathematics, science, languages or history. They insist that any student passing in a certain *number* of subjects without regard to what they are, be admitted to colleges—thus enabling him to by-pass the "difficult" subjects. Likewise, any attempt to raise the percentage of marks qualifying for entrance (say from 35 per cent., which is usually the minimum, to 40 per cent. or 45 per cent.) is stoutly resisted by all the representatives of the public on university bodies. If in the case of a particular examination the proportion of failing candidates is higher than in the preceding few years, there is a public hue and cry and even examiners become nervous in failing candidates.

It has to be confessed that in these and other similar matters, it is not as if it is the non-academic public alone which exerts the pressure and that the academic world, *i.e.*, the teachers, try their best to resist it. Many of the non-government colleges, founded and conducted by private or semi-public organisations, caste associations, religious groups, etc., even though they receive a small grant from government, are very dependent on the students' fees for most of their income. Therefore not only the non-academic members of their governing bodies and the larger number of contributing members, but the teachers, too, often support the demand for lowering standards of admission, etc. In the case of the affiliating universities, the heads of affiliated colleges and their teachers have a very powerful voice in the academic council and the boards of studies. They are therefore in a position to influence university policy in purely academic matters even more than representatives of the public.

VI

The question of the medium of instruction which has been agitating the mind of the public in India, both academic and non-academic, since independence, provides in microcosm a picture of how various external social and political factors influence matters which are of the utmost importance in higher education. For almost a century after the establishment of the universities in India, English was the medium of instruction in high schools and in higher education. It was also the language of administration in the provinces and at the centre. Educated Indians, who alone possessed in English a means of communication which was current all over India, organised the movement for the liberation of the country. The ordinary people were drawn into this movement, usually by the leaders in each region appealing to them in their regional language. By

the end of World War II, the public as well as educationists began to agitate for the replacement of English by the regional languages as media of instruction. As Indians began to acquire more and more influence in the provincial administrations, they were able to get this demand accepted and the regional languages, *i.e.*, the mother tongues of a large majority of the pupils, were adopted as the media of instruction in high schools. At the stage of higher education, however, English continued to be used as the medium of instruction.

The Indian constitution provides that Hindi, written in the Devanagari script, should become the "official language of the Union", beginning with 1965. Hindi is the language spoken by about 35 to 40 per cent. of Indians. (This is according to the 1951 census figures and even those are not very accurate, since in some of the Northern states the census operations were vitiated by various circumstances. The figures about the number of speakers of different languages, according to the 1961 census, are not yet known.) The regional languages have acquired a greater importance since the reorganisation of the states, as all of them have become one-language regions, with perhaps the exception of the Punjab. Most states have decided to adopt, in due course, the regional languages as languages of administration. The Departments of Education, which exercise detailed control over secondary education, had, in several cases, already modified the syllabi of high schools with a view to reducing the time allotted to English and increasing the importance of Hindi. Gradually the demand that English should not be allowed to remain as the medium of instruction in higher education gathered strength. There was, however, no unanimity about which language was to replace English. The advocates of the regional languages pointed out the soundness of the principle that the mother tongue was the best medium of instruction. The need to bring new thoughts, new science and new technology into the regional languages and thus down to the common man was also emphasised. This, they said, could be done best if the regional languages were made the vehicles of thought at the level of higher education.

The protagonists of Hindi are to a large extent the speakers of Hindi. Their plea about the need to have a common medium of instruction in all Indian universities in order to promote intellectual cooperation, free internal migration of students and teachers and, in general, a feeling of national unity, is weakened by a widespread belief that they are trying to secure an advantage by their advocacy of Hindi. Of course, there are a few Hindi enthusiasts even in the non-Hindi regions of India, but their chief objective is the use of Hindi as the official language of the Union. Very few non-Hindi speakers are in favour of Hindi being used as the language of instruction in colleges and universities all over India.

Both the proponents of Hindi and the regional languages have been exerting great pressure in the state legislatures, university courts and senates and in parliament on the Ministry of Education, etc. It appears from recent events that the regional languages are winning, mainly because education is a state subject under the Indian constitution and, with only four exceptions, the universities are financed in large part from state funds. Many universities have now permitted students to answer papers in their examinations in the regional languages. Undergraduate classes in many colleges, particularly in small towns, and even postgraduate classes in some universities are now being conducted through the regional languages, though the latter is confined mostly to courses in arts subjects. Even the Union Ministry of Education has apparently succumbed to the pressure from all sides and the Minister recently made an announcement that universities were expected to change over from English to the regional languages as media of instruction, at least in the undergraduate courses, by the end of the third five year plan (March 1966).

In their present state of development, none of the Indian languages is really in a position to replace English efficiently as a medium of instruction because of the absence of suitable books and of the terminology for teaching many of the subjects. The rising tempo of industrialisation, which is the consequence of the five year plans, has already increased the inter-state migration of administrators, scientists, technologists, industrialists and business people. Their children will encounter great difficulties if each region uses its language for higher education. Also, communication between specialists trained in different regions will become extremely difficult.

In August and September of 1961, there were two conferences on national integration in New Delhi, one confined to the Chief Ministers of states and the other to which political and other leaders were invited. They both recognised the disadvantages of the replacement of English by the regional languages as the media of instruction in higher education. Such a change would have deleterious effects on the maintenance of academic standards, and also on national unity. They, however, did not draw a logical conclusion; they failed to recommend the continuance of English at least until it could be replaced by another *all-India* medium. The following passage from the statement issued after the Chief Ministers' Conference is of some interest in this connection:

> "The question of the medium for university education was discussed at length. The tendency of regional languages to become the media for university education, though desirable in many ways, may well lead to the isolation of such universities from the rest of India unless there is a link in the shape of an all-India language. Teachers and students will not be

able to migrate easily from one university to another, and the cause of education will suffer for lack of a common link between universities in different linguistic areas.

"The importance of such a common linguistic link between universities was emphasised. Such a common link can only be English or Hindi. . . . The change-over to Hindi and generally to a regional language as a medium of education will only be effective when such languages had adequately developed for the purpose of modern education, and especially for scientific and technical subjects." [5]

The rather illogical and ambiguous wording ("the change-over to Hindi and *generally* to a regional language"—my emphasis) of this part of the statement goes to show how even Chief Ministers are subject to pressure from their regions and have to modify their attitudes. It is obvious that the knowledge of a *link* language is not going to solve the problem of migration of students and teachers, if regional languages are to used as languages of instruction. A student from, say, Bengal, who wishes to, or has to, study in the Madras university will not be able to do so because instruction will be in Tamil and not in Bengali, his language, even though he can communicate privately with his teachers in the "link" language —English or Hindi.

Meanwhile, in consequence of the passionate political agitation about the question of the proper medium of instruction, the Indian college and university student is being less well educated than would be possible under more favourable circumstances. The rapid expansion of secondary and higher education in the post-independence era has been accompanied by a general lowering of standards. This was most noticeable in the case of the proficiency in English which has been aggravated by the deliberate policy followed by many states to curtail the time devoted to the study of English. This was based on the expectation that English would soon lose its importance. The students who completed their high school course and came up to the universities and colleges thus had a very poor knowledge of English and found it difficult to understand the lectures delivered in English, to read books in English or to answer their examination papers in that language. Also it should be remembered that, generally speaking, most Indians are deeply attached to their language and that all-India loyalties have not yet taken deep roots. Therefore when the students in colleges and universities began to feel the difficulties in the use of English as the language of instruction, the demand began to be voiced for the replacement of English by the regional languages. Some universities, particularly in areas which are linguistically more homogeneous, have already yielded to these demands to some

[5] *The Times of India*, 13 August, 1961.

extent by adopting the regional languages as optional media of instruction during the last few years. In the larger colleges, especially in cities with mixed populations, parallel classes are held, one in which English is used and the other in which the regional language is used. In the smaller colleges, and particularly in towns with a relatively homogeneous population of local students, only the regional language tends to be used. However, for various reasons English continues to be the sole medium of instruction in the faculties of Science, Technology, Medicine, Agriculture and Law. In the first place, colleges teaching these subjects have students from many language areas and so no regional language could replace English, which is known by a larger number of students than any other single language. Secondly, none of the regional languages has the textbooks and the technical terminology to serve as an efficient language of instruction for these subjects. And thirdly, the teachers would find it difficult to use a regional language because they are accustomed to use English and have never used any other language.

So much emotion and sentiment for the regional language and for "Indian" as opposed to "foreign" things has been introduced into these discussions, even in academic circles, that it is difficult to have the subject considered in a calm and dispassionate manner. The Hindi speakers, because they form the largest single group, and because the constitution already gives the status of the official language of the Union to Hindi, are impatient at the delay and want to replace English by Hindi here and now in all fields of all-India activity. They envisage that English will be studied in India only by those who wish to specialise in it or by those who may have occasion to use it in their business or careers.

For over a century English has been studied in the universities and not just as a compulsory subject in all classes. Emphasis has been laid on English literature, classical authors and literary trends. In the new scheme, it will be necessary to change all that and to learn English as a language, as an instrument of communication and for the acquisition of modern knowledge, as a unifier of the modern world. The Central Institute of English, established by the central government at Hyderabad, is doing very good work in this field by evolving new methods of teaching English and by training high school teachers. Leaders in many fields have realised the value of English as the language of a large part of the civilised world and there has been a swing of the pendulum in favour of English in the last three or four years.

The present position can be summarised as follows: all universities and colleges affiliated to them still use English as the language of instruction, though in a small number of institutions or in some subjects, the regional language is allowed as an optional medium. In the faculties of

Law, Medicine, Technology and Agriculture, English is the medium used in all universities. The federal institutions for teaching and research in medicine, technology, engineering, pure and applied science, though necessarily located in one of the states, will continue to use English until at some future date it becomes possible to replace it by Hindi, because they cannot use any of the regional languages. For this, two things will be necessary. One is that a terminology must be developed. The present trend is to use English terms and not attempt to develop new terms at all. A vast number of books in all subjects and at all levels will have to be produced and teachers must become familiar with them. Secondly, all teachers and students in all parts of the country will have to acquire a knowledge of Hindi so that they can use it with facility. This may take many years, particularly because the country can ill afford to spare the services of experts for this purpose at the present time. The effect of the replacement of English by Hindi, or the regional languages, on standards and on intellectual cooperation between universities has been increasingly realised in recent years by many leaders, though the chauvinists in the states, both Hindi and non-Hindi, are exerting political pressure for doing away with English, and some people who know better are reluctant to say what they really believe. It is possible that the gap between what the leaders say in public and what they actually do or mean may widen out of fear of running foul of chauvinists and demagogues.

It is clear that the medium of instruction in higher education is an academic question and is intimately connected with the availability of books, the existence of an adequate technical terminology, the effects on the recruitment of teachers and the migration of students, etc. Governments and legislatures are paying very little attention to these aspects of the matter and it is sad to see that university bodies do very little better. Such arguments as "English is a foreign language and must therefore be replaced" find great favour with the politicians and the public. The real danger of the isolation of the universities in one region from those in the others which, from the point of view of intellectual activity, would do great damage to the progress of the country, leaves no impact on the emotion-charged atmosphere.

VII

Of course, universities, even if they are supported by private endowment, must be responsive to the needs of their society. This however is something quite different from the intervention of politicians, governments and public opinion in matters which are properly academic. There is general agreement, throughout the university world, that in academic

matters like admissions, courses of study, standards of achievement, etc., the voice of the teachers should prevail. The line is sometimes difficult to draw when it is a matter of deciding how much emphasis should be placed on one subject or set of subjects, such as the natural sciences, in contrast with other subjects. But there, too, a resolution is possible in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect between the public and the academic community. In India the problem becomes much more complicated. In the first place Indian society is divided by castes and by languages. The peculiar system of affiliating universities and colleges possessing very diverse resources, coupled with the new urge of the lower castes and rural populations to improve their prospects by securing access to higher education, and the inadequate resources that colleges and universities have to work with, all combine to create a situation where institutions of higher education offer great temptations to public opinion. One more factor in the situation is that teachers in colleges and universities in India do not as yet feel themselves to be members of a single intellectual community and have yet to absorb the traditions of modern science, scholarship and higher learning. Their loyalties are still anchored in the social group to which they belong by birth; the academic community itself has been prevented from coming into being by the divided nature of Indian society. Under these circumstances it looks as if it will be some time before institutions of higher education in India acquire and deserve the prestige and reputation which many of their counterparts in the West enjoy.