

EDUCATING INDIA

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Nalini Menon



PROFESSOR DR R. GOPAL

ACCREDITATION IS A MUST FOR GLOBAL STATUS

Skills and knowledge are the driving forces of economic growth and social development in any country. In a developing country like India, education plays a major role as it holds the key to the socio-economic development of our country.

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in India is quite low. Various studies prepared by the Planning Commission and other government bodies would like to see India as the global hub of education and/or the global hub of knowledge creation. For such a scenario to take place, it is essential that there has to be quality education comparable with the best in the world. Unfortunately Indian institutions do not figure in the top 100 institutions in the world. Globalisation today is leading to borderless education. Knowledge sharing through faculties from various parts of the globe is essential.

The higher education system in India has grown in a significant way to become one of the largest systems of its kind in the world. And the rise of India as an economic superpower has increased the demand for quality management education which will help produce managers who can effectively supervise, manage and increase India's growing business.

A news item in the *Times of India* indicated that 1.4 lakh higher education seats are vacant in the state of Maharashtra alone. In the area of hotel management, around 43 per cent of the available seats are vacant while in the case of MBA and MMS there are around 31 per cent vacant seats. In engineering, around 27 per cent of the seats are not filled. The issue here is — why are these seats vacant? Is it a case of mismatch between supply and demand? Is this a case

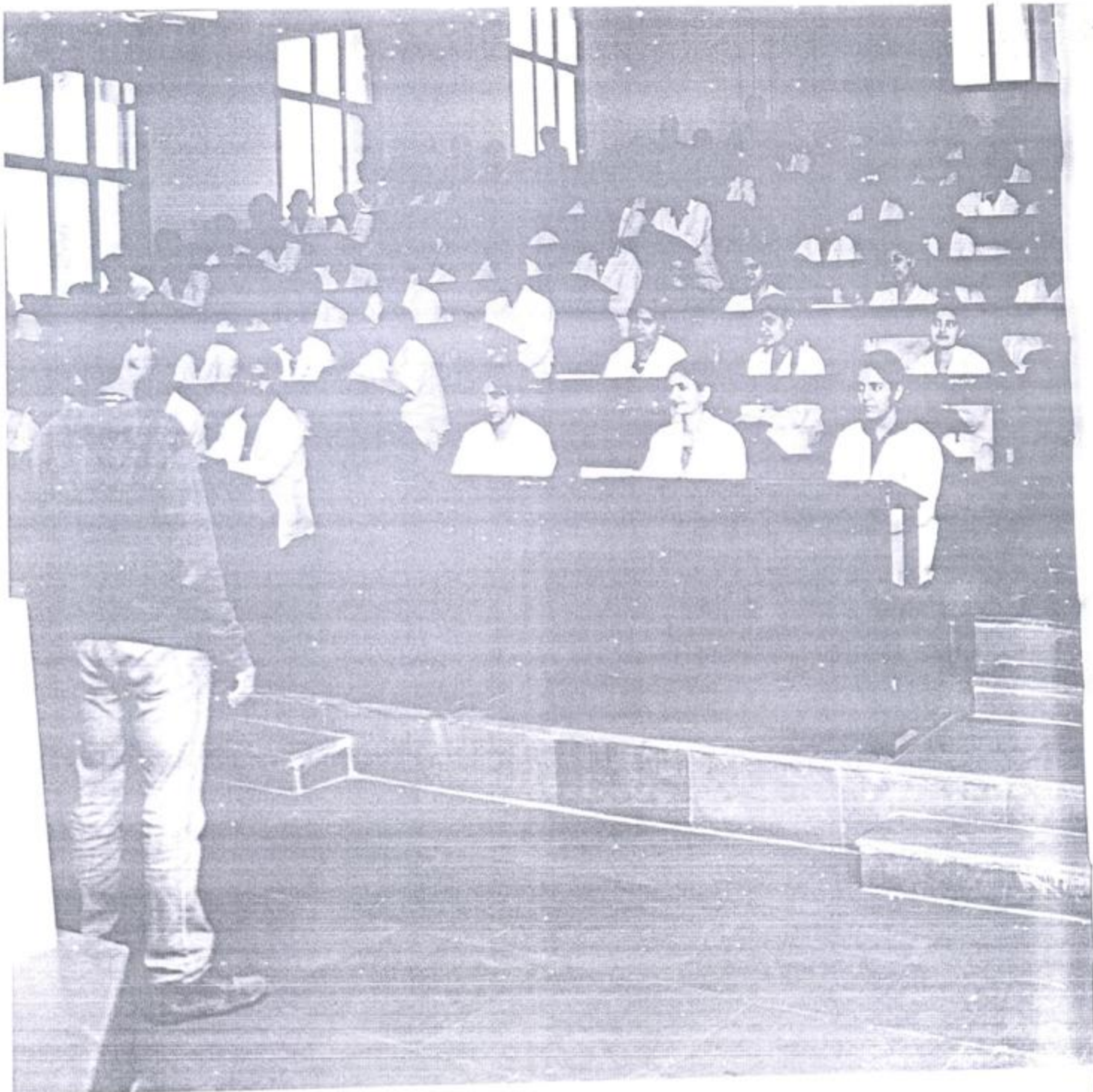
of students identifying poor quality institutions and hence not wanting to join these institutions? Benchmarking of institutions is a must and this benchmarking has to take place either by oneself or by some other external body like an accreditation agency. This then is the need of the hour.

There is an urgent need to create a stimulating and challenging environment in the so called 'Harvards' and 'Stanfords' of India. The evaluation of institutions by an external body must be carried out regularly so that these institutions can produce employable students. A recent study indicated that around 70 per cent of the MBA students are unemployable.

Accreditation can be defined as a voluntary method of quality assurance used by education providers of all types serving all ages of students. It is the finishing point of any quality assurance system and the beginning point of rectification if any. Accrediting educational programmes/curricula and institutions is mainly about developing a workforce that would be indirectly and directly responsible for building a sustainable future.

There are two types of accreditation that take place at present. First, institutional accreditation (assessed by NAAC — an autonomous body of the UGC) and second, programme accreditation (assessed by NBA — an autonomous body of the AICTE). The function of any accrediting agency would be to verify that the institution meets established standards and benchmark the same and assist prospective students so that they are able to identify the quality of the institutions and finally to create goals for self-improvement involving both the faculty and the staff.

The accrediting procedure involves the collection



of data (previously standardised and applicable to undergraduate colleges as well as postgraduate colleges); the evaluation of the data collected by an on-site evaluation, the publication of the result and finally the periodic monitoring of the same. Provisions are normally made for reevaluation if any.

A look at many of the ratings given by NAAC indicate that there are several institutions which have been ranked B or even C, which essentially means that these institutions do not have the minimum standards. It has also been found that in many cases the B or C is essentially because of no research or minimal research. The issue is should every institution be research-oriented? Is research the only criterion for

getting a good rating?

In addition to the above two autonomous rating agencies, there are several other private agencies (e.g. rankings given by *Business India*, *Business World* etc) who do not style themselves as rating agencies but who rank institutions using similar formats. The weightage used by these institutions are different and in almost all cases the process is not at all transparent or clear. It has been found that in many cases the same institution gets a ranking which varies from the top to the bottom or the middle.

Knowledgeable sources in the educational field also indicate that in many cases there is a price to be paid for getting good ratings either in the form of

advertisements or otherwise. In the case of one reputed agency, the agency did not understand the difference between the procedures and the workings followed by a department of the university and a stand-alone institution. Consequently the ranking given to the university department was quite at variance to that of the stand-alone institution in spite of the university department having some of the best faculty and facilities.

Some agencies feel that if an institution has a large number of visiting faculty/adjunct faculty from the industry then it is a good institution. There is no method of checking the profile of the visiting faculty, the contribution made by such faculty to institution building and so on. Yet, in spite of all these shortcomings, accreditation is an important aspect and this needs to be carried out.

An article in *The New Indian Express* (May 28, 2013) stated, "In the West, accreditation is an integral component of both government and private higher education institutions (HEIs). Affiliation of new colleges, though uncommon in the West, happens only after Level I accreditation. Besides, accreditation councils there are fully autonomous.

"The scenario in India is skewed due to political and money-power interference right from the time a college is established. Affiliation is dictated by forces from outside as well as from within for pecuniary benefits by following farcical processes. Neither the existing NAAC nor the proposed state-level accreditation councils have full autonomy, structural stability and operational accountability..."

There is thus an urgent need to involve private bodies in the process of accreditation but it has to be

made clear and mandatory that the entire process must be transparent. Additionally the accrediting agency should comprise members from the teaching faculty as well as from the industry and also from other stake holders. The weightage given to each of these parameters must be clearly spelt out. Adequate weight must be given for student outcomes e.g. placements, industry-institute interaction, alumni interaction etc. Performance or output-based measurements should be the main criteria in evaluating an institution. Such parameters could be based on factors like relevance of the course curriculum to the needs of industry, teacher quality and evaluation process, infrastructure availability, institutional social responsibility (on lines similar to corporate social responsibilities), inclusive collaboration arrangements (e.g. collaborative arrangements with schools and colleges in the hinterland or in rural India — where there is an extreme shortage of faculty and other facilities — perhaps an MoU with such institutions could be given some weightage), governance aspects etc.

The holistic development of a student is a must. Student pedagogy must include activities and methodologies through which students develop not only in their functional areas but also in the development of soft skills. This helps in their overall development not only as managers but also as responsible and responsive citizens.

All institutions must be subjected to accreditation and this must be published. Non-compliance should result in the institution being closed down. It is via accreditation that institutions could be motivated to challenge each other and thus reach greater heights.

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