

# Evolution of Governance Structure in Higher Education: A Socio-Historical Journey

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we focus on the entire picture of governance in higher education, from the pre-independence era to the 21st Century. Indian higher education has witnessed tremendous growth as well as failure since independence. The contemporary university system started in 1857. Since that time, the higher education system has progressed a lot, but we find an equally dismal story where privatization, poor governance, lack of autonomy, and governmental direct influence over universities are the causes behind unsatisfactory results from higher education. Despite all the obstacles, Indian higher education has become the third largest system after the USA and China in terms of student recruitment and growth of colleges and universities. Institutionalization is also a peak point for our country, where other countries are opening their campus in India. But the questions are- How should higher education be governed? How is 21st-century higher education equivalent to the quality of Oxford and Harvard? Are we able to solve the traditional problems regarding higher education? If we see the reports of University Grants Commission (UGC), National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, it suggests redesigning higher education with proper governance because the structure of university governance is still followed by a traditional approach. NEP 2020 presents an opportunity for the entire education system. It has taken the initiative to improve the quality of higher education. The onus is on each stakeholder to keep the students at the centre as they redesign the higher education architecture. Hence, this article provides insight into how governance has emerged and evolved in higher education institutions, identifies the challenges of university governance, and examines how the NEP reforms the governance structure.

**Keywords-** Higher Education, Evolution of Higher Education, NEP 2020

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*“Where the mind is without fear” - Rabindranath Tagore*

India is a democratic country that has always kept the demand for autonomy to the forefront because no one wants to bear the pressure of dominance and autocracy. Consequently, India fought for its independence for a long period with the help of its people, most of whom are the youth of our country. After independence, we established our own constitution, created governance, but the country is still struggling with the issues of community existence and inclusivity.

To create an inclusive and secular society, India has established universities. These universities play a direct and indirect role in social change; they help fulfill the goals of society (Sauman & Chattapadhyaya, 2022) and actively address the socio-economic and political problems in our country. Traditionally, India developed an ideal society through the creation of universities such as Nalanda, Takshila, and Vikramshila, which spread a very rich culture and knowledge throughout society.

Hence, now the enrollment of students has been increasing day by day. At the time of independence, the country had 19 universities, some 400 colleges, and around 25,000 students (Ramachandran, 1987). This number has increased to 4.33 core in 2021-22 (AISHE, 2021-2022). But the question is, how can public universities provide quality education to all? Moreover, we can see that people choose private universities over public institutions for better opportunities, such as various courses, multiple teaching methods, and advanced technology available there. Private institutions have graded autonomy. On the other hand, public universities are not independent, and they remain subordinate to government authority. They review their curriculum every five years, whereas private universities conduct continuous evaluations (Atul, 2020). As a result, public universities are facing a struggle to compete with private universities. In addition, most of the youth in India cannot afford costly higher education from private universities. So, the situation highlights economic discrimination in education. Now, India has to speed up the quality of higher education, and we need to reconstruct our public universities so that everyone can get high-quality education and no youth is left behind.

Now the question is, how can we achieve this? How can we stop brain drain in India? The answer lies in an effective governance system that can improve the quality of education. There are three most important dimensions of high-ranking universities: concentration of talent, abundance of funds, and appropriate governance (Dhar, 2020). Therefore, we need to enhance the quality by granting universities autonomy to discover new methods, knowledge, and curriculum. The aim of universities should not be limited to teaching and learning, but also to preparing youth as leaders for society. The objective of the study was to explore the transition of governance structure in an Indian university. To know the present issues of governance in the university and to give suggestive measures from the documents.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This paper presents a qualitative, descriptive study. The data were collected through journals, reports, books, news articles, and others, and this was analyzed through the content analysis process.

## **3. SOCIAL IMPACT ON UNIVERSITY TRANSITION**

The contemporary university system of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras came into existence under the auspices of the colonial government in 1857, and the governance structure they followed was replicated by the London university model. Their aim was to bridge the gap of discrimination. However, they were unable to reach the entire population (Beteille, 2014). For example, Andre Beteille, in his book 'University Crossroads', mentioned that "the aim of establishing a university was to create a secular and inclusive society; in the early phase, it was for the 'elitist' and did not promote equal opportunity to all" (Beteille, 2014). The same governance is still carrying out the responsibility of universities, yet the structure of universities is not ideal for all. The picture of our society has always been reflected in our universities (Sancheti, 2020) because society and universities are complementary to each other, and both

are working for the welfare of people. To run a country or a university, effective governance is important. By observing some documents, we can understand how India has been governed over several years, and this is reflected in universities, too.

Traditionally, the structure of Indian society was hierarchical, and a glimpse of this can be seen in universities. Even though the country became decentralized, universities could not. From the pre-independence era, the colonial government controlled the country and the universities. After independence, the country and the universities were under the responsibility of the provisional government. The university structure reflects the values and culture of society. According to Andre Beteille, “the social structure of Paris was hierarchical and rigid so that we can see its reflection in the university system” (Beteille, 2014). Still, both society and universities are struggling for inclusivity and autonomy. As a public institution in a democratic country, it must have inclusivity and democracy in every aspect, including decision-making. Therefore, world-class institutions are greatly needed for the nation's progression. In this paper, we discuss the major steps the Indian government has taken to revive the university structure and how the structure of governance has been evolving.

#### **4. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION IN ACADEMIC STRUCTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY**

##### **4.1 Concept of Governance in University**

Governance is a systemic process of decision-making. Each and every organization has its own pattern for making decisions. Similarly, a university has two basic strata of decision-making: one is external governance, and the other is the internal governance structure. When external stakeholders make decisions for the university, it's called external governance; alternatively, when internal stakeholders such as Vice Chancellors, Deans, Faculty, Staff, and Students are responsible for decision-making, it's called internal governance. In this paper, we focus solely on the internal governance structure.

Practically, governance is believed to be flexible and decentralized. To achieve high-quality education, India needs quality classrooms, strategic teachers, upgraded curricula, and technology-enabled pedagogy. That means the institution should be accountable and focused towards performance. University must have academic freedom that is consistent with Collegial, Participatory, and Democracy (Sudhanshu, 2019). They must ensure the autonomy and independence for effective governance in the university (Kumar et al., 2016).

##### **4.2 University Governance at the pre-independence era**

The history of education starts from the Vedic period, when the education system was much flexible, freely instructive, and autonomous. In this era, the system of higher education was introduced by Takshila University, which was a center of the Guru-Kula of brahmanical education. It became a prominent centre of knowledge during the past era of India. But the system Guru-Kula immediately transformed into Kula-Guru after the dominance of the British. In 1835, through Macaulay's minute, British dominance in Indian education was finally established. The British government became so powerful that the universities of India were run according to the British model. For example, the first universities were established in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, following the model of the London university. They directed the examination, affiliated colleges, and hold degrees. From that era to the present, the colonial legacy remains (Sudhanshu, 2019). However, Sudhanshu, (2019) in his book 'The future of Higher Education in India', comparing the Indian traditional educational education with the European model of university has noted: there is a difference between colonial and European system of university, In Europe they established democracy,

liberalism by awaking the scientific knowledge of masses and protested against the dominance of institutions like-church and the kings. To oppose the monarchy, they established their autonomy on knowledge, where scholars could work independently. In contrast, in India, the colonial government was engaged in promoting the British government. Mainly, they were the actual ruler who created pressure on universities and never encouraged the faculties as well as scholars to create new knowledge. Thus, the growth of Indian society became restricted. Their motto was to control and maintain the status quo. As a result, they failed to create an inclusive structure of an organization. The teachers and scholars did not have the right to make any decisions. So, universities operate bureaucratically and are not concerned about scholars, faculties, and staff (Sudhanshu, 2019).

### **4.3 University governance at the post-independence era**

After 1947, the contemporary Indian government, led by its people, took control of the Indian education system, marking the beginning of political involvement in education. In 1956, the UGC Act was established to maintain the quality of higher education in India. They established the structure, which was a centralized regulatory authority for standardization (UGC, 1956). Moreover, the Ganam Report of 1990 described greater politicization in university governance. That followed the same traditional British governance structure. The government started controlling universities directly. According to B.R. Ambedkar, the responsibility for running a university must remain in the hands of teachers, but in reality, the hierarchical dominance becomes evident. The steering is in the hands of Vice-Chancellors and centralised bodies like the Senate, Syndicate, Academic Council, etc., (Sudhanshu, 2019). There needs to be a discourse and discussion between scholars, faculties, and authoritative bodies regarding Fellowship, Seminar, Curricular Guidelines, Admission process, and teaching, learning, and research guidelines, etc. The role of university administration should be a facilitator rather than a controller. The power of decision-making should not remain in one hand.

Traditionally, the colonial system of higher education had an influence over post-colonial universities; similarly, the post-colonial universities had an influence on further development of universities, which helps to develop economically. Since independence, the universities have been dominated by bureaucracy, politics, and now they are also under the influence of privatization and globalization (Sudhanshu, 2019). In India, even after seventy years, the influence of colonial administration still exists

## **5. INFLUENCE OF TRADITIONAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE ON PRESENT UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION**

Future higher education in India should learn from the mistakes of the past. As we have discussed earlier, the traditional governance structure of the university was rigid and centralised, because external influence over the university was visible. However, many commissions from Radhakrishnan to JVC highlighted the broken structure of this governance, and they suggested reframing the structure and creating an autonomous, flexible institution. In reality, the structure of governance is still centralized (Sudhanshu, 2019). So, the influences of traditional structure in modern university administration are-

### **5.1 Hierarchical Decision Making-**

We can see that the university's decision-making process is highly centralized and bureaucratic (Malik, 2017). Due to its hierarchical structure, the top authorities include the Senate, Syndicate, Academic Council, Finance Committee, and Board of Studies (BOS),

which collectively hold the power to govern the university. Moreover, the NEP-2020 shows how an ineffective governance structure harmed the quality of education.

## 5.2 Autonomy and Academic Freedom

Traditional universities were given value for academic freedom and autonomy; they did not allow any external interference in the university. Modern universities are also built on the basis of these values, but some modern challenges persist due to funding pressures and government regulations. Therefore, we can't say that our universities are entirely autonomous.

## 5.3 Role of Governance Bodies

Governing boards, including the senate, syndicate, academics, and external representatives, are emphasized by the traditional model.

## 5.4 Bureaucracy

The term "bureaucracy" is not new to universities. About a hundred years ago, in 1948, Max Weber discussed Bureaucracy, which was started in a German university and whose effects have spread more or less everywhere, especially in India. University, the top authorities are the Executive Council/Syndicate. The Court or Senate they dealing with or making the policies for the university, and others will follow their instruction

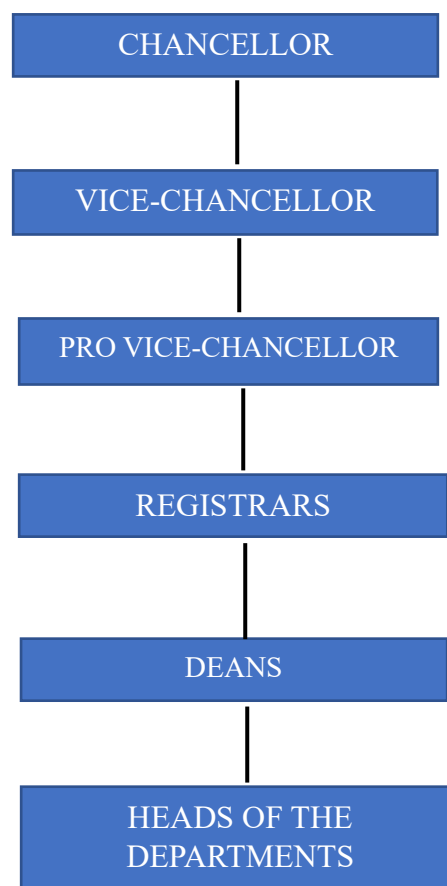


Figure 1. Hierarchical structure of the Universities

The NEP-2020, aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, emphasizes quality education and highlights the rigid structure of higher education, advocating for autonomy.

## **6. INITIATIVES OF POLICIES REGARDING INTERNAL GOVERNANCE OF UNIVERSITY**

In India, the modern university started with the establishment of the university at Kolkata, Bombay, and Madras followed by the British university Model. After Independence, significant changes in the economy, society, and politics have led to the formation of numerous committees and commissions, including the Radhakrishnan commission, the Kothari commission, NEP-1986, etc. These policies have recommended decentralising the structure and making it autonomous. Currently, India has numerous colleges and universities. However, many colleges have lost their reputation, and only a few have managed to maintain their dignity. Thus, there is an emergency need to reshape the management system of a university. Before doing so, it is crucial to consider the initiatives previously suggested by this committee's commissions -

In this paper, we focus on the evolution of the university's governance structure.

### **6.1 Radhakrishnan Commission**

The first university commission established after independence is the Radhakrishnan commission. The main objective of this commission is to develop a university; at the same time, they wanted to make the university free from any control, and they do not support bureaucratization or centralization. This commission wanted to support the autonomy and freedom of teachers.

- i. Autonomy- Each institution should be autonomous
- ii. Governing Body- They founded two governing bodies, one is the academic council and the other is the administrative council. The academic council deals with formulating policies regarding curricula and managing academic programs.
- iii. Encourage the Participation-They incorporated the faculty and students in the academic decision-making process
- iv. Freedom- They noted the faculty's freedom to regulate their own course

### **6.2 The Kothari Commission Report**

This commission opposed the observable rigid structure, which has been functioning hierarchically.

- i. To increase the quality, structural development is important. For this, we need to give freedom for experimentation.
- ii. There should not be any rigidity for the course duration
- iii. Promoted autonomy to the faculties
- iv. Give autonomy to the colleges

### **6.3 Committee on Governance of Universities and Colleges (1971)**

To discuss the problem of higher education, UGC developed a committee on university governance. Two committees were held, one is the Committee on Governance of the College, and the other is the Committee on Governance of the University.

- i. They developed an organizational setup in the university, and it should be democratic and flexible.
- ii. Encourage students to participate in the organizational setup, and greater participation can face the challenges. In addition, their participation would be in the court and the Academic Council.

- iii. There should be a ‘University Complex’, where students will be included in this complex, but no party or opposition will be entertained. The main objective was to consider students' questions seriously.
- iv. University must be democratic, transparent, and accountable. They must exercise their freedom.
- v. Teacher and students should have autonomy of power. The university would encourage the students to give their views on the budget, management, and administration.
- vi. Recommended the principle of decentralization in every sphere of activity

#### **6.4 NEP-1986**

- i. In paragraph 5.28, they have maintained about Autonomous colleges. Affiliated colleges do not have autonomy. They can't decide on their courses or evaluation. So, colleges should enjoy their autonomy. There should be 500 autonomous colleges developed.
- ii. The management structure of autonomous colleges should be changed in a more decentralized way. Emphasize freedom, innovation, and funding for research.

#### **6.5 National Knowledge Commission (NKC)- 2006**

‘The system is overregulated and under-governed’ (Verma, 2018). NKC sought to establish an independent institution of higher education. It addressed higher education as a problem because the governance has been weakened, which does not ensure autonomy and accountability. They felt to reform the governance structure.

- i. They wanted to reform the structure of governance. We need to free the university from government control.
- ii. The power of decision-making should be shared with other stakeholders
- iii. Need to stop the government interference
- iv. Providing autonomy to the colleges is the best solution.

#### **6.6 Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee Report 2005**

There are various decision-making bodies in the university, including the Court, the Executive Council, and the Academic Council. The management system is operated by bureaucracy; there is a need for flexibility and autonomy. Administrative autonomy should be a mechanism for coming together more in a participative way rather than by control.

- i. Promote autonomy and accountability by allowing them to determine their own culture.
- ii. Flexibility of management structure.
- iii. Encourage the participation of students, teachers, and management in the education process. Teacher should design their academic activity.
- iv. There should not be any kind of rigidity, and the chain of control must be reduced. Collective responsibility should give in spite of control
- v. The university will encourage the students’ community to participate in administration.

#### **6.7 Yashpal Committee Report-2009**

Yashpal noted the university as the most undermanaged organization in society (Yashpal Committee Report 1 | Page, 2010). The decision needs to be freed from the bureaucratic governance system (Dhar, 2020). The governance structure of the university should be revamped in a more decentralized and democratic way.

- i. Need to engage various stakeholders
- ii. Low involvement of faculty and students in the process of decision making creates centralization in governance.
- iii. Low management as well as low autonomy harm the system.
- iv. Need to increase autonomy by empowering the stakeholders.
- v. Remove bureaucratization and politicization
- vi. Governance structure should be transparent, accountable, and autonomous

## 6.8 National Education Policy 2020

Since the independence, several policies, and committees has organized to develop the higher education but the quality is missing. After 35 years, the NEP has been organized, and it has detected the issues of higher education, also pointing out that suboptimal governance and leadership are among the issues in higher education institutions. To make it effective, NEP-2020 recommended:

- i. Strong Self-Governance is the key to a successful world-class institution
- ii. There must be autonomy in the university within 15 years
- iii. BOG will be established with competent, dedicated individuals. They are responsible for decision-making, and they will be accountable and transparent to all stakeholders.
- iv. Each institution will make an Individual Development Plan (IDP) with the joint participation of faculty, staff, and students. That will be related to their academic plan.

## 7. BARRIERS TO EFFICIENT FUNCTIONING IN UNIVERSITY

### 7.1. Internal Issues:

- Low member engagement and commitment.
- Skill gaps among members, limiting their contributions.
- Insufficient resources (financial, human, etc.).
- Resistance from influential individuals to participate.
- Hidden agendas and conflicting interests among members.
- Difficulty achieving quorum (required number of members for meetings).
- Poor meeting preparation and inadequate planning.

### 7.2. Barriers Faced by Governing Teams:

- **Resource Constraints:** Inadequate time, limited resources, and insufficient budget.
- **Motivational Factors:** Low motivation, lack of recognition and rewards, and inadequate support.
- **Development Challenges:** Absence of training and appropriate guidance.

### 7.3. Barriers Faced by Institutional Management Teams:

- **Time and Resource Constraints:** Inadequate time, low budget, and limited resources.
- **Motivational Factors:** Low motivation, lack of recognition, and rewards.
- **Operational Challenges:** Irregular meetings, lack of member interest, and limited administrative and financial autonomy.
- **External Factors:** Uncertain work environment and complex government regulations.
- **Development Challenges:** Insufficient training opportunities.

## 8. STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE THE EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY

**Youth Focus:** Students are at the heart of the university. An effective model will actively seek their input through various avenues, such as online forums and Gmail.

**Inclusivity:** It will strive to ensure that everyone, including students, faculty, and non-teaching staff, has a voice and can participate meaningfully in the governance process.

**Transparency & Accountability:** Decision-making should be open and transparent, with information readily available to the university. Mechanisms are in place to hold decision-makers accountable for their actions.

**Decentralization:** Power will be shifted away from centralized authorities toward students, empowering them to make decisions that directly affect their lives.

**Collaboration:** All the stakeholders work together to identify challenges, develop solutions, and implement programs.

**Continuous Improvement:** An effective model should be dynamic and adaptable. It will constantly learn, evaluate its effectiveness, and adjust based on students' feedback and outcomes.

## 9. CONCLUSION

With the changing demands of society, the requirements of every entity associated with it also evolve. Therefore, a democratic, independent, and inclusive society necessitates an autonomous institution where every student is treated equally. To achieve this, it is essential to move beyond traditional mindsets. There is a need to establish inclusive and participatory governance that enables the delivery of informed decisions and high-quality education to society.

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