

An Outlook on the Journey of University Grants Commission (UGC) as an Indian Higher Education Promoter

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Abstract

Indian Higher Education system is renowned for its academic expertise since ancient history, the likes of Nalanda and Taxila signify India's academic reputation, which attracted a wide range of students across the globe. The roots of current Indian Higher Education System goes back to British regime, which sown its seeds through various committees. The Paper inclusively discusses the Hierarchy of UGC formation, and its attempts to improve the quality of Indian higher education through various regulations. The paper put its light on the most recent draft regulations, and stern initiatives by UGC - approving a list of referred journals and anti plagiarism draft regulation, so as to strengthen the research regime of India. The paper extends its discussion on various committees which were critical of UGC, and recommends to establish a single regulator, in place of multiple regulators. World university rankings reports of QS and The Times Higher Education were cited, to signify the under performance of Indian universities/institutions at global level. The paper also discusses the low S&T publications output of India, in comparison to other countries. HEERA as a latest administrative reform was also discussed, by focusing on the substantive reasons for its establishment. Finally, the paper recommends a set of policies, driven by the principle motivation of educational inclusivity, which may mainstream the dynamic intellect, leading to strengthening of the Indian Higher Education regime.

Keywords: UGC, Times Higher education, HEERA

Introduction

Hierarchy of UGC formation

Indian Higher Education system is renowned for its academic expertise since ancient history, when we delve upon the academic antiquities, it reminds us the same. The likes of Nalanda, Taxila and other ancient Indian universities, which were hailed as higher educational institutions of unequivocal academic repute, and are the converging points for diverse students coming from different parts of the globe, particularly from South East Asian countries viz... Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and others. The roots of current Higher Education system in India can be traced way back to British Indian regime. Various committees, which recommend guidelines for Indian education system progressively culminated to the formation of an Institutionalized system, for promotion of Higher Education in India, in the form of UGC. For conduciveness, we shall discuss by beginning with the recommendations of Mountstuart Elphinstone of 1823, which laid emphasis on teaching European sciences and English in Indian schools, as a further follow up Lord Macaulay, in 1835 recommends for the establishment of strong English Education system in British India. Major push for Indian higher education comes through the recommendations of Sir Charles Wood's Dispatch, popularly known as Magna Carta of English Education in India of 1854, gesticulating the need for a well defined education system in India, from school to university system with teaching in vernacular language, as crux point for learning, it brings a coherent policy for Indian educational regime, which culminates to the formation of trio universities in 1857 at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. Later in 1925, The Inter University Board was formed with the intent of cooperation amongst universities in the spheres of educational, cultural and allied spheres. The first ever national educational policy was formulated, based on the recommendations of Sargeant report – Central Advisory Board of Education on post

war Educational development, established in 1944, leading to the foundation of University Grants Committee in 1945, to monitor the functionary of 3 central universities of Delhi, Aligarh and Banaras, later in 1947 supervisory role further extends to all the universities of the time ^[1].

Immediately after attaining Independence, significant importance has been given to Indian higher education system, which took the expression of forming University Education Commission, chaired by Dr.S.Radhakrishnan in 1948, to recommend, how best the Indian University regime be improved. The committee recommends for restructuring of University Grants Committee on par with UK's University Grants Commission, manned by a regular chairman and other board members of sound educational repute. The Central Government of India in 1952 entrusted UGC, with the power of grants in aid from public fund, to be disbursed to various universities of the country. The then education minister, late Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad formally kick-started the UGC in 1953, as a non statutory organization, later the central government enacted UGC act, 1956 to sanction statutory status to UGC ^[1, 2].

Powers of UGC: UGC entrusted with the Powers of promotion, coordination, formulation, determination and maintenance of Indian Universities Education Standards ^[1, 2].

UGC decentralized its officiating duties, for holistic coverage through 6 regional bodies – Hyderabad, Bangalore, Pune, Kolkata, Bhopal and Gowhati. Apart from New Delhi's UGC Main office, it also has 2 more additional offices at University of Delhi – South campus, and 35, Feroz shah Road, New Delhi for effective coordination of Indian universities ^[1].

Schematic Representation of time line for UGC formation

Mountstuart Elphinstone's report (1823) → Lord Macaulay's report (1835) → Wood's Dispatch (1854) → Inter University Board (1925) → Sargeant Report (1944) → University Grants

Committee (1945) → University Education Commission (1948) → University Grants Commission – Non Statutory (1953) → University Grants Commission – Statutory (1956)

Initiatives of UGC to improve the quality of Higher Education in India

UGC from time to time, took number of initiatives in the form of regulations and guidelines, to improve the quality of universities/institutions in India. Currently the total quantitative strength of Indian universities regime amounts to 794, upon which the UGC extends its jurisdiction, embodying 362 state universities, 263 private universities, 122 deemed universities and 47 central universities. UGC, to enhance the academic competitiveness amongst the colleges started a special programme - College with potential for excellence (CPA), under which currently 314 colleges has been earmarked. We shall discuss important regulations of UGC, which were aimed to strengthen the quality of universities in India. Previous UGC regulations which were calibrated to enhance the quality of Indian universities are [UGC – Inspection of Universities Rules, 1960], [Recognition of college in terms of Regulations, 1974 – Framed under the UGC act], [UGC – Establishment and Maintenance of Institutions Regulations – 1985], [UGC – Regulations, 1985 regarding the Minimum standards of Instruction for the grant of the First Degree] and [UGC – Regulations, 1991 regarding Minimum qualifications for Appointment of teachers in Universities and Colleges]^[2,3,4,5,6,7].

Current UGC regulation aimed to improve the quality of research degrees [M.Phil/Ph.D] is UGC (Minimum Standards and Procedure for Awards of M.Phil/Ph.D degree), Regulation, 2009. The core provisions of the regulation are

1. To conduct research entrance test by individual university/institution, to admit students into M.Phil and Ph.D programmes.
2. It is an obligation for a Ph.D student to publish one research manuscript in indexed journal, Prior to his/her thesis submission for evaluation.
3. It is the duty of University/Institution, to submit the soft copy of (M.Phil/Ph.D) to UGC – INFLIBNET, for the benefit of different Universities/Institutions to equip with the recent findings⁸.

UGC, in order to extract the best out of teaching regime has formulated a regulation, UGC – Minimum qualifications required for the appointment and career advancement of teachers in Universities and Institutions affiliated to it [3rd Amendment], Regulation, 2009, the crux point of the said regulation is aspirants must clear the NET/SLET exam to get appointment as lecturers into Universities/Institutions^[8].

Of late, UGC has formulated a new draft regulation which has been opened for public feedback. The author opined that the said regulation was drafted in the light of global developments, particularly Indian universities poor performance in QS and Times Higher Education's World University rankings report.

UGC – Categorization of Universities for the grant of graded autonomy, Regulations, 2017. The said regulation for categorization of universities is based on the parameters of NAAC score/ NIRF ranking.

Important provisions of the regulations were^[9].

1. **Category I Universities:** Universities excelled in NAAC score with accreditation of more than 3.5 score.

(or)

Universities excelled in NIRF's top 50 ranks for two years in line.

2. **Category II Universities:** Universities excelled in NAAC score with accreditation between 3.01 – 3.49 score.

(or)

Universities excelled in NIRF ranking between 51-100 for two years in line.

3. **Category III Universities:** Universities with NAAC score of below 3.0

(or)

NIRF ranking of above 100

The author opined that, the said regulation may enhance the competitiveness amongst the Indian universities and Institutions and adapt as per the global advancements, so as to mainstream Indian universities, and link up the gap between developed and developing academic world.

UGC's another recent draft regulation, which intends to increment the quality of Indian research regime is UGC (Minimum standards and Procedure for Awards of M.Phil/Ph.D degree) – 1st Amendment Regulations, 2017, the central theme of the regulation is Ph.D aspiring candidates, who wants to get admission into category III universities must clear NET/SET exam, the said provision in the draft regulation is to enhance the research quality of underperforming Universities/Institutions, increase the competitiveness and bring them into mainstream developmental track^[9]. It may appear at the moment that getting Ph.D admission is some what difficult, for one has to clear NET/SET exam to enter into category III universities, under which majority of Indian universities comes in^[10]. UGC of late, took a sweeping reform in the form of changing the criteria to clear UGC – NET exam, by determining top 6% of appearing candidates be declared as qualified the exam^[11].

UGC's stern initiatives to improve the higher education system in India

Referred journals list: In an unprecedented way, UGC has approved a list of journals belonging to different themes as referred, most of the academicians welcomed the calibrated initiative of UGC, as it consolidates the intactness of Indian Higher educational universities/institutions. As of now, there were 47016 journals considered as UGC referred list, of which Science journals amounts to 32028, Social science journals – 10242, Arts and Humanities – 3604 and Multidisciplinary – 1142. The nature of UGC referred journals list is dynamic, and the sources of the journals were 1. Scopus 2. Web of Science 3. ICI – Indian Citation Index 4. Standing committee recommended journals and 5. Universities recommended journals^[24].

UGC's anti plagiarism draft regulation: UGC, in a stern and studious way formulated a draft regulation, to dissuade academic unethical practices – Plagiarism. The Proposed anti plagiarism draft regulation, [UGC – Promotion of Academic integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in Higher Education Institutions, Regulations – 2017] shall impose penalties on academicians, (students and faculty) based on their extent of academic misconduct, accordingly 3 levels of plagiarism (non core) has been categorized based on the extent of matching. Level 1 plagiarism - >10% - 40%, Level 2 plagiarism - > 40% - 60% and Level 3 plagiarism - > 60%. The AMP –

Academic Misconduct Panel shall be constituted by concerned HEI, (Higher Education Institution) to investigate the allegation and their recommendations be submitted to the PDA - Plagiarism Disciplinary Authority, which shall decide the matter. If a student commits a level 3 plagiarism, his/her registration may get cancelled. In case of faculty, committing level 3 plagiarism, he/she shall be withheld from publishing their work and shall not be entitled to yearly increments. The concerned HEI, must install anti plagiarism software for the benefit of students and faculty, and have to conduct awareness programmes on ethical academic practices ^[25].

Various Committees recommendations, a set back to UGC:

High level empowerment committees are a backbone to Indian administration, since Indian independence it has served for a wide range of issues. Various committees has been formed from time to time to restructure UGC as per global developments, all such committees were critical of UGC functionary. The author extends the discussion in the light of recent recommendations of T.S.R.Subramanian and Hari Gautam committees. T.S.R.Subramanian, a former cabinet secretary to Ministry of HRD, entrusted to formulate a new national educational policy, it recommends terminating the UGC act, as the UGC found to be ineffective and incapable to enforce its regulations, leading to undermining the quality of Indian higher education system, it also recommends lowering down the role of UGC. The need for such an overhaul recommendation is owing to misappropriations in grants and weak manpower of UGC ^[12]. Similarly Hari Gautam, a former UGC board member, chaired a committee to assess the functional efficacy of UGC. The committee recommendations were critical about UGC functionary, which even suggested to scrapping down the UGC and supersede by National Higher Education Authority. It recommends that reconstitution of UGC will be unproductive, as UGC found to be ineffective in implementing its mandate, and further recommends to establish National Research Aptitude test for Ph.D entry ^[13].

In the face of all these recommendations, there is a widespread public debate regarding the role of UGC, as Indian Higher Education promoter.

Indian Universities / Institutions Poor show at Top 200 World University Rankings

Nonetheless, the Massive size of Indian Universities/Institutions, Indian institutes performed below par at QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) and Times Higher Education's top world university rankings. QS and Times Higher Education used to publish top universities rankings of the globe annually. Beginning with 2011-12 QS world university rankings, none of the Indian universities/institutes bagged position in top 200 elite club of universities, where in MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) topped the rankings ^[14]. The same dismal scenario is repeated in 2014-15 Times Higher Education's list of world universities rankings, with no Indian university/Institute occupying the rankings in top 200 slots, where as Singapore's National university of Singapore bagged position in top 25 world universities, with California Institute of technology topped the rankings ^[15]. In 2015-16 QS world universities rankings, IISc, Bangalore -147 and IIT, Delhi – 170 bagged positions in top 200 rankings restricting the number of Indian universities to just 2, with MIT topped the table ^[16], but in Times Higher Education World universities

rankings of 2015-16, none of the Indian universities/institutes occupied the position in top 200 slots, with IISc, Bangalore just making to 251-300 grouping, where as Chinese universities dominates the slots and California institute of technology topped the list ^[17]. Recently released 2017 QS world universities rankings display a slight improvement, but still below par status with no Indian university/institute ranked in top 100 and just restricting to IIT, Delhi -172, IIT, Bombay – 179 and IISc – 190.

The parameters used by QS and Times Higher Education were (i) Academic reputation of the institute/university (ii) Ratio of faculty – student (iii) Faculty citations (iv) Reputation of the employer (v) International students and faculty ^[18]. Based on this, we have to infer that Indian universities/institutions have to fine tune their academic regime vis-a-vis to global developments to enhance its academic reputation.

India's low output of S & T Publications

Not only in terms of world university rankings, India also underperformed in science and technology publications output when compared to countries like China, South Korea and others. Gupta et al. (2013) assessed world S&T publications output based on Scopus International Multidisciplinary database during the period 1996-2011 and they suggests that India is on back foot in varied entities of S&T as follows ^[19].

1. India's global share of publications output is just 2.46%, which is far behind the U.S - 23.86%, China - 8.73%, U.K - 6.64%, Japan - 6.22% & Germany - 6.14% during the assessment period of 1996-2011.
2. Total S&T publication size of India is 634472, when compared to China's 2248278, South Korea - 497681, Brazil - 391589 & Taiwan – 351610 during 1996-2011.
3. India's h – index stood at 281 during the assessment period of 1996-2011, which is lesser than China's 353, South Korea – 309, Brazil – 285 & Taiwan – 249.
4. India's average citations per publication stood at 5.24, which is lower than China's 8.04, South Korea – 8.01 and Brazil – 7.37.
5. India relatively performed well in year wise rate of S&T publications during the assessment period of 1996-2011 with 10.42%, but still lesser than China's 19.65%, South Korea – 13.15%, Turkey – 12.74% & Brazil – 12.66%, where in Taiwan achieved a growth rate of 9.69%, which is close to India.

The overall data depicts the point that, India has to introspect deeply regarding the current status of Research regime and frame holistic policies to match with the global standards.

HEERA – Higher Education Empowerment Regulation Agency

T.S.R.Subramanian committee and Hari Gautam committee of the current NDA government, and Yashpal committee and National Knowledge commission of the UPA government, all recommends a coherent suggestion of establishing a single regulator in place of multiple regulators. This radical leap has been taken after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision, who chairs the education committee in March 2017. The Proposed body tentatively named as HEERA - Higher Education Empowerment Regulation Agency. A Committee embodying Niti Aayog CEO Amitab Kant, Higher Education secretary K K Sharma and others were swiftly formulating a blueprint for HEERA legislation, as it requires amendments to

existing rules to supersede the UGC and AICTE. The need for a single regulator in place of multiple regulators was a long standing demand, which was emanated from the grounds that multiple regulators leads to restrictive regulatory regime that affects the integrity of institutional autonomy, rampant corruption and misappropriations in terms of granting, ambiguous provisions and overlapping provisional jurisdiction. Therefore, in the wake of underperformance of Higher Educational institutions of India vis-à-vis to publications output, poor show at world university rankings and various committees advocating single regulatory regime, HEERA has been proposed, on the lines of simple, clean and short administrative hierarchy, respecting the institutional autonomy as the crux point of the HEERA [20,21,22,23].

Conclusion

Author would conclude that, keeping in mind the historical background of India, in the form of bloody partition in 1947, drain of wealth from India by British which ruled us for over 200 years, different wars waged by India, 1947 - India and Pakistan (Jammu and Kashmir war), 1962 - India and China, 1965 - India and Pakistan, 1971 - India and Pakistan (Bangladesh liberation war), 1999- India and Pakistan (Kargil war), higher poverty rate and poor infrastructure, which all compels Indian government to invest higher budget in these sectors, which may otherwise divert some budget in Research and Development. By considering all these issues, Indian universities/Institutes under UGC, performed well within its available resources and UGC did tried to improve the quality of Indian higher education system by its regulations, but the matter of concerned is its holistic and integrated implementation. India has to frame holistic and educationally inclusive policies, which may bring the dynamic intellect into the mainstream academic regime which may further our academic reputation, on this line, the author recommends a set of policies as follows

1. Strengthen the chain of government school and university system.
 2. Performance based incentives for State universities, which occupies the higher share in the list of Indian universities.
 3. Collaborations between Central and State universities through faculty and student exchange programme.
- Finally Injecting new blood in the form of HEERA is a welcoming decision, but it should not be implemented in a hasty manner, it has to be framed on the lines of educational inclusivity coupled with simple administration which leads to acting as an effective higher education promoter of India. JAI HIND

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