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CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

7.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the concluding part of the research report. It gives a brief summary of the research study and the main findings and conclusions and a few suggestions. The Study was about a broad-based innovation in higher education of the country and the implications and indicators of the findings and a few suggestions are presented with a view to be of use for researchers, educators and administrators at the tertiary level of education in the country.

7.2. THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study was an evaluative survey of the management processes in bringing about autonomy to colleges in the country and the management of the programmes in the colleges to run them as autonomous institutions. This study extends to a ten year period of experimentation with this concept in ten selected colleges, three from the University of Madras, four from Mahurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, one from Bharathidasan University, Thiruchirappilly and two from Bharathiar University, Coimbatore.

7.2.1. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY.

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

(1) To study from a historical perspective the evolution of the concept of autonomy to colleges in India, to be surveyed (a) in the background of affiliating colleges to the universities, (b) about the need for autonomy (c) objectives of autonomy, (d) factors favouring and disfavouring it, (e) the institutional and other attempts and processes involved in bringing about autonomy to colleges, etc.

(2) To study the management of autonomous colleges from the point of view of the achievement of the aims and objectives of autonomy through the processes of (a) planning, (b) decision making, (c) communicating, (d) organising and coordinating, (e) evaluating and replanning, and (f) discontinuation and readaptation, of administrative actions and academic programmes such as, curricular planning, methods of teaching, learning research, evaluation, etc.

(3) To draw institutional profile of one autonomous college through in-depth study with a view to find out: (a) what makes this institution different from other autonomous colleges, (b) what are the causes of outstanding achievements or notable failures or non-achievements: (c) the innovative proneness of the staff and its effects on the achievement or otherwise of this institution: and (d) what more or less methods and techniques of administration, instruction, learning and evaluation are observable in this institution than in the other

autonomous colleges.

7.2.2. THE SAMPLE

The present study is based on a survey data collected from ten Arts, Science and Commerce colleges affiliated to four universities in Tamil Nadu. These were the only autonomous colleges coming under the above categories which have completed between 5 to 10 years of working under autonomy. The faculty, students, controllers of examinations and other administrators of these colleges were the respondents for the interviews and questionnaires. The samples include 10 principals, 176 teachers, six controllers of examiners, and 426 students from these selected colleges.

7.2.3. INSTRUMENTATION

The following tools were used to collect the relevant data:

- (1) Opinionnaire to the teachers of autonomous colleges
- (2) Questionnaire to the students of the autonomous colleges
- (3) Questionnaire to the Controllers of Examinations in autonomous colleges.
- (4) Unstructured interview with the teachers and the principals, managers and other administrative personnel.
- (5) Document analysis

7.2.4. DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data were analysed at different levels - descriptive, differential, correlational and profile analyses.

Appropriate statistics applicable to the variables under study were used to derive the results.

7.3. MAJOR FINDINGS

The following are the major findings evolved from this study.

7.3.1. INITIATIVE FOR AUTONOMY AND TEACHERS' ATTITUDE AND PARTICIPATION IN THE MANAGEMENT PROCESS.

In the case of most colleges the initiative for autonomy came from the part of the management. Most teachers were positively oriented towards autonomy at the beginning. At later stages this positive orientation has come down slightly.

The involvement of the teachers at the thinking, planning and decision making levels for bringing about autonomy was rather low. At the level of implementation their participation has been very high. The following points emerge in this regard:

(1) In the initial managerial processes and actions of deciding for autonomy and planning for the same, less than 50 per cent of the senior teachers only were involved.

(2) The decisional involvement and participation of all the teachers in the execution of the autonomous college programme are on the higher side, except perhaps, in the case of planning and implementing co-curricular activities.

(3) More than 52.85 per cent of the teachers feel that they are directly involved in most of the decisions in the college.

Only less than 8 per cent feel that decisions are individualistic and autocratic; and

(4) The satisfaction of the teachers in the decision making process in the colleges is more than average, i.e., 62.88 per cent of the teachers are satisfied.

7.3.2. INADEQUATE STAFF PREPARATIONS.

- (1) Orientation programmes were conducted on a variety of topics related to autonomy, although the number of times these programmes was conducted is very limited in most areas;
- (2) Evaluation methods and techniques and curriculum planning are the most frequented topics on the orientation programmes;
- (3) The majority of teachers who are functionaries in Autonomous colleges have not undergone any orientation programmes;
- (4) The number of such orientation programmes participated by individual teachers is extremely low;
- (5) The opinion of majority of teachers is that the orientation given to them for practising autonomy was inadequate; and
- (6) Most teachers agree to the need for refresher programmes for the practioners of auotnomy:

In general, it can be said that autonomy was introduced without sufficient staff preparation.

7.3.3. BRAIN-STORMING AND COMMUNICATION CHANNELS:

As per the responses of the faculty, the communication channels

and processes in the autonomous colleges are on the whole healthy and satisfactory. However, in the initial stages of such an innovative programme as the Autonomous Colleges, cent per cent perfection in these fields cannot be expected. The perfection achieved remain above 62 per cent which seems to be a good achievement.

There is hardly any evidence that any kind of serious forecasting was made to ascertain the higher educational needs of the locality or of the clientele of the institutions.

7.3.4. STRUCTURAL CHANGES EFFECTED IN AUTONOMOUS COLLEGES:

Course and curriculum planning, syllabus design and student evaluation are the major functions in an educational organisation. In non-autonomous colleges these functions are discharged by the affiliating universities. In autonomous colleges these are assigned to the colleges. One of the objectives of such delegation was to decentralise these functions. Secondly, it was intended to effect qualitative improvements in areas of educational activities. Thirdly, such delegations envisage a wider participation by the entire teaching community in the colleges in discharging these functions qualitatively at a superior level and with added efficiency, speed and flexibility.

The results of the analysis show that in all these three objectives there has been achievements. The level of achievement and the degree of success vary from college to college. The experience of most colleges does indicate that

this system of autonomous colleges can work and it can bring about qualitative improvements in the higher educational fields in these respects.

In autonomous colleges the opportunities for the students to choose subjects and combinations are quite good. However, regional needs find rather very little attention in the curriculum and syllabi.

More than 50 per cent of the teachers are satisfied with their participation in the planning of long-term administrative and co-curricular activities of the colleges. More than 60 per cent of the teachers are satisfied about their involvement in course, curriculum and other academic plannings and implementation.

The reorganisation of the administrative structures of the college as a result of gaining autonomy has been done fairly well in all the colleges. More than 81 per cent of the teachers responded express satisfaction about the working of the Boards of studies and other academic and administrative structures in the colleges. More than 70 per cent of the teachers agree that there exist good organisational coordination among the academic community in the colleges.

Some colleges have proved that there is possibility of a very high degree of flexibility and efficiency in effecting changes and updating of course, curriculum and syllabi.

7.3.5. WORKLOAD OF TEACHERS AS A RESULT OF AUTONOMOUS STATUS:

(1) When compared to the non-autonomous colleges, the work load of autonomous college teachers may have slightly increased. It will be more realistic to say that in the autonomous set up, depending on the top level administration of the college, teachers could be made to work at least to a minimum degree which was their obligation even in non-autonomous condition but from which they used to easily excuse themselves, and so this cannot be said as additional workload. However, in those well-run colleges where teachers who used to be hard-working and sincere, autonomy has imposed an additional burden on them which will vary depending on their dedication and application to work. More sincere and dedicated teachers will have more burden to carry.

(2) A considerable section of teachers willingly accept this work load as justifiable and satisfying to them. A small section of them consider it as unjustifiable and over-burdening.

7.3.6.ADAPTATION OF NEW TEACHING AND TESTING TECHNIQUES.

(1) There is change and adaptation in teaching-learning and instructional methods as a consequence of the colleges becoming autonomous.

(2) Teachers' view is that there is more scope for such changes when compared to those already effected and the colleges are oriented towards such changes.

(3) Teachers and students agree to the employment of various teaching, learning and testing methods and techniques, but the

degree of their agreement vary considerably.

7.3.7. QUALITATIVE IMPROVEMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS IN AUTONOMOUS COLLEGES

(1) More than 60 per cent of the teachers agree that autonomous college system is better suited for character formation and life-orientation of the students.

(2) More than 55 per cent of the teachers and students agree that their colleges have innovative programmes which equip their students with self learning technique, problem-solving and practical skills, social awareness, expressions of creativity and originality, etc. However, there are certain colleges that are far ahead in these skills and some lagging far behind.

(3) The curricular strategies of every autonomous college do not give equal importance to acquisition of various skills and qualities by the students. There is hardly any attempt made in some colleges in this regard. But there are others where teachers and students work with team spirit and with a vision for the future. The students in the latter category of institutions acquire significant strides in these areas which is evidenced in their conversations. Also such students are sought after for higher education and employment purposes by other institutions and agencies. In the process, the teachers of these institutions also grow in knowledge, skills and effectiveness. Evidence for this is that these teachers are much sought after by other institutions for giving orientation for their teachers and students.

In general one can conclude that there are promising signs in the autonomous colleges for achieving qualitative improvements in the higher educational field of the country.

7.3.8. EVALUATION OF THE MANAGERMENTS OF AUTONOMOUS COLLEGES.

More than 65 per cent of the teachers assess their managements as intellectually and financially capable, constructive in approach, adaptable to situations, appreciative of teachers, and sympathetic to the students. More than 56 per cent of the students also agree that their managements are responsive to their needs and aspirations. More than 83 per cent of the teachers and 76 per cent of the students rate their managements as democratically oriented.

7.3.9. EVALUATION OF THE TEACHERS OF AUTONOMOUS COLLEGES.

(1) More than 70 per cent of the teachers are willing to be evaluated by their colleagues, students and outside agencies. However, the principals feel that this claim of the teachers is not true and that most teachers are unwilling to be evaluated.

(2) About 50 per cent of the teachers in autonomous colleges are involved in some kind of professional improvement programmes, such as writing research papers and books, participation in and conducting of refresher courses, etc.

7.3.10. STUDENT EVALUATION IN AUTONOMOUS COLLEGES

On an average, 64.14 per cent of the teachers are positive about the achievement on the examination reforms. The fact that

internal evaluation is employed in all the selected colleges cannot be disputed. But the methods employed for such evaluation and the commitment of the teaching community are disputed issues. Teachers have wide ranging differences of opinion in this regard.

In the case of continuous internal assessment of the students, 78.78 per cent of teachers agree that this objective has been achieved. This degree of agreement seems to be quite moderate in this aspect because in all the colleges continuous internal assessment is being done and this forms part of the final grading of the students. May be the teachers mean to say that the quality of such assessment has not come to the level of their expectations. Unstructured interviews with the teachers reveal that everything with internal evaluation is not all right in many colleges. However, in some of the colleges this is the best managed and well appreciated portion of autonomy. The products from such colleges are much in demand for employment as well as for higher studies.

Major finding on Examination Reforms in Auotnomous Colleges

- (1) Semester system and continuous internal evaluation of the students are incorporated in all the autonomous colleges.
- (2) The proportion of continuous internal evaluation and semestral examination marks (grades) for the final grading of students vary from college to college.

(3) Methods employed for internal evaluation, the degree of impartiality of teachers in this regard and hence the reliability or credit-worthiness of evaluation systems in the autonomous colleges are disputed issues both by the practitioners and the observers of the system.

(4) Great majority (64.14%) of the teachers are positive about the achievement of the objectives of autonomy in the field of examination reforms.

(5) At present there are both internal and external evaluation of the students in all the colleges. There are certain Post Graduates departments in some colleges experimenting with final internal evaluation or cent per cent internal evaluation of the students. However, the claim of 56.63 per cent of the teachers that their colleges are ready for adopting final internal evaluation seem to be exaggerated or premature.

(6) The attitude of academic circles outside autonomous colleges questioning the credibility of the evaluation system in autonomous colleges in general and so restricting the entry of their products into higher educational and employment areas is questionable and not justifiable, although the arguments for such moves are not without basis. Any flaws in this regard are to be given the benefit of doubt and be viewed as initial problems in a major mass-based experimentation which definitely can be overcome by constant review and concerted efforts from the part of the functionaries, supervisory agencies and critical observers.

(7) Internal evaluation in autonomous colleges is made use of also as a feed back mechanism for remedial action only to a very limited extent.

(8) There are some innovative evaluation methods experimented upon in some colleges. This trend is yet to catch up.

(9) 50 per cent of the teachers feel that there is an excess dose of examination (internal) in autonomous colleges which hampers to a certain extent creativity and self-study instincts of students.

(10) Only less than 50 per cent of the students of autonomous colleges hold the view that the evaluation system in their colleges are capable of testing their creativity, analytical thinking, decision making capacity, communication and application-oriented skills and mastery of knowledge.

(11) More than 75 per cent of the students are satisfied with the system of internal evaluation in their colleges and do not have any complaints about it. 45 per cent of them prefer to have 50 per cent internal and 50 per cent external and another 33 per cent prefer a 25:75 per cent proportion between internal and external evaluations. More than 50 per cent of the students are convinced about the various advantages of internal evaluation.

(12) Less than 25 per cent of the students complain about victimisation by the course teacher in internal evaluation. Less than 31 per cent of the students report about favouratism shown

by the course teachers. More than 36 per cent of the students report that they are favoured for admission for higher studies and for employment because they are students of autonomous colleges.

(13) The controllers of examination of autonomous colleges are positive and optimistic about the system employed for student evaluation in their colleges. They deny any kind of mal practice in this regard.

(14) In general, one may observe that the reforms introduced in student evaluation in autonomous colleges, are in the right direction. Lack of adequate planning and other pitfalls and imperfections are there; but they could be seen as initial difficulties and could be remedied

7.3.11. HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS IN AUTONOMOUS COLLEGES.

As a result of becoming autonomous, most colleges have adopted many innovative programmes and projects in order to improve the quality of education and improve teaching and testing operations in the colleges. Semester system, credit system, grading, streaming, Continuous Internal Evaluation, Various techniques and new methods of evaluation, application oriented courses, optional and additional courses, inter-disciplinary programmes, etc., are but a few such innovations adopted. Most of the autonomous colleges are oriented and tuned for innovations and change at considerable speed and efficiency. Various methods of teaching also are introduced in these colleges.

7.4. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

The following general observations may be drawn in the light of this study:

(1) There is no uniform pattern in introducing autonomy in different colleges. Since this was quite an uncharted path, each institution had its own unique way of venturing into it. Each of them has gone through a process of trial and error.

(2) Most teachers (more than 82 per cent) of the autonomous colleges are of opinion that autonomy in their colleges is a success.

(3) More than 63 per cent of the teachers hold that the various apprehensions about autonomy to colleges are baseless and not objective.

(4) More than 60 per cent of the teachers are convinced that the expected advantages of autonomous colleges have been achieved or they are within their reach for attainment.

(5) Regarding conferring of autonomy to other colleges in the country, the opinion of the teachers is divided. Majority of them are of the opinion that time is not yet ripe for such an expansion.

(6) Some institutions have not given much thought to arrange for adequate training to the faculty to switch over to this new style of functioning. Confusion and lack of directions in such institutions are conspicuous.

(7) The main objective of shifting the burden of conducting examinations and certification has been fully achieved in all autonomous colleges. But opinion is divided as to the methods of doing it. It is here the credibility of the institution, each individual teacher and of the student is to be tested. This credibility is yet to be established fully. Deficiencies in this regard are partly due to the initial confusion which is being overcome gradually. Partly it is also due to the lack of firmness in the policy of certain institutions, lack of commitment and reluctance to take up responsibility by the teachers and lack of training and initiation into the process. Again, it is this credibility that gives lustre to certain institutions.

(8) In most cases teachers are given autonomy in academic matters. There are good number of competent professionals in these colleges who behave in a very responsible manner. Hence further decentralisation is possible. However, there are autonomous colleges where even academic decisions are imposed from above, say from the management. But they are exceptional.

(9) There are instances where teachers confuse their academic freedom with absolute personal autocracy. Some such teachers do not value the idea that education is a cooperative endeavour with specific goals to be achieved for the institution, for the society and for the individual. Team work and team spirit should be the backbone of this structure which is sometimes

foregotten by these teachers. They want full decisional powers individually to evolve own syllabus, teaching and testing methods independent of the Board of Studies and the Academic Council.

(10) There were allegations that autonomy to college would give unchecked powers to the management. Evidence is to prove it otherwise.

(11) There were apprehensions that autonomous colleges would be centres promoting elitism in the country. In the light of experience gained there seems to be no more takers for this position.

(12) Attempts are made in some institutions to give vocational training. In most cases this is limited to imparting computer training. Some institutions have ventured into specialised courses either as part of curriculum or outside it for imparting vocational training.

(13) Some institutions have taken up extension activities seriously. But for most others this is not yet a consideration.

(14) Most institutions have not given serious thought to introduce some local content into the curriculum or in other words contextualising the content of education. There is hardly any local participation visible in the educational process.

(15) Academics are not unanimous in accepting the new style of functioning. The large majority are positively for it. Some

were reluctant in the beginning but later on got enthusiastic. Some who were fully for it in the beginning turned cold afterwards.

(16) Active teachers' unions still oppose the very idea of autonomous colleges on some pretext such as elitism, fear of the managements' assuming more powers, etc. But the vehemence of their opposition to autonomous colleges has waned out. Some union members still oppose it as a union policy although in private talks they agree that most of their apprehensions were proved imaginary or without foundation and supporting evidence.

(17) In most institutions real work is going on in incorporating new knowledge and adapting to changes.

(18) Student participation in academic decision making is yet to be introduced in many institutions.

(19) As is clear from its profiles, Lady Dock College, Madhurai, is one college which fulfills most of the conditions for a good autonomous college.

7.5. SUGGESTIONS FOR AN IDEAL FUNCTIONING OF AUTONOMOUS COLLEGES.

On the basis of this study, a few suggestions are given below which may be considered for improving the quality and attaining the objectives of colleges which may be brought into autonomous status in the future.

(1) The vision for going autonomous for a college can be had from the management. But before autonomy is brought about in a college, the faculty should be taken into confidence motivated to own the programme and work for it. This is because autonomous college programme in this country is envisaged as more of academic autonomy rather than autonomy for the management.

(2) As an essential prelude to introducing autonomy to a college it is absolutely necessary for the faculty to be thoroughly oriented and prepared through refresher courses, seminars, workshops, etc., for knowing what autonomy is and for being the principal functionaries in an autonomous set up. This is a must for the success of the autonomous colleges.

(3) Some kind of a preliminary study should be conducted before introducing autonomy to the college to find out the local or regional needs so that these could be incorporated into the courses and curriculum of the autonomous college. Also there is need for establishing operational avenues of interaction with the local community and industries to make the programmes in the college meaningful, practical, need-based and useful to its clientele.

(4) There are already minor incentives for the teachers to improve their educational qualifications. Some misgivings and confusion also do exist in this regard. These have to be clarified and such incentives and rewards for professional improvements should be further strengthened, broadened and made

more attractive and challenging to the teachers. In addition, there should be some effective reward and punishment mechanism whereby teachers are prompted to apply themselves wholeheartedly to do practice-oriented research and to bring out their results through curricular and co-curricular activities and through publications. Promotion of teachers to higher positions should be definitely linked to these activities and automatic promotions purely on the basis of the number of years worked (seniority) should be stopped forthwith.

(5) Increasing the volume and content of external evaluation in autonomous colleges is not the right means to improve the credibility of the evaluation system. Teachers who teach are the right people to evaluate their students. Here there is need to establish mutual trust in the academic community. Further, teachers are to be motivated to be objective, impartial, far-sighted and bold. People of character should be made the controlling officers in the examination department of the autonomous colleges.

(6) The country as a whole should evolve a system to recognise and reward meritorious students for their achievements. This suggestion is made in view of the handicap of the autonomous college students that they are not considered for the academic ranks and awards of the university. Delinking degree and job will be one such measure. Instituting more corruption-free selection tests for jobs and higher studies will be another measure.

(7) The national level planners should devise some mechanism such that the management of autonomous colleges are further strengthened to have effective control over the personnel and over the administration of the college. This is because there are evidences to show that teachers sometimes misuse their academic autonomy by being irresponsible, negligent and unaccountable for their actions, leading to a credibility gap which results in inferior quality of the products from the colleges. This is also true with regard to the non-teaching and administrative staff. Here again, changes are more advisable through a system of reward and punishment rather than through many administrative measures.

(8) Some kind of propaganda machinery should be devised so that teachers' "fear of the unknown" about autonomous colleges should be removed. The practitioners of autonomy could be made to write and speak about their experience as faculty members in autonomous colleges. Secondly, teachers of non-autonomous or would-be autonomous colleges could be deputed for short periods, say three months, to autonomous colleges to know and to learn for themselves about the working of autonomy in such colleges. Teachers from autonomous colleges could also be asked to work for shorter durations in non-autonomous colleges. This exchange arrangement could be done at the university, inter-university or inter-state levels with the concurrence of the concerned university and state governments. Even short visits by groups of teachers from non-autonomous colleges to autonomous colleges

will be helpful.

(9) Arrangement for periodic meetings of faculty members from various autonomous colleges and exchange of views and ideas and other kinds of academic interactions could enhance the quality of autonomous college programme.

7.6. CONCLUSION

Conferring of autonomy to colleges is a right step in the organisation of higher education in India. Every endeavour has to be made to expand it to as many colleges as possible. But going autonomous for a college should be necessarily an autonomous decision from the part of the institution. For this purpose proper climate has to be created. There are many confusing thoughts in the minds of the managements, of the teachers and the students. There are also many apprehensions in these groups, some real and many imaginary. They have to be removed and an atmosphere of trust and confidence is to be created.

The UGC can play a major role in reducing these confusions and fears. For this it has to be listening, responsive and quick in taking decisions. As a coordinating organ of the Central Government, the UGC may also require some more administrative powers in addition to its grant-giving function. Conditions should be created that universities and State Governments cannot afford to neglect the directives and guidelines of the UGC for a long time, while at the same time not infringing upon their

autonomy.

Undue haste in introducing autonomy may become counter productive. But it has also to be a time-bound programme to be speeded up and applied universally to all colleges, at least to those willing to go autonomous.

7.7. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY.

(1) The financial implications in running colleges autonomously has not been looked into in this study although it has to be a major consideration of management. This aspect may be subjected to further studies.

(2) There are indices to point out that most Ladies Colleges perform better as autonomous colleges. It is worth making a comparative study between the women's and mixed colleges about their styles of management and reasons for achievement or non-achievement.

(3) There is a governing body suggested by the UGC for the autonomous colleges in which the majority might be people from outside the management personnel with such powers as to sell, mortgage or alienate the property of the college. This is not a proposition quite acceptable to most of the private college managements. Because of this provision some autonomous colleges are even thinking to opt out of autonomy.

One of the apprehensions of the universities in giving autonomy to colleges is that the universities will go out of business

once the supervisory activities and conduct of examination are taken away from them. How best the universities could have a more meaningful and fuller existence in the changed circumstances is worth researching into.

These two problems, one of the private managements and the other of the universities, could be seen together. Universities could be supervisory bodies for autonomous colleges in a more meaningful manner than the present one wherein they will be in a position to take care of the aspects which the government or the UGC expects the above-mentioned governing bodies of the autonomous colleges to do rather than asking the managements to surrender their rights in running their colleges as their institutions.

The universities could also provide professional consultancy to the colleges in academic and administrative matters. Of course, this has to be in such a way that there is no further concentration of powers with the university and that the universities will not put any hindrance for the progress of the colleges as autonomous institutions and even for their growth into deemed universities. Universities also could be accreditation agencies in relation to autonomous colleges. These aspects of the relationship of the universities to autonomous colleges could be made subjects for further study.