

## The Idea of a University: A Sociological Study of a National University in India

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**ABSTRACT** What is the role and relevance of universities in the contemporary Indian society is the fundamental question that bothers students, intellectuals and policy makers. A brief review of literature on university education reveals that universities are in a transition phase and undergoing a crisis across the nation states including India. The primary aim of the paper is to analyse to what extent the universities in India reflect the centre of universal teaching and research. It also aims to map the expectations and experiences of students in a university. This paper is broadly divided into two parts. The first part presents the broader debates on the idea of a university, critically examining the current status of university education in India. The second part captures the demographic composition, personal experiences and ideological convictions of students on the role of a university in nation building, social transformation and social and economic mobility.

### INTRODUCTION

The reflections of Sen (2011) on the legacy of the Nalanda University in ancient India, Newman's (1908) 'the idea of a university', the Humboldt ideal of the modern university as a replica of the unity of teaching and research; inform the university as a centre of universal learning. Intellectual articulations of Visvanathan (2000), Guha (2007) and Beteille (2010) present a wide range of meanings and debates associated with ideal goals and ideological contests on the ideas of an ideal university in India. The history of India's higher policy since 1947 to the latest National Knowledge Commission (NKC 2009) was aimed to prepare Indian youth for the knowledge economy.

### The Idea of a University

In this paper an attempt has been made to map out the ideological divergence in approaching the idea of a university and its relevance in the context of India. In this paper Newman's idea of a university has been accepted as a conceptual category for sociological examinations.

If I were asked to describe as briefly and popularly as I could, what a University was, I should draw my answer from its ancient designation of a *Studium Generale*, or "School of Universal Learning." (Newman 1908: 6).

*The Idea of a University: Defined and Illustrated* (1908) by Newman remains a scholarly piece on the study of the origin and functions of a university. According to him, the university should be the seat of universal learning. His idea of university implies the assemblage of students and faculty from all parts of the world in one spot. It should represent the diversity in schools of knowledge and ideologies. The essential feature of a university is to provide a mechanism for circulation of thought in everyday intellectual life. The university should be able to transform ordinary students as an intellectual community. His idea of a university implies the cultivation of knowledge, wisdom and critical thought which allows the student to lead a balanced intellectual and social life. However, a critical reading of the history of the idea of a university reveals the clash of epistemological traditions on the lines of universal versus specialised learning, excellence versus equity, university for knowledge versus the market and social versus personal good (Beteille 2005). These are some of the major concerns confronting the very idea of a university in the era of the privatisation of education and employment. Globalisation as an economic and epistemological system posed a fundamental challenge to the very idea of university education across the developed and developing countries. A wide range of conceptual

and empirical studies conducted by scholars such as Habermas and Blazek (1987), Oakeshott (1989), Kinnear (2001), Williams (2005), Marginson (2007) and MacIntyre (2009) highlight the tensions, transformation, student protest and lack of autonomy leading towards crises in universities (Readings 1997). The foregoing writings primarily demonstrate the crisis in universities in the era of globalisation. In the context of India, the writings of Jayaram (2004), Altbach (2009), Chanana (2007) and Tilak (2014) cover multiple empirical and epistemological issues associated with crises and conflict of interests in the higher education scenario.

Beteille (2010), while dealing with the idea of a modern university, traces out the fundamental ideological and intellectual differences between Humboldt's idea of the university which was the first modern university established in Berlin organised on the principle of the unity of teaching and research, in contrast to, the Napoleonic idea of the university that was based on the concept of excellence in small academic circles. *Napoleon* was responsible for framing the institutional system based on small, compact and highly selective institutions designed to give expression to the principle of 'careers open to talent'.

Scholars such as Beteille (2005) and Viswanathan (2000) who worked on the history of universities, argued that the fundamental difference between the pre-modern and modern university is differentiated by diverse sociological and epistemological parameters such as production and distribution of knowledge, excellence and equity, accountability and autonomy. The so-called sacred knowledge dominated university education in the pre-modern era, whereas the secular and diverse branches of knowledge dominated the university in the modern era (Beteille 2005). The writings of Newman (1908) and Beteille (2005) highlighted the role of religion in shaping the nature and direction of knowledge systems across the universities in the world. The study of Buddhism dominated the learning practices of the Nalanda University in ancient India, whereas the moral and material philosophy of Christianity determined the scholarly practices of the universities in pre-modern Europe (Beteille 2005).

Visvanathan's (2000) reading of a university reflects the sociological imagination of the intellectuals of the enlightenment era not only in

Europe, but also in the post-colonial nationalist leadership of India.

The university is a futuristic institution that makes innovative uses of the past. It is one of the last surviving medieval institutions, the only one of the guilds to adapt and survive in modern society. It is a microcosm of the walled city. Today the wall may not exist, but the separation between the university and society is real. It is a source of tension and creativity (Visvanathan 2000: 2)

Visvanathan (2000) believes that the university is an inevitable entity for modern societies. It became a symbol of modernity. It attained the role of progressive ideologies and the production of knowledge. The ecology of knowledge in the university is organised upon the cardinal values of liberty, equality, fraternity and dissenting voice. He brings forth the fundamental distinction between the ultimate goal of the university from the perspective of intellectual freedom and social accountability. The modern phase of the university also marks the dialectical relationship between the university and society.

*"Universities are not only centres of learning, however, badly or well they play their part in the transmission and creation of knowledge, they are also social institutions that provide the setting for a very distinctive kind of interaction among young men and women, and between the generations"* (Beteille 2005: 1).

Universities enable the exchange of social interaction between and among its members (both young and old) belonging to diverse backgrounds (caste, class, religion, region, gender, age and language). Most of the students and parents in developing countries consider universities as public institutions due to economic location and political philosophy of public welfare. According to Beteille (2005), the university must respond to the functions and challenges of the society. Nevertheless, how public are the public institutions (universities) in India? It is extremely important to deliberate upon such a fundamental question at this juncture.

In order to answer the above question, one can refer to Guha (2007), whose writings highlight what an ideal university and its key features are in India in the context of globalisation, which pushes for a specialised branch of knowledge. According to Guha (2007), India as a nation and community represents multiple levels

of pluralities. The geographical diversity, religious plurality and diversity need to be approached to address the core value of unity and diversity in India. According to Guha (2007), an ideal university should fulfil six features of pluralisms. They are, firstly, pluralism in the student body, secondly, pluralism in the teaching faculty, thirdly, pluralism in disciplines, fourthly, pluralism in approaches within a discipline, fifthly, multiple sources of funding and sixthly, pluralism in student ideologies.

A cursory glance at the writings of Beteille (2005), Visvanathan (2000) and Guha (2007) reveal that a university is primarily a system of learning that cultivates universal values of equality, liberty and fraternity for building a progressive nation-state. It should guide a progressive intellectual movement and cultivate the urge for social justice. The aforementioned reflections reveal that there is a fundamental difference between the modern and the medieval notions about universities. However, broadly speaking, the spirit of a university across the ages reveals that it stands for universal learning and the exchange of critical intellectual traditions. Higher education in general and university education in particular, gained critical significance in the making of a modern nation-state with liberal political democracy.

Studies reveal that those who are part of higher education are considered to be the future of the country who will take their nation to the zenith of progress and development. It is the responsibility of universities to fulfil this goal by imparting higher education and knowledge to its pupils, thereby strengthening its relationship with the society. With the foregoing account of the nature of the relationship between universities and society, the following pages present a brief overview of the history of university education in India. The major issue that bothers the historians of higher education is the antiquity of a university in India. Does it belong to colonial rule or did it exist in ancient India? This question was dealt with in a balanced way in the report on university education in India popularly known as the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948). The committee opined that:

The universities of modern India owe very little to our ancient or medieval centres of learning, but one must not forget the existence of such centres of learning since very early times (1948: 12).

The report of the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948) on the history of the university accepts the ideological and epistemological differentiation of the universities in pre-modern India, when compared to the universities in the modern era conceptualised in the west and implanted in the east. The history of modern university education began with the University of Calcutta, University of Madras and University of Bombay in 1857<sup>1</sup>. After 156 years, there are around 659 public and private universities<sup>2</sup> providing higher education for the millions of aspiring Indian youth. However, the high power committee chaired by Pitroda (2009) strongly felt the need for expanding university education in India in order to prepare India for the knowledge economy. His committee recommended more than one thousand universities in India, which represents the diversity and pluralism at various levels. The massive expansion of higher education speaks volumes about the nature of the relationship between state, economy and society in three historical junctures: that is, the colonial, post-independent, post-globalisation era. The colonial phase reflects the struggle, sacrifice, visions, ideological discourses, tensions and transitions. The post independent phase was characterised by the privatisation of higher education and celebration of tool based learning by negating the traditional concept of comprehensive knowledge.

It began with state initiatives being aimed at meeting the aspirations of the middle and working class students till the pre-globalisation era. The post liberalisation phase prepared the ground for an expansion of private sector in higher education at a massive scale (Tilak 2014). In spite of enormous expansion, access to higher education in India is still limited to less than 8% of the aspiring youth. The most significant question that quite often takes a back seat is what is the meaning of expansion for Indian youth aspiring for higher education. How far, such a substantial expansion in higher education is successful in retaining the very concept of an ideal university, which emphasises the plurality and diversity of knowledge systems, student's composition and faculty constitution remains unanswered. A body of literature on the issues of expansion of higher education brings the transitions in university social composition in terms of class, caste, gender, religion, region, language and tribe. The following section presents the

methodology, tools of data collection, discussion and findings of the study.

### METHODOLOGY

The fieldwork was conducted at the University of Hyderabad. The sample of the study consists of 500 students, which accounts for 10% of the total university population (5,000). The sample consists of students from three programmes of study, namely, undergraduate, postgraduate and research students. The fieldwork was conducted over a period of three months starting from the first week of February to the last week of April 2012.

The tools for data collection were questionnaires and interview schedules. In order to elicit the expectations and experiences of students on the idea of a university, its role in society and to get their personal insights, twenty in-depth interviews were conducted based on their voluntary participation. The questionnaires were constructed on the parameters of caste, class, gender, religion, region, language and multiple questions were designed to test the perceptions of the university students on diverse issues of professional and personal relevance. The questionnaires had questions that were of a closed type, while the interview schedules had open ended questions.

### OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

A cursory analysis of the growth of university education reveals the pattern in which the higher education system is expanding. According to the latest data, the Indian higher education system ranks as the third largest education system in the world after China and the United States. Higher education plays an important role in shaping the goals and objectives of the youth in nation building and social mobility at individual levels (Altbach 2009).

Thus, the role of higher education is very critical in determining the life chances of the youth. The University of Hyderabad is one of the leading universities in India and well known for its academic accomplishments both on national and international academic platforms. It attracts students from different states and union territories (UT) of India, represents diversity and the plural character of the Indian society.

### Diversity and Inclusion in a Central University

The history of the university unfolds achievements in diverse institutional spaces of the country. As an institution, it has produced great natural and social scientists and scholars of diverse branches of knowledge ranging from philosophy to physics. The university has been successful in training students of diverse backgrounds by providing quality education which ultimately enables them to compete globally<sup>3</sup> and stand in positions of power in different spheres of life.

However, a critical analysis of the intellectual and social history of a university reveals that it is a site of contestation between multiple spaces and identities inherited by and generated by the university itself. The social values and meanings attached to these 'spaces' are highly conditioned by caste, class, gender, religious, regional, linguistic and political ideologies of students. An attempt has been made to dwell upon the core features of a university identified by the eminent social scientist Guha (2007). The Humboldt and Newman traditions emphasised the significance of plural branches of knowledge in shaping the true spirit of the university. The University of Hyderabad is one of the few leading universities to offer a wide range of degrees and subjects. The university provides an opportunity for students of diverse academic interests and epistemological concerns to exercise different entry and exit points.

### Knowledge Diversity

The policy makers and educational leaders realised the need for the expansion of quality education not only for the elite strata, but also the mass which has been eagerly waiting to gain from the fruits of higher education, which is always referred to as a means of social mobility. Table 1 presents the profile of academic programmes offered by the university the core value of unity between teaching and research in diverse branches of knowledge. The University of Hyderabad, once widely considered only as a research university and barely known outside its sphere of operations, has today emerged as one of the top three centres of higher learning in the country (UoH Herald 2013). The University consists of ten schools representing intellectual unity in diverse branches of knowledge.

**Table 1: Socio-regional and demographic profile of the respondents**

Age	F <sup>1</sup>	%	T1.1-Age profile		of study profile			T1.2-Programme		T1.3-State profile		T1.5-Caste profile		
			Program of study	F	%	State	F	%	Gender	F	%	Caste	F	%
Not answered	16	3.6	Integrated Masters	82	18.3	Andhra Pradesh (AP)	226	50.3	Male	281	62.6	Scheduled Tribes	58	12.9
17-20	64	14.3	Post-Graduation	188	41.9	South (Except AP)	81	18.0	Female	161	35.9	Scheduled castes	85	18.9
21-23	266	59.2	M.Phil/ Ph.D	179	39.9	students)	47	10.5	Any	7	1.6	Other Backward Classes	143	31.8
24+	103	22.9	Total	449	100.0	India	3	11.8	Other	7	1.6	General	161	35.9
Total	449	100				India	42	9.4	Total	449	100	Category	02	0.4
						East India	449	100				No Response	100	
						Total	449	100				Total	449	100

<sup>1</sup> % = Percentage <sup>2</sup> F = Frequency

Looking at some past records, the students' strength in various courses since inception (1975) has been categorised into four phases: 1975-1985, 1985-1995, 1995-2005, 2005-2010. The courses that the University has introduced since inception include MA, MSc, MCA, BTech, MBA, Master of Performing Arts (MPA), Master of Fine Arts (MFA), PG Diploma Course, MPhil, MSc, M Tech, and PhD along with Integrated Master of Arts (IMA) and Integrated Master of Sciences (IMSc) in the later period. In the first phase (1975-1985), we find that the highest enrolment of students took place in the MPhil course from 1975-1976, which was 87% (41) out of a total of 47 enrolments comprising all courses, while the lowest enrolment was in MSc. The M Tech course from 1984-1985 had only 2% (16) out of a total enrolment of 742. In the phase between 1985-1995, it was found that the highest enrolment of students took place in the PhD courses from 1994-1995 which was 36% (727) out of a total of 2,042 enrolments comprising all courses while the lowest enrolment was in the MFA course from 1988-1995 which was stagnant at 1% enrolment.

The third phase between 1995-2005 reveals the highest enrolment of students in the PhD courses from 2003-2004 which was 37% (917) out of a total of 2477 enrolments for all courses while the lowest enrolments were in the MPA, MFA, PG Diploma and B Tech courses, in the entire phase, which were fluctuating between 1% and 2%. In the fourth phase 2005-2010, it was found that the highest enrolment of students took place again in the PhD course from 2005-2006 which was 36% (952) out of a total of 2,641 enrolments comprising all courses, while the lowest enrolment was recorded to be in the MPA, MFA, and PG Diploma courses, which varied between 1% and 2% from the year 2005-2010 (UoH Annual Report 2010).

Students enrolled in the liberal arts programmes, shared highest values on the role of university as a site of critical learning. Ms Sheeba, currently pursuing an MA in the fourth semester in English at the University of Hyderabad shared her perception on the role of a university in cultivating a critical spirit:

Universities create critical consciousness as long as they entertain opposing arguments of the students. Students should question even the propaganda and functioning of the univer-

sity. A university must be a place and platform for questioning everything.

Though the university offers diverse branches of knowledge, students' response to these courses reveals the nexus between market demand and academic hierarchy in the age of globalisation. There is an overwhelming response to the M Tech and MCA courses, compared to the traditional courses such as Physics. On the one hand, there is a massive demand for the English course, while on the other side there are few applicants for Philosophy. Similar trends can be noticed in the School of Social Sciences where Economics attracts lots of students, whereas Anthropology hardly gets applications for admission.

The study argues that the university as a system of knowledge production is undergoing a crisis in the era of globalisation. The major outcome of this trend is, approaching education as a means to an end, and not an end in itself. There is a public perception that the University has failed to meet the growing expectations of the middle classes who have been aspiring for global opportunities.

An in-depth interview with students revealed that it is the market value of the courses which shapes the sense of superiority and inferiority of the students at the university. Those who enrolled in the job-fetching courses such as M.Tech/MCA with assured, positive expectations of jobs, lead campus life with hope. Incidentally, most of these students hail from a middle class background with minimum second generation educated parents. On the other, most of the first generation students who enrolled in traditional arts and science streams carry the burden of family and campus. Lack of hope for the future and the inability to cope with the demand of courses were experienced and faculty members push the students to difficult situations. Therefore, despair is the reality of everyday experience. Dilemmas concerning life to learn and learn to survive exist simultaneously in the campus life.

### Demographic Diversity

Demographic diversity is one of the core features of the university system. The University of Hyderabad attracts students of diverse age groups into its academic fold. On average the minimum age of the student at the time of entry

into the university is 17, whereas the upper age limit is 30+ years. There is a corresponding link between the age and level of study. This study made an attempt to understand the demographic profile of the students to examine the rationale behind choosing university education and their experiences while residing at the university. Table 1 shows the range of age groups on the university campus. The majority (59.2%) of the students belong to the age group of 21-23 years.

It implies that all these students are pursuing postgraduate programs, followed by a significant (23%) presence of the 24+ age group of students who enrolled in PhD programmes. An integrated Master's programme is one of the major additions to the university. According to this programme, the young teenage students get an opportunity to pursue their undergraduate (bachelor) course. Around 14% of the campus students belong to the bachelor programmes. This kind of demographic convergence has been possible just because of the introduction of the integrated Master's programme, considered to be innovative aimed to foster a comprehensive science education in India. The aim of this programme is to attract young minds to the university to strengthen the indigenous development of scientific research for nation building and technological self-reliance. Otherwise, most of the young students have been opting for applied sciences such as engineering. The convergence of different age groups also brings new intellectual energies, range of epistemological problems and methods, and a festival of ideas which ultimately add colour to the campus life. Campus life also demonstrates the commonalities and contradictions associated with youth.

The study brings to the fore the range of meanings associated with youth culture and the intellectual culture of the campus in shaping individual concerns and community challenges. The young undergraduate students learn the academic ethos and culture of learning at an early age. They get an opportunity to interact with postgraduate and doctoral scholars. However, there is a difference in perception on the values offered by the senior students to junior students. Interviews with junior students revealed that they were used by seniors for affairs related to students' political organisations. However, senior students felt that junior students were culturally and morally corrupt due to freedom with control offered to them at a very young age. The

academic deviance of junior students is one of the major issues that dominate even the faculty and academic council meetings on the campus. Since age is a socially constructed category in the Indian society, the faculty members and senior students tend to expect absolute discipline and obedience from the so-called junior students. The whole idea of the age of learning is a contested sociological concept on the university campus.

### Regional Diversity

A plurality of the student body across countries and regions within India is one of the core values of the university. The definition of a university primarily shares a sense of bringing together students and faculty from different parts of the globe<sup>7</sup>. The study reveals that the University of Hyderabad represents the true spirit of a university both in policy and practice. This is one of the few universities in India to attract students from different parts of the country<sup>8</sup>. Since this university has been declared as one of the best universities in the country, students from all across show interest to seek admission. The policy of conducting university entrance tests in different cities and towns enables the student to appear for the entrance examination in their respective regions. The proactive policy of the university's administration in the decentralisation of examination centres paved the way for students across the country, ranging from Arunachal Pradesh in the northeast to Kerala in the extreme south and West Bengal in the eastern region to Rajasthan of the western region of India<sup>9</sup>.

The state-wise distribution of students for 2009-2010 points out that among the students who took new admission, the majority are from the State of Andhra Pradesh. There are 1,193 new admissions together with 1,328 ongoing students making the count to 60% of students belonging to Andhra Pradesh, when compared to the rest of the country. After Andhra Pradesh, the second highest number of students came from Kerala (7.48%) (UoH Annual Report 2010). A critical exploration of primary and secondary data reveals that the majority of the students are from Andhra Pradesh the home state of the University of Hyderabad. Students from neighbouring states such as, Kerala show keen interest to join the university. Kerala is well-known for attaining higher levels of literacy than other re-

gions in India. Therefore, the university attracts a large number of students from Kerala.

Thus, the eastern and north-eastern part of the region constitutes almost 21% of the university student population. Around 10% of students hail from the northern part of India. The distance between the place of study and place of birth ranges from two thousand miles away. The paper argues that students in India are looking for the best places to attain knowledge. They are prepared to go to any part of the country for the sake of quality education. Though it involves travel of 24-48 hours of train journey, students and parents take the pleasure in the pain of travel. For the last two years, the university has introduced online application systems which received a mixed response. According to this system, students are expected to fill out and submit the application forms online (UoH Annual Report 2010).

The major outcome of this policy is a 25% increase in the number of applicants seeking admission. However, this policy led to a digital divide wherein the students from rural backgrounds and the north-eastern parts of the country in particular, have suffered due to geographical isolation and poor technological connectivity. Lack of a chance to submit the hard copy of the application form created confusion and contestations among the students from the under-privileged backgrounds.

In spite of these administrative problems, the university provides admission to Foreign Nationals. For the years 2009-2010 there were 45 Foreign Nationals who took admission. The total number of students who took new admission for 2009-2010 from across the country was 4160. The geographical diversity on the campus brings a sense of national integration, despite cultural and linguistic distinctive identities. The sense of social cohesion based on university solidarity bridges the geographical barriers of the regions.

### Gender Composition

Gender equity is one of the core features of an ideal university. The present study found that the university consists of around 36% female students. It is also interesting to note that 6 students (1.3%) have been identified with alternative gender preferences beyond the male and female categories. Though the proportion of al-

ternative gender group is insignificant, it does however, indicate the presence of alternative sexual identities and thus demands an in-depth sociological exploration to map out the invisible groups who share similar trends. In the case of women in higher education counting a smaller number of enrolments and even a smaller number of outcomes due to various socio-economic conditions, the post-colonial state policy of positive discrimination for women in diverse spheres, including education and employment, has encouraged the family members and the larger civil society to educate women students.

The University of Hyderabad has been attracting female students from the time of its inception (1975) and continues to include them to this present day. The University records reveal that from 1975-1985, the female students admitted were 331 out of a total enrolment of 690 that is 47.9% from 1983-1984. In the second phase (1985-1995), the majority of female students who took admission were 786 out of a total enrolment of 1,934 that is 40.6% from 1992-1993. In the third phase (1995-2005) the majority of female students who took admission were 797 out of a total enrolment of 2,530 students that is 31.5% from 2004-2005. In the fourth phase (2005-2010) the majority of female students who took admission were 1356 out of a total enrolment of 4,160 students that is 32.6% from 2009-2010 (UoH Annual Report 2010).

The growing proportion of women in the university is primarily a response to the growth of opportunities for women in the employment sector. The study found that a significant proportion of female students are children of educated parents (the second generation learners). The following case study reflects the perceptions of the women students on *the role of the university in challenging patriarchy*. According to Ms. Sravani Benerjee, aged 21 and belonging to the upper caste, studying currently in the fourth semester in Sociology:

The university does not challenge the structure of patriarchy, but its students may, out of personal experience and commitment question the same. However, it tries to challenge the ideological systems at the intellectual level.

The university is the only intellectual space to open a wide range of spaces for intergender interactions, which gains significance in the Indian society where the traditional values dominate the social organisation of the everyday life.



This kind of social environment provides an opportunity for the opposite sex to interact with each other and enables the culture of gender socialisation and mutual respect for each other. The study also observed that sexual harassment and the patriarchal nature of spatial organisation of the campus sustains the age-old patriarchal practices and ideologies of gender socialisation in both visible and invisible forms. The study argues that though the participation of women in higher education is increasing steadily, the institutionalised forms of socialisation reinforce the gendered value system of the society. Based on the personal interviews with the male and female students, the study submits that the university as a social institution provides a space for negotiating new social relations and sexual orientations otherwise barred in the caste based patriarchal social system of the Indian society.

### **Caste Profile**

University education to some extent enables the students to overcome the barriers of ascribed identities such as caste, class, region, religion, gender and language. In the broader sense, it works as a means of social mobility and helps the deprived to foster a new form of social identity based on achieved status. However, a critical look at the social character of higher education in general and university education in particular, reveals that it might reinforce one's identity based on caste, class, region, religion, gender and even language giving rise to what may be called, identity politics/student politics among different groups of students. While the modern university claims to be socially inclusive and unbiased with regard to academic excellence, how far this is true still remains to be seen.

The radical policy of affirmative action popularly known as the reservation policy in India challenged the traditional notions of discrimination based on caste and gender. Although these policies are rooted in the colonial regime, the postcolonial state took a proactive role in expanding a reservation policy for university education for the subaltern sections of the Indian society. The modern universities today have expanded the system of education in order to amend the inequalities that colonialism had created. In addition to this, the State has also introduced reservation policies in the form of quo-

tas, within the universities to provide an opportunity to those belonging to the marginalised sections and those discriminated against previously.

Quotas have been allocated in the universities for admission of Scheduled Castes (SCs) with 15%, Scheduled Tribes (STs) with 7%, and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) 27%, and also for Physically Handicapped (PH) with 1% enrolments, thereby trying to maintain the inclusive character of a university. An attempt has been made to review a brief history of the social composition of the university over a period of three decades. The different reserved categories that the University has housed since inception (1975) are Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), Physically Handicapped (PH), Defence Personnel (DP) and Other Backward Caste (OBC). The enrolment into the various reserved categories since 1975-2010 has also been divided into four phases, 1975-1985, 1985-1995, 1995-2005, and 2005-2010 (UoH annual report 2010).

In the first phase (from 1975-1985), we find that the highest percentage of enrolment under reserved categories was 12% out of a total enrolment of 742 students comprising reserved and general categories from 1984-1985. In this phase, the highest enrolment of students was in the category of SCs where the number of enrolments was 71 out of a total enrolment of 91 students in the reserved category from 1984-1985. In the second phase (1985-1995), it was found that the highest enrolment of students was again in the SC category that is 309 out of a total enrolment of 407 students in the reserved category from 1994-1995. In the second phase it was found that the highest enrolment of students in the reserved categories was 20% out of a total enrolment of 2,042 students comprising reserved and general categories from 1994-1995.

In the third phase between 1995-2005, we find that the highest enrolment of students in the reserved categories was 31% out of a total enrolment of 2,477 students from 2003-2004 and 2,530 students from 2004-2005 comprising reserved and general category students. It was found that the highest enrolment of students was in the SC category that is 21% from the year 2000-2004.

The fourth phase (2005-2010) reveals that the highest enrolment of students in the reserved categories was 52% out of a total of 4,160 students from 2009-2010 comprising reserved and

general category students. In this phase the highest enrolment of students was again found to be under the SC category which was 21% from 2006-2008. The primary data reflected in Table 5 reveals that 36% students belong to general category, that is, from the upper caste background. Followed by the OBC students with 32%, 19% of SC and 13% of ST are represented in the sample of our study. The following case study reflects the mood (perceptions) of the university students on the role of university in challenging the caste within the university and the civil society. Mr. Venkata ramana, aged 27 and belonging to the backward caste and, pursuing doctoral studies in political science at the University of Hyderabad shared his ideas and perceptions on the role of the university in annihilation of caste system:

I do not see the university as something that abolishes the caste system because the 4<sup>th</sup> column of every application / educational form is the name of caste. Students form political organisations based on caste, gender, religion and region too. Though the university enables the student to read theories of caste and revisit the anticaste movements, it does have the potential to abolish the caste as a system and practice.

The sociological implications of the study are that the proportion of students from lower caste background has been increasing steadily against the students from the upper strata of the society. It is interesting to observe that higher education in the era of globalisation reconfigured the values which are primarily driven by the global market. The undergraduate education in southern and western India witnessed a massive privatisation in the era of the liberalisation of the Indian economy, which started in the post 1990s. It could be inferred that the students from upper castes and middle classes across the castes began to prefer engineering and medical education instead of the traditional courses offered by the University. How to understand the quantum jump in the number of admissions from the lower caste students who constitute more than 55% of the university students, is the major sociological question which needs to be explored.

The close reading of the pattern of admission to diverse courses reveals a broader relationship between the castes and courses. The large number of upper caste students clear the test in the best market driven courses such as M

Tech and MCA, whereas more than 80% the students from marginal castes get admission into the least demanded courses such as Telugu and Philosophy to name a few. The most striking trend on the campus is the steady rise in student suicides. The sociological reading of the suicides reveals the academic apathy and administrators' resentment towards the higher participation of these groups as major contributing factor in university education. They tend to believe that the qualitative jump of the lower caste students is generally referred to as the compromise with quality and excellence of the academic ethos. The corruption of academic quality is the dominant theme of the public sphere in India.

The discriminatory attitude of the faculty members manifests in multiple forms; they are, unwillingness to supervise the PhD studies of the first generation learners who invariably hail from the lower castes in general and untouchable castes in particular. Those who get a chance to work with faculty members of a higher excellence face the institutionalised and individual forms of discrimination in their day to day academic life. The antagonistic attitudes of the faculty members are the core reason for the increase in the number of student suicides on the campus coupled with administrative indifference.

Lack of positive coordination between the student, teachers and administration often pushes the University towards a crisis. The symptoms of the crisis are suicides and punitive forms of punishment. The growing number of student suicides cases<sup>10</sup> on the campus need to be read as the highest form of protest against the dominant oppressive institutional structures such as the state, society and university system. Apart from the suicide cases, another infamous event happening on the campus was the rustication of ten dalit students in the year 2002.<sup>11</sup> Although there were contradictory versions of responses for the student rustication, it was the mistrust and lack of dialogue between the students and administrative bodies which caused this infamous act.

Thus, dealing with deprived groups and negotiating with deprivation foregrounded the identity and agenda of student positions and politics since the year 2002. The shift of adherence from the core (encompassing identity) ideology to the identity based politics was primarily guided by the failure of the existing student bodies to represent the needs and aspirations

of the marginal social groups and growing awareness levels of the so called subaltern to represent their voices as part of the right to representative politics. Presently, around a dozen formal students' associations claim to represent the rights, assertions and aspirations of their respective student communities on the campus. How to deal with deprived castes on the campus is the major challenge for universities. The university instead of evolving a proactive student friendly policy is rather resorting to reactive measures which led to the death of young Dalit scholars on the campus. The paper argues that the culture of learning in higher education institutions should be changed in the context of the massive enrolment of students who are first generation learners.

**Table 2: What is the most important role of a university?**

Code	Primary function of university?	Frequency	Percent
0	No response	7	2
1	Knowledge and research production	253	56
2	Preparation for employment	34	8
3	Preparing leaders for social revolutions	24	5
4	Enable critical thinking	92	20
5	Preparing a group of people as policy experts	5	1
6	Preparing for corporate life	4	1
7	Any other (Please Specify)	9	2
8	Can't say	21	5
Total		449	100

Although the idea of an ideal university claims that the university becomes an agent of social change and one of the vehicles of modernisation, it is extremely important to understand the perceptions of students about the idea of a university. A close reading of the data from Table 2 implies that more than 50% of students felt that the primary function of a university is to generate knowledge and engage in the process of research. It is also interesting to note that around 20% of students subscribe to the idea of enabling critical thinking as the basic function of the university. Generating employment opportunities is another precondition of a university. It is interesting to note that around 5% of students felt that universities should play a critical role in training revolutionaries for social transformation. The following case study re-

flects the perspectives of the university students on diverse issues of the society.

Mr. Rameswar aged 21, belonging to the upper caste and a believer of Hinduism, pursuing M.A fourth semester in political science at the University of Hyderabad shared his ideas and perceptions of the role of the university.

According to him the most important role of the university is to take in economically and socially backward students along with the other students, give equal opportunities to them, broaden their vistas of thought, instil aspiration to attain social justice and to make students a good human and be responsible to the society.

The study implies that there is unity of thought among different groups of students on the idea of a university. Individual students share diverse shades of reflections in negotiating the university as an intellectual space of learning, revolution, and employment mechanism. The university youth of contemporary India who study in the centres of excellence, strongly felt that the university's role is greater than preparing the youth for employment.

Is there a role for university in social transformation? There are two schools of thought that differ on the idea of understanding the relationship between the university and society linkages. The first position is celebrating the autonomy of the university, both in teaching and research and negates any form of social and political intervention. It believes in the separation between university and society. The scholars of the alternative position strongly believe and advocate universities as public institutions (Beteille 2010).

**Table 3: To what extent do you feel that the university plays a role in social transformation?**

Code	Primary function of university?	Frequency	Percent
1	Social change	29	6
2	Creation of a critical consciousness	91	20
3	Abolition of the caste system	164	37
4	Challenging patriarchy	111	25
5	Bringing religious harmony	40	9
6	Bridging the gap between different ethnic groups	1	0
0	No response	13	3
Total		449	100

Table 3 provides a critical analysis of the students' perceptions about the role of a university on diverse issues of sociological significance. It reveals that the university has a potential role in challenging the age old practice of caste system (36.5%) based on the structure of domination and discrimination. Students also felt (25%) a university should play a critical role in challenging the patriarchal system which humiliates women and discourages their public participation and social and cultural mobility patterns. Creating a critical consciousness is possible with a proactive engagement of the university with diverse social problems, including religious discrimination. The degree of development of the nation and social communities determines the degree of relationship between the society and university linkages. Most of the students strongly felt that universities must play an active role in guiding the nature and direction of the society. Students felt that major social problems in India such as caste and gender based discriminations and exclusions must be addressed by the University. The study argues that the youth in a developing country like India strongly advocate for the thick relationship between the university and society linkages.

Students of the University of Hyderabad played an important role in responding to issues of political, social and educational significance. Responding to the channels of change, has been the core agenda of the student community. The 1990-2000 phase is a replica of multiple political, social and cultural articulations of the Indian society in general, and Andhra Pradesh in particular. This is also a phase of neo-liberal political economy and the withdrawal of the state from welfare policies and associated politics. The battle between caste and religion (Hindu rightwing politics) literally captured the academic and popular imagination of the Indian society.

The University as a social institution is forced to engage with social and spiritual encounters. During this phase, the government of India implemented the policy of reservations for OBCs in the year 1991 which led to unprecedented student violence in educational institutions across India including the political protest at the University of Hyderabad Campus. The University student community was virtually divided into two camps: the pro-reservation (quota/affirmative action) and anti-reservation camp.

This event marked the institutionalisation of social markers such as caste stigma, ideological discrimination and affiliations. Thus, consolidation of social identities and the use of identity as a means of political articulation were the major themes of this period. Thus, the study submits that the University is a reflection of social upheavals.

The students of diverse social and ideological contours respond to historical events ranging from reservations for OBC students in higher education to the Telangana Movement for separate statehood which ultimately became a reality on 2 June 2014. The following case study reflects the perceptions of the University students on diverse issues of the social relevance. Mr. Rasheed, aged 22, belonging to the Muslim community pursuing an M.A currently in the fourth semester in Anthropology at the University of Hyderabad, shared his thoughts on the role of the university in *Social Change, Religious Harmony and Bridging Ethnic Groups Diversity*.

All the educational institutions are important, but since universities formally educate youths who are relatively mature, universities are the most integral part of any social change. University fails to unite students from different religious backgrounds. Political affiliations, formation of the friend circle are at times decided by religion. Attempts are, however, made by students to unite themselves for religious harmony, but it's a failure I must say. I completely agree with this point as that central university accommodate and educate students from across the nation. They get to interact very well with this amicable campus. We even interact with foreign students, which is a pleasant and informative experience.

The foregoing analysis informs the multiple meanings and expectations attached to the University. It has been viewed that the University has a role to play in changing the larger social structure by rethinking about the ageold practices which hinder the progress of the society.

## CONCLUSION

The university system has become a symbol of modernity and social change in developing countries like India. A systematic study of the University of Hyderabad reveals that a university in India is marching towards cultivating the

spirit of pluralism. The plural character of the University is clearly reflected in the multiple traditions of the knowledge systems, courses and ideologies being practised on the campus. However, the University as a modern institutional space failed to address the issues and aspirations of the students who are first generation learners. There is an institutional failure on the part of the University in dealing with the issues related to caste, class, gender and ethnic diversities and the ensuing protests on the campus addressing academic and social problems. A significant finding that emerged is that the University as an inclusive social institution must address the grave issue of student suicides. An innovative step towards evolving an inclusive policy of learning and representing the aspirations of the students across sociocultural boundaries need to be taken. Only then can universities be accepted as public institutions.

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#### NOTES

- 1 For more details and debates on the political, economic and educational context of the mid 19th century in India, please refer to the Radhakrishnan Commission on University Education in India (1949).
- 2 It consists of 312 State Universities, 129 Deemed to be Universities, 45 Central Universities, 173, Private Universities. (UGC website-<http://www.ugc.ac.in/oldpdf/alluniversity.pdf>. Accessed on 14 March 2014).
- 3 Preparing for an employment opportunities both at Global and Local (National) level.
- 4 One of the key reasons for setting, the University of Hyderabad in the city of Hyderabad is to expand the base of a modernisation project in the underdeveloped regions of India in general and Andhra Pradesh in particular. The regional composition in the university enrolment reveals that most of the students admitted in the university are from Andhra Pradesh followed by neighbouring states such as Kerala and Orissa.
- 5 The universities such as the University of Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), University of Hyderabad and Pune University are known for attracting students from different regions of India.

- 6 It is common to find students from faraway places such as Jammu and Kashmir, eight north-eastern states and West Bengal who travel more than 3000 Kilometres to study at this university.
- 7 An outcome of various professional and personal problems in addition to the administrative apathy. More than 6 suicide cases have been reported on university campus.
- 8 Castaway in Hyderabad. The Hindu. 3/3/2002. online edition of India's National Newspaper, <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mag/2002/03/03/stories/2002030300280100.htm>. Retrieved on 10/3/2011.

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