

Open and Distance Learning in the Era of Globalisation

J.M.PARAKH

Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India

Abstract: *The present era is seen by this writer as being inappropriately called 'globalisation era'. As Ellen Meksins Wood tells us, that what has been called globalisation is actually "universalisation of Capitalism". In her own words, " I prefer to talk about the universalisation--the increasing imposition of capitalist imperatives, a capitalist "logic of process" on all aspects of social life--rather than about "globalisation".(Wood:1998,p46). In the context of education, globalisation leads to increased imposition of capitalist controls and this tendency is seen both in developed and developing countries. While agreeing that open and distance learning (ODL) is not born out of globalisation, the paper contends that it is more vulnerable to the attacks of capital and more susceptible to come under the grip of it. This system of education could be used for those disadvantaged sections of the society so far denied access to higher education. This needs to be kept in mind to understand the perspective in which ODL should develop. Otherwise the danger of vested interests taking over the ODL is too great not to take account of. In this article I have kept this perspective in mind to understand the link between ODL and globalisation. Due to limitations of my experiences, I have presented a sketch of the problems involved and, taken IGNOU as an example.*

Globalisation is being seen today as an essential global process. It is being heralded as the next step towards democratisation and empowerment of the people, such an indispensable step from which no one can escape. Only by becoming a part of this process we can take full advantage of its potential. It is only after accepting this first step that we can redefine and reshape the other agendas of development. In the era of globalisation market has become the central force and because of this everything else is decided by the rules of the market force. By market it is meant a place where things are bought and sold. The seller has only one dharma (religion) that is to make a profit. Even democracy is weighed by the freedom and rights given to the market rather than to the people. In Noam Chomsky's book *Profit over People*, the American media thinker Robert W.McChesney writes in the Introduction: "As neoliberal guru Milton Friedman put it in his *Capitalism and Freedom*, because profit-making being is the essence of democracy, any government that pursues anti-market policies is being anti-democratic, no matter how much informed popular support they enjoy. Therefore it is best to restrict governments to the job of protecting private property and enforcing contracts, and to limit political debate to minor issues (Noam Chomsky: 1998,p.9). "Defining globalisation Robert W.McChesney further writes:"Globalisation is the result of powerful governments, especially that of the United States,pushing trade deals and other accords down the throats of the world's people to make it easier for corporations and the wealthy to dominate the economics of nations around the world without having obligations to the peoples of these nations" (Noam Chomsky: 1998, p. 13). Noam Chomsky himself holds that there is no doubt that ideology of neoliberalism weakens education and health, increases inequalities and lessens the contributions of labour in incomes (Noam Chomsky:1998 p.32). This is true not only for third world countries but also for advanced industrialised nations. The proof of this is that in last one decade the US and the European nations have drastically cut grants to education,

health and other social services. Not only that, today the economies of these nations are going through a recession which seems to be here to stay. And it does not appear that they will be able to get out of it very soon. The process of this globalisation is directly affecting the working classes of these countries. That is why, one can see so many strong protests from Seattle in the US to Genoa in Italy. It is to be noted that these protests have been international in nature and working classes, environmentalists and other affected groups of different countries have taken part in them.

This discussion on globalisation has intensified since the '90s when Soviet Union was dismantled and the US emerged as the only economic and military superpower. The primacy of capitalism is assumed in globalisation and it is taken for granted that there is no alternative to it. Market is all powerful and decisive. Market decides what we need and what we should consume. Whatever comes into the market comes as a product which is to be sold or bought. The expansion of market converts even those things into products which so far were not considered as things to be bought and sold. Included in this list is education. So far it had been held that providing education to all citizens was the duty of the State and to receive education was citizens' fundamental right. It is a different matter that most of the third world nations including India have not been able to wipe out illiteracy till the end of the 20th century.

Today the idea that education is not a universal right of man is gaining ground. Whoever can pay for education has the right to it. As we take decisions about buying and selling things in the market on the basis of quality of the product and our purchasing power, this is being applied to the educational enterprise as well. New technologies are being used today for converting education into a product of the market. These technologies, we are told, are taking us towards an information society. Information technology is being used extensively in the field of education and it is being called Education Technology (ET). In the area of ET, new inventions and discoveries has made it possible to make use of newer resources. Computer and satellite communication system enabled us maximum communication across time and space in the field of education, entertainment and information. In the field of education, computer education became very important and computers have profoundly influenced the system of education. The massive expansion of the ODL in recent years is a proof of this influence. Its growing influence can be felt in syllabi, pedagogic practices as well as in examination and evaluation systems. This technology is making a great deal of contribution in the informal sectors of education as well. Giving peasants-agriculture-related informations, the unemployed youths-employment related information and industrialist and traders-occupation-related information in a small time span is the major contribution of this technology. But the question is can we in the field of education solve our real problems through this technology alone? And can technology be an alternative to knowledge? This state of art technology at the same time seems to be prioritising the goals of multinational corporate sector rather than those of learners. The implication of this is that education is deviating from its basic objective and is becoming indebted to profiteers of the private sector. This attack on education is a matter of concern not only for a developing country like India but is also troubling intellectuals and educationists from developed countries. Whether it is the question of technology in education or technology of education, the most crucial question is of education per se.

Changes in field of education due to globalisation which affected the US and Europe have attracted the following comment from the educationist David F. Noble: *"The major change to befall the universities over the last two decades has been the identification of the campus*

as a perception which has resulted in the systematic conversion of intellectual activity into intellectual capital and, hence intellectual property. There have been two general phases of this transformation. The first, which began twenty years ago and is still underway, entailed the commoditization of the research function of the university, transforming scientific and engineering knowledge into commercially viable proprietary products that could be owned, bought, and sold in the market. The second, of the educational function of the university, transforming courses into courseware, and the activity of instruction itself into commercially viable proprietary that can be owned, bought, and sold in the market. In the first phase the universities became the site of the production and seller of patents and exclusive licences, in the second, they are becoming the site of the production of -as well as chief market for- copy righted videos, courseware, CD-ROMs, and websites. "(Monthly Review, Feb. 1998, p.40). However, India has not yet reached this stage of commercialisation nor has the tendency to look at research results as intellectual property surfaced yet.

The effects of commercialisation are being felt in the field of higher education. Amongst the ODL policy makers this impact of globalisation can be seen very clearly. However, teachers and bureaucrats are not much alert to this phenomenon and see new developments in this field as new opportunities and achievements only. *"The Information and Communication technology had already made globalisation of education a reality, and an economic activity. It is being increasingly recognised that education, especially at the higher levels, is a service industry driven mainly by market forces of supply and demand. Countries which have highly developed education systems are looking for markets abroad, and are trying to sell their product and services in diverse ways. The emergence of distance education as an acceptable and credible mode has vastly enhanced the marketing potential of education. In this globalisation process, India occupies the enviable position of being a seller and a buyer at the same time. A large number of foreign students come to India for education. Distance education has added new dimensions to this situation, just as more Indian students register for distance education programmes of foreign universities, there are still more foreign students registering for Indian distance education offerings (Pillai and Kanwar:2000, p.68)"* .The tendency to understand advantages of globalisation to buying and selling of education products and giving opportunities to Indian students to study abroad or foreign students to study in India is indicative of how market reduces the social and cultural roles of education. Not only this, now a process of commercialisation of teaching community as a whole begins, where the teacher thinks that his /her skill of teaching and knowledge is a commodity to be sold in the market. So knowledge and teaching skills are presented as such. Educational bureaucrats make their own contribution to the commercialisation process when they try to provide *"a fashionably forward looking image"* (David Noble:1998). It is unfortunate that the teaching community instead of paying attention to how education can contribute to all around development of our nation by, providing every strata of our citizens equal opportunities for development and binding them together in a progressive and humane social and cultural milieu, gets embroiled in hollow and superficial questions posed by the educational bureaucrats.

In this era of globalisation what the Multi National Corporations (MNCs) want from education in the third world countries like India can be seen from the World Bank reports. These reports confirm Noam Chomsky's doubts that neoliberalism is weakening the field of education. The World Bank has placed the question of public funding of higher education in the third world in juxtaposition with expenditure on primary and secondary education and has argued that because of public expenditure on higher education, primary and

secondary education is suffering and therefore the Third World is not making progress in the field of education. The World Bank Report says, *"Indeed it is arguable that higher education should not have the highest priority claim on incremental public resources available for education in many developing countries, especially those that have not yet achieved adequate access, equity and quality at the primary and secondary levels. This is ...because the social rates of return on investments in primary and secondary education usually exceed the returns on higher education"* (World Bank, 1994). The economist D.P.Winkler who is associated with the World Bank illustrates the reason, *"Even though opportunities for Higher Education have significantly increased in the last two decades, benefits are frequently received by young students from high income families. Young students from lower income families lack necessary academic training to enroll or successfully compete at public universities"* (Sharma: 2000, p. 6). Suggesting remedies, Winkler says the government should give loans to needy students and end subsidies so that the costs can be recovered. The World Bank has suggested that in the higher education sector, the State-funded institutions should be regulated. A favourable atmosphere for private institutions should be created, costs should be recovered from the students only and for higher education long-term loans should be made available to students. The World Bank has also suggested that in the field of higher education alongwith government agencies private business interests and their representatives should be included to enable them to work together in both private and government universities. Alongwith this non-university higher education institutes, polytechnics, short-term professional courses and distance education courses should be started (Ibid, p7). We have seen how in India work in this direction has begun. Universities are being pressurised to generate their own resources and not depend on the government funding. The University Grants Commission (UGC) constituted Punnaiyya Committee while agreeing that *"the State must continue to accept the major responsibility for funding essential maintenance and development requirement of the Universities"* still suggests that *University should look for their own resources. It argues, "atleast 15% of the total recurring expenditure (plan and non-plan) at the end of the first five years and at least 25% at the end of ten years"* should be generated on their own. The Committee also suggested that to generate its own resources the universities could hire out its facilities like auditoriums, computers, class rooms, playing fields, guest houses, hostels, lawns etc" (Ibid, p27-28). In this context, the HRD ministry also decided that, *"Universities and colleges must generate at least seven percent of its maintenance grant through internal resources (raised through fee hike and other sources) at one percent increase every year till it reaches fifteen percent"*. This pressure of HRD ministry is now being felt by all the colleges and universities. The process of increase in fees is going on at quite a speed in engineering, medical, management and computer associated institutions and courses.

Against this backdrop, is it then accidental that even after fifteen years of its establishment IGNOU does not have not any helpline for students of economically weaker backgrounds? Only Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) students can claim their fees from social welfare ministry but it is difficult to say how many students make use of this facility. Likewise the fee remission for girl students given by Gujarat Government has been snatched back. Here we will not discuss the pending bill for private universities nor we will discuss the controversial Ambani-Birla report which has suggested limitation of government grants for Humanities and Social Sciences and handing over of the marketable subjects to the private sector.

In 1947, when our country became independent, neither higher education nor education as such were developed. At that time there were only 20 universities and around 500 colleges

in the country. Within next ten years this number had doubled. But then this was not enough and the need to create space for students who could have access to higher education was felt. The result was that in 1962 correspondence courses were started. This was the first attempt in distance education in India and gradually many universities offered correspondence facilities for the students. When the country became independent about one lakh students were enrolled in higher education and by 1998-99 this number rose to 74 lakhs (7.4 millions). In spite of this rapid increase even today only six percent of students and youths between ages 18-23 access higher education. That is, 94 out of 100 youths are still deprived of higher education. If we compare these figures to developed countries the picture of our backwardness is clear. In Canada 99%, in USA 76%, in Western Europe 40% and in south-east Asia 18-20% access higher education (Santosh Panda: 1999). The World Bank believes that the development of higher education is linked to economic development. That is why, "enrolment ratios in higher education average 51% in countries that belong to the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), compared with 21 percent in middle-income countries and 6 percent in low income countries" (World Bank, 1994).

In higher education the slow growth is linked to the slow growth in our economic development. When the country became independent only 12 % of its people were literate. Even after 50 years we have not been able to remove illiteracy. In spite of all our efforts our one third of the population is still illiterate. (And about this much percentage lives below the poverty line. Is it a coincidence or is there a link between the two?). According to 1999 figures, 44.3% children left primary education midway. At the secondary level we see a dropout rate of 63.4 %. Reflecting on this, Krishna Kumar writes, "*It is not difficult to guess the collective identities of the children who fail to survive at school. They are children of landless agricultural labourers and subsistence peasants. Caste-wise, a substantial proportion of them belongs to the Scheduled Castes who have been granted special rights in the Constitution, including reservation in higher education and representative bodies (Kumar, 2000, p27)*". Krishna Kumar tells us that of 43.8% children who take admission in class V only 3.6 % survive till class XII. It may be about 1.8 % in rural areas (Ibid. p27). The situation is not very different for Adivasis and girl students. It should be a matter of concern for our policy-makers that even such a small percentage of the total student population cannot be accommodated in our higher education institutions. Can the path of development we have chosen enable the realization of objectives like 'Education for all, Jobs for all'? It is a different matter that in the era of globalisation these objectives are hardly being discussed!

If there is a link between education and economic condition, then development of education is only possible if we bring about a change in the economic condition of communities deprived of education, that is, improvement in conditions of landless labourers, small peasantry, crafts men etc., so that they send not only their children to the school but also they could complete their education. Alongside it is also important that the necessary educational institutions are established to do this task. It is the steps taken after independence which have enabled our literacy rate to reach about 60% from 12%. Similarly, notable increase has taken place in percentage of students who have gone through primary and secondary education. However, it was important that a new education system should have been developed for those school-leavers who could not go ahead with further education. Land-reforms legislation coupled with attempts at large-scale industrialisation went along with the determination to wipe out illiteracy after independence. Yet these attempts met with limited success. Land-reforms went on at a

slow pace and industrialisation could not cope up with the problems of unemployment. Adequate number of school and colleges could not be established.

As we have mentioned earlier, to come out of this state of affairs it was important that apart from traditional methods, other methods should have been thought of. It was the Central Advisory Committee on education under the leadership of D.S. Kothari that suggested starting of correspondence courses in 1962. Between 1967 to 1971 India sent three delegations to the then Soviet Union for consultation on correspondence institutions. In 1970, the then education and social welfare ministry organised a national seminar on 'Open Universities'. The seminar strongly recommended establishment of such universities. In the meantime number of correspondence institutions' students increased and during the 5th Plan (1974-79) about one fourth availing higher education were from these institutions (Santosh Panda, 1999). This evidently established the need for OU kind of institutions so that higher education could expand. The 1970 UNESCO seminar had brought out the need for such institutions in both developed and developing countries. The needs of a developed England, Canada etc. were, however, different from needs of a developing India and China. England had a tremendous network of traditional universities. But in India, inspite of a tenfold increase of higher education institutions, there is no significant fulfilment of its demand. In contrast a similarly backward China has made rapid strides since the 1949 socialist revolution. Central to the Chinese expansion in higher education was the full utilisation of communication technology in ODL. According to a study, The People's Republic of China has a full communication infrastructure for the nation with a wide coverage of postal service, radio and television (TV) broadcast via satellite, telephone and telecommunication. Also the television owning rate is quite high, at 912 of 1000 households including rural areas till 1997. Thus satellite TV plays an important role in China, particularly in the rural area."(Manjulika and Reddy, 2000, p. 147). On the contrary, even though satellite TV has reached virtually every corner of India, in comparison with China, the capacity to utilize these media is very inadequate. IGNOU had started using the radio and television programmes right from its inception 15 years ago it has still not made them an integral part of its system since the media are still out of reach for the majority. This is so even as a 24 hour TV channel, the Gyan Darshan, has started functioning with IGNOU as its nodal agency. Gyan Vani, the radio counselling network, continues to be suspect about its accessibility and utility.

Though the above scenario holds true for education as a whole, specially in higher education it is clear that the people deprived of it are the poor and the backward sections of our society. They come from areas where the process of modernisation is very slow. That is why any new beginning in the field of higher education should have kept in mind that this education should be able to reach the poor and the deprived sections and reach areas where conventional institutions of higher education have not been able to reach. Here it needs to be stressed that the problem is not only of reaching education to these sections but also of reaching them the means of employment. Liberalisation had left behind the earlier attempts at land reforms and the globalisation process is threatening not only small craftsmen but also small industries. Since priority is privatization, Government is selling the public sector to the national/international private companies. Privatisation looks for profits first and not generating employment. That is why jobs decline. Since in the private sector there is no reservation, the SC and ST, other backward sections of our society become direct victims. So the problem today is not only making higher education accessible but also making it sufficiently knowledge and skill-oriented to enable its beneficiaries acquire stable jobs. Opportunities should reach those sections who were so far deprived because of their

social and political conditions. Political, psychological and cultural confidence building of these sections is yet another big issue for higher education. Obviously, no simple solution exists as an answer to these questions.

It is relevant to ask in the context of higher education that if a person does not have the means to obtain school education then how can he/she acquire higher education. The first question here is that is it possible to do college and university education without completing school education? The second question that when a person does not have the time and resources to attend a regular college can a way be found to reach education to her? Obviously the new type of educational institutions could be found only in the answer to the above questions. In this context another question which comes to the fore is that if a person has studied mainly in a conventional system and is working and now feels the need to update herself in the fast changing technological environment, how can she get such an education?

Open education was conceptualised as one response to these challenges. This response was a step ahead of distance education and wanted to meet those new challenges by new technologies. Here communication technologies which were emerging and which could be used in less time and with less expense could ensure that quality education material could be sent to the students. A distinct possibility of this seemed to be emerging. Second advantage was that by using this technology, student-teacher dialogue could be retained-- , echoing the basic foundation of the conventional system. Radio, telephone, television and internet now not only created the possibility of student-teacher dialogue but now by using this media, educational material could be reached in different forms to the students. Developed nations used ODL mainly for the latter purposes. But could a developing country like India adopt this very same path?

To find an answer to this question let us get informed a little. In India the first Open University (OU) was setup in 1982 in Andhra Pradesh. And three years later, by an Act of Parliament, the first national OU was setup in 1985. After this eight more states have established OUs. In all these universities about 18 lakh students are studying who constitute about 25% of the student strength in higher education. About three hundred courses are available to the students. The question which needs to be addressed here is as to which background students are coming from and what kind of courses are they offering. In the year 2000, IGNOU had more than 6 lakh students. Registered students that year were 193530 out of whom 92146, that is 47.6% students are into computer-related courses. 16.1%, that is 31169, students opted management related courses. Rest of the courses have a percentage of 36.7% as compared to 63.7% students registered in the two above mentioned courses. Out of this 36.7% about 68% are registered for graduation in Commerce, Science and Arts streams i.e., they form one fourth of the total registered students. In this way in the year 2000, out of fifty academic programmes being offered by IGNOU, twelve courses accounted for 88.3 % of the students and 38 programmes had the rest 11.8% of the students. In the last few years the only change in the University enrolment is that there has been a slight decline in the number of management students and the number of students opting for computers-courses has increased (1996 to 2000 the number of management students declined to 29937 from 62573 while in this period the computer student increased from 14606 to 94092) though the management courses continue to attract students (Annual Report, IGNOU, 1999-2000). The computer and management enrolment has to a large extent, decided the social background of the student, coming in the University. One must note that as an eligibility condition, management students have to be

graduates. All the management programmes in IGNOU are available in English only. Likewise, some of computer courses, for example, CIC require completion of 10+2 schooling but workcentres in the courses are in the metropolises and towns, making it difficult for a student of small towns and villages to take admission it and sustain the course.

Is the situation in the states very different? A glance at these OU courses will give a clear picture. Post-graduate management programme is being offered in six out of the nine Open Universities. Though BCA and MCA are being offered by IGNOU and one other state only, certificate courses in computers is being offered in six OUs. The OUs which do not yet offer post-graduate degree in management offer some diploma programme in this very field. Not only programmes in computers and management, the other programmes also tend to be duplication of the conventional system. It is only in the Nasik Open University, that we find a focus on non-conventional courses. Here Radio and TV mechanic fitter, domestic wireman, plumber, two-wheeler mechanics, lathe operator, mason, multi-skilled vocational, industrial painting technology, gardens training, office automation, DTP, basic electronic, TV repair and maintenance, etc., figure as certificate-level courses. But astonishingly no other Open University has dared to follow the Nasik example. In IGNOU and other Open University where vocational courses such as Library Sciences, B.Ed, B.Sc Nursing or Engineering related courses are offered admissions are restricted to people already working in the related field and to those who have 2 to 5 years experience. How is it then possible for this system to cater to demands of higher education by people seeking employment and wanting to benefit from the declared openness of the system?

Is IGNOU able to fulfill the objectives set before it by the Parliament? The IGNOU Act clearly states that the objective is "to provide opportunities for higher education to larger segment of the population and to promote the educational well-being of the community generally." Has the IGNOU been able to fulfil this objective? Facts don't support this. When the University started its academic programmes in 1987 these tended, by nature to be middle class oriented and were based in metropolises. Most popular of these was a Diploma in Management (of which mention has been made earlier), which was converted in to MBA later on. Obviously a programme of this kind was not meant for the masses and nor could it reach the unreached. The First Schedule of IGNOU Act states: *"It shall:*

- a) *Strengthen and diversify the degree, certificate and diploma courses related to the needs of employment and necessary for building the economy of the country on the basis of its natural and human resources;*
- b) *provide access to higher education for a large segments of the population, and in particular, the disadvantaged groups such as those living in remote and rural areas including working people, housewives and other adults who wish to upgrade or acquire knowledge through studies in various fields."*

It is clear from the above that it was desired of the IGNOU that it reflects upon this need for new kind of programmes which will help to build up the economic system and employment scenario and at the same time reach higher education to that vast majority which lives in distant villages and amongst whom are the working people, domestic housewives, and the deprived adults who want to better their educational standards or those who want to study in different fields to help the country's development constructively. But the majority of IGNOU's programmes don't match upto such expectations. In the begining the University

offered three types of programmes. At the first level were management, distance education and creative writing programmes. These were helpful for those who had been through higher education and were working at middle or high professional levels. At the second level, graduation programmes in arts, commerce and sciences were offered. Here in the arts and commerce a provision was indeed made for those students who may be over 20 years of age but had not yet completed 10+2. This at least catered to a part of the deprived sections. They could enter into graduation after a six months preparatory course. But this facility was not available to students in the sciences. It must be said here that in spite of IGNOU's vast network the graduation in sciences is not yet available in all the regions. In opposition to the First Schedule, graduation in the sciences is restricted to those cities where conventional colleges and universities already exist. Actually through its courses IGNOU is catering to those students whom the conventional universities don't admit since they do not secure the desired marks or to those students, who while, studying in the conventional system want to obtain a degree from IGNOU alongside to better their employment prospects. At the third level are the courses of the awareness raising variety, e.g. certificate in food and nutrition or diploma in childcare, etc. Though useful, these courses are still offered to a middle class clientele or to those situated in cities only.

What do these facts indicate? Why is it that the University right at the beginning sidelined the first and second subsections (clause 1) of the First Schedule? Not only the teachers and the administrators but also the statutory bodies closed their eyes to this. Was this not a violation of the Parliamentary mandate? Right from the beginning a large chunk of the students are coming from the metropolises and cities. This section has already availed of the opportunities for higher education or is availing of it and Dalits, Women and the Rural Population form a very small part of it. 1989-90, IGNOU's women's enrollment was only 4.5 %. SC and ST were 3.7 and 1.6 percent of the total students population respectively. And the rural folk were only 20% of IGNOU's students. In this very period BRAOU's women enrollment comprised 33% of its students strength, Kota OU's 22% and YCMOU's was 26%. Likewise the SC composition was 9.6, and 18 percent respectively of the total students population. ST composition was 1.3 and 2 percent respectively. And while BRAOU had 65% of its students from the rural background, YCMOU had 30% of its students from rural areas (Pillai and Kanwar, 2000, p 57). IGNOU's statistics of 1992 to 94 reveal that even in the management programmes, women enrollment in this period increased merely to 7.8 % from 5.6%. While on the other hand, the rural students declined to 12.9% in 1994 from 13.4 in 1993 (Ibid, p 62).

The other trend with regard to IGNOU courses is that the job-oriented courses don't have either a flexible admission policy nor are they open to everybody. MBA, B.Ed, BIT, ADIT admissions seekers have to clear entrance exams. B.Ed also stipulates teaching experience of 2 years from a recognised school as an enrollment requirement. Likewise for entering B. Lib., one has to have an experience of working in a library. Thus the doors of the open university are open to those who have the required status. The rural folk, remote settlers, women, dalits, and the poor obviously do not command such status. How did it happen that IGNOU could not make the First Schedule its guide and chose to opt for elite courses instead? To understand this we need to understand the changing national and international scenario. Despite continuous thinking on the establishment of an Open University since 1970 it is only by the 1980s that some concrete action begin to take shape on this front. With Rajiv Gandhi in the saddle by 1984, the talk of New Economic Policy and New Education Policy began and an announcement of a sort was made abandoning the Nehruvian Model. The 1985 Education Policy brought it out clearly to the fore that the

government was not intending to shoulder the burden of education henceforth. In spite of just 3 percent of GNP being spent on education, the policy document stated that education is like a load on the back of the government (Challenge of Education: a Policy Perspective 1985, p. 25). At a time when the demand for education is increasing, the government wants to shrug off its responsibility towards it. Under pressure of institutions like the World Bank, it is pulling out of the onus of spending on higher education. But the money withdrawn from higher education is not being spent on either primary or secondary education. Between 1992 to 1997, only 8 percent of total expenditure on education was on higher education. In the Fourth and Fifth Five Year Plans, this expenditure had reached 25 percent but now it has fallen even below the expenditure incurred during the First Five Year Plan. Attempts to reduce expenditure on higher education have, on the one hand, led to the demands for increasing the burden of fees on the students and, on the other hand, the government is seeking to encourage private professional institutions in this sector. Delhi University is an example where out of its annual budget of Rupees 5 crores only 12 lakhs Rupees are obtained from fees, i.e., only 2.4 percent of the total expenditure of the University, while the government is urging the University to garner as much as seven percent of its expenditure on its own. In other words, Delhi University will have to struggle for an income which is three times its present income (Sharma: 2000). The position of IGNOU is quite different in this regard. In 1999-2000, IGNOU raised Rs. 73.20 crores from fees alone. This is 64% of total expenditure (plan and non-plan) of Rs. 114.39 crores. This amount of fees was raised from the two lakh students registered that year, this is on to say it an average Rs 3700/- per student was raised which was Rs. 1200 more per student than the previous year. This probably was due to an increase in the number of students in computer-related courses by about 20,000. Over the years, the trend has been that those courses which are considered more viable for middle class employment command high fee in various institutions. The same is the case with IGNOU. The CIC course for six months costs a student about Rs 2,300. This table highlights various programmes in IGNOU and their fee structure indicating as to which sections of our society would be the beneficiaries of such courses.

Table

S.No.	Name of the Programme	Fees
1.	Master of Business Administration	Rs. 500/- per course (Total 21 courses)
2.	Master in Computer application	Rs. 4600/- per Semester (Total 6 semesters)
3.	Master in Library and Information Science	Rs. 4600/- for one year
4.	Master's Degree in English	Rs. 4100/- for two year
5.	Bachelor in Computer Application	Rs. 2600/- per semester
6.	Bachelor in Education	Rs. 10000/- for the programme
7.	Doctor of Philosophy in Education	Rs. 10000/-for the programme
8.	Bachelor in Information Technology	Rs. 7500/- per trimester
9.	Bachelor of Science in Nursing	Rs. 5100/- per annum

This example once again indicates that it is not easy for the poor or deprived sections to obtain higher education in the ODL system. Of course the programme with less fees are the ones for which there is less demand or the ones in which the programme components comprise print material along with other media inputs and as much no practical training for skill development is involved. It is said that the system is cost-effective but this cost-effectiveness is in favour of the institution and not the students. In the ODL institutions while deciding on fees, the main consideration is the costs incurred in programme development and not the economic background of the students. Fees is taken per semester

or per year even if due to some reason the student cannot complete the studies. For example, the BA student has to pay the fees for the first three years even though she might have to leave studies in between. Whether the student completes her studies or not, the university extracts complete fees from her. Since the fee is deposited initially itself there is no pressure on the university to provide effective facilities to the student and the problems and difficulties faced after registration become the concern of the student alone. So in spite of the ODL being a part of the public sector (autonomous institutions funded by respective governments), students are treated as if they have come to a private institution.

It does not look as if in India there has been much thinking on the kind of education which can be reached to large segments of people. It has however, been concluded that ODL is the only way to cope up with the demand of higher education and with the help of ODL higher education can be reached to people to whom so far its access has been denied. But alongside there is another process which had been forcing the government by the 1980s to implement the ODL. This is an argument very rarely brought out in the open but there are enough indications to this effect. The 1985 Policy of Education put this across as a problem that the teachers and students movements are having a negative effect on education. In all democratic countries students and teachers have consistently organized themselves and this is not always in favour of the state powers that be. So it will not be surprising if the ruling classes tend to view ODL as a means of getting rid of the teachers and students movements. There are far lesser opportunities for ODL students to get organized as one community and voice their opinion or intervene effectively in their own concerns. The teachers are not very differently placed than the students in this either: the ODL has lesser numbers of teachers as compared to the conventional system and policy-makers want to maintain a less number only. The situation becomes even more worrisome when the teacher is marginalized from her teaching work and is not able to intervene effectively in favour of students educational issues.

Let us try to understand the implications of the presence of a small number of teachers in the ODL system. Today even the conventional system has a diminishing student-teacher ratio. In 1960-65 this ratio was 12.1:1 which has today increased to 217:1. But in ODL this ratio is 2830:1. That is one teacher for about 3000 students. In BRAOU this ratio is 4500:1 and in YCMOU student-teacher ratio is 8000:1. To clear the picture let us again turn to IGNOU. We have about 300 teachers for about 6 ½ lakh students and the study centers have about 20000 counsellors, that is, 300:1 ratio. This is not far from the conventional system. But then here counsellors are appointed from other educational institutions and work in IGNOU on a piece-meal basis only. That is why their presence in such big numbers does not influence any major educational or administrative decision-making. In these counselling sessions, the students and teachers come into contact with each other. But it is very difficult to say as to how many students are taking advantage of these counselling sessions or how useful they are for them. My own guess is that about 10% of the students take advantage of these in most programmes where counselling is not compulsory, and that also not on a regular basis. That is how about 300 teachers facing a huge administrative structure (it should be noted that in ODL, while the number of teachers is less, the technical and administrative staff is about four times the number of teachers). In the state open university this ratio is even more negative so that there is more helplessness against political and bureaucratic interventions. In such a situation ODL ceases to be a threat of any kind to the status quo.

I am not trying to argue here that ODL has no use or that one can't reach the un-reached through it. Examples abound of how programmes have been developed to reach the un-reached. We have seen this in case of YCMOU's job-oriented courses. Similarly, in IGNOU a few programmes like Panchayati Raj, Sahbhagi Vikas Niyojan, a vocational programmes for tannery workers, etc. are being offered with the inspiration to reach the deprived. For these programmes, still new ways of developing their curriculum and reaching them to the students needs to be worked out. May be the extensive network of educational technology we have built, will have to be used in a very different way. The question is not whether and to what extent can we use educational technology but which technology is most useful for reaching the students. The question to be addressed is have we succeeded, through our programmes, in reaching those people whom the Parliament had mandated we should reach. Computer and management programmes are, of course, now available to a large number who would not have found access to these in conventional institutions. To that extent we did reach the un-reached. But do we not need to think whether we are not merely producing degree holders in these fields. It is not only the quality of curriculum but also the question of our students obtaining gainful employment comparable to students of other institutions which is as crucial. In this era of globalisation when there is an increasing tendency to marginalize the teachers and students as a community and it is believed that computers and TV can substitute teachers, many new social and cultural challenges are being thrown up. These challenges are further compounded when it is held that instead of students coming together with fellow students to develop socialization, on a campus real socialization lies in linking up with the entire world through Internet. The students can now instead of assembling on a campus, link up on the internet with the whole world and build a true socialized community! In the context ODL, internationalization is often talked about. But then third world nations do not have a strong mutual exchange network and are inclined more towards developed nations. Countries like India have a tendency to borrow perspectives, curricula and technology in an imitative fashion and also treat less developed countries in a manner in which more developed countries treat India. That is why ODL in India has not become a role model for the third world, and, at the same time, it has not learnt from the progress of China and Pakistan in this field. ODL in the current context of globalisation today faces the real problem of coming into the clutches of privatization. ODL has a very little capacity within the system to resist this. Also a limited democratic perspective and a bureaucratic outlook makes ODL even more vulnerable to negative aspects of globalisation. We need to be conscious and aware of this trend. This consciousness can actually take shape when students and teachers become integral to the decision-making process in the system where their present and future is deeply linked to its institutions. The question is not of a choice between ODL and traditional systems of education as is commonly understood but of a choice between globalisation and democratization, of a choice between vested self-interest and the interests of the people for whom the Parliament has already given a mandate.

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[Dr. J.M. Parakh Reader in Hindi, School of Humanities, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi-110068].