

## **SOCIAL CONTROL ON HIGHER EDUCATION\***

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### **Abstract**

*This article reviews a few important dimensions relating to social control on higher education. Social control on higher education has to be studied in relation to social functions of and society's responsibility for higher education. Presently all the three aspects are under jeopardy. Social control also includes control by not only the state, but also several other actors. The state which is ideally expected to play a very significant role in the development of higher education is unwilling to do so; in contrast, the market the entry of which into the arena of education is welcomed not by all, is very eager to take complete control of higher education; and the rest of the society has been a helpless onlooker only. In this overall context, it is critical that the public-good nature of higher education is resurrected, so that higher education helps in creating and building 'social pressures' for normative modes of social control of higher education.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the context of discussing 'social control' on higher education, it is important to note three inter-related concepts. They are: 'social control on higher education,' 'social responsibility of higher education' and 'social responsibility for higher education.' While social control refers to the question, who should control higher education, social responsibility of higher education refers to the question, what higher education should do for society, or simply what the social functions of higher education are. Social responsibility for higher education refers to the issue of what society should do for higher education.

All these three are very closely related and are inter-dependent. Society gets authority on either ethical or legal grounds, if higher education performs its due role in the development of the society, and more importantly if the society provides what the higher education system requires in order to perform its functions. If higher education does not perform its role in the development of the society, it also cannot expect the society to do its duty towards development of higher education. If the higher education system contributes to the development of the society, and if the society fulfils its obligations, then only one can speak of social control – the right of the society to control higher education.

### **Social Functions of Higher Education**

So first, what are the functions of higher education? It is recognised for long that higher education performs a very critical role in the development of the society. One of the most important roles assigned to higher education has been socialisation and modernisation of societies by helping in forming attitudes and even by causing the necessary changes in attitudes of the people. Higher education helps in socialisation of the youth and in their effective functioning in the modern societies, as many sociologists have highlighted. It induces change and progress in society. It contributes significantly to transformation of traditional societies into modern ones. In short, education is a major instrument of social change. As the Education Commission, also known as the Kothari Commission, noted, "if this 'change on a grand scale' is to be achieved without violent revolution (and even for that it would be necessary), there is one instrument, and one instrument only, that can be used: EDUCATION" (Education Commission 1966). Secondly, by developing critical thinking among the people, higher education produces citizens with social consciousness and with national and human values, which are important in creating a politically mature, socially cohesive and a humane society. By inculcating right values, it helps in formation of national culture. It helps people in their effective participation in socio-political and cultural spheres of development of the societies. The role of higher education in creating intelligent citizenry for the national and global societies is widely recognised. Thirdly, it produces and supplies skilled manpower for development of the economy – for industrialisation and economic transformation – and also manpower for administration and the overall governance of the nations. This now known as the human capital function of higher education is being widely recognised as a very important one,

along with its social and political functions, so much that higher education is considered as an important factor in economic growth and development. Fourthly, higher education also helps in the development of sustainable education systems, by producing teachers, researchers, administrators, planners and policy makers for all levels of education. Above all but most fundamentally, higher education contributes to the creation and advancement of human knowledge and the expansion of frontiers of knowledge, through scientific research and several other intellectual endeavours – knowledge which is essential for the very sustenance of the civilisations and the humanity at large. Thus the social functions of higher education include social, cultural, economic, political, educational and humanistic; and it has a long time horizon often spanning over generations and centuries. While the contribution of higher education to increase in productivity of the people in labour markets, and thereby in employment and increase in individual earnings are regarded as direct individual benefits of higher education, others are considered as social benefits or externalities of higher education, accruing to the whole society. The externalities, many believe, are a legion. That higher education is both efficient (in improving economic growth) and equitable (in reducing poverty and income inequalities etc.) is also well known. These externalities or social benefits of higher education make higher education a public good (at least a quasi- or semi-public good), and a merit good, in the production of which the state assumes a significant role in most civilised societies. As the specialists of human development theory remind us, higher education not only contributes to development of the societies, i.e., it serves as a means of development, but also it is an end in self, it is development. That is, large numbers of higher educated people rightly represent higher levels of human development of a nation.

### **Social Responsibility for Higher Education**

To ensure that higher education performs its due role effectively, the society has a responsibility towards developing and nurturing the edifice of higher education. The society's responsibility cannot be confined to financing, or the delivery of higher education. The society's responsibility includes policy formulation, planning, financing and providing higher education to the citizens and to ensure that the system of higher education functions efficiently. When I say efficiency, I do not mean just managerial efficiency or financial efficiency; it should be socially as well as economically, politically and educationally efficient. Only if the society performs its duty, it gets a right to 'control' higher education.

The society's all-encompassing responsibility is important. Otherwise, nowadays it is being argued that these functions can be split and shared by several actors in the society: the state might have to finance higher education, but does not have to provide it; or the state may plan, but implementation can be left to others, notably the markets; or the state might at best serve as an enabler, providing an enabling framework for the markets to set up and manage higher education institutions; and so on. The proposal for public-private partnership in higher education has to be seen in the same context. The core responsibilities cannot be split, as the interests of the various actors are different and contradictory, as I argue later.

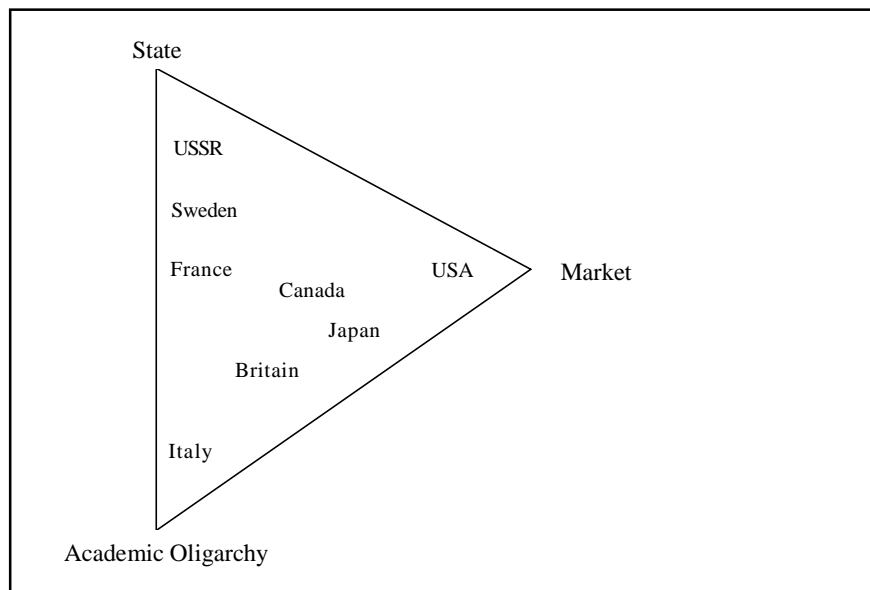
### **Who should 'Control' Higher Education?**

This takes me to the main issue of social control or control by the society on higher education. There are two terms: social (or society) and control. First, in the framework of welfare economics, 'society' encompasses all its social, economic, political and cultural organs, including the state, markets, households, and all other public and private institutions; in other words it includes all government as well as all non-government organs. So social control actually means control by all these organs. But problems are complicated, not only because they are too many, but also because none of these institutions is static; all are dynamic in nature, ever and even rapidly changing; and they have different interests. I shall come back to this a little later. Secondly, the term 'control' looks less positive, if not altogether negative and harmful. But 'social control' seems to be a positive one, compared to 'control' in general. Nowadays it is becoming fashionable to discuss this issue under the banner of 'regulation' or more prominently 'governance'.

### ***The Several Actors in Higher Education***

While 'society' includes all its organs, a meaningful discussion can take place only if we examine the different organs and their role in higher education. Earlier social scientists (e.g., Max Weber, Thorstein Veblen) have analysed the relations between faculty and bureaucracies and also the role of commerce in university affairs. Putting them together in a more coherent analytical framework, Burton Clark (1983) identified three major actors in higher education, viz., state, market and academic oligarchy. The three contemporary authorities may have different, even conflicting, interests. Clark refers to the relations between them as a triangle of coordination of higher education (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
**Clark's 'Triangle of Academic Coordination'**



Source: Clark 1983:143

The relationships between the three are always a matter of serious dynamic tension. While in most societies, all the three try to 'control' higher education, Clark classifies the erstwhile USSR as one that belongs to the category of state-controlled higher education systems, USA as a market-controlled system and the higher education in Italy as one that is controlled by the academic oligarchy. Sweden and France figure on the axis of the state and academic oligarchy, and the systems in Canada, Britain and Japan belong to the centre of the triangle, tilting towards the market-academic oligarchy axis. Clark's triangle of coordination in higher education has been quite robust in explaining the authority of the state, market and the academic institutions on higher education. But it might look simple.

In the Dr. Malcolm Adiseshiah memorial lecture, I have identified three major actors, the state, households and markets as the actors in the triangle (Tilak 2003). Perhaps that is also not sufficient. The taxonomy might consist of a larger number, if not a multitude, of actors. Certainly there are more than three actors: state, markets, households, academic institutions, civil society etc. Markets include domestic and international

markets. Higher education institutions include the leadership, administration, students and teachers, including teachers' organisations and students' unions. There is also another huge segment in the society, represented not necessarily by the state, namely the political power structures. That political institutions including political parties and politicians often exercise undue control on higher education often not sanctioned *de jure* by any authority, is well known. In addition, there are also international organisations (e.g., among many, the World Bank and the UNESCO) that work either through the state, or through the markets, or on their own and influence shaping of higher education policies. Thus one can note several actors on the higher education scene. All may be related and even if they are not clearly related, they influence each other. The interests of all these actors are often different, contradictory and even conflicting with each other. An increase in the role of one would be at the cost of another: for example, the role of the state diminishes as the role of the market increases; or as markets become dominant, the role of the state diminishes. The contemporary authority relations in higher education are indeed complex, as Brian Pusser (2008) notes. Hence we need a more nuanced model to have a better understanding of contemporary authority relations in higher education.

The state in a civilised society considers education as a public good and its provision as one of its most important responsibilities. The markets consider higher education as a tradable commodity from which profits can be generated; the students and households treat it as an individual or a private good and will be interested only in the benefits that it confers on them; and the political institutions might consider education primarily as a vote bank. The academic institutions that include teachers' organisations might view higher education as a noble profession in the service of the society or might consider it as any other business. Normally public higher education institutions may regard higher education as a public good, while private institutions may treat it, like the markets, as a commodity meant for sale. Thus the differences in the interests and considerations of various actors are indeed serious, strong and are conflicting with each other. The entwining of all these – the state, market, civil society, academic organisations etc., and their control on higher education – requires serious attention.

In such a context, when society means inclusive of all these actors, what is meant by social control, i.e., control by society? Who in the society should govern or control higher education? One might argue that many of

the actors we have identified do not necessarily control higher education. This may be true, but they do influence shaping of higher education development considerably. They have an indirect control, which, in fact, can be quite dominant. For example, look at the students and households. Many students increasingly tend to focus on individual pecuniary benefits from higher education; accordingly they opt for such areas of study which have high value in markets, such as technical education nowadays, essentially IT (information technology) related disciplines and management disciplines, some of which were not considered as higher education for a long time by some of the best universities in the world. The first choice of few students seems to be humanities, or basic sciences or even traditional engineering sciences and technology, which indeed lay foundations for society's development. Many also view higher education not merely as a passport for job, but also as a visa to go abroad, mainly to the west. All this – students' and parents' aspirations – might considerably influence the development of higher education – public provision and even the private higher education. Departments of humanities, social sciences, basic sciences etc., in many universities might, in response to such aspirations of the students and their parents, get closed, and more and more engineering colleges offering degrees in information technology, fashion technology, and hotel management may get opened, as we note nowadays as a major trend. Similarly the markets and the private sector in higher education would be interested in only revenue-generating areas of study and ignore other areas of study and research, however genuinely important they are for the development of a humane society. Particularly most of the actors in the non-government sector might not have any long term vision and considerations for the development of higher education. Even the civil society may not necessarily have a long term perspective.

Higher education sector often gets pressurised to respond to such conflicting demands. An important question may be: should higher education respond to market demands, or should higher education influence and change market demands to socially relevant needs. This is an important question. Here the market demands may be inclusive of students' perceptions and others' pressures. Quite often, the answer has been in favour of the higher education system responding to market pressures; after all, it improves the market value of higher education, it is argued. But this may not necessarily be right, particularly when markets are volatile, imperfect, and are characterised by typical features like profit motive and are bereft of

'normative' social considerations and long term perspectives. So normatively one may argue that higher education should not get influenced, but should influence the market demands. This is indeed a difficult task.

### *State versus Markets*

So who should control higher education? While there are several actors, the discussion is and can concentrate on *state versus markets*, though it is also important to discuss the role of the state/markets versus academic institutions (the familiar issue of autonomy versus control). Also important to note is, ideally the state is expected to represent the views of the people, but as Gunnar Myrdal (1968) notes in his famous *Asian Drama*, the state tends to be increasingly un-representative of peoples' wishes, though the people's perceptions can also be based on all kinds of not necessarily right perspectives.

What are the advantages and weaknesses of state and market control on higher education? Market control on higher education and corresponding weakening of the role of the state in higher education, as the experience shows, might cause serious damage to the growth of higher education. Elsewhere (Tilak 2007), I have argued how markets in higher education cause severe distortions in higher education development (as markets fail to note the externalities associated with education, which are immense), how market entry into higher education would restrict the access of the poor and thus would form an impediment in providing inclusive education, how the imperfections in capital markets do not provide a case for private markets to enter education and how markets fail to provide optimum quantities of public goods like education. Market control on higher education leads, as the experience shows, to the growth of private higher education, to the rising cost of higher education, to the widening of inequalities in access to higher education, to the emergence of profit motive in higher education, to the flourishing of marketable disciplines of study at the cost of genuinely important areas of study causing serious imbalances in education development, to distortions in higher education and research agenda of academic institutions, to the crowding out of the public institutions altogether (like in the Arab and Camel story) and finally to the eclipse of the public good nature of higher education. It is important to realise how imperative it is for the state to play an effective role in education development.

While state control on higher education is not an anti-dote to all this, certainly I argue that effective state control on higher education has a great potential to arrest the growth of such undesirable phenomena in higher education; and that markets on the other hand, actively promote the growth of the above aspects.

Further, to state that state-controlled or public institutions have no or less degree of autonomy and are subject to a high degree of bureaucracy, compared to private institutions, may not be altogether right, unless we make a distinction between autonomy from the government and autonomy from market/business community that manages the institution. At least theoretically it is possible to conceive a fair degree of autonomy in state institutions (and may be so even in case of private institutions). All academic institutions require autonomy, particularly in academic matters (academic autonomy), even if autonomy is restricted in the case of administrative (administrative autonomy) and financial (financial autonomy) matters. Further, academic autonomy has to be guaranteed and respected not only at the institutional level, but also at the individual level of the faculty members. Autonomy, however, does mean autonomy with accountability. After all, there is no meaning of autonomy without accountability. But the question is accountability to whom – to the government, to the market, to the students who are nowadays regarded as customers ('customer is the king'), to the parents who pay for their children's education, to the teachers' and students' organisations, or to the academic profession, or to all. The issue assumes importance as the measures of accountability of these various 'stakeholders' are different. We need to define normative measures of social accountability. This is, of course, more easily said than done.

Having noted all this, let me also state that the state is also not necessarily a body of virtues. State in a given context could be myopic, may be subject to short term pressures – domestic and external – and/or may have wrong assumptions, say about the importance of higher education, or about the role of the state or about the role of the markets in higher education. All this, however, depends upon the nature of the state and its understanding of the issues, which are also subject to change. A neo-liberal state may adopt an approach of governance which could be drastically different from, say that of a welfare state. While a welfare state might assume a strong role in planning, providing and financing of higher education, and thereby effectively 'controlling' higher education, at the same time with a considerable

degree of in-built autonomy for the universities and decentralisation in governance, a neo-liberal state may restrict itself to broadly providing an enabling framework for the development of higher education and for the markets to take the lead. So it depends upon the nature and strength of the state. An authoritarian state might adopt policies altogether different from what a democratic state might adopt. How strong and benevolent the state is in a given socio-political and economic context also determines state's policies of control on higher education.

Having noted that markets might not play a positive role in the development of higher education and state too can go on a wrong way, it is important that the academic oligarchy plays a crucial role. The institutional estate (of higher education), consisting of the students' organisations and teachers' associations, has to be ever vigilant and strive to protect the genuine academic interests keeping in view social development as its important goal and to see that the state does not deviate from its normative path. The role of the academic oligarchy in creating social pressures is very important in this context. Students' movements which were very popular and strong in the 1960s and 1970s in exerting pressures on the state, have unfortunately become weak in the recent decades, in response to changing socioeconomic policies. Students paying heavy fees for their education, tend to become career-oriented and less interested in larger social issues. So do the staff associations, which are increasingly getting concerned with personal issues rather than with social and larger academic issues. But academic oligarchy has great potential in creating social awareness and building pressures and in controlling the very direction of higher education, and this role needs to be resurrected.

The policies of the state are often influenced by people, particularly in democratic societies. Hence it is important that higher education inculcates critical thinking in people, and produces not just skilled workers, but socially conscious critical thinkers and intellectuals, who critically examine and if necessary contest state action. Higher education has to impart and nurture human values necessary for sustainable human development; it has to influence and change irrelevant market demands into socially relevant needs from a long term perspective, rather than remaining at a receiving end; and it has to be instrumental in influencing development paradigms, rather than being allowed to be influenced by them.

While some view state's active control of higher education as desirable and some as undesirable, many note that the lack of state control may actually imply abdication of responsibility by the state, and even promoting *laissez faireism* that can create chaos in the society. Hence there is the need for state control of higher education. But paradoxically what we note nowadays is: state which is expected to play an active role in higher education is unwilling or reluctant to play its role, and markets which are not expected to enter into the arena of education, are eager and highly enthusiastic to take complete control of higher education. The state's reluctance to regulate the higher education system is clear, when we note several attempts being made in the proposed regulations for new universities, entry of foreign institutions etc. The draft regulations argue, for example, for doing away with the need for any prior approval by state bodies to set up institutions, and the need for state bodies to insist on fulfilment of basic conditions relating to infrastructure etc. They seem to favour the growth of a highly de- or un-regulated higher education system. On the other side, the enthusiasm of the markets in higher education is also clear with the burgeoning number of private (recognised and unrecognised) institutions of higher education being opened in the country, its demand for introduction of private university bill in the Parliament, the recommendation of the Ambani-Birla Committee report (Government of India 2000) for leaving the whole higher education to the private sector etc.

### Where Are We?

I have stated that there are several actors in the society that 'control' higher education, which put together, constitutes what can be called 'social control.' That the interests of these various actors are highly diverse and often conflict with each other is well established not only in India, but also in other societies. Even with regard to the state, there are several organisations in India, including the University Grants Commission, All India Council for Technical Education, Medical Council of India, Ministries/Departments of Higher Education (in the central and state governments), Planning Commission, State Councils of Higher Education, etc. In some cases, it is not clear who is calling the shots? But is it possible and if possible, desirable to have one 'authority' or control that can take the interests of all the actors in higher education? Now there is a proposal to constitute a statutory body named the National Higher Education Commission (A similar proposal was made by the earlier government also). The National Knowledge Commission

(2007) had already proposed creation of an Independent Regulating Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE). Both these proposals envisage a single regulatory body for whole higher education. Can the proposed Higher Education Commission or the IRAHE be conceived as a powerful body of 'social control' on higher education in India or as yet another administrative body with no meaning of any 'social control' on higher education? I will stop with this question for the reader to ponder over. Perhaps I have raised more questions than I could answer. Well that is, I feel, the very purpose of higher education.

### Note

\* Keynote address delivered in the XIX Conference of the MUTA (Madurai Kamaraj, Manonmaniam Sundaranar, Mother Teresa and Alagappa University Teachers' Association) on "Social Control on Higher Education", Madurai (4-5 October 2008).

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Rajagiri Journal of Social Development  
Volume 4, Number 2, December 2008

## THE SCOURGE OF POVERTY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: THE CASE OF AFRICA

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### **Abstract**

*About 220 million people or half the population of Sub-Saharan Africa live in poverty, with projections indicating a figure of about 400 million by the year 2010. Poverty in Africa has been characterised by declining per capita income, poor economic growth, low employment and inadequate access to social service. It has been exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the erosion of social security nets as countries adjust their economies in the wake of globalisation, political instability, ethnic conflict and genocide. Utilising Africa as a case study, this paper argues that conventional theories of development, which have been used to explain poverty such as the modernisation theory, have failed. It therefore calls for the promotion of direct attacks on widespread poverty where African governments and the people themselves play a critical role in poverty alleviation programmes. The paper also argues that over-reliance on outsiders, generally known as the dependency syndrome, is escalating poverty in Africa, and proposes that Africans should be more enterprising if poverty is to be reduced in the foreseeable future.*

### **Introduction**

In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, signatories proclaimed that all people have the right to education, work, health and well-being. But today, millions around the world are crippled by poverty to fulfil these basic rights. Millions continue to go hungry and scores of children

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