

DISTANCE EDUCATION
A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The word "education" has sometimes been used in a very broad sense to designate the totality of influences that nature or other men are able to exercise either on our intelligence or on our will. In its broadest meaning, education is any process by which an individual gains knowledge or insight, or develops attitudes or skills. It can be viewed as including all communicating of knowledge and shaping of values.

Formal education is acquired through organized study or instruction, as in a school or college. Informal education arises from day-to-day experiences or through relatively unplanned or undirected contacts with communications media, such as books, periodicals, motion pictures, radio or television.

The function of education is both social and individual. Its social function is to help each individual become a more effective member of society by passing along to him the collective experience of the past and the present. Its individual function is to enable him to lead a more satisfying and productive life by preparing him to handle

new experiences successfully. "Education" is also the name given to that science or branch of study that deals historically and contemporarily with the principles and practices of teaching and learning.¹ Schools as we know them in the 20th century are of fairly recent origin. Not until the 19th century were universal primary or elementary systems of education effectively established in some European countries and North America. During the 20th century, there has been an enormous expansion of public education. Compulsory schooling lasting from 8 to 10 years is a fact in most European countries including the USSR, in North America, many parts of the Commonwealth of Nations, and Japan. Elsewhere governments are striving to attain this goal.

Changes have been taking place in the material equipment used in education. All over the world teachers stand (or sit) with a blackboard behind them and rows of children at desks in front of them. "Chalk and talk" are often the main ingredients of teaching. Cave paintings,

1 See Encyclopedia Americana, vol.9, 1983, Grolier Incorp. U.S.

rock carvings, ideograms, alphabets, pens, pencils, paper and printed books illustrate the growth in man's power to accumulate and disseminate information. Modern technology has provided sound recordings, films and videotapes. Film and slide projectors, radio sets, closed circuit Television equipment, tape recorders, overhead projectors and programmed learning machines are among the devices that have been introduced into schools to improve instruction and extend the range of information passed on to the younger generation.

So great has been the explosion of man's knowledge that everywhere one of the most serious problems facing teachers is that of selecting from an enormous stock of information, what is worth preserving and handing down. Each society makes a decision on the basis of its educational aims. Consequently, national systems differ in important respects. A broad distinction may be drawn, however, between those schools whose principal task is to conserve cherished traditions and those that are regarded as agents of individual and social change. The European educational tradition, based on Plato's rejection of change as undesirable, is broadly conservative. The schools of the U.S. have been influenced by pragmatic philosophers

such as John Dewey, and many educators believe that the schools should be agents of social improvement. In fact schools serve both functions. During some stages of history they have been a dynamic element; at other periods, they have been unduly conservative. Their changing role can best be understood through a study of the many historical ingredients that have made national school systems what they are today.²

The cultural variety of modern societies is so great that different types of societies seek different types of schools. Education which might be ideally suited to adjustment in England might be entirely irrelevant or even hostile to the social patterns of the Eskimo in the far north. The educational needs of a farmer, would certainly differ from those of a city-bred individual. Education which stresses conformity, memorization, obedience and submissiveness is well adapted to an authoritarian society in which people do not rule but simply obey. It is less well suited to a democratic society stressing initiative, freedom and social equality.

2 Ibid.

Julius Nyerere in his "Declaration of Dar-es-salaam" (pp.9-10) has described the liberating potential of education when he says "Development is for man, by man, and of man. The same is true of education. Its purpose is the liberation of Man from the restraints and limitations of ignorance and dependency. Education has to increase man's physical and mental freedom - to increase their control over themselves, their own lives, and the environment in which they live. The ideas imparted by education, or released in the mind through education should therefore, be liberating ideas; the skills acquired by education, should be liberating skills. Nothing else can properly be called education".³

However, some people have argued that education is directly linked to power in most societies. People without education are at the mercy of those with it, who can use what they know to their advantage and to the disadvantage of the ignorant around them. Education is a means of gaining power, and hence freedom, something that should be everyone's right and not simply the right of the better-educated minority. On this showing the case for expanding

3 Michael Young et al., Distance Teaching for the Third World (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), Chapter I, 'Impasse?'

education is a simple egalitarian one. While education alone will not transform the world, or the life of most of those who get it, the provision of education to only part of a community, or part of the world, reinforces relative deprivation".⁴

"A central aspect of the experience (of education) is that the individual undergoes 'pressure', and not only pressure but systematic pressure...Education is today a 'universal' institution - whatever may be its unique importance or characteristics in (American) society, it has become an institution of paramount importance all over the world".⁵ One sharp critic of contemporary education, Ivan Illich, has even called the school the new 'universal church'.⁶ "Churches, indeed have been magnificent producers of pressure throughout human history, and religions of universal benevolence have often been experienced by people as intolerable oppression in actual social life. Contemporary education and contemporary schools prove to be no exception to this."⁷

4 Ibid., p.2.

5 Berger and Berger, Sociology - A Biographical Approach (Penguin, 1983), p.193.

6 See Ivan Illich, Deschooling Society, Penguin, 1972.

7 Berger & Berger, 1983, p.194.

Educators on the look-out for alternative models which could reduce the physical, social and psychological distance that separates knowledge and the learner, have in particular, turned their attention to the possibility of using the communication media to extend education in both space and time and to diversify its objectives, content and form - which is what 'distance education', a departure from 'conventional education' aims to achieve.

The process of education has become more interesting and significant, due to the use of communication media. A logical outcome of the needs of modern, rapidly changing, innovative societies, has been the use of the multi-media approach to education. It is being argued that students are more likely to remember and get involved in their curriculum if formal, classroom teaching is aided by a multi-media approach (broadcasts, print and face-to-face study) - to education. The mass media in both formal and non-formal/distance education are versatile tools. In the 1980s, distance education emerged as a standard component of the provision of education in many national systems. In contrast with conventional education which is oral and group-based, distance education shatters the interpersonal communication of face-to-face provision and disperses the learning group throughout the nation.

The significance of our studying the concept of distance education is linked to its quantitative and qualitative improvement in the 1970s. This can be attributed to:

- the development of new communications technology;
- a growing sophistication in the use of printed materials;
- improved design of instructional materials;
- improved provision of support services for students studying at a distance;
- the foundation in 1969 of the Open University (U.K) and the subsequent foundation of a series of similar structures in both developed and developing countries.

Over the past decade and half, a number of autonomous distance-teaching institutions have been established in a number of countries. Examples include: Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan; Athabasca University, Canada; Everyman's University, Israel; Sri Lanka Institute of Distance Education; British Open University; Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi; and Andhra Pradesh Open University, Hyderabad.

Distance Education would encompass both 'distance teaching' and 'distance learning'. Distance teaching indicates the process of course development by which a

distance institution prepares learning materials for students. In the same way, 'distance learning' is seen from the students perspective.

In 1983, Sewart of the Open University (U.K.) wrote: "The last decade has seen a phenomenal growth in distance education and the integration of this method of education into the standard educational provision in a large number of countries to such an extent that it is now no longer possible to think solely in the traditional sense of face-to-face contact".⁸

The growing awareness that learning, not teaching, is the decisive factor in education has brought support to distance education along with other methods of independent study like the University-without-walls movement, for instance. Both the need for disciplined study for specific useful purposes and the drive towards student autonomy have paved the way for wider recognition of distance education, which appears to be an effective tool for both endeavours.

8 Sewart, Distance Education: International Perspectives (London: Croom Helm, 1983).

The Indian Link

A high rate of illiteracy, rising population and the high cost of conventional education have been some of the important factors in the launching of distance education in India. In view of the national priorities to provide:

- a second chance to school drop outs, out of school youth and adults;
- an effective alternative to formal education for those who are coming out of adult literacy and non-formal education programmes, the CBSE set up an Open School in 1979. From a modest start in the first year, the enrolment has increased from 1674 to about 10,000.

On similar lines or objectives, the Open University, has been started in Andhra Pradesh and now in Delhi with

respect to higher educational needs. For families in India where children are a valuable asset, as income-earners or home-tenders, the rigidities of the formal school prove to be a major hurdle to their educational mobility.

In our country, the formal education system is not in a position to take the load of such huge numbers because of the severe constraint of resources. There are also social, economic and cultural reasons which prevent girls, scheduled castes and tribes and children of landless labourers, urban slum dwellers etc., to enter (or re-enter) the formal set-up of education. There are also persons whose work situations and job requirements make it impossible for them to pursue further education, for instance persons serving in the army, railways etc., who have to travel a lot or those in careers like marketing and sales can hardly find time to study on a regular basis.

Thus, manifestly atleast, given the not too impressive scenario of formal education in India since Independence, along with its economic, social, demographic, cultural and political limitations, "distance education" seems to be a highly feasible/alternate model.

However, there are a number of limitations of this system, which we shall discuss in detail, towards the end of this study. Distance education, is still considered in some countries to be a second rate education for second chance learners and does not enjoy the reputation and status that it should be accorded, for the services it is rendering. This has been observed more in the case of such systems which are working as parallel systems, and, awarding independent certificates. However, New Zealand, and other countries of South Pacific give equal status to the degree of conventional and distance education systems.

Looking at Indian society, we may generalize to the extent that Andre Beteille does, when he says that "The existence of social inequality is perhaps a common condition of all human societies".⁹ The idea of hierarchy is so central to our social system - whether it be caste, class or gender - that it is impossible to perceive of a universally applicable distance education model over the entire set-up.

9 Beteille, ed., Social Inequality, Penguin, 1984.

The way our society is stratified, especially with regard to high status being accorded to high castes, we do not see how the lower castes, in areas where caste system still persists (and we know it does in many areas), shall avail of the opportunities being thrown open with the distance education model. As far as the economic structure is also concerned, we know about the vast distance between the 'very rich' and the 'very poor'. Will distance education be able to reach out to the economically deprived sections of society (like labourers, daily wage workers, landless farmers, young children working etc.) who because of their existing conditions may neither have the resources, nor the motivation to make use of the opportunities provided under this scheme?

Besides, the socio-economic scene, the cultural gap that exists between the urban and the rural, the tribals and the mainstream, men and women, in our society, has also to be taken into consideration. In this social context, the manifest function of covering the social gap/distance may be just a cover-up for the latent function of creating a 'false consciousness' (as Marxists would put

it) amongst the masses.¹⁰

One of the basic assumptions of distance education is that in a poverty-stricken nation, education, which is not within the reach of a common man, would be made available through these home-study programmes. Keeping this point in view, the effectiveness of instruction through distance-teaching will be relevant only when it is provided efficiently and at the lowest possible cost.

Another assumption in such a model is the presence of a high level of technology - which may be taken for granted in western societies, but to think of a multi-media set-up including telephones, videos, television etc., at such a massive scale is quite unimaginable in the Indian set up. The literacy rate in our country being 36.23 (1981), the print media itself may have its limitations.

Taking other assumptions like separation of learner and teacher or privatisation of the learner, in a society

10 For further clarification on the concepts, 'manifest' and 'latent' functions, see Chapter I, Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Framework.

where the use of medium may itself pose a hindrance to learning because of lack of proper knowledge, separating the main 'motivating agent' that is the teacher, may increase the distance between 'teaching' and learning than its manifest purpose of decreasing the same.

So, given the Indian social reality, with its many limitations, plus the 'borrowed', 'western', concept of 'distance education, we feel that a difference in technique may just result in a difference in degree of education of society. Some of the questions that need to be probed in this study, include:

- How is distance education different from conventional education (in terms of methods, content, goals and objectives, functions, use of medium etc.)?
- Theoretically speaking (in terms of some of the above mentioned criteria) is it an improvement over conventional education, that is, does it reduce the gaps between the 'manifest' and 'latent' functions of education?
- Is distance education (with special reference to higher education/Open University model) an appropriate model for the Indian social context - given its many constraints.
- Will distance education lessen the 'social' distance of people (vis-a-vis their culture, language, economic disparity, sex etc.)?

- Will an 'integrated' model not be more feasible for our society than a purely 'conventional' or purely 'distance' one?

For these questions our hypotheses shall be the following:

- i. Given the high rate of illiteracy, distance education is not going to serve its manifest function of 'reaching out to the masses'.
- ii. Given the cultural heterogeneity and socio-economic disparities of Indian society, distance education is not going to equalise educational opportunities.
- iii. A gap exists between the intended/manifest functions of distance education and the latent functions of the same.
- iv. This gap will be wider in the conventional education set up than the distance education.

Our sources mainly consist of Open University Press publications and other publications about which we have mentioned in Chapter Two. Besides, there are also some journals like 'Open learning' and 'Teaching at a Distance' which have been consulted. For the Indian data, there are government reports, surveys, journals, seminar papers from which we have drawn some information. Some information has also been taken from the Open University in Delhi.

After surveying the various sources on distance education systems in other countries, especially the Open University in Britain, we have tried to fit in the concept of Open University as it has been envisaged in the Indian social context. We have taken the Open University model as an ideal type of distance education project. The long-term significance of this (Open University) as an educational venture is that it would devise the first workable multi-media teaching approach 'for higher education', on a large scale.

PURPOSE

Our intent has been to show how questionable are the assumptions (of reaching out to the masses etc.) of distance education by showing that except under certain specific conditions, the distance education model is applicable mostly in technologically advanced societies. In other words, we have argued that given the social structure of Indian society and its relative technological backwardness, distance education is a conceptually weak model. We have tried to critically evaluate the model within the Indian social context while substantiating

our data from the Indian social reality.

After establishing the link between the Indian social context and the distance education model, we have suggested certain modifications in the conceptualisation of distance education. Having introduced the problem, our study shall consist of the following chapters:

CHAPTER ONE .. CONVENTIONAL EDUCATION AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

Conceptual clarification and Theoretical framework where we shall elaborate on the two concepts and link them to the main theories in sociology.

CHAPTER TWO .. DISTANCE EDUCATION

Its illustration as envisaged in other countries which shows the variations in the nature of distance education.

CHAPTER THREE .. INDIAN SCENARIO OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

The main focus of our study shall elaborate on the Indian scenario where we shall build up the rationale behind the launching of distance education as an alternative to conventional education and critically evaluate the appropriateness of this model in the Indian social context.

CONCLUSION

.. Shall reflect our overall perspective and especially carry forward the arguments of the preceding chapters, besides offering some suggestions.

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER ONE

CONVENTIONAL EDUCATION AND DISTANCE EDUCATION: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Before analysing the concept of distance education, as it is envisaged, and implemented in various social contexts, we would like to define, and discuss in detail the concepts of 'Conventional Education' and 'Distance Education' and link them to the main theoretical perspectives in sociology.

Mainly for heuristic purposes, we are taking 'conventional education' to be synonymous with formal education as it is generally defined. This chapter shall be divided into two parts: (I) Conventional Education; and (II) Distance Education.

I. CONVENTIONAL EDUCATION

The term education comes from the Latin word 'educare' which literally means 'to bring up', and is connected with the verb 'educere' which means to 'bring forth'. In western culture, the actual idea of education is not merely

to lead the pupil in the acquisition of knowledge and experience, but also, to bring him up or develop in him those habits and tasks, attitudes with which he may successfully face the future.

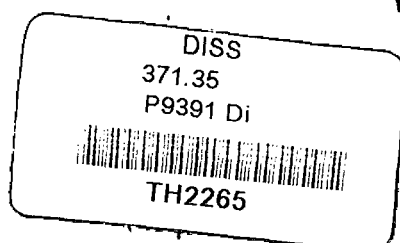
It is difficult to define education in a manner that will satisfy everybody, for education is a subject which concerns all and is looked upon differently by people according to their personal interests in and expectations of it. "An educational administrator may take the view that education should make children pass examinations. A teacher may think of education as mastery of the subject matter by the child. For a statesman, education may be a means to train loyal citizens. A religious leader may see education, as a means of inculcating spiritual values".¹

What education means to a parent, administrator, a teacher, religious leader etc., may not only be different, but even contrary to each other. In reality, all these definitions represent various aspects of education, and as such supplement each other.

1 Salamutullah, 1979, Education in the Social Context, NCERT.

Education can be considered as a process and, as a product. Process signifies how development takes place or how change comes about. Product denotes the end-result, what has actually taken place. In its truest sense, education is a life-long process, beginning at the time of birth and continuing throughout an individual's life till death. This is because, most experiences in life have an educative effect. As a process, therefore, education transcends mere schooling, memorising of a given body of facts or teaching of a prescribed syllabus. In this sense, one's whole life and all life activities become a real source of education.

Hence, a system of education is an integral part of society, and the context and organisation of education are likely to reflect the prejudices, inequalities and social and economic priorities of that society. It is not so autonomous, so as to be used in a socially neutral way, to change or 'improve' society i.e. it may not necessarily be a tool for social engineering. Educational innovation and 'rewarding' experiences within educational systems are liable to be affected by external pressures - favourably, or, otherwise.



A working set of assumptions is called a perspective, an 'approach' or sometimes a 'paradigm'. Some of the perspectives used in sociology are the evolutionary, interactionist, functionalist and conflict perspectives. Each perspective views society from a different vantage point, asks different questions, and reaches different conclusions. For example, in the study of class inequality, evolutionists study the historical development of class inequalities in different societies; interactionists study how class inequality affects people and how their behaviour effects their class position; functionalists note how class inequality operates in all societies to distribute tasks and rewards and to keep the system operating; conflict theorists focus upon how class inequality is imposed and maintained by dominant classes for their own advantage, and at the expense of the less privileged.

For the purposes of this study, we shall draw mainly from the Marxian or conflict perspective plus the 'Manifest' and 'latent' conceptualisation of the functionalist, Robert Merton.

Over the past decade, two radical thinkers who have made an immense impact on the sociology of education are

Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich. In Freire's hands, literacy is a weapon for social change. Education becomes the means by which men can perceive, interpret, criticize and finally transform the world around them. Speaking from and for the Third World, and implicitly for all underprivileged people, he proposes a view of education as something positive and also hazardous, a means of liberating people and enabling them to participate in the historical process.

The role of education in radical social change is accepted and appreciated by Paulo Freire. The special contribution of the educator to the birth of the new society would have to be a critical education which could help to form critical attitudes, for the naive consciousness with which the people had emerged into the historical process left them an easy prey to irrationality.²

In his 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', Freire formulates a theory of education of the oppressed. The central idea

2 Paulo Freire, "Education for Critical Consciousness", 1973, Seabery Press, New York.

this theory is the concept of 'conscientization'. This concept refers to 'learning to perceive, social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.'³ Freire's approach concentrates upon the ability to deal creatively with reality, to develop a perspective of education which is authentically his own and combines both reflection (critical type of thinking) and action for social transformation.

Ivan Illich's radical critique of the role of education in advanced industrial societies has many parallels with Marxian views. But he is not a Marxist in his theoretical perspective. In his *Deschooling Society*,⁴ he analyses the evils of the present system of education and suggests solution. His main attack is on the failure of schools to match his educational ideals. He regards schools as repressive institutions which indoctrinate pupils, smother creativity and imagination, induce conformity and stupify students into accepting the interests of the powerful. In sum 'most learning requires no teaching'. He argues that 'The

3 Freire, 1973, *Pedogogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin, p.12.

4 Illich, I., 1973, *Deschooling Society*, Penguin.

pupil is 'schooled' to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence'. Illich sees the educational system as the root of the problems of modern industrial society. He proposes a simple yet radical solution. And the title of his book, 'Deschooling Society' suggests, the answer lies in the abolition of the present system of education. Since schools provide the foundation for all that is to follow, deschooling lies 'at the root of a movement for human liberation'. From a Marxian perspective, however, liberation involves a revolutionary change in the economic infrastructure of society.

Thus, we see that the strength of radical thinkers like Illich and Freire lies in their consistent demolition of the theory and practice of the present education under capitalism in Latin America. But the major weakness in the activity and output of thinkers like Illich lies in their individualist ideology, ignoring the central question of political power. We cannot talk of education (school) system as being separate from political and economic system. Experience shows, that whenever, people like Freire, have tried to confront actual reality they have usually been beaten back by the establishment.

Friere and Illich do not seem relevant in the Indian context, because taking distance education to be an official exercise, which it is bound to be, it would be difficult to implement the radical transformations propounded by them in the existing politico-economic social structure.

Coming to the two main perspectives from which we shall borrow for this study, the functionalist perspective views society as an organized network of cooperating groups operating in a fairly orderly manner according to a set of rules and values shared by most members. Society is seen as a stable system with tendency to maintain a balanced, harmoniously operating system. The conflict perspective on the other hand, is most directly related to the works of Karl Marx (1818-1883), who saw class conflict and class exploitation as the prime moving forces in history. Where functionalists see the normal state of society as one of stable equilibrium, conflict theorists see society as in a continuous state of conflict between groups and classes.

As far as viewing the functions of conventional education is concerned, both models would differ. The

functionalists would look at education as playing a positive function in society - namely that of transmission of cultural values, training of skills, dissemination of knowledge etc., and that education would be necessary for the maintenance of society.

For Emile Durkheim, education answers social needs and "society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning the essential similarities which collective life demands".⁵

Durkheim treats systems of education in terms of their relationships to the total social system in which they occur - this kind of insight is of the highest value for educators today, particularly from the point of view of making them aware of the context of their action. Education for him, cannot be understood apart from its historical context either at a given moment or over time. Therefore, historical and comparative method is essential for the determination of the changing trends and ends of education.

5 Durkheim, E., Education and Society, Free Press, New York, 1956, p.71.

School for Durkheim, is a mini-society, because it provides the context where people learn to cooperate with others - who are neither their kin or friends, so school serves a function which cannot be provided by family or peer groups alone. Also, school rules sensitize the child to adopt the rules of society - which is a sort of initiation of the child into a sense of Duty. Through education, society makes man grow. Education therefore according to Durkheim is the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Therefore, he has approached education through its being a social fact.

Thus, the functionalist perspective, as Durkheim used it, in case of education, is evident in his search for the social function performed by it, that is to say the part played by education in the promotion and maintenance of social cohesion and social unity.

Durkheim's views are open to a number of criticisms. He assumes that the norms and values transmitted by the educational system are those of society as a whole rather than those of a ruling elite or a ruling class. A consideration of this possibility may well result in a

very different view of the role of education in society. In fact, Durkheim's view was essentially a conservative interpretation of the task of education - a view which appears very natural in the background of a stable society and a long established tradition as in France, and in Europe generally.

In America, John Dewey (1859-1952) was one of the first Americans to appreciate the essential relationship between the school and the society. In the American context of a new society in which social institutions of an earlier period were all changing and the rising republican and industrial society was developing new responsibilities for formal education, he spelt out a broad social reconstructionist role for education. He observed that "it is the particular task of education at the present time to struggle on behalf of an aim in which social efficiency and personal culture are synonyms instead of antagonists".⁶ He saw the educational system as a direct agency of social change, and he enthusiastically looked to the schools to reform society.

6 John Dewey in Shukla and Kumar (ed.), Sociological Perspectives in Education - A Reader, Chanakya Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p.35.

For Dewey, the school was a community in miniature, a micro society which both reflected the larger society outside and also sought, in the long run, to improve upon that society. For him, the principal object of education was to instil in students the attitudes and habits conducive to the development of their capacity to solve problems. Dewey held that the democratic society must instil in its citizens the habit of free inquiry and an antipathy to rigid and dictatorial methods. Typical of his view that education, to be most meaningful, must have a practical outcome in his statement in "Democracy and Education" (1916) that "men have to do something; they have to alter conditions".⁷ Further, in his *Experience and Education* (1938), he affirmed the importance of the cultural heritage and cautioned against deriving education from experience alone.

Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) strongly felt that we could not educate in a vacuum. He anxiously sought to diagnose the sort of society in which we are living. In *Man and Society* he stated, "sociologists do not regard education solely as a means of realizing abstract ideals of culture,

7 Encyclopedia Americana, vol.9, p.46.

such as humanism or technical specialization, but as a part of the process of influencing men and women. Education can only be understood when we know for what society and for what social position the pupils are being educated".⁸

Critical of what Hitler could achieve, Mannheim felt that educational practice must be as varied as possible and not try to 'indoctrinate'. The emergence of the Nazi type of character in Germany was the most conspicuous example to him, of the "disorganisation of standards and the prostitution of educational ideas".⁹ He has also (like Durkheim) given importance to the study of education with a historical perspective and lest it become an abstract exercise, he has given a sort of measuring rod by referring to Weber's classification of (1) charismatic; (2) education aiming at culture; and (3) specialist education.

Drawing on Durkheim's ideas, the American sociologist, Talcott Parsons outlined what has become the accepted

8 Karl Mannheim in Man and Society, quoted in Morrish, The Sociology of Education, Allen & Unwin, London, 1972.

9 See, Mannheim & Sewart, An Introduction to the Sociology of Education, London, Roulette & Kegan Paul, 1970.

functionalist view of education. However, whereas the problem of continuity and change in a society as a whole engaged the attention of the founders, the problem of differentiation within society was studied by Parsons. A prominent functionalist of the mid-20th century, he took the existing state of American society, its integration as well as its differentiation, as given and stable and even legitimate and looked into the educational process for an explanation. He argues that after primary socialization within the family, the school takes over as the 'focal socializing agency'. School acts as a bridge between the family and society as a whole, preparing the child for his adult role. Schools socialize young people into the basic values of society. Further, Parsons sees the educational system as an important mechanism for the selection of individuals for their future role in society. In his words, "it functions to allocate these human resources within the role structure of adult society".¹⁰ Thus, schools, by testing and evaluating students match their talents, skills and capacities to the jobs for which they are best suited.

10 Parsons, "The School Class As a Social System" reproduced in Shukla & Kumar, Sociological Perspectives in Education, 1985.

The school is therefore seen as the major mechanism for role allocation.

Like Durkheim, Parsons fails to give adequate consideration to the possibility that the values transmitted by the educational system may be those of a ruling minority rather than of society as a whole. His view that schools operate on meritocratic principles is also open to question.

Robert Merton's functionalist model is of special importance to this study, especially the two concepts of 'Manifest' and 'Latent' functions. Our interest in looking at the manifest and latent aspects of an institution like conventional or distance education in society has been motivated by the gap that exists between the conscious, intended functions or purposes set before launching it and the simultaneous consequences that are latently involved in such an exercise.

Merton says "Although all the new institutions are thus formed with the definite purpose of satisfying certain specific needs, their social function is by no means limited to their explicit and conscious purpose... whatever is the predominant, official, common interest

upon which the institution is founded, the association as a concrete group of human personalities unofficially involves many other interests".¹¹

Distinguishing between manifest and latent functions Merton says that "the first refers to those objective consequences for a specified unit (person, sub-group, social or cultural system) which contribute to its adjustment or adaptation and were so intended; the second refers to unintended and unrecognized consequences of the same order...therefore through this distinction between manifest and latent functions apparently irrational behaviour may at times be found to be positively functional for the group".¹² Findings concerning latent functions are evidence of greater departures from "common-sense" knowledge about social life. No wonder that such a research which goes beyond the manifest into the latent realm, produces "paradoxical" results. Paradoxical, because latent aspects indicate how social life is not as simple as it first seems.

11 Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure.

12 Ibid., p.118.

The primary manifest function of education, in America, for instance, is to prepare people for occupational roles as practically all occupational roles require basic literacy, while many also demand some type of specialized training. The list of other manifest functions of education is quite expansive: preserving the culture by passing it on from one generation to the next; encouraging democratic participation by teaching verbal skills and developing the persons ability to think rationally and independently; enriching life by enabling the student to expand his or her intellectual and aesthetic horizons etc; some of these manifest functions may not be fulfilled, but they are nonetheless intended functions of the educational system. In fact the manifest functions of the school have multiplied to such an extent that we often seem to assume that education can solve all the problems of society. Generally, it is also assumed that all children have a right to the same quality of education. Of course they do not all receive it. Another hidden assumption in conventional education is "that the set of knowledge an individual needs will correspond with the set defined by the teacher, or the syllabus, although either is a necessarily arbitrary part of the universe of knowledge".¹³

13 Michael Young, et.al., Distance Teaching for the Third World, 1980, p.6.

An education that consists of uncritically learning by rote a fixed body of knowledge and mastering a limited range of skills may be an appropriate preparation for a junior bureaucrat, especially when the higher posts are not open to promotion from the ranks below. But an education of this sort is not likely to produce people who can use their learning to change society, or their own position in it. In many ways thus, education in many developing countries is dysfunctional. It relies heavily on rote learning, leads to an inappropriate reverence for proper qualifications, and is based on curricula that are irrelevant to the students' future lives. It also creates an imbalance, with many school-leavers unemployed, while on the other hand there is a shortage of skilled and semi-skilled workers.

Education also has latent functions which include keeping youth off the labour market, weakening the control of parents, promoting cultural gap between school norms and family or kin norms. An education that should have been liberating succeeds only in alienating man from man, and man from his own culture. Education, as it latently develops, seems to be perpetuating an increasing inequality rather than fostering the equality that is manifestly

postulated. In most countries, rich and poor children get unequal opportunities. Education, therefore, becomes socially regressive, widening the gap between rich and the poor.

We now come to conflict theory which generally regards itself as a radical critique of existing society and views consensus theory as an appeaser of the existing system, the status quo. Given the Marxian view of the role of education in western industrial society, the major question asked is "How is the educational system shaped by the economic infrastructure?" Questions which derive from this such as "How does the educational system produce the kind of workforce required by capitalism?", involve an investigation of the links between power, ideology, education and the relations of production in capitalist society. The answers provide a radical alternative to functionalist and liberal views of the role of education in society. Education, according to the Marxist analysis helps to 'reproduce' or maintain the capitalist economic system.

Louis Althusser,¹⁴ a French philosopher, presents a general framework for the analysis of education from a

14 Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus" reproduced in Shukla & Kumar, ed., Social Perspectives in Education, 1985.

Marxian perspective. As a part of the superstructure the educational system is ultimately shaped by the infrastructure. It will therefore reflect the relations of production and serve the interests of the capitalist ruling class.

Althusser argues that no class can hold power for any length of time simply by the use of force. Ideological control provides a far more effective means of maintaining class rule. If members of the subject class accept their position as normal, natural and inevitable, and fail to realize the true nature of their situation, then they will be unlikely to challenge ruling class dominance.

Education, according to him, not only transmits a general ruling class ideology which justifies and legitimates the capitalist system; it also reproduces the attitudes and behaviour required by the major groups in the division of labour.

Althusser has produced only a very general Marxian perspective for the analysis of education in capitalist society. His ideas are not supported by evidence, and, as he himself admits, only a preliminary framework has been outlined.

Like Althuser, the American economists Bowles and Gintis¹⁵ argue that the major role of education in capitalist society is the reproduction of labour power. In particular they maintain that education contributes to the reproduction of workers with the kinds of personalities, attitudes and outlooks which will fit them for their exploited status. According to Bowles and Gintis analysis, the educational system can be seen as a gigantic myth-making machine which serves to legitimate authority. It creates and propagates the following myths: educational attainment is based on merit; occupational reward is based on merit; education is the route to success in the world of work. In "Schooling in Capitalist America", Bowles and Gintis argue that schooling is organized to meet the requirements of a repressive and exploitative capitalist society. The role of the educational system is social reproduction, the reproduction of a labour force geared to meet the needs of a capitalist society.¹⁶

15 Bowles and Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America.

16 Bowles and Gintis in Shukla & Kumar, 1985.

They have been criticized for their insistence that a capitalist economic system is the source of all the evils of American education. However, Karabel and Halsey argue, that, many of the aspects of American schooling condemned by Bowles and Gintis are found in socialist societies. Studies of educational attainment in USSR have clearly shown that the most successful students tend to be sons and daughters of the privileged.

The conflict theorists, thus view the functions of education as mainly serving the interests of the privileged sections of society, and according to them, education would merely be a reproduction of labour power to serve the interests of the upper classes.

Distance education, becomes relevant in modern societies because it assumes the 'failure' or inadequacy of the 'conventional education' model to reach out to every individual in society. It could be taken as an alternative, or supplement to the existing conventional set-up. However, it is put to use, this concept needs elaboration, which is what the second part of this chapter intends to do.

II

For the purpose of this study, it has been decided to label as 'conventional education' the normal on-campus provision at School, College or University level. According to Kaye and Rumble, the term 'conventional education' is applied to formal class-room-based instruction in a school, college or university setting, where teacher and students are physically present at the same time at the same place".¹⁸

Conventional education is also used synonymously with oral, face-to-face and group-based education. Distance Education has been defined in many ways, though there is a general unanimity regarding its basic features and assumptions. The most comprehensive definition seems to be of G. Dohman (1967-) who has been quoted by Desmond Keagan.¹⁹ He defines Distance Education as "a systematically organized form of self-study in which student counselling, the presentation of learning material and the securing and supervising of students' success is carried out by

18 Kaye and Rumble, An Analysis of Distance Teaching Systems, Milton Keynes, Oxford University, 1979, p.22.

19 Ibid., p.39.

a team of teachers, each of whom has responsibilities. It is made possible at a distance by means of media which can cover long distances. The opposite of 'distance education' is 'direct education' or 'face-to-face education': a type of education that takes place with direct contact between lectures^{Yc} and students".

According to O. Peters (1973) "Distance teaching/education is a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes which is rationalised by the application of division of labour and organisational principles as well as by the extensive use of technical media, especially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching material which makes it possible to instruct great numbers of students at the same time wherever they live. It is an industrialised form of teaching and learning".²⁰

Distance Education is often synonymously used with other terms which might create some confusion. For instance, correspondence study, home study, open and distance education, radio, television teaching - in fact all forms of mediated instruction, in the United States,

20 Peters, 1973, *ibid.*, p.41.

are increasingly referred to as "independent study". In Europe, however, the term 'distance education' is used for the same. The weakness with the concept of 'independent education' is that it indicates independence from an educational institution, which is not the case in Distance Education.

Even "correspondence education" for that matter, is used to designate to the postal sub-group of the print-based forms of distance education in which student contact is not encouraged. The main problem with the term "correspondence education" is that it cannot encompass the didactic potential of the form of education in the 1980s and beyond: print, audio, video and computer-based possibilities must be reflected by the terminology chosen. Critics of the term tend to associate "correspondence study/education" with some of the less successful aspects of distance education in the past and to feel that this term (correspondence education) contributes to the still-questioned status of study at a distance in many countries.

Similarly, a term like "Home study" has little claim to being an overall term as it is mainly applicable in the United States and there too, is confined to further

education (technical and vocationally oriented institutions) and not higher education (universities and university-oriented colleges). The distance students may not, in fact, study at home or may study in part at home and in part at other centres.

"External Studies" is the term most widely used in Australia. It describes the ethos of distance education as found in Australian Universities and colleges of advanced education: a form of education that is 'external to' but not 'separated from' the faculty, staff of the institution. The same staff have two groups of students, one on campus, the other external, and they prepare both groups for the same examinations and awards. "External studies" can have little claim to general acceptance because of its limitation to Australia and because of possible confusion with programmes structured differently such as the American external degree.

Therefore, terms such as "correspondence education", "distance teaching" or "teaching at a distance" are generally used to refer to subsets of distance education or to specific elements such as the course development

part of the process. 'Home study' becomes an American equivalent of 'distance education at further education level' and 'independent study', the American term for "distance education at higher education levels", with "external studies" being a term suitable for particular Australian educational structures.

In the Indian context, "Non-formal education" is generally taken to be synonymous with Distance Education. We have yet to come across any major distinction having been made between the two overlapping concepts. However, for the purpose of this study, mainly for conceptual clarification, distance education is being taken to be a wider concept than non-formal education - which does not necessarily have a multimedia approach to education - a hallmark of distance education. In non-formal education, face-to-face interaction takes place, which one would not normally expect in a typical "distance education" set up.

So, distance education can be equated with the combined, systematic and flexible use of at least three major elements:

- i. Print based communication
- ii. Broadcasting and/or other techniques
- iii. Face-to-face contact

in support of an independent learner.

Therefore, distance education methods, cater for the individual learner studying independently which entails, high levels of motivation amongst the learners, and is the key reason for the fact that the great majority of distance education projects are aimed primarily at adults. However, distance education provision does exist in some countries for school-age children unable (for geographical or health reasons) to attend classes. In general, however, distance students are adults.

A survey by a Swedish Commission on Television and Radio in Education (1976) emphasized that 'distance' cannot solely be defined in terms of miles or kilometres. Distance can also be a product of social or working conditions. Thus, distance education methods can be successfully used for catering to groups who, for geographical, economic or social reasons, are unable or unwilling to make use of traditional (i.e. classroom based) provisions. In so doing, they can liberate the student from the constraints of space, time and age. And it is this social aspect of the definition or concept of distance education which is of significance to this study (especially in relation to the Indian social context).

EVOLUTION

In Britain, the origins of distance education can partly be traced to the historical distinction between teaching and accreditation which was one of the key features of the Oxford and Cambridge systems - the colleges taught, and the University examined. Thus, when the University of London was established in 1836, it had no teaching functions, but merely registered and examined students, in the U.K. and overseas, for external degrees. This is one particular pattern of provision, and perhaps the earliest, i.e. correspondence tuition provided by an independent organization for degrees awarded by a public university. It is still to be found in a number of countries.

A second model is that of a conventional University which provides correspondence study facilities itself to external students, as well as examining and accrediting these students.

A third model of University level correspondence teaching is that of collaboration between a number of different institutions of higher education in catering for external students.

A fourth model, is that of a massive centralised state provision for correspondence education at all levels, including University level. Examinations and qualifications attained are identical with those of the formal school/university sector.

Like this, Kaye and Rumble (1981) have given several other models of distance education which have evolved over the years but, the model which represents the most recent development is that of autonomous institutions established solely and specifically for external students, using a variety of distance-teaching methods to provide specially prepared multi-media courses, and with formal responsibility for evaluation and accreditation. The first of this new generation of institutions was Britain's Open University set up in 1969, so called because of its lack of formal entry requirements and the openness of its teaching.

In America, according to a book edited by Perraton in 1979 (published by the World Bank), the main early developments of distance education would be traced to the mid-60s when a series of projects began in which attempts were made to link the three components of broadcasting, correspondence, and face-to-face tuition.

There were a few isolated examples of broadcasts linked to correspondence tuition (e.g. using radio in New Zealand in 1937 and the programmes of the Chicago Television College, which started in 1956) but since the 1960s, there has been a very significant quantitative and qualitative increase in the number and range of distance programmes throughout the world.

FEATURES

From the various definitions provided for distance education, the following features have been found to be common:

- (1) The separation of learner and teacher
- (2) Privatisation
- (3) The use of technical media
- (4) Two-way communication
- (5) The separation of learned and the learning group

TARGET

These characteristics make distance study facilities attractive to people who cannot or do not want regularly to attend classes and to people who have limited time to

spend on study, such as most adults who have jobs, families and various other social commitments.

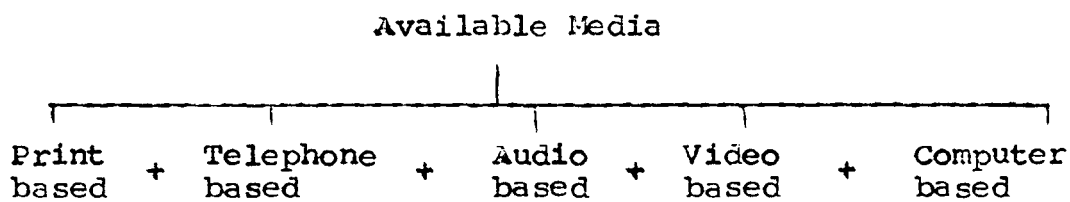
Distance education was thus created to give those a chance to study who could not go to an ordinary school or university for financial, social, geographical, demographic or medical reasons. Distant education was, and is, also a means of providing adult education based on a belief in the value of education for its own sake and for people seeking professional promotion and a higher social status.

The kind of learning promoted by distance education, therefore, would not be based on very rigid formulations. Here, one can proceed at one's own pace and here there is also an assumption of a less coercive form of educating young people and adults.

As far as the choice of medium is concerned, print, is of course, quite a durable medium but when the course is in presentation, students need instant feedback by telephone, electronic mail or line computer or teleconference. Print can be a pretty cumbersome slow communication process as is the case with most correspondence methods dominating this kind of education.

Improved and cheaper telephone services should lead to the wider use of the telephone for immediate two-way communication when the student is in difficulties.

A simple presentation of the choice of media available for carrying the content of a distance education course might be represented schematically thus:



There is no super medium as such for distance education, but each can serve different functions. Logically speaking, one should use a range of media in a planned and integrated manner so that a variety of educational functions and approaches can be offered. Overall, one could say that teaching materials designed for use in a traditional classroom situation are generally not suitable, and certainly not sufficient, for the distance learning situation.

The reasons for going into distance education vary from society to society. In France, for instance, one of the functions of distance education is education for handicapped children, or for children in hospitals who cannot get to school. In the late 1920s, the Soviet Union seized on correspondence as a way of widening educational opportunity and combining study with productive work. The experience of productive work and of life generally which as adults they bring to their study is seen as being a positive advantage for them and for society. In the USA, a desire for equality led the public educational sector into correspondence study. In Australasia correspondence education was also seen as a way of extending the school system to those who would otherwise be deprived: Australia's scattered population meant that there were large numbers of children who could not get to school.

Due to the social heterogeneity of our society, we know that a simplistic model like the functionalist notion of society would not be very appropriate to explain the Indian reality. Conflict has become such a part of our everyday life that perceiving 'universal consensus' (which the functionalists profess) would be quite Utopian.

It is in this sense that we wish to analyse the model of distance education as having been influenced only by the functionalist, consensual notion of society, because of which, it is less likely to succeed on a large scale. Besides, one cannot hope for reforming an existing (conventional) educational system by merely injecting a new medium into it.

Looking at distance education from the functionalist perspective, it would promote social equality by widening the potential of diversifying job prospects, promotion of technical skills and, in general, reaching out to the masses. Conflict theorists on the contrary would perceive the function of Distance Education as being more power-elite-oriented than Conventional Education. According to them, the propagation of dominant class ideology would be facilitated due to the large scale use of media. For the privileged ruling elite of our society, superimposing a 'foreign' model like Distance Education - with all its 'western' overtones - may be perfectly 'functional' by latently controlling the potentially destabilising force - i.e. the unemployed youth. We would like to mention some new theoretical perspectives that have been applied

to the concept of distance education, which we may not necessarily incorporate for our study.

NEW THEORIES

Wedemeyer²¹ is of the opinion: "It is unfortunately true that the failure of correspondence study to develop a theory related to the mainstream of educational thought and practice has seriously handicapped the development and recognition of this field". The claim of Wedemeyer that distance education has failed to develop a theory related to the mainstream of educational thought and practice, remains true today. Kegan has classified the more 'important theoretical positions vis-a-vis Distance Education into 3 groupings:

1. Theories of autonomy and independence:

These contributions come mainly from the late 1960s and early 1970s and the major representatives are Rudolf Manfred Delling (Federal Republic of Germany), Charles A. Wedemeyer (USA) and Michael G. More (U.K.).

21 Refer to Keegan, Foundations of Distance Education, 1986.

2. Theory of Industrialisation:

Otto Peters' work in the Federal Republic of Germany comprised comparative studies throughout the 1960s and theoretical formulation in the early 1970s.

3. Theories of Interaction and Communication:

More contemporary views from Borje Holmberg (Sweden/FRG), John A. Beath (Sweden), David Sewart (U.K.), John S. Daniel (Canada) etc.

1. Theory of Autonomy and Independence:

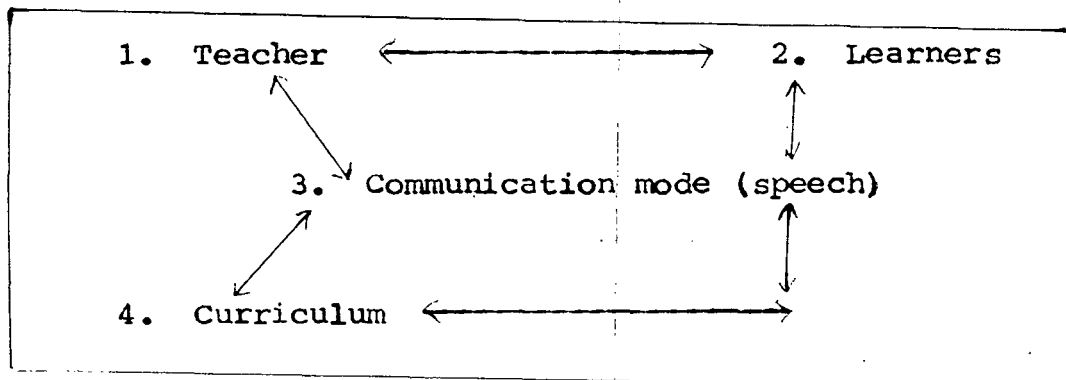
Delling tends to reduce the role of the teacher and of the educational organisation to a minimum and throw the whole emphasis on the autonomy and independence of the learner. This is especially important because adults are normally the learners in distance programmes. Adults do not, he suggests, accept the conventional educator-pupil relationship.

Wedmeyer saw instinctively that the only way to break what he called the 'space-time barriers' of education was by separating teaching from learning. This meant planning each as a separate activity. In many of his writings, he claims, that every teaching-

learning situation comprises four elements, which he presents diagrammatically:

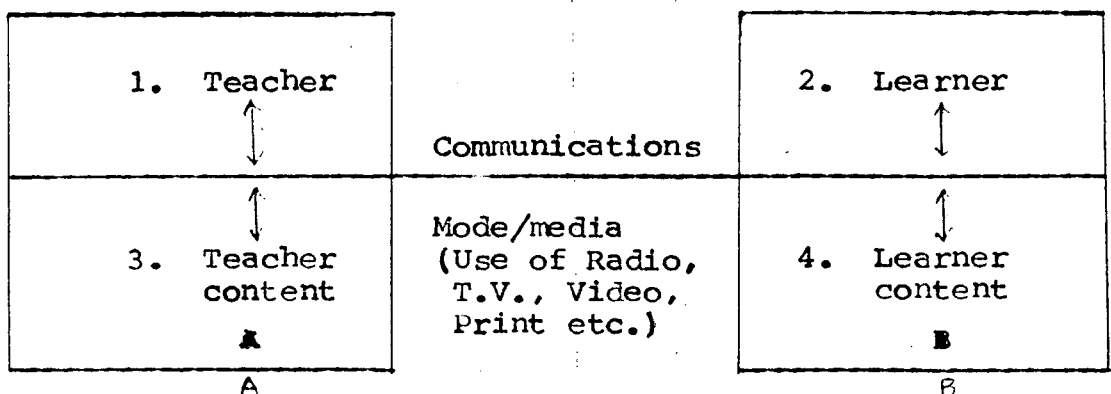
- (1) Teacher;
- (2) Learner or learners;
- (3) Communication system or mode; and
- (4) Something to be taught/learned.

He claims that the traditional classroom could be represented as a box, which encompassed the four elements:



A Teaching-learning System: The Classroom

However if we are to achieve a 'teaching-learning system that can work any place, any time, for one learner or many', Wedemeyer tells us that the class-room box must be restructured thus:



A teaching-learning situation to accommodate physical distance

According to this theory, the teacher is the daily monitor and motivator of the distance student.

2. The Industrialization of teaching

"Anyone professional involved in education is obliged to presume the existence of two forms of instruction which are strictly separable: traditional face-to-face teaching based on inter-personal communication and industrialised teaching which is based on an objectivised, rationalised, technologically-produced interaction" (O. Peters, 1973, in D. Keegan, 1986, p.80).

Peters justified his search for a new theoretical basis for distance teaching on the grounds that it is a new form of industrialised and technological education. He states that from many points of view conventional,

oral, group-based education is a pre-industrial form of education in which the individual lecturer remains in close contact with the whole teaching process just as an artisan does with his craft.²² He states that traditional educational concepts are only of partial use in analysing and describing this industrialised form of education. Therefore, new categories for analysis must be found and they can best be found from the sciences which analyse, industrial processes*.

Peters also presents a comparison of distance teaching and the industrial production of goods under the following headings: rationalisation; division of labour; mechanisation; assembly line; mass production; preparatory work; formalisation; standardisation; functional change; objectification.

His view is that industrialised society of today has developed so many needs for education that it is absurd to imagine that conventional systems can satisfy them. New techniques are needed and must be industrial.

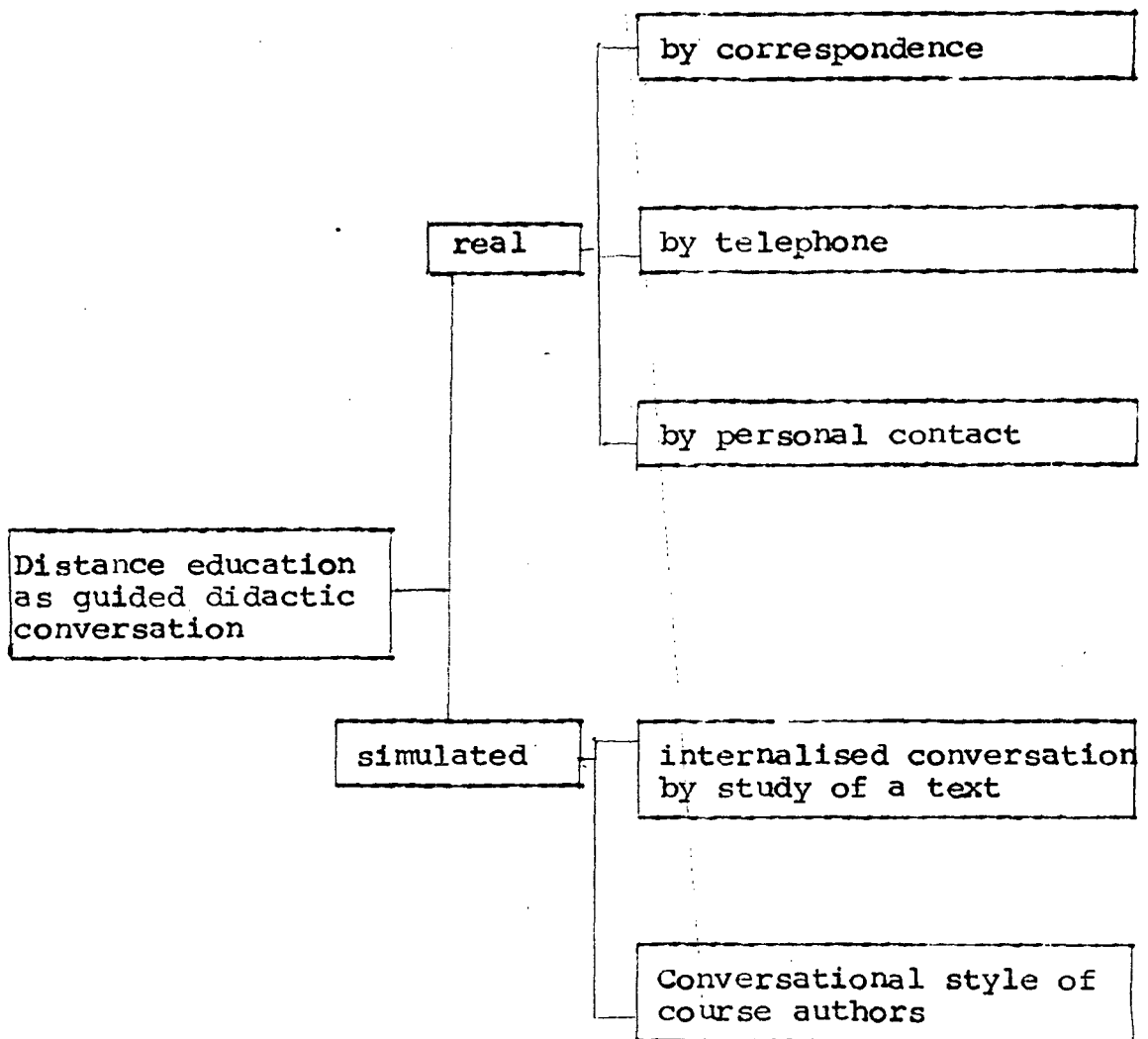
22 Keegan, p.81.

Though criticized by many, his theory has heuristic value, in that it offers some explanation of the nature of educational institutions in which the warehouse and the production process dominate and in which there are few educational installations and that such systems have a propensity to alienation and monopolisation.

3. Interaction and Communication

Borje Holmberg characterises study in a distance system as self-study but it is not, he insists, private reading, for the student is not alone. The student benefits from having a course developed for him and also from interaction with his tutors and other representatives of a supporting organisation. The relationship between the supporting organisation and the student is described as a guided didactic conversation. Two-way communication in writing and on the telephone between students and tutors has been one of his chief concerns.

Holmberg's view of distance education as guided didactic conversation might be presented schematically:



(Guided didactic conversation (Holmberg in Keegan, p.97)).

Although he is not the only scholar to recommend a conversational style for distance learning materials he has been the only one who has developed a coherent theory, and then empirically tested the same.

According to John Daniel the emergence of distance education systems can be seen as coming from 3 sources: a long tradition of independent study; modern developments in the technology of education; and, new theoretical interest in open learning. All learning in a distance system, he states, is achieved by a balance between the learning activities the student carries out independently and those which involve interaction with other people. The balance between the two is the most crucial issue facing distance study systems.

He believes that courses should not be designed that are entirely independent. Socialisation and feedback are the main functions of the interactive activities and whereas the importance of socialisation in education is less vital for adults studying part-time than for children and those involved in compulsory and full-time education, the feedback role of interaction is of crucial importance. Distance students are weakly integrated into the social system of the teaching institution and may feel low involvement. Therefore the importance of interactive activities needs to be enhanced.

David Sewart (1981) argues that first as in most complex bureaucracies an intermediary is necessary (a social worker, a hospital orderly) to bridge the gap between the individual and the institution, so in distance systems an intermediary is necessary between the individual student and the teaching package. The intermediary is employed by the institution but works for the individuals in the system and individualises their problems when confronted with the bureaucracy.

Role of the Intermediary (Sewart)

System	Intermediary	Individual
Government Bureaucracy	Social worker →	Citizen
Hospital	Orderly →	Patient
Distance Institution	Student services →	Student

Even though one would appreciate the emphasis Sewart has given to 'Interaction' and 'communication' in distance education, looking at his interpretation from the conflict perspective one could hypothesize that the intermediary, whether it be the hospital orderly, the organisation's social worker or the

teacher/counsellor of the distance institution, is bound to align himself more with the institution than the individual - due to individual self-interest or pressures exerted by the (bureaucratically-run) organization. It is in this perspective, that the role of 'intermediary' becomes debatable in distance education projects.

One would like to add that despite the new light that these theoretical perspectives throw on 'distance education' we cannot incorporate them for our study. Mainly for heuristic purposes, we shall limit our assumptions to those of the conflict theorists and the functionalist Robert Merton's 'Manifest' and 'latent' functions. Applied to micro-studies, these 'new' theoretical perspectives on distance education may prove holistic enough, but shall fall short of expectations, if they are applied for a broader 'sociological' understanding of distance education.

As stated in the purpose of our study,²³ we wish to draw a link between our societal limitations and

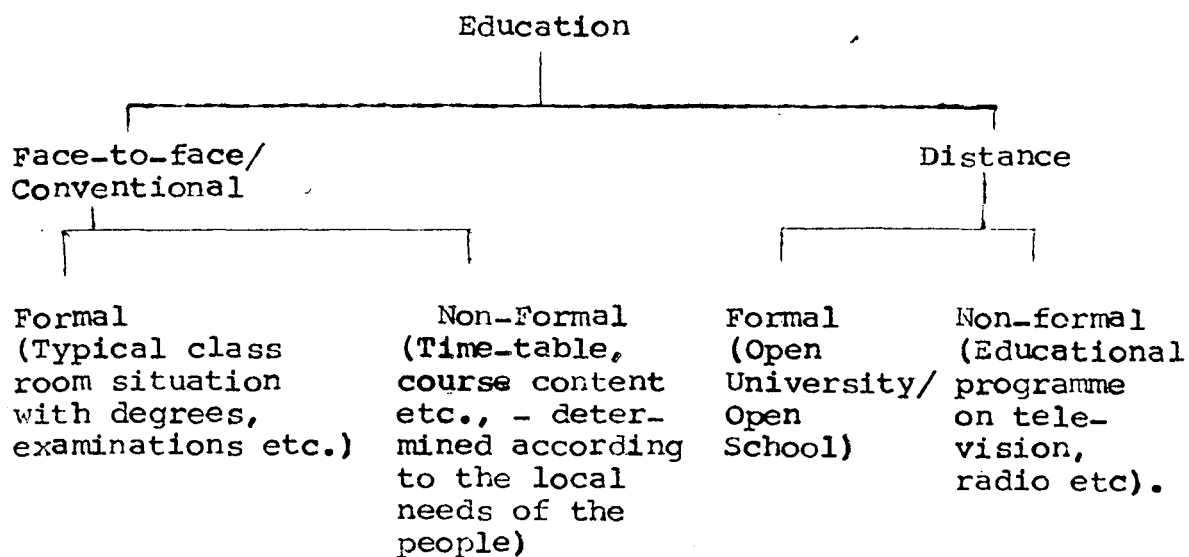
23 Refer to Introduction

distance education model as applied per se, on the (Indian) society. This sort of an analysis shall be better probed, if it is seen through the macro, generalisable, comparable theories like conflict and functionalist approaches in sociology. Summarizing, one could delineate the differences between conventional education and distance education, as under:

Conventional Education/ Face-to-face Education	Distance Education
1. Immediate, personal contact between learner & teacher	Contact mainly through communications media
2. Teacher can readily to learners immediate behaviour	Adaptation is delayed
3. Personal relationships can moderate learning	Personal relationships not so important
4. Direct control of learner by teacher is possible	Teachers influence is mainly indirect
5. Learning materials can be of low didactic importance	Learning materials must be of high didactic standard (well organised, clear etc.).
6. Limited degree of freedom for learner	High degree of freedom
7. Communication need not be planned to last detail	Communication is usually highly planned
8. A high degree of evaluation and feed-back from the teacher is possible	A comparatively low degree of evaluation and feed-back from the teacher is possible
9. Willingness and ability of learner to work without direct supervision may be low	Willingness and ability of learner to work without direct supervision must be high

(From Cropley & Kahl (1983) in D. Keegan (1986, p.124).

Thus, we have seen distance education to be a departure from the conventional educational set-up and how this system is a synthesis of 'education' and 'media'. If put to use with the right perspective, it has vast potential. Though there certainly is a lot of overlapping, for heuristic purposes only, we would like to draw the distinction between the conventional education and distance education (formal and informal) set-ups as under.



CHAPTER TWO

CHAPTER TWOSELECTED DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEMS: AN APPRAISAL

Before we go on to discussing distance education within the Indian social context, we would like to briefly discuss the application of distance education in other social contexts - countries which represent a wide range of experience and possibility. Some have yet to begin distance education on a large scale, whereas others can claim to have had decades of distance education that may be now undergoing renewal and revitalization.

Recent years have seen prolific growth of distance education in countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Sri Lanka, India, Australia, New Zealand etc. The following important trends have been noticed:¹

- (a) The systems do not confine themselves to formal certification of courses but are gradually extending to other professional and vocational courses.

1 . Report of a sub-regional workshop, "Distance Learning Systems and Structures - Training of Distance Educators", Colombo, July 1984 (UNESCO, Bangkok, 1985), p.26.

- (b) The distance teaching system is finding its utility in life enrichment and other non-formal and non-certification programmes which are helpful in improving the quality of common people. Today education in health, child development nutrition and such other aspects as parental education are common concerns of distance education.
- (c) A large number of professional agencies have launched distance education programmes in specialized areas e.g., agriculture handicrafts, industrial training and rural development for the general public. The object of these programmes is to develop appreciation and give greater professional understanding.
- (d) The distance education agencies are inclining towards greater and greater use of other media e.g., audio-visual aids, radio, television.

All these factors point to the heavy demand likely to be made on distance education in the near future in most countries.

The four distance education case studies examined in this chapter operate in very different environments. Of these four countries, one is characterised by the World Bank (1980) as industrialized (United Kingdom), one is a middle income country (Costa Rica). One is a low-income country (Pakistan) and one belongs to that category of countries which has a centrally planned economy. The countries range in size from Israel (20,700 sq.km) to China (9,597,000 sq.km) and in population from Costa Rica (2.3 million) to China (1000 millions). World Bank figures also show that the percentage of total population living in urban areas varies from 13 per cent (China) and 28% (Pakistan) to 85% or over in Israel and the United Kingdom.²

Clearly so, the very wide variations in social, economic, cultural and educational conditions in these countries (and other countries, the world over) would

2 Rumble & Harry, Distance Teaching Universities, (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p.204.

evidence the fact that the factors which contribute to the success or failure of distance education shall vary from society to society. That is, distance education models, when put to practice, vary from one social context to another, and that there is no one distance education model which can be said to be universally applicable, all over the world.

Most of the relevant books were written around and after the Open University was started in Britain in 1969. Walter Perry, the first Vice-Chancellor of the Open University brought out a Report in 1972, giving the details of development of the institution, academic matters, counselling and tutorial services, student services etc., of the University.

In 1976, he wrote a fuller account in the form of a book entitled 'Open University' Jeremy Tornstall in 1974, edited a book named 'The Open University Opens' which gives a first-hand account of what the Oxford University is about and what it feels like to be an Oxford University student or lecturer. There were some others too who gave their versions of the Oxford University, for instance John Ferguson in 1975 wrote "The Open University from Within".

Dealing with the wider concept of Distance Education, Borje Holmberg, in 1981 wrote 'Status and Trends of Distance Education' in which he extensively reviews his views and ideas put forward in his previous book, 'Distance Education'. He presents a true picture of distance education as it is today - its reality, theoretical backgrounds, problems and concerns - by illuminating its present status and some of the important existing trends. Brigitte Willen's publication of 1981 presents an evaluation of the experiments with distance courses at Swedish Universities and also contains a follow-up study of the distance students five years after they started. Another important book is "Distance Education: International Perspectives" by David Sewart and Others (1983). The most pioneering work in the field seems to be of Desmond Keegan whose "The Foundations of Distance Education" (1986) reviews the theories that underlie the evolution of Distance Education.

In India, though there have been a number of related works on correspondence education, non-formal education, education through radio and television etc., "distance education" as a separate concept for study has not been dealt with by many authors. One of the relevant works is that of Satyapal Anand who wrote University Without Walls

(1979) which deals with distance teaching and distance learning, concepts which negate the traditional notion of the University as an institution fixed in time and place. The other book related to the subject was "Distance Education" edited by S. Parmaji (1984) which contains articles on different fields of Distance Education but which does not give much emphasis on the broader conceptual and theoretical aspects of Distance Education.

Rumble and Keegan³ have selected five general areas for analysis which seem to be particularly important for the study of distance education systems:

1. Objectives of distance education systems
2. The students that they attract
3. The use of 'new educational media'
4. Their academic standards as compared to conventional systems
5. Their cost-effectiveness

all of which we shall go into briefly, before dealing with our case studies, in detail.

3 Rumble & Keegan, "General Characteristics of Distance Teaching Universities", in *ibid.*, p.204.

1. Objectives:

The end of the Second World War was followed by the rapid expansion of access to educational services at all levels in the western industrialised countries, the central European socialist states and the developing nations of the Third World.

The expansion of the University sector in developed countries and in some developing countries too, was partly motivated by the increasing demand for educated manpower and partly in response to demands for educational equality.

A) The high cost of conventional University education and the reputed potential of distance teaching systems to expand the number of places available at a lower average cost per student has led some countries to regard a distance teaching University as a means of providing additional University places for school leavers more rapidly and more cheaply than could be done by other means...⁴ We shall see further in this chapter, that the distance education systems in China and Costa Rica were established with this as one of their objectives. In contrast, the United Kingdom Open University excludes applications from students under twenty-one and in this respect is not in competition with the conventional Universities.

4 Ibid., p.206.

B) Another objective of distance education projects is to enable new target groups to be given an opportunity of studying at University; specifically mentioned are: (i) Adults (Costa Rica, United Kingdom); (ii) Those who for a variety of reasons have been unable to study in conventional educational systems (Costa Rica, Israel and United Kingdom). In the case of Costa Rica specific mention is made of those who for social, economic or geographical reasons cannot enter a conventional university.

A particularly important group are those who want to study at the same time as they continue in full-time employment. Specific mention of this group occurs in the objectives of Costa Rica and Pakistan.

C) Some of the distance teaching Universities set out to make up for the past lack of higher educational opportunities in their countries.

In the United Kingdom for instance the Open University planners had in mind not only those qualified school learners who had not gone to a University but also those who had left school without the normal minimal qualification for entry and who might now wish

to enter a University, so the Open University there requires no formal educational qualifications of applicants.

D) Distance education systems, or, distance teaching universities in particular, have on occasion been seen as a means of keeping students out of the campuses where it is likely that they will be politicized (e.g. the Free University of Iran).

Viewing the Indian situation within the 'manifest-latent' perspective dealt with earlier, we could add that one of the latent objectives of establishing Open University in India could be seen to be the same.

2. The Students:

In general, distance education students are older than conventional ones and a much higher proportion are in employment, married and homemakers that would not be the case with conventional university students. However, the situation may vary from country to country. As is evident from several countries, the features of distance study that have attracted students have been the flexibility of independent study at a distance, the fact

that students can study at home, and the fact that they can study and work.

"Overall the single most important conclusion to emerge is the degree of heterogeneity of the student body with their wide range of ages and marked differences in life experience, which distinguishes them from the traditional 18-22 age-group enrolment of conventional universities".⁵

3. The Use of New Educational Media

The objectives of a number of distance teaching institutions specifically require them to use the new communications technology. The United Kingdom's Open University's Charter specifically "enjoins it to advance and disseminate learning and knowledge by teaching and research by a diversity of means such as broadcasting and technological devices appropriate to higher education, by correspondence tuition, residential courses and seminars and in other relevant

5 Ibid., p.120.

ways".⁶ The variety and range of different media or learning methods within different distance teaching Universities is shown in Table-A. However, there is enormous variety in the relative weight attached to each medium or learning method. Print is generally the key medium except in the central China Television University.

One has to contend with the reality that "television, and radio in particular, are proving to be of less significance in teaching systems or more difficult to use successfully than was originally expected".⁷ One of the reasons is the relatively high cost of broadcasting which clearly influences the extent to which it is used in some systems. Another problem could be shortage of skilled broadcasting staff.

As the table shows, the distance teaching Universities have on the whole, adopted a multi-media approach where the use of print and tuition by correspondence and by personal contact in local centres predominates.

6 Ibid., p.212.

7 Ibid., p.213.

Table-A: Use of Media in Select Distance Teaching Universities

	OU	CCTU	UNED	ED	AIYOU
Print	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Study Centres	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Face-to-face tuition	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Access to computers	✓				
Access to laboratories	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Home experiment kits	✓			✓	
Residential schools	✓				
Television	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Video tapes	✓				
Radio	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Audio cassettes	✓		✓	✓	
Telephone tuition	✓		✓	✓	

OU .. Open University, United Kingdom

CCTU .. The Central Broadcasting & Television University,
China

UNED .. The Universided Estatal A Distancia, Costa Rica

EU .. Everyman's University, Israel

AIYOU .. Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan

Source: Rumble & Harry (ed.), The Distance Teaching Universities, Croom Helm, 1982, p.214.

4. Parity of Academic Standards

All the distance education institutions have had to establish a reputation for reliability, validity and credibility. Comparative research has shown that parity of standards between conventional and distance learning systems is achievable in certain carefully structured systems. "The evidence from the University of New England at Armidale, Australia, a University with both conventional and distance students, shows that distance students can achieve similar results to conventional students on the same University study programmes".⁸ The assessment model at the University of New England is so structured that both internal and external students sit the same examinations, are assessed by the same examiners and qualify for the same awards.

The use of a system of external examiners (e.g. at Everyman's University, Israel and the United Kingdom Open University) both to assess the examination papers and the marking is one means by which distance

8 Ibid., p.216.

teaching Universities in common with many conventional Universities safeguard standards. What matters most, however, is the institutions' record in enabling students to succeed in their examinations.

5. Cost-Effectiveness

Distance education institutions require quite complex organisational arrangements before a single student can be admitted. Apart from administrative functions, very considerable sums of money have to be invested in materials design, production and distribution, and in student and local support services. "In general conventional teaching systems are cheaper for low numbers of students, while distance teaching systems are cheaper for high numbers of students".⁹

However, if the number of courses expands, without a corresponding increase in its student numbers, the cost advantage of distance education institutions is found to be undermined.

Having considered the five general areas for analysis of distance education systems, we shall go

9 Ibid., p.220.

over to our particular case studies:

1. The Open University, United Kingdom

The idea of the Open University (1969) was initially greeted with considerable scepticism and even hostility, but the developing institution has achieved credibility in the academic world, and has survived a decade and a half of political change and national economic crisis.

"The Open University's activities can be considered in terms of its programmes. Three teaching programmes, for undergraduates, post-graduates, and associate students are offered. In addition to these, the University has a research and development programme; a small programme of international activities; and, through a subsidiary company (Open University Educational Enterprises Ltd) marketing programme (related to the marketing of the University's teaching materials).

Access and Needs:

The Open University has done a fairly good job of increasing access to University education:

Since its inception in 1969, this University has permitted no less than 600,000 U.K. citizens officially to apply for enrolment for a University degree. It has discovered an extremely large population of adults for whom the offerings of other U.K. Universities was inaccessible or unimportant.¹⁰ However, some hesitancy has been encountered in representatives of lower social classes enrolling and Open University. U.K. statistics when compared with those of the other U.K. Universities show a marked difference in occupations of O.U.U.K. students' parents rather than the students themselves.¹¹

Drop-outs:

"The sceptics who claimed at the foundation of the O.U.U.K. that no more than 10 per cent of any intake would eventually graduate have been resoundingly answered...Upto 45 per cent of each year's cohort is graduating in a highly acceptable time scale of six years".¹²

10 Keegan, Foundations of Distance Education (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p.253.

11 McIntosh et. al., The Open University - The First Eight Years Distance Education, 1, 1, 1986, p.107.

12 Keegan, 1986, p.254.

Quality of Materials:

The OUUK broke new ground in distance education by the quality, complexity and comprehensiveness of its learning materials, both print and non-print. Their recommended materials became popular amongst many conventional Universities, also. They were characterised by careful structuring and sequencing of content together with sophisticated lay-out and design.

Status:

The OUUK quickly shed its correspondence image and sought to insert itself within its first decade into the fabric of British educational and political life. This was achieved partly through its contact with the British Broadcasting Corporation and partly through factors like:¹³

- The immediate international reputation of the UKOU.
- The number of qualified academics who joined its full-time staff.
- The winning of a series of national research awards.
- The cohesiveness of the system, especially concerning the evaluation of students' study.

13 Refer to Keegan, 1986, p.256.

Media and Methods:

The printed main text is the principal teaching medium in most Open University undergraduate and associate courses. The student may also receive printed supplementary materials which may consist of broadcast notes to accompany radio and television programmes, off-prints, computermarked and tutor-marked assignments and other information which needs to be revised regularly. Open University main texts are closely integrated with additional reading materials, with assignments, and with radio and television programmes to form units of work, each requiring one week of study.

Kits are supplied to students to enable them to undertake scientific experiments at home, to carry out field work and to understand the practical application of theoretical principles.

Attendance at residential school is compulsory for open University students on foundation courses and some high-level courses. The schools are held mainly on conventional University campuses during the summer vacation and provide opportunities for learning such

as lecturers, seminars, field work, laboratory work and informal discussions.

Costs:

In common with other Universities in the U.K., the Open University is financed principally from public funds. A study undertaken by Wagner in 1976¹⁴ showed that the average cost per student per year was about one-third that of the cost in conventional British Universities, while the cost per graduate was about one half that of the conventional universities.

To conclude, this University has established itself as a major provider of higher and continuing education during the last decade and a half. There is concern however, that the increased fee levels which the government is requiring the University to impose on its students is having an effect on demand, on drop-out, on the ability of certain sectors of society (particularly the lower paid, the unemployed, and women) to enrol. It is now the case that an Open University degree costs considerably more to the student than a part-time degree at a conventional University.¹⁵

14 Wagner Leslie, "The Economics of the Open University Revisited", in Sewart, et. al., 1983, pp.374-397.

15 Rumble and Harry, 1982, p.186.

In general, it is to be hoped that the Open University "will maintain its position in the vanguard of distance learning institutions and will continue to work effectively towards meeting the educational needs of those people who can best profit from education at a distance".¹⁶

2. A Look into Some Aspects of Distance Education in the People's Republic of China

One cannot talk about distance education without mentioning the general educational system in a given society. In China, education falls into three somewhat overlapping categories: Conventional, Vocational and Social.¹⁷

Conventional education includes education at pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary levels, mainly conducted within walls on a face-to-face setting. It is of a general nature. With emphasis on practical abilities, vocational or technical education aims to turn out qualified personnel with know-how in a particular field.

16 Ibid.

17 Yu Xu, "A look into some aspects of distance education in the People's Republic of China in 'Distance Education', vol.7, no.1, 1986.

Though also a kind of classroom education, it has a specific nature. Social education is mass education, designed to enhance the cultural and professional levels of everyone, of the whole society. It includes all kinds of TV, colleges, correspondence colleges, various night schools, spare-time workers' colleges, radio instruction, inservice training etc. Distance education in China falls within the category of social education.

China's distance education takes the form of Television Universities at central, provincial, municipal and country levels, correspondence schools and colleges, and lessons over the radio.

Social Need:

Developing distance education along with other types of education is a recognised social need in China - China is now embarking on a new revolution of socialist modernization and, the key to success, lies in the rapid development of science and technology which in turn requires a galaxy of qualified people in various fields.¹⁸

18 Ibid., p.94.

Developing distance education is indispensable in raising the universal cultural level of the society; China is a big country with a population of one billion, 80 per cent of which is scattered in its vast countryside. "Confronted with the challenge of the technological revolution now sweeping the world, China has made education one of the strategic priorities in its socialist modernization programme. Distance education is particularly suitable to China's social environments".¹⁹

The Central Broadcasting and Television University
(CCTU)

Not only can China boast one of the world's earliest television universities, it has a long tradition of correspondence education dating from the beginning of the century. Although such education has been developed at University level, through special departments attached to Universities, the establishment of the CCTU is the first attempt to set up a national, multi-media, distance learning institution. Its aims are "to promote the modernisation of China, to raise the level of scientific

19 Ibid., p. 96.

education, and to repair the damage done to education by the 'gang of four'.²⁰ China provides distance learning with a unique challenge: to cope with the economic, demographic and geographic conditions of the country.

Students:

No precise data on students exists at national level but most of them come from the following occupational groups: secondary school teachers, civil servants, technicians, and factory workers.

All students must be senior secondary school graduates, although this does not imply that they hold a particular qualification. To be admitted students must pass an entrance examination which, although it is national, is different from that given by students wishing to enter a conventional university, in that it aims to ensure that those admitted can cope with the study of the CCTU courses.

Media:

The CCTU teaches through television but also uses

20 Harry & Rumble, 1982, p.58.

print and face-to-face tuition. Radio is used in only one part of the English course.

Television provides the basic mode of instruction consisting largely of lectures written out on a black-board, as would be found in a conventional University.

The print component of the teaching package is largely made up of conventional textbooks. In view of the great pressure on television,²¹ and its limitation (both in production and transmission) the University has recognised the need to develop its use of print as the main medium of instruction.

Costs:

The budget, for which no figures are available, is administered by the state council (~~and the Ministry of Education is administered by the state council~~) and the Ministry of Education, with the Broadcasting Bureau being responsible for television production costs.²²

21 Ibid., p.62.

22 Ibid., p.69.

To conclude, the University has made some remarkable strides in the first few years of its existence, by registering so many students, and by producing so many courses. However, what is needed is an increase in the teaching function of print, and this means the need to design specially prepared printed material in those subject areas where no good conventional textbooks are available.

As is usual in all distance education systems, there is generally a potential conflict between broadcasters and teachers. "Arriving at a relationship between the two is fundamental to any multi-media system".²³

The fact that the University serves a largely urban audience is another limitation. If it has to be an instrument of mass education it must reach the rural population. However, such a vast number of students would require many changes in the distribution system and the support services. The addition of rural students may also require changes in the nature and indeed the level of courses.

23 Ibid., p.70.

These problems of China can be seen in the Indian perspective too, for, our problems are also going to be similar.

3. The Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan

This University was formally established in 1974, following the passing of the People's Open University Act, "to provide part-time educational facilities through correspondence courses, tutorials, seminars, workshops, laboratories, television and radio broadcasts and other mass communication media..."²⁴

The main Objectives of this University were to:²⁵

1. To provide facilities to people who can not leave their homes and jobs.
2. To provide such facilities to the masses for their educational uplift.
3. To provide facilities for the training of teachers.

24 Federal Ministry of Education, Education Policy of Pakistan (1972-80), Section 7.10.

25 Refer to Harry & Rumble, 1982, p.126.

4. To hold examinations and to award and confer degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic distinctions to and on persons who have been admitted to and have passed its examinations under the prescribed conditions etc.

As quoted by their second Vice-Chancellor, "The People's Open University...is entrusted with the task of serving the whole country and all categories of people...its clientele are the masses. It rejects the elitist view that only a small selected class of people can benefit from higher education...that for any real learning to take place people have to be secluded behind walls of educational institutions and pursue a rigidly structured curriculum. The University is not designed to replace the formal education system, nor can it do so. It will complement and supplement existing educational institutions...will give high priority to the occupational education of farmers, industrial workers and craftsmen".²⁶

It is quite clear that a main thrust of the University's activities was intended to be towards basic literacy, vocational and community programmes, particularly for rural areas.

26 Zaki, W.M., Education of the People (Islamabad: The Peoples Open University), 1975.

Media and Methods:

The teaching units or materials consist of printed books, with diagrams and supplementary material where required (e.g. glossaries, handbooks), plus radio and television broadcasts where appropriate. Courses in the General Education programme have 5 or 10 radio programmes, including an introductory one, plus 2-6 television programmes, where appropriate.

Tutorial services are also provided at study centres and through assignments, non-credit courses generally don't have tutorial support. Courses involving practical skills (e.g. Electricians) have compulsory tutorials for both the practice and testing of these.²⁷

"There is no disguising the fact that there is a Drop-out problem because some courses are perhaps too difficult or not well-prepared; because some students are perhaps ill-prepared, poorly motivated or poorly supported; or perhaps they find it difficult to adapt to a new system of learning that makes heavy demands on their qualities of application and self-discipline. The

27 Rumble & Harry, 1982, p.134.

reasons are likely to be many and varied".²⁸

Economic Effectiveness

In 1979, an Evaluation Mission from the United Kingdom Overseas Development Administration visited the AIOU in connection with the phasing of further aid support. It was of the view that "taking into account amortization of capital costs, salaries and other recurrent expenditure, together with student numbers, the AIOU would progressively show considerable cost advantages over other conventional institutions...(they stressed that). AIOU per capita costs decrease as student numbers grow, in that capital and recurrent costs (e.g., salaries, broadcasts) remain virtually the same irrespective of student numbers".²⁹

CONCLUSION

This University has shown that it can provide programmes of a very wide range, from basic literacy projects

28 Alec Fleming, "The Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan", in Rumble & Harry, 1982, p.143.

29 Ibid., p.145.

through to post-graduate work. However, occasional problems of communication and technology do occur. Emphasis needs to be directed towards the need for functional and social education and towards women's courses. Another need is for the enhancement of the educational quality of the course materials and improvement of the actual course production process.

If there can be improvement and development of this kind, achievement by the AIOU set for it in 1974 may be brought immeasurably closer.

4. The Universidad Estatal A Distancia of Costa Rica

Perhaps one of the most prospering distance-education system in Latin America is the Universidad Estatal a Distancia of Costa Rica (UNED). Costa Rica has certain characteristics which are important to be considered before we deal with its distance education projects:

- (a) It is rather a small country in geographical area with only 50,900 square kilometres and approximately 2.2 million inhabitants.

.../-

- (b) It is the only country in Latin America that does not have an army and can, therefore, invest upto 35% of its national budget on education. It has also been very stable, politically for the past 30 years.
- (c) It has the highest literacy rate in Latin America, 87.7% of the population is literate and this figure is rising year by year.
- (d) Its national telephone system allows calls to be made throughout the country by simply dialling, without any code, area number or extra charge.³⁰

Philosophy and Objectives

Established in 1977, this new University was not meant "to enter the field of Costa Rican higher education to compete with or try to replace the other traditional universities, but rather it would try to complement them by offering a new alternative for training and education whilst working to the same academic and professional standards".³¹ The main objectives are:

30 Refer to OCHQA, M.A., "Some Basic Issues on Implementing A Distance Education System", in Pentz & Neil, Education of Adults at a Distance (London: Kegan Rag, 1981), p.202.

31 Ibid.

- to assist those sectors of the population that have limited access to the traditional centres of higher education.
- to be flexible and prompt in solving the educational needs that arise by adjusting itself to varying requirements and offering alternative solutions.
- to guarantee that its students will have the opportunities to achieve the same academic standards, at least, as can be achieved by students attending the other Universities in the country, etc.³²

Design and Implementation

The process of implementation began immediately the project had been established in 1977. It is important to note, however, that the authorities of UNED Costa Rica did not design and implement this programme by simply copying the U.K. Open University from which it took advice and guidance. It, in fact, used curriculum designs and methodology which would adapt to its own social context.

32 Ibid., p.202.

An example of this is the fact that it mainly began as a University for adults with quite specific requirements. Now, of course, it has changed and become an open system by accepting all kinds of students who have simply attended secondary school.

The students

The University opened up opportunities to persons who would otherwise not have had a chance to enter the Universities - working adults, housewives, married persons. It is not clear whether the disadvantaged sections (economically) in particular are being able to avail of this opportunity.

Media:

The basic teaching medium is the printed course book of which there is normally one per course. Limited use is made of cassette-books that is, a number of audio tapes with supporting printed materials which take the place of the basic course text. Television programmes are also produced in limited numbers and are intended to support the written course texts. Limited use of

radio began in 1980.³³

Student Drop-Out

Student drop-out is a serious problem and the main reasons are because they could not reconcile the demands of their jobs with those of their study or, they don't find sufficient time to study. A general feeling of isolation, financial or economic reasons also contribute to the drop-out number being high. As far as costs are concerned, "it is unlikely that the conventional universities have the same potential for economies of scale as UNED has. Indeed, as UNED increases numbers, so its cost-efficiency is measured by average student costs is likely to improve dramatically".³⁴

To conclude the UNED, inspite of having been in operation for less than a decade, is playing a significant part in the overall provision of higher educational opportunities in Costa Rica. A few students have already succeeded in gaining a degree.

33 Rumble & Harry, 1982, p.80.

34 Ibid., p.86.

Overall Appraisal

The very different cultural, social, political and economic environments in which distance education systems operate makes it difficult to draw direct comparisons between them. Usually, the comparison is made between the performance of traditional and non-traditional (distance education) systems operating within the same country/social context. However, this is bound to be a micro-study approach and would not be able to analyse the general purpose, objectives, and operating conditions of conventional and distance education systems.

We have generally compared the distance education systems of the different countries, with their conventional set ups, and thereby, given a brief idea of distance education as it operates in different social, cultural and economic environments.

We shall give an appraisal of the distance education systems of our case studies, on the basis of Keegan & Rumble's³⁵ criterion of attempting to establish:

35 Ibid., pp.226-227.

- (1) The 'quantity' of the learning achieved
- (2) The 'quality' of the learning achieved
- (3) The 'status' of the learning achieved
- (4) The 'relative cost' of the learning achieved

1. The quantity of the Learning Achieved

(i) To evaluate the extent to which the distance education systems widen access to education, it is quite clear that they ~~meet~~ meet a need in so far as students freely enrol on their courses. Thus, in 1981 the CCTU (China) had 417,000 students, UKOU had nearly 86,000³⁶ etc. There are also indications that at least one of them (the UKOU) appears to be "providing a second chance to people who are already socially mobile and have already aspired to non-manual jobs, mainly through the acquisition of educational qualifications", and is enabling the "middle class" descendants of 'working class' parents "to secure and legitimise this mobility".³⁷

However, this equalising of opportunities for access to higher education is going to be of "limited benefit if

36 Ibid., p.227.

37 Woolfe, R., "Education, Inequality and the Role of the Open University", Adult Education, 1977, 50, 2, pp.77-83.

the 'open' door is also a 'revolving' door through which ill prepared students pass only to re-emerge as drop-outs".³⁸

ii) Distance education systems have frequently been criticized on the grounds that their drop-out rates are unacceptably high. However, this problem can be found in some conventional set ups also.

In Costa Rica, for example, a study of student progress at the conventional Universities, showed that,³⁹ out of 316 students who entered the University of Costa Rica in 1971, 82 (25.9%) had graduated by the first semester of 1978; 77 (24.4%) were still studying; and 182 (57.6%) had dropped out.

2. The Quality of the Learning Achieved

The quality of the instructional material provided by many of the distance education systems (United Kingdom, especially) is generally recognised to be high. In fact in many setups, the quality of the learning materials is so good, that they are used in the conventional set-up also.

38 Ibid., p.227.

39 Ibid., p.228.

There are also signs that distance teaching Universities are becoming major educational publishers in their own countries (e.g. UNED in Costa Rica), and there is some evidence that their texts are being bought on the open market by students studying at conventional Universities (e.g. in Pakistan).

Escotet (1980)⁴⁰ claims that in general, distance education systems have failed to establish a real and permanent contact between the student and the lecturer.

Carnoy & Leven⁴¹ argue that much of the value of a University education is captured in its 'socialization content' and not by the examination per se and that "the average University student receives not only instruction and instructional materials' but "substantially more tutorial services, contact with fellow students, access to libraries, computers and campus lectures than does his (U.K) Open University counterpart". Hence, they suggest that the quality of the education of institutions like the United Kingdom Open University may be substantially less.

40 Refer to Ibid., p.234.

41 Carnoy & Leven, "Evaluation of Educational Media: Some Issues", Instructional Science, 4, 1975, p.396.

3. The Status of the Learning Achieved

A number of distance teaching Universities (e.g. United Kingdom Open University) have credit transfer agreements with other Universities in their countries. This is a sign of their acceptance by the educational community.

There are signs that attitudes towards institutions such as the UKOU are less sceptical now than they were when these institutions were being planned.

"In general, however, degrees gained at a distance share the fragility of all non-traditional educational programmes.- a fact which can be attributed in large part to the innate conservatism of the academic community in general and of educational administrators in particular".⁴²

While the status accorded to this system of education varies from country to country, their image needs to be changed especially amongst the society members at large and employers in particular.

42 Ibid., p.238.

4. The Relative Cost of the Learning Achieved

Economic studies of distance education systems have tended to assume that the quality of a distance education student is the same as one from a conventional systems.

If it were true that the quality of the degree gained at a distance education set up is not as high as that gained at a conventional set up, then it would mean that the benefits to the student of having the degree, or to society of educating him, are likely to be less.

Mace⁴³ has pointed out that the average age of UKOU (37 years) is much higher than those from conventional British Universities. He notes that the "labour market studies suggest that by the age 37 most people are established in their jobs" and this is bound to inhibit their mobility. In addition, UKOU graduates will have a shorter earning period in which to reap the benefit of their degree, and hence "the economic benefits of an OU degree will be below those of a (conventional University) degree". He therefore has challenged the assumptions to the contrary which profess the cost-benefitness of the distance-education students.

43 Mace, J., Mythology in the Making: Is the Open University Really Cost Effective?, High Education, 7, (295-300) (in *ibid.*, 241).

In general, we could say that distance education systems are more cost-efficient and cost-effective than conventional Universities, as is evident from our case studies.

We can also conclude that wherever, considerable emphasis has been placed on face-to-face tuitions and learning groups within distance education set ups there is likelihood of their quantity, quality and status improving; and the cost of the learning is made cheaper and hence more cost-efficient.

While teaching at a distance is being adopted in many countries in the world, there is certainly an even greater need for it in developing countries, if we are to expand educational opportunities, conventional and non-conventional, to cover a large proportion of our populations.⁴⁴

It is in this context that we shall now proceed to distance education in our own social surrounding that is, distance education as it is envisaged, formulated and implemented in the Indian context (in the next chapter) and attempt an appraisal of the same.

44 Refer to Kuhanga, N.A., "The Concept of Adult Education At a Distance and Its Application in Developing Countries", in Neil & Pentz, 1981, pp.11-12.

CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER THREEDISTANCE EDUCATION - THE INDIAN REALITY

From the previous chapter, it is evident that Distance Education has been taken to be a viable alternative to the conventional system of imparting education, in both developed and developing countries. No model from another country could be adopted in toto by any other country. Some variations and modifications have to be made to suit the peculiar conditions in each country. "However basically the distant education method is more or less the same all over".¹

As is usual with every new system, distance education in most of the developing countries had some teething troubles, and in some countries these troubles are still there. Most of these troubles were caused by resistance from the traditionalists in the universities partly due to the want of proper awareness of the innovative

1 Bakshish Singh, Distance Education in Developing Countries - with special reference to India in "Distance Education for Development" - International Seminar, September 1979 (ed., Jan R. Hakemulda).

system of distance education - lack of conviction and boldness on the part of policy-makers and educational administrators also stood in the way of development of distant education. Consequently in some of the developing countries, the distant education system has been developed only as an extension of the traditional system. However, some countries have tried to tap the potentialities of Distant Education in providing interdisciplinary, vocational and job-oriented courses.²

In this chapter we shall try to analyse the experience of Distance Education in the Indian context, where education is considered a major instrument in effecting social change. The education minister states in "The Challenge of Education", "In our conditions, the role of education is to transform a static society into one vibrant with a commitment to development and change".³ Education is recognised as a "tool for ushering in changes in an orderly manner".⁴ Further, even the Kothari Commission

2 Ibid., p.77.

3 Challenge of Education - Foreword

4 Ibid., p.2.

was of the opinion that "There is, of course, one thing about which we feel no doubt or hesitation: education, science based and in coherence with Indian culture and values, can alone provide the foundation - as also the instrument for the nation's progress, security and welfare".⁵ The National Policy of education formulated in 1968, also held the same opinion. Hence, philosophically, there has not been much of a change envisaged regarding the role and importance of conventional education in India.

India has a long history and perhaps the oldest traditions. Here, education evolved over 3,500 years ago. "There is perhaps no country where education had so early an origin. Indian educationists and Philosophers had greatly contributed to educational thought and practices. Some of them flourished at a time when the great civilizations of Greece and Rome were yet unborn. But foreign domination subdued its glory".⁶

5 Report of the Education Commission (1964-66), Foreword.

6 Aggarwal, J.C., Development and Planning of Modern Education, 1982, p.420.

According to Aggarwal⁷ four distinct periods of development can be marked in the history of Indian education - Ancient, Medieval, British and post-independence period. In ancient India, Education's chief concern was the individual. It flourished in the intimate relationship between the teacher and the pupil. The pupil lived with the teacher as a member of his family. When the Muslims came to India in the 11th century, the system of education based on maktabs and madrasas mainly for religious purposes was introduced 'The Hindu system of education, however, continued to prevail in Patagalas and in Temples".⁸ It was the British education policy which helped in the promotion of modern education, which was mainly responsible for public awakening. "Western education played an important role in revolutionising the outlook of Indian intelligentsia".⁹

With the Independence in 1947, the expert recommendations of various commissions, committees and conferences,

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., p.421.

9 Salamutullah, Education in the Social Context, NCERT, 1979, p.60.

the launching of the five year plans and the acceptance of priority claim for education matters of money and material helped in a new vista of educational reconstruction opening up.

In 1954, India's Parliament declared that the broad objective of economic policy should be to achieve the 'socialistic pattern of society'. The Resolution¹⁰ to this effect at the Avadi session of the Indian National Congress reads, "In order to realize the object of the Congress as laid down in Article-I of the Congress Constitution and to further the objectives stated in the Preamble and Directive Principles of state policy of the Constitution of India, planning should take place with a view to the establishment of a socialistic pattern of society, where the principal means of production are under social ownership or control, production is progressively speeded up and there is equitable distribution of the national wealth".

10 The Resolution quoted in S.S. Mathur, A Sociological Approach to Indian Education, Vinod Pustak Mandir, Agra, 1966, p.269.

Demographically speaking, India's population is young. About every two out of five persons are below 15 years in age. People above 60 are only 5 to 6 per cent. The distribution of the population by age has more or less maintained these features over the years as may be seen from the table below.

Table-1: Percentage Distribution of Population by Broad Age-groups (1901-1971)

Year	Age Groups		
	0-14	15-59	60 +
1901	38.6	56.3	5.1
1911	38.5	56.4	5.1
1921	39.2	55.6	5.2
1931	40.0	56.0	4.0
1941	38.2	56.9	4.9
1951	37.5	59.9	5.6
1961	41.1	54.1	4.8
1971	42.2	52.0	6.0

Source: C.L. Sapra, ed., 1980, Demographic and Educational Statistics in India (Background papers presented at the 'national' training seminar on methods for projecting school enrolment in India). Jointly organised by UNESCO and NIEPA, p.7.

From the above age-structure of India it is apparent that the majority of the population falls in the 'educationally-potential' category due to which policies regarding education of society at large are bound to be affected.

However, "although a large number of new schools, colleges and Universities were added, they still could not cope with the rising spiral of new learners. Our limited resources and priority for compulsory schooling target did not permit reckless opening of more colleges and Universities. At the same time, with our commitment to the socialistic pattern of society we could not possibly deny equal opportunities of education to all the sections of society. We had, therefore, to think of non-formal systems of imparting higher education, and that is how correspondence courses came to be instituted in some of our Universities.¹¹

We have mentioned earlier in this study that distance students are mainly adults. Most of our instances to substantiate our study have also been derived from

11 Bakshish Singh, Distance Education in Developing Countries with Special Reference to India, p.77; In, International Seminar on Distance Education for Development, 1979.

University level - distance - learning set-ups in other countries. Our examples in the Indian case shall also focus mainly on the Open Universities and other Universities offering distance education. For this purpose, a brief overview of the trends of higher education since independence in India would be needed.

About two decades ago, the Education Commission expressed the feeling that "There is a general feeling in India that the situation in higher education is unsatisfactory and even alarming in some ways, that the average standards have been falling and that rapid expansion has resulted in lowering quality...Many of our educationists and public men have not fully realised how serious are the actual conditions, academic and physical, that obtain in colleges and Universities".¹²

The enrolment in higher education in 1951 was about 173,000 which shot up to 22,34,000 in 1973-74 and to 33,59,000 in 1983-84. However, as a recent study on higher education observes, "The search for a white collar job with the help of a passport provided by the University continues to be the main motivating force behind higher

12 Report of the Education Commission (1964-66), NCERT, New Delhi, 1971, p.503.

education in India". Even the Government annual report of the Ministry of Education, contends that "The quality of education at all stages continues to cause considerable dissatisfaction. At the elementary stage we have so far not been able to achieve universalisation, the school system is unsufficiently provided in terms of teaching aids, the quality and commitment of teachers as widely perceived has not been up to the mark. There is overcrowding and dilution of standards in the higher education and there are sub-standard technical teaching institutions. The system needs to be overhauled urgently to improve the quality of education and to make it a dynamic tool for modernising the country".¹³ The Planning Commission in its Approach to the seventh plan sums up the above by stating that "The education system is widely felt in its content and process to be dysfunctional to the requirements of the country and need of radical changes".¹⁴

Apart from administrative and financial factors, the four main areas in higher education that cause concern and deserve immediate attention are: (a) inequities;

13 Annual Report for 1984-85, Ministry of Education, Government of India, p.121.

14 The approach to the Seventh Five Year Plan, 1985-90, Planning Commission, New Delhi, July 1984.

(b) quality; (c) rigidity; and (d) relevance.¹⁵ That there are inequalities between the Scheduled Castes and others, between the Scheduled Tribes and others, between the males and females and between the developed and less developed regions have been forcefully brought out by the survey conducted for National Commission on Teachers in Higher Education.¹⁶

According to the Census, a person who can both read and write with understanding in any language is literate. The progress of literacy in India from 1961 to 1971 is given in Table-2.

Table-2; Literacy in India, 1901-1971

Census Year	Percentage of literate population to total population	Percentage of literate males to total male population	Percentage of literate females to total female population
1901	5.35	9.83	0.69
1911	5.92	10.56	1.05
1921	7.16	12.21	1.81
1931	9.50	15.59	2.93
1941	16.10	24.90	7.30
1951	16.67	24.95	7.93
1961	24.02	34.44	12.95
1971	29.46	39.45	18.72
1981	36.23	46.89	24.82

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15 IGN Open University, Project Report, September 1985 Educational Consultants India Ltd., New Delhi, p.7.

16 Higher Education in India: A Survey, op.cit., pp.29-73.

Note: The data for 1901 to 1931 is for undivided India.
The data for 1951 excludes Jammu & Kashmir.

Source: i. Demographic and Educational Statistics in
India, p.8.

ii. India 1985, Publication Division, Government
of India, p.66.

The literacy rate has no doubt increased between 1961 and 1971, but the increase is slower than the previous decade. The table also clearly shows that males continue to be far more literate than females.

Literacy is one of the major indicators of social advancement. From Table-3 it is evident that the percentage of literacy among communities other than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes showed an increase from 33.8 in 1971 to 41.22 in 1981; the corresponding increases for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has been very low especially their female literacy. All these figures are bound to manifest the inequities existent in the conventional education system which distance education envisages to redeem.

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Table-3: Literacy Rates Among Scheduled Castes/
Scheduled Tribes and the Rest of the
Population

Year	Rest of the Population	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes
1961	27.06 (16.59)	10.27 (03.29)	08.53 (3.16)
1971	33.80 (17.11)	14.67 (06.44)	11.30 (4.85)
1981	41.22 (29.51)	21.30 (10.93)	16.35 (8.04)

(Figures in brackets represent female literacy percentages).

Source: Seventh Five Year Plan, Planning Commission,
Government of India, p.330.

The formal education system, would be unable to meet the demands and challenges of educational development. The total enrolment in higher education has now reached a level of 33.5 lakhs. In the coming twenty years, as in the previous twenty years, the enrolment is likely to quadruple and reach the 130 lakh mark.¹⁷ Besides, its incapacity to meet the growing demand in terms of enrolment, the formal educational system has certain

17 Development of Higher Education during Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90): Draft Proposals, UGC. New Delhi, p.3.

inherent limitations. By its very nature it is restrictive in approach and not everyone can take advantage of it. It covers only a small non-working population which constitutes an even smaller section of the total population of the country...If the deficiencies and inadequacies of our educational system are to be corrected, there is a need to develop, strengthen and implement a non-formal system as a parallel, complementary and additional system. A properly blended and comprehensive system of formal and non-formal education will be an answer to some of our problems in education. "The non-formal system reduces the costs, it makes education accessible to those sections (especially the poor, disadvantaged and those resident in remote rural and hilly areas) who are now-largely outside the system. Another advantage is that it can relate education more effectively to development. The uniqueness of the system is that it can fully utilise the new educational technologies and promote quality, quantity and equality in education -- The modern age stresses on the need for universal education and indeed on Universality of education. The limitations of finance, physical facilities and availability of adequate number of teachers to cater to a face-to-face pattern of education, now cry out for a suitable alternative...To be sure, non-formal system and distance

education are not synonymous. However, in a broad sense, distance education is one of the conspicuous manifestations of the contemporary movements of non-formal education. If non-formal education is characterised by its emphasis on getting away from the restrictions of the formal system, distance education provides the necessary concept to achieve that breakthrough".¹⁸

Thus, the need for distance education in India can not be undermined as, in a developing economy like ours, expansion of education at all levels is inevitable - partly due to the need of the economy for educated people and skilled manpower and partly due to the government's commitment to universalise education. Besides, in a growing economy, people generally entertain high aspirations. They desire to go up in their job positions as well as acquire better jobs. "In the Indian economy, higher positions and better jobs are linked with higher educational qualifications. To meet their demands for

¹⁸ Indira Gandhi National Open University, Report, September 1985, pp.8-9. Educational Consultants India Ltd., New Delhi.

higher education, correspondence courses need to be introduced in more universities, and more options need to be given, to meet the growing demand for higher education".¹⁹

When we achieved independence, the need for a new educational system was often and forcefully stated by the national leadership. Jawaharlal Nehru, as back as 1948, while opening an educational conference, said: "Wherever conferences were held in the past to form a plan for education in India the tendency as a rule was to maintain the existing system with slight modifications. This must not happen now. Great changes have taken place in the country and the educational system must keep pace with them. The entire basis of educational system must be revolutionised".²⁰

Even J.P. Naik in 1965 expressed the feeling that "what has happened is merely an expansion of the earlier system with a few marginal changes in content and

19 Padmanabhan, K., Distance Education for Educating One Billion by 2000 A.D. Paper presented in National Conference on Distance Education, November 9-10, 1986, Ahmedabad.

20 Quoted in Naik, J.P., 1965, Educational Planning in India, Allied Publishers, Bombay, p.13.



technique".²¹ He surmised, "In short, while we have talked of 'revolutionary changes' we have practised only a 'moderate reformism'...²²

To answer the need for expanding education, faster and cheaper, correspondence education in India was conceived as a pilot project in the University of Delhi. The success of this experiment encouraged other Universities to take up instruction through the distance education technique. In 1985, 31 Universities have taken up instruction by correspondence at various levels.²³ It has been estimated that the University system alone provides instruction via distance education to nearly 400,000 students at various levels in the University structure. This implies that nearly 11 per cent of total enrolment in the Universities is accounted for by distance education.²⁴

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., pp.19-20.

23 It may be noted that the term 'distance education' and 'correspondence education' are being used synonymously contrary to our earlier distinction made between the two (see Introduction). However, in the Indian context it is contended that the term 'distance education' is of very recent origin. For the first two and a half decades, it has mainly been in the nature of 'correspondence education'. Also refer to 'Distance Education in India', Ruddar Dutt, paper presented in January 1987 India International Centre.

24 Ibid.

Three major stages of the growth of distance education in India, have been outlined by Ruddar Dutt:

1. Pre-Take-off Stage:

This stage can be identified in the sixties, when only 4 Institutes of Correspondence education were established viz., Delhi (1962), Punjab, Patiala (1968), Meerut (1969) and Mysore (1969). "The sixties was, therefore a period during which the idea of distance education took birth and was taking roots in Indian soils".²⁵

2. The Take-off Stage:

During the decade (1970-80), 19 Universities started Directorates of Correspondence Education and thus a major thrust to distance education was provided. More and more Universities took to distance education as an alternative technique of education. Moreover, whereas during the sixties, as an experimental measure, only undergraduate courses were started, it is in the seventies that Institutes of Correspondence Courses started Post-Graduate and diploma/certificate courses.

25 Ibid., p.2.

3. Drive Towards Maturity:

Till the end of the seventies, distance education was attached to the conventional University system. It could, therefore, work within its ambit. "There was a strong demand made in various quarters about the need for the establishment of an Open University which should co-ordinate the work of all the directorates in the country. It was also felt that an apex institution of this kind fully devoted to the development of distance education will be very useful".²⁶

In 1982, the Government of Andhra Pradesh took the first step to establish an autonomous institution of the level of a University to develop distance education. It set up the Andhra Pradesh Open University and in 1985, the Government of India decided to set up the Indira Gandhi National Open University.²⁷ Several state governments of India have initiated action towards the establishment of Open Universities.

A review of correspondence education reveals that as against 40,753 students receiving education through

26 Ibid., p.3.

27 Refer to the Indira Gandhi National Open University Act, 1985 (No.50 of 1985).

this technique in 1971-72, by 1975-76, total enrolment went up to 59,445 indicating a growth rate of 9.7 per cent per annum. But during 1975-76 to 1982-83, enrolment went up from 59,445 to 1,59,712 giving a growth rate of 15.2 per cent per annum.

From Tables-4 and 5, it may be noted that the annual rate of growth of enrolment in correspondence courses during the last 12 years has been much higher than that in the Universities. For the period, 1975-76 to 1982-83, the annual rate of growth of enrolment was 15.2 per cent in correspondence courses as against a mere 3.7 per cent in the Universities. From the tables it is also clear that greater expansion of distance education has taken place at the post-graduate level during 1975-76 to 1982-83 than at the under-graduate level.

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Table-4: Growth of Enrolment in Correspondence Courses
in Indian Universities

Year	Under- Graduate	Post- Graduate (including research)	Diploma/ Certificate	Total
1971-72	0,30,169 (74.0)	06,172 (15.1)	04,412 (10.8)	0,40,753 (100.0)
1975-76	0,48,016 (80.7)	11,429 (19.3)	...	0,59,445 (100.0)
1982-83	1,05,628 (66.2)	51,017 (31.9)	03,067 (1.0)	1,59,712 (100.0)
<u>Annual Compound Growth Rate of Expansion</u>				
1971-72 to 1975-76	12.29	16.63		9.73
1975-76 to 1982-83	10.95	23.81		15.18

Source: Computed from the data provided by the University Grants Commission Report for the year 1972-73, 1976-77, 1982-83.

Refer to Ruddar Dutt, Distance Education in India, paper presented in India International Centre, New Delhi, 1987, pp.5-6.

Table-5: Growth of Enrolment in Universities and
Affiliated Colleges in India

Year	Under- Graduate	Post- Graduate (including research)	Diploma/ Certificate	Total
1971-72	18,35,077 (88.9)	1,95,338 (09.5)	34,626 (1.6)	20,65,041 (100.0)
1975-76	21,46,919 (88.5)	2,38,207 (09.8)	40,983 (1.5)	24,26,109 (100.0)
1982-83	27,45,381 (87.5)	3,45,265 (11.0)	46,340 (1.5)	31,36,986 (100.0)
<u>Compound Annual Growth Rate of Enrolment</u>				
1971-72 to 1975-76	4.0	5.1	4.2	4.0
1975-76 to 1982-83	3.6	5.5	1.8	3.7

Source: Computed from the data provided in the University Grants Commission Report for the year 1972-73, 1976-77 and 1982-83.

Refer to Ruddar Dutt, Distance Education in India, paper presented in India International Centre, New Delhi, 1987, pp.5-6.

The various correspondence courses offered by many of the Universities in India, have been expected to cater to the needs of the following categories of students.^{27a}

- "(a) Students who had to discontinue their formal education owing to pecuniary and other circumstances;
- (b) Students in geographically remote areas;
- (c) Students who had to discontinue their education because of lack of aptitude and motivation but who may later on become motivated;
- (d) Students who cannot find a seat or do not wish to join a regular college or University department although they have the necessary qualifications to pursue higher education;
- (e) Individuals who look upon education as a life-long activity and may either like to pursue their knowledge in an existing discipline or to acquire knowledge in new areas; and
- (f) in-service persons."

Most of the courses offered under this system by the Indian Universities are the same courses offered for their regular students. "After 1970s a few vocational and employment-oriented Diploma courses in

27a Annual Report, UGC, 1982-83.

Information science, Journalism, Tourism and Hotel Management, Library Science, Broadcasting, Office Organisations etc., are being offered by a few Universities".²⁸

The most important difference and perhaps the only difference, between the correspondence system and the Conventional University system is that learning through face-to-face contact is substituted by learning through correspondence material. A great majority of admissions in these institutions are to the conventional courses than the new and innovative courses mentioned. There are regional variations also in correspondence education.²⁹ In the South, this system is more popular than elsewhere. The southern Universities account for 63 per cent of the total enrolments under the system, Northern Universities 26.2 per cent, Western Universities 9.1 per cent and the Eastern Universities only 1.5 per cent.

28 Indira Gandhi National Open University Report, 1985, Educational Consultants India Ltd., pp.29-30.

29 See Ruddar Dutt, Planning & Development of Distance Education, Journal of Higher Education, no.3, vol.3, Spring 1984, p.309.

An examination of the working of the institutions of correspondence education in the country reveals that they are facing several problems and constraints which inhibit their proper and effective functioning to make any real impact. Some of the limitations which contributed to the ineffectiveness of correspondence education in India are:³⁰

- (a) Most of the correspondence institutes do not have competent and adequate staff. Best teachers are not posted to work in these institutes. As a result, they have low motivation;
- (b) More than one University in a state started correspondence courses thereby duplicating efforts resulting in low enrolments in many places;
- (c) Lessons are prepared in a hurry with no regard to quality;
- (d) Not much attention is paid to the assignments; they are not evaluated, corrected and returned to the students in time;
- (e) Most of the Correspondence Courses do not have 'study centres' and personal contact programmes are organised by only a few institutions;
- (f) Too much reliance is placed on the printed material and latest communication technology is hardly made use of;

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Arun K. Gupta. The status of correspondence Education in India - A Survey, in John S. Daniel et. al., (eds.), Learning at a Distance - A World Perspective, Edmonton, Athabasca University.

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- (g) There is considerable delay in the despatch of lessons to the students;
- (h) Bodies charged with the running of these institutions are not organised properly;
- (i) The system has the same rigidities in the courses offered as the formal system, the students offer the same courses and appear for the same examinations as the regular students;
- (j) Rarely laboratory and library facilities are provided and where they exist they are much below the standard;
- (k) They do not have identity of their own as they work within the University structure. The latter pay perfunctory attention to the former; and
- (l) Rarely efforts were made to evaluate and check the standards of these correspondence courses. Therefore, their growth and working is haphazard leaving much to be desired.

"Above all, most of these institutes are considered as revenue generating centres rather than those catering to the new approach to education. This disposition of the conventional Universities leaves little scope for experimentation and innovation and acts as a damper to the adoption of modern education technology".³¹

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International Council for Distance Education, 1982, p.15. Ram Reddy, Distance Teaching in India, A Profile of Andhra Pradesh Open University, in Evaluation of High Education Results, Universidad Nacional De Education A Distancia, Madrid, 1983, pp.287-288.

In the recent past, institutes of correspondence studies of some Universities have also started adopting some of the important features of the Open University system. Open admission policy is one such feature. For example, in Mysore University no eligibility qualifications are stipulated (except an age restriction) for enrolling into under-graduate and post-graduate courses. The SNDT Women's University Bombay, under Open University Programme, admits women without any previous schooling to join B.A. and B.Com., courses on the basis of an entrance test.

The Government of Andhra Pradesh in 1982 decided to establish an Open University to provide "access to higher education to the adult population of the State, for upgrading their functional capacities and improving quality of their life in context of broader social and political objectives of equalisation of educational opportunities and the emergence of a new concept of life long education".³² To give shape to this policy,

32 See, "Towards An Open Learning System", Report of the Committee on the Establishment of an Open University, Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad, 1982, pp.1-2.

the government appointed a Committee and based on the Committee's Report, the Government established the Andhra Pradesh Open University in 1982. Providing education to the distant learner is becoming an accepted policy of many governments. The basic objective is to make higher education available to those who are denied and deprived.

In a country of India's magnitude and diversity, the formal pattern cannot meet the educational needs and demands of its growing population. The policy makers in India, therefore, have realised the imperatives and inevitability of distance education to provide access to higher education to all those deprived sections of the community who could not avail of it earlier. "Another important concern is the improvement of the quality of higher education".³³ The quantitative expansion of higher education has led to starting of "innumerable sub-standard colleges which have adversely affected the quality of education. It is, therefore, necessary to initiate appropriate measures to set right this trend.

33 IGNOU Report, op.cit., p.36.

One of the important measures is to use the Open Universities for this purpose".³⁴

Taking the case of the National Open University, set up in 1985, the objects of this institution clearly emphasize that the new University shall make use of communication technology to provide:

- (a) Opportunities for higher education to a large segment of population;
- (b) Promote educational well-being of the community generally;
- (c) encourage open university and distance education system in the country; and
- (d) to co-ordinate and determine standards in such systems.

"From this it is clear that this University has to strive to strengthen distance education in the country which will broaden the access to higher education providing flexibility in open learning programme that will suit the needs of various categories of learners".³⁵

Further, the same report is of the opinion that "if education in the country has to cater to the needs

34 Ibid., pp.36-37.

35 Ibid., p.42.

of the weaker sections of the society and also to persons staying in remote rural and hilly areas; it may not be possible within the constraints of the resources available to expand the formal system of education. There are several universities in the country which are providing facilities for higher education through correspondence courses and hardly any of these have taken advantage of the development in modern technology...we feel that since distance education is an alternative system of education, it would be desirable that an agency be created which could be made responsible for the organisation and development of institutions which provide for distance education in the country. This would also be charged with the task of guiding the different programmes designed to maintain high standards and excellence in education. In the present circumstances, we are of the view that this responsibility could be entrusted to National Open University. It would liaise with the state level Open Universities and help them in planning their activities. The University should provide leadership and develop mechanisms for effective cooperation between distance teaching institutions...The University, therefore, in fulfilment of its objectives should be a pace-setter in

Distance Education in India. It should be able to serve as a model to be emulated".³⁶

As far as the clientele is concerned, the National Open University is intended to cater to the needs of a variety of people. For instance, those living in urban and rural areas, in the plains and in the hill areas, housewives and school drop-outs, employed and unemployed etc. In formulating its academic programmes, the University intends to keep in view all these categories of people and design courses to meet their requirements. An important aspect of this University's policy-makers is their emphasis on people living in urban areas being served by the formal educational system, to a considerable extent. Therefore, the Open University intends to give priority to the needs of the people living in rural areas and to such other sections of the community.

As far as the choice of Media is concerned in the Open University, they aim to apply an integrated media approach i.e. printed material, broadcasting, and audio-visual aids supported by tutorial system, contact classes,

36 Ibid., pp.35-36.

summer schools and similar other methods. They opined however that they "should make use of atleast in the formative years, the print and the face-to-face contact for effective distance teaching with audio and video use being supplementary".³⁷

If one takes the case of the Andhra Pradesh Open University which was established in 1982, we see that its academic work commenced in 1983 only. Its objectives have also been similar to other distance learning systems, in the world, mainly:³⁸

- "(a) to provide educational opportunities to those students who could not take advantage of institutions of higher learning;
- (b) to realise equality of educational opportunities for higher education for a large segment of the population including those in employment, women including housewives and adults who wish to upgrade their education or acquire knowledge and studies in various fields through distance education;
- (c) to provide flexibility with regard to eligibility for enrolment, age of entry, choice of courses, methods of learning, conduct of examinations; and operation of programmes;

37 Ibid., p.73.

38 Reddy, C. Narayana, "Andhra Pradesh Open University - Some Reflections" in University News, vol. XXIV, no.42, Nov.8, 1986, p.17, AIU, New Delhi.

- (d) to provide programmes complementary to those of the existing universities in the state in the field of higher learning so as to maintain the highest standards on par with those of the best Universities in the country; and,
- (e) to make provision for research and for the advancement and dissemination of knowledge.

"The University has made rapid strides within a short span of four years and its enrolment has increased from 7,500 in 1983 to 55,000 in 1986".³⁹

The present Vice-Chancellor of this University contends with the fact that, despite the multi-media approach expected in Open Education, the most important component of the learning package still continues to be the print material, though in this University also, despite many constraints (mainly of resources), the course material, personal contact-cum-counselling classes, audio-video media of instructions, radio lessons and summer schools together act as an integrated package.

39 Ibid.

As the first batch of the University, moved out in December 1986, an evaluative study on an empirical basis, would be beyond the scope of this study, at this stage.

As far as the problems faced by this University are concerned, "the need for coordination is utmost in the Open University system...it is better to ensure that atleast 50 per cent of the course material is ready before announcing its academic programme for various courses".⁴⁰ Another problem that had to be faced by this University was that of translating the course material into the regional language media, which takes considerable time and supervision to be done.

Then another problem is their dependence on existing colleges for infrastructural facilities, like use of buildings, laboratories etc., which may sometimes clash with the time-tables/interests of the conventional set-ups. Then, "unlike the traditional Universities,

40 Ibid., p.19.

the open University has to regularly communicate with the students by post and the press. Despatch of course material requires careful planning and coordination with the postal authorities".⁴¹

According to a study by Ruddar Dutt,⁴² the distance education institutions in India are using the following inputs to impart learning to their students:

1. Reading materials
2. Personal contact programmes
3. Students Response sheets/Assignments
4. Audio and Video cassettes and Radio and T.V. broadcasts.
5. Laboratory facilities for science and other applied courses.
6. Library-cum-study centres with facilities for guidance by the teachers.

Reading Materials are prepared by every distance education institute for every course since this is considered to be a basic input of distance teaching. In

41 Ibid.

42 Refer to Ruddar Dutt, Distance Education in India, paper presented in a Seminar on "Open Learning Systems" in India International Centre, January 13-14, 1987.

this connection, it would be appropriate to point out that there is a large scale duplication of work performed by the different distance education directorates and open universities producing almost similar reading materials. As far as the writing of course materials is also concerned, it is not assigned to very competent teachers. Besides, the remuneration paid is a paltry sum of Rs.150/- to Rs.200/- per lesson.⁴³

The personal contact programme remains a difficulty in India because except for a very few courses, where it is compulsory, it remains optional for students to attend, besides, as per the University Grants Commission guidelines, "personal contact programme should be organised only at centres where there is a concentration of nearly 200 students. Consequently, personal contact programme gets restricted to the headquarters of the directorates and few other centres".⁴⁴ Some of the major difficulties in attending the personal contact programmes are:

43 The Indira Gandhi Open University has raised the rate of remuneration for writing of reading materials to a figure of Rs.800-Rs.1000 per lesson of about 5000 words - which would certainly attract competent teachers. Needless to add, this long-term perspective should have been realized earlier in our country.

44 Ruddar Dutt, op.cit., p.16.

1. Employers do not grant them leave for the purpose at a stretch for 7-14 days.
2. The costs involved in personal contact programme are very high.
3. In an under-developed country like ours, people don't have the finances to pay for these personal contact programmes.
4. The distance could be a hindrance.

As a consequence, only 50-60 per cent of the students, mostly residing in the nearby areas where the personal contact programmes are held, are able to avail of this facility.

Taking the third input, response sheet assignments, it is generally felt that in case the response sheets are not sent in time, the students lose interest and stop submitting response sheets after some time. The situation regarding this, "as it prevails in India today is not encouraging and needs much to be desired".⁴⁵

When we take the next input -- Radio Broadcasts, Television, Audio and Video cassettes, we see that Radio

talks have been used by correspondence institutes, for instance the school of correspondence courses, Delhi University, broadcasts nearly 700 talks per year from the Delhi station of the All India Radio. These talks in nine subjects are given both in Hindi and English. However, radio talks have their limitations as all students must be free at the specified time and, also the art of listening requires a high level of concentration which few students possesses and, therefore, the students can not grasp the lessons in their entirety. Besides, "the student cannot play back the talk and thus assimilate at his own pace".⁴⁶

So far, in India, we have not used Television as a medium of instruction at the level of higher education.

Audio cassettes and video cassettes are considered to be much more effective but the "investment required is very heavy. Besides, "In the University system more especially in social sciences, in order to preserve academic freedom, excessive dependence on state media like All India Radio and Doordarshan should be avoided".⁴⁷

46 Ibid., p.19.

47 Ibid.

Thus, despite our attempt to ape it, the United Kingdom model, in its totality, may not suit or be applicable to the Indian situation, mainly because of lack of resources. However, media can make distance education in India more effective. "...it is possible to use various sensory experiences to teach the same point in different ways through different media..."⁴⁸

When we consider the question of financing distance education in India, we see that "the question of financing of distance education is intimately linked with our vision of distance education. Although every academician speaks of developing it as an alternative viable technique of education as against traditional formal teaching, but in practice distance education is reduced to the supply of reading materials plus the ritual of a few days - say a week - of personal contact programme...This view has been prevalent in India during the entire period of two decades (1962-82) and very few institutions were able to break this notion and attempted to provide a modicum of student services".⁴⁹

48 Chib, S.S., 1977, Teaching by Correspondence in India - Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi.

49 Ruddar Dutt, Financing of Distance Education, paper presented in National Conference on Distance Education, November 1986, Ahmedabad.

How do the costs of distance teaching compare with those of studying in traditional way? Which system is more efficient? According to K.S. Sharma⁵⁰ we are faced with five major difficulties in answering such questions. Firstly, the cost of distance education cannot be determined with exactitude as we determine with the help of books of accounts. The cost figures thus obtained constitute an imaginary quantity that cannot simply be derived from such data as provided by books, accounts bills or receipts. Expenses in distance education, by contrast, reflect real money transactions. The second is, that measures of output are notoriously difficult. We can measure the cost of education to some extent though not with accuracy but it is not possible to measure its benefits or calculate its price. The third, relates to students. It is difficult for a non-government distance teaching institution to keep track of its students, to discover how they perform in examinations or what effect the institution has on their lives. Data on the effects are difficult to find even if it were possible to quantify

50 Refer to K.S. Sharma, Cost-Effective Mechanism in Distance Education: A Conceptual Framework - paper presented in National Conference on Distance Education, November 1986, Ahmedabad.

them. Another difficulty is regarding the multi-media approach - it is easy enough to calculate the costs of producing and correspondence text but the broadcast components can not be calculated in exact terms. The final difficulty arises in comparing those students who work part-time with those who do not.

Without answering these questions, the efficacy of distance education in principle cannot be established, according to the writer. From his paper, one can surmise that there is probably a minimum number of students, below which distance education is unlikely to be cost-effective than the conventional alternative. "That minimum limit depends, of course, on the sophistication of the teaching methods, that are used and on the extent of face-to-face support given to students".⁵¹

If we go into the limitations of distance education in the Indian context, we can agree with the fact that, "at the very outset, the idea of an Open University, when considered for India, will have to take a large number of factors into account. Due to our technological and consequently economic and commercial under-development,

51 Ibid.

there is an inbred lacuna in the nature of our higher education, namely, lack of expertise and specialisation... when a job, irrespective of inclination, talent or discipline, expertise or excellence becomes the only goal of a University degree, everything else noteworthy in the name of education is doomed".⁵²

Again "in our situation, with television still a highly localised luxury, and video-tapes and other learning aids not in general use, the Open University might seem to be no more than mere correspondence courses under a more impressive level".⁵³

A fairly pessimistic viewpoint regarding distance education has been expressed by Kishore Valicha, according to whom, "the inevitable acceptance of a contemporary industrial cultural society is bound to pose problems in an India that is still largely wedded to a tradition-bound and somewhat lethargic culture...Distance education as a system entails considerable teamwork...A culture that is lethargic tends to promote a highly inflated individual ego. This makes collisional effort difficult. The

52 Anand, Stayapal, University Without Walls, Vikas Publishers, 1979, p.51.

53 John V.V., "The Parallel Academy", Times of India, 13 September 1974.

individual tends to work for his own ends rather than for certain common ends. Each views his interest as part from the interests of the team and of the task to which each has committed himself or herself. There is not only a lack of professionalism but there is a pervasion of special egotistical wants that bog the system down and politicize it...It is possible therefore that the open learning system in India will go the way most things do...It may become yet another white elephant...testifying to our national pastime of welcoming whatever is western and alluring".⁵⁴

Giving an instance of the School of Correspondence Courses, University of Delhi, A.S. Vats and C. Prabha⁵⁵ are of the opinion that "this institution is not treated at par with other colleges by the academic community despite the fact that it is a University maintained institution. Throughout the last two decades it has been used as a dumping ground for school leavers, who fail to get admission in regular colleges".

54 Kishore Valicha, "The Concept of Distance Education", paper presented in NCDE, November 9-10, 1986, Ahmedabad.

55 A.S. Vats and C. Prabha, Distance Education in India Concepts and Realities in Teachers Movement, 6(1), 1985, pp.25-30.

A large majority of our people - the Backward Classes, physically disabled or the socially disabled - women, for instance, remain beyond the functioning of our educational institutions - i.e. the conventional set up of education does not have a wide enough coverage in India.* It is this social distance that is expected to be covered by the distance education systems established in the country. "The introduction of Distance Education for the backward classes/regions of our country presupposes the existence of some functional requisites, for instance, if education is given through mass media, it assumes that the consumers possess radios, televisions, newspapers and other techniques and tools which are used for imparting knowledge. Possession of all these articles cost the consumer. The cost varies at least from Rs.300 to about Rs.3000, if a transistor set or a television set is purchased. Owning equipment of Distance Education is not sufficient. It also requires a regular service of electric supply and the services of mechanics for repairs etc., postal services travel expenses for occasional contacts are the other necessities for maintaining the programmes of Distance Education".⁵⁶ Besides, according to the same writer,

56 Talesra, Hem Lata, Distance Education, Backward Classes and the New Social Order in University News, vol.XXIV, no.42, November 8, 1986, p.30.

* See Tables 2 and 3.

"It is easy to conceive of starting programmes of Distance Education but it requires a large scale exercise to find out whether the weaker classes of the society possesses the infrastructure for consuming the Distance Education programme".⁵⁷

U.V. Reddy⁵⁸ while outlining the barriers to distance teaching is of the opinion that a lack of specific objectives, goals and well defined policies. On the part of the educational institution producing the programme, can be a major obstacle. Other problems according to her could be enlisted as:

- lack of cultural or ethnic or linguistic homogeneity among the students may place the educational institution in an awkward situation of producing programmes which may meet the requirements of the dominant group;
- finance, personnel, inadequate facilities for the production and distribution of the material may reduce the effectiveness of the programme;
- The media can't act alone and so can't the learner - without effective support and followup devices from teachers;

57 Ibid.

58 Refer to U.V. Reddy, "Mass Media and Distance Teaching" in S. Parmaji, Distance Education, (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1984), pp.20-22.

Adding some more, S. Parmaji⁵⁹ is of the opinion that:

- there could be a possibility of a lack of student-teacher and even student-student rapport which may hinder efficacious feedback system;
- there could be an over-dependence on correspondence material (partly due to paucity of other (non-print media));
- possibility of relative out-datedness of the information communicated;
- lack of adequate knowledge about the type of innovations to be used (in underdeveloped or developing nations).

Adding to this, we feel, that distance education requires the student to be highly independent, self-disciplined and motivated. Also, women, lower caste/class members, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes would be at a disadvantage, if the system is not supported at the local political level.

To offer a solution to the above problems of implementing distance education, we wish to quote Satyapal Anand⁶⁰ who feels that "what we need really

59 Refer to S. Parmaji, 1984, Distance Education.

60 Anand, op.cit., pp.52-54.

is not an open University but something of a new system which would adopt two features of the American "University without walls", modified to suit the Indian conditions, which will be a departure from the British system. One feature of the "University Without Walls" is that it allows its units a large freedom to develop special courses tailored to meet the needs of local groups of learners and even provides for programmes of independent study. The other is that students formally enrolled in the traditional institutions could supplement their regular programme or replace some of it by courses under the University without walls...when in the hopefully near future, the weaker institutions will not go to the wall, but will find the services of a 'University Without Walls' a source of strength in their own programmes".

Further, "Emphasising non-formal education does not necessarily mean degrading formal education. It does, however, mean developing a new dimension of education which can provide learning experience for a much larger proportion of the population in place and environments in which they live".⁶¹

61 Ibid., p.54.

Thus, we have seen that distance education as envisaged in the Indian context has many well-intended manifest functions of reaching out to those beyond the reach of conventional education - latently, however, it may be doing quite the contrary because of its many limitations which we have enumerated above. Our social context cannot be thought of as apart from the model (distance education) being applied to it. And, as we have seen, distance education in India is merely an extension of or perhaps a new name for 'correspondence education' which has been on in the country for about two decades. The drawbacks of correspondence education in the country cannot of course be wished away while establishing a broader notion of the same method of imparting education. So obviously, there has to be a spill-over effect. As the two Open Universities established in the country are of very recent origin, empirical evidence to substantiate our argument has been beyond the scope of this study.

Distance education, therefore we reiterate, as we propounded in our hypothesis, may not necessarily make a wide dent in the country's illiteracy unless something is done about the infrastructural problems, financial

resources allocated, and a basic change in the cultural ethos of the society.

We do not however leave the solution to a radical societal change of the system - as Marxists would propound, nor do we feel that the distance education model applied per se, on the Indian set-up is instrumental for the needs of our society, or, is functional to it in every sense.

Our stand goes beyond these two approaches and we feel that with minor changes in the model, we could apply it more usefully on the system. Two seemingly different models of face-to-face education and 'distance' education could be easily continued or supplemented to implement a much more 'feasible' model and method of education.

Taking the two major theoretical perspectives, consensus (functionalist) and conflict, from which we wish to borrow, we feel that these two views may not necessarily be two opposed or incompatible perspectives as both deal with a macro-approach to society. Thus we do not accept one and radically reject the other. Just

as in any social system there can be unity despite diversities, the 'distance education' and 'conventional' education models can be complementary to each other. Despite differences in technique, their basic inherent objectives are the same -- those of equalisation of opportunities, reaching out to the masses, especially the deprived sections, etc.

We do not feel that distance education should displace face-to-face education because the latter has certain advantages of class-room teaching (involvement, regular supervision etc.) which distance education on its own as a separate entity can not hope to achieve. Our own perspective could be labelled as the holistic approach where we are borrowing from the two differing perspectives, to arrive at a sort of mid-way solution or synthesis, where we envisage a change in the existing model of (distance) education without any need for revolutionary upheavals in the infrastructure of society. Needless to add, a total revolution of the Marxist kind would not be possible, in the near future at least, in the Indian context. One reason why we say this is due to the fact that inciting the masses on ethnic lines seems to be much

easier and effective than on merely class-based interests. This has been evidenced by the many communal riots our country has gone through where 'class' has generally cut across ethnic affiliations - more so, ironically, in the urban areas than in the rural ones where most of our educated elite abide!

We do, however, feel that distance education in the Indian context would have considerable future, if handled properly with the right priorities in mind.

CONCLUSION

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Providing education to the distant learner is gradually becoming an accepted policy of many governments. The basic objective is to make education available to those who are denied and deprived, which is being implemented by establishing Open Universities and other distance education institutions (Open School, School of Correspondence courses etc.) all over the world. Though the nomenclature and certain objectives may vary from country to country, one would have to agree that the idea of distance education has gained momentum and acceptability throughout the world. This is more so when the desire for knowledge and demand for degrees is universal, whereas the resources with governments, to establish and run the conventional type of Universities are quite limited.

From the preceding chapters, we have inferred that the reasons for founding distance teaching universities were mainly:

- the need felt in many countries to augment university education generally;

- a wish to serve society at large by offering opportunities for study to adults (especially the disadvantaged groups);
- a realization that adults with jobs, familial and social commitments comprise the majority of prospective part-time university students;
- the need for specialisation or further training at an advanced level;
- the need to encourage educational innovation;and also,
- the need to 'contain' or 'occupy' potentially 'disruptive' elements who would pose a threat to the establishment.

Therefore, while formulating education policies, planners would have to take into account the various socio-economic and cultural characteristics of a society. One of our purposes in this study has been to show how distance education may not necessarily make a significant dent in the country's illiteracy unless the social,

cultural and economic constraints are overcome, wherever possible. Despite being a dependent variable, education in India, especially distance education, has the immense task of changing the traditional value system, so deep-rooted in every sub-system of the society.

Education, we do contend, if used effectively, can further and consolidate the objectives that a society sets for itself. These objectives are generally, manifestly atleast for the universal good of society. Latently, however, they may be serving the purpose of a few power elite of the same society, thereby strengthening their domination over the mass of illiterates. It is clear from our study that distance education need not be inferior in quality. If anything, it has all the potential of offering high quality education not only to its own students but to others also. It is also obvious that in a country of India's magnitude and diversity the 'conventional' pattern cannot meet the educational needs and demands of its growing population. Therefore, the significance and inevitability of distance education for the disadvantaged sections of the community, has been recognized.

One could surmise that the power elite of our country have failed to implement what had been envisaged in article

45 of the Directive Principles of State Policy in our Constitution, namely:

"The state shall endeavour to provide within a period of 10 years, from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years".

Again, in terms of absolute numbers, in 1951, there were 173.57 million adult illiterates, the number went up to 245 million in 1981. According to the World Bank estimates the number should increase to 5,000 million in A.D. 2000, which is what makes the need for distance education even greater. A literate parent or adult, needless to mention, is a motivating factor for the child going to school, whereas illiterate parents would be seen as 'potential' causes for drop-outs.

The increase in population, since Independence has tended to neutralise the gains, whatever, on the front of literacy. According to the 1981 Census, the total population of India (including the projected

population of Assam) was 68,51,84,692. As compared to the 1971 Census, it showed an increase of 25 per cent. The proportion of rural population to total population was 76.69 per cent and of urban to total population was 23.31 per cent.¹ Again 84.4 per cent of the country's illiterates live in rural areas.

In a situation like this, education has a great role to play, in order to create awareness about population control and its immense necessity for our development in any sphere. An educational system only reflects the realities of its larger socio-economic environment. While education helps social changes, it is itself determined by social realities. The democratization of education often remains an illusion, if inequalities and privileges are built into the functioning and values of the socio-economic system.

Disparity in knowledge and information reinforces the condition for exploitation and such disparity is the stark reality of the contemporary Indian social reality. With more than half of the males and two-thirds of the females being illiterate, our country is on a very slow path of development.

1 India, 1985 - A Reference Manual - 1981 - Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India.

We know that the agricultural sector in India contributes nearly 40 per cent of the net national product, provides livelihood to about 60 per cent of the total working force and accounts for nearly 35 per cent of the total value of the country's exports. Thus, our country being basically ^{an} agrarian structured one, it would be quite apt to say that the land relations in our country are integrally related to the basic characteristics of its national economy, social stratification and political system. Eventually of course, education too, gets affected by the same. Given the high degree of concentration of people on land for their livelihood and the extreme inequality involved in landlord-tenant relations, it is not surprising that so much emphasis was placed on land reforms in India, almost immediately after the country became independent in 1947 and adopted a constitution wedded to a socialistic pattern of society.

The predominance of hierarchical values in the largest sector of a society has implications for the society as a whole. Traditional values creep into modern organisation and distort the very ends which they are designed to achieve. In a situation like this, education

has a massive task ahead, of eradicating these deep-rooted values, which one must admit, would call for the cooperation of people (educationists, social workers, politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen etc.) within the society.

Taking the technological aspect of distance education, we do know that access and exposure to the mass media and its computers are still very limited in India, even in urban areas. The reach and coverage of radio and television, is no doubt very extensive, but a very small proportion of the population can afford a receiver. Even access to the print medium is limited, because of the low literacy levels, a poor transport system, in rural and other geographically inaccessible areas, and of course, a woefully inadequate purchasing power of the masses. Telecommunications is a sadly neglected infrastructure in our country, and this is particularly true of the telephone system.

Law and order has broken down in most parts of India. The statistics given to Parliament last year showed that on an average the army was called out in India once every four days to do some job or the other.

Indiscipline and non-cooperation have to be rooted out of our society and this can be done through the help of education, more so by distance education, that focusses on a sense of integrative values.

We need to evolve a distance education model not merely as an academic exercise but as a practical solution to the problems faced by the nation. Besides, we need to make it relevant to the available employment opportunities within the country. It is in this respect that a sociological analysis of distance education is very significant to our times because conceptualising or implementing a model would be a futile exercise if it is not related to its particular social context. It would be a waste of effort, indeed, if we were to merely borrow any model from outside, and try and apply it to our own society. The fact that it has been a success in United Kingdom, or any other country, does not necessarily warrant its credibility while application in another nation. In a country like India for instance, we have seen that 'distance education' has not really been much of a departure from 'correspondence education' in the past two decades that the latter has been in existence.

Given our low literacy rate, and a limitation of

technological facilities, how do we expect even the print media to take over the responsibility of covering the gap between the literate, privileged minority and the illiterate disadvantaged majority?

A country where values and norms are so deep-rooted, vis-a-vis caste, religion, language, man-woman relationships etc., would certainly find it difficult to transcend those hindrances and uniformly apply a model which requires community effort, drive, personal motivation, absence of petty competition etc., and all these at a higher level than conventional education.

Our study brings out the fact that the educational needs and aims of one society differ from another. Education has been seen to be linked with power, therefore in a democratic polity like ours, ^{there} has been the need for equality of educational opportunity. To decrease the distance between knowledge and learners, the significance for the use of communication media, has been felt to be immense. Distance education, the synthesis between education and communication media, helps to disperse the learners over much greater distances, than would be possible with conventional education. Our study has focussed on distance education with special reference to adults.

Some of the questions raised by our study have been, briefly:

- How is distance education different from conventional education?
- Is it an improvement over conventional education?
- Is it an appropriate model for the Indian context?
- Will distance education lessen the 'social' distance amongst people?
- Will an 'integrated' model not be more suitable?

Distance education has been seen to have certain characteristic components which have been missing in the conventional set-up, namely, separation of learner and teacher, learner and learner, subsequent privatisation of the learner, and, the use of technical media, which make distance education different from conventional education. We contend that without an empirical study, it may be difficult to establish that distance education is an improvement over conventional education. However, theoretically speaking, given the added multi-media

dimensions of distance education, we may infer that it would certainly have a greater accessibility in terms of numbers than conventional education although to what use or interest, distance educational techniques may actually be put is another, problem altogether.

Is distance education an appropriate model for the Indian context? We think that it is appropriate or feasible, to a certain extent. As far as its potential of reaching out to the masses, launching an awareness campaign through the use of media, is concerned distance education offers immense hope. Its potential of lessening the 'social' distance is also great because of its ability to 'integrate' the largely, heterogeneous society. It may be easier to eliminate prejudices through a comparatively 'objective' media, print or broadcast than when a class-room teacher is entrusted to take up the job of teaching children of diverse social and cultural backgrounds, which may clash with the 'interests' or values of his own social background. However, instead of this 'distance' (of languages, regions, religions, caste, class, gender etc.,) becoming less, there is every possibility of a reinforcement of certain dominant group-interests taking place, through the 'effective' (mis) use of communication media.

It is because of this that we have contended the need for an 'integrated' model being of relevance to our study and social context. In a situation like ours the 'conventional' and 'distance' education models need to complement each other rather than work as alternate systems.

The values, customs, deep-rooted norms need to be changed and it would have to be a two-way process between education and social traditions, where the media could play a major role in uprooting the masses of their irrational beliefs and values.

What is actually called for is a nation-wide mass movement of sorts where a committed leadership is absolutely essential. A strong political will and its expression into governmental action with proper financial support is perhaps, the need of the hour. What we really require is an involvement of students, teachers, professionals, government servants, social workers, business houses and their cooperation-cum-collaboration with media men of the country. The already literate we feel should become the actual medium through whom knowledge should be disseminated to the mass illiterates. All we are trying to propound is that,

besides the use of televisions, videos, radios, print packages et. al., student contact programmes are very essential for inculcating the requisite motivation, for distance education to make a headway in the country.

Even institutions, educational and industrial could adopt villages and towns in their attempts to eradicating illiteracy and this could be supplemented with governmental efforts which would of course include distance educational media. Care would also have to be taken to avoid duplication of efforts by various agencies. The "each one teach one" programme could be made a reality if students, teachers and other educated adults are given the right incentives and motivation.

What we are calling for is a remodelling of the existing framework where an attitudinal change, right from the grassroot level is also required. A cultural ethos based on honesty, integrity and commitment to work needs to be encouraged. At the level of practising distance education specific subjects should be allocated to specific areas where the 'suitability' of the subjects is given precedence instead of the objective of disseminating knowledge (related or unrelated) on a mass-general,

nation-wide scale. For instance, in fertile areas of the Punjab, farmers could be taught about new breakthroughs in agriculture which would be directly relevant to their means of living. This could be done through video-films, radio talks, television interviews etc., which would see to their occupational interests. Again in coastal areas, subjects like Oceanography could be taken up. This would make the practical feasibility of distance education far more feasible than mere education of the masses, taking them to be a homogenous unit.

In our study, we have not conceptualised distance education to be an alternative to conventional education. With a constant give and take process between the two. Learners would have the freedom to choose between 'conventional' and 'distance' education methods with the guarantee that both would have an equal status in the job-market. Unless the degrees awarded in both systems are given equal precedence, we do not see how 'correspondence education' (the prevalent form of distance education in India) could possibly become popular and relevant amongst the masses. Besides this, the course

curriculum chosen for 'distance education' would need to be more local-need-oriented, as mentioned earlier than has been the case in conventional set up.

We appreciate the need to open education to the deprived sections of society and this again, can only be achieved if we remove the structural rigidities in our educational system and integrate the latter with developments in communications technology, which is what our ideal notion of a successful distance education set up would be. However, we also believe that, if distance education is allowed to be treated as subservient to conventional education then the very purpose of implementing an innovative system of education would be defeated and would be unable to give any purposeful direction to our education. We would merely have prided ourselves in having discovered a comparatively economical method of imparting education, to the weaker, deprived and neglected sections of the society. In sum, we would like to observe that:

- Distance education is a construction of social reality - that is, it is deeply rooted in the context to which belongs; thereby, we have the variable

nature of distance education as observed from the various instances in our study.

- It has to be properly organised and broad-based enough to suit the particular needs of the society, Relevant and meaningful courses should be adopted rather than blindly follow 'successful' models which may be misfits to the requirements of that society.
- Though a multi-media approach is essential, it would not be instrumental in case of paucity of resources to establish the requisite infrastructure. For the initial, formative period, especially in cases like India, Pakistan etc., it may be possible to educate the masses through correspondence method which would of course have to transcend mere print packages being posted. Especially in a country like India, illiteracy would first have to

be tackled with which would mean that programmes like 'each one teach one' would have to be implemented, at the governmental level, before expecting even correspondence education (in its true print-sense of the term) to show any signs of expansion.

- To involve the people and for increasing motivation and drive of the students, frequent personal contact programmes, would need to be encouraged. Besides, other incentives (job opportunities) would also have to be made available simultaneously.
- There should be close cooperation between the conventional and distance education universities especially as regards the former letting the latter use their infrastructural facilities.

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