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HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA - IN SEARCH OF QUALITY

Editors :

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Association of Indian Universities
AIU House, 16, Kotla Marg, New Delhi-110002

First Published 1995

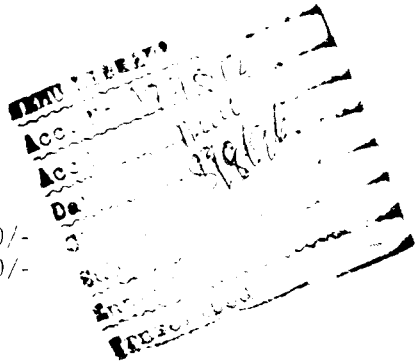
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ISBN : 81-7520-009-X

Price : Paper Back : Rs. 400/-
: Deluxe Edition : Rs. 500/-



Published by
Association of Indian Universities
16 Kotla Marg
New Delhi 110 002
Fax : (011) 3315105

Printed at :
Jeevan Offset Press
New Delhi - 110055
Phone : 5761394

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Federalism and Indian Higher Education

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Introduction

Education is a powerful and pervasive agent of change. It is the key that unlocks the door to development and modernisation. This is particularly true in respect of higher education, for the concentration of knowledge and talent in various institutions of higher learning and research can make for a penetrating interaction with society, more than is possible at other levels or forms of education (see *Robbins Report* for details).

A democratic society such as ours, which stresses egalitarianism and social justice, builds up irresistible pressures for availability of qualitative and quantitative education of all kinds. After all, it is education which makes man 'to be himself' and 'to become himself'. *"Democratic institutions cannot exist without education, for democracy functions only when the people are informed and are aware, thirsting for knowledge and are exchanging ideas... And in the underdeveloped economies, education itself stimulates development by diplomatically demonstrating that tomorrow need not be the same as yesterday, that change can take place, that the outlook is hopeful"* (Rusk, 1966).

From the time of Independence, the national leadership has realized the need of a revolutionary approach which would bring about radical changes in objectives, structures, processes and organization of education. Far back in 1948, in his address to the National Educational Conference, Nehru stated: *"Great changes have taken place in the country and the educational system must be in keeping with them. The entire basis of education must be revolutionized"*. Even so, nothing much has happened. The architects of the Constitution did not envisage the crucial role of education in national development and on that basis give the Centre greater control over it.

Their case for centralisation stemmed from their view that education was an essential instrument in the hands of the Centre for national integration and national solidarity. Also with greater economic resources at its command, they felt, the Centre could promote the rapid development of education, ensure minimal uniformity, prevent duplication and waste and make for better co-ordination and control. Accordingly, the subject of education found a place in all the three lists of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.

Education in a Federal Framework

To understand the placement and management of education in the federal frame of our parliamentary democracy, one needs to bear in mind the peculiarities of the Indian federal system. Ours is a strange brand of co-operative federalism. A unique flexibility is provided through three lists of subjects which are interlocked at many points as in the case of the subject of education. The Constitution provides for a strong federal Centre what K. Santhana, described as a 'paramount Centre' with full powers to control states in essential matters. This has been further accentuated by planning seen in the status and modus operandi of the Planning Commission as also in the presence of sizeable Central ministries in state subjects.

Nation-building activities are assigned to the states. But, their national perspective gives the Centre a role to play. Awareness of this dimension promoted Renuka Ray to state in the Constituent Assembly, "*where a country has a tremendous leeway to make up, particularly in the nation-building services, the unifying force must be strong and the Centre should be given some power of a supervisory and co-ordinating character, in regard to both Education and Health*" (Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. VII, p. 358).

The balance of financial power is tilted in favour of the Centre. This is all the more pronounced because of the Planning Commission and its distinction between plan and non-plan grants. To give states maximum-*'built-in'* stimulus to self-help, the principle of matching grants has been adopted. This has made a difficult situation all the more complex, for while the Planning Commission works to the *'matching-principle'*, the Finance Commission is more concerned with equalization and balanced regional or state growth.

Increasingly, development activities multiply the number of advisory and consultative committees. Most of these operate at the Centre and serve to promote uniform institutions and procedural patterns in states' sphere of activities. They also provide for effective liaison between Centre and states and between states themselves. In the context of India's centralized co-operative federalism, higher education has largely been managed by the Centre, through the Human Resource Development

(HRD) Ministry and its agencies like the UGC and other coordinating councils concerned with professional disciplines.

Education in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution

The placement of subjects in the three lists of the Indian Constitution is akin to that of the Act of 1935. Education, therefore, was generally conceded as a state subject. Co-ordination and policy making were already with the Centre. According to the then Education Minister Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, educational planning and maintenance of standards in higher education should stay with the Centre. This ultimately found a place in the Constitution as Entry 66 in List I which has no parallel in the Act of 1935. Entry 66 entrusts to the Centre "*co-ordination and determination of standards in institutions for higher education or research and scientific and technical institutions*".

Entry 63 places some universities under the Centre and this has resulted in the distinction between Central Universities and Institutions of National Importance under the Centre, and State Universities under the control of the States. Entry 64 permits the Centre to establish institutions for scientific and technical education. Entry 65 concerns government's activities in education of its own personnel and conduct of its own research. However, the most crucial is entry 66, for it prescribes the Centre's role and task in a federal frame-work. It was hotly debated in the Constituent Assembly (for example : Gujarat University vs. Shri Krishna - AIR 1963 S.C. 703) and finally allowed, since Central financial aid to the states was provided through Articles 275 and 282. The UGC Act of 1956 flows from this entry.

Entry 11 in the State list places education, including universities, subject to the provisions of Entries 63 to 66 of List I and Entry 25 of List II, under the state. Entry 25 of the Concurrent List relates to the vocational and technical training of labour. By the 42nd Constitutional Amendment of 1976, education is moved from the State to the Concurrent List.

A close examination of the various entries relating to education, indicate a degree of ambiguity and overlap as also complexities in legislative competence. Judicial pronouncements on the matter have shown that the Supreme Court's interpretation of relevant Constitutional provisions have consistently enhanced the powers of the Centre.

With education on the Concurrent List it is believed that the Centre would have constitutional or legal power to back and support its insistence on state compliance in matters of truly national educational concern. It would be easier to formulate and implement a much more coherent national educational policy. The UGC, with all its experience and expertise, could be emboldened to exercise the negative sanctions if the need to

do so persists. Other co-ordinating agencies at the Centre would also grow in power and influence. However, the direct impact of this Constitutional change is yet to be felt in the management of higher education.

Educational Planning

Educational planning emanates from the top. The Central Government, i.e. the HRD Ministry, largely through the UGC, shapes national educational policy, determines priorities, provides finances and revitalises the system to suit the needs of the times.

The Ministry, through its Bureau of Planning, works in close collaboration with the Education Division of the Planning Commission. As far as professional education is concerned, in so far as these subjects are not covered by the universities, they are taken care of by the various related subject ministries. Hence, the planning of higher education is assigned to the UGC which is assisted by the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) in the planning of technical education and the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) in co-ordinating the planning of educational development in the states.

At the level of the Planning Commission, it is its Education Division which is involved in higher educational planning. Difficulties arise because in the Planning Commission there are subject divisions almost parallel to the Central Ministries. These divisions remain in contact with the respective Central Ministries and state departments. While the planning of general and technical education is taken care of by the Education Division, planning of professional education is the concern of the related subject divisions. Thus, plan proposals for educational development emanate from different divisions and are dispersed in reports of the Planning Commission. Hence, even at the national level, the plan does not present co-ordinated picture. To remedy this problem, as per the *National Policy on Education (NPE)* of 1986, it is proposed to establish a “national body covering higher education in general, agriculture, medical, technical, legal and other professional fields for greater coordination and consistency of policy, sharing of facilities and developing interdisciplinary research” (TOI, 1994).

Higher education planning at the state level is poor. There is no effective planning machinery, no proper technical staff, nor correct role perception. Administrative competence is also poor. The divided authority in higher education management, which characterises the Centre, is repeated at the state level. Medical and agricultural education are handled by the Departments of Health and Agriculture respectively. Vocational and technical training of labour comes under the Department of Education or some other department like that of Labour. As implementing bodies,

there is the Director of Education who takes care of general education, while the Director of Higher Education and the Director of Technical Education are in charge of their respective fields.

To make for effective co-ordination of higher education at the state level, the NPE (1986) has proposed the setting up of State Councils of Higher Education as statutory bodies. Their main functions will be to prepare consolidated programmes of higher education in each state, scrutinise development programmes of universities and colleges, assist state governments in determining block maintenance grants and advice on the setting up of new institutions, monitor the progress of implementation of programmes and assessment of performance of institutions and assist and advice the UGC in respect of maintenance of standards.

Every state has a State Planning Department. It is mainly a coordinating agency, for it has to put together the projects and schemes submitted by the various departments. In fact, much of the bargaining and negotiating at the state level is to persuade and pressurise departments to deflate their demands largely on financial grounds rather than on the basis of any appraisal of project utility. State Planning Departments undertake the work of co-ordination, review, liaison and advice. A recent development is the establishment of State Planning Boards. If such a Board does not exist, the State Planning Department formulates the state plan and provides the linkage not only with other state departments, but with the Central ministries and the Planning Commission as well.

It is only after formulating the macro framework for the national plan, that the Planning Commission can indicate to each state the guidelines and financial magnitudes regarding state plans. Sectorial plans in various state subjects are taken up only after state plans are more or less finalised. The Planning Commission's Education Division prepares the guidelines for the forthcoming plan well in advance. These are sent to the HRD Ministry and the State Departments of Education for plan formulation. The Planning Commission asks for the 'draft' Five Year Plans of the Centre and the states in education.

The State Education Department undertakes detailed primary educational planning. Secondary and higher secondary education are the concern of their respective boards. Detailed planning for universities is left to the universities themselves in concert with the UGC. These draft education plans of the Centre and the states are discussed in the Education Division of the Planning Commission which is assisted by the Panel on Education. They are then put together to form the draft plan of educational development. On getting legislative approval, the Five Year Plan is incorporated, in parts, into the annual plans and budgets of the Central and state governments. As the plan progresses, often due to scarce resources, annual plans get considerably pruned and hardly reflect the picture as projected in the Five Year Plan.

Higher education planning calls for concerted action on the part of the Centre (UGC), the state government and state universities. Trouble spots in this triangular arrangement which surface are delays, lack of co-ordination, poor faculty involvement, inadequate reporting and evaluation of programmes under execution procedures. The lynch-pin in higher educational planning is the UGC which interacts with the Planning Commission at the Centre and state universities at the state level.

While the UGC determines higher educational policy and accordingly prepares approach papers, policy-frames, programmes and projects, the operative mechanisms necessitate large-scale involvement of the state government that has to provide some monetary assistance or of the universities that have to adopt and implement these educational innovation. It is here that the rub lies. Educational institutions view the UGC as only a fund disbursing body, which hardly appreciates the difficulties at ground level. Happily, the UGC has endorsed the idea that there should be a Planning and Evaluation Board in each of the universities and educational cells in states for interaction between the state government, Union HRD Ministry and the UGC.

At the state level, universities are not structured for higher educational planning. As for state governments, higher education does not stand high in their list of priorities. State Councils of Higher Educational have yet to take shape. A notable development is the involvement of a state government official with the work of the UGC Plan related Visiting Committees from the 5th Five Year Plan.

Statutory Bodies

University Grants Commission (UGC)

The UGC works in accordance with the provisions of the University Grants Commission Act (1956) as amended by Parliament from time to time. It is the apex national body for the promotion and co-ordination of university education and the determination and maintenance of standards in teaching, examination and research in universities. It serves as a vital link between the Union and state governments and institutions of higher education. To attain the objective of development of higher education, the UGC inter alia allocates and disburses grants to universities and colleges and advises central/state governments on measures for improvement of university education.

Among the important section of the UGC Act, mention must be made of Section 13 which gives the Commission the power of inspection and Section 14 which gives it the power to withhold grants. This has been reinforced by Section 12A inserted by the UGC (Amendment) Act, 1972.

It is a penal clause, according to which no grant will be given unless the university is found fit to receive it. The 1972 Amendment also brought in Section 12C which enables the UGC to aid all universities for any general or specified purpose. The Commission has its Secretariat in Delhi with total staff of 800. In a move towards decentralisation, Regional Offices have been set up in Hyderabad, Pune, Ghaziabad, Bhopal and Guwahati.

The procedure of work of the Indian UGC is closely modeled on that of its British counterpart. Before the formulation of each Five Year Plan, the UGC indicates its development programmes and the extent of funding while it invites universities to propose their own schemes of development. The UGC examines these proposals in relation to the availability of funds. The universities are accordingly required to revise their plans.

The UGC is committed to an organic, integrated view of higher education. The college sector accounts for over 85% of the total enrolment at the undergraduate level and over 55% of the enrolment at the post-graduate level. However, only colleges recognised by the UGC, in terms of Section 2 (f) and 12 (b) of the UGC Act are eligible to receive development grants from the UGC. The quantum of grants is worked out on the basis of various parameters such as the level of teaching, student and faculty strength, etc. Grants are generally provided for buildings including hostels, strengthening of libraries and laboratories and for faculty improvement programmes for the teachers. As of 1991-92, 4000 out of 7513 colleges received grants amounting to Rs. 205.53 million from the UGC.

The pattern of UGC assistance to colleges for development of undergraduate education is on a sharing-basis and for the Plan period. This implies that counter-part funds must be provided by the state government. Besides, after the Plan period, the entire financial burden reverts to the state government. Making a departure from the previous practice, the UGC during 1991-92, sent expert committees to the states, with a view to finalising outlays of the colleges under VIII plan in consultation with the college principals. Representatives of state governments were also involved. On the basis of the recommendations of these committees, the UGC approved an outlay of Rs. 2196.5 million for about 3100 colleges who had submitted proposals.

The UGC takes care of *general* higher education. Professional education which is not covered by universities is outside its purview. For instance, while the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), attached to the Ministry of Agriculture, takes care of this subject, agricultural colleges affiliated to the multi-faculty universities come under the UGC. In addition, there are agricultural universities established by the Ministry, in co-operation with state governments, without consulting the UGC,

and these come directly under the Central Ministry of Agriculture. Medical education is funded by the Ministry of Health which operates through bodies like the All India Medical Council and the Indian Council of Medical Research. Legal education is handled by the All India Bar Council which comes under the Ministry of Law. Then there is the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) which plans joint action with other research bodies and the UGC, and the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) which has fine collaboration with the ICSSR. The UGC has therefore to interact with various bodies engaged in the management of higher education.

The Department of Education under the Ministry of Human Resource Development is assisted by a number of advisory bodies. To mention one, the CABE is a broad-based consultative body on which Central and state governments are represented. It is to play a pivotal role in reviewing educational development, infusing new ideas and monitoring implementation. The NPE (1986) expects it to function through appropriate committees and to establish State Advisory Boards of Education as also District Boards of Education so as to correct its centralist bias.

There are also consultative bodies attached to other Ministries at the Centre. For example, the ICAR performs the same role with regard to agricultural universities as does the UGC in respect of general universities. Medical education is controlled by the Centre through the ICMR and the Medical Council of India. The latter is a powerful co-ordinating body, set up in 1933 under a law enacted by the Centre according to Entry 26 of List III. Amongst its notable posers are the power to recognise medical qualifications granted by universities or medical institutions, laying down minimum standards of medical education, inspection, etc. By the very nature of its activity, this Council has to interact continuously with the Central government and the states concerned. In science and technology there is the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). There are also the Indian Space Research Organization and the Atomic Energy Commission.

The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)

The Council was established in 1987 by an Act of Parliament for ensuring coordinated and integrated development of technical education (including management, architecture and pharmacy), and for maintenance of standards in these areas. It is the principal funding agency for technical educational institutions. It has recently established a National Board of Accreditation (NBA-India) to monitor the standard of technical education.

Coordination of Higher Education

Co-ordination of higher education is complex, elaborate and difficult because of the involvement of many Ministries and their consultative

bodies. Besides, except for the AICTE and ICSSR, these agencies do not have structures at state or regional levels. No wonder the UGC has complained of uncertainty of areas and extent of its jurisdiction.

Interestingly, the Education Commission (1964-66) preferred to solve this problem by setting up UGC type organization for agriculture, engineering and medical education. However, the UGC Review Committee (1977) had suggested an apex body wherein hands of different agencies would come together to take policy decisions, allocate funds and provide guidelines. "*The UGC would naturally be expected to play the role of primus inter pares in this multi-organizational body*" (UGC, 1964-69; also Azad, 1975). Though this recommendation was accepted through the Government Resolution of 30th April 1979 and subsequently the NPE (1986) upheld the idea, it has yet to be implemented. Another idea floated on this issue relates to giving total charge to the UGC for all higher education (UGC, 1991-92). But this is an unworkable solution because professional disciplines are rooted in their respective ministries and the very nature of their specialisation, their organizational inputs and their past history would not make it easy for the UGC to handle them. As it is, the UGC is unable to cope with its present task. Taking on more, would mean its collapse. Another suggestion was that a Ministry of Higher Education be set up into which the present UGC could merge, or alternatively, the present UGC could be converted into the Ministry of Higher Education (Joshi, 1977).

State universities are funded by concerned state government and by the Centre through the UGC. The States are not too niggardly in their support of higher education. Generally, about 20 percent of the state budget is allocated to education, although some states like Kerala, raise it to as much as 40 percent. Of this, about one-tenth goes to higher education. A compelling reason for higher outlays is to enable institutions to 'lift' UGC assistance. Additionally, institutions also depend on the UGC for educational programmes. For example, UGC provides assistance to universities at three levels, the lowest being Departmental Support, then Department of Special Assistance and finally, Centre of Advanced Study.

The main area, bristling with difficulties, is the federal tie-up between the UGC, state governments and state universities. UGC officials strongly believe that it is their business to deal directly with state universities and not with state governments. It is up to the state universities to manage their affairs with their states governments, especially in matters of funding. This is one major trouble-spot. Although UGC men sit in on discussion of state plans, they have not been able to ensure sufficient funds for UGC schemes. Though a representative of the state government is associated with the work for reviewing committees, this has not promoted a better understanding of each other's roles.

UGC's relationship with state universities is also problem ridden. State universities complain that it takes inordinately long to get UGC approval and sanction for schemes. This is compounded by the further delay at the governmental level for unless and until government approval for matching share is received, UGC sanction for grants cannot be sought. Moreover, the UGC releases funds in instalments. The UGC puts the onus for delays on the universities for they are unable to submit their proposals in time and besides these are often not in order. The UGC also finds it very difficult to cope with pressures on its liquid assets as demands for payment are rushed through rather late to meet the plan dead-line.

Considering the stresses and strains in the triangular arrangement in respect of higher education, there is a real need for some institutionalised machinery at the state level to undertake co-ordination horizontally and also effect vertical links with the UGC. State UGCs could be ideal in this regard in that they could function as ears and eyes of the parent body, monitor UGC programmes, take follow-up action, provide the feedback in the form of reports, statistics and vital data of local institutions and provide the channel for aid and direction from the Central UGC. State UGCs could also tie up all the sources of fiscal aid and make these directly available to the institutions concerned.

The UGC itself was not convinced of the need of State UGCs. The Education Commission too was opposed to the idea of state UGCs for it felt that this "*would hinder the existing direct relationship between the UGC and the universities*" (UGC, 1991-92). Nor was the UGC Review Committee supportive of the idea. It feared that a state UGC would turn out to be "*a wing of the secretariat of the state education department and would further tend to curb the autonomy of the universities*" (GOI, 1966). It was only the Bombay University Reorganization Committee (1950) that saw the worth of state UGCs (University of Bombay, 1950). However, the experiment in state UGCs was a failure. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar did set up UGCs but these did not last long. There was no much gain, only additional red tape! Perhaps, the experiment was too short lived to show positive results.

What has finally fructified is the idea of Regional Offices of the UGC. Since such decentralized structures have made for the success of AICTE and ICSSR, it could as well work in respect of the UGC. But will regional offices be able to take care of the federal dimension of higher education? Much depends on the power and functions of these bodies as also their personnel and modus operandi.

Educational Financing

Federal financing is a difficult and complex exercise. It is all the more so where the states are subservient to a financially dominant Centre as in India. The system of Central assistance has led to a distinction between Plan and Non-Plan expenditure. The former is provided for by the Planning Commission according to Article 282 and is meant for development schemes and involves the Planning Commission, the UGC and Central Government, and the latter is provided by the Finance Commission according to Article 275.

The intricacies of federal financing also manifest themselves in matter of higher education. At the Central level, the major financial burden is borne by the HRD Ministry. Other Central ministries also contribute with regard to professional education. While technical education is directly handled by the HRD Ministry through the AICTE, general education is funded by the same ministry through the UGC. Central universities and their affiliated colleges, institutions of national importance and institutions deemed to be universities are fully funded by the Central Government (HRD Ministry) through the UGC. Through a system of grants-in-aid, the Centre makes finances available to the states, and states, through a grant-in-aid code, make funds available to universities and colleges. Table 1 gives the details of grants released under Plan and Non-Plan heads during 1991-92 (UGC, 1991-92). State aid to universities is given according to an elaborate grant-in-aid code. In most states, block grants for maintenance purposes are given to universities for one to five years. In addition to block grants, states pay matching grants for development schemes and ad hoc grants for specific purposes.

Table 1: Details of grants released under Plan and Non-Plan during 1991-92

	<i>Plan</i>	<i>Rs. in million</i>	<i>% of total Plan</i>
(i)	Central Universities	479.7	28.2
(ii)	Institutions Deemed to be Universities	106.2	6.3
(iii)	State Universities	720.8	42.5
(iv)	Science Centres	135.2	8.0
(v)	Colleges of States Universities	205.5	12.1
(vi)	Colleges of Central Universities	25.7	1.5
(vii)	Miscellaneous	24.8	1.4
	Total	1697.9	100

	<i>Non-Plan</i>	<i>Rs. in million</i>	<i>% of total Non-Plan</i>
(i)	Maintenance grants to:		
	(a) Central Universities	1592.7	59.8
	(b) Institutions Deemed to be Universities	338.0	12.7
	(c) Colleges of Delhi University, BHU	573.1	21.5
(ii)	State Universities for specific purposes	19.3	0.7
(iii)	Teachers Awards, Research Fellowships, Scholarships, etc.	64.4	2.4
(iv)	Media Centres	24.8	1.0
(v)	Grants to Non University Institutions	1.7	0.06
(vi)	Establishment expenditure of UGC office	48.6	1.84
	Total	2662.6	100

Almost every state has an elaborate grant-in-aid code and in accordance with these rules, maintenance grants are made available to colleges. The state grant-in-aid to colleges is generally fixed as a certain proportion of the net deficit, i.e. 'approved' expenditure minus 'approved' income. The bulk of UGC assistance comes to colleges through the universities to which they are affiliated. The college has to prepare an integrated plan relating to its development programmes. Colleges generally take advantage of UGC schemes where the assistance is on a cent per cent basis rather than those which have the matching principle.

Conclusion

The whole account of Centre-state relations in India in the field of higher education revolves round Entry 66 of List I which was devised by the architects of the Constitution to indicate Central competence in this field. This brings the UGC on centre stage. In its early years, the UGC was not too sure as to how best to function as a major co-ordinating agency in a federal system. Acutely aware of federal complexities and irritants, it was very cautious in its interaction with states - their universities and colleges. Though it could apply sanctions, it chose not to. It preferred to coax and persuade, rather insist and assert. In the first decade of its existence, it was pre-occupied with 'bricks and mortar' and not co-ordination and maintenance of standards. In the 70s and 80s, the focus shifted to providing not just equipment, books and journals, but, using modern technological advances, to promoting quality higher education. In the 90s much is done to provide inter-university centres and information centres as also development for teaching and research. With education on the **Concurrent List**, the UGC should no longer be apologetic or play

defensive in its relations with states. A lubricant in this interaction are the regional offices of the UGC which could act as miniature UGCs. How successful they are only time will tell. It is hoped that the contemplated apex body for higher education and state councils of higher education will have a tonic effect on the whole system.

In the refashioning of Centre-state relations in India in the field of higher education, we need to ensure that co-operative federalism does not mean that the Centre functions as a 'big brother', or that the states conduct a holding operations for the Centre, but that the two work in harmony for the successful management of higher education.

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