

RSTV

EDUCATION REFORMS



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Context

- Recently, the Department related to **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports**, headed by Rajya Sabha MP **Vinay Sahasrabudhe's** report made public, made many observations and recommendations related to exam reforms, accreditation, research and the academic environment in higher education institutions.
- This is the **341st report** of the committee on the subject "Review of education standards, accreditation process, research, examination reforms and academic environment in Deemed/Private Universities/other Higher Education Institutions".

About Departmental Standing Committee

- On the recommendation of the **Rules Committee of the Lok Sabha**, 17 Departmentally-Related Standing Committees (DRSCs) were set up in the Parliament in 1993. In 2004, seven more such committees were set up, thus increasing their number from **17 to 24**.
- The main **objective** of the standing committees is to secure more **accountability** of the Executive (i.e., the Council of Ministers) to the Parliament, particularly financial accountability. They also assist the Parliament in debating the budget more effectively.
- The 24 standing committees cover under their jurisdiction all the ministries/departments of the Central Government.
- Each standing committee consists of **31 members** (21 from Lok Sabha and 10 from Rajya Sabha). The members of the Lok Sabha are nominated by the Speaker from amongst its members, just as the members of the Rajya Sabha are nominated by the Chairman from amongst its members.
- A **minister is not eligible** to be nominated as a member of any of the standing committees. In case a member, after his nomination to any of the standing committees, is appointed a minister, he then ceases to be a member of the committee.
- The term of office of each standing committee is **one year** from the date of its constitution. Out of the 24 standing committees, 8 work under the Rajya Sabha and 16 under the Lok Sabha.

Key Recommendations

- One of the key issues raised in the report was the growing trend of colleges associating with coaching institutes in “certain states”. It said that it is an “**unholy nexus**” between colleges and coaching institutes which has made the learning process a “farce”.
 - The Committee recommends that the Government, in coordination with State Governments, must work out mechanisms to curb such trends and punish such institutions by derecognizing them
- Among other recommendations, the committee asked the government to look at shortening **recruitment time** for faculty members. It also said that universities should on an “experimental basis” start **evaluating their teachers** through peers and students.
- **Physical and digital** modes of instruction should be emphasised. There is an urgent need to revisit and revamp the norms for starting online classes
- 100% **tax rebate** for donations to the education sector.
- Parity of education with infrastructure. Open curriculum and continuing curriculum revision.
- There is a need to intensify efforts to **bring higher education** institutes in the country under the **formal accreditation** system and all universities and colleges must be scored on how foolproof their examinations are.
- The government gave active consideration to the demand that **deemed universities** be allowed to use the term university by amending clause 23 of the UGC act 1956.
- The report also added that several state universities regularly **fail to carry out assessments** smoothly often reporting instances like question paper leaks and also rampant cases of copying.

What is the “deemed university” tag?

- Dr Bhushan Patwardhan, former UGC Vice-chairman and Chairman of the National Accreditation and Amendment Council (NAAC)’s executive committee explained that the “deemed to be” or “deemed university” tag was given to universities **that were not originally established as universities** but were given that status.
- The tag university is used by institutions that were established under the Central, Provincial or State Acts as such.

- Using the provisions of **Section 3** of the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act, the first deemed university -**IISc Bangalore** -was created on May 12, 1958.
- Currently, there are **126 deemed universities** across the country, including top-ranking institutions like BITS Pilani, Manipal Institute of Higher Education and the Vellore Institute of Technology.
- According to educationists, the tag **questions the credibility of an institution**, particularly when it comes to foreign collaborations.
- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports has echoed this view in its recent report, in which it has recommended an amendment of clause 23 of the UGC Act, 1956 to let the deemed universities shed the prefix.

What the parliamentary panel has observed in the recommendation as far as reforms in the higher education sector are concerned?

- The Parliamentary Committee in its 49-page report highlighted many reforms but there are two **major challenges**.
- First, on the one side, the report focused on the **reforms in the examination** and on the other side recommended that the exams should be very focused and should be fair and should contain any malpractices in examinations. However, the universities have been asked not to report any malpractices.
- Second, out of the **total grant**, 80% goes to government institutions whereas their contribution is just 20%. The report failed to highlight this issue, as the private sector is contributing 80% with a grant of just 20%.

The private sectors are contributing hugely when it comes to higher education in the country but the kind of financial support and incentives that one should expect is somewhere lacking.

One of the key recommendations that the government gave active consideration to the demand that, “deemed universities” are allowed to use the term university and this would require an amendment to the UGC Act 1956.

How significant this amendment could be?

- The nomenclature or the tag of the deemed university is nowhere used in the whole world. But it is used in India to **maintain the hierarchy** among universities. Like Indian Institute of Science and Tata Institute of Fundamental Research has accorded the status of university and others as a deemed university.
- The **National Education Policy 2020** (NEP 2020) has also been recommended to rectify such issues. Hence, removing such a tag will help students to be recognised **as graduates of the nation**.
- It will also help universities in **foreign collaboration**. As foreign institutes are sceptical of such a tag. So, the amendment will help student exchange programmes and will increase exposure for students as well as institutes.
- This change will also increase **multidisciplinary graduate** courses in one university.

What is the most important takeaway in the report that promises to bring about the much-needed overdue reforms (on the lines of NEP 2020) in the higher education sector in the country?

- The NEP 2020 has talked about **restructuring the whole system** i.e., 1+3+3+4 and is considered an important component.
- Whereas the report recommended building different **research universities**. The mixing of teaching and research will help develop a practical understanding for students and will perform better in their endeavours. The research allocation will be a determining factor in the performance of research institutes.

- The University Grant Commission (UGC) will be reconstituted into the **Higher Education Service Commission of India** (HECI). This will help to do away with unnecessary regulation. All the major recommendations would be important for the better implementation of NEP 2020.

Will removing regulators lead to more malpractices in recruitment and examinations?

- No, the malpractices come when the practices are not being adopted. If the recruitment is done by the fare calendar, then the research and teaching will not suffer.
- If we go by the rest of the framework, we find that most of the colleges and universities are getting good ranks in **National Institute Ranking Framework** (NIRF) because rather than recruiting, teachers are outsourced.

On the evaluation of teachers, the report talks about how universities should on an experimental basis start evaluation of the teachers through peers and students.

How significantly this evaluation will improve the performance of the faculty members?

- The NEP 2020 already intend to reform the teacher recruitment as well as the assessment process. The policy says that there will be a **tenure track procedure** where an institute can track the performance of the teacher. This is already in practice in European and American universities.
- Currently, the assessment of teachers has been left to administrators and this policy and report recommend making assessments done by **peers and students**.
- There is only one salary structure for all the university professors but the **quality of teaching** is very different in universities. This depends on the faculty's regular assessment which always pushes them to perform better. Many teachers are trying to make fake publications and API points which will be withdrawn in a new format.

The funding of private universities is supposed to be self-financed and the private universities in terms of coverage or enrolment of students do not match with the public universities.

Why government should use public money to finance private institutions?

- The committee has highlighted two data:
 - Out of 50,000 institutions 9,000 has been aggregated so far
 - 80% of institutions are only private and 20% of institutes are the government.
- One parameter which has also been considered as a **research contribution**. In terms of research, private institutes like IITs have given collectively more patents as compared to public or government institutions.
- These institutes in terms of research reflect that they can function or **perform at par** with world-class institutes like Harvard and MIT.
- Hence, it is not about whether the institute is private or public, it is about the **capability of that institute** to become a world-class institute. The government must set the criteria that will assess the performance of institutes and will receive grants to support research or any other thing irrespective of the ownership.

The committee also suggested that the funding must be encouraged through donations by individual alumni and institutions and which will be 100% tax-deductible.

What efforts private institutions should make towards raising funding by this mechanism?

- A lot of attention has been paid to the alumni contribution. Even UGC has recommended many of the companies and then support agencies that would **track alumni** and bring them back into the mainstream. The presence of alumni would be strengthening and enhance the whole curriculum.
- In addition to that **One Nation One Data** has been also mentioned by this committee and has to be there which would fill a lot of gaps.

How can we strengthen the industry-academia partnership to effectively implement reforms in higher education?

- The private institutions have expanded their scope in the field of education. They have performed better as compared to public institutions.
- Although public institutions served the poor but private are becoming more powerful. The appointment of the vice-chancellor in a public institute is not because of merit but because of connections.
- e Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** himself said that we can no longer look at the private-public institutes differently. We have to take them together to perform better and make Indian institutes world-class institutes.

The committee panel suggested several programmes. One among them was **Humanities in Technology Institutions**. It says the experiment of providing courses in humanities in technology should be reviewed.

How significant, feasible and productive this would be if implemented?

- Ethics and values have been adopted in Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) as part of **training given to civil servants**.
- There are already a few institutes that are providing the liberal sciences and social sciences, if it will be implemented as pan-India universities they will be most productive. As ethics and values are losing nowadays and the **technocrats** after adopting this will regain the ethics and values in the society.
- Technology and tradition are very important for the growth of the young mind, if we are going after technology, we should have a judicious **blending of tradition and technology**.

With regional language being introduced in technical education, what are the kind of sweeping changes that it is going to bring about in the area of technical education?

- Indian society is very much attached to their vernacular language, being technical knowledge available in the local language will help locals in rural areas to understand it better and thus increase **digital literacy** and will also bridge the digital divide in India.
- By addressing several challenges related to translation and local software this will prove to be very efficient in the long term.

On the challenges, as this is going to reform many things and will change the face of education in India there will be several hurdles.

What are going to be the hurdles to effective implementation of the above-mentioned policies?

- The major challenge would be the **implementation**. Those who are made responsible for implementing it must know the domain.
- For example, the Chief Executive of Rajya Sabha TV have to be a media person or must be from the **same domain**.

- Unfortunately, India in its history reflected people being appointed at posts, not their domain. If we take an example of world-class institutes, they have been managed by the educationist or from the same domain.

Education is a determining thing; it fuels human resources and a country is known by its humans. Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) will be the key to its effective implementation. Other than that building infrastructure facilities for the better implementation of digital education will be a challenge for the government. By keeping the interest of all the stakeholders, the policymakers would be able to shorten the distance between the current scenario and education aspirations.

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