Tracing the Historical Developments in Open and Distance Education*

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Introduction

The Indian sub-continent during the British rule included the present Pakistan and Bangladesh, and any educational developments during and subsequent to the rule are excluded today in describing the educational status of independent India. As a federal system comprising 29 states and 6 union territories, India is the second largest democracy and the second most populous country in the world. A multi-cultural and multi-linguist country, with 18 constitutionally recognised languages and as many as 1652 spoken dialects, Indian system of education is also one of the largest and most difficult to manage in comparison to many such large systems in the world.

Starting from 17 universities and above 400 colleges at the time of independence, India today has 329 universities, nearly 16,885 colleges (including 1798 women’s colleges), and over 10 million students, nearly 0.45 million teachers and one of the largest higher education systems in the world (GoI, 2005). While more than 88% of the students study undergraduate programmes, 5% and 3.5% respectively study engineering and technology, and medicine; and about 1.5% of students are pursuing courses in agriculture. About 40.22% of the students are women, and the percentage of students from disadvantaged communities has not gone beyond 12. Since independence the system has grown 14-fold in terms of number of universities, and 33-fold in the number of colleges; and its successful socio-economic planning through the Five Year Plans facilitated transition from an elitist system of education of the British era to a mass system of education subsequently. The Constitution of India guarantees free and compulsory elementary education up to grade VIII (age of 14); and in 2001 India constitutionally guaranteed its citizens ‘education’ as a fundamental right. Though there is tremendous expansion in terms of numbers and access to education as briefed in Table 1 (upto 2003-04), only 6% of the relevant age group study in higher education; there is about 5% annual growth of student enrolment in conventional higher education; and that nearly 40 million children are out of the provision of schooling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Institutions (thousands)</th>
<th>Students (millions)</th>
<th>Teachers (thousands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper primary</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary and senior secondary</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>27U†</td>
<td>304U†</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>590Cº</td>
<td>13,500Cº</td>
<td>(C + U)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Actual figures (not in 000s); U = university, C = college
Source: Panda (2005)

However, in contexts of international comparison, Indian education system, like its economy, is one of the fastest growing systems in the world. The pressure of the graduates from schools, opening up of the economy, liberalisation and liberal policies for mass literacy and education, need for continuing professional development, commitment towards greater access and equity

especially for the disadvantaged and minority sections of the society, tremendous indigenous developments in science and information and communication technology – all had their varying shares in contributing to significant policy decisions to go for alternative schooling, non-formal education, and open and distance learning in the country. Like the system of education in general, its distance education system is one of the fastest growing systems globally; the Indian system of distance education is the second largest in the world, and definite plans of action have contributed to this tremendous growth. It will be interesting to examine historically the growth and expansion of such a huge system. While critical reflection on the past and present experiences has been recorded elsewhere (Panda, 2005), we shall in this chapter trace and examine the historical developments in ODL in India.

**Genesis**

Distance education in its earlier form of correspondence education started in the West in the middle of the 19th century, though distance education in India began almost a century later in the form of postal correspondence education. The origin of postal education in India however can be traced to the educational activities of commercial institutions. The International Correspondence Schools (ICS) and the British Institutes (BIET) are the prominent institutes of postal courses, based in Bombay (now Mumbai), which offered a variety of postal courses in areas of engineering, management, architecture, interior decoration, dress making, journalism, beauty care, photography, cartooning, commercial arts, radio, transistor, refrigeration, among others (Chib, 1977).

At the time of Independence from the colonial rule in 1947, India did not have a comprehensive ‘National Policy of Education’. The only policy or developmental plan was ‘Post-War Educational Development in India: 1948-84’ drawn by the then British rulers, though due to its narrow objectives it was not accepted by the Indian leaders. One such objective of the Five Year Plan was its advocacy for selected system of secondary and higher education and limited provision for technical and vocational education. Independence brought with it hopes for radical reforms in education. People in general felt that transformation of education, which the Indian leaders pleaded for during the ‘freedom struggle’; should be initiated as early as possible. Specifically no plea was made for introduction of distance education as a component of new India’s education policy and programmes. But the general feeling was that the radical reorganization of the education system was one of the important national priorities. The need for the change was sufficiently expressed in the following words (Naik, 1975):

> The first and the most important step would be to abandon our exclusive reliance on the traditional system of formal education and to move in the direction of providing life-long education for all for creating a learning society. From this point of view:

- education should cease to be considered as a one-shot affair meant for children and youth;
- all three channels of education — full-time, part-time, and own-time — should be developed in every sector of education and given equal status;
- education should cease to be looked upon as a school process, it should be a social process covering all learning that takes place, whether in or outside the school;
- education should cease to be the delegated responsibility of a profession and should become the direct social responsibility in which every individual is involved, both as a teacher and as a student;
- the right to learn should be assured to every individual without any discrimination and with full equality of opportunity, and he should also receive all the support and facilities necessary for its effective exercise through his life; and
- the non-formal sector which has been neglected in the past should be developed and blended with the formal sector in an integrated fashion to create a new system of education which will have the advantages of both the sectors and to eliminate the weaknesses which arise when these sectors are developed in isolation.
In the late 1950s and the early 1960s in the Independent India, the planners thought of correspondence education as a supplementary method to meet the growing demand for higher educational opportunities. The Planning Commission of the country in The Five Year Plan made the following observation:

With the expanding base at the elementary and secondary education, the demand for higher education has greatly increased over the past... The rapid expansion in the number of the universities and colleges in recent years has led to a number of problems. These have been reviewed in the report of the University Grants Commission for 1959-60... The Commission has stressed that if deterioration is to be avoided, increase in the number of students should be accompanied by corresponding expansion of physical and other teaching facilities ... In addition to the provision in the Plan for expansion of facilities for higher education, proposals for evening colleges, correspondence courses and the award of external degrees are at present under consideration.

**Government Policy Initiatives**

The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) in its meeting held in January 1961 noted the observations of the Planning Commission and recommended that a detailed study of ‘correspondence courses’ be made by a small committee before arriving at a decision to start them (Satyanarayana, 1995). Accordingly, The Union Ministry of Education constituted an Expert Committee under the Chairmanship of D.S. Kothari, the then Chairman of the University Grants Commission. The Members of the Committee included two vice chancellors, two university professors, one college principal, two educational consultants and three educational advisors to the Ministry of Education. The Committee suggested that it would be desirable to proceed slowly as correspondence education was new to India. It considered the kind of educational and administrative problems that might arise from the opening of an alternative channel of education in which there would be no regular classroom contact between the teacher and the student. Drawing on the experience of the other countries like the erstwhile Soviet Union, Australia, UK, USA, and the Scandinavian countries, the Committee felt that it would be possible to maintain high standards in education and achieve economy. The Committee observed and suggested the following (Singh, 1978):

1. The correspondence method provides for greater flexibility than classroom education, particularly in the combination of subjects.

2. Since many items of expenditure in the regular system of education can be eliminated in the correspondence method, it should be possible and essential to achieve results with economy.

3. Academic standards are determined by general factors such as admission standards, well-prepared instructional materials, easy to understand texts, ample exercises in the application of knowledge, pre-tested and constantly revised courses, careful correctional and instructional service etc.

4. Correspondence courses could provide opportunities for persons who have been denied these facilities and are at present in full-time employment or are, for other reasons, prevented from availing themselves of facilities at colleges.

5. For correspondence courses leading to the first degree, there should be a personal contact between the teacher and the taught for about three weeks in a year, preferably on a tutorial rather than lecture basis.

6. To maintain educational standards, it should be necessary to associate top-ranking scholars and teachers in the preparation of courses and text books.

7. The success of the entire scheme of correspondence courses will depend upon the competence, resourcefulness and dedication of the staff that runs correspondence courses.
University Level Correspondence Education – The Beginning (First Decade)

All the essential conditions for making correspondence education an effective alternative channel i.e. flexibility, well written materials, training of staff, contact programmes, provision of study centres, etc were perceived and underlined by the Committee. It did not, however, take into account the difficulties involved in operating a new system within the framework of the existing conventional university system whose rules, regulations, methods, processes, techniques and organizational structures were set by and geared towards face-to-face education (Satyanarayana, 1995). The Committee’s suggestion that only a pilot project of correspondence education be started at the University of Delhi was accepted by the central government. Accordingly, the University of Delhi agreed to the proposal and appointed a Sub-Committee to go into the details of its operation. On the basis of the Sub-Committee's Report and the subsequent concurrence of the UGC, the University of Delhi established the School of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education (SCCCE) in 1962 and started BA courses in selected subjects with 112 students in the first year; later on B.Com was offered in 1970 onwards. Thus, the first correspondence course at the university level began in India. Sh. K.L. Shrimlali, the then Union Minister of Education, while inaugurating the programme, highlighted three main objectives of correspondence education (Chib, 1977):

1. to provide an efficient and less expensive method of educational instruction at a higher level in the context of the national development of India;

2. to provide facilities to pursue higher education to all qualified and willing persons who had failed to join regular university courses due to personal and economic reasons or because of their inability to get admission to a regular college; and

3. to provide opportunities of academic pursuit to educated citizens to improve their standards of knowledge and learning through correspondence instruction without disturbing their present employment.

Within a year, the UD — first dual mode university in India — attracted a good number of students. In 1969-70, the B.Sc course was started but was discontinued in 1973-74 on account of lack of demand for it. A B.Com course was introduced in 1970-71 and subsequently postgraduate courses were also introduced in the university.

In 1964, the Government of India appointed an Education Commission under the Chairmanship of Dr. D.S. Kothari to advise the government on the national pattern of education and on the general principles and policies for the development of education at all stages and in all aspects. The Commission noted that one of the major weaknesses of the existing educational system was its exclusive reliance on full-time instruction and non-development of the two other channels of part-time education and private study or own-time education. The Commission recommended opportunities like evening colleges for part-time education and correspondence education for own-time education. The Commission dispelled any apprehension that correspondence courses are an inferior form of education than what is given in regular schools and colleges. The Commission further recommended:

i) In order to bring education to those who are unable even to attend part-time courses, widespread organisation of correspondence courses should occur.

ii) Students taking correspondence courses should be provided opportunities to meet the teachers occasionally.

iii) Correspondence courses should be supported by well-coordinated radio and television programmes.

iv) Correspondence courses should not be confined to preparing students for the university degrees but should also provide agricultural, industrial and other workers such special courses of instruction as would help them to improve production.
v) Correspondence courses should be made available for those who desire to enrich their lives by studying subjects of cultural and aesthetic value.

vi) Correspondence courses should be developed for the teachers in schools to keep them abreast with new knowledge as well as with new methods and techniques of teaching.

To get benefited by the experience of the erstwhile Soviet Union in correspondence education, the UGC sent a delegation to the country in 1967 to study correspondence education in that country. The delegation consisted of representatives of the Union Ministry of Education, the Faculty of Education & Psychology of M.S. University (Baroda) and the NCERT. The delegation after studying correspondence education in the erstwhile USSR strongly favoured it for India, particularly for the expansion of teacher education. The delegation stated “it is our considered opinion that the system of correspondence courses for teacher training can be profitably adopted in our own country...” (Singh, 1978).

Considering the recommendation of the Education Commission 1964-66, the Planning Commission, the UGC delegation and the satisfactory progress of the pilot project of the University of Delhi, the UGC appointed a committee to consider the question of expansion of correspondence courses in universities. The committee suggested that correspondence courses should be started only in a selected number of well established universities with strong faculty strength, and provided very meaningful guidelines for the expansion of correspondence courses. Besides the other things, the committee suggested study centres for contact classes for students, use of the laboratory and library facilities of conventional colleges by the correspondence students, and preparation and availability of quality instructional materials. Had the UGC and the universities followed these guidelines in the subsequent expansion of correspondence courses in India, the quality of dual mode university correspondence courses would have been different from that of today (Satyanarayana, 1997).

In the light of the recommendations of the Education Commission 1964-66 and the UGC Committee on the expansion of correspondence courses, the UGC decided to extend the scheme of correspondence courses to other universities. Punjabi University, Patiala was the second university in the country which was allowed to set up a full fledged Directorate of Correspondence Courses in 1968 with the offer of pre-university and BA courses in English and Punjabi. The university was the first to offer pre-university correspondence course with an enrolment of 2,400 students.

In 1968 another delegation comprising the principal of the SCCCE, University of Delhi and a representative of the UGC visited the erstwhile USSR. The delegation felt that although there was much in common between India and the USSR in regard to the objectives of correspondence courses, yet for historical and social reasons, it would be neither feasible nor appropriate for India to emulate the Soviet system, though India could be benefited by the Soviet model in increasing the operational efficiency of correspondence education. The delegation specifically emphasized the academic character of correspondence courses and de-emphasized the commercial character of the courses. Further, the delegation stressed the need for compulsory contact programme for the students, submission of assignments by students, and a wider coverage of course subjects including professional areas (Singh, 1978).

In 1971 the third delegation comprising the directors of correspondence courses of Punjabi University and Rajasthan University again visited the erstwhile USSR. The delegation made a detailed study of the Soviet system of correspondence education and made several important suggestions on the expansion, diversification, coverage of adult education, use of media, teachers, production of self-instructional materials, and others.

As a follow up measure to the recommendation of the third delegation to the erstwhile USSR, the Standing Committee for Part-time Education and Correspondence Courses of the UGC held a special meeting in September 1972 to consider a proposal to set up a National Institute of
Correspondence Courses. The meeting, besides other things, favoured the establishment of NICC as a forerunner of the fulltime national correspondence university to be an affiliating and/or independent body for all the correspondence courses in the country. The UGC at its meeting in December 1972 agreed in principle with the suggestion of setting up a NICC and constituted a planning committee consisting of 6 members (Rais Ahmed, M.V. Mathur, J.N. Kapur, Bhakhshish Singh, D.V. Urs and P.C. Mukherji). The first meeting of the committee was held in April 1973 which discussed the details of the proposed national institute. Thereafter, though nothing happened. The main reason for the indecision seemed to be the idea of the union government to set up an open university, which might perform the functions of the earlier proposed national institute (Singh, 1978).

During the first decade of correspondence education (1962-72), the following 13 correspondence units of conventional universities were set up which offered different graduate, postgraduate and certificate level courses (Anand, 1985):

i) School of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education, University of Delhi (1962).

ii) Directorate of Correspondence Courses, Punjab University (1968).

iii) Institute of Correspondence Studies and Continuing Education, University of Rajasthan (1968).

iv) Institute of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education, University of Mysore (1969).

v) Institute of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education, Meerut University (1969)

vi) Institute of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education, Madurai Kamaraj University (1971)

vii) Directorate of Correspondence Courses, Himachal Pradesh University (1971).

viii) Directorate of Correspondence Courses, Punjab University (1971).

ix) Directorate of Correspondence Courses, Bombay University (1971).


xi) Institute of Correspondence Courses, Sri Venkateshwara University (1972).

xii) School of Correspondence Courses, Andhra University (1972).

xiii) Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (1972).

**Correspondence Education at School Level**

The idea to start correspondence courses at the school level originated in 1964 when the Conference of Boards of Secondary Education (COBSE) in India recommended that the state boards of secondary education (BSE) should start correspondence courses to improve the academic standards of private students. As a consequence, the BSE of the state of Madhya Pradesh started correspondence course for intermediate students in 1965. The Patracher Vidyalya followed suit in 1968. The BSEs of states of Rajasthan, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh later initiated correspondence courses at school level for private candidates only. These institutions followed the same courses as were prescribed for the formal school children and held common year-end examinations.

In 1979, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) set up an Open School at the secondary level for the learners of 14 years age and above, who for a number of reasons, were unable to continue their studies in formal schools. The Open School aimed at providing education at home to out-of-school learners – school dropouts, working adults, housewives/homemakers, learners from disadvantaged sections of society and those living in remote areas of the country. The objectives were:

a) to offer bridge and preparatory or foundation courses to those whose achievement level corresponded to class VI to VIII level so that the learner may successively take up secondary school level course;

b) to offer secondary, senior secondary, technical, vocational and life enrichment courses; and
c) to promote an open distance learning system of education through research, publication and dissemination of information.

Open schooling was experimented from 1978 to 1989 as a project of the CABE and was amalgamated with the National Open School (NOS) and now called National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), an autonomous organisation set up in November 1989 by the Ministry of Human Resource Department, Government of India. NIOS has supported the establishment of the largest number of open schools compared to any other country in the world. Besides NIOU, state open schools have been set up in Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala and J&K with NIOS collaboration and assistance. Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan have set up their own state open schools. During the 10th Plan more state open schools are likely to come up. For a detailed study on this, Panda and Garg (2003) and the section on school education in this volume should be useful.

**University Level Correspondence Education (Second and Third Decades)**

By the end of the first decade (i.e. 1972), correspondence education in India gained considerable recognition and acceptance. The findings and suggestions of various committees and delegations and the practices of CCIs motivated many educators to meet periodically to discuss the problems and prospects of correspondence education provided by the conventional universities through their separate schools/institutes/directorates/departments. The Indian Association for Continuing Education, formed during this period, acted as a catalyst for periodic meetings of the (correspondence) educators to promote academic climate in favour of correspondence education.

IACE's first major contribution was the organisation of the first national seminar on correspondence education at Mysore in October 1972 in collaboration with the Mysore University. Later, three more national seminars were held in 1976, 1979 and 1982 at Patiala, Chandigarh and Trivandrum respectively. The first national seminar was significant in terms of rich discussions and valuable recommendations. It created an opportunity for the representatives of the participating universities to assess developments in the newly emerging sectors of education and to develop a perspective for the coming years. The seminar envisaged the possibility that correspondence education could become an effective agent of change in regard to the quality of higher education at the first degree level and beyond. It further recommended that a Joint Committee of the UGC and the Inter-University Board (now Association of Indian Universities) should guide the Universities in promoting correspondence education (Satyanarayana, 1995).

The UGC which had all along been concerned with the development and streamlining of the scheme of correspondence courses convened in October 1974 at Delhi a conference of the CCIs with a view to assess the functioning and to discuss their problems and make suggestions for their improvement. Satish Chandra, the then Vice Chairman of the UGC, in his address urged for the introduction of new courses of innovative character which can bring education nearer to the problems of the country. The observations and recommendations of the conference may be classified under five heads:

- Scope of correspondence education in India
- Preparation of reading materials
- Future of correspondence education and the role of the state
- Organisational and administrative set up in a directorate of correspondence courses
- Ancillary services such as radio talks, TV presentations, etc.

The UGC’s Standing Committee for Part-time and Own-time Education took stock of the deliberations of the conference and after detailed discussion evolved a set of guidelines for
correspondence courses which were approved by the UGC in March 1975. The guidelines helped some universities in giving serious thought to the quality aspect of their correspondence courses, but by and large they were not taken seriously. Some universities saw the correspondence courses as money spinners and not as agencies for widening the access to higher educational opportunities. This attitude of the university disturbed the heads and teachers of CCIs of the universities as well as the correspondence students which was reflected in the deliberations of the conferences and seminars on correspondence education organised later on. But on the one hand the old situation continued and on the other hand the number of CCIs increased year by year.

The 11th World Conference of the International Council for Correspondence Education (ICCE) was held in November 1978 at New Delhi. Some of the CCIs participated in the conference highlighted the need for strengthening of correspondence education. They reaffirmed the earlier proposal to establish a central organisation to promote and strengthen correspondence education and to serve as a watch dog of the working of correspondence courses of different universities in the country. In spite of the acceptance of the proposal by the UGC as early as in 1972 and the continuous demand by the CCIs, no central organisation could be established for streamlining, strengthening and monitoring correspondence education until the establishment in 1985 of IGNOU which was given the additional role of coordinating and maintaining standards in distance education in the country.

Correspondence education in India now upgraded to distance education, in spite of its long journey continued to be of poor quality like many other countries overseas. Before the emergence of the open university system in the country, correspondence education was criticised by educationists and conventional university teachers for its ineffectiveness and inefficiency. Some of the limitations which contributed to the ineffectiveness of correspondence education in India are (IGNOU Project Report, 1985; Mulay, 1986; Ram Reddy, 1985; Satyanarayana 1995; Prasad & Venkaiah, 2005):

- Most of the correspondence institutes do not have competent and adequate staff. Best of the teachers are not posted to work in these institutes. As a result, they have low degree of motivation.
- More than one university in a state started correspondence courses thereby duplicating efforts resulting in low enrolments in many universities.
- Lessons (course units) are prepared in a hurry with no regard to the principles of self-instruction.
- Not much attention is paid to student assignments; they are not evaluated, corrected and returned to the students in time.
- Most of the correspondence courses do not have ‘study centres’ and personal contact programmes are organised by only a few institutions and that to only a few times in a year.
- Too much reliance is placed on the printed material, and information & communication technology is hardly made use of.
- There is considerable delay in the despatch of course lessons to the students.
- Bodies charged with the running of these institutions are not organised properly.
- The system has the same rigidities in the courses offered as in the formal system, compelling the students to opt for the same courses and appear for the same examinations as the regular students.
- Rarely laboratory and library facilities are provided, and where they exist they are much below the standard.
- They do not have identity of their own as they work within the parent university structure and statutory provisions.
- Rarely efforts are made to evaluate and check the standard of these correspondence courses. Therefore, their growth and style of working are haphazard leaving much room to be improved.
In spite of several limitations, correspondence education continued to spread rapidly in the university system. Fast expansion, meagre student support services and lack of innovativeness of flexibility in course structure caused alarm among educational planners, and intensified their desire to reform the system.

The original guidelines issued by the UGC in 1975 were later modified to conform to the changes in the expectations of the correspondence education system. The revised guidelines clearly stated:

Distance education is essentially based on the supply of instructional material but has to be supported and supplemented by personal contact programmes, student responses, library facilities, study centres, radio programmes and audio-visual aids, etc. A well conceived programme of distance education can be as effective and meaningful as regular day-time instruction in a college or a University department and every possible effort must be made to make it so effective.

The UGC prescribed minimum standards of instruction for the grant of the first degree through non-formal distance education in the faculties of arts, humanities, social sciences, sciences and commerce. Some CCIs tried to follow the UGC guidelines while many failed to understand the spirit of new guidelines.

By the time the idea of an open university was gaining ground, 34 dual mode universities were offering correspondence courses, and the student enrolment in correspondence courses was 6.16% of the total higher education enrolment (Table 2).

Table 2: Enrolment in higher education vis-à-vis correspondence education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Universities/colleges (number)</th>
<th>(%)</th>
<th>Distance education institutions (number)</th>
<th>(%)</th>
<th>Total enrolment (number)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>2,426,109</td>
<td>97.42</td>
<td>64,210</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>2,490,319</td>
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<td>1976-77</td>
<td>2,431,563</td>
<td>96.83</td>
<td>79,718</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>2,511,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>2,564,972</td>
<td>95.56</td>
<td>119,163</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>2,684,135</td>
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<tr>
<td>1978-79</td>
<td>2,618,228</td>
<td>95.15</td>
<td>133,459</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>2,751,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-80</td>
<td>2,648,579</td>
<td>95.10</td>
<td>136,699</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>2,785,278</td>
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<td>1980-81</td>
<td>2,752,437</td>
<td>94.30</td>
<td>166,428</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>2,918,865</td>
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<td>1981-82</td>
<td>2,952,066</td>
<td>93.84</td>
<td>193,691</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>3,145,757</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Various UGC Annual Reports; Yadav & Panda (1999)

**Idea of an Open University**

In India, the first proposal for establishing an open university was made in the early seventies. The Ministry of Education and Social Welfare in collaboration with the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (Government of India) and the UGC organised a seminar in December 1970 as part of a programme for the observance of International Education Year. Inaugurating the seminar, V.K.R.V. Rao, the then Union Education Minister, first mooted the idea of establishing an open university in India and observed:

…It must cover not only the comparatively limited number of university students, but should cover much larger number of students who drop out from the school at various points, the neo-literates, and eventually all adults who desire to avail these programmes of continuing education… The new interesting programmes of instruction, based on modern science-oriented educational technology for students of higher education studying in the Open University should be made available to this much larger body of population which remains outside the so-called University system.
As a result of these suggestions the Government of India appointed a Working Group with Mr. G. Parthasarathi, the then Vice Chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University, in 1971 to examine the feasibility of establishing an open university in India. This Working Group in its Report submitted in 1975 stated:

In a situation of this type, where the expansion of enrolments in higher education has to continue at a terrific pace and where available resources in terms of men and money are limited, the obvious solution, if proper standards are to be maintained and the demand for higher education from different sections of the people is to be met, is to adopt the Open University System with its provision of higher education of part-time or own time basis.

The Group recommended that an open university be established under an Act of Parliament with jurisdiction over the entire country. This Act was to be enacted after consultation with state governments both in respect of jurisdiction as well as the possibility of drawing upon the resources of the existing institutions furtherance of the objectives of the open university. The functions suggested for such an open university were to:

a) offer courses similar to university programmes for the working population and others who are unable to join regular university courses;
b) offer continuing education for the work force including government functionaries, professionals and other members in the form of special programmes depending upon the requirement of each category;
c) organise special programmes, for housewives, of general education, home-making, nutrition, maternity, child care, population education, etc.; and
d) carry out certain catalytic functions for universities involving non-formal programmes of higher education.

The proposed open university was to carry out almost all the functions which were prescribed for the NICE. The recommendations of the Working Group did not draw much attention of the educationists and planners. The idea of a national open university remained on shelf till 1985 when IGNOU was established.

In 1982, a Committee to Enquire into the Working of the Central Universities, appointed by the University Grants Commission under the chairpersonship of Dr. (Mrs) Madhuri R Shah made the following observations:

To satisfy existing thirst for knowledge as well as degrees, admission to formal courses on the basis of merit requires that opportunities for off-campus studies should be created on a large scale, for a great variety of courses of high quality. We already have a number of Universities offering correspondence courses; we need to utilise and coordinate this expertise and infrastructure to create an effective system of distance learning. Mass media, such as radio and television, which are already beginning to be used to greater potential is being created through the satellites, should be employed in a systematic manner to enlarge the scope and enrich the quality of distance education. We could create with available know how in software and hardware a highly proficient and attractive system of education for the whole Country of which the present correspondence institutes could become focal points. Courses in new fields, particularly in science and some in technology could also be started, perhaps using college laboratories in off-hours and some of the best teachers could be involved in delivering lectures, libraries of audio and video cassettes could be created to enrich both formal and non-formal education.

The committee recommended that practical steps for creating a national open university of distance education be taken up without delay.
The debate at the national level on the open university system stimulated thinking on the subject in various states. In Andhra Pradesh, a proposal was made to start an open university as early as in 1978. In that year Ram Reddy, the then Vice Chancellor of the Osmania University was requested by the then Education Minister of Andhra Pradesh to visit the British Open University and submit a report. In the report, he commended the role of the unique institution and suggested a similar institution for Andhra Pradesh to strengthen non-formal education in the state. The Education Minister liked the suggestion and proposed an open university, though the proposal did not bear fruit. About the same time, Osmania University made a proposal for starting an 'open education college' (OEC) to strengthen distance education. The college was to have full autonomy but the degrees were to be awarded by the Osmania University. At about the same time the OEC was to be set up, B. Venkataram, who as the Education Minister had requested G. Ram Reddy to submit a report on the British Open University in 1978, became the Chief Minister of the state. During the early days of his short tenure, the new Chief Minister revived the interest in the open university system. In 1982 the Government of Andhra Pradesh 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 and equalisation of educational opportunities and the emergence of a new concept of life long education”. To give shape to this policy, the government appointed a committee under the chairmanship of G. Ram Reddy, the then Vice Chancellor of Osmania University and, based on the Committee’s report, the Andhra Pradesh Open University (APOU) was established in 1982. The first full fledged and totally public funded distance teaching university in India. The open university formally came into existence on August 26, 1982, and was later renamed as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU) in 1992. The course of distance education in the country would have been different, had this open university not been set up.

Realising its importance and immediate relevance the Government of India decided to establish a National Open University in the early part of 1985. The then Prime Minister, late Shri Rajiv Gandhi, in his first broadcast to the nation on January 5, 1985, spelt out the new government’s policy relating to education and announced the establishment of a national open university. He observed “…Steps are being taken to establish an open university to bring higher education within the easy reach of all”. The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) named after the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was set up on September 20, 1985. The idea of a national open university initiated in early 70s, thus, became a reality after fifteen years. Interestingly, the founder Vice Chancellor of the first Open University, G. Ram Reddy, became the first Vice Chancellor of the National Open University. The credit of setting up and shaping the future of two major open universities in the world, as Sidharth Ramphal, the then Secretary General of the Commonwealth acclaimed in his address to the first convocation of IGNOU in 1989, goes to Ram Reddy.

Soon after its establishment, IGNOU was entrusted with the responsibility, besides acting as a national (open) university and as a national resource centre for distance education, of promoting and coordinating the open learning and distance education system in the country as well as monitoring and determining their standards. It focused its attention on the problem of correspondence education provided through Institutes of CCI and organised a seminar in January 1986 on the ‘problems of distance education in Indian universities’ to which all the heads of CCI were invited. The seminar was attended by 23 representatives of Institutes of CCI and a representative of Andhra Pradesh Open University (APOU). The seminar discussed and debated several issues including the nature and scope of relationship between IGNOU and the SOUs, IGNOU and CCI and between the latter two. In the light of the problems posed and possible solutions suggested at the seminar, IGNOU convened a meeting of Vice Chancellors and Officers-on-Special Duty of SOUs in May 1986. The Vice Chancellor of APOU, Special Officers of proposed SOUs in the Maharashtra and Kerala attended the meeting. The meeting
mainly discussed the pattern of academic programmes, networking of courses, standards of
instructional materials and the relationship between IGNOU and SOUs.

In October 1990, the UGC organised a conference of Vice Chancellors to discuss the
coordination and maintenance of standards in distance education. A theme paper was
developed by the UGC for the Conference through a Committee comprising the Vice
Chancellors of IGNOU, SOUs and a few others. After discussing the theme paper, the
conference constituted four groups for making recommendations for strengthening distance
education. The four groups made valuable suggestions. On the basis of the recommendations
of the groups, the UGC and IGNOU evolved an organisational frame and procedures to
coordinate and maintain standards in distance education.

Till the establishment of Distance Education Council (DEC) by IGNOU in 1990, the efforts of
IGNOU to coordinate and strengthen distance education in the country confined to the system
of SOUs, and the UGC continued to look after the correspondence education offered through
the conventional universities.

DEC has three roles: the promotional role, the role of coordination and maintenance of
standards, and the role of financial support. The activities of DEC have expanded over time.
The DEC extends financial support to distance education institutions for development of
infrastructure, institutional reforms, academic improvement, staff development and training,
student support services, computerisation and networking of institutions for improvement of
quality of education.

By 1994-95, 62 dual mode universities and 7 open universities were offering distance education
to nearly 0.8 million students comprising above 13% of the total higher education enrolment
(Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Universities/colleges (number)</th>
<th>(%)</th>
<th>Distance education institutions (number)</th>
<th>(%)</th>
<th>Total enrolment (number)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982-83</td>
<td>3,133,093</td>
<td>94.07</td>
<td>197,555</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>3,330,648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-85</td>
<td>3,404,096</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>3,570,897</td>
<td>90.96</td>
<td>3,55,090 (27,629)</td>
<td>9.04</td>
<td>3,925,987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-87</td>
<td>3,681,870</td>
<td>91.14</td>
<td>357,791 (28,745)</td>
<td>8.86</td>
<td>4,039,661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>3,814,417</td>
<td>90.45</td>
<td>402,720 (36,448)</td>
<td>9.55</td>
<td>4,217,137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-89</td>
<td>3,947,922</td>
<td>89.68</td>
<td>454,243 (77,748)</td>
<td>10.32</td>
<td>4,402,165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989-90</td>
<td>4,246,878</td>
<td>88.84</td>
<td>533,441 (66,265)</td>
<td>11.16</td>
<td>4,780,319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>4,425,247</td>
<td>88.72</td>
<td>562,814 (75,417)</td>
<td>11.28</td>
<td>4,988,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>4,611,107</td>
<td>87.12</td>
<td>678,063 (122,531)</td>
<td>12.82</td>
<td>5,289,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-95</td>
<td>5,310,753</td>
<td>86.86</td>
<td>803,176</td>
<td>13.14</td>
<td>6,113,929</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Various UGC Annual Reports; figures in parentheses indicate the enrolment in the open universities;
n.a. = not available. Yadav & Panda (1999)

**Present Status**

The comprehensive institutional growth of distance can be discerned from Table 4 and Table 5.
Higher institutional growth is a phenomenon of the nineties; and as shall be seen from Table 4
the duration 2001-05 has seen establishment of three open universities and 36 dual-mode
university distance education centres.
Table 4: Institutional growth of distance education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Open universities</th>
<th>Conventional university distance education centres</th>
<th>Cumulative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1962-75</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-82</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-85</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-90</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-00</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-05</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Open universities in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Open University</th>
<th>Year of establishment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University</td>
<td>1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Indira Gandhi National Open University</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Vardhman Mahaveer Open University</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Nalanda Open University</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Y C Maharastra Open university</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Kamataka State Open University</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>U P Rajasri Tandan Open University</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Tamil Nadu Open University</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Pandit Sundarlal Sharma Open University</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Information Base on Distance Higher Education in India, DEC, IGNOU, 2004.

The policy of the Government of India is that each state shall have to establish an open university and an open school to cater to the increasing educational and training needs of the students and citizens. Above all, access and equity have so far been the prime focus, and shall remain so in the future (Panda, 2005). There is a definite federal government mandate that the enrolment in distance education must reach 40% of the total higher education by the end of the Tenth Plan period (i.e. by the year 2007). The expansion of the open university so far as given in Table 5 suggests that institutional growth and achievements have been tremendous, and are poised to grow in the future.

As of today there are 12 open universities and 106 dual mode university distance education institutes/centres in the country, offering above 2.8 million students 429 academic programmes and 3817 courses through a network of 105 regional centres, 4229 study centres, and 62270 tutors/counsellors (see Table 6). In the Tenth Plan period (2002-07), the 29 states in the country are expected to have one Open University each, and the distance education system is expected to cater for the educational needs of at least 50% of the additional student enrolment. Today it takes care of above 25% of the total student enrolment in higher education. If we consider the Tenth Plan proposal of increasing student enrolment in higher education from the present 6% to 10% of relevant age group of 18-23, in absolute terms this implies an additional student enrolment of above seven million. Though the distance education system may not be able to take on 50% of this load, the enrolment within distance education is expected to increase at the most to 30% (i.e. up to about four million in total, with 50% sharing for IGNOU at 1.95 million students) by the end of this plan period.
Table 6: Status of open universities (2003-04)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>IGNOU *</th>
<th>BRAOU</th>
<th>VMOU</th>
<th>NOU</th>
<th>YCMOU</th>
<th>MPBOU</th>
<th>BAOU</th>
<th>KSOU</th>
<th>NSOU</th>
<th>UPRTOU</th>
<th>TNOU</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programmes</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>3863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students (‘000)</td>
<td>366.1</td>
<td>190.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>192.2</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>923.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Rolls (‘000)</td>
<td>1311</td>
<td>190.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>199.2</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>225.2</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>2873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCs and SRCs</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCs</td>
<td>1257(^1)</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1425</td>
<td>1070</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACs</td>
<td>33,366</td>
<td>5344</td>
<td>2465</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>8949</td>
<td>8000</td>
<td>979</td>
<td>1050</td>
<td>2473</td>
<td>885</td>
<td>875</td>
<td>64,838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio</td>
<td>1293</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>1792</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2288</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>1369</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3577</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IGNOU=Indira Gandhi National Open University (* data for 2004-05); BRAOU= Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University; VMOU = Vardhman Mahavir Open University; NOU=Nalanda Open University; YCMOU= Yashwantrao Chavan Maharastra Open University; MPBOU=MP Bhoj Open University; BAOU= Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University; KSOU= Karnataka State Open University; NSOU=Netaji Subhash Open University; UPRTOU= UP Rajarshi Tandon Open University; TNOU = Tamil Nadu Open University.

RC= regional centre; SRC = sub-regional centre; SC = study centre; AC = academic counselor or tutor; n.a. = not available; 1 = includes 22 tele-learning centres and 35 overseas centres.

Source: DEC (2004); IGNOU (2005)
The tremendous developments in the indigenously developed media capacity housed/handled by IGNOU as given in Table 7 reflect the growing importance given to multiple media education and media networking for distance learning.

Table 7: National media capacity (of IGNOU)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media and technology</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satellite transponder</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleconferencing centres</td>
<td>790 (to increase to 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National TV channels</td>
<td>6 (including the teleconferencing channel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All India Radio stations</td>
<td>186 (interactive radio counselling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tele-learning centres</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FM radio stations</td>
<td>17 (to increase to 40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite</td>
<td>1 (EduSat)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Panda (2004); IGNOU (2005)

Conclusion

The distance education system has emerged as an alternative as well as channel of education and training in India. It has already established its credibility and recognition. The growth of distance education, both quantitatively and qualitatively, has been phenomenal during the last two decades, particularly after the introduction of single mode open universities. Further, the application of ICTs gave a major fillip to the accelerated development of distance education. The role of distance education is going to be more and more predominant in the coming decades. The process of convergence between the distance education and conventional education is becoming faster and the convergence will continue to be necessarily fast. There is an immediate need for the planners and policy makers to formulate necessary policies and strategies to enhance the quality of distance education in India.

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