CHAPTER IV
EQUITY, EQUALITY AND COST OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Today's life is embroiled by the contradictions of the principles and the practices of equality. The mirage of equality that prevails in Indian Society is evident in its intellectual interpretation. Here is a country where the Constitution lays emphasis on equality mapping it a fundamental right for every citizen to enjoy. But a common Indian confronts bewildering varieties of inequalities interwoven with traditional customs of social discrimination passed on to him from time immemorial. The contradiction of customs and values in a pluralistic society and the built-in taboos of discrimination are not confined only to India. It is a pattern seen in most parts of the world where the history of the land dates several centuries back. Inequalities in those days were not considered uncivilised and our Indian Society even gave legal sanctity to such discriminatory practices through 'Manu Sasthra' which preached discrimination, based on occupation and the practice of vocation as a class on hereditary lines as a dictum. The role of Indian universities in the present unpredictable conflict between the hierarchal social order of the yester years and the needs of the present egalitarian days is discussed in this chapter, having in view the process of changes taking place in the social order of Indian society.
University in contemporary Indian life is embraced by the contradiction of the hierarchal social order, inherited from the past on one hand and commitment to equality of the present on the other. Every one expect the Universities to reduce the constraints of the hierarchical order, but how far the universities can satisfy the populistic demands and still survive as a dynamic entity, is the paradox facing today's Indian University system. Before determining as to how to resolve the contradiction between the ideals and realities of equality it is necessary to know how the universities themselves got entangled in it.

The Universities have come to occupy a large and permanent place in Indian life, although academicians like to talk more about their being in the grip of crisis of some form or the other. There is certainly an appearance of crisis on the university campus in almost every part of the country, be it a financial or political one, or failure of administrative machinery. A crisis in a university receives more than its due share of public attention since university teachers and students in India, as elsewhere are articulate and reflective. Since universities have grown in number and size, both students and teachers have become unionised throughout the country. The demand for equality in the universities is not a mere matter of what is required by the free and unfettered pursuit of reformers; but it
has to be perceived also in terms of the fiscal policies enunciated by the Government from time to time. The formation of different union at different levels within the university Campus, also contribute.

The Indian University is not characteristically a quiet place, tucked away in a remote corner. It has been from the very beginning associated with the metropolis. Further, universities have been established largely at the initiative of the Government, first the colonial Government and then, after independence, the Central and State Governments. The first three universities were set up in 1857 at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras which were the principal centres of British rule in India at that time.

The goals of university education are many and diverse. Even the most ardent egalitarian would not like to agree that the pursuit of equality, let alone its attainment, should become the sole concern of the university. At the same time, if this becomes a major concern of the intelligentsia in general, it is difficult to perceive universities remaining indifferent to it. Having turned the light of criticism on the social hierarchies outside, the universities cannot screen itself of their own internal disorders.

There is hardly any institution in the modern world which provides a more congenial ground than the university for
experiments with equality. It brings together individuals from a variety of classes and strata; but to what extent it is enabling them to deal with each other on individual merit, regardless of social background is a debatable issue. To some extent universities do bridge the gap between institutions of home and work; but enabling men and women to deal in equal terms is a different ball game altogether.

It is not easy to measure the contribution made by university education to the attainment of equality. For one thing, this contribution may not be direct; for another, it may not be apparent in the short run. One should also consider the argument that, by diverting scarce resources from primary and secondary education to university education it might in fact have hindered rather than helped the equalisation of opportunities in the society as a whole.\(^1\) This is particularly true in a country like India where large numbers of people do not get even the benefits of primary education.

Even for countries that can manage to send everybody to school, there is no clear evidence of the gains to equality from university education. The rapid expansion of university education does not guarantee the reduction, not to speak of the elimination, of social inequalities. After noting this expansion

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\(^1\) Sen Amartya, 'Ten Crisis in Indian Education' (The Lal Bhadur Shastri, Memorial Lectures, delivered on 10th and 11th March, 1970, in New Delhi).
in America, a recent study declares, somewhat indignantly: 'Colleges and universities play a crucial role in the production of labour power, in the reproduction of the class structure, and in the perpetuation of the dominant values of the social order.'

Those who hope for the elimination of the class structure through the expansion of university education will have to wait for a very long time.

It will be a mistake to think that only radical academics in America express indignation when they find that their universities are reproducing the class structure. Such indignation has very wide following and perhaps quite widely felt. On the other hand the commission on University Education, set up under the Chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, shortly after independence, declared: "Education is a universal right, not a class privilege." What the commission probably had in mind perhaps would be that access to the university should not in principle be denied to anyone. It is not that in practice everyone who asked for a place in a university should get one. Nor is it likely that the Commission had in mind the immediate

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abolition of the class structure. But this much ought to be very clear, that so long as society has a class structure, university education will continue to be more or less of a class privilege.

The concern for equality was carried over into the second major commission on education set up in independent India, the Education Commission of 1964-66, under the Chairmanship of Dr. D.S. Kothari. The scope of the Kothari Commission was wider than that of the Radhakrishnan Commission since it covered primary and secondary in addition to higher education. It not only included the attainment of equality among the objectives of education—school education as well as university education—but also assigned a more active role to education as an instrument of social change: 'If this "change on a grand scale" is to be achieved without violent revolution there is one and only instrument, that can be used: EDUCATION.'

Both the Commission produced very sober and judicious reports, formulating a whole range of goals and objectives for university education and drawing attention to the practical difficulties of harmonising the same. At the same time, they have served to give shape and substance to the argument that the universities can no longer justify themselves by academic attainments alone, but must orient to definite social purposes. Their academic attainment must be judged in the light of the social purpose.

Edward Shils has argued in his Jefferson Lecture that 'The idea that universities could create social equality' is a new one.¹ In the United States it caught the imagination of the public only after the Second World War. This is not to say that in the past people did not recognise that universities could be used as means of social ascent by talented individuals lacking the advantages of birth. In fact, special endowments have been made in the universities from the Middle Ages onwards precisely with that end in view. Such a conception of the university does not call for an end to the existing system of stratification but, rather, takes its continued existence for granted. Totally different from it is the conception that the university should play a major part, if not the central part, in transforming a hierarchical society into an egalitarian one, or a class-divided society into a classless one.

It should not be difficult merely to recognise that the pursuit of equality through increased opportunities for individual mobility is different from the creation of equality by abolition of the class structure. What is difficult is to accept all the implications of the distinction without yielding to the temptations of rhetoric. Increasingly, on public occasions such

as convocations, academic dignitaries call upon the universities to take the lead in the creation of full equality, although in private they readily admit that such an objective may not be very realistic, and that the universities should try at least to give more people a better chance.

It should also be borne in mind that the maladies of creating an 'educated elite' class are far less than the maladies of existing class structure and in fact given the realities a preferred one.

The Radhakrishnan Commission, which declared that 'education is a universal right, not a class privilege', also pointed out that 'in most countries of the world there is an ordered hierarchy in the universities.' As institutions, the universities have had a very long a very chequered history and it is difficult to form a realistic idea of what they may be expected to do without some consideration of their history. The most important part of this history for this study lies in the way in which the university has changed from being an institution adapted to a hierarchical social environment to the one more in tune with the contemporary spirit of equality.

The social concept of education is rather a new development when viewed in the context of university education that prevailed in the traditional educational set up of British and European model. It is to be noted that the nineteenth century was a period of great expansion in the building of universities in England where, until the University of Durham was set up in 1832, the two Universities of Oxford and Cambridge had between themselves held the field for more than six hundred years.\(^1\)

From the sociological point of view the real achievement of Cambridge and Oxford lies in the success with which they have conducted their passage from the medieval to the modern world.\(^2\) It is not simply that some of the best work in the humanities and sciences are still conducted there, but also that their roots go directly back into the Middle Ages which are visibly present in them to this day.

The traditions of Oxford and Cambridge reach back into a historical age in which the concern for equality would appear strange and unfamiliar. Medieval European society was a hierarchical society and when the first universities were set up in Bologna, in Paris in the same period people did not think that

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\(^2\) Ibid.,
the established hierarchy must pass away or that the universities must play a main part in their passing away. On the contrary the universities not only contributed to the elaboration of the ideas which kept the hierarchy in place they also reproduced the same hierarchy in the organisation of their own internal life. From the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth, the universities of Europe—certainly Oxford and Cambridge—became progressively more hierarchical as they became better endowed and better established.¹

In the light of the experience of the British model of Universities, two striking reforms that these universities were able to bring about over centuries of their existence are notable. The elimination of medieval institutions of (i) close involvement of church in university education and the attendant hierarchical order of student discrimination and (ii) the denial of education to women were the remarkable achievement of these universities. The patronage structure of the university and its colleges were until quite recently closely linked with that of the church.² The question of equal educational opportunities for

² Ibid.,
women did not arise as the education of women had no place in either Cambridge or Oxford until about a hundred years ago.*

Family background had an acknowledged place in the classification of students in Oxford, and the following categories were officially used: baronis filius (sons of noblemen), equitis filius (sons of knights), armigeri filius (sons of esquires), generosi filius (sons of gentleman), plebei filius (sons of commeners) and clerici filius (sons of clergymen). In keeping with traditional distinctions of status, sons of bishops were listed with sons of noblemen, not of clergymen. Those of inferior status paid smaller fees but those of superior status were entitled to take first degrees after nine instead of twelve terms of residence. It is noteworthy that these categories were used until as recently as 1891 when the Registrar of Oxford began to record the father's occupation instead of his status. In Cambridge the privilege where by sons of noblemen were excused from taking examinations was abolished only in 1884.²

* In Cambridge two colleges were set up for women in the second half of the nineteenth century. Women were allowed to take the tripos examination in 1881, but were not allowed immediately to proceed to university degrees. It was only as recently as in 1948 that women were granted full membership of the university.


The marks of invidious social (as opposed to academic) distinction were also visible in the internal structure of the colleges. There were distinctions, between master and fellows and between students, with their respective privileges. 'Students' themselves were of various kinds. The core consisted of the 'scholars' who, like the fellows, were supported by the foundation: the college provided them with education as well as boarding and lodging. But there were others who had to pay for what the college gave them; these included 'pensioners' who were ordinary fee-paying students in residence, and 'fellow commoners' who paid extra and had the privilege of dining with the fellows. At the bottom were the 'sizers' who, in Cambridge, were granted the benefits of college life, including education, in return for menial services rendered to the more privileged members of the college.¹

Similar distinctions were maintained in the French Universities under the ancient regime. Philippe Aries writes: 'An edict of 1626 reveals the existence of similar customs in the colleges of the university of Paris: the colleges separated the boarders from the dayboys, the laymen from the clerics and also the sons of good family from the poor students who acted as college servants.'² These distinctions were closely associated

¹ Stone Lawrence, Op.Cit.,
with the corporate life of the colleges, and were particularly marked with the dominance of the university by its colleges in Cambridge, Oxford, Paris and elsewhere.

The pre-occupation of the medieval universities with their privileges, liberties and immunities were older than the colleges and their stratification. On reading about Bologna, Padua and Montpellier, it is clear that this kind of pre-occupation was no less marked in the so-called 'student-Universities' than in the 'magisterial universities.' It is striking to note the endless petitions from students and masters, jointly and severally, to the authorities—the Pope, the Emperor of the city—for the grant, extension or restoration of legal or quasi-legal privileges of every conceivable kind made during those periods. Medieval society was one in which, where people worried little about equality and much about privileges in the concrete, and the medieval universities fought hard for its privileges and watched over them with a jealous eye.

The intension of dealing with the importance given to the privilege and patronage by some of the renowned universities in the world is not to impress that merit did not find any place


in them. It would be capricious to maintain that Cambridge and Oxford devoted all their attention to social origin and none to individual merit. Their history in almost every century is too full of illustrious names in every field of learning to allow such an argument to be taken seriously.

The point stressed here is that an institutional order based on privilege and patronage might still have within itself considerable room for the recognition, cultivation and promotion of individual merit. This may sound paradoxical— in terms of modern conceptions of equity and justice, but the historical evidence quite clearly shows the capacity of institutions to accommodate diverging principles that appear to be contradictory. Indeed it is this accommodation of principles that gives the institutions their living quality and ensures their viability by enabling them to adapt themselves to changing historical conditions.

There is need to emphasise the dynamic tension between the attention paid to the social diversities and the recognition given to individual merit within the older universities right until the end of the nineteenth century. No one will say that a privileged social background counts for nothing in Oxford or Cambridge today, but attention to it has become muted and has had to yield ground to other considerations. Throughout the last hundred years people from an increasingly varied social
background have found their way to these institutions, occupying positions of distinction in them.¹ The demands at home and abroad of an expanding capitalist economy played some part in this process in the nineteenth century, and in the two World Wars of the twentieth.

As compared with England till the end of the nineteenth century or even later, the universities in India have been far in advance of society in repudiating traditional social distinctions. In England certain distinctions continued to be maintained, at least in the older universities, long after they had become obsolete or anachronistic in the wider society.² There is nothing in the constitution of the modern Indian University which requires the maintenance or even the recognition of the traditional distinctions between castes and sexes. These distinctions are nevertheless carried into it from the environment on which it depends for its supply of students and teachers, and it has to devise ways and means of dealing with them. Oxford and Cambridge in the nineteenth century maintained many medieval features even in a society in which characteristically modern ways of life were beginning to get established. In

¹ Ibid.,

Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, on the other hand, the Universities were struggling to emerge as islands of modernity in a society that is still set largely in its traditional hierarchical mould.

Originating in the nineteenth century, the Indian Universities were imbued with the characteristic liberal enthusiasm for opening careers to talent. The liberal concern for the individual, irrespective of race, caste and creed, is the guiding principle of the entire Report of the Radhakrishnan Commission. 'The fundamental right is the right of the individual, not of the community. Every young man must have an equal chance with others to make the most of his abilities.'¹ To the extent the Indian University's seek to give primacy to the individual, they remain at odds with the structure of traditional Indian values or whatever survives of it.

There seems to be a fundamental lack of harmony between the organising principle of the university, as seen, for instance, by the Radhakrishnan Commission, and the traditional institutions of village, caste and joint family.² The modern university is different in its orientation from these institutions or even antithetical to them, but it cannot be segregated from

their influence, precisely because no university in the modern world can be insulated from its social environment. It is precisely due to this reason that it is important to realise that the institutional foundations of the Indian Universities are weak and infirm. Whereas the scope and pervasiveness of the traditional institutions are far reaching, not to say overwhelming. The populist believed, at the time of independence that the time and mere expansion of education would sweep all traditional barriers to some extent which no longer holds good. In fact this expansion has served to develop caste and community interest resulting not only in the luxuriant growth of caste based colleges,¹ but also institutions that promote communal character such as Aligar Muslim University.

One cannot emphasise too strongly the part played by nineteenth century colleges in India in creation of a new social class and a new kind of sensibility. It was here that the 'modernisation' of India began and it was also here that India's dependency' on the cultural resources of the West was sealed. These colleges provided not only a new system of knowledge to which many turned with enthusiasm, but also a privileged setting for a new kind of sociality promising inexhaustible possibilities.

The college or the university provides a privileged setting for experiments with a new pattern of relations among persons: This is no less true of Jawaharlal Nehru University in the 1980s than it was of Hindu College in the 1820s. If there is any setting in India in which social relations among persons are relatively unconstrained by tradition, it is neither the office nor the factory, nor even the political party, but the university campus. Nor is this true only of the advanced or liberated campus in the metropolitan city; for life in even the most remote campus in a backward State has a different quality from the general pattern of life in its hinterland. Nothing could be more crass than the belief that young men and women in India come to the universities with the sole object of getting degrees. Young men—and especially young women—also come in order to experience a kind of life which they have never experienced in the home or the neighbourhood and which they fear they may never experience again.

The Indian Universities and colleges, being with modern rather than medieval foundations, never nourished the kinds of invidious distinctions which the European Universities had to contend with when they began to modernize themselves in the nineteenth century. They did not grade their students as 'fellow commoners', 'commoner' and 'sizers' in the way in which the colleges in Cambridge and Oxford did for centuries; they did not
have different rules for admission to their degrees for sons of
noblemen and sons of commoners as they did in these universities;
and the segregation of women never became an established
tradition within the university, no matter how strong such a
tradition might have been outside it. If the historical roots of
these universities do not go very deep, this also means that they
did not have too many hierarchical traditions to outgrow.

The colleges throughout the nineteenth century, and
the universities until the time of independence, accommodated
only small numbers of individuals mainly from the upper strata of
society. There might have been attempts from the start to mix
the castes and communities promiscuously together within the
institutions, but that was very different from having them
equally, or even equitably represented. These were privileged
settings in which people coming mainly, though by no means
wholly, from privileged homes sought to establish new norms of
social interaction.

It is difficult to see what success they could have
achieved inside such small and privileged settings. But they did
achieve some success, and it would be wrong to denigrate or
ignore the achievements of the colleges and universities in their
early phase of growth. Though it is strikingly true that the
preponderance of names of distinguished persons who were
graduated from Calcutta University in earlier days were from the
three upper castes such as Brahmin, Baidya and kayastha. But at the same time in the Hindu College, the group that formed itself around Derozio had set about ignoring the distinction of caste and in the twentieth-century Calcutta University not only accommodated but also honoured such men as Brajendranath Seal and Meghanad Saha who came from traditionally under privileged castes.

With the increase in the number of universities and the growth in their population, the social composition of the universities are now more mixed than it used to be. More people now come to the university than before and they come from a wider range of castes including from the middle and the bottom of the traditional hierarchy. Even so, the various castes are not equally or proportionately represented as a whole on caste basis, there has been an improvement. But going by class, in the sense of family income or occupation, the picture is far from clear. This kind of change, particularly since independence, has come about partly through political pressure. But the very urge to have a more equitable representation of all the major castes has given a different turn to the initial experiment for creating new pattern of relations within the university.

Ironically, it is in the 'elit' institutions, which are financially autonomous and supported by private endowment, and where social and academic privileges are evident, the
considerations of caste play the least part in interpersonal relations within the university community. But the poorly endowed provincial universities which depend on Government grants for financial support get influenced by their immediate environment for the intake of both students and staff and are more manifestly in the grip of caste and other traditional distinctions. If the rate of caste is not evident in the relations between students and teachers in the class rooms, it is certainly evident in the relations among students in the hostels. But even here there is a change, the inequalities of caste have again become manifest, not so much because everyone accepts them, as in the past, but because many are not trying to overthrow them.

There is one area of relation within the university community where change is most marked, although it is evident everywhere: that is the relation between men and women. Women began to make a place for themselves in the universities almost as soon as the universities came into existence in India, unlike in the West where the universities kept women out for centuries during which time they acquired markedly male traditions. The University of Calcutta, set up in 1857, allowed women to take the B.A. examination in 1878 and the first women graduates took their degree in 1883; the University of Bombay followed shortly after.
Colleges for women began to come up in the nineteenth century and when the post graduate departments came up, women found their way in there as well.

University and college education for women was a highly restricted affair in the nineteenth century and it remained restricted until and middle of the twentieth. Even today there is no question of absolute equality between men and women in any numerical sense, but the changes in both quantitative and qualitative terms are worth noting. The number of women enrolled as students in colleges and universities rose from six in 1881-1882 to 256 in 1901-02 and reached at 23,207 in 1946-47 on the eve of independence.\(^1\) Since then the rise in women enrolment has been very rapid; from 43,126 in 1950-51 to 170,455 in 1960-61 to 655,822 in 1970-71 to 748,525 in 1980-81 and went up to 12,51,491 in 1988-89. In relative terms there were 10.9 women for every 100 men in 1950-51, 16.2 in 1960-61, 21.9 in 1970-71, 37.35 in 1980-81 and stood at 46.41 in 1988-89.\(^2\) The number and proportion of women teachers in colleges and universities have also gone up.


Women have by now competed successfully for the best places in university examinations and the highest positions in faculty appointments, not in every university or in every faculty, but in a sufficient number of cases for them to be able to feel secure about their academic achievements within the university. The success of women is particularly visible in the metropolitan universities such as the Universities of Calcutta and Bombay among the older ones or Delhi University and Jawaharlal University among the newer. All of this has been accompanied by a marked change in the social participation of women in the universities, whether as students or as teachers. For women, even more than for men, the University is not only a place of work, it is also a place of recreation.¹ There is more equality between men and women both in performance and in participation in the universities than anywhere outside. This transformation is overwhelmingly if not entirely, a middle class or bourgeois phenomenon.

The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes constitute a tiny section of the middle class unlike the women who constitute half of it. Together these two groups of communities comprise over twenty per cent of the total population

of the country. They have for centuries been socially and economically disadvantaged and although their disabilities have been removed by law, they continue to suffer from a number of disadvantages in practice. The progress of education, particularly higher education has been slow among them, despite attempts by the government to hasten it through freeships and scholarships. According to 1981 census while for the rest of the population the literacy rate was 42.1 per cent for Scheduled Caste and Tribes it was only 16.7 per cent. Social prejudice has to some extent obstructed the academic achievements of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, but a more serious obstacle today is the abject poverty of the vast majority of them to whom even the benefit of literacy comes very slowly.

The way in which the gap between men and women has been narrowed in the university stands in marked contrast to the continuing gap between the upper castes and the lower, or between the middle class and other social classes. It tells a great deal about the extent up to which universities can operate as an instrument of change in creation of social equality but it also enlightens more about the deep rooted nature of the cause for such social discrimination and the need for alternative

mechanisms. At best universities as social institutions can create a temporary facade of social equality. There is no doubt discriminations continue to exist between men and women, but the discrimination existing is different not only in degree but also in kind from the one that exist between castes and classes.

Certain arguments have been put forth in favour of the Indian Universities to show that they have made some progress in the pursuit of equality, at least in certain directions. But they have not moved forward to the same extent in every direction, and some time it appears at least from certain points of view, to be moving backwards. Paradoxically, it is in the most 'Privileged' or 'elitist' or 'exclusive' institutions that the relation among castes or between sexes are least marked by the kind of invidious distinctions that have been traditionally their most remarkable feature.

If the universities can supersede the invidious distinctions upheld by the society, then the extent to which they may be expected to undertake their pursuit to create social equality is debatable. Clearly, they have other aims and responsibilities, including the creation of new knowledge and the promotion of individual talent and ability. The university as it is the place of learning has to ensure the students admitted for any degree courses has the capacity to measure up to the academic
demands. As the Radhakrishnan Commission put it tersely, 'Intellectual work is not for all, it is only for the intellectually competent.'

Some might feel uneasy about having to reconcile the dictum that 'intellectual work is not for all', with the sentiment that 'education is a universal right'. To be sure the two may easily be reconciled in principles requiring, firstly, that certain forms of discrimination be rigorously excluded from the university, and secondly that certain other forms of discrimination be applied with equal vigour. But there are enormous practical difficulties in ensuring that these two seemingly simple requirements be simultaneously met, and it is impossible to escape the suspicion that the wrong kind of discrimination is being made under cover of the right one. Such suspicion is present in all universities in the modern world, but it is academic in India where traditional distinctions are all pervasive outside the university, while within it academic standards are weak and unreliable.

How does a university make its academic standards firm and reliable and how does it create confidence among people in its ability to deliver? There can be no general answers to such

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questions, and only through historical examples it can be explained. The European Universities did not acquire their acknowledge place in public life in a day or even in a century. Oxford and Cambridge had passed through many vicissitudes before successfully evolving their own criteria of discriminations as a result of centuries of experimentation.\(^1\) Indian Universities have had little time to grow into institutions with their own criteria of discrimination, accepted and acknowledged within and outside. They had hardly settled down to an academic existence before being caught in the toils of nationalist politics, radical politics and above all populist politics.

To discriminate consistently according to academic criteria alone is not an easy undertaking, and there are many diversions along its exacting course. Success in such a task calls for a capacity for independent judgement and a respect for the same can come only from long experience. It is a part of the routine of every university to exercise such academic judgement in the admission of students, in awarding scholarships and fellowships, in the appointment and promotion of faculty members, and so on. It is utopian to hope that these judgements are free of errors and bias it is more so where there are too many takers

for a too little available vacant seats, as in the case of Indian Universities, and often objective criteria for academic judgement gets vitiated and gets influenced by political and social prejudices.

It will be difficult to pretend that in India much confidence exist in the university's capacity to exercise academic judgement without fear or favour. The lack of confidence is not only widespread outside the university but also conspicuous inside.

A clear indication of this is the increasing amount of litigation in which the universities have become involved over appointments, admissions and examinations. There are universities that have acquired a certain notoriety for making appointments on extraneous consideration other than merit.

Even where academic criteria are not strictly adhered to in appointments and admissions, it does not follow that this is because discrimination is being practised, consciously or unconsciously, in accordance with traditional principles of exclusion. Firstly, academic criteria themselves are not always or even generally unambiguous, secondly their true nature and significance are not always fully understood by those who have the responsibility to apply them. Thirdly, those who seek to manipulate the system use quite complicated calculations, leading to gradations that differ, and sometimes differ quite widely, from the gradations of the traditional order.
Far from eliminating all forms of inequality, the modern university creates new inequalities, by the process of competition in which 'pure merit' is believed to count as against race, caste, or sex, or the so called 'social background.'

Ideally, it might appear necessary to separate out the contribution to scholastic achievement or academic success, of 'pure merit' from that of 'social background'. In practice it is difficult, if not impossible, to do this.¹ The difficulty faced is not entirely due to contributions of heredity and of 'environment' to intelligence,² because, academic appointments and admissions are not made nor claimed to be made on the basis of generalised intelligence.

Now, it is well known that ability of the kind valued by the university is not found evenly distributed among various strata and between men and women. This being the case, one would expect men from the upper strata to be represented in excess of their proportion in the population, without the university consciously discriminating against either women or the lower strata in its admissions and appointments. In other words, the university tends to reproduce, at least to some extent, the

existing inequalities in society. But it must be realised that when this happens, the responsibility for it does not rest only with the university; it is the result of deep rooted maladies that the society as a whole is suffering from.

Perhaps one might say that people can be taken up only by the universities from where they are left off by the family and the school. The university does not have access to individuals in their natural condition. If the schools prepare children from the different strata narrowing the inequality for university education, the university might cancel out some more of these inequalities, but not all of them. If the family does not prepare its sons and daughters with the same care for school education, the school can—if it has the will—and make good the disparity to some extent but not to the full extent.

The University can try to correct the disparities due to social background with which its population is already encumbered at the time of entry into it. It can do this to some extent because the family, the school and the other institution of society might stifle but cannot destroy the capacity for intellectual growth among individuals against whom they discriminate on social grounds, i.e., on the ground that they are women or of a lower caste. With regard to women this is proved by many examples of great academic success, particularly in the
better Indian universities during the last two or three decades.\textsuperscript{1} It is true, nonetheless, that the individual must have more than average intellectual ability in order to attain average academic success if he or she has also to overcome the disadvantages of social background.

The Indian Universities are not always able to provide the kind of congenial setting that makes it easy for talented individuals to overcome the disadvantages of social background. It is not always possessed of a clear judgement of the issues involved, and, even when it has the judgement, it might lack the will to act in accordance with it. Its judgement is clouded and its will sapped by too many pressure from within and outside. It is difficult for the university to maintain clarity of judgement and firmness of will in the handling of social problems once it begins to lose confidence in its academic standards. The feeling that it can and must create social equality here and how is easily replaced by the mood that it can do nothing to reduce the disparities between individuals owing to their social background unless the government or some other political agency intervenes and imposes a radical solution from outside.

Forty three years after independence, Indians with a social conscience have begun to feel that the universities have

\textsuperscript{1} Chitnis Suma, \textit{Op.Cit.}
made little if any tangible contribution to the spread of equality in their society. They have begun to wonder what has become of all the Plans that were made for directing education to a new social purpose, and to ask where all the moneys went that was poured in for the building of new universities and the expansion of old ones. Perhaps the universities might have done a little more than they actually did; certainly, they have done much less than they were expected to do.

In a society which is divided into innumerable tribes, clans, castes, sects and denominations in addition to various linguistic, religious and other divisions, and where collective identities are weakly marked, people find it natural to ask whether the representation of university graduates (or of college lecturers) from their community is in proportion to their population or not. In fact, this is one of the characteristic forms, in which the problem of equality is coming to be posed in contemporary India, and a whole new language of discourse—involving phrases such as 'backwards' and 'forwards', 'minorities' and 'majorities', 'quotas' and 'reservations'—has begun to animate the debate on equality and social justice.

It will be a mistake to think that this frame of mind described above is unknown outside India. It is fairly common in other Asian countries and seems to be rapidly gaining ground at least in the universities in the United States, despite the
pronounced individualism characteristics of that society. Those responsible for making appointments in the American Universities need not have to pay attention to maintaining some kind of balance between the claims of men and women and of the various ethnic groups till lately. But now not to have any women, Blacks or Hispanics on the faculty would expose it to the charge of practising discrimination against them, for it is undoubtedly the case that they are grossly under-represented in the American University. Again, in America as in India, the government is deeply involved in this process, and Edward Shils has charged it with wishing 'to displace intellectual criteria and to diminish their importance in order to elevate ethnic and sexual criteria' in the selection process.¹

The American example is considered to be of very great significance because it shows that even in a society which places the highest value on individual merit, the 'quota principle' can make some room for itself. But there are also some significant differences between India and America. American society lacks the multiplicity of castes and communities characteristics of Indian society and hence there the main emphasis is likely to be on quotas for women, whereas in India the special claims of

castes and communities are likely to receive far greater political attention. Caste quotas are very much in harmony with the character of Indian Politics, but this is not to say that ethnic quotas are unknown in American politics. However, the most important differences is that academic life in America, unlike in India, stands on firm, institutional foundations; hence the American Universities have better resources than the Indian to contain social demands that are not necessarily consistent with academic requirements.

It is difficult to determine the correct moral position on a question of this kind, or even to decide whether there has to be only one correct approach. The principle of equal opportunity cannot be tested in a vacuum, it has to be judged by its fruits. It will be unreasonable to complain when equality of opportunity leads to inequality of result, for that is a necessary consequence of academic competition. But there will be reason, for misgivings when the inequalities that result from academic competition reproduce identically the same pattern of inequalities that prevailed in the traditional order. These misgivings will be reinforced when there is independent evidence of social prejudice in the university against traditionally disprivileged strata. It will then be up to the university to take note of such evidence, to keep a watchful eye on social prejudice, and to model a selection procedure with built in
correctives against it. It is true that the line between social prejudice and academic discrimination is a thin one, but the university must bear the responsibility of drawing it.

Those outside the university must realise that even if the university succeeds in eliminating all social prejudice from its selection procedures the inequalities generated by academic competition will at best differ somewhat, but not a great deal, from the inequalities of the traditional order. Students of Men and women from professional and peasant families, belonging to different castes students are very differently equipped intellectually by the time they seek admission to the university at the age of nineteen or twenty. It would be foolish and irresponsible to expect the university to wipe all these differences away by the wave of a magic wand. Anyone who has taught in a university knows how little he can do to alter the mental habits of students who have passed their teens, and how hard it struggles at that age, to raise the ill-equipped students to even the level of the average one. So if students leave the university in roughly the same order of rank in which they enter it, that is not necessarily because of active operation of social prejudice within the university.

Thus, distinguishing between two things are essential i.e., the elimination of all forms of social prejudices against the traditionally-disprevileged sections of the population; and,
second the creation of a faculty or a student body in which all sections of society will be represented in proportion to their strength in the population. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that the second objective cannot be automatically realised by simply evolving a quota system based on caste within the university, while leaving untouched the other institutions of society, eg. its domestic and economic institutions. No doubt a representative character may be artificially imposed on the university from outside by a comprehensive system of quotas. But that is more likely to prevent than to promote the cause of equality and equal justice as this creeps in a new order of social justice.

Every time a candidate of superior academic merit is passed over to make place for one who is less than his academic equal, some damage is done to the foundations on which the university stands. It is not clear how such damages caused to the university is justifiable by reason of need for creating parity among castes. One may doubt whether it is at all possible in this day and age to establish parity between castes, and whether is worth trying to pursue such an elusive objective at the cost of the educational system.

The University Education Commission of 1948-49 had warned against the consequences of the 'rationing' of seats' among castes and which tend to increase the stratification of our
society. To insist on quotas for communities would be to assume that the nation is composed of separate and self-sufficient groups, which is a negation of our national idea and amounts to compartmentalisation of society. Discrimination practices generate tensions and the spiritual damage caused by them is not measurable. 'Education should not be used for creating or deepening the very inequalities which it is designed to prevent.'\(^1\) In other words, the university cannot pay its debt to society by sacrificing individual merit on the plea of promoting parity between castes; the attempt to promote such parity will lead not to the weakening of caste but to its strengthening.

If the university is to play any part in freeing society from the grip of traditional distinctions, it must promote the individual as against caste and community. To be sure, it must attend to special needs where such needs exist, just as it must encourage and reward outstanding merit wherever such merit is found. But these special needs must be seen as the needs of individuals, just as outstanding merit it is always recognised as an individual merit. The university as we know it today is equipped to attend to the special needs only of individuals, and not of castes and communities. If it tries to attend to the needs of castes and communities, it cannot remain what it has to be. It cannot distribute its rewards—whether examination grades or scholarships or faculty appointments—on

the basis of quotas determined by political bargainers. Above all universities should not be allowed themselves to be a place for hunting for leaders of various castes and communities for negotiating their shares in the rewards of their constituents irrespective of merit. They will contribute little, if anything, to the attainment of equality in that way, and they will certainly undermine their own institutional foundations in the process.

In a country with a vast population of illiterates, university students are a privileged category by the very fact of them having been through a university. But this is not necessarily how it appears to them. A university degree is a necessity for the better kind of employment, but is no longer a guarantee for any kind of employment. The large increase since independence in the number of universities has been accompanied by a corresponding increase in the number of unemployed graduates. Having to bear the responsibility for the overproduction of graduates, the universities are particularly sensitive to the pressures for creation of additional employment for them. The most direct way of responding to these pressures is of course to ask for the creation of more employment within the academic system by adding to the posts in the existing universities and colleges and by establishing new colleges and new universities.
There is a close acknowledged link between the expansion of university education and the problem of employment. It would be futile to pretend in a country like India that the university needs to attend only to 'academic' problems, leaving other institutions to deal with 'social' problems. The university cannot insulate itself from social problems, and the most pressing among these is the problem of employment: fair employment, just employment, equitable employment and, above all, more employment. In India the successful academic must be able to find or create jobs for at least some of his students; to pretend to judge him solely by his qualities as a scholar or a teacher would be disingenuous.

It is impossible to create or find jobs in the university without recourse to government. Indian Universities are in theory autonomous institutions, governed by their own Acts, Statutes and Ordinances. In practice, however, their dependence for funds on government requires them to bring their rules of appointment and promotion in alignment with government policy on employment. The manoeuvres through which this alignment is brought about are varied and complex but some sacrifice has always to be made of academic criteria to what the government of the day considers to be the criteria of social justice. Two conspicuous examples of this are appointment according to community and promotion according to seniority, both
of which are advocated as measures of justice and equity without consideration for the specific needs and objectives of universities as institutions.

From time to time news items appear in the press about measures being contemplated by government to remedy the inadequate representation of socially backward communities on university and college faculties. According to a newspaper report, "A statement circulated among the members of a parliamentary committee shows that there is no lecturer belonging to Scheduled Castes or Tribes in Aligarh, Hyderabad and Jawaharlal Nehru Universities while there are three each in Banaras and Delhi Universities and one in Viswabharati."¹ There were indications of threats by or on behalf of the University Grants Commission to stop the flow of funds to these universities if they failed to remedy this lack of representation.

Various parties are involved in these pressures to ensure equity between castes and communities within the university. Apart from the legislatures and the ministers of the union and State Governments, there are the University Grants Commission and the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The office of the Commissioner is an important

¹ The Times of India, New Delhi, April 11, 1981.
one, created under the Constitution of India to watch over the interests of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In recent years successive Commissioners have increasingly argued for the reservation of jobs virtually in every area of public life. The models in all such cases are the Union and State Government services where strict and elaborate procedures are laid down for the reservation of posts for various castes and communities.

The Ministry of Education and the University Grants Commission have therefore, been advised by the Commissioner to ensure that the Act is suitably amended so as to enable the University Grants Commission to issue a directive to all the universities for implementation of the safeguards in service matters.¹ The Amendment of the Act, it hardly needs to be said, will have far-reaching consequences for the Central Universities which have so far successfully resisted pressures from such quarters to alter the conditions of academic appointments.

They have reserved posts for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Backward Tribals and other Backward Classes to the extent of 15 per cent, 3 per cent, 5 per cent and 28 per cent.

cent respectively. Thus, more than half the posts are reserved on the basis of caste and community, and, of the reserved posts, more than half are earmarked for the Other Backward Class consisting in the main, of various castes and communities.

Government service enjoys high prestige in India, and there are certain features of Government service, such as security of tenure and regularity of promotion, that have a large if not universal appeal among university teachers. University teachers in India enjoys virtually the same measure of security as Government officials, but the prospects of promotion are different in the two cases. When university teachers compare themselves with gazetted officers in Government service, they find that, although they start on broadly the same salary, their prospects of moving into higher salary grades are much smaller. Thus, the demand for 'meaningful avenues of promotion' has gathered strength among university lecturers in all parts of the country. This demand is accompanied by a jealous and watchful eye for cases where the claims of seniority are overlooked when lecturers move to readerships, or readers to professorships.

1 Ibid., Part II, p.27.
In effect the overwhelming sentiment among university and college lecturers is that there should be more room for promotion and that promotion should be by seniority. In that way all who succeed in entering the university service as lecturers at the same time will have equal chances of becoming readers. Here again, the universities in Tamil Nadu have taken a lead by deciding that all lecturers will automatically become readers after thirteen years if they have Ph.D., degrees and after eighteen years if they do not. This reflects not so much a commitment to equality as the urge for security and a safe upward passage of those with their feet on the first rung of the ladder. The State may subsidise upward mobility to a certain extent, but even in this its role is strictly limited in an economy of scarcity, while to what extent this kind of subsidized mobility can create equality of condition or simulate equality of opportunity is a different question altogether, it is generally believed that equity and quality pull each other in opposite direction. If it is proposed to achieve equity, quality would suffer and vice-versa. It is also believed that equity, i.e., expansion is opportunities would result in increase in the resource requirement and hence higher costs of education. It is

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1 Krishna Daya, Times of India - 'India's Liberal Democracy' New Delhi, June 15, 1981.
in the light of these generally held beliefs that a thesis of negative relationship between equity and quality, and equity and efficiency is propounded.

Whether there is a negative or positive relationship, besides being a matter of empirical evidences, is also a matter of philosophical approach or of a paradigm under which a phenomena is understood, empirical evidence are analysed and social policy and action are planned.

Concepts, social policy and social action pertaining to human life and the societal system are significantly influenced and to a large extent determined by the philosophical views held by people in a society. This philosophical view, in turn, is shaped by various ideologies as well as by individual, group and societal interests. Concepts, social policy and social actions with regard to equity and costs in higher education are, also, influenced by the factors mentioned above. It may, therefore, be pertinent to discuss the philosophical bases of the concepts of equity, quality and cost.

In the governance of the State, a major break-through which took place in the course of 17th to 19th centuries in Europe was the system of the democratically elected government, where franchise, i.e., one individual one vote, was given to all adults irrespective of caste, creed, sex and economic or social status. This breakthrough stems from the philosophy of "equality
of men". This philosophy, in certain societies was extended to equal distribution of property and productive resources whereas, in some other societies, it was deprived to even political processes. In some other societies, this concept was accepted as a part of the political system, but it was not extended to remove inequalities to significant extent; even though the concept had built in implications in terms of ensuring equality among people in every walk of life.

Logically, the equality of men in electing their government should have resulted in such social policies and actions which secured equality of men in all spheres of social and economic life. However, this logical outcome of the ideal of equality of men in political processes was severally constrained by: (a) the existing imbalances in the distribution of property and productive resources in the society, (b) the low level of education and awareness among the people, and (c) strong influences exercised by individuals and groups to further their own sectional interests rather than the totality of societal interests.

Hence, in such societies the concept of equity was sought to be explained from the point of view of "Social justice". This philosophy of "social justice" was however, a welcome development as compared to the feudal system of privileges by inheritance, rule that prevailed in those days. Which was sought
to be explained by biological differences among individuals although it had its roots to the possession of property and productive resources. This idea did not have a scientific rationale or evidence and also ran counter to the accepted philosophy of 'Social Justice'.

There are, three philosophical approaches that have influenced the concept, of equity and social justice.

First, the philosophy of equality of men being applied to political processes and distribution of property and productive resources, as also their inequalities distribution, is viewed as the source of inequities in society.

This approach when partially applied with limited scope of rationing or subsidising essentials to mitigate the sufferings of inequitous has proved reasonably successful and that too where such equi-distribution of productive resources are attempted with equal franchise rights. But the drastically radical models like that of Soviet model where dictatorship of proletariat was experimented as a tool for achieving social equality have met with failure and resulted in disintegration of the society. However this approach helped the development of capabilities among men through equal distribution of educational opportunities, both in quality and quantity.

Second, the philosophy implied equality of men in political processes, but severally limited the scope of this idea to distribution of property and productive resources. However, it
simultaneously advocated the correction of the malaise of inequality through measures based on the philosophy of 'social justice'. Such measures are calculated to minimise social tensions without removing the structural inequalities which cause such tensions.

Third, there is the philosophy of inequality as a natural, hereditary, biological phenomenon without any scientific rationale or evidence. This concept is rooted in sectional interests rather than in overall societal interests.

The debate on concept social policy and social actions in the world has and is, therefore, centred around these philosophical approaches. The first tends to logically extend the people, the second tends to tackle the problem only from a limited view of "social justice" without advocating any attempt to remove structural inequalities and the third tends to negate both these attempts and believes in an exploitative social set-up.

These philosophical approaches have tended to characterise societies as progressive, liberal and conservative. They have also influenced the economic development models of these societies.

The fourth philosophical approach may be described as "equity as a prerequisite of development and of a progressive human society". This has implications for global as well as nation-specific societies. Unequal capabilities among people as
well as the inequitous distribution of property and productive resources by its very logic would result in slow economic and social development, as the pockets of inequality would counter the developmental process, both qualitatively and quantitatively, besides causing social tensions and conflicts within the international community or within a nation. Therefore, equality is the very basis of development and of progressive human society.

The stage of development of a society depends not only on the quantity of goods and services produced but also on their quality; as well as on the quality of life of people in the society. Therefore, the concern for quality in a society stems from the desire for attaining greater and more fruitful goals in the development of the society. Coupled with this concern is the characteristic of homo sapiens which make this society strive for achieving greater heights in development, i.e., from one standard of attainment to yet another higher standard, from one stage of development to yet another higher stage. In education this has meant achieving higher standards of performance and exploring new and uncharted areas in the universe of knowledge.

The philosophical basis of quality to attain higher standards and the need of excellence for attaining higher stages in the development are, therefore, the innate characteristic of home sapiens. The scope of the idea of quality is severally
limited by two widely prevailing views: one, that quality is a selective phenomenon, only a few can attain it, and two, quality for quality's sake or in regard to specific areas rather than quality with a certain degree of contextual relevance and quality in different walks of life.

The first view, by its very nature, is narrow and it treats equity and quality as mutually exclusive and emphasises selectivity at the expenses of equity. This view works against the efforts to rise the floor level of attainment by the society as a whole. It may be pointed out that excellence among a few is very important, whereas such excellence in the vast sea of mediocrity as far as the overall development of society is concerned, has no meaning.

The second view, of quality for quality's sake and in selected areas, defeats the very purpose of quality attainments for a given objective, and tends to narrow the scope and discourages efforts to attain quality in different walks of life.

These two views have adversely affected the efforts for attaining quality of knowledge, skills, and aptitudes within the education system and the quality of life in society. Therefore, as against these two prevailing views, a broader view of quality in every walk of life and by a larger number of people and various systems, including education, is considered as the philosophical basis of the concept of quality.

For carrying out any activity, human and physical resources are required. These resources when acquired indicate the financial costs. The philosophical basis of cost estimation are two-fold. First, that for carrying out any activity
effectively, a minimum amount of resources is required. Below this minimum level of resources, the quality of performance or completion of desired activity is likely to be adversely affected. In other words, in order to carry out an activity effectively, a critical minimum level of investment is necessary.

Second, resources, being scarce, need to be used efficiently. Even in a situation of abundance, no society can afford to waste its resources as that is considered an indicator of inefficiency. This implies that optimum results need to be obtained with minimum cost. It also suggests that alternative cost-effective methods need to be worked out to carry out an activity. Thus the philosophical basis of cost analysis is to ensure efficiency in the use of resources. This philosophy stems basically from man's desire to do things in a better and more efficient manner as well as from the idea of economic and rational use of resources.

The idea of cost analysis as an indicator of its efficiency is quite often blurred by 'economising the expenditure' or 'least cost' approach without considering the objectives for which resources are spent. These views often influence policies and practices in Governmental establishments or where resources are allocated by the public exchequer. Such
views not only distort the concept of cost analysis but also adversely affect efforts for achieving efficiency with regard to attainment of the given objectives. Therefore, the philosophical basis of the concept of cost analysis should focus on, 'critical minimum investment' and 'optimum output' on cost rather than simple 'least cost' or economising of expenditure.

The phenomena of equity, quality and costs, viewed in the above stated philosophical basis, do not logically and normatively pose a situation of conflict. For development of higher education both equity and quality are necessary and to achieve these a minimum critical level of resources, input is also a must. The quality of knowledge and of planning and management would ensure efficiency including the optimum use of resources.

The erroneous belief of conflicting relationship between equity and quality and equity and costs, therefore emanates from a narrow philosophical basis as well as an erroneous assumption that quality is a function of numbers only. Quality will deteriorate even when the number is small; if for instance the quality of educational inputs namely, teachers, infrastructural facilities, contents of courses and the process of teaching and learning are poor. Hence it is not only the number of students, but the quality of several teaching and learning inputs that determines the quality of higher education.
Similarly, the belief that equity would result in higher costs, is also based on the narrow and one-sided consideration of resources rather than on the consideration of the objectives of education and the demands of modern development process, which requires wider base of quality for accelerating developmental process. Inadequate expenditure on education, therefore, will cost a society more than it would save.

Therefore, as against the generally held belief, that equity, quality and efficiency in education are complementary and would work in harmony, provided a critical variable quality of educational inputs and process are adequately cared. Hence equity, quality and costs are functions of the quality of educational inputs and processes.