CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of Indian higher education for the next fifteen years was spelt out recently in the brochure entitled 'Development of Higher Education in India - A Policy Frame'. This proclaims that "the most urgent and significant reform needed in the field of education is to transform the value system, the basic structure and processes of the educational system, to make it flexible and dynamic", with shifting emphasis from teaching to learning, from the individual to social objectives, and from mere acquisition of information, to the development of skill.

The Task Ahead

The task before the educationists and social scientists in the context of this 'new philosophy' of higher education is stupendous. The mounting problems of multi- versity, apathy and indifference of students to academic values, crisis of confidence, the problem of obsolescence of disciplines, and above all, the chronic reative behaviour of students must be looked into in proper perspective.

The hitherto approach to the re-orientation of the massive educational infrastructure consisted of
changes in the content of courses and in curriculum and examination reforms, so as to minimize the stress and strain and maximize efficiency and purpose.

No doubt, each approach has its own merit with regard to its purpose. But what is needed most is a research-based understanding of the issues that confront us most often and the efficacy of the proposed changes.

A New Perspective

In the light of the diverse nature of the problems faced by the colleges and universities, any changes in the educational infrastructure, whether it be changes in the curriculum, teaching method or objectives, should be made with reference to the most basic unit of the system — the student.

Since students are to become the target of new experimentation, it is extremely important to understand their orientations and values towards education. A systematic study of the expressed orientation of students will not only help in providing a general picture of the type of role he would like to adopt as a student, it will also help sustain student interest in the educational experience if these expressed needs form the base for curricular reforms.
This aspect has also been stressed by a member of researchers, from White (1952), and Chickering (1969), to Morastain (1976) who emphasize the importance of the roles played by the students in their own education. They also point out that this is an important factor in the developmental process during college, and will help the individual student inculcate a 'sense of competence' (White 1952).

Student orientations towards education, in fact, constitute an important frame of reference while developing any measure of change.

The other, and equally important aspect on which a lot of research has been centered, is that of the relative fit of students within programs or institutions. Many researchers have interpreted their data as suggesting that students who are incongruent in various ways with the institutional ethics and values are more likely to be dissatisfied, more likely to leave the institution, and less likely to profit from their educational experience. (Pace, 1966; Pervin, 1967, 1968; Stern, 1970).

In recent years, a vast body of literature has been gathered pertaining to student background variables, general personality characteristics, perceptions of the
college environment, students orientations towards the purpose of education, towards the process of education and towards the relationship between faculty and students in determining the nature of the academic endeavor.

The basic thrust in the new perspective of research centres around the

(i) educational needs of the increasingly heterogenous student body;

(ii) the relative fit of students within programmes or institutions; and

(iii) formulation of changes in the academic milieu.

The Response from the Social Scientists in India

Of the enormous output of research published each year pertaining to the problems of education, little attention has been given to the understanding of the vital issue of student - institution/programme fit, and the question pertaining to the students 'consumer rights in education' (Stark, 1975). Most of the researches available in this field pertain to structured surveys of students on various aspects of student - teacher interaction (Mohanty, and Pani, 1979; Jha, 1973), perceptions of the academic program (Shah and Jhab, 1982),
student involvement in studies (Bhatnagar, 1980), attitudes towards school (Vernal, 1979) innovations in the examination system (Kaul, 1979) and limitations of the same (Kaul, 1974; Rao 1974; Misra 1972), making no consideration for an assessment of the discrepancies arising out of a mismatch between the expressed orientations of the students and their perceived environment. The 'extreme' nature of the studies undertaken, either in overgeneralising or in dealing with overly specific aspects of the environment has also resulted in the lack of a systematic examination of the students' orientations and perceptions with reference to the overall content of education and their relative fit within the academic program.

In view of the proposed educational policy of the government, it thus becomes imperative to explore the values and orientations of the student body in order to provide for effective programme planning and for subsequent evaluation.

**The First Phase of the Study**

In a pilot study, the orientations held by students towards various aspects of education was investigated to see whether this had an effect on student performance.
An attempt was also made to see whether students coming from different curricula showed different patterns of orientations, as was indicated in the western context, (Thistlethwaite, 1960; Centra 1965, Morstain, 1973). Data was collected from students in a technical and in a social science course to see if there were any course differences.

**Areas And Dimensions Of Orientation**

The study of the orientations of students was based on the work of Morstain and Grey (1973) who had indicated two general areas and several dimensions under each area in which students were expected to differ in their views and attitudes towards their educational experience. These two areas were a general preparatory and an exploratory area. Students with a preparatory orientation were those who valued college most highly in terms of its preparatory function - of acquiring useful knowledge, skills, vocations and social roles, while students who valued college for its exploratory possibilities, for the opportunities it afforded for exploring one's interests, ideas and personal identity were classified under an exploratory orientation. The dimensions studied under these areas referred to variations in the way students endorsed the purpose of their college education, their preferred modes of learning, evaluation techniques and extent of involvement.
in decisional situations, peer relations and preferred involvement in public affairs. According to Morstein and Grey (1973) individuals in institutions hold different conceptions of their duties and roles (in all these dimensions) which ultimately shape their performance.

Some Salient Findings

The findings of the pilot study revealed some trends, although these could not be generalized due to the size of the sample. These were:

1. No significant differences showed up in the patterns of orientations between the two groups. However, the intra-group results indicated trends supporting Morstein conclusions, in which students reported different profiles of orientations towards education, with some students expressing a more preparatory orientation, and others a more exploratory one. It was suggested that these orientations could have been influenced by antecedent factors such as prior schooling and other background factors, as well as by other personality dispositions, such as cognitive styles etc., and did not
depend so much on the influence of the Academic environment as represented by the two curricula.

2. The educational orientations of students were not directly related to their performance which was measured in terms of academic achievement. It was suggested that factors leading to student-environment incongruence, which included the effect of background and personality characteristics on orientations, and subsequently, perceptions of the environment would be operating along with student orientations in affecting performance.

The Focus of the Present Study

In the light of the findings of the first phase of the Study, the basic thrust of the present research focused on —

a) Identifying significant patterns of variation in Orientations of students' with particular reference to the dimensions of the content of education.

b) An investigation into how students perceived their environment with particular reference
to the same dimensions along which they expressed their orientations.

(c) The effect of background factors, as well as deeper rooted personality dispositions (such as field dependent/independent cognitive styles), on student orientations and perceptions; and

(d) Finally, an examination of the effect of discrepancy arising out of differences in the expressed orientations & perceptions of the environment on the relative fit of students within the institution, i.e., on their performance and satisfaction.

To reach the objective of providing an 'effectant' education, to initiate the necessary changes with respect to design of course content, changes in teaching methods, opportunities for extra-curricular development etc., in the light of student needs, a fresh view of education, an exploration into the orientations, perception and other factors affecting student performance will provide a strong starting point for further educational planning.
The following Chapter presents the theoretical background on which this study is based.