Chapter IV

Portraying Governance in the Public-State University

*Shared, But Not Self-Governance*

**Introduction**

Since independence, higher education has been increasingly regarded as a social right. Hence intervention by the state in promoting ‘access to all’, is inevitable. Scholars and policy makers in India have engaged in analyzing the fact that universities in India are witnessing unprecedented challenges in sustaining the agenda of the state while keeping pace with changing needs and demands of the society (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2015; Roy, 2015; Heslop, 2014; Chattopadhyay, 2009; Bhushan, 2008). In response to such challenges, the higher education sector in the last few decades have witnessed the entry of private actors, juxtaposed to the monopoly of the government, historically. Today, both private and public actors, constitute the landscape of higher education, almost on an equal footing. Among several reasons, for such a shift, the inadequacy of funding by the government (Tilak, 2008) and growing demand for higher education requiring additional institutional expansion (Agarwal 2009), rationalize the case for private sector participation and gradual withdrawal of the government. Higher education as public good mandates sustained state investments, suggesting limited scope for increasing enrolment and demand. (Tilak, 1997).

The model of state-supported development was debated in the 1980s (Heyneman and White, 1986). As result of this, nations in global south questioned the role of the state in economic progress and growth by engaging in sustained public investments in higher education. Changing patterns of funding with an emphasis on primary education in the developing countries resulted in limited or no investment in higher education (Banya and Elu, 2001). The
National Knowledge Commission (NKC) estimated the need for 1500 universities compared to 700 universities, to cater to increase in demand for higher education (NKC, 2009). Between 2007 and 2013, the number of private institutions grew faster that the number of government institutions, with Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 8.3 percent in 2007 to 10.3 percent 2014 (FICCI, 2014). Similarly, the enrollment in private institutions increased from 7.5 million in 2007 to 12.8 million in 2013 (FICCI, 2014).

However, privatization of higher education has rekindled the debate on issues of equity and inclusion, given increasing fee structures, selective admission policies and so on (Kapur and Mehta, 2004). Such debates are laid out in the previous chapter discussing the context of growth, crisis and reforms in the Indian higher education system in the last six-and-a-half decades.

Reforms have continued to emphasize on addressing challenges and opportunities in the expansion, equity, and excellence in the system of higher education (Tilak, 2013). However, the interpretation and priorities of these challenges and opportunities have been evolving. The higher education system, in comparison to its inception, has evolved into a complex structure of various types of universities envisioning their mission and objectives. Among these types of universities, the Private Deemed University and the Public State University types constitute the major component of the higher education system regarding their numbers juxtaposed to other types of universities in the country. To this end, here the idea of Public-State University (hereafter State University) in the Indian higher education system and the overall governance structures and processes of one of the oldest Public-State University-In the state of Karnataka (hereafter University-I), are explored and analysed, respectively. Open-ended interviews and observations in the field (University-I) from – administrators, faculty members, students, faculty administrators, alumni and students along with observations during and post-field visits
are discussed to develop narratives on expansion, equity and excellence and its interaction with
the governance mechanisms in University-I.

The main aim of this chapter is to discuss and analyse the aspect of university governance in
the public state university (University-I) in the state of Karnataka. In particular, examine the
structures and processes determining the act of governance across actors in meeting the
objectives of expansion, equity, and excellence in teaching, research and extension.

The descriptive analysis proposed here and analysis therein, provide insights into the main
objectives of the study:

(1) to understand the internal and external processes (governance mechanisms)
among State universities and Deemed-to-be-universities in the state of Karnataka
and,
(2) to analyze university governance mechanisms in the context of the main themes
in higher education reforms - equity, excellence, and expansion.

The Idea of the Public-State University

The Public-State University (here after state university), means University established by an
act of State legislature. Each of these state universities is governed per respective State
Universities Acts. In Karnataka, the Karnataka State Universities Act, 2000, provides the
statutory provisions for the powers and functions of the actors and the university.

In the past, universities were elite institutions providing access to the privileged. With limited
access universities emerged as homogenous institutions with learners and teachers representing
a certain section of the society. As a result, any change was gradual and not disruptive as such.
In the last few decades, universities are expanding, and the clientele is heterogenous,
representing the entire spectrum of society. The ‘publicness’ of the erstwhile ‘elite’ universities
are an outcome of an increased number of public universities and gradual backing from the
Government. Such is a scenario in most of the developing societies in the global south – Brazil and China (Carnoy, Loyalka, Dobryakova, Dossani, Kuhns, & Wang, 2013).

The National Policy on Education of 1986 explicitly states that the universities should be ‘open for all’, with special provisions for the marginalised sections of the society. World-wide, the call for promoting government-owned universities is emphasized in the UNESCO’s (1995:26) policy paper on ‘Change and Development of Higher Education’:

State and society must perceive higher education, not as a burden on federal budgets but as a long term domestic investment, to increase economic competitiveness, cultural development and social cohesion.

Significantly, Dhanarajan (1998:54) illustrates two examples to substantiate the above. The former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Tony Blair said “… the three priorities for (his) government (should his party come to power) would be education, education and education”. Likewise, Bill Clinton in his second inaugural address called for “a new land (in which) education will be every citizen’s most prized possession… And the doors of higher education would be open to all”.

Lucus (1998), summarising the views at a conference on ‘Universities of the 21st Century’, Peking University, concluded that in the near future there would be two main type of universities – the research-intensive universities and the principally teaching universities. The former with a specific function, with quality staff active in research. The latter, catering to the demands of mass higher education, seeking various forms of delivery, strengthening the relationship between the teacher and the taught.

Public universities in India are characterized by myriad types. There are specialised research institutions – Institutes of National Importance viz., Indian Institute of Technologies (IITs) and
Indian Institute of Management (IIMs); Public Deemed Universities like the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru followed by Central Universities (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi). And the Public State Universities, constituting the majority among the typologies, engaged in teaching, research and extension, with teaching being the foremost function.

Most of the Public State universities are ‘affiliating universities’, there are about 310 such affiliating universities in India, and 22\textsuperscript{15} in the State of Karnataka (AISHE, 2016). Affiliating university model is based on the University of London; wherein there is a central campus for the postgraduate studies and research with several affiliated colleges spread across stipulated jurisdiction of the university, by regulatory bodies.

Affiliating universities provide academic and administrative support to colleges under its jurisdiction. Scholars and experts in the field of higher education suggest that the ills of higher education can be attributed to the system of affiliation. While the system of affiliation ensures effective outreach to the learners and standardised teaching and learning processes set by the affiliating university, the system has few challenges. Most of the State universities have approximately 200 colleges\textsuperscript{16} on an average affiliated to them.\textsuperscript{17} The affiliated colleges have common syllabi and examination system. Coordinating syllabi and examination is the most important administrative function of the state university, vis-à-vis another teaching, research and extension functions. Policy-makers devised the affiliating model to regulate and standardise the quality of education in colleges. As a matter of fact, with the tremendous increase in the number of colleges, and lack of proportionate increase in the state universities, the affiliation system has become counterproductive.

\textsuperscript{15}Two new state affiliating universities – the Bengaluru Central and the Bengaluru North Universities – are carved out because of trifurcation of the existing Bangalore University in 2015, vide Gazette notification, Government of Karnataka (the AISHE, 2015 data does not account for these additions)

\textsuperscript{16}Total number of colleges in India 38,056 and 3,075 colleges in the state of Karnataka (AISHE, 2016)

\textsuperscript{17}Erstwhile Bangalore university had more than 600 affiliated colleges, before trifurcation in 2015.
**The Setting: University-I (Public-State University) in the State of Karnataka**

As mentioned above, the State of Karnataka is home to one of the oldest Public State Universities in the country. The case-in-point here is University-I (pseudonym for the Public University for this study) in Karnataka, established in the year 1916 as an affiliating public state university - sixth University in India and the first one in the State of Karnataka. University-I, commemorated its centenary celebrations this year (1916-2016). The legacy of the University is rooted since the colonial time. The University was affiliated to Madras University, one of the first State universities along with Bombay and Calcutta Universities established in 1857.

The inception of University-I was due to the royal patronage in the region. The vision, land, and financial assistance provided via royal patronage has been central to the growth and sustainability of University-I. The landscape of University-I, located in the heart of one of the prominent cities in Karnataka - is vast and beautiful. A walk across the campus reveals the unique sight of heritage buildings amidst modern infrastructure, reminiscing the legacy of the city and its culture.

Today, University-I provides access to higher education for about 53,000 students across five constituent colleges and 122 affiliated colleges in three districts of Karnataka. University-I comprises of 42 postgraduate departments on campus offering more than 70 postgraduate courses, 02 Postgraduate centres and eight centres for research and training. More than 1000 students are from 45 plus countries pursuing higher studies in this University. Most of the international students come from middle-east, China and South Asia.
### Table 3: Enrolment in University Departments (on campus) and Post-Graduate Centers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1452</td>
<td>1812</td>
<td>1487</td>
<td>1856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2581</td>
<td>2362</td>
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<td>2478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td>4943</td>
<td>5161</td>
<td>4967</td>
<td>5095</td>
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Enrolment in this institution represents diversity in socio-economic-linguistic backgrounds. Majority of them belonging to first and second-generation learners and most of the have completed their primary and secondary schooling in vernacular medium (Kannada).

### Table 4: Enrolment in Constituent and Affiliated Colleges and Post-Graduate Courses in Colleges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>2012</th>
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<td>511</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37146</td>
<td>36679</td>
<td>37507</td>
<td>36847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td>73825</td>
<td>74354</td>
<td>75159</td>
<td>75684</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Members of the university, especially the teachers, attribute great value to such diversity. A senior Faculty member and the Chairperson of one of the Department within the Faculty of Arts, acknowledging the diversity and relevance in the university, said:

This is my thirtieth year of teaching. The doors of the university have been always open to learners. Since its inception, one of the main policy of the university was to encourage students to enroll in higher education and be an informed citizen. As a result, the university seeks mass enrolment of students, representing diverse socio-economic-cultural backgrounds. The mixed backgrounds of students in the classroom have been a challenge and an opportunity to engage in teaching and research. Like many universities, our university represents a mosaic – political, social, cultural, and academic and many such experiences, critical space for learning and the learners (U1RESFMADMIN02).

University-I has evolved as the centre of excellence with state-of-the-art infrastructure for curricular and co-curricular activities. The University library is the state-of-the-art digital platform, one of its kind in the State of Karnataka. The university boasts of more than seven lakhs collections, the majority of them being digitized. With such diversity and infrastructure, University-I was first accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) with 5 Stars in the year 2000 and accredited with A plus in 2006. In 2013, the University was reaccredited with A grade by the NAAC (based on revised accreditation methodology). With such progress, the Government provided the university with grants of hundred crores under the ‘Institution of Eminence’ scheme of the government. In this context one of the senior faculty-member of the university shared his opinion:

I have been associated with the university, since 2002...I have witnessed the transformation of the University in terms of – infrastructure and changing profile of students and teachers. In the last few years, we are witnessing many students from constituent colleges and other private institutions, seeking enrollment in our PG
Programmes, particularly in the disciplines of management and natural sciences. One of the major reasons for this could be the innovation and infrastructural development in the university, because of increase in funds. Under various schemes the university has received funds from the UGC and the MHRD, to excel in teaching and research. Thus, state-of-the-art library with a digital platform, new laboratories, hostels and academic blocks have been developed. The university has evolved from five departments to more than 40 departments engaged in teaching and research, to more than 3000 students on campus. (U1RESFM08)

*Figure 5: The Case of University-I (Public State University)*
Governance constitutes following components - the organizational structure and the hierarchy of and amongst personnel and management of resources in determining the functions of the organization. The organizational structure illustrated in figure 6, represents the power and hierarchy of public State universities, as per the provisions of the Karnataka State Universities Act, 2000 (KSU, 2000). The move to amend the KSU Act, 1976 and introduce a new KSU Act, 2000, was vehemently criticized by academicians and students. Among many issues, one of the major aspects for such strong criticism was that the KSU Act, 2000 makes provisions for the state government to influence and intervene in the affairs of the university. In the context of such reforms, one of the former VC of the State university, remarked - ‘giving the State government greater intervention in the functioning of public universities — as a “death knell”’ (The Hindu, 2013). The KSU Act, 2000 replaces the Senate (an elected body) with Syndicate (a body of 20 members nominated by the state government, Chancellor and the VC) in
managing the affairs of the university, led to major debates and resistance in the state of Karnataka (Pinto, 2001). Restructuring existing governance mechanisms in providing scope for external influences hinders autonomy, which is typically challenged and resisted by actors within the system (Marginson & Considine, 2000).

In University-I, the ‘power and authority’ vests with the Chancellor and the Syndicate in administrative matters and the Chancellor and the Academic Council in matters related to curriculum and research. The Chancellor appoints the Vice-Chancellor in concurrence of the State government, by choosing one person from the panel of three eminent educationists for the post of the Vice-Chancellor. The KSU Act, 2000, stipulates that the Chancellor while appointing an eminent educationist as the VC, “shall keep in view merit, equity and social justice”.

However, there has been a lot of resentment among the faculty members, with regard to the appointment of the present vice-chancellor. According to one of the key personnel within the university administration, expressed his discontent:

The present VC is a political appointee, not an eminent academician. He is related to one of the prominent political leaders of the state, who allegedly influenced his appointment. There are series of allegations against him of being engaged in misuse of office for personal gains during his earlier tenure as VC in one of the state universities and of plagiarism. More than this, I don’t understand how the Chancellor can confirm his appointment, when the search committee lacked consensus on his candidature, in fact one of the members of the search committee vehemently opposed his candidature openly in media. In that case, the search committee has to re-constituted. Irrespective of all these allegations and controversies, the same candidate has been appointed as the VC. With such a situation, there is limited or no respect for the VC in this university – considering he is the principal
executive, exercising control over the affairs of the University-In maintaining academic rigor and overall discipline in the university (UIRESADMIN05).

The position of the Registrar is most important for the day-to-day functioning of the university. Section 17 of the KSU Act, 2000 stated that the – “the Registrar should be a whole-time officer of the University. The State Government may appoint an officer belonging to the All India Services working in super-time scale to be the Registrar of a University.” However, through an ordinance in 2010, section 17 of the KSU Act, 2000 was amended to “the Registrar shall be a whole-time officer of the University. The state Government may appoint an officer, not below the rank of Group A officer of the super time scale or a member of the faculty of any university working as a professor for at least ten years, to be a Registrar of a university.” Such an amendment has raised skepticism among the members of the university. The involvement of the State government in appointing the Registrar from the pool of eligible faculty members has led to suspicion of nepotism, casteism and regionalism, exposing the nexus between state government, the VC and the members of the Syndicate. To this end, one of the senior faculty-member of University-I remarked:

It is disgraceful to see that our Registrar, who is the custodian of the university records and the administrative unit, does not have the minimum eligibility to the post of Registrar. Many in the university raised series of objections to his appointment. It is also said that the registrar is a close aide of the Chief Minister. Hence he was appointed, over-riding other eligible faculty members or members of All-India Services. Historically, the office of the registrar was sacrosanct to the university and its being...today with government and other external influences, the office of the registrar has become ‘good for nothing’, a major factor for the decline of the university and its ethos. I strongly oppose the idea of appointing university faculty members as registrars and revert to the old system of appointing administrative personnel as registrars of the university. It is important to revisit the
amendment and revert to the earlier method of appointing the registrar – someone who is an outsider to the university (U1RESFM04)

In addition to such person’s being appointed as registrar, the amendment has further influenced the relationship between faculty-members, students with the administrators. Sharing his experience, he said:

The amendment in the process of appointing the Registrar in 2013, has led to a major transformation in the administration. Until recently, the majority of the administrators in key positions (registrar and Finance Officer) belonged to All India and State Administrative Services, appointed by the VC in consultation with the government and the Chancellor of the university. With key administrative positions held by faculty members, there is a shift in administration resulting in a series of changes (practically) as to how governance has evolved in the university. For example, the relationship between faculty-members and the administrators with respect to our research projects and its processing highlights instances of various subjective and objective experiences – colleagues who are close to the administrators usually get their files passed rather swiftly, without many delays. Such subjective favors hinder our competitiveness and motivation in the university (U1RESFMADMIN05)

Under the vice-chancellor and the registrar’s office, there exist lists of Deans of each faculty, followed by Chairpersons for each department across faculty of studies. The lowest-tier in the governance hierarchy are the faculty, followed by students. Gathering insights from interviews and observations, the governance structure of University-I is based on the principles of shared governance, then self-governance. The governance mechanism is clearly laid out at various levels across the main administration block, faculty of studies (Deans, BoS and faculty members) and other constituent and affiliated colleges, representing actors. The executive body of the university – the VC and the registrar, are bound by the approvals of the Syndicate – the
highest decision-making body in the State university. Section 28 of the KSU Act, 2000, lists following members who constitute the Syndicate:

(i) the VC, the Commissioner of Collegiate Education,
(ii) the Director of Technical Education,
(iii) one Dean nominated by the VC per seniority for one year on rotation,
(iv) two members nominated by the Chancellor from among eminent educationalists,
(v) four principals of affiliated colleges nominated by the VC per seniority for one year on a rotation basis of whom one shall be a women principal,
(vi) six persons nominated by the State Government from amongst eminent educationists of whom
   – one shall be a person belonging to SC/ST, one person belonging to OBC, one a Woman, one person belonging to religious minorities, and two others;
(vii) one person who is a Professor of PG studies nominated by the VC with the approval of State Government for a period of one year by rotation in the order of seniority;
(viii) the Director of Medical Education, and
(ix) the Commissioner of Public Instruction and the Director of Pre-University Education.

One of the senior faculty members and Dean of the Faculties of Studies at the University said,

The Syndicate is the main decision making and law-making body – it is like the ‘Cabinet’.

The syndicate (with 20 members) and only one Professor (out of 400 odd members) and one Dean of all faculties (out of 9-10 faculty of studies), represents the interest/concern of the teachers/students in the meeting…lacking representation as such, wherein the authority to govern many of us, lies in the hands of few members (U1RESFADMIN01)

Extending the discontent on the statutory provisions in establishing the Syndicate, abolishing the erstwhile elected body – Senate, one of the senior faculty member from the Department of Library Sciences, Faculty of Science and Technology, lamented on the composition and control of the Syndicate in the affairs of the university and more importantly the lack of will and wit of the VC in curbing such impositions.
He remarked:

No doubt that the Syndicate is the core agency for making major decisions for the University. However, an astute VC can override many political and non-academic interventions of the Syndicate, if s/he is determined. I have seen at least few of them in the past, who strongly objected to Syndicates interventions in academic affairs of the faculty members and researchers. According to the Universities Act, the Syndicate can hold eight meetings in a year, and the VC can call for emergency meetings on a need basis. Our VC is popular for calling regular Syndicate meetings, beyond the minimum stipulated number of meetings. This suggests his inability or anxiety make decisions by himself, by the power vested in him to do so, by the Act. Also, it is evident that his position is bestowed by the government, not by his eminence. As an astute vice-chancellor without such pressures, can exercise their discretion and execute orders in the interest of the University and its members. There are statutory provisions, but seldom invoked, since the Syndicate holds the ultimate power, which hinders the freedom of the university and its agencies…with weak and dependent leadership, one cannot imagine the future of this university

(U1RESFM02)

To this end, the administrative processes set-forth by the state legislature guarantees utmost representation and professionalism. However, the process of governance, i.e., wherein the authorities engage with their powers in managing their resources and the actors within the university, is not so representative and professional. It is in this context that the study proposes to critically analyse the interface of changing university governance with its ideals of expansion, equity and excellence. The ideals of expansion, equity and excellence, continue to be the core of higher education policies since independence. However, the interpretation and priorities of these ideals have been evolving. Some of these evolutionary changes are due to changing governance structures and practices in universities. In the following section, the study explores these ideals in the context of a public state University-In the state of Karnataka. A
descriptive-analytical framework of expansion, equity and excellence – and their interpretation and priorities, provides critical insights into the governance structures and practices within the university.

**University Actors and Expansion: Reaching out to the ‘un-reached’**

The 12\textsuperscript{th} Five-year plan (2012-2017), prioritizes the need for expansion in higher education while ensuring equity and excellence. Scholars suggest that post-independence the demand for higher education has been unprecedented. One of the main reasons for such unprecedented demand is attributed to ‘pro-welfare’ policies of the government in democratizing higher education (Tilak and Verghese, 1991; Chitnis & Altbach, 1993 and Beteille, 2000). Policy interventions ensuring equality opportunity in higher education has been the most important attribute towards expanding the system, horizontally. Public universities promote the ideal of ‘access for all’, enshrined in the policies of the government.

In continuation of the idea of a public university, mentioned above, the main function of the public University-I is teaching, examination and affiliation. The primacy of teaching over research is due to the mass enrolment of students who come from a various socio-economic-intellectual background, because of ‘access for all’ policy in enrolment. Such profile of the students provides no time and resource for faculty-members to prioritize research over teaching. In this regard, a faculty member from the Faculty of Social Sciences opined that the:

> The primary function of State universities is teaching and conducting examinations. Since they have a social responsibility to cater to the majority of the aspirants coming from diverse background and interests, the university’s reach and composition are vast and diverse. This university has seen a massive expansion in terms of students’ enrolment and in a number of colleges affiliating to this University in the last few decades. Enrolment is natural and inevitable, but affiliation system is an administrative setup and hence could be
reformed. But, the practice of affiliation has continued for many years, no administrator or leader is willing to reform the system. Many of us are investing a lot of our time on the affiliation system and its processes. We are asked to visit these colleges located away from the university campus for Board of Studies (BoS) meeting, examination duty and other academic activities (U1RESFM01)

In alignment with the concerns expressed by the U1RESFM01, in addition to woes of teaching, the system of affiliation of state universities is expanding with the rise in demand for higher education. There were no guidelines on a number of affiliations for the state universities, apart from suggestions on an ideal number of affiliations – Gajendragadkar Committee, 1971 was of the view that ideally on an average an affiliating university should have 25-30 affiliated colleges on an average. As a matter of fact, apart from omitting such suggestions, there is no uniform distribution of the number of affiliated colleges across state universities in India. There are variations in the number of affiliated colleges among state universities, within the state.

Affiliation system is important for democratising higher education and sustaining public universities, because of which it is hard to transform the system: firstly, affiliation system enables the university to extend its functions and reach to those in the fringes from the main campus of the university especially in the rural and semi-urban areas, and secondly, the affiliation system is one of the major sources of revenue for the university, as part of annual affiliation and examination fees received from each of the affiliated colleges. Higher the number of affiliated colleges, there is a proportionate increase in the revenue for the university. In fact, Bangalore University with 600 affiliating colleges, highest in the country, is in the state of Karnataka (as on December 2016). On the one hand, the university generates revenue, but on the other, face various challenges in managing the administrative and academic discipline of the affiliated colleges. To address the problems regarding affiliation system, the Rashtriya Uchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA, 2013), recommended a limit of 100 affiliated colleges per
state university. However, despite such interventions, practically, the issue of affiliation both in a quantitative and qualitative sense, continue to be a major conundrum with the public state universities.

The case-in-point, University-I, an affiliating university, is not devoid of such challenges. Majority of the faculty-members and administrators expressed their content and discontent on the university affiliation system. A faculty-member, earlier associated with an affiliated college, expressed his opinion:

Affiliation system expands the horizon of the university, as result of this there is an increase in a number of student enrolment, which is good. But increasing the horizon via affiliation without rationalizing the impact on university resources is problematic. The university does not want to do away with the affiliation system, because the revenue generated by this system is large and hence one of the main lifelines of the university. However, there could be some reforms in the way administrative processes are structured as of now. For instance, the university should take steps to increase the number of autonomous colleges, from the existing list of affiliated colleges (U1RESFM12).

On campus, the University-I is facing pressures of increase in enrolment in the last few years. The university has take-up massive infrastructure overhaul, to accommodate the increase in enrolment – new classrooms, hostels and laboratories have been commissioned. One of the PG students from the Faculty of Sciences, when asked about his understanding of the expansion in the university, said:

The pace of infrastructure development on campus is already in progress. Additionally, the number of courses offered has also increased. However, there is hardly any space within the campus – the green cover of the University is lost to such expansion. The campus once rich with trees and lawns, has lost its aura…there is hardly much space for us to hangout before and after class…it is necessary to expand, but not at the cost of environment and our comfort (U1RESSTU15)
To cut down the increase in enrolment, the university should introduce an entrance exam for the PG courses. Admission based on merit, then quota, will be good policy to check unnecessary burden on the university due to expansion. Suggesting, the ills of the quota system, a first-year student pursuing MA in Economics at the Department of Economics and Cooperation, at the University, expressed her concerns about ‘access for all’, policy:

The university should have a tough entrance exam, which will ensure the entry of students on merit and not based on quota…our classroom size is huge, compared to our senior batches. In my course, a classroom consists of 90 students; it is very difficult to engage in discussion with the teacher in the classroom also it is hard to concentrate (U1RESSTU06)

University Actors and Equity: Diversity in Meaning and its Practices

The expansion of higher education in India is not devoid of severe disparities especially with regard to geography, caste and gender. By virtue of being a public institution, it is the responsibility of the state and the university to ensure accessibility to students in need of higher education. Such a mandate aligns to the democratic ideals of social justice espoused in the country’s higher education policies. However, mere policy enactments do not achieve these objectives due to ‘complexity of structural issues’, those that are culturally rooted in university structures and processes (Ovichegan, 2015). This is further substantiated by the fact that, stratification in Indian society is reflected in inequalities in education attainment across caste, religion, and ethnic boundaries (Dreze & Sen, 1995) further reflected in institutions of higher learning.

Extending such concerns, one of the members of the University-I, holding a key administrative position, remarked:

It has been noticed that despite the facilities made available for the students coming from the marginalised communities there is limited enrolment, the problem of excluding them
persists, and a large section remains deprived, as a result of social, political, economic and psychological barriers. Also, those who were fortunate to overcome the barriers and sought access to higher education, are still struggling to compete with ‘high achievers’ most of them belonging the mainstream communities of the society. Such a problem exists within university structures and the very attitude among the members of the university… here in our university, I have witnessed such loopholes and hence, strongly recommend a complete overhaul of the system and its processes along with the change in the attitude of the members of the university. We need to internalize the meaning and relevance of equity in practice and not merely as an instrument of policy or ‘things-to-do’ for the members of the university (U1RESLEADER01)

While the university appreciates equity in enrolment and recruitment, few members of the university express their discontent with regard to members exploiting the policies of affirmative action on campus. One of the senior most faculty members, Faculty of Science and Technology studies opined that:

There is a high number of teacher absenteeism in this University in some departments. Some of these people get away with such practices either because they are close to the VC, especially if they belong to his community or caste or if the concerned faculty belongs to certain caste categories, especially, to the marginalised caste, it is hard to question them. If we raise the alarm on this issue, they often take refuge under the Atrocities Act (The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989). Following which we are labelled as ‘casteist’, ‘Brahmanical’ and ‘jati vadi’ which will hinder our career prospects. The best strategy is to stay away from such issues and be a silent observer of such practices that hinder the overall quality of teaching-learning in the university (U1RESFM11).
Discriminations are not just limited to gender or caste but extended to regional and linguistic aspects. A senior faculty member of the Faculty of Arts exclaimed her experience of discrimination because of her regional affiliation:

The caste dynamics and caste-based favouritism within faculty and administrators are very evident here. In addition to this, I have also seen linguistic and regional biases being practiced in this university; since I come from Andhra Pradesh (married to a Kannadiga), I have been exposed to such biases many times. Such experiences can be very demoralizing (U1RESFM09)

Similar experiences and opinions are also reflected among the students of the university. It is interesting to note, the perspective of one of the Doctoral student at the university – he believed that:

The role of the faculty members in strengthening the attitude for inclusion and equity among students is indispensable. Faculty-members are the key agents of propagating caste and gender inequalities among us – we witness this in classrooms and outside. For instance, faculty-members in this university are known for preferring students from their caste/community and region during PhD admission process, and some of them hire project assistants, on these criteria. However, there are very few faculty-members who are very professional and ethical in these matters (U2RESSTU14).

Such attitudes are embedded in the organisational structures of the university extending various forms of stigmatization (Goffman, 2018). For instance, a student from the Faculty of Science and Technology shared his experience and concern about displaying of affiliations, constraining his identity associated with specific caste and quota, not as a student and/or an achiever in the field.
Our department notice board lists the names of those students who avail scholarship under the special schemes provided by the government…similar categorization is done in the library while issuing books (book bank) such display of our affiliations often makes us uncomfortable…on the campus (U1RESSTU11).

Further, the university ensures there are efforts to bridge the gap between gender. The annual reports of the university list series of programmes related to gender sensitization at the department, faculty and university levels. Apparently, while talking to students there seems to be a limited influence on the administrators and faculty-members. These programmes have limited impact on university administration and its administrators:

In my opinion, the administration and faculty have a direct role in ensuring equity, excellence and expansion of the university. We need an administration that is responsive to the grievances of the students in case of discrimination. This is possible only if the administration is sensitive to the needs and experiences of the students. They need to create sufficient confidence in the students so that the students can approach them without any hesitation (U1RESSTU07)

To substantiate one such instance with regard to discrimination within the campus, as a result of insensitivity or ignorance of administrators of the University, one of the students opined that:

The only major issue presently is related to hostel timings for female students, we must get back to the hostel by 8pm…we do not have internet access in the hostel, sometimes we need to access internet from cyber cafes, especially during our assignment submission – boys have an advantage in this regard, there is no cut-off time for them, as such. Also, there are many interesting talks happening in the city; we often miss them due to our deadline. If we come late to the hostel, we are reprimanded for being uncultured and very
modern and so on...we also miss out on many social engagements with our peers (U1RESSTU12).

Apart from such experiences outside classrooms, stigmatization exists within the classroom. Classrooms any form or type of a university represent the heterogeneity of students by caste, gender, learning ability and economic profile. Lack of appreciation of these differences and exposing any one of these differences results in subtle of explicit stigmatizations. One such incident was reported by a student (international student):

While pursuing my master’s in commerce degree in this university, during my second year (even semester) classroom, one of the male teachers pointed to me, asked me to stand up to express his discontent on me sitting in the classroom with my leg crossed. According to him, a woman sitting with her leg crossed is disrespectful, uncultured and an insult to the teacher. In my home country, which I thought was the most traditional amongst modern nations, this was a shocking revelation to me in my experience at the University. It disturbed me a lot, so much so that, I opted to move out the Faculty of Commerce subsequent to master’s degree, I have joined Faculty of Management Studies to pursue my doctoral degree. I was very keen to pursue my doctoral thesis within the discipline of commerce but had to compromise on my choice as a result of such experiences (U1RESSTU18).

Further, a student with the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, shared his recent experience on faculty-member’s attitude in promoting gender sensitization in the classroom,

Our sociology teacher, has been a strong supporter of feminism...this is what we have heard from her in the classroom, and in many forums, she has expressed the same...this is what you can gather from your first impression, but later on, when it came to her attention that there were few female students found smoking outside the campus, she remarked that
smoking is a way for girls to be like men, and also that boys and girls aren’t responsible enough in the first year to share benches in the class, hence they should be sitting in separate rows (U1RESSTU05)

Such duality of the attitude of among teachers within and outside classrooms, affect students and their overall experience on campus.

In the last few years, the university under the directions of the UGC has initiated series of ‘self-financing’ courses. Such an initiative is a special arrangement in order to enhance the employability of students in the labour market. Even in such courses, there exists skewness in enrolment of students and their socio-economic affiliations in pursuing self-financed courses.

The coordinator of one of the self-financed courses at the university said that:

Higher education is undergoing such a flux that such studies are needed. In fact, a few months ago, I have done a short research study on ‘self-financed courses’. Since many state universities (including ours) introduced ‘self-financing’ courses, I was curious to know ‘who will join these courses (particularly languages, folklore and others), paying so much money’. Many of us in the University thought this model would not be successful since students who come to this university (also in many state universities) come from economically backward communities and will be unable to pay fees. The lack of scholarships in the university given high fees for the self-financing courses (fast increasing), equal opportunity for socially and economically weaker is a concern (U1RESFM15).

Such concerns lead to another oft cited challenge, that is the excellence with equity in university education. Professor at the Faculty of Education Studies, while sharing his view on the practice of equity, share the ground realities on campus.

Most of the students enrolled in this University come from neighboring villages,
generally lack skills of reading and discussion, unlike our students from university constituent college in the locality…we spend a lot of our time and energy in teaching them these basic skills before engaging ‘intellectual’ discussion in the classroom, beyond text books. If we have that intellectual space, we can aim towards having greater quality in our research and teaching, but our priority is to teach and then engage in research (U1RESFM13)

To overcome aforementioned challenges and contradiction, the majority of the actors within the university suggest that the attitude amongst members of the university and its governance mechanisms must reform substantially. To this end, a faculty member opined that the:

The governance of the university rests in the wrong hand, and people like students and us suffer because of that. Education should clear the shadow of caste and other discriminations – but in universities, these differences are highly visible in our day-to-day processes both internal to our department and external, i.e., between the department and the overall administration of the university. Caste based appointments, enrolment and promotions should be replaced with merit and eligibility. The administration must be sensitive to performance than caste or class or cree of the members of the university (U1RESFM11).

University Actors and Excellence: Between Expansion and Equity

Excellence is an integral part of the university and its functions. One of the core issues relating to excellence in public universities is that achieving excellence with equity is a challenge (UGC, 2013). Ensuring equality of outcome is a challenge vis-à-vis equality of opportunity. Arguably, the enrolment in public universities, unlike the private institutions, is diverse and heterogenous with students representing various strata of socio-economic categories (seetable 3 and 4 in the chapter – IV and chapter – V respectively for an illustration of social diversity across students in the public university).
Most of the faculty-members consider the very profile of students along with dilapidated infrastructure as one of the key reason for the overall decline of excellence in teaching, research and extension activities of the university. In addition to these problems, interestingly, the rapid proliferation of alumni of the respective universities as faculty members – in-breeding - is considered to be another critical issue for the decline in the quality of education and research, especially in public state universities. One of the senior students (finalising PhD) states:

When a University is ready to spend so much on infrastructure and other extra facilities, why couldn't they get us good and well qualified teachers? Well, there are very few of them out there. Most of the teachers are postgrads from the same university or some local college from around the university. In most instances, they are PhD students of some of the influential teachers on campus, who are nominated as members of the interview panel or other members of the interview panel are influenced by the said faculty member. The apathetic nature of professors in the curriculum is one of the main reason for the age old outdated syllabus since most of them continue what their predecessors did as a result of hierarchy, obedience to their senior teachers or lethargy. They don’t bother to create that extra interest in students, which is again a quality of a great teacher…even if they do senior teachers or their former teacher consider it to be a threat and hence demotivate such innovations, continuing to use their authority (U1RESSTU05).

Socio-economic diversity along with academic in-breeding along with infrastructure deficit is considered to be barriers to ensuring excellence. However, actors within the university also suggest that fundamental barriers are created by the administrative personnel, and the administrative structure per se, a faculty member in this regard opined:

At least in my experience until now, I have seen administrative hurdles like these have hindered the process of excellence or quality in our university. This is, in general, the major
opinion among my colleagues in this university. And may be holding the same perception among students as well, which I’m not sure about (U1RESFM03)

To illustrate administrative barriers for achieving excellence, it is apt to quote some of the experiences of the faculty members. At a systemic level, one of the faculty members said that the administrative system needs an overhaul. He said:

Before joining this university, I heard that there were members appointed by the government from Indian Accounts Services or Karnataka Civil Services as Registrars, Finance Officer and so on, such administrative model should have been continued so that there could have been neutrality in favouring certain academic disciplines over other – but the caste and regional biasness could continue (U1RESFMADMIN09)

On similar lines, but at the micro level, some of the faculty members who are keen to pursue research projects expressed their concerns and challenges in smooth functioning of the administration which is conducive for research studies. A faculty member from the Faculty of Arts while expressing her discontent said that:

Whenever any project grants come to the university as part of our research projects, it will be deposited in the name of the Registrar in the university’s account among several other accounts – every time we need to withdraw that fund I need to take administration sanctions– for instance, if I need to go for field work, I need to apply for sanction to the administration to draw the money in advance. During our audit, also, they see these administrative sanctions before closing the account. These processes are not very encouraging… With such practices, how can you expect the faculty to do research work? How are going to add to the overall quality of research in the university? (U1RESFM11)

In line with this, another faculty member and Head of the Department within the Faculty of Management Studies opined that:
We follow the age-old procedure of submitting ‘this bill, that bill – AC bill, DC bill’ and keep wondering if it was passed on or not…there the administration could be transparent. We have the training of e-governance, but we don’t have the infrastructure to use it – we have got wi-fi this year, and our training on e-governance was 2 years ago… If we practice e-governance effectively, then we need not go to the administration building (which is far from my department) for submitting bills or any other matter that could be resolved via e-governance. Such a mechanism will ensure flexibility and transparency in administration.

(U1RESFMADMIN06)

In sum, most of the faculty members engaged with research studies, in particular, expressed their discontent and concerns with regard to the disconnect between the administration and faculty and their research. It is important to revisit these linkages to ensure a conducive environment for excellence in teaching and research.

Subsequent to issues relating to administration and individual faculty member experiences, it is interesting to note prioritisation for research across Faculty of Studies. One of the Registrar’s of the university noted that there exists skewness in individual faculty member or department with the Faculty of Studies for a conducive research environment. According to him:

In the arts/social sciences faculty of studies, there have not been many contributions as compared to the natural sciences. They have reached greater heights. Excellence is attributed to individual faculty members (individual centric) particularly in social sciences rather than the department (department centric). Individual faculty members or faculty from specific departments get priority or preferential treatment in the overall administrative system. For instance, the time taken for approval of applications related to research proposals, realising instalments for a research study on time and so on, varies from individual faculty and department belonging to a specific faculty of studies. The preferential treatment to certain faculty depends on his/her caste affiliation and social
capital within the university, whereas similar treatment for certain departments within the faculty of studies is due to administrative pressure. Most often it is the Vice Chancellor or the Finance Officer coming from these departments, which makes these processes differentiated across the faculty members or departments in the university (U1RESFADMIN04)

With such an administrative environment, it is hard to ensure excellence in research or any other function. The aforementioned thought was acknowledged by the majority of the faculty members and administrative staff. Further, one of the research scholars of the university suggested that the root cause for the decline in quality of education is the attitude of the university administration. According to him:

The faculty members are usually just as powerless as the students when it comes to dealing with the administration. The administration, in my opinion, is the root cause of most problems like infrastructure issues, examination issues and issues related to the functioning of colleges according to the academic calendar. Where they are better able to handle the queries of the students and teachers, the system will automatically become more efficient (U1RESSTU12)

The issue of measuring the performance of the faculty members through the Academic Performance Index (API) of the UGC was vehemently criticised by faculty members in University-I. One of the senior most faculty members who also holds a key administrative position said:

If you measure excellence in terms of ‘international publications’ and the Academic Performance Index (API) of UGC, we at this university don’t conform to such an idea of excellence in practice. Though principally we are accountable to such measures – publication, conferences and so on as part of performance appraisal, this does not reflect our time and energy we dedicate catering to the diverse needs of the students as such.
Rather, we focus on teaching and providing knowledge to students – we have achieved excellence… In our university, at least the classes will be scheduled on time (not like other state universities) … students who come from rural areas have the problem of not having good command over English; this is a major problem. Students are good at using their own language but end up losing out in larger communication when it comes to interpreting in English. If you measure excellence in the local context that is their local skills and logic and its implication on their work – we have achieved excellence. But external processes setting a standard of excellence and adhering to the same, we must go a long way (U1RESADMIN02).

According to him, a critical measure of excellence among public University-Is the quality of teaching not much on the quantity of research and self-development. The main task of the faculty members is to teach, especially, to the students who are first generation learners. The API scores do not measure such critical attributes. Hence, excellence needs to be localised to the experiences related to the specific typology of universities and the challenges therein.

According to Berdahl (1990), it is vital to provide maximum autonomy in consonant with that accountability for higher education institutions to ensure quality. However, autonomy without accountability could be less productivity and create a culture of distrust and demotivation with the university. A faculty member, who is also the Head of the Department within the Faculty of Arts opined:

In the state university system, there are no rewards and punishments – and those who don’t do anything for many years get promoted – here we have professors who have not even produced one PhD, and they are full professors. There is something called Career Advancement Scheme (CAS)- for promotion, the faculty members need to apply, and external experts review application and the concerned faculty is called for an interview by the board constituted by the university authorities. The VC, Registrar, Department Head/Chairperson of the concerned subject and subject experts constitute this is the board
the board approves the application – they are called for an interview. Sometimes the faculty members may fail the interview but are still promoted. For example, my own colleague from another department failed twice – the third time he was pushed and promoted to become a professor. In the private sector, such pushing of unqualified faculties for promotion is impossible

(U1RESFADMIN08)

Conclusion

In sum, the interface of expansion, equity and excellence and the experiences of the university actors illustrates that most of the functions of University-I is organised first around conventions, and only then rules. Though there are an Act, statutes and ordinances which determine the functions and powers of the actors within the university, there are many day-to-day decisions encumbered into university functions. Normative governance structures and processes in University-I are exposed to series of nuances and inherent tensions and conflicts.

Such a system of governance espouses interesting insights in the inner world of the university. The system is exposed to several tensions and conflicts between the administrators and the faculty-members. However, these tensions are incommensurable given the diversity of the profile of the students, faculty-members and the overall functions of the university. Streamlining governance mechanisms aligned to such diversity of actors and their concerns is the need of the hour.