

institution able to sustain its academic offerings over time in India?

Allowing foreign institutions to set up shop in India is not the only road to the internationalization of Indian higher education. Twinning programs, joint degrees, exchanges of students and professors, sharing of curriculum, and other relationships are possible and more likely to ensure that essential Indian control over Indian higher education is maintained.

So far, India's main contribution to world higher education is the export of students, many of whom do not return. India needs to engage more with the rest of the world, but not at the expense of giving up academic sovereignty. Higher education is not, in the end, purely a commodity to be bought and sold on the international market. Higher education represents an essential part of a nation's patrimony and a key to future prosperity. (This article appeared in *The Hindu* (Chennai, India), July 15, 2008). ■

Caste, Class, and Quality at the Indian Institutes of Technology

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The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), established through an act of the Parliament and aided by the central government, have been playing a pivotal role in technological manpower development and research programs. Entrance to the IITs is made through the Joint Entrance Examination. Every year, about 300,000 students appear for just 3,000 seats. Though it is very tough to get admission into the IITs, these institutions remain the most sought after.

A conflict is now under way between the seven IIT directors and the Ministry of Human Resource Development over the June 9, 2008 order asking the institutes to implement a 15 percent quota for the Scheduled Castes, 7.5 percent for the Scheduled Tribes, and 27 percent for the Other Backward Classes in the faculty from 2008/09 academic session. Usually the term Other Backward Classes implies "socially and educationally backward classes." According to the 1931 caste-based census, there are 2,399 backward castes or communities in India.

Though the reservation policy for the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students at the IITs existed since 1973, the ruling UPA (United Progressive Alliance) government directed the University Grants Commission to extend reservation to lec-

tures and professors in all centrally aided institutions except the minority institutions in 2005. In order to pave the way for reservation, the 93rd constitutional amendment was also passed in December 2005. In January 2006, the Central Educational Institutions (Reservations in Admissions) Act came into force, making it mandatory to reserve 27 percent of seats for the Other Backward Classes in all centrally aided institutions, including the IITs. The June 9, 2008 order extended the reservation to the appointment of faculty as well.

All the IITs provide reservation for these students. They also offer reservation for administrative posts ranging from the most junior employees to deputy registrars. Now they are required to reserve posts for lecturers and assistant professors in science and technology and up to the professor's level in management, social sciences, and humanities.

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It is hard to imagine, however, that faculty will use the caste factor to get entry into the prestigious and elitist IITs. Though the order was signed by Seema Raj, director of technical education at the Ministry of Human Resource Development on the recommendations made by the standing committee of the IIT Council, many faculty members believe that the order has been thrust upon the IITs by the ministry itself. According to them, matters of such strategic importance should have first been discussed in the IIT Council, but in this situation a decision was made without having consulted the stakeholders. The ministry, on the other hand, has taken the stand that the IITs have been skirting around the reservation policy despite the fact that they were never exempted from it.

RESERVATIONS ABOUT RESERVATION

IIT directors have expressed their dissent against reservation for faculty appointments. They are insisting that the UPA government should revoke its decision. Whereas the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bhabha Atomic Research Center, and the Harish Chandra Research Institute are exempt from reservation—for being "institutes of national importance"—it has been made mandatory for the IITs despite their being of equal reputation, if not more. The question arises why there should be reservation only for the position of lecturers and Assistant Professors at the IITs in the case of science and tech-

nology and why there should be reservation up to professor's level in the case of the humanities and social sciences. These divisions seem to be an outcome of the "enclave mentality" despite the fact that the IITs are now trying to bridge the gap between the sciences and humanities by offering some more interdisciplinary programs at the master's and PhD levels.

The IITs remain a small number of centers of academic excellence amidst the plethora of mediocre higher education institutions in India. Beside the faculty, the IIT alumni and current students have also expressed anguish about the quota for faculty. They believe that the IITs' reputation consists of the excellent teaching by highly qualified faculty. To them, reservation for faculty seems a politically motivated decision that will seriously ruin the interests of the students.

The existing IITs already suffer a shortage of about 900 qualified faculty. The government is now planning to start 10 more IITs and Indian Institutes of Management during the 2007–2012 five-year plan to promote technical and management education in India. Instead of providing incentives to the highly qualified sector, faculty reservation policy is likely to dilute the teaching and research standards.

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POLICY GOALS

Supporters of reservation argue that in a caste-ridden and hierarchical society like India it is desirable to find some ways of providing social justice and economic opportunities to all those who were deprived due to social and educational backwardness. Reservation policy is usually deployed to win over the support of the marginalized or underrepresented sectors of society. Reservations or quotas are seen as important instruments for affirmative action.

Whereas affirmative action remains open-ended and without any fixed number, reservations or quotas can have any fixed number or percentage. The latter are generally justified in the name of equity, social justice, or democracy. Reservation for faculty positions at the IITs can be seen as a peculiar outcome of deeply entrenched caste-based discriminations in Indian sociocultural, political, and psychological upbringing. As a political corrective, reservation can be seen as a short-term measure but certainly not a panacea. We need to find a balance between equity and quality in the long run. ■

US Regional Accreditation Abroad: Lessons Learned

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As higher education "globalizes," more institutions abroad have sought US accreditation because it offers a non-governmental, mission-oriented model, with trained and impartial evaluators and applied to both public and private institutions. Is such accreditation possible under existing standards? What are the costs and benefits for institutions and students here and abroad?

To answer these questions, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), an institutional accreditor, instituted a pilot project in 2002. Although MSCHE has long accredited US institutions abroad that are chartered in the Middle States region, it had not accredited non-US-style institutions incorporated abroad. MSCHE recognized the need to be sensitive to the notion of "cultural imperialism" while applying US standards abroad, but it insisted that applicants meet the commission's usual standards.

All 9 institutions in the pilot were volunteers. MSCHE also acquires information in the course of accrediting 9 institutions abroad incorporated in our region and the 330 locations abroad operated by 79 of our member institutions in over 50 countries. Some in the pilot have achieved accreditation; others are still in the application/candidacy process. They are located in Canada, England, Chile, United Arab Emirates, Taiwan, British Virgin Islands, and Greece. Some institutions withdrew after discovering the depth and continuing nature of US review and monitoring, which includes a long "candidacy" process. There is currently a moratorium on accepting new institutions.

ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

The first question was whether the commission's mission-oriented standards were sufficiently flexible to accommodate practices abroad. So far, the answer seems to be positive, although some institutions have presented special challenges. To meet the requirement that an institution offers "general education" basic skills, MSCHE accepted precollege learning as equivalent. Some institutions changed their governance structures to meet the commission's requirements of an independent governing board with no conflicts of interest. Financial statements required "translation" into US practices. When academic freedom and free-speech issues have arisen,