

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University
Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA)

Special Lecture on
Indian First Open University in Transition:
Need for Reimagining the Future Together

By

Prof. V.S. Prasad

Formerly Vice Chancellor (Acting),
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Director, NAAC



Dr.B.R. Ambedkar Open University,

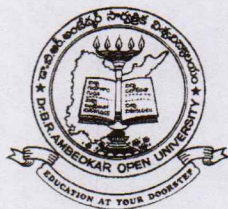
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About Dr.BRAOU

The University, initially known as Andhra Pradesh Open University, was set up on 26th August 1982 through an Act of the A.P. State Legislature (APOU Act 1982). Subsequently the University was renamed as Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University on 26th October, 1991. The establishment of this University, the first of its kind in India, heralded an era of affirmative action on the part of the Government of Andhra Pradesh to provide opportunities of higher education to all sections of society to meet the changing individual and Societal needs. The University is providing services to the student community through a wide network of 213 study centres spread across both Telangana & Andhra Pradesh States, including 23 Regional Co-ordination centres and 11 centres exclusively meant for women students. Even prison inmates under life sentence also enrol themselves as students and pursue education through exclusive study centres at Central Prison – Cherlapally, Warangal, Rajahmundry, Visakhapatnam, Kadapa and Nellore. In all, the University offers Certificate, UG, PG Diploma and PG Degree and Research programmes including various Professional programmes.





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Special Recognition

Indian Post Open University in Transition:
Need for Realigning the Future Together

Prof. V.S. Rao

Indian First Open University in Transition: Need for Reimagining the Future Together

PROF. V.S. PRASAD

1. Introductory Remarks

I am thankful to Vice Chancellor Prof. K. Seetharama Rao for inviting me to give the Special Lecture on the occasion of launching of lecture series on 'Quality Enhancement' by the University's Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA). It is an appropriate occasion to launch this lecture series by CIQA, in the context of University preparations for NAAC assessment and many other initiatives in the fortieth year of the University. I congratulate the CIQA for this initiative and hope the lecture series will help the institution to improve the quality and to ensure the institutional accountability; the two key objectives of NAAC assessment and accreditation. Greatly appreciate the effort of Prof. P. Madhusudhan Reddy, Director, CIQA and GRADE in organizing this programme. Today I propose to speak on **"Indian First Open University in Transition: Need for Reimagining the Future Together"**

2. The Focus of the Lecture

The focus of my lecture is 'to reflect and identify the action points for sustainable future of the University'. I look at this as an opportunity to share my experiences and hopes on University's contribution to society. My observations on 'action points' are only suggestive not prescriptive and they should be taken as a part of a learning organization activity. Let me start with a brief explanation of the terms/ concepts

used in the title of the lecture, with a belief in the Socratic expression that “The beginning of wisdom is the definition of terms.” Let us start with **Transition** – change from one stage of condition to another. The University is in transition from ODL (Open Distance Learning) to ODeL (Open Distance electronic Learning). **Reimagination** refers to imagine again / a new. Management experts talk about six steps in reimagination i.e., Reflect, Connect, Explore, Choose, Repack and Act. Albert Einstein rightly said; ‘Imagination is more important than knowledge’. **Future** refers events that will or likely to happen in time to come. Futurist Wendell Bell has identified three types of futures i.e., possible future; probable future; and preferable future. We should learn to search more fully for possible futures, to forecast probable futures more accurately and to make judgement of preferable futures more objectively. **Together** focuses on actions in unison / collective work with the belief that ‘none of us is as smart as all of us’.

To put it simply the focus of my presentation is to ‘reimagine the University transition to build its future together’. What is the frame for doing it?

3. The Frame of Transition

The frame of transition includes the ideal of transition and the process of transition.

3.1 The Ideal of Transition

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s social vision of education and Prof. G. Ram Reddy’s institution building legacy should be the ideal parameters for reimagination of the future of the University.

Dr. Ambedkar way back in 1930’s has advocated inclusive quality education for all to ensure social justice. Greatly,

influenced by John Dewey's education philosophy, Ambedkar relentlessly worked for democratization of education, the ideal of Open University. UNSDG goal 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all" is a continuation of Dr. Ambedkar's transformative vision of education. National Education Policy 2020 recognizes education as fundamental for developing an equitable and just society.

Prof. G. Ram Reddy as the founder Vice Chancellor of the University laid strong foundations to build an effective, inclusive and accountable institution to open the ivory towers of education. Identification, nursing and recognition of talent, networking for institutional development, optimum utilization of available educational resources and designing flexible result oriented academic and administrative structures and practices are some of his legacies which have continuous relevance in reimagining of the University for future. Sincerity of purpose and passion to make a difference tempered by pragmatic wisdom are the guiding values of Prof. Ram Reddy's institutional legacy, which all of us should cherish and practice.

3.2 The Process of Transition

In the process of transition, we have to examine the continuity and change and the practicability of change. The fundamental premises of the University should always be kept in mind in the transition process. The fundamental premises are:

- **Democratisation of higher education:** (includes access with equity; access with quality and access with success)

- **Technology mediated form of education:**(includes four As of technology – accessibility, acceptability; appropriateness and affordability; digital equity and ethical concerns)
- **Self – directed learning facilitated by institution:** (includes learner- centric system; appropriate support systems and flexibility)
- **Lifelong learning for all** (includes continuous education; knowledge and skills upgradation; education for wellbeing)

These are dynamic foundation values and need continuous reimagination. Any change takes place in the context. In case of University's transition to a new age Open University, the contextual factors to be taken note are:

- Post- COVID / Post- Pandemic world
- Digital age/ Information age
- National Education Policy 2020
- Hands – off approach of Government

Management expert John Kotter has suggested eight steps for organization transformation. These are: 1.Creat sense of urgency. 2.Form a powerful guiding coalition. 3 Create a vision and strategy for change 4.Communicate the vision 5. Empower action, 6. Create short term wins, 7. Build on Change and 8. Anchor the change (John Kotter,Leading Change,1996).

With all our good intentions, we must be aware of difficulties in bringing changes in public organization. Here, pragmatic approach is more useful in realizing the ideal. Perseverance is the mantra. If you cannot achieve the targets, don't change the targets, but change the methods of doing things.

4. Focus Areas for Reimagination

I have identified five focus areas for reimagination. These are:

- Admissions
- Programmes
- Teaching-learning and Evaluation Strategies
- Learner Support System
- System Management

Technology applications and quality assurance constitute the two running themes of all areas. In each area I have identified three action points critical for transition in my perspective. Let me explain them briefly.

4.1 Admissions

Firstly, I would like to emphasize the importance of enrolling more students to make it a University at Scale. The University started with 6,231 students in 1983-84, reached highest of 1,91,367 in 2010-11 and is settling down to around one lakh and above in recent years. More enrolment of students is not only a fulfillment of its vision of democratization of access but also a necessity for its sustainability and survival. **Secondly**, the University has to design new strategies to enroll students from new categories of learners, may be with a more focus on working population in informal/ non-informal sectors looking for opportunities to upgrade their skills and qualifications. More flexible system of admissions and study may be designed for ensuring more enrolment. The NEP2020, new initiatives like Academic Bank of Credit (ABC), Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Micro-Credential with Course

wise registrations may help in opening the doors of Open University to large numbers. **Thirdly**, the University should also focus on designing appropriate systems for student retention and success. In Open Distance Learning (ODL) the cost of education is low, but because of low success rate the cost of graduation is very high. The University's credible steps in increasing the success rate will also enhance its credibility and contribute for more enrolment.

4.2 Programmes

Firstly, The University should design, develop and deliver Programmes resulting in development of life skills and employability, fulfilling two objectives of education i.e., education for living and education for life. The Programmes should result in learners acquiring competencies which are personally, professionally and socially useful. The University may relook at the present programmes from this perspective and identify new multidisciplinary programmes to meet the changing requirements. More than the domain knowledge, learning abilities are becoming more critical in this VUCA world. **Secondly**, the University may offer more short duration and add on courses to meet the changing work needs of working population. Based on social and market needs University may identify short duration add on courses. **My Third**, suggestion is that the University should network with more public, private and community organizations to pool the resources for offering Programmes.

4.3 Teaching – Learning and Evaluation Strategies

Firstly, the University should learn from the experiences of other ODL institutions- national and international- the new approaches in development and adoption of learning

resources. More extensive use of Open Educational Resources (OER) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are desirable. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) knowledge resources are very useful to understand world-wide developments in this area. **Secondly** urgent reforms are necessary in ways of formative and summative ODL learners evaluation. Here also the COL resources and University Grants Commission recommendations are very useful. The University should explore and put in place the technology enabled evaluation systems appropriate to its capacities and context. **Thirdly**, as part of its mission of continuing life-long education, the University should be more pro-active in developing learning resources for lifelong learning and making its learning resources as open learning resources. In the present context of large recruitment to public services in Telangana, the University may make available as OER some of its learning resources relevant to persons appearing for competitive examinations.

4.4 Learner – Support System

Firstly, effective learner support services system is one of the defining elements of Open University system. This makes the Open University system different from Conventional System and distinguishes one ODL institution from another ODL institution. **Secondly**, in the Post-COVID and digital society technology-enabled learner support services are becoming more relevant and acceptable. The shift is from group services to individual services. The MOOCs models of services are becoming more popular. The University should explore and put in place more Web Based learner services, with face-to-face and hands on experiences where necessary. Every programme design should include the appropriate

technology based multi-mode learner support services. The faculty should take the responsibility for design of appropriate learner support system. **Thirdly**, there is a need for structural reforms in management of learner support system. The distinct feature of BRAOU learner support management system is the creation of a separate cadre of Academics for managing learner support system. Initially, till 2002 the University has followed two tier learner support systems with a Student Services Directorate at Headquarters and Study Centers, one in each of the 23 districts of integrated Andhra Pradesh. Later from 2002 the University like IGNOU and other OUs, has put in place three tier structure of study centre, Regional Coordination Centers and Headquarters. Presently only a few Regional Coordination Centers (RCCs) are managed by full-time academic and full-time support staff and most other are managed by part-time coordinators and part time support staff. The present system needs a relook in view of shortage of staff, change in the ways of providing learner support services, for optimum utilization of available resources and for having uniform staffing system. To ensure uniform staffing pattern the present academic and support staff working a few RCCs/SCs may be shifted and be posted at Headquarters with redesigning of their functions. The University may develop an appropriate system of integrating the separate academic cadre of student services with faculty, their roles being appropriately redefined. The RCCs and study centers may be managed by part time staff with effective coordination and monitoring from headquarters with the use of technology tools. The transformation has to be worked out carefully without adversely affecting the learners interests and in consultation with all stakeholders.

4.5 System Management

Firstly, enhance the institutional and staff capabilities. The STD and GRADE, the training and research units of the University have an important role in capacity building of staff and institution. **Secondly**, more flexible technology enabled management systems are necessary to ensure a function centric and results based governance model. Project mode may be used to execute the schemes. Y.N Harari, reflecting on the changing institutional context rightly observed; “Education in a traditional way is building a structure with strong foundation. Now it is building a tent easily foldable and changeable”. Flexibility is the mantra of modern system management. **Thirdly**, to strategize for future an Institutional Development Plan (IDP) should be prepared as suggested by NEP 2020. The IDP may include short term, mid-term and long term plans. The IDP should be based on hard facts and realistic action proposals with time lines for change.

5. A Few Questions

I would like to raise a few questions for reflection and action. These are:

- How can the University sustain and increase the enrolment?
- How to design and develop relevant programmes and appropriate teaching-learning and evaluation strategies resulting in learners acquiring attributes personally, professionally and socially useful?
- How can the University design and put in place effective learner support services?
- How can the governance system of the University be made more effective, accountable and inclusive?

- How can the University develop strategies for the sustainable development in the VUCA world?

The University may constitute Five Task Forces to address these questions and come out with solutions and action plans with time frame for implementation

6. To Sum UP

I have a few suggestions emerging from this lecture for the consideration of the University community. These are:

- Designing Integrated role for Faculty by including Teaching – Learning; learner support services; student evaluation; research and extension functions
- Strengthening of Faculties with more staff and techno-resources
- Redeployment of permanent academic staff located in RCCs/SCs
- Technology enabled individualised interactive direct to home learner support services.
- More flexible and responsive administrative arrangements.

7. To Conclude

Hope this discussion will result in 'reimagination of our experiences' and 'intelligent action'. Let me conclude with a quote from Betrand Russel. He said:

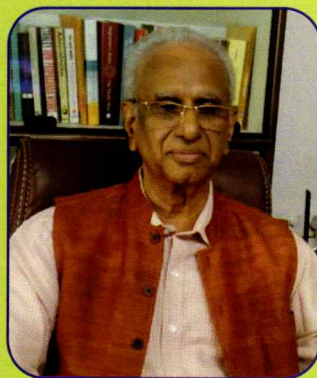
"With every increase in knowledge and skills wisdom becomes necessary, because every such increase augments our capacities for evil if our purpose is unwise"

(Transcript of the Lecture delivered at BRAOU Campus on 12.04.2022)

PROFESSOR V.S.PRASAD

Brief Bio-Data

- Professor V. S. Prasad was born in 1943 in a small village, Mahadevapuram in Khammam District of Telangana, India. He obtained his Masters and Ph.D in Public Administration from Osmania University, Hyderabad, India
- Prof V. S. Prasad is known for his contribution to Open and Distance Learning and Quality Assurance. During his more than four decades of academic life, held many academic and educational leadership positions which include Professor of Public Administration; Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Acting Vice-Chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University; Vice-Chancellor of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University and Director of National Assessment and Accreditation Council.
- Prof. Prasad is an internationally recognized expert in the field of Open and Distance Learning. The Commonwealth of Learning, in recognition of his services to ODL honoured him with the award of “Fellow of Commonwealth of Learning”. Prof. Prasad headed the Project of Government of Mauritius as Project Director, Open University of Mauritius from January 2009 to June 2010, for the establishment of Open University in Mauritius.
- Prof. Prasad as a Quality Assurance Professional, headed India's premier Quality Assurance Agency i.e., National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) as Director (2003-2008) and also actively associated with the activities of International Quality Assurance Agencies.
- Presently, Prof. Prasad is engaged in the study and advocacy activities in Higher Education, particularly in areas of Open and Distance Learning and Quality Assurance.
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"We may forgo material benefits of civilization, but we cannot forgo our right and opportunity to reap the benefits of the highest education to the fullest extent as the Education is the greatest material benefit"

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

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