



The Speech of
Dr. K. PONMUDY
Minister for Higher Education
Government of Tamil Nadu, Chennai

**In the State Higher Education
and Technical Education Ministers'
Conference at New Delhi**

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Honourable Minister for Human Resource Development, Honourable Minister of State for Higher Education, Honourable Ministers from other States, Officials of Ministry of Human Resource Development and Officials from various States,

At the outset, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for Human Resource Development for having convened the meeting of the State Education Ministers to discuss various issues pertaining to higher education and technical education. I hope that the deliberations of this conference will have greater impact on the education policy of our country.

1. The subject "education", which is included in the concurrent list of the Constitution needs to be examined in the light of the experience of the last 30 years, when the subject "education" was transferred from the State list to the concurrent list in 1976. You will all agree with me that because of inclusion of the subject "education" in the concurrent list of 7th Schedule of the Constitution of India, the State Government is not in a position to frame regulations, relating to Higher Education. Whenever, the State Government issues any orders or enacts any legislation, with regard to making admissions to the Professional Colleges, they are challenged before the court of law and invariably, the legislation passed by the State legislature is struck down for the reason that it is an occupied field by central legislation.

It is pertinent to point out that the State Government enacted the legislation abolishing the Common Entrance Test for admission to Professional Colleges in the year 2006. This Act was struck down by the High Court of Madras as unconstitutional. Again in December 2006, a Bill was passed by the legislature abolishing the Common Entrance Test for admission to the Professional Courses. This Bill was reserved for the assent of His Excellency, the President of India. The President has given his assent for the Act. The enactments were made in order to make level playing field to the students coming from rural areas and the people who are coming from the poorer sections of the society. This Act has been enacted to ensure equity and social justice to the people who have been deprived for a very long time. This Act has also been challenged in the court of law. It is pertinent to mention here that matters relating to procedure on admission to Professional Colleges have a bearing on the State development and social justice. Therefore, I earnestly appeal to you that the subject "Education" which is included under the concurrent list of constitution needs to be transferred back to the State list, so that the State Governments will be in a better position to handle the matters relating to Education taking into consideration the local conditions.

To achieve the following objectives, it is felt that the subject "Education" should be included in the "State List":

- i. To prevent exploitation of students in the name of "Capitation Fee", and other exorbitant fees
- ii. To prevent mushroom growth of Professional Colleges without adequate standards
- iii. To monitor the functioning of the Professional Colleges at close quarters so that the quality of education does not suffer
- iv. To establish the standard procedures in admission to Professional Colleges including merit and reservation
- v. To plan for providing access to higher education for all; and
- vi. To frame policy for regulated growth of higher education taking into consideration the local priorities.

2. The Central Government has been levying Education Cess on Income Tax for the last few years. I understand that atleast a part of the Education Cess flows to State Governments in the form of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan and some other Grants mainly focusing on "Primary Education". But the Higher Education does not get any allotment from the Education Cess. It is considered that even though the Primary Education is very important and lot more remains to be done in a country like India where literacy rate is very low, the Technical and Higher Education should not be ignored totally in the allocation of Central Funds. Due to inadequate funds, the infrastructure

needs of Higher Education Institutions, run by the State Governments could not be fulfilled. In most of the places, the Higher Education Institutions are run with bare minimum facilities. I appeal to the Government of India to earmark a portion of the Educational Cess to the States for the development of infrastructure in Higher and Technical Education. By this allotment, I hope the State Governments should be able to spend money on creation & maintenance of Laboratories, Workshops and Libraries and other infrastructure requirements, which are very badly needed.

3. The bodies like UGC, AICTE, NCTE & DEC were created to regulate the Higher Education in India. Instead of regulating, these all India Institutions have started administrating the Higher and Technical Education in the whole of India and in the process the standards and quality of Technical and Higher Education have become the victim.

There is a mushroom growth of Technical Education Institutions in the self-financing mode and if this is not regulated immediately by involving State Governments, educational system which have been built up since independence, will be ruined. You will all agree that UGC and AICTE, sitting in New Delhi cannot monitor the activities of the Institutions at remote places in Tamil Nadu. At present, the State Governments do not have any control over the functioning of these institutions in their respective States and Honourable Minister for Human

Resource Development would agree with me, it would be more meaningful and sensible to entrust the responsibility to State Governments to monitor and regulate the Technical and Higher Education Institutions. We have been talking of giving more powers to local bodies whereas the State Governments do not have powers to regulate the activities of Higher Education in their own State. It is a pathetic condition that the standards of Technical and Higher Education were not adhered in most of the Institutions and the State Governments could not point out any of these shortcomings, because they don't have any power. The State Governments remain as mute spectators.

I am to state that the all India Institutions have failed in their responsibilities and lost their relevance and need to be abolished forthwith. If there is any need for the existence of these Institutions like UGC, AICTE, NCTE, DEC etc, it would be better, if these institutions confine to only setting indicative standards / guidelines, pertaining to Higher Education, instead of getting involved in recognizing of these institutions and monitoring their activities. Indicative standards will be of guidance to the States to set their own standards and monitor orderly growth of Technical and Higher Education.

If abolition of these institutions will take time, I suggest an interim arrangement of creating State Level Bodies to monitor Higher and Technical Education Institutions with greater role to the State Government.

4. Tamil Nadu Government under the leadership of our Honourable Chief Minister, Dr. Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi is making efforts to enhance the access to higher education from the present rate of 7% to 20% in a span of 10 years. Towards this end, we have been making efforts like opening of new colleges, starting of new courses and also introduction of shift system in both technical as well as Arts and Science colleges and we are also encouraging the self-financing and aided colleges to go for shift system and introduction of new courses. In addition, we felt that the community colleges can also play a vital role in increasing the access to higher education. Community colleges in other countries have been playing important role in providing higher education to the economically weaker sections of the society. The expenditure to pursue higher education will be much lesser when students pursue higher education through the community college system. Even though the Tamil Nadu has got a number of community colleges spread all over the State, the vertical mobility of students coming out of these colleges has not been thought of. We plan to introduce integration of Community Colleges with University system, so that the students in community colleges by getting diploma or certificate after undergoing prescribed course from community colleges could be allowed to pursue higher education either in the regular university system/ Distance Education system without insisting on their passing +2. If this is done the youth who are mostly School drop-outs and who have been deprived higher education because of poverty or

other reasons, would be able to pursue higher education through the community colleges. We plan to introduce vertical integration of Community Colleges with regular University System from this academic year onwards. UGC may also examine this and take a decision accordingly.

5. The Government of India had announced sometime back that there would be National Institute of Science in three places including Chennai. But this had not taken place and the Government of India had stated that two new institutions with entirely different inputs have been established at Kolkotta and Pune and another such Institution is proposed to be set up at Punjab. Tamil Nadu does not have much of Central Government Institutions. In this regard Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu has written a letter to Hon'ble Prime Minister of India for establishing this National Institute of Science at Chennai. I request the Hon'ble Minister for HRD to take up this issue so that National Institute of Science can be established in Chennai.

6. Another issue which is hanging fire for a long time, is establishment of Indian Institute of Information Technology which was announced 3 years back. The State Government has also written to the Central Government providing 100 acres of land at the outskirts of Chennai. This Institute needs to be started as soon as possible. This is very important to our State. This institution will be a complementary one to the already developed software industries in Tamil Nadu.

7. The important issue which needs to be addressed immediately is the deteriorating standards and quality in technical education. The reasons for the falling quality in Technical Education are obvious:

- i. Inadequate qualified teachers – Most of the colleges appoint the fresh graduates immediately after their graduation to teach.
- ii. Shortcomings in the infrastructure – in terms of inadequacy in laboratories, libraries, workshops etc.
- iii. No regular/surprise inspections by AICTE
- iv. Not providing the skills the industry requires
- v. No regular updating of curriculum

To a certain level, this falling standards and quality in technical education can be arrested by making accreditation mandatory. At present the accreditation is a voluntary one. I earnestly appeal to the Central Government to make it compulsory from this year onwards.

8. Since distance learning is gaining importance, due to its cost effectiveness and wider coverage, an orderly growth of distance education with built-in mechanism for Quality Assurance is the need of the hour. Today, anybody can start any course under distance learning mode. Virtually there are no restrictions on the nature of programmes and their content / number of intake / number of contact sessions / number of

core faculty for programmes / minimum infrastructure at the study centres and minimum infrastructure at the Head Quarters. Since no restrictions have been placed on starting of courses, distance learning has become free for all and unless it is given some sort of channelisation, we may not be able to shape the growth of Distance Education later on. In our state, I find one of the Institutions proposed to start distance education courses for engineering in competition with the regular engineering colleges with the approval of DEC and another University has made it known its intention to start engineering courses in Arts & Science Colleges through Off-Campus Mode. These tendencies are very dangerous and need to be taken up very seriously. If it is not curtailed at the beginning it will have disastrous effect on the future of education in India. In our State, one of the institutions is having 6 lakhs students on its enrolment in Distance Education, which is 10 times more than the regular class in their own campus. Similarly, there is no provision, either internal or external, for quality audit. Unless, they have a system of quality check in place, then the Degrees awarded by Distance Education will be worth its paper value only.

In Tamil Nadu, we have already banned research level courses like M.Phil & Ph.D., through Distance Mode, I am to state that it will have a tremendous effect on the research activities in regular Universities. The need of the hour is to

have a regulatory system in place at the State level, which can regulate and monitor the functioning of the various Distance Education courses conducted by the various Universities.

We have also banned direct PG Courses for non-graduates through Non-formal Distance Education [Open University System], following UGC Regulations. However, it is understood that such courses are being offered in other States. UGC Should insist on uniform policy throughout India in this regard.

Secondly, I would like to emphasize on setting up of Distance Education Council (DEC), as an independent body separated from IGNOU, which is one of the distance education providers. This body could evolve broad guidelines which could be followed by the State Authorities on Distance Education. The independent body of DEC and State Authority on Distance Education have become necessary in the context of the globalization of education in the years to come. The foreign Universities can inundate the Indian Educational Market with courses from abroad and if the DEC and State Authority on Distance Education do not have the regulatory system in place, then, Indian students will be vulnerable to poaching by the foreign Universities.

Another Issue in the Distance Education is the mobility of the students between the Campus Universities and single mode open universities at the State level for facilitating credit

transfer. A mutually agreed upon identical curricula for campus universities and single mode open universities at the State level may solve the problem and this will also help in creating atmosphere conducive to accept learners through the ODL provision on par with their counterparts in the face-to-face system.

Another important issue in Distance Education is funding of Open Universities. Block grants are given to the regular Universities by UGC, whereas Open Universities do not get adequate funds either from UGC or from the DEC to fund for the infrastructure development of the University. I think, that funding, if it is given to Open Universities for infrastructure development, the Open Universities will establish physical infrastructure and creation of core faculty with financial assistance given by the UGC / DEC. This may be considered positively.

Thank You!
