

## OPEN UNIVERSITY : A REVOLUTIONARY EDUCATIONAL MOVEMENT

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### Introduction

Education has become a fundamental right now. Hence, educational institutions and the State have a greater responsibility of taking care of the educational needs of all children in the school going age. People are now coming forward to assert this right. The 1986 National Policy on Education had already focused on enlarging canvas of educational system by various other adoptable means and models. The limitations of conventional education system in terms of resources, physical infrastructure and educational facilities have been clearly evident since then. If we want to cater to the educational needs of our growing population we do not have any other recourse than to adopt the non-formal education system. Hence, to encompass all the potential learners the need to explore potential of external education, continuing education and distance education system has increased. This has been clearly deliberated upon in various policy documents on education at all levels.

**Key Words :** Open Learning, Distance Education, Open University, YCMOU

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system has grown exponentially in the last two decades particularly in developing countries to meet the demands of quality education for all and lifelong learning at affordable cost. Since the ODL system is dynamic and lends itself to technology, it can accommodate and imbibe changes in development and delivery of Programmes. That is why it has graduated through five generations in a short span of time. Through these the learners get access to a flexible learning system that allows them to learn as per their pace, choice and ease. The State Government of Maharashtra with these noble motives has established this university and has made a revolutionary move and taken a great leap in educational arena of the State.

On this backdrop it would be apt to note the genesis of the open universities. The first Open University was established in England in 1969, and that was the dawn of many Open Universities in

the world. In India the honor of establishing the first ever Open University goes to the State of Andhra Pradesh with inception of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University established in 1982. Later in 1985 at national level Indira Gandhi National Open University was established by the Government of India. Now there are 14 Open Universities in India that are working towards reaching higher education to the all strata of society. The State of Maharashtra through its Act XX of 1989 established Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) on 1 July 1989 at Nashik.

The Act of Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University clearly states the objectives and approaches of the University in its first schedule. Some of the major objectives are as follows:

- to make higher, vocational and technical education available to large sections of the population.
- to give special attention to the needs of the disadvantaged groups, in particular, people in the rural areas and the women.
- to relate all courses to the developmental needs of individuals, institutions and the state.
- to provide innovative, flexible and open system of education by using distance-teaching methodology and by applying modern communication technologies to education.
- to provide continuing, adult and extension education. Special attention is to be given to retraining adults in new skills, to enable them to adjust to a changing technological environment.
- to provide post-graduate studies and research opportunities in all fields of knowledge, especially in educational technology, distance education and development communications.

### **Genesis of Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University**

Dr. Ram Takwale, former Vice-Chancellor of University of Pune had initiated the 'Institute of Distance Education' in the University of Pune in 1983. The jurisdiction of this institution was limited to the jurisdiction of University of Pune only. However, to extend its benefit to the needy, even out of its jurisdiction the institute was renamed as the 'Institute of Open Learning' on May 01, 1988 and started 15 centers across the State of Maharashtra. In June 1989 Preparatory and BA/ B. Com Programmes were to be started through these centers.

However, before that on 8 January 1989 on these 15 study centers a test was given to those who could not pass their HSC examination but now after a few years' gap, given an opportunity wished to take higher education. The response received then was an eye opener for everyone in the conventional education system. The then Chief Minister of the State of Maharashtra and the present Minister for Agriculture (Govt. of India) Shri. Sharadchandraji Pawar took due note of this report

and earlier reports of the ‘Institute of Open Learning’ and the Government of Maharashtra established Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University on 1 July 1989 at Nashik. Dr. Ram Takwale was entrusted with the responsibility of the founder Vice-Chancellor and the Institute of Open Learning was merged in Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University along with its Academic Programmes and the administrative staff.

With the theme song “Dnyanganga Gharoghri” and the university song written by V.V. Shirwadkar alias Kusumagraj, the university was formally inaugurated on 10 January 1990 at the auspicious hands of the then Governor of Maharashtra His Excellency Brahmanand Reddy and in presence of the then Hon’ble Chief Minister Shri. Sharadchandraji Pawar. The university song, “Chirantan Dyanachi Sadhana...” (Enduring dedication to knowledge) illustrates that every human being is a life long learner and worshipper of knowledge.

### **Special feature of the university**

Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University is the only Open University to offer Educational Programmes immediately after its inception. In 1989-1990, the inception year Preparatory and First Year of BA/B.Com Programmes were offered at 15 Study Centers to 3757 students, whereas in 2012-13 the number of Study Centers has gone up to more than 3728, with 224 Educational Programmes and more than 608,760 students. After the amendment in its Act the university has expanded its jurisdiction to the whole world. For its commendable work the university has rightly been awarded with the ‘International Award for Institutional Excellence in Distance Education’ by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), educational wing of Commonwealth Secretariat (UK) situated at Canada.

### **Structure of the University**

The university has adopted flexible organizational structure taking into consideration the objectives of the university and characteristic need of the distance education system. The Statutory Bodies of the university are viz. 1. Board of Management 2. Academic Council 3. Planning Board 4. Board of Examination 5. Board of University Teachers and Research 6. Finance Committee.

### **The functional elements in the university**

1. Eight Schools/ Disciplines 2. Academic Services Division 3. Students Services Division 4. Students Welfare and Extra-Mural Studies Centre 5. Examination Division 6. Centre for Students Evaluation Technology 7. Programme Evaluation and Quality Assurance Resource Centre 8. Print Production Centre 9. Audio- Visual Centre 10. Library and Information Centre 11. Special Project Cell 11. Finance Division 12. Registrar’s Office 13. Planning and Coordination

### Uniqueness of the University

The conventional universities are known as established universities by virtue of having affiliated colleges and also regular students attending classes. However, since its inception only in 25 years the Open University has been able to reach out to considerable population of society beyond the State of Maharashtra, due to its unique nature with set of qualities and flexibility such as:

1. Parity of all level Programmes, with all the conventional universities of India established under the University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations.
2. Ease of learning while working.
3. Ability to bring back the dropped out learners into the education stream
4. Availability of range of educational Programmes from Certificate level to Research.
5. Students who could not pass their HSC examination can also take higher education by taking especially designed 'Preparatory Programme' for such need by the university.
6. Use of multiple mode of dissemination of education.
7. Opportunity to chose the Programme as per the choice and complete the same with ease. Three year duration Programmes can be completed in span of eight years with provision of 100% ATKT.
8. Examinations are held using latest evaluation patterns.
9. Counselling by using Audio-Video support material on Aakashwani, Doordarshan.
10. On-line examination for many Programmes.
11. Straight reach to the subject experts in the field through VLCs.
12. Various Awards for distinguishing achievements.
13. Provision of interactive counseling sessions at more than 3000 study centers across the State for personalized counseling, discussions, addressing difficulties, question-answers and forum for collaborative and cooperative learning.
14. Flexibility in self-learning mode.
15. Opportunity to any conventional university student to earn further certificates, diplomas and degrees and add value and edge to their lifelong learning in this competitive world.

At this juncture it would be most justified appeal to the readers that if they are still not part of this noble endeavor they should join this movement of reaching need-based and higher education to the last un-reached one at the earliest for meaningful contribution towards the society at large and realize holistic development of the same.

### Conclusions

Considering the huge cost of physical and educational services in the existing educational system it is a great challenge to provide education to the growing number of learning population. Now there is yet another dimension to this issue, a greater challenge is bringing back the dropped out learners into the educational stream and also retaining them. The reasons might vary, including the rigidity of the existing educational system, lack of choice due to absence of flexibility. Those who have left education and are working or self-employed are in need of afresh opportunities to learn relevant skills. Such, and even greater challenge is achievable only through open and distance mode.

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