



Netaji Subash Chandra Bose Institute of Higher Learning (NSCBIHL) Deemed to be University: Issues and challenges

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The world is witness's rapid changes in the process for dissemination of knowledge in 21st century. Knowledge is significant to success and is fundamental for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable society by promoting values and ethics. Recognizing the significance of a robust and comprehensive knowledge system, India since independence has implemented several comprehensive policies to ensure quality education for all, which is fundamental to our country. India will have the highest numbers of young people in the world over the next decade, and the challenge before our country is to provide high-quality educational opportunities to them, which will determine the future of our country in course of time. To achieve high quality knowledge based society, India has embarked on NEP 2020 towards achieving objective of holistic development of pupils. High-quality education is the best way forward for developing and maximizing our country's rich talents and resources for overall wellbeing of the individual, the society, the country and the world.

To impart higher education at par with their counterparts, the A & N administration has strive to develop the Higher Education policy with mandate to sets out the vision for Deemed to be university which aims to transform existing educational system in the new era of opportunities and ecosystems. Indeed, this has been a vision for an island based education ecosystem that would directly contribute to transforming our lives by providing quality education for all. In this article I have chosen the topic on proposed Deemed-To-Be University for Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which is proved to be turning point in the field of higher education system for islanders.

Deemed to be University: Meaning and Nature

Deemed University as defined in the Section 3 of the UGC Act of 1956 is an accreditation granted to higher academic institutions in India by the DHE (Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education (MoE) on the recommendation of UGC (University Grant Commission) to provide them with the status of a university. They enjoy the academic status, privileges and autonomy in terms of deciding their courses, fees, admission etc., similar to any university in the country. Deemed University neither fully private nor fully under the government rather they are autonomous institutions that have been recognized for a specific purpose. The role of Deemed University defined by the UGC (Institutions Deemed to be Universities) Regulations, 2019 mention some of the main objectives of the Deemed Universities. Thus, according to these regulations, the main role of a deemed university is to-

1. Provide excellence and innovation in higher education at the undergraduate, postgraduate and research degree levels.
2. Engage in the areas which they specialize in, and contribute to higher education in diverse disciplines.
3. Provide high-quality teaching to their students and organize internationally-recognized research projects.

There are 130 Deemed institutions in India with Tamil Nadu having the most 28. The designated university has complete independence and it is free to choose how the course will be taught, how much it will cost and how admission criteria will be implemented, these are primarily intricate in the process of setting up deemed university.

De-Novo Category Deemed University for A & N Islands

Andaman and Nicobar administration had sent proposal to Ministry of Home Affairs to setup central university for A & N Islands. Based on this request a central committee visited these islands to conduct feasibility study and submit its report to Ministry of Education to decide on its merits but it declined stating that the proposed criteria is not fulfilled. Thereafter A & N Administration has applied again for a cluster university under the Rashtriya Uchhtar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA). However, this request was also rejected by the UGC. Rather UGC suggested the A & N administration should apply for Deemed University status under the category of De-Novo, which is meant for new institution yet to be established. In 2018 A & N Administration moved a proposal for setting up a new institution to be declared as an institution of Deemed-to-be-university. This is called a De-Novo to be Deemed University

which will undertake study and research in unique and emerging areas. Further it is stated in the relevant clauses that the emerging area of knowledge in the context of de-novo institutions means such specialized /niche areas of knowledge which are consider desirable and useful and not usually imparted in the country. The procedure of this was given under Clause 6.04 of the UGC (Institutions deemed to be universities) Regulations, 2019. A Detailed Project Report (DPR) showing its vision and plan for 15 years detailed strategic vision Plan and 5 years rolling implementation plan viz., Academic Plan, Faculty recruitment Plan, Student Admission plan, Research Plan, Networking Plan, infrastructure development Plan, Finance Plan, Administrative Plan, Governance Plan etc., with clear annual milestones and action plans on how the new deemed to be university is to be setup with identifiable outputs and outcomes has been submitted with five new courses viz., MBA (Coastal Management) and Island Studies with clear outcomes including the details of the land, financial sustainability, details of the key academic and administrative personnel with an undertaking to comply with the provisions of the UGC Regulations. A Letter of Commitment from the A & N Administration to extend financial support to the institutions even after it acquires the Deemed University status has been sent to MoE through MHA for necessary approval from UGC Expert Committee. In the meantime Prime Minister Narendra Modi in public meeting at Port Blair has announced and named as “Netaji Subash Chandra Bose Deemed to be University”. The name has got historical significance and associated with great freedom fighter and nationalist of India Subash Chandra Bose, who had liberated this island territory from British rule and proclaimed independence of India by hoisting first Tricolor as mark of the end of British yoke in 1943. He has subsequently named these islands as Shaheed and Swaraj.

To create institutional set-up for the designated the proposed deemed university for A & N islands, necessary rules have been amended in the existing society viz., Andaman & Nicobar Islands Legal Education Society (ANILES) proposes to amend the Rules & Regulations, Memorandum of Association & Grant-in Aid Rules of the society to align with Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Institute of Higher Learning (NSCBIHL) Society, Deemed to Be University. To make Deemed University functional, the A & N Administration has made necessary arrangements by notification a Memorandum of Association may be called “Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Institute of Higher Learning (NSCBIHL)”. The primary aim of the society is to provide Higher Education and Research in allied fields in A & N Islands; and to impart Higher Education and to carryout Research in allied fields relevant to A & N Islands. Moreover, it is committed to extend support in the allied fields and to impart training to officers and staff of A & N Administration in various relevant fields.

By way of notification the Hon'ble Lt. Governor (Administrator) A & N Islands who is also President of General Body NSCBIHL (Amendment) Rules and Regulations 2023 shall come into force from the date of notification. The composition of General Body of NSCBIHL consist of 13 nos of senior officers of administration including Chief Secretary, Principal Secretaries, Secretaries of various departments are as members with the Joint Secretary (Hr. Education/ Director – member Secretary. A Principal, Andaman Law College was lone member with 02 co-opted members of eminent educationalist of national and international repute. Further to ease and to regulate the proposed university an Executive Council was constituted under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary , A & N Administration consist of 15 members with similar numbers of senior officers from A & N Administration shall act as members. One of the Powers and functions of the Executive council as per clause 10 A xii b written as “Framing of regulations on Admission/enrolment of students, formulation / institutions for course of studies and research programme, examinations to be held for the course of studies on the recommendation of the Academic Council” in accordance to the norms prescribed by regulatory authorities. Further the Executive Council has empowered to “Approving of recruitment rules classification and method of appointment and determination of the terms and service conditions in respect of all posts under the control of the NSCBIHL”.

Objectives of NSCBIHL

The objectives that can be achieved by the implementation of Deemed to be University concept for A & N Islands are as follows:

- To ensure access to education for all islanders, regardless of their socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity or disability.
- To enhance the quality of education by setting rigorous standards, promoting innovative teaching practices, and fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- To promote inclusive practices that cater to the diverse needs of students, including those with disabilities, special educational needs, or marginalized backgrounds.
- To encourage a culture of lifelong learning that enables individuals to acquire knowledge and skills throughout their lives to adapt to an ever-changing world.
- To increase awareness regarding the rationale to offer various courses or market oriented courses to compete with other Universities in the vicinity.

- To provide learning experiences that will prepare the students for effective participation in different areas of vocational training and employability.
- To provide opportunities to functionaries and teachers working in the education sector to critically examine their practice and enhance it by exposing them to the developmental and pedagogical basis of designing course work and development, learning, and educational experiences.

Functions of NSCBIHL

- to create teaching, administrative, technical, ministerial and other posts and to make appointment thereto, in accordance with the guidelines of all regulatory authorities;
- To approve Rules and Regulations related to conduct of examination by the University / NSCBIHL;
- To make all such arrangements as may be required to be done as per the statues, ordinances and regulations of NSCBIHL; and
- To cooperate with potential collaborators in any part of the world having objects wholly or partly similar to those of the Society by exchange of faculty scholars and in such manner as may be conducive to their objects.
- To make necessary fund provision for implementing the idea to be deemed university for various colleges working under its aegis. This would be more or less a Research University with the constituent college set-up.

Issues and Challenges before A & N Administration

1. Opening Deemed universities is a herculean task

India today has about 1,000 universities across the country. There are as many as 54 central universities, 130 deemed universities and remaining are state and private universities established in India. One of the stated objectives of NEP 2020 has been doubling the Gross Ratio Enrollment in Higher Education by 2035. No doubt that opening Deemed University in this remote part of the country will facilitate the higher educational needs of the islanders, but the way ongoing public protest to the concept of Deemed University for Islands is undoubtedly the biggest challenge. There is an apprehension about the quality of education would be delivered in the days to come. Most of the islanders believe that the quality of education of these islands comparatively better than counterparts at mainland. Previously

the existing colleges of these islands were affiliated to Punjab University and the character is lone National University, but due to Khalistan movement, A &N had withdrawn its affiliation and tied knot with Pondicherry University since 1987 with character of central university. The degrees issued by both universities were respected across world over and it has treated with great pride and dignity.

Now with the idea of establishing Deemed to be University in these islands certainly paving way for uncertainties are looming large. It would be better if we have a better university mean central university or if not greater Autonomy for the existing colleges. The colleges like Jawaharlal Nehru Rajkeya Mahavidyalaya (JNRM) that hold the potential of offering upgraded & better educational facilities can't make their own decisions due to dependency on proposed system which would in turn impact the quality of education. Everything depends on how colleges utilize academic freedom. There has to be discipline in every action and decision.

Today roughly we have 08 affiliated colleges in A & N Islands that have a dependency on degree-granting on Pondicherry University. As per rules & regulations stated by the proposed Deemed University for A & N Islands, the 08 colleges which fall under the given mechanism will spoil the credibility of the system. This would lead to merger of all colleges under one roof. In such circumstances the charter of higher educational institutes viz., JNRM etc will have to suffer a lot in terms of its profile of yeoman service.

The need to create a large number of qualified teachers and manpower

The proposed deemed university aims to redesign the curriculum structure for employability and skills as a very acceptable step. But in order to make this curriculum successful, teachers need to be trained well to cope new vistas of knowledge and who can understand the needs of young population. Teachers will be the key players in the smooth implementation of Deemed University. More teachers need to be oriented on various aspects of functioning of Deemed University. At the same time the authorities must appoint faculties which are lying vacant for a decade and so. Currently all colleges under A & N Administration running with the help of Part-time / Guest faculties, which hamper in deliver the quality of education. In some departments there is no single regular faculty since its introduction of the course, which is serious matter and needs to be look into. With this background we can make the higher education in these islands more vulnerable and exposed to innumerable issues.

In this respect, it is the responsibility of the A & N Administration to orienting the teachers of proposed deemed university on the lines of NEP-2020. Moreover, NSCBIHL

memorandum serves as a guiding framework for the higher education eco-system of Island territory. It outlines the goals, objectives, and strategies to be implemented to enhance the quality, accessibility, and inclusivity of education. These policies typically address various aspects, including curriculum development, assessment methods, teacher training, infrastructure improvement, and educational reforms. Many curriculum changes require major changes in the thinking of teachers, as well as parents. Running the University would require a large number of academicians and non academic staff at the rank of professors, experts, technical and unskilled etc. To execute the idea of Deemed University requires huge amount of finances for mobilizing the resources and other infrastructure. A number of academic committees and bodies also required with academicians of repute are required for running the Deemed University.

Disciplines suitable for Islands

The biggest challenge before Deemed University is to select suitable disciplines, which can draw attention of the learners. The nature of proposed university has been research oriented and promotes more research oriented university. Five major disciplines were selected for the proposed university viz., MBA (Coastal Studies), Fisheries, Forestry, Tourism and Island Studies. There is dearth of literature and to conduct research based studies, the literature shall play major role in production of quality research. The cost of research would be more and students may find it difficulty in achieving the given results. Since islands are separated from mainland India and vice versa dependence for all sorts of literature has got its own demerits to conduct good research.

Moreover, the age old courses will not bring any relief to students particularly for job seekers. There is no major industry within the territory; therefore it is imperative to have such disciplines which can offer jobs outside island territory. Further it is necessary that to attract foreign students, needs to have high demand courses with resource accumulation of high quality and excellence. Furthermore, special focus for vocational education needs to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in the job market. It aims to integrate vocational education into mainstream education, ensuring that students have skills of international standards. There should be a Policy on disciplinary education and it should contain a number of initiatives to improve the quality and scope of the education system in these islands.

There should be a comprehensive framework for the development of higher education and it should aims to transform the University education system to ensure that it is inclusive, holistic, and flexible. Further it should aims to develop an eco-system that fosters the overall development of students, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. It also focuses on providing quality education to marginalized communities especially Tribes and economically weaker sections.

Further, it is mandated that to promote a flexible education system that allows students to choose their courses and subjects according to their interests and aptitudes. Besides it aims to promote multiple entry and exit points in higher education based on NEP 2020, making it possible for students to pursue their studies at their own pace. To ensure quality and cheap education the A & N Administration has to focus on improving the quality of teachers, curriculum, and infrastructure in existing colleges.

Unrest for Deemed to be University

Student unions like Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), forerunner to oppose the idea of Deemed University for pristine islands of India. Besides National Student Union of India (INC) and Communist Party of India (CPI) also registered their opposition against the proposal to form a deemed university in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The general public particularly prospective students maintain that the formation of the deemed university will result in expensive education, because the UGC and other governing bodies have no stakes in deciding fee structure therefore putting poor residents of the islands at peril. It is also known fact that the available experience of deemed universities across India have been horrific for poor students for high end fees structure.

Further it is stated that even though the draft notification has changed rules regarding receiving of fee under Clause 4h, there is no clarity whether there will be any monetary support beyond 5 years from the Union government. If they are really keen on transferring the affiliation to the new body, why don't they strive again for a central university for Islands? In case of central university the fee will be cheaper and employees will have their employment and social security. In current setup, the colleges have been running fine through existing mechanisms where the Pondicherry University affiliates and offers various need based programmes with low fees and high end central university degrees and for that A & N Administration pay only about Rs 15 lakh per annum to the university for affiliation charges

and to conduct examinations. The students of these islands get highly subsidized education at par with the standards of best renowned universities available in India.

The Government of India has appointed a committee to look into the matter of ambiguity and submit report over the functioning of the deemed Universities in India. The committee was headed by P N Tondon, and in its report the committee said that the deemed universities are working like money making machines. They are more concerned about the revenue rather than the study, research and standards of education. They are mainly concerned about the fees generated by the admission rather than promoting the research work and academic work. Further the committee also suggested a national level committee for fixing the fee structure for all deemed universities and they should also make the provision of reviewing the fee from time-to-time. Most of the deemed universities are not working according to the governing norms. Further the committee fails to assert not even single example of technology transfer, generation and new research conducted by these universities. The report says” Except a few public funded institutions, quality research is not done in any of the deemed universities. Research, which is a major component of University, is not being carried out by these institutions”. The fate of NSCBIHL is not less than other deemed universities working currently in India.

In the present setup for NSCBIHL, there is little scope for academics in General Body and as well as in Executive Council. As per the notification NSCBIHL 2023, the top niche is occupied by the senior officers of the Administration and therefore there is minimal penetration from academic side, which is major concern. Jawaharlal Nehru Rajkeeya Mahavidyalaya (JNRM) and other institutions of par excellence are not given representation in the General body, whereas the General Body NSCBIHL is meant for academic activity therefore it is mandated to have academics instead of officers in the policy formulation. The current set up of NSCBIHL is more or less officialdom with no access to academic fraternity. Rather it would be on similar lines that the Administrator of A & N Islands should act as a chancellor by delegating administrative, financial and other academic powers to propose deemed to be university. To grow and to retain its character in its own lines NSCBIHL should be made free from administrative command and shall retain its autonomous status as it mandated in the UGC notification for larger interest of the institution.

Conclusion

Education plays a crucial role in the development and progress of a society. Recognizing the significance of comprehensive higher education and to ensure quality education for all, it is proposed to set up the 'Deemed-to-be-University' status with the executive committee for granting an approval from GOI. The A & N Islands will get the deemed-to-be-University status in De Novo category. Once the proposal approved by the GOI which will undertake study and research in unique and emerging areas of knowledge that are not offered by any other university in India. Further Deemed to be University for A & N Islands shall undertake various activities and programmes, which include educational research and innovation, besides it will develop academic instructions teaching and learning, among others. Alongside these policies, professional development programs for teachers have gained prominence.

Reference:

1. NSCBIHL (Amendment) Memorandum of Association 2023.
2. Notification no. S-167/Adm dated: 6th September 2022.
3. NSCBIHL (Amendment) Grant-in-Aid Rules 2023.

