IGNOU @ 40

IGNOU AT FORTY:

REFLECTIONS OF PRACTITIONERS

Indira Gandhi National Open University

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Reflections of Practitioners

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Foreword

As Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) completes forty years of its remarkable journey in 2025, it is an opportune moment to look back with pride, gratitude, and renewed commitment. It is a moment of celebration and reflection for the entire IGNOU fraternity. Few institutions in independent India have so profoundly shaped the nation's educational landscape as IGNOU has. Conceived in 1985 through an Act of Parliament to democratize higher education and to reach learners who could not access the conventional system, IGNOU has grown into the world's largest open university, serving millions of learners across India and abroad.

Over the past four decades, IGNOU has not only widened access to education but also continually redefined the meaning of inclusivity, flexibility, and lifelong learning. Its journey is intertwined with India's larger story of social transformation, technological change, and aspirations for equitable growth. Each decade of IGNOU's history has carried forward the legacy of innovation, resilience, and service to the nation.

The Foundational Decade (1985–1995): Laying the Groundwork for a New Educational Vision

The first decade of IGNOU's existence was one of institution-building and experimentation. Founded with the dual objectives of expanding access and ensuring quality in higher education, IGNOU began its journey with just two academic programmes and around 4,000 students. The challenge was immense, creating an open and distance learning system that could deliver quality education at scale, using multiple media, and ensuring learner support in even the remotest corners of the country.

This formative phase saw the development of the University's core infrastructure, Regional Centres, Learner Support Centres, the Electronic Media Production Centre, and a robust system of self-learning course

materials. The academic and administrative frameworks for curriculum design, evaluation, and learner support were established during these years. Importantly, IGNOU also began producing educational radio and television programmes in collaboration with *Doordarshan* and All India Radio, marking the beginning of its rich legacy in educational broadcasting.

Through innovative programmes in diverse disciplines: from humanities and social sciences to management, computer science, health, education, and technology, IGNOU became a national leader in curriculum design and learner-centric pedagogy.

The University emerged as the hub of the nation's open and distance learning system through the establishment of the Distance Education Council (DEC), and the Staff Training and Research Institute in Distance Education (STRIDE). The DEC functioned as a regulatory and coordinating body under IGNOU for the promotion, coordination and maintenance of standards in the open and distance learning system of the country. STRIDE had the mandate to train functionaries working in the Open Universities and Directorates of Distance Education at dual-mode universities across India and South Asia.

 The vision of making higher education truly open, free from constraints of age, qualification, and geography was put into practice. The seeds of a system that would soon become a global model were thus sown during this pioneering decade.

The Expansion Decade (1995–2005): Reaching the Unreached

The second decade witnessed rapid expansion and consolidation. IGNOU's learner enrolment grew exponentially, and the network of Regional and Learner Support Centres expanded to every part of the country. This was also the decade in which the University began to assert its leadership role within the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system in India through the presence of DEC and STRIDE.

During these years, IGNOU also began to reach beyond India's borders. Study Centres were established abroad, particularly in the Gulf region, South Asia, and Africa, taking the spirit of India's educational inclusivity to international learners.

Technological innovations such as the introduction of interactive learning through *GyanDarshan* and *GyanVani* educational channels further strengthened IGNOU's visibility and impact. This decade thus established IGNOU not just as an institution, but as a movement for democratizing education.

The Consolidation and Digital Transition Decade (2005–2015): From Open Learning to Technology-Enabled Learning

The third decade of IGNOU's history coincided with India's transformation into a knowledge economy. IGNOU adapted with foresight, embracing digital technologies to enhance learner engagement and administrative efficiency. The University launched its first online programmes, introduced the eGyanKosh digital repository, and initiated the development of a learning management system to supplement print and broadcast media.

The introduction of new disciplines viz, Agriculture, Law, Tourism, Vocational Education, Social Work, Journalism, Performing Arts, among others, marked the University's growing academic diversification A notable achievement was the expansion of vocational, professional, and skill-oriented programmes aligned with the needs of a changing economy. IGNOU's collaborations with government ministries and industry, in rural development, nursing, education, tourism, and agriculture, extended the reach of ODL into areas of social relevance and employability.

During this period, the University expanded its network of Regional Centres and Study Centres, while also experimenting with new models of flexible delivery through memoranda of understanding with the Indian Armed Forces.

With the establishment of the National Centre for Innovation in Distance Education, the National Centre for Disability Studies, and the Inter-University Consortium (later renamed as Centre for Online Education), IGNOU entered a new phase of growth. These centres institutionalized innovation, strengthened inclusivity for persons with disabilities, and catalysed the University's transition from a traditional print-based model to a dynamic, technology-driven and learner-responsive system.

The Transformative Decade (2015–2025): Towards a Digital and Global IGNOU

The ongoing decade has been one of deep transformation, driven by the digital revolution, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. IGNOU responded to these challenges with remarkable agility, ensuring continuity of learning for millions even during periods of national lockdown.

Under the leadership of the Centre for Online Education, the University, assumed the prestigious role of National Coordinator for SWAYAM and subsequently SWAYAM Prabha, reaffirming its leadership in technology-enabled open and distance learning. IGNOU launched its online programmes and MOOCs and Digital platforms such as SWAYAM and SWAYAM PRABHA, the mobile-friendly e-content ecosystem, and initiatives like the IGNOU SAMARTH portal have significantly enhanced the learner experience. Digitization of operations and processes has become the norm of the University. The University has integrated, multimedia resources, and interactive e-learning platforms to meet the expectations of a new generation of learners.

The creation of the Centre for Internal Quality Assurance represented a decisive step in strengthening IGNOU's academic and digital ecosystem. The Centre for Internal Quality Assurance played a pivotal role in earning the University its highest NAAC grade and a number one position in the NIRF rankings under the Open University category. It has also spearheaded the implementation of the foundational principles of NEP 2020 at the University.

Internationally, IGNOU's global footprint has grown stronger through renewed partnerships and collaborative programmes. Its role as a policy advisor and capacity builder for open universities and distance educators across the globe continues to strengthen India's soft power in education.

This decade has also seen a renewed emphasis on inclusivity, special provisions for persons with disabilities, initiatives for defence personnel particularly the Agniveers. IGNOU's mission of reaching the unreached remains as vital and vibrant as ever.

The Road Ahead: IGNOU in its Fifth Decade

As IGNOU steps into its fifth decade, it stands at the confluence of immense opportunities and emerging challenges. The landscape of higher education is being reshaped by artificial intelligence, immersive technologies, and global knowledge networks. The new decade must therefore be one of innovation, integration, and inclusion.

The way forward calls for IGNOU to reaffirm its foundational mission while reimagining its strategies for the future:

• Digital Transformation: Building next-generation open university powered by AI, analytics, and adaptive learning systems to provide personalized learner experiences.

• Global Engagement: Strengthening international collaborations and positioning IGNOU as a global hub for higher education, research and innovation.

• Research and Quality Assurance: Expanding research in open education, learner analytics, and digital pedagogy to reinforce quality and relevance.

• Sustainability and Inclusivity: Integrating green education, gender equity, and social responsibility into the curriculum and institutional practices.

• Lifelong and Skills-Based Learning: Aligning programmes with emerging skill ecosystems, micro-credentials, and continuous professional development opportunities.

Guided by the vision of *Viksit Bharat*@2047 and the transformative agenda of NEP 2020, IGNOU's fifth decade must be defined by its leadership in creating a digitally empowered, inclusive, and globally connected learning ecosystem.

This commemorative volume, ***IGNOU at Forty: Reflections of Practitioners***, brings together voices from within the IGNOU community: teachers and academics, the practitioners who have shaped and witnessed this extraordinary journey. Their reflections offer not only historical insight but also inspiration for the years ahead.

As we celebrate forty years of IGNOU's service to the nation, we also reaffirm our collective resolve to continue expanding the horizons of learning, to innovate fearlessly, and to uphold the ideals of equity and excellence that define this great institution.

As we enter the fifth decade, the University rededicates itself to its timeless mission: to reach the unreached, to teach beyond boundaries, and to empower every learner through the light of knowledge.

Prof Uma Kanjilal
Vice Chancellor
Indira Gandhi National Open University

Acknowledgement

As the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) enters its fortieth year of service to the nation, the book, ***IGNOU at Forty: Reflections of Practitioners****,* celebrates a landmark moment in the history of open and distance learning (ODL) in India. Over four decades, the University has grown into the world's largest open university, embodying the ideals of access, equity, quality, and lifelong learning.

The idea of bringing out this commemorative volume to mark four decades of IGNOU's journey in the field of higher education in India was conceptualized by Prof. Satyakam, the then Pro-Vice Chancellor of IGNOU, in consultation with senior colleagues. The idea was supported by the then Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Nageshwar Rao. His vision was to create a reflective account that would document the University's evolution, achievements, and contributions to the democratization of education through ODL. Several colleagues were invited to contribute to this volume by sharing their experiences, insights, and reflections on IGNOU's growth and impact. The volume thus stands as a collective tribute to the University's remarkable journey and enduring commitment to expanding access to quality higher education.

The valuable contributions of Prof. Neeti Agarwal and Prof. Nayantara Padhi merit special acknowledgment for their dedicated efforts in bringing together the diverse inputs of their colleagues and integrating them seamlessly into a cohesive and meaningful volume.

Preface

This commemorative volume brings together scholarly reflections and lived experiences of practitioners who have been instrumental in shaping the University's evolution. Through five insightful chapters, the book captures IGNOU's journey from its pioneering beginnings to its present role as a global leader in Open, Distance and Digital Learning (ODDL). Each chapter provides a unique perspective on how IGNOU's institutional ethos, pedagogical innovation, and social commitment have redefined the contours of higher education in India and beyond.

The opening chapter, **Chapter 1**, **"*Learning Without Walls: The Historical Journey of the Indira Gandhi National Open University*,"** presents a detailed account of IGNOU's foundation and growth. It offers a comprehensive narrative of IGNOU's remarkable journey since its establishment through an Act of Parliament in 1985. Conceived as a pioneering experiment to democratize higher education, IGNOU has, over the decades, transformed into a global institution embodying the ideals of access, equity, quality, and lifelong learning. The chapter traces the University's genesis to India's post-independence vision of "education for all," highlighting the progressive policy framework and leadership that gave shape to the concept of open and distance learning. Drawing inspiration from international models such as the UK Open University, IGNOU was designed to extend the frontiers of education beyond physical classrooms—making learning flexible, inclusive, and technology-driven.

From its modest beginnings with two diploma programmes and a few thousand learners, IGNOU has evolved into the world's largest open university, offering a wide spectrum of programmes across disciplines, supported by a robust network of regional and study centres. The narrative also reflects the University's commitment to innovation, as seen in its pioneering use of radio, television, satellite communication, and digital technologies to reach millions of learners across diverse geographies.

Aligned with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**,** IGNOU continues to lead India's ODL movement with renewed focus on

multidisciplinary education, skill development, and technology-enabled access. The chapter stands as both a tribute and testimony to IGNOU's enduring mission, transforming higher education into an inclusive, learner-centred, and lifelong process, and reaffirming its role as a national institution that continues to turn the dream of "education without walls" into a living reality.

Chapter 2, "*Teaching Through Open and Distance Learning: IGNOU's Flexible Learning Model*," presents an in-depth account of the University's pioneering approach to learner-centred, technology-driven education. The chapter traces IGNOU's evolution from its early years to becoming a global model of ODL, emphasizing innovation in curriculum design, instructional delivery, and assessment. It highlights the dynamic role of teachers as facilitators, course designers, and mentors who guide learners through well-crafted self-learning materials, multimedia content, and interactive platforms. The narrative elaborates on IGNOU's development of high-quality instructional materials, its course team approach, and the establishment of the Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE) for faculty training and professional development, as hallmarks of its commitment to academic excellence.

The chapter also examines the University's flexible learning framework *viz*, multiple entry and exit points, modular programmes, differential fee structures, and multilingual content, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for diverse learner groups. Emphasizing IGNOU's innovative use of media and digital tools, it celebrates the University's efforts in transforming traditional pedagogy into a participatory, inclusive, and lifelong learning process.

Ultimately, the chapter reaffirms IGNOU's leadership in reimagining education through ODL, bridging distances, fostering equity, and empowering millions through transformative pedagogy.

Chapter 3, "*Reaching the Unreached*," highlights the University's pioneering role in democratizing higher education by extending its reach to diverse and marginalized communities. The chapter underscores IGNOU's commitment to inclusivity, serving learners across social, economic, and geographic boundaries, including women, rural and tribal populations, minority groups, persons with disabilities, defence personnel, and prison inmates.

It traces the evolution of IGNOU's extensive Student Support Network—comprising Regional Centres, Learner Support Centres, and specialized units such as the Regional Services Division and the National Centre for Disability Studies that together provide counselling, technological assistance, and academic guidance across the nation. The chapter also documents IGNOU's expanding presence in the North-East, remote and tribal regions, and its international operations through Overseas Study Centres.

By leveraging technology-enabled platforms like *e-Gyankosh, GyanDarshan,* and *GyanVani*, IGNOU has successfully blended flexibility with quality and equity. The chapter reaffirms IGNOU's enduring mission to "reach the unreached," transforming open and distance learning into a powerful instrument of empowerment, inclusion, and social justice in alignment with the vision of the NEP 2020.

Chapter 4, "*Towards a Multi-Modal Learning Environment***,"** examines the University's evolution into a comprehensive institution that seamlessly integrates multiple learning modes to serve diverse learner needs. The chapter highlights IGNOU's transformation from print-based correspondence education to a rich blend of print, audio-visual, online, and digital delivery systems, creating a dynamic and inclusive learning ecosystem.

It elaborates on the University's strategic use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to promote interactive, flexible, and learner-driven education. The chapter emphasizes the significance of the Multi-Modal Learning Framework, which integrates classroom components, virtual learning, and digital pedagogy, ensuring a balance between flexibility and academic rigor. It also explores IGNOU's initiatives in digital infrastructure, online examinations, and learner support innovations aligned with the goals of NEP 2020.

Through its multi-modal approach, IGNOU continues to uphold its mission of inclusive and technology-enabled education, bridging distances, empowering learners, and redefining the future of open and distance learning in India.

Chapter 5, "*Technological Interventions and Innovation***,"** traces IGNOU's four-decade journey of technological transformation and

pedagogical innovation. From its early use of print materials, audio lessons, and video programmes to today's comprehensive ecosystem of Open Distance and Digital Learning (ODDL), IGNOU has consistently redefined access, quality, and inclusion in higher education. The chapter highlights the pioneering role of units such as the Electronic Media Production Centre (EMPC), Computer Division (CD), Centre for Online Education (COE), and the National Centre for Innovation in Distance Education (NCIDE) in driving this evolution. It documents milestones including the launch of *GyanDarshan*, *Gyan Vani*, *e-GyanKosh*, *SWAYAM*, *SWAYAM Prabha*, and web-enabled academic support systems that have expanded IGNOU's global reach.

Emphasizing the alignment of IGNOU's initiatives with national priorities, Digital India, NEP 2020, and the Sustainable Development Goals, the narrative showcases the University's commitment to innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology-enabled learning. Through the creation of an innovation and start-up ecosystem, IGNOU continues to nurture creativity among students and faculty alike.

Collectively, these five chapters portray IGNOU not merely as a university, but as a national movement for educational empowerment and lifelong learning. Over forty years, IGNOU has redefined the meaning of access and quality in higher education, turning the vision of *"education without walls"* into a living reality. Its innovative practices, global outreach, and unwavering focus on learner success stand as a testament to India's commitment to inclusive growth and knowledge-based development.

As the University moves into its fifth decade, it reaffirms its dedication to advancing the frontiers of Open, Distance, and Digital Learning through innovation, excellence, and compassion. This volume, authored by those who have shaped IGNOU's legacy, offers both reflection and inspiration reminding us that the true strength of an institution lies in its ability to evolve while staying rooted in its foundational values of access, equity, and empowerment.

Prof Manjulika Srivastava
Prof Shubhangi Vaidya

Editors

Prologue
आमुख

इंदिरा गांधी राष्ट्रीय मुक्त विश्वविद्यालय का इतिहास आपके समक्ष है। इस वर्ष यह अपने 40 बसंत पूरे कर रहा है और 41वें वर्ष में चरण धर रहा है। प्रसन्नता का विषय है कि अर्धशती की ओर बढ़ता यह विश्वविद्यालय एक सशक्त, अनुभवी, समर्थ, प्रासंगिक और अनुभवी व्यक्तित्व के नेतृत्व में प्रगति पथ पर अग्रसर है। इग्नू की 09वीं और पहली महिला कुलगुरु प्रोफेसर उमा कांजीलाल के संरक्षण और मार्ग निर्देशन में इतिहास के इस पुस्तक का प्रकाशन पुण्य नक्षत्र का प्रमाण है।

इग्नू का इतिहास लिखा जाए, इसकी प्रेरणा मुझे इग्नू के तत्कालीन कुलगुरु (2019 से 2024) प्रोफेसर नागेश्वर राव के आशीर्वाद स्वरूप मिली। कोरोना अपना फन फैलाए और विष वमन करते हुए संपूर्ण विश्व को त्राहिमाम कर रहा था और हम सब डरे, दुबके, सहमे अपने–अपने घरों मे कैद थे। प्रोफेसर नागेश्वर राव उसे दौरान खेल गांव से मैदान गढ़ी आ चुके थे और अतिथि गृह के कैंप कार्यालय में रह रहे थे। उन्होंने कभी भी अवकाश नहीं लिया; रोज काम, काम, काम। समकुलपति के रूप में मैं भी अनुगामी बना रहा। उसी दौरान एक दिन दुपहरिया में वार्ता के दौरान इग्नू के इतिहास लिखने की बात उछली और मैंने लपक ली। जहाँ तक मुझे याद है, कुलगीत की बात भी आई और उसकी रचना, संरचना, निर्मिति का उत्तरदायित्व भी मैंने माँग लिया। दोनों काम साथ–साथ शुरू हुए। गीत भी लिखता रहा, इतिहास के पन्नों को भी पलटता रहा। इतिहास अब प्रस्तुत है।

कुलगीत की कहानी बहुत ही दिलचस्प है। इग्नू का मंत्र है जन–जन का विश्वविद्यालय। मैंने इसी मंत्र को गीत का मुखड़ा बनाया। आगे की पंक्तियाँ स्वमेव बनती चली गई। कई ड्राफ्ट बने। फिर कुलगीत के ड्राफ्ट को अंतिम रूप देने के लिए मेरी अध्यक्षता में एक समिति बनी। इस समिति की रिपोर्ट (कुलगीत का अंतिम रूप) को एकेडमी काउन्सिल और बोर्ड आफ मैनेजमेन्ट को स्वीकृति मिली। बोल को स्वीकृति मिल गई, धुन बनाने और गाने का

प्रकरण सामने आया। आकाशवाणी से सम्पर्क हुआ, धुन बनने लगी और अन्ततः तैयार हुई और आज जो कुलगीत है, उसकी यही संक्षिप्त कहानी है। यह कुलगीत इग्नू की आत्मा भी है, विजन भी और इतिहास भी।

अब थोड़ा इग्नू के आरंभिक दिनों को याद कर लें। इग्नू चार दशक की दहलीज पार कर चुका है। जब मैं 1988 में इग्नू में व्याख्याता बनकर आया उस समय स्नातक उपाधि कार्यक्रम, आधार पाठ्यक्रम और ऐच्छिक पाठ्यक्रमों का निर्माण चल रहा था। पहले पहल प्रूफ रीडिंग और अनुवाद का कार्य मिला। ज्वाइन किया जय सिंह रोड स्थित YMC। भवन में जो उन दिनों (1988) इग्नू का प्रशासनिक भवन था। इसके अलावा खेल गांव (यहाँ आवासीय परिसर भी था), हौज खास, सफदरगंज एन्क्लेव, कैलाश कॉलोनी में भी प्रशासनिक भवन और अकादमिक कार्यालय थे। कार्यालय जैसा ही माहौल था क्योंकि प्रशासक और अध्यापक दोनों ही कुर्सी टेबिल पर बैठकर काम करते थे। काम की प्रवृत्ति अलग—अलग थी, पर भौतिक उपस्थिति और अंदाजेबयाँ एक सा था। एक कमरे में, हाल में, बहुत सारे लोग। डेढ़ बजे दोपहर के भोजन का अवकाश। फिर वापस अपने—अपने स्थान पर। मतलब विश्वविद्यालय (परंपरागत) जैसा कुछ नजर नहीं आता था। ऐसा लगता था कि किसी कार्यालय (आफिस) में काम कर रहे हैं। आज भी इग्नू के कर्मचारियों यहाँ तक कि अध्यापकों भी यह कहते सुना जा सकता है कि 'ऑफिस' जा रहा हूँ। यानी यूनिवर्सिटी या विश्वविद्यालय बोलने का चलन कम था। आज भी नहीं है। इसका कारण मुख्यतः यह है कि हम कार्यालयी माहौल में ही काम करते रहे। अध्यापकों ने अपने कार्यों से इसे शैक्षणिक बनाया।

मैंने पहले YMCA में अपनी श्रवपदपदह दी फिर वहाँ से मुझे कैलाश कॉलोनी भेज दिया गया, जहाँ मुख्य रूप से मानविकी, समाज विज्ञान, विज्ञान विद्यापीठ कार्यरत थे। पूरा नौकरशाही माहौल/व्याख्याता बड़े हॉल में, रीडर एक कमरे में दो या एक, प्रोफेसर के लिए ए0सी0 युक्त कमरा। निदेशक के लिए शानदार कक्ष। बाकी जगह कूलर। किसी भी स्थिति में यह विश्वविद्यालय जैसी सं. रचना नहीं थी। आज भी इसकी छाया है पर अब काफी कुछ बदल चुका है। धीरे—धीरे हमने सीखा, जाना, अनुभव किया कि मुक्त और दूरस्थ (Open and Distance Learning) शिक्षा पद्धति का अर्थ क्या है। पहले व्चमद का अनुवाद हुआ 'खुला' बाद में इसे 'मुक्त' किया गया।

1990 की शुरूआत में हम मैदानगढ़ी आए धीरे–धीरे। शेडनुमा आकृति के भवन में, जिसमें आज भी प्रशासन, परीक्षा, नामांकन, डच्क्क् आदि ऑफिस है। पहले यहाँ सारे विद्यापीठ और पुस्तकालय भी थे। इसके पहले पुस्तकालय सफद. रगंज डेवलपमेंट एरिया में था। 2003–04 तक नए अकादमी भवन बने जहाँ आज विभिन्न विद्यापीठ और पुस्तकालय स्थित हैं। इसके पूर्व जापान की मदद से EMPC (1997) का संचार भवन निर्मित हुआं। 1989–90 तक आते–आते आवासीय परिसर भी बन गए और बसावट शुरु हुई। इसके पूर्व यह पूरा क्षेत्र पहाड़ी पथरीला और बंजर था जहां बेर और कांटों के सिवा कुछ नहीं था। अभी भी इसके अवशेष मौजूद हैं। लोमड़ी, भेड़िया, नीलगाय, साहिल, मोर, साँप, अजगर और तरह–तरह के पक्षी इस परिसर को आनंदवन बनाते थे। कैम्पस में सबसे पहले अखबार, दूध और सब्जी आया। किसी के घर में फोन की घंटी बजती थी तो सब सुनते थे। लैंडलाइन ही था वह भी पहुँचा खरामा–खरामा / मोबाइल फोन अभी भी नही आया था। ईमेल, कंप्यूटर आदि का पदार्पण हो रहा था। जब मैंने ज्वाइन किया (1988) तो इलेक्ट्रॉनिक टाइपराइटर आ चुका था। इसके पहले पुराने टाइपराइटर पर काम होता था। पतला कागज, प्रूफ की पुरानी तकनीक डै बनाने में White Fluid, रबर और ब्लेड का इस्तेमाल। नई फोटोकॉपी मशीन आ चुकी थी जिसे जापानी मशीन कहते थे। इक्के–दुक्के शिक्षकों के पास गाड़ियां थी। सब लोग सार्वजनिक वाहन या स्कूटर, साइकिल से आते जाते थे। इग्नू से चार्टर बसें चला करती थीं। छठें वेतन आयोग के बाद गाड़ियों की तादाद बढ़ने लगी।

आज इग्नू अपने शीर्ष पर है। यह राष्ट्रीय से अंतर्राष्ट्रीय विश्वविद्यालय बन चुका है। जन–जन के इस विश्वविद्यालय ने लाखों लोगों को उच्च शिक्षा तक पहुँचाया और 2035 तक 50 प्रतिशत GER के लक्ष्य को प्राप्त करने की दिशा में अग्रसर है। इग्नू ने उच्च शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में क्रांति का उद्घोष किया और शिक्षा को समावेशी, सर्वसुलभ, और सबके द्वार तक पहुँचाया। कामकाजी लोगों, महिलाओं, गृहणियों और शिक्षा से वंचित तमाम नागरिकों से हाथ मिलाया। इग्नू की ख्याति इसके स्वाध्याय पाठों (Self Learning Materia)। से चहुँओर फैली और संपूर्ण देश में अध्यापकों, विद्यार्थियों और सिविल सर्विसेज के अभ्यर्थियों के लिए यह अमृत रस बना। इग्नू के अध्यापकों ने कड़ी मेहनत की, लगन और निष्ठा से कार्य किया और भारत के प्रमुख विद्वानों और विशेषज्ञों

को पाठ्यक्रम निर्माण और पाठ लेखन से जोड़ा गया। अस्तु, पाठ्यक्रमों की गुणवत्ता का यह प्रयास अखिल भारतीय रहा।

आज इग्नू विद्यार्थियों की संख्या और अपनी पहुँच के फलस्वरुप विश्व का सबसे बड़ा विश्वविद्यालय है जिसमें लगातार लगभग 35 लाख विद्यार्थी उच्च शिक्षा ग्रहण करते है। NAAC के द्वारा इसे A++ का दर्जा प्राप्त है और मुक्त विश्वविद्यालयों की NIRF Ranking में यह सर्वोच्च है।

मुझे प्रसन्नता है कि इग्नू का चार दशकों का यह गौरवमयी इतिहास मूर्त रूप ले रहा है और इसके लिए विश्वविद्यालय की यशस्वी कुलगुरु प्रोफेसर उमा कांजीलाल और इस परियोजना में लगे सभी साथियों को बधाई देता हूँ और इग्नू के उज्जवल भविष्य की कामना करता हूँ।

<div align="right">–प्रोफेसर सत्यकाम</div>

CHAPTER 1

LEARNING WITHOUT WALLS: THE HISTORICAL JOURNEY OF THE INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY

Swaraj Basu

The story of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is, in essence, the story of India's enduring commitment to democratizing knowledge. Established in 1985 through an Act of Parliament, IGNOU emerged as a visionary experiment—an audacious step toward transforming higher education into a right accessible to all, irrespective of geography, age, gender, or circumstance. Over the past four decades, the University has redefined the contours of learning, moving education beyond the physical boundaries of classrooms into the limitless realm of open and distance learning. This commemorative chapter traces IGNOU's historical journey—from its modest beginnings with nine Schools of Studies to its evolution as a global leader in open education. It celebrates not only the institution's academic innovations, self-instructional materials, and multimedia outreach but also its unwavering belief that education must be inclusive, equitable, and lifelong. As India moves forward in alignment with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, IGNOU's legacy stands as a living testament to the power of education without walls, an enduring symbol of access, opportunity, and transformation for millions.

Modern democratic societies, driven by ideals of equity and inclusivity, have consistently aspired to ensure "education for all." Yet access to higher education remained largely restricted to the privileged and urban sections of society. Conventional universities, operating within the framework of classroom-based, face-to-face instruction, were often unable to extend their reach beyond physical and socio-economic boundaries. The emergence of ODL marked a paradigm shift in educational philosophy and practice. This approach challenged the conventional notion that learning must occur within the confines of physical institutions and in the presence

of teachers. Instead, it emphasized self-directed learning, flexibility, and learner autonomy, supported by structured self-learning materials, technological aids, and responsive learner support systems. Over a period of time, advances in communication and information technologies provided the necessary tools to bridge geographical and temporal divides, transforming education into a more inclusive and participatory process. In India, the rationale for ODL gained significant momentum in the post-independence period, as the nation sought to expand educational opportunities amidst rapid industrialization, urbanization, and population growth. The existing higher education system struggled to accommodate the growing demand for education, particularly among working adults, rural populations, women, and other marginalized groups. It increasingly became evident that the conventional university system was inadequate to respond to the heterogeneous and ever-expanding educational aspirations of a transforming society. Consequently, the concept of Open Universities evolved as a progressive mechanism to promote the democratization of higher education and also to offer opportunity for life-long learning. At the international level, the establishment of institutions such as the Open University (UK) in 1969 demonstrated the viability and success of distance education as a mode of mass learning. Drawing inspiration from such global models, Indian policymakers and educationists envisioned a similar framework to address the national challenge of educational inclusivity. This led to the conceptualization and eventual establishment of the IGNOU in 1985, through an Act of Parliament. IGNOU was designed as a pioneering institution to promote open and distance learning across the country, integrating technology, flexible curricula, and learner-centric methodologies to expand access to higher education for all segments of society. The creation of IGNOU symbolized a transformative step toward the democratization of knowledge by ensuring quality higher education to all at their door steps. The open university model thus became an effective alternative promising equal opportunity in higher education. The NEP 2020 indeed echoes many of the core principles that have long guided ODL in India, such as *flexibility, inclusivity, lifelong learning,* and *use of technology to democratize education*. Today, NEP 2020 envisions a *flexible, multidisciplinary, and technology-integrated education system* that caters to diverse learning needs and pathways.

Reaching the Unreached: Open and Distance Learning

The concept of an Open University integrates two fundamental ideas, Distance Education and Open Learning[1]. These two approaches together aim to democratize education and make it accessible to all, especially to those who are geographically, socially, or economically disadvantaged. Distance Education primarily focuses on taking education to the learner's chosen location, rather than requiring the learner to come to a traditional campus. With the advancement of communication technologies such as multimedia, digital resources, learners are now able to access high-quality educational resources through self-instructional printed materials, audio-visual broadcasts, and digital media. These resources make it possible for students to learn at their own pace and in their preferred environment. This flexibility has played a crucial role in *reaching the unreached,* individuals who might otherwise be excluded from formal education systems due to distance, work commitments, or other constraints. However, one of the early challenges of distance education was ensuring two-way communication between learners and educators. Since the learners often studied independently, addressing their doubts, providing feedback, and monitoring progress became complex. To overcome this, the system incorporated face-to-face counselling sessions organized at designated Learner Support Centres (LSCs). These centres served as crucial bridges between students and the institution, providing academic guidance, counselling, and opportunities for interaction with tutors and peers.

Open Learning, on the other hand, emphasizes flexibility and learner autonomy. It allows students the freedom to choose when, where, and how they wish to study. This openness extends to various dimensions — eligibility for admission, duration of study, pace of learning, choice and combination of courses, and even flexible exit options. Such an approach ensures that education adapts to the learner's circumstances, rather than forcing the learner to adapt to a rigid institutional framework.

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[1]For detailed explanation of defining distance education one may consult Sewart, Keegan and Holmberg [eds.], *Distance Education-International Perspective*, London, 1983; Walter Perry, *Open University, A Personal Account by the Vice-Chancellor*, Milton Keynes, 1976; Keegan, D, *The Foundations of Distance Education*, London, 1986; G. Ram Reddy [ed.], *Open Universities: The Ivory Towers Thrown Open*, New Delhi, 1988; Evans Terry and Daryl Nation, [eds.], *Reforming Open and Distance Education: Critical Reflections from Practice*; etc.

It is important to highlight the collaborative role of conventional educational institutions in making this system successful. IGNOU, for instance, has partnered extensively with conventional colleges and universities across India. These institutions have provided their physical infrastructure, classrooms, laboratories, and libraries, for counselling sessions and practical work. More importantly, they have allowed their teaching faculty to serve as counsellors and mentors. Without their support, it would have been impossible for IGNOU to extend its reach to learners in remote and rural areas. As a result, IGNOU and similar institutions are not perceived as competitors to conventional universities, but rather as partners in expanding educational opportunities. Together, they embody the true spirit of open and distance learning —an inclusive, flexible, and learner-centred approach designed to empower individuals and foster lifelong learning.

Here it would be pertinent to refer to the UNESCO document on open learning published in 1975. It describes open learning as follows:

> *"Such systems are designed to offer opportunities for part-time study, for learning at a distance and for innovations in the curriculum. They are intended to allow access to wider section of adult population, to enable students to compensate for lost opportunities in the past or to acquire new skills and qualifications for the future. Open learning systems aim to redress social or educational inequality and to offer opportunities not provided by conventional colleges or universities"*[2].

It is very important to note that UNESCO saw significance of Open learning in its emphasis on removing social or educational inequalities. Thus, open and distance learning was not conceived merely as an alternative to conventional mode of education, it was also envisaged as supplementary system to provide opportunities for innovation, flexibility, skilling and lifelong learning. Therefore, open and distance learning has broad philosophy based on principles of equality affordability, quality, flexibility and need oriented[3].

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[2]Cited by G. Ram Reddy, *Studies in Distance Education*, op.cit., p.12
[3]G Ram Reddy's book *The Open Universities: The Ivory Towers Thrown Open* exemplifies his views on distance education. op. cit.

The establishment of UK Open University in 1969 in fact gave a major push and more defined model to be adopted for promotion of open and distance learning. This helped in shaping distance education as system where academic and industrial characteristics are blended to give a new meaning to education. The instructional design and development of learning materials, both print and multimedia, represent its academic nature. Distribution of learning materials and delivery of learner services represent its industrial face. With the revolution in information and communication technology a few new dimensions have been added. Coming of digital technology in a big way and with growing expansion of online learning it may not be very far that 'open and digital learning' will replace 'open and distance learning'.

The Thinking behind the Establishment of IGNOU

The policy makers of Independent India were aware of the importance of higher education and were very keen to provide opportunities for best possible education to all. The Third Five Year Plan (1961-1966) deliberated on the rising demand for higher education and recommended that "With the expanding base at the elementary and secondary education, the demand for higher education has greatly increased over the past. The Commission recognising the limitations of conventional mode of education which required massive investment in the development of infrastructure gradually started experimenting with the alternative mode of education. In addition to the provision in the Plan, for expansion of facilities for higher education, proposals for evening colleges, correspondence courses and the award of external degrees were under consideration[4].

Appreciating the concerns of the Planning Commission, the Central Advisory Board of Education suggested for constituting a committee to look into the concern. Union Ministry of Education appointed a committee under the then chairman of the UGC, Prof. D. S. Kothari. The Kothari Committee was of the view that the Correspondence course is a "step designed to expand and equalize educational opportunity, as it aimed at providing additional opportunities for several thousand students who wished to continue their education and the persons who had been denied these facilities and were in full-time employment or were for other reasons

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[4]Report of the Third Five Year Plan, 1961-1966, Government of India, 1961.

prevented from availing themselves of facilities at college[5]" Following the committee's recommendation as a pilot project of correspondence education the University of Delhi established the School of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education in 1962 starting with B.A. courses. The Government of India and the UGC were supportive of the idea of correspondence courses primarily because of its cost effectiveness and the opportunity to provide greater access to higher education.

In 1964 the Government of India appointed an Education Commission under the chairmanship of Prof. D.S. Kothari. Commission examined the emerging global trend towards education through Distance mode and pointed out: "The correspondence or home-study course is a well-tried and tested technique. Experience of correspondence courses in other countries of the world such as the U.S.A., Sweden, U.S.S.R., Japan and Australia encourages us to recommend fuller exploitation of the method for a wide range of purposes. There is hardly any ground for apprehension that correspondence courses are an inferior form of education than what is given in regular schools and colleges. Experience abroad and experiments in India have shown results which on balance tend to strengthen the case for correspondence education, programmes like correspondence courses should be extended as widely as possible and should also include courses in science and technology (either at the degree or diploma level).

Further, highlighting the importance of distance education in facilitating education for the deprived and economically weaker sections of society it said:

> *They (correspondence courses) will reduce the capital cost to a substantial extent especially as enrolments grow. They are the only means to provide higher education to those who desire to study further but are compelled on economic grounds to take up employment at the end of the school stage. We suggest that by 1986, at least one-third of the total enrolment in higher education could, with advantage, be provided through a system of correspondence courses and evening colleges[6]".*

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[5]Report of the Expert Committee on Correspondence Courses, 1963.
[6]Report of the Education Commission (1964-66), Government of India.

The recommendations of the Kothari Commission became part of national policy of education and provided the required impetus to many universities to start correspondence courses. However, to ensure quality and parity with the conventional system the UGC appointed a committee to look into the issues faced by students in correspondence courses, mainly unfair treatments given to students of correspondence courses, within and outside the university. The committee (Muley Committee) found that most of the conventional universities saw the correspondence courses as major source of revenue generation for meeting the financial requirements of their respective institutions; hardly any attention was paid to strengthen the institutes of correspondence courses.

Meanwhile, with the establishment of Open Universities in many countries, 1960s and 1970s witnessed significant developments in the arena of distance education at international level. Open universities were solely devoted to providing education through distance mode with innovative features catering to the needs of distance learners. They got the freedom to design and develop curriculum keeping in view the needs of distance learners and also to develop learning materials, print as well as audio-video, to facilitate learning. Along with developing good quality of study materials specially designed for self-learning using best subject experts, the Open Universities also developed a strong student support service network to address problems of learners. Being influenced by these developments, particularly the experiment of the United Kingdom Open University, the Government of India in 1970 hosted a seminar on the idea of Open University keeping in view the national agenda of democratization of education. The then education minister, Government of India, Shri V.K.R.V. Rao in his inaugural address endorsed the need of Open University in India to cater to the larger body of population who remained unreachable for the so-called university system.

Following this thinking in 1974 the Government of India appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Shri G. Parthasarathi, the then Vice-Chancellor of Jawahar Lal Nehru University, to explore the possibility of setting up national open university. The committee recommended for establishment of Open University by an Act of Parliament having jurisdiction over the entire country which would not only provide access to university education to those who could not join regular university but

also offer continuing education in different fields to different segments of population.

Even before the Union Government could take a call on setting up the National Open University, it was the Government of Andhra Pradesh that took the lead in establishing Open University in 1982. Prof. G. Ram Reddy played an important role in giving shape to Andhra Pradesh Open University, later renamed as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University in 1992, and became its founder Vice-Chancellor. At the national level the idea of establishment of a national Open University was revived again in 1985. The then Prime Minister, late Shri Rajiv Gandhi, in his first broadcast to the nation on January 5, 1985 said, "…Steps are being taken to establish an open university to bring higher education within the easy reach of all". Prof. G. Ram Reddy, an established expert in the field of open and distance learning, was given the responsibility to prepare the road map and was made convenor of the committee to work out plan of action for establishment of Open University at National level.

Introducing the Bill for the establishment of National Open University, in the Parliament, the then education minister, Shri K.C. Pant said:

> *"Despite the tremendous expansion of the formal system of higher education since Independence, the pressure on the system is continuously increasing. Indeed, the system has not been able to provide an effective means to equalize educational opportunities. The rigidities of the system, requiring, among the others, attendance in classrooms have been a disincentive to many learners. …That the Bill to establish and incorporate an Open University at the national level for the introduction and promotion of the Open University and distance education systems within educational pattern of the country and for the coordination and determination of standards in such systems, as passed by Rajya Sabha, be taken into consideration[7]".*

In his opening remarks, Mr. K.C. Pant, while introducing the IGNOU Bill in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Indian Parliament) on 26 August 1985 stated that:

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[7]Parliamentary Debates on IGNOU in Rajya Sabha, May 21, 1985: Cited by M. Srivastava, *Open Universities: India's Answer to challenges in Higher Education*, New Delhi, 2012, p.12.

"The Open University system of distance education would, on the other hand, be vastly superior to correspondence courses and, in some cases, even to formal programmes offered by regular colleges. The multi-media delivery system that the Open University would adopt would make for greater efficiency and a package of services like counselling, guidance, summer schools, contact programmes and laboratory facilities it can offer could ensure more effective interaction between the system and the learners. Above all, the flexibility in its processes which transcends the limitation of time of time-bound and space-bound education would provide the Open University system an advantage even over the formal programmes…. The proposal before the House seeks not only to establish an Open University to offer a variety of programmes, but also to assume a leadership role in promoting a distance education system in the country. The Bill provides that the National Open University will coordinate the functioning of various distance learning institutions in the country and ensure that they maintain a standard that commands respect and establishes a high level of credibility for this system in India. Besides, the National Open University will provide resource support to other institutions of distance learning through documentation, training, methodological backup, and so on…"[7]

It is pertinent to mention the coordination role entrusted to the National Open University. He clarified in the house by stating:

"The UGC has, over the years developed its own attitudes and approaches, traditions and conventions and I think that at this stage of the development of the new university, perhaps we should allow it to grow for some time without any formal binding at all. It is an open university which would have to be flexible and it would have to break new grounds in many areas which would go against the experience of many of the established educationists of this country. Therefore, we should allow it a certain amount of freedom, which seems to be better than to have a formal coordinating body …. I would rather have it informal at this stage. Later, we may consider what needs to be done."[7]

A glance at Parliamentary debates shows that IGNOU was conceived not merely to open up opportunities for higher learning to all aspiring learners

breaking many rigidities of the conventional education system but also was visualized to give a credible identity to non-formal education at national level. This was the reason that IGNOU unlike any other university in the country was not placed under the University Grants Commission (UGC) but directly under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, (MHRD), presently known as the Ministry of Education, (MOE), Government of India. Its national level status and mandate provided IGNOU a pre-eminent position to give direction to the open and distance learning in India.

The Mandate of IGNOU

The First Schedule of the IGNOU Act specifies its mission and mandate:

"To advance learning by diversity of means, to mobilize communication technology, to encourage the Open University and distance education systems in the educational pattern of the country and to co-ordinate and determine the standards in such systems. Elaboration of the above aims and objects in the First Schedule provides further the following:

(a) *Standardizing diversifying degree, certificate and diploma courses related to the means of employment and necessary for growth of the economy of the country;*

(b) *Providing access to higher education for larger segments of the population, and in particular, the disadvantageous groups such as those living in remote and rural areas including working people, housewives and other adults who wish to upgrade or require knowledge to study in various fields which offer opportunities for educational upgradation of knowledge, training and skills;*

(c) *Providing an innovative system of University level education, flexible and open methods and pace of learning, combination of courses, eligibility for enrolment, age of entry,*

(d) *Improvement of the educational system by providing a non-formal-channel, complementary to the formal system and encouraging transfer of technology,*

(e) *Providing educational training in the various parts and segments of the country, including training of teachers required for such activities as to provide counselling and guidance to the students,*

(f)   *Fulfilling the above objectives by diversity of means of distance and continuing education interaction with existing universities and institutions of higher learning making full use of the latest scientific models and new educational technologies".*

The Act gave IGNOU a very wide mandate and mission different from any other university in India. It was expected to play the role in the field of distance education that the UGC plays in the conventional system of higher education. This was the reason that from its inception financial grants to IGNOU were given directly by MHRD/MOE unlike all other universities including central universities who receive grants from the UGC. This gave IGNOU an added responsibility to promote, develop and determine the standards of distance education at national level. IGNOU was assigned the role to develop open and distance learning as an alternative to conventional mode of higher education. Besides the degree oriented programmes IGNOU was expected to develop programmes in areas of continuing education and non-formal vocational training to provide required skills for employment. The philosophy of inclusive education was the guiding spirit behind the establishment of IGNOU.

IGNOU: Opening a New Window For Learning

IGNOU came into existence in September 1985 and on 19 November 1985 the foundation stone of the University was laid by the then Prime Minister, late Shri Rajiv Gandhi, in a site of around 150 acres of land at Maidan Garhi village in the outskirts of South Delhi not very far from two premier educational institutions, Indian Institute of Technology and Jawahar Lal Nehru University. Addressing the audience on the memorable occasion, the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi said that the university was created to fulfil Smt. Indira Gandhi's dream of democratizing education. He desired that IGNOU should take education to the door steps of all and make education relevant to national needs. To make the occasion memorable and to deliberate on experiences of open universities and potentiality of distance education, an international seminar was hosted by IGNOU from 20th to 22nd November 1985.

Keeping in view the need of acceptability of Open University among the fraternity of academics in conventional universities, Prof. G. Ram Reddy who was also the president of Association of Indian Universities (AIU)

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at that time, organized a seminar in 1986 at Ahmedabad in collaboration with Gujarat University and AIU. The focus of the seminar was to make educationists familiar with the idea and scope of distance education as an effective alternative mode of learning. Democratization of education being its guiding philosophy, IGNOU from its inception was very much attentive to bring access, equity, affordability, quality, flexibility, credibility in developing its academic credentials. The National Education Policy announced in 1986 underlined the importance of distance education and the role of IGNOU in shaping the future of distance education.

The long and successful journey of IGNOU which began with the launch of two academic programmes, Diploma in Management and Diploma in Distance Education with a modest enrolment of 4,528 students to over 300 programmes, more than 1000 courses and enrolment of over 9 lakhs per annum went hand in hand with the establishment and growth of its Academic and Administrative Structure. A very important step in this direction was the introduction of BPP- Bachelor's Preparatory Programme, a six-month programme available for those adult learners who could read and write but for various reasons could not secure basic eligibility qualifications like Higher Secondary schooling. It was like a bridge course to open the gates of higher education even for those who could not pursue formal education. Such an initiative reflected the eagerness of IGNOU to encourage those who found conventional system restrictive.

Academic Journey of IGNOU

From its very inception**,** IGNOU embarked on its academic journey with a remarkably liberal and forward-looking approach to knowledge organization and curriculum design. Unlike conventional universities, where disciplinary structures are often rigidly defined and departments operate within narrowly demarcated boundaries, IGNOU consciously rejected the compartmentalized notion of academic departments. Instead, it adopted a School-based structure, where each School of Studies was conceptualized as an interdisciplinary hub bringing together experts from diverse domains to design and deliver programmes that addressed contemporary educational, professional, and societal needs. This innovative framework was rooted in the University's belief that knowledge cannot be confined within traditional disciplinary silos, especially in an era marked by rapid technological advancement, globalization, and changing

learner aspirations. The goal was not merely to reproduce the curricula of conventional institutions but to reimagine higher education in a manner that reflected the real-world interconnections of knowledge, skill, and application. Thus, in developing its programmes, IGNOU encouraged collaboration among scholars, practitioners, and industry experts from varied disciplines to create integrated, learner-centric course materials that were both conceptually robust and practically relevant.

The early years posed significant challenges as well as opportunities. Designing and delivering programmes in fields such as management, teacher education, engineering and technology, nursing, computer and information sciences, and natural sciences through the ODL mode required bold experimentation. These were domains traditionally associated with laboratory work, internships, and hands-on experience, areas where distance education had not yet been widely tested. Yet, IGNOU demonstrated remarkable academic courage and innovation in developing pedagogic strategies, instructional materials, and assessment mechanisms that could effectively translate these practice-oriented disciplines into the ODL framework. In doing so, IGNOU redefined the possibilities of distance education in India. The introduction of such programmes not only expanded the frontiers of ODL but also legitimized distance learning as a viable mode for professional and technical education. The University's approach reflected its conviction that learning is not restricted by mode but enhanced by design, support, and relevance.

Equally transformative was IGNOU's commitment to flexibility and learner autonomy. The University empowered students to decide their own pace, place, and mode of learning, offering unparalleled mobility across programmes and disciplines. Through mechanisms such as credit accumulation and transfer, modular course design, and multiple entry and exit points, learners were given the freedom to structure their educational journey in accordance with their personal and professional circumstances. This flexible and inclusive academic model positioned IGNOU as a pioneer in the democratization of higher education. It offered a platform where a rural learner, a working professional, or a homemaker could engage with advanced areas of study on their own terms, without the barriers imposed by time, location, or prior formal education. In essence, IGNOU's approach to interdisciplinary and flexible learning

not only broadened access to higher education but also transformed the very philosophy of learning itself, from one of rigid conformity to one of continuous exploration, innovation, and empowerment. From conventional liberal arts and sciences to vocational, professional and continuing education programmes—teacher education, management, rural development, disability studies, women's empowerment—IGNOU has continuously expanded and adapted its academic offerings.

The First Decade: 1985-1995

To achieve its academic mission, the following eight Schools were established in the initial years:

1.	School of Continuing Education	1986
2.	School of Humanities	1986
3.	School of Management Studies	1986
4.	School of Sciences	1986
5.	School of Social Sciences	1986
6.	School of Education	1987
7.	School of Engineering and Technology	1987
8.	School of Computer and Information Sciences	1991
9.	School of Health Sciences	1991

The nature and character of IGNOU demanded establishment of a different set up. Four divisions were created which were unique in university system in India, namely the Communication Division, later renamed as Electronic Media Production Centre; Distance Education Division, later renamed as Staff Training and Research in Distance Education; Material Production and Distribution Division and Planning and Development Division. These divisions were closely integrated with the design and development of academic programmes in IGNOU which were distinct and innovative. The University followed a rigorous quality control in designing, developing and producing course materials.

The full-time teachers recruited in various schools with the help of subject experts available at national level have designed and developed academic programmes keeping in view the learners' needs. The academic content is approved by a number of statutory bodies of the University having outside

experts also. In the process, a thorough scrutiny takes place at every stage. The materials developed after a lot of efforts are also edited by eminent subject experts in respective areas of study drawing academic resources at the national level. The result of such a rigorous exercise has helped the University in developing world class study materials rooted in sound principles of instructional design and curriculum development. Faculty was also recruited with skills in English editing in School of Humanities to help in language editing of the course materials. To make available the course materials in Hindi, a translation unit was created in School of Humanities. Developing audio-video programmes was also a major academic activity. In consultation with media experts working in communication division, audio-video programmes were made simultaneously to supplement the printed texts.

It is interesting to note that initially IGNOU functioned from several rented accommodations in South Delhi in Safdarjung Development Area, Saket and Hauz Khas. Eventually the offices were brought under one campus, the present campus at Maidan Garhi. In the beginning it was a temporary accommodation which resembled barracks. Reaching these 'barracks' was not easy; there was a small village road connecting to Mehrauli-Badarpur road, without any public transport connectivity. Colleagues pooled and hired chartered buses. Those were the days when IGNOU launched it most coveted programmes.

The process of developing permanent buildings in the campus soon started and priority was given to staff quarters to facilitate better working environment. More than three hundred quarters were built in first phase facilitating the much needed housing in the campus. The next major construction activity was the building of academic complex, and two buildings near the "down campus"-Distance Education Council (DEC) building and a building adjacent to it. In the new academic complex all schools, library and computer division were housed. Soon the Guest House and Convention Centre were also built. What is most important to take note is the transformation of a hilly barren land into a large green campus. IGNOU got the look of much desired academic institution. In 1994 the foundation stone for staff housing complex in the campus was laid by the then Minister of Human Resource Development, Shri Arjun Singh.

The University held its first convocation in 1989 and 1171 learners were awarded their Diplomas. The first Master's Degree programme was launched in 1990 by School of Management Studies along with the specialized Diplomas in Management. By 1992, IGNOU started broadcasting its radio programmes from Bombay and Hyderabad stations of All India Radio. In 1991 *Doordarshan* started telecast of IGNOU's video programmes.

The year 1992 was very memorable in IGNOU's history for two reasons; first IGNOU's Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates were recognized by the UGC as being equivalent to those of other universities in the country and second, the creation of the Distance Education Council (DEC). IGNOU was assigned the responsibility to act as a national resource centre for distance education and was empowered to take all steps for promotion, coordination and maintenance of standards in the system. DEC since its inception played a proactive role in setting up number of State Open Universities. Through financial grant and academic support DEC tried to expand and strengthen the directorates of distance education in a number of dual mode universities. Within the first decade of its existence, IGNOU achieved the coveted status of Centre of Excellence in Distance Education by the Commonwealth of Learning, Canada. The Commonwealth of Learning also instituted Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship for Commonwealth nationals to pursue IGNOU programmes. This was a major international recognition for IGNOU's academic credentials.

This was also the time when IGNOU started a project with ISRO for establishing one-way video and two-way audio teleconferencing network connecting regional centres with IGNOU headquarters. IGNOU hosted eighth annual conference of the Asian Open Universities. To promote extension education Centre for Extension Education was created to act as an intermediary between the School of Studies and extension activities along the line of IGNOU's mandate.

To translate its mission of accessibility into practice, IGNOU systematically developed an extensive network of Regional Centres (RCs) and Study Centres (SCs) across the country. Beginning with a handful of centres, the network expanded rapidly to cover most Indian states by the early 1990s. These centres became the operational backbone of IGNOU's ODL model, acting as vital interfaces between the University and its learners.

The Regional Centres were entrusted with administrative and academic responsibilities; learner registration, distribution of study materials, coordination of counselling sessions, and supervision of examinations — thereby decentralizing operations and ensuring local responsiveness. The Study Centres, often located within conventional colleges or institutions, hosted Academic Counsellors, many of whom were faculty members from nearby colleges/universities. This collaboration between the open and conventional systems enhanced the academic credibility of IGNOU's programmes and fostered mutual understanding within India's higher education landscape.

This decade of consolidation was thus not merely a phase of growth in numbers but one of intellectual and institutional maturation. It witnessed IGNOU transform from a promising new university into a trusted and respected leader in distance education — one that combined academic credibility with social commitment, and innovation with inclusivity. As the University entered the mid-1990s, it was already looking ahead , envisioning a future where technology-enabled learning, lifelong education, and global collaboration would further extend the reach and relevance of its mission: to make education truly open, flexible, and accessible to all.

The Second Decade: 1995-2006

The second decade of IGNOU's history is marked by expansion in all directions. Need was felt to extend IGNOU's educational opportunities abroad, particularly in the Middle East Asia. Accordingly required amendment was made in IGNOU's Act enabling the University to open study centres outside India to offer its academic programmes abroad. To look after the specific activities of foreign students International Cell was created in 1997, later it was upgraded to the status of a full-fledged Division in 2002. This was also the period when IGNOU undertook large number of initiatives in collaborating with various departments of Government of India and organized conferences in collaboration with UNESCO, National Centre for Educational Research and Training (NCERT); National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA); National Council for Teacher Training (NCTE) and other bodies. The XV Annual Conference of Association of Asian Open Universities (AAOU) was hosted by IGNOU in 2002 and in the same year a two-day

conference on "Borderless Open and Flexible Learning" was organized. The Commonwealth of Learning conferred upon IGNOU the 'Award of Excellence for Distance Education Material' for the course developed to provide education and training of elected members of Panchayats.

In the arena of technology enabled education this period witnessed a large number of initiatives and got support from various ministries and ISRO. Inauguration of Sanchar Kendra/ Electronic Media Production Centre (EMPC) having state of the art production facilities by the then Prime Minister of India Shri H. D. Devegowda on 8th January, 1997 was a major boost to create a modern production and transmission centre for educational purposes. IGNOU received grants from the Japanese International Cooperation Agency to set up its audio-visual production centre and in a record time under the direct supervision of the Japanese agency the iconic, first permanent building in the campus was constructed. The Satellite Earth Station was inaugurated at IGNOU and in 2000 Prof. Murli Manohar Joshi, Minister of HRD, Government of India launched the national educational channel *GyanDarshan*. Soon *GyanVani* FM, Allahabad- the first educational Radio Station was inaugurated. Subsequently more FM Radio stations were established.

The first technology channel '*Eklavya*' was inaugurated in 2003. In 2004 *Kisan* TV channel was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Launching of EDUSAT from Sriharikota by Indian Space Research [ISRO] added a new dimension to technology enabled education. This was a major shift from producing only audio-video programmes, IGNOU moved towards transmission, often live of educational programmes at national level.

In terms of academic growth two new schools, School of Agriculture and School of Law were established in 2005 to provide academic programmes and professional skills required in the area of agriculture and allied sciences and legal studies. Three new centres also were created to develop awareness, culture of innovation in open and distance learning and spirit of cooperation and sharing of expertise in distance education. The new centres were National Centre for Disability Studies, National Centre for Innovation in Distance Education and Inter University Consortium. Initiatives were taken to expand IGNOU's presence in North-East through

a special project funded by MHRD. This helped in a big way to take education to the door steps of people of North-East.

In order to extend its reach to socially marginalised and dispossessed groups many other initiatives were also taken. One such major initiative was Distance Education Programme under *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* initiated by MHRD and IGNOU was made National Resource Centre to train large number of teachers involved in elementary education. Similarly, supported by World Health and the National AIDS Control, IGNOU developed awareness programme on HIV/AIDS. Some other collaborative educational initiatives taken by IGNOU were Participatory Management of Displacement, Resettlement and Rehabilitation, Youth in Development work, Intellectual Property Rights, IGNOU-*Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti* project for professional development of teachers, developing human resource in agriculture, development of competent and productive human resources for food processing, etc. IGNOU also started joint degree programme for hotel and hospitality professionals in collaboration with National Council for Hotel Management, an autonomous body under Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. Importantly, IGNOU also took up initiatives to open its doors for education to Army, Navy, Air Force personnel.

The Third Decade: 2006-2015

The third decade saw another round of expansion in schools of studies at IGNOU. Most visible among various new initiatives taken were the establishment of 10 new schools of studies:

- School of Extension and Development Studies
- School of Foreign Languages
- School of Gender and Development Studies
- School of Interdisciplinary and Trans-Disciplinary Studies
- School of Journalism and New Media Studies
- School of Performing and Visual Arts
- School of Social Work
- School of Tourism and Hospitality Service Management
- School of Translation Studies and Training
- School of Vocational Education and Training

Strengthening the academic credentials of IGNOU was seen in the establishment of chairs in different areas and eminent scholars were brought in to provide new impetus to IGNOU's academic achievements. Two new centres were established, Centre for Indira Gandhi Freedom Struggle, later renamed as Centre for Freedom Struggle and Diaspora Studies and Centre for Local Governance in order to encourage research in defined areas. This era also witnessed beginning of Face-to-face teaching in select academic programmes. The Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre was established. The Research Unit was created and scholarships were given to more than hundred scholars to encourage discipline based research. Efforts were also made to increase enrolment through two schemes, Community Colleges and Convergence project with regular colleges to offer various IGNOU programmes. Expansion also took place by opening new regional centres and study centres. The Electronic Media Production Centre (EMPC) became vibrant with new initiatives to promote technology enabled education.

However, this was also the period when IGNOU lost its regulatory control over distance education and in 2013 the Distance Education Council was dissolved by deleting of Statute 28 from the IGNOU Act. The authority of regulating distance education was given to the UGC by an order of MHRD and IGNOU was brought under the jurisdiction of the UGC for offering academic programmes. This was a major setback for IGNOU not only because of losing its academic autonomy but because of deviation from its mandate. Most of the new initiatives like Sign Language Institute, Face-to-face regular academic programmes, convergence scheme, community college initiatives were discontinued. MHRD also asked the University to discontinue technical and professional programmes and gradually a few good initiatives of IGNOU like teacher education, nursing education, health education, engineering etc. faced challenges. Fortunately, due to its academic credentials IGNOU succeeded in establishing such a strong foothold that a few setbacks in its eventful journey could not dent its endeavour to take quality education to diverse learners.

In terms of expansion of physical infrastructure, during this decade two permanent buildings, the Vice Chancellor's secretariat and an adjoining building were constructed. Besides this a number of temporary structures

were built to house new schools and other activities of the university. Refurbishing of the old "barracks" was also done.

The Fourth Decade: 2016 onwards

We are now in contemporary times and despite roadblocks in between IGNOU's journey and commitment towards greater access, affordability, equity and quality education to all remained firm. Development of new programmes and new initiatives to go with the present time never took a back seat. Persistent efforts made by IGNOU and its undeniable leadership in the domain of open and distance learning succeeded in making IGNOU free from the regulatory role of the UGC in designing and developing academic programmes, both print and online. IGNOU was exempted from regulations made by the UGC for offering distance learning programmes and online education programmes. Autonomy has brought more accountability and IGNOU has taken two major initiatives to prove its quality and relevance in the age of digital learning. The creation of Centre for Internal Quality Assurance in line with the national mandate to get the University accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council has helped in streamlining various activities of the University and also an opportunity for self-assessment. Similarly, digital education is expanding rapidly and various initiatives were taken by the Government of India to promote online education along with conventional education. To keep pace with the new development in technology enabled education Inter University Consortium was renamed Centre for Online Education with special focus on expanding IGNOU's presence in online education. IGNOU has the responsibility to develop and coordinate at national level certificate and diploma programmes for MOOCS and is also the coordinator for managing six SWAYAM PRABHA Channels to promote online education. The repository has become a major educational resource centre for various academic programmes. Many activities pertaining to learners like admission, re-registration, filling-up examination forms, term-end result, empanelment of academic counsellors, etc. have been made online. Special mobile APP has been developed through which IGNOU learners have access to learning materials. All these reflect the growing urge within the University to keep pace with the changing demand for learning.

The University is a pioneer in the use of state-of-art Information and Communications Technology for dissemination of knowledge as well as for providing effective student support services. In the difficult and rather gloomy atmosphere of the COVID-19 pandemic, IGNOU successfully carried out its statutory/academic/expert committee meetings through online means such as webinars, Google and Zoom meetings etc. in order to observe the norms of social distancing and other prescribed COVID protocols. During this period, IGNOU strengthened its ICT enabled quality education through web-based support, web-conferencing and *eGyanKosh*. For wider outreach, most of the instructional materials were made available for open access on *eGyanKosh* platform, which has now become the largest open access repository of the National Resources Centre for Education and Research. Most of IGNOU's self-learning materials are now available on *eGyankosh*. As a National Coordinator for SWAYAM and SWAYAM PRABHA, IGNOU has offered 58 independent MOOC programmes and 215 courses till date as part of online programmes on SWAYAM portal and is coordinating four channels of SWAYAM PRABHA platform of the Ministry of Education. Translation of IGNOU MOOCs into eight regional languages has also been initiated.

The New Education Policy 2020 played an important role in the development of academic programmes and their delivery. Due to its inherent structure IGNOU found it easy to implement NEP 2020. IGNOU has already being offering Credit Transfer which in a way functioned as 'multiple entry-multiple exit' options. IGNOU has implemented several initiatives recommended by the Government of India's National Education Policy in 2020 through its extensive network of Regional Centres across the country. The university is actively implementing the National Education Policy through its dedicated NEP cell. As part of its commitment to implementing NEP-2020, IGNOU now provides a comprehensive selection of over 300 programmes. Recently eight new Masters programmes in disciplines like geoinformatics, statistics, geography and physics have been launched. IGNOU also launched 19 programmes under Four Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP) based on the UGC guidelines and has the multidisciplinary component. The University is making significant strides in expanding its range of UG/PG programmes, with the recent addition of skill-based courses. Recently IGNOU entered in an MOU with

Department of Justice, Ministry of Law & Justice, Government of India to equip the paralegals and to increase the legal awareness and legal literacy among people.

When the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) extended their ambit to include Open Universities within the purview of national quality assurance and ranking mechanisms, it marked a significant step towards benchmarking excellence across diverse modes of higher education delivery. In keeping with its tradition of transparency, accountability, and commitment to continuous improvement, IGNOU willingly subjected itself to these rigorous evaluative processes alongside its peers in the higher education ecosystem. The outcome was a reaffirmation of IGNOU's academic and institutional excellence. The University was conferred the prestigious 'A++' grade by NAAC — the highest level of accreditation — signifying outstanding performance in areas of curricular design, learner support, research, innovation, and institutional governance. Further, in the NIRF rankings, IGNOU secured the top position among Open Universities, underscoring its leadership and credibility in the domain of Open and Distance Learning (ODL). These recognitions are not merely accolades but acknowledgments of IGNOU's unwavering pursuit of quality, inclusivity, and innovation. They reflect the University's success in harmonizing its foundational philosophy of "education for all" with the national vision for excellence and accountability in higher education. Through such achievements, IGNOU continues to demonstrate that open and distance learning, when guided by academic integrity and institutional vision, can match and even surpass the standards of conventional systems.

Concluding Observations

IGNOU's evolution mirrors the aspirations articulated in the NEP 2020, which envisions an education system rooted in access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability. In an era when higher education was often confined within the walls of conventional institutions, IGNOU emerged as a revolutionary alternative—an institution that redefined the very meaning of accessibility, flexibility, and inclusivity in learning. Its initiatives have not only opened the doors of higher education to

millions of learners across India and beyond, but have also reimagined the relationship between equity and quality, proving that mass education and academic excellence can indeed coexist. The history of IGNOU stands as a living testament to the adage that *"where there is a will, there is a way."* Over the past four decades, IGNOU's journey has been one of innovation, resilience, and transformation—a journey shaped by visionary leadership, dedicated scholars, committed academicians, skilled technicians, and an unwaveringly devoted support staff. Together, they have navigated challenges, embraced change, and nurtured a model of education that transcends barriers of geography, time, and circumstance.

Looking ahead, IGNOU stands poised to further strengthen its role in the following ways: integrating advanced online and blended learning technologies (AI, adaptive learning, AR/VR), expanding trans-national collaborations, deepening industry-academia linkages and enhancing lifelong-learning pathways. As India advances its ambitions of higher education expansion, research-capacity building and workforce readiness, IGNOU's model offers a robust platform.

As IGNOU completes its forty-year journey in the domain of open and distance learning, it merits both celebration and reflection. At a time when the demands on higher education are expanding, in terms of scale, diversity, relevance and technology, IGNOU's legacy offers rich lessons: institutional vision rooted in equity; pedagogy built around self-instruction and learner support; national reach coupled with academic rigour. As IGNOU steps into its fifth decade, the commitment remains unwavering: to continue opening doors, broadening horizons, and anchoring education in the ideals of equity, flexibility and quality.

CHAPTER 2

TEACHING THROUGH OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING: IGNOU'S FLEXIBLE LEARNING MODEL

Poonam Bhushan

"Open education institutions have been created, not as modifications of established educational practices but ostensibly, as reformed practices with new values, approaches and students" (Terry & Nation, 1993, p. 8)

The new values and approaches of 'open', 'flexible' and 'lifelong learning' have enormous implications on the nature and approach of pedagogy and on the role of teachers itself. In contrast with traditional teaching, distance education provides technology mediated education to 'those who were removed in time and space from the major sites of education in cities and towns.' This implies the use of pedagogy of distance learning to deliver education to the home of the learner and a reconfigured role of the teacher in the institutional context of an open university.

The historical perspective vis-à-vis the present scenario in the process of developing pedagogic strategies to 'teach' at a distance and the intrinsic link between the use of educational technologies and distance learning plays an important role at IGNOU. The very process in the IGNOU's journey, as a leader in open and distance education in India, is to celebrate accomplishments and to present a moment to step back and reflect on success with a critical lens.

Three underlying assumptions run through the narrative on distance education pedagogy at IGNOU and the role of the teacher:

1.   The philosophy of Open and Distance Learning and the objects of the University shape the role of the teacher.

2.   Being a national university, teachers in IGNOU are responsive to shifts in policies, the market, change in learner demographics,

emergence of new technologies and change in employer preferences, etc. If need be, they question the relevance of their curricular practices and accordingly modify/improve them. Dilemmas sometimes surface when the nature of change warrants that teacher shifts the commitment from the core purposes of the University and address the need of learning communities.

3. Development of self- learning materials takes place in a team. In practice, however, the teacher is at the centre, and performs a range of academic, technical and coordination tasks, overseeing the entire process of course development, design and delivery.

Distance education systems follow learner-centred practices. As an example, the approach to curriculum design being followed in IGNOU focuses on learning outcomes, and states what the student is expected to do rather than on the content the teacher is likely to cover. Curriculum planning involves assessment of learner needs, content selection, choice of methodology and design of formative and summative assessment that build on learner's abilities and preferences. Provisioning for a two- way feedback is done so that learners know exactly how they are progressing. Learner-centred approaches do not take away from the teacher the responsibility of enabling effective learning. In a way this sentence sums up the role of a distance teacher.

The teacher in IGNOU is basically a distant teacher who teaches the students in a unique manner, keeping in view the nature and demand of Distance learning. The 'Academics' or 'other academics' participate primarily delivering the programs and supporting the learners. They not only play a significant role in designing, developing, and delivering of Programmes/Courses but reach out to their learners as invisible teachers. This includes review and revision of the Programmes.

The Act of the University specifies the nature of duties of teachers and other academics as follows:

1. Preparation of the course material, content editing and scrutiny, linguistic editing etc. from the point of view of requirements of distance education and liaison of the work of outside experts associated;

2. Her academic duties shall be to give guidance, and instruction to, students in the form of counselling, conducting of tutorials, seminars, practical and assessment/ examination/evaluation

3. A teacher in the University shall fully and enthusiastically participate in the corporate life of the University. (IGNOU, 1985, p. 33).

The Act of the Open University conceived in 1985 with small amendment in 1996, is the formal declaration of the purpose and objectives of IGNOU, its values and educational vision. In directing the University to provide access to education to all and for upgradation of knowledge and skills for working adults, the Act expanded the scope of higher education and defined the type of Programmes, the nature of learners and the role and responsibility of distance teachers.

During the journey of 40 years, this Act has become the guiding framework, enabling a shared understanding of common purposes and goals. The 'unique' and 'different' identity of teachers in the University emanates from the Act itself.

Learning experiences, in distance education are provided to learners who are dispersed and removed in time and place from their teachers. In the absence of direct interaction between the teacher and learner, teaching-learning, including a two- way interaction, is structured, planned in advance and delivered with the help of educational technologies.

In other words, in ODL, teachers and students are in different places for all or most of the time and that teaching and learning occurs with interaction dependent on the available communication medium.

Transiting from Conventional to Distance Mode

IGNOU had succeeded in catching the imagination of the teaching community, educators, policy makers, and young students looking forward to taking teaching as a career. (Kaul, Singh, & Ansari, 1988). The prospect of joining a University set up for a social purpose and 'teaching' adult learners seemed exciting as well as daunting. Conjectures were made about how the University would function, the idea of teaching at a distance seemed unique but what would 'teaching' in this system mean? To some, it was unclear what the word 'Open' implied and then imagining a University with no students was difficult. What kind of technology could be used for

teaching? What will be the role of the teacher? Then there were skeptics who were not sure if the University and the concept would find acceptance.

At the same time, the rationale for creating an Open University found resonance amongst many who were not happy with the state of higher education in the country and wanted the 'brick and mortar Universities' to 'step out of their ivory towers' to democratize education and make themselves relevant to society.

Teachers, Academic staff, educational technologists and media personnel, who joined the University had come from conventional universities, colleges, and organizations like All India Radio, *Doordarshan*, etc. They were products of the conventional mode and had no grounding in distance education. Transition to IGNOU meant a complete change in their notion of teaching which was based on conventional teaching methods.

Teaching in higher education has long been synonymous with lecturing and a large section of teachers recognize it as an important mode of transmission of knowledge. Teachers as 'givers of knowledge,' are considered superior and their unassailable authority is accepted by students who are just 'passive recipients'. In the teacher dominated model, the classroom environment becomes intimidating and does not encourage learners to actively participate in the learning process.

Teaching at the Open Universities meant a major shift from this understanding of teaching and its underlying assumptions. It meant taking on new roles as a teacher, adapting to teaching with technology, having the ability to communicate effectively, working in teams, and more importantly, placing the learner, her needs and interests over and above else.

In the conventional system, the teacher transacts the course with students, in somewhat personalized settings of the classroom. In contrast, in distance learning, for completing a programme, hundreds of students, dispersed over different geographical locations, go through the same course materials with the unlikelihood of meeting the teacher.

Students who come to the Open University have varied levels of ability and prior knowledge. Developing instructional materials for a very heterogeneous group is indeed a challenging task that teachers at the Open University face.

This chapter delves into the progressive educational philosophy that ODL entails, highlighting its significance in fostering an equitable learning environment; emphasizing the need for a flexible curriculum, differentiated instruction, and supportive learning resources. It highlights the teaching-learning process underpinning the high-quality instructional materials created by the University that allow students to engage in deep, meaningful learning, resulting in better learning outcomes. As an open university, it continues to experiment with instructional design, evaluation and assessment to build quality educational experiences for highly heterogeneous learner populations.

Features of the New Teaching - Learning System

According to its mandate, IGNOU was to design '*learner-centric*' study material that would compare with the best being offered at the tertiary level. Keeping in view the task assigned to it and the lessons learnt from the teacher centred, one way communication relied upon by correspondence education, it geared itself towards developing an interactive, flexible, adaptive learner-centred and technology enabled teaching-learning. In distance education, designing good quality study materials is an imperative because it determines the quality of the teaching-learning process. The study materials replace the teacher, they are expected to meet the needs of the learners and substitute the social environment in which learning takes place in the classroom. Designing quality Self Learning Materials (SLMs) and backing it with a sound learner support was, and continues to be, a particularly challenging task.

To address these issues, the University follows a process of instructional design which has evolved over the years and is based on an understanding of the needs of the learners, specification of goals and objectives of instruction, and planned assessment activities to ensure a sustainable quality of instruction. The learner-centred model is based on some basic characteristics such as:

- Good quality, self-learning materials, (SLMs) in the form of Printed text material;

- Multiple media-based learning materials, that included Audio/Video materials and teleconferencing, interactive radio counselling;

- Materials developed by engaging the best minds in the area from academia, industry, social sector-NGOs, government;

- Efficient means of delivering the SLMs;

- Country-wide presence of learner-support centres for providing counselling, tutoring, library support, labs and 'hands-on training' with qualified, competent teachers and counsellors;

- A flexible learner-assessment system based on assignments for continuous assessment and in-built feedback and term end examinations;

- Modular nature of courses and programmes of study based on accumulation of credits leading to final certification with lateral entry and exit options and a credit transfer policy recognising the prior knowledge acquired;

- Flexibility and openness in eligibility qualification with entry, age relaxation;

At present, the University offers academic programmes for diverse groups of learners in different areas of knowledge and skill development, and its credibility as a distance education university has grown both at home and abroad. A careful process of planning, monitoring and evaluating the stages of design, development and delivery has resulted in good quality learning materials. Instructional materials developed by the University are used not only by the learners but also by the teachers and the students in conventional universities, functionaries in education departments, and those aspiring for jobs like the civil services, managerial positions, scientists, economists, social scientists, educationalists, etc.

It is interesting to recall that in the initial years, conjectures were made if distance education system could offer relevant, affordable, and accessible quality education to a large number of people, challenges that the conventional higher education system had been grappling with for decades, without much success. Additionally, the mandate to provide life-long learning experiences was not easy either. It meant designing need-based programmes for those learners who were likely to return to the University to upgrade their knowledge and skills at different stages of their career pathways.

Schools of Studies: Multidisciplinary Offerings

The University took a decision to have a core of permanent faculty in every discipline, enough in number to *'create a critical core for cross-fertilization of ideas'*, an idea that was inspired by the UK Open University (UKOU). Except in Programmes where the number is mandated by the regulatory bodies, the Schools of Studies continue to have a small core.

Since media is used with Self Learning Materials (SLMs) to enhance learning, the University appointed 'Academics' who joined the EMPC as producers (Communication Division) with an experience of programme production and broadcast media in All India Radio and *Doordarshan*. The core teaching faculty was to be academically strengthened with the help of academics and subject experts from other Universities by associating them in course design, development and delivery. Apart from regular appointments, consultants on deputation, through invitation were also invited to contribute their talent and scholarship.

The role and responsibilities of teachers have been emphasized in Statutes 17 (5) which includes:

● Preparation of course material, content editing and scrutiny, linguistic editing from the point of view of requirements of distance education and liaison of the work with outside experts.

● Academic duties shall be to give guidance and instructions to students in the form of counselling, conducting tutorials, seminars, practical and assessment/examination/evaluation.

To promote multidisciplinary thrust to academic deliberations and courses, the Schools of Studies were created as multidisciplinary structures. The boundaries of discipline-based departments were done away with. There are many Programmes specifically designed with a multidisciplinary approach at their core in areas such as rural development, development studies, entrepreneurship, social work, education, counselling, gender studies, environmental science, tourism, corporate social responsibility, waste management, health, Gandhi and Peace studies, etc.

It was decided that the School of Study would be the academic home of all courses and programmes of Study. As on date there are twenty-one Schools

of Studies in IGNOU. A brief background about each School is given in Appendix 1.

Statutory Bodies for Academic Regulations

The University created Statutory academic bodies to deliberate, scrutinize and vet the courses and programmes of study. These are the School Board, the Academic Council and the Planning Board. They have representation from in-house faculty as well as from external teachers, media professionals and technical experts to provide their inputs during different phases of programme development.

For the first time, a University had a Planning Board which would give broad directions for the need and demand for launch of academic programmes based on strategic planning which included the Five-Year Plan and data analysis of admission trends, need assessment and workforce requirements.

The School Board has a number of external experts and resource persons to bring in a wide range of expertise and fresh ideas for the development and design of academic programmes. It approves the course structure, proposes orientation programmes, suggests names of course writers, examiners and moderators for different courses and reviews methodologies for preparation of educational materials. It also reviews the facilities for transaction of the practicum in such courses. School Councils are set up in order to encourage democratic participation, collective decision making, sharing of responsibility and generating accountability amongst all levels of teachers.

The Academic Council as the highest academic body finally approves all the courses and programmes and is responsible for, the maintenance of standards of learning, education, instruction, evaluation and examination within the University. The University has set up a Research Council that functions under the overall guidance of the Academic Council to manage and administer the research policy and programme.

Transition from Conventional to Distance Teaching: Orienting Teachers and Academics

For those who joined in the initial years, a brush with the readings of the works of eminent distance educators like Desmond Keegan, Borje

Holmberg, Greville Rumble, Otto Peters, Hillary Perraton, Tony Baits, Anthony Dodds, Fred Lockwood, Alan Tait was mandatory. This was a part of capacity building sessions in the initial years, conducted by resource persons from UKOU and International Extension College. For the newly initiated, the works of distance educators and practitioners, gave insights into the theories of distance education and how they directly affected the practice in the field. Of particular interest was Sir Walter Perry's inspiring account of UKOU as a Vice Chancellor which helped in imagining the contours of the 'difficult to conceptualize' Open University and its struggle in achieving its mission with remarkable success!

In the case of UKOU, the University decided to follow an "immersive" approach for the development of SLMs; a "hands-on" learning environment helped the faculty to "learn through" and develop the learning materials.' Teachers at IGNOU however, were to be trained for the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and competencies needed in writing the SLMs because it was felt that ODL systems require capacities that are unique to their operations and differ in content from the conventional universities. In this regard, the establishment of the Division of Distance Education (DDE) in IGNOU (1986) was a significant milestone, as it was expected to cater to the need for capacity building of current and prospective distance education functionaries within and outside the system. Prof. B N Koul (1998), the founding Director of the Division, recalls that Sir Walter Perry in his capacity as advisor to Vice Chancellor, IGNOU, tried to dissuade Prof. Reddy from setting up a dedicated Unit for Staff Training and Development at IGNOU. He was perhaps speaking from his own experience as VC, UKOU, which had followed a different trajectory. With the DDE, the University had come into its own and could now meet its current and continuous professional development needs in all areas of distance education. Once the University started offering programmes, it became evident that the academic staff would require a deep understanding of the pedagogy of and the operational aspects of the system, if they were to become effective 'distance teachers'.

In the initial phase, with financial assistance from ODA and UNESCO, resource persons were invited from the Institute of Educational Technology (IET), UKOU, BBC, and from International Extension College, UK. Between 1987 and 1991, workshops and orientation sessions were organized

on philosophy and pedagogies of distance education, characteristics of isolated learners, student support, developing scripts for audio and video programmes and also hands-on for multimedia content development. In 1988, inaugurating one such training in the basement of K-76, Hauz Khas, New Delhi, Dr Ram Reddy, in the presence of Dr. Janet Jenkins, of International Extension college, UK, and Dr. B. N Koul, Director, Division of Distance Education, expressed happiness that he had been successful in having them both as resource persons at IGNOU, something he had tried earlier as VC, Andhra Pradesh Open University, but was unsuccessful in doing so. His was a statement indicative of the faith he reposed in their ability to contribute to a University achieving its objectives. A few of the training programmes are mentioned below:

- A ten-day Orientation Programme in Distance Education and Course Preparation, 5th April to 25th April 1989;

- Workshop on "Audio Visual Presentation" with assistance of Overseas Development Academy of Great Britain, from 29th November to 4th December, 1989;

- Regional (South Asian) Training workshop on Course Development organized by Commonwealth of Learning from 3rd to 14th December 1990;

- Advanced Workshop on Course Development from 15th April to 10th May 1991;

- Workshop on "Assessment Across Disciplines" with assistance of Overseas Development Academy of Great Britain, from 16th to 25th September 1991 on Evaluation patterns and assessment;

- Workshop on "Script Development" with assistance of BBC, UK, from 16th to 27th March 1992 on Development of production scripts for educational video programmes;

Training sessions used to be interesting and always something to look forward to. Friends and colleagues, working from different locations in the city, would converge during these sessions. Duration of training or capacity building would be short or long combining, theoretical understanding with activities and 'hands on experience'. Teachers and academics from different Schools and Divisions, individually and in groups, would engage

in activities designed to enable development of self- learning materials: formulating objectives, writing for audio and video programmes, presenting the script in front of the camera, discussing the philosophy and underpinnings of distance education.

In the initial years, workshops with experts like Janet Jenkins, Eleanor Morris, David Seligman, Jack Koumi and others became a regular feature and they became a part of IGNOU fraternity. During and after training, suggested works of distance educators like Desmond Keegan, Borje Holmberg, Greville Rumble, Otto Peters, Hillary Perraton, Tony Baits, Anthony Dodds, Fred Lockwood, Alan Tait and others, helped to fill the gaps in theory and practice of distance education. Desmond Keegan's definition of distance education is still as pertinent and resounds while writing materials. Of particular interest was Sir Walter Perry's very interesting and inspiring account of the establishment of UKOU, which helped imagine and shape the contours of an Open University, its initial struggle and its journey to the pinnacles of success. Later the trained senior faculty played role of trainers for the teaching community joined University after 1991.

As is evident from the above discussions, ODL systems require capacities that are unique to their operations and differ in content from the conventional universities (Trinidade, Hermano & Bidarra, 2020).

The paucity of adequately trained and experienced teachers, well versed in teaching at a distance, was felt at the time of the inception of the University itself and soon in 1986 Division of Distance Education was established. It is interesting to note that the National Policy on Education, 1986, recommended that the University offer two diploma programmes in the beginning -in Distance Education and in Management.

Staff development plays a very important role in developing robust teaching-learning practices. Effective staff development engages with the needs of the faculty and helps them to improve their professional practice. In this sense, establishment of Division of Distance Education (1986) was significant; it was entrusted with the responsibility of developing a pool of competent distance educators for effectively operationalizing the expanding ODL system. With Division of Distance Education, the University had come into its own; it could now meet its current and continuous professional development needs in all areas of distance education. Koul in 1998 recalls

how Sir Walter Perry in his capacity as advisor to VC, IGNOU did not desire to have a dedicated Unit for Staff Development in IGNOU! And this was perhaps based on his own experience as VC, UKOU.

Capacity Building

The Division of Distance Education (DDE) was established in 1986 by the University and in October 1986, the first staff development programme was conducted by the DDE with assistance from the UNESCO. During 1919-92, the DDE provided support to the Schools of Studies of the University in the areas of Educational Technology, Staff Development, Programme Evaluation and preparation of courses for diploma and Master's programmes.

During the year 1991-92, a project report was prepared for establishment of National Institute of Distance Education as human resource development centre for the distance education system. The major objectives of the Institute were identification of training needs, development of suitable training strategies as well as materials, building up training resource base, organisation of staff development activities etc. The steps for establishment of the Institute were initiated in 1992-93 (IGNOU, Annual Report 1991-92, 1992, pp. 19-20).

In 1993, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), undertook a study of institutions engaged in training in Distance Education in member countries and after an evaluation of training work conducted by the DDE, declared IGNOU as a COL Centre of Excellence in Training in Distance Education in South Asia Region for five years. The COL also undertook the responsibility of strengthening of training activities of IGNOU by setting up of a regional centre. Following this, the DDE was upgraded to Staff Training and Research Institute in Distance Education (STRIDE) in 1993. The STRIDE was entrusted with the task of training not only the staff of IGNOU but the staff of all the Open Universities and Distance Education Institutes in India as well as the region, particularly South Asia (IGNOU, Annual Report 1994-95, 1995, p. 24).

With a view to capacity building for the system for knowledge generation, one of the first Diplomas to be offered by IGNOU was the Diploma in Distance Education in 1987. Instructional components consisted of printed

self- instructional materials, with supplementary audio-video programmes, TV broadcasts and optional weekend counselling sessions; of the first batch of 644 students, admitted in 1987, 217 were awarded Diplomas in 1989. The diploma was upgraded to a post graduate diploma in 1994 and now forms a part of the Masters programme in Distance Education, an example of a modular approach being followed by the University.

Apart from meeting the futuristic needs, learning materials and other artefacts created by STRIDE have helped to create a knowledge base in distance education. An interesting initiative by the Division of Distance Education taken in 1989 was Training of Trainers (ToT), a popular technique used for skilling of staff efficiently and with less costs. The idea was to create a cascade: impart skills and knowledge to a small group of senior teachers in the University, who would become trainers and subsequently, transfer the learning to others. In this way, staff would be trained exponentially and training could become self-sustaining over time. ToT was organized in 1989, with assistance from the ODA; training needs of full-time academic faculty, course writers, editors, script writers and academic counsellors were identified based on their perceptions. Many in-house workshops were conducted in subsequent years, with the help of teachers who had participated in the ToT.

Regular training programmes are conducted for faculty by the STRIDE in newer aspects of developing self-learning materials, assessment and evaluation strategies, curriculum design and development for diverse learner groups, Audio-Video production, and academic delivery and support methods. Specialized regular training is also provided to the media professional and teachers in methods of media selection and production and conduct of tele-conferencing methods.

Induction programmes meant for the newly inducted faculty focus on the philosophy of distance education, the vision and mission of the University and reflecting on their role, as faculty, in accomplishing its objectives. The training design is drawn before-hand and sessions are conducted by resource persons from Schools, Centres, Divisions of the University and STRIDE.

Orientation and Refresher Programmes are modelled after the Orientation and Refresher Programmes of Academic Staff College of the UGC. The

Orientation Programme is organized for a period of 10 days, in a face-to-face mode, in combination with self-learning packages. The Programme is designed to give an orientation about the distance learning system, its philosophy and practice. Refresher programmes are necessary for career promotion of teachers and academics in the University. STRIDE has conducted discipline-based refresher programmes for distance teachers in distance teaching in the disciplines of Science, Education, and History distance teaching, etc.

STRIDE plays an important role in offering 'on-site' support to in -house faculty engaged in programme development.

Evaluation is formative and feedback from the counsellors, learners, faculty, is an ongoing process starting from the time the Programme is offered. It is the mandate of STRIDE to undertake/conduct Programme Evaluation studies for feedback and revision.

Open and Flexible Learning in IGNOU

The University provides flexible opportunities for learning; it uses a variety of media including print, to overcome the separation of teacher and learner to deliver teaching-learning experiences, including theoretical and practical experiences. The following are some of the features of the flexible and open learning:

Flexibility in Admissions and Enrollment

The University's mandate could be fulfilled only if it 'threw open its doors' to all those aspiring to get higher education, in contrast to the rigid entry rules prescribed by the conventional system. This and many other strictures imposed by the conventional system required the University to create provisions for all those aspiring to access education.

On another plane, there were professionals and others who had completed their studies, and on the basis of their qualification, had a job but did not have the option of improving their qualifications because joining a university meant that they would have to give up their job. A few did not fulfil the eligibility criteria for getting admission into a programme/degree, in spite of having many years of work experience. With the result, many working as school teachers, secretarial staff, lower-level sales, marketing

and supervisory staff in private business, large number of retired armed forces personnel (who were retired in their 30's and 40's as per rules), and lower and medium level technical persons, were stuck in their grooves for years, with no chance of altering their professional status. The University was committed to providing such aspirants opportunities for up gradation of knowledge and technical and professional skills for their upward mobility and improved pay packages.

The University introduced openness and flexibility in its various programmes of study to meet the needs of the large group of learners outside the conventional system. The biggest initiative came in the form of allowing entry to school dropouts, adults of 21 years of age, to the Bachelor's Degree Programme without having to successfully complete the senior secondary school (10+2). The age of 21 was later brought down to 18 years. Such learners, desirous of seeking admission to the B. A/ B. Com Programmes, could do so after successfully completing a six-month Bachelor's Preparatory Programme (BPP). They would be then on par with those who would join the Programme with 10+2 qualifications. The Preparatory Programme was designed for developing readiness amongst learners for undertaking a 3 years degree programme. It proved to be a great success, with thousands of learners getting a second chance to improve their qualifications which had been missed due to various deprivations or compulsions. This programme had to be withdrawn after the notification of the UGC Regulations, 2017.

Another initiative was the relaxation of the eligibility criteria in the Business Management Programmes. At that time, due to the expansion of the economy, there was a big demand for management professionals but there were very few institutes offering professional programmes in the area. This also helped the large workforce, already employed, but lacking in formal qualifications to improve their professional prospects.

In the conventional system, a graduate degree and full-time attendance was necessary to complete further education in any professional area of management education. Those who were employed, and had a bachelor's degree were not in a position to leave their jobs and join a higher education programme. The University relaxed its entry qualifications for those with work experience, which meant that all graduates with 3 years' work

experience and non-graduates with six years' experience in a supervisory capacity in the industry and the corporate offices, could get admission into the management programmes. Desirous learners were to appear in an entrance test conducted at the national level, and if successful, would get admission. This provision benefitted many who were seeking a second chance to improve their qualifications. The University, through an entrance test and work experience ensured their suitability to the Programme. Continuous Assessment and evaluation of the learners during the course of their Programme, ensured that they were acquiring the knowledge and skills expected of them. A similar strategy was adopted to provide an opportunity to the personnel in technical areas who possessed a Diploma in Engineering and with work experience, could obtain a degree in Engineering, after going through the required duration of study and successfully completing it.

A large number of students aspiring for a Bachelor's in Computer Application (BCA) could not get admission in the formal system because studying Mathematics at the 10+2 level was a prerequisite for admission to the programme. The demand for Computer professionals was huge as the Indian economy was getting integrated with the global market around that time. The University facilitated their admission to the programme by prescribing additional Mathematics courses to fill in the gap, along with other courses. Besides helping a large number of learners to get admission, this measure also helped in creating a pool of trained technical experts in the area.

Statistics show that in India access to education beyond higher secondary schooling is a mere 10% amongst the university- age population and a huge disparity exists across socio-economic religious groups and geographical regions. In this scenario, different skill development programmes for enhancing employability and adding value were offered for those who had completed schooling (10+2). At the same time, for the ones without a 10+2, admission was given after completing the BPP. Many certificate programmes, considered relevant and useful for the society were offered to learners who didn't complete the formal school; the Certificate programmes in Food and Nutrition and Early Childhood Care figure in this category. Other programmes aimed at nurturing entrepreneurship for laboratory technicians, fashion technology, security services, renewable energy,

agriculture, motorcycle repair, power distribution utilities, IPR, Cyber law are offered with completion of secondary school.

An area where significant intervention was made is that of teacher education. With societal aspirations for quality education having gone up, the need for trained teachers was increasing manifold. The resources committed to teacher education have been shrinking over the years, there is a dearth of institutions offering teacher education. The Bachelor's in Education (B. Ed) and later, the Diploma in Elementary Education (D. EL. Ed) were offered for untrained in-service school teachers. Keeping in view their teaching experience and to focus on the knowledge and competencies required to improve their professional practice, the curriculum was so designed that they would continue to teach, except for attending the practicum for a short period. Three-year's teaching experience, and clearing the entrance test was required for admission to the B.Ed. Programme. The D.EL.Ed was offered to in-service teachers, sponsored by different State governments, who were expected to meet the provision of training all untrained in-service teachers under the Right to Education Act (2009).

Having discussed the above, it is to be mentioned that the University is cognizant that the entrance test is one of the ways of testing the learner's knowledge, especially in situations where her/his education is incomplete. At the same time, the test also acts as a filter to eliminate several learners, who may be from the disadvantaged sections, reinforcing social advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, there are a large number of certificate, diploma and degree programmes which do not require a test for entrance into the programme.

Flexible Pace of Learning

The students who join the University are very different from those joining the conventional system. These are working people who are not able to devote sufficient number of hours for study; some have family commitments and some maybe from the disadvantaged groups, with little exposure to education. A few can be all of these. Correspondence courses offered by the formal universities, placed the learners on par with the regular students, irrespective of their backgrounds. They were expected to complete the programmes in the same duration as full time students, leading to a high rate of attrition.

The University took note of this problem and offers flexible time to the learners to complete the programme. The instructional materials and assignments are designed at a pace that is convenient to them; a three years' degree programme can be completed in six years (initially this period was as long as eight years). Similarly, a two years Master's Degree Programme can be completed in four years; a one-year year diploma or a six-month certificate programme in three and two years respectively. Students can accumulate credits and once the desired number is earned within the specified time frame, they are awarded a degree. Further flexibility is offered in exams which are conducted twice a year; the learner can choose the suitable time for appearing in examination.

Flexible Learner Engagement with Assessment and Evaluation

The University allows flexibility to students enrolled in any course in submission of assignments. Rather than choosing a single deadline for an assignment, learners have the option of submitting them within the maximum duration of the Programme. This flexible time-frame allows students to plan their work around other life activities and responsibilities.

The learners have a choice in the submission of their assignments, projects, fieldwork journals, etc. They could turn them in, in the beginning of the session within the cutoff date for submission or if they are unable to do so in one academic year, they can ask for the assignments set for the subsequent year/s and submit them within the deadline suggested for that specific year. Similarly, they can take a term-end examination whenever they feel they are ready for it, within the stipulated maximum number of years required to complete the programme. Term-end examinations are held twice a year to provide additional opportunity to learners to decide when to take the test.

Flexibility in the Choice of Medium of Instruction

To make learning accessible to large numbers in a multilingual society, many of the University's certificates, diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are offered in Hindi and English. Programmes like the Certificate in Food and Nutrition are being offered in eight languages, including Hindi and English. Programmes in Agriculture, Law, Teaching of Primary School Mathematics, Laboratory Techniques, Tourism Studies

are offered in English and Hindi. Undergraduate programmes such as B. A / B.Sc. / B. Com are offered in Hindi and English; similarly, the Masters of Arts in Social Sciences, Social Work and Masters in Commerce are offered in English and Hindi.

As a national university, the academic offerings should be accessible to students coming from different linguistic backgrounds. Translating the materials is a huge task, for this, the University has devised a decentralized policy, whereby it is the responsibility of State Open Universities, Directorates of Correspondence Education and the State Governments to translate the teaching-learning materials for different programmes and offer them in mother tongue.

Modularity

Research on distance learners suggests that learner's motivation and engagement in long duration programmes is low, resulting in attrition. In a study of Open University learners in Assam, nearly 66% stated 'no time to study' as the reason for drop -out. Working students and the ones struggling with family responsibilities, reported higher incidence of non-completion and dropout. Learners who would complete a few courses only, were not able to earn any credits. In view of this, Programmes were so designed that the option of earning a certificate or a diploma after completion of a specified number of courses, without completing the entire programme, existed.

The first major Master's Degree Programme in this direction was the MBA Programme. Subsequently, the University has adopted the modular approach to curriculum implementation in many programmes, such as Computer Applications, Women and Gender Studies, Family Therapy and Counselling, Social Work, Adult Education, and Business Administration, offering a choice to learners to opt for the Diploma/Degree as per their needs and objectives. Modularity is ensured in two ways. Some Programmes give an exit option to students who can get a Diploma/PG Diploma after completion of a defined number of courses. For example, students enrolled in the Master of Computer Applications (MCA) can exit the Programme after completing the first two semesters and earn a PG Diploma in Computer Applications (PGDCA). Similarly, the students of the MBA programme will receive a

Diploma in a particular stream if they do not want to complete the entire programme. This flexibility in choosing a limited number of courses and earning credits helps the students in meeting their immediate professional requirements.

The other aspect of flexibility and openness is the choice extended to students who have completed a Diploma/PG Diploma Programme to gain lateral entry in a degree programme. For example, students completing the PG Diploma in International Business Operations (PGDIBO) can get admission in the second year of the Master of Commerce (M. Com) Programme. This arrangement helps the students in upgrading their knowledge/skill according to their requirement and convenience. Under this provision, the students with a PG Diploma in International Business Operations (PGDIO) or a PG Diploma in Distance Education (PGDDE), for instance, can join the M. Com or the Master of Arts (Distance Education) in the subsequent session. This saves time in applying and waiting for the finalization of admissions. There are currently 14 Programmes, mostly in the area of Business Administration, with the option of premature exit.

Credit- Based Instruction

Long before the introduction of multiple entry and exit as proposed under NEP-2020, IGNOU since inception has been following credit system as a method of openness to allow learners the provision of lateral entry and also the flexibility to exit from the system. In the ODL system a programme of study has fixed credit value. The basis for working out credit for ODL system was the input that a conventional learner is required to put in for study in terms of hours.

The University developed *"credit-based instructional design"* whereby each component of teaching and learning (including ICT) forms a part of the credit system". A credit is thirty hours of study time put in by the learner in going through the different components of the learning package.

Thus, a four-credit course involves 120 study hours and an eight-credit course involves 240 study hours. For earning the Bachelor of Arts for instance, the learner had to put in a total of 96 credits by completing its three major components, within a period of 3 to 6 years, depending on her/his convenience. The credit-wise structure was: a) Foundation Courses 24

credits b) Elective Courses 64 or 56 credits c) Application Oriented Courses 8 or 16 credits. The learners however could earn only up to 32 credits in a year.

A Certificate of six months duration comprised of 16 to 20 credits, a one-year Diploma has 28 to 36 credits, a two-year degree programme 60-68 credits and a three years' degree programme had 96-104 credits. 1 credit means 30 hours of study.

The University has created the SOP for the implementation of Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) at IGNOU and registered on the Academic Bank of Credits of UGC portal in order to implement the credit transfer policy.

The University has introduced the Course-wise Registration and Certification Scheme (CRCS), which allows students to enroll in as few as one course or as much as sixteen credits worth of courses.

Wider Choice of Courses

The University followed the 'cafeteria approach' by offering a platter of courses from different Programmes, giving the learners the freedom to choose what they want to study at a pace convenient to them.

The Bachelor's Degree Programme had subjects divided into "Foundation" "Elective "and "Application" Courses. The foundation courses are offered in 14 languages, elective could be chosen from a basket of more than 100 courses and skill oriented practical courses from a group of around 20 courses.

The Bachelor's Degree Programme was followed by the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) and provided an opportunity for the learners to choose courses from the prescribed courses comprising four categories Discipline Specific Core Courses (DSC), Discipline Specific Electives (DSE), Ability Enhancement Compulsory Courses (AECC), Generic Elective Courses (GE) and Skill Enhancement Courses (SEC)]

The University has now implemented Four year undergraduate programmes in line with the latest UGC Guidelines. By incorporating Ability Enhancement Courses in Environmental Studies and Languages, a basket of skill enhancement courses from various Schools of Studies along

with an Interdisciplinary course, Value Added courses, minor courses and Vocational courses. Students have the freedom to select their desired courses providing curriculum's interdisciplinary flexibility. Students in various fields such as sciences, computer sciences, psychology, library science, social work, sustainable development, counselling and family therapy, food and nutrition, anthropology, education, health sciences, nursing, information security, and more, are expected to actively participate in hands-on learning experiences to enhance their job prospects.

Widening Access: Differential Fee Structure

To make sure that no one is excluded from accessing education, because of the inability to pay the University fee, the University follows the policy of charging fees depending on the nature and employment potential of the programme. The high-end, job-oriented, professional programmes like the MBA and the B.Ed have higher fees as compared to programmes aimed at social purposes like a Certificate in Early Childhood Care or a Diploma in Elementary Education. The high-end programmes with higher fees, cross subsidize or support the programmes with lower fees. The fee structure of many 'high end' programmes, however, (Computer Applications, Journalism, Fashion Design, Dietetics, etc.) is much less than what is being charged by the private and the public providers. Apart from this, to mitigate economic hardship, the University offers a variety of scholarships in line with the policy of the Government of India.

Design, Development and Delivery of Self Learning Materials (SLMs)

IGNOU has come a long way in preparing educational materials that are at par with the best in the world. For teachers and academics, distance teaching was a major shift from teaching-learning in the traditional universities and its underlying assumptions. Here, the role of a teacher had to be reconfigured to that of being a facilitator, an effective instructional designer and a content and language expert. While most, as classroom teachers, devised their teaching, based on their understanding of their students and the feedback of student progress, they were now expected to engage with the complex task of designing and developing learning materials that embodied the tasks of a teacher.

Programmes of Study: Some Features

With the vision and the suitable structures in place to implement it, the University started its academic offerings in earnest, soon after its establishment, that is, from 1988 itself. In offering academic programmes, IGNOU maintained a fine balance between two seemingly contradictory strands in the philosophy of open learning: democratization of higher education which commits the University to offering more degree programmes at the Undergraduate and Postgraduate levels which are cost-effective, and on the other hand, need-based, livelihood- linked Certificate and Diploma programmes for relatively small learner groups, from economically, socially and geographically disadvantaged sections.

In its academic endeavours, the University decided to associate a large number of subject experts, teachers, academics, professionals and technology experts, known for their expertise, from universities and academic institutions spread all over the country. This association was solicited at all stages - course design, development, production and delivery of learning materials. In this way, the University had the most distinguished specialists in their respective fields. The second advantage of this association was that the University was able to produce high quality reading materials, based on their knowledge and work in the area. The third big advantage was that the credibility of the University, amongst its academic peers and learner groups went up because of a transparent and quality driven course development process.

For designing the curriculum of the programme of study, the University standardized certain parameters for programmes and courses

- Each programme of study was to lead to certification, after the due process.

- The programmes were offered in various categories and levels, that is, Certificate, Diploma and Undergraduate and Postgraduate Degrees.

- Each programme comprised a number of courses. Depending on the level, duration and nature of the programme, credits were allocated to each Programme.

Each theory course of a programme was to be divided into themes and sub-themes of the area of study. They were termed as Blocks and Units.

One unit of study material was assigned a standard length of around 5000 words on the basis of learner study hours. On the basis of these parameters, each course comprised a number of Blocks and each Block, a number of Units. Generally, 3 – 5 units were expected to be equivalent to one credit of course work, including all associated academic activities required to complete it. A course could comprise 2/4/6/8 credits. Depending on the needs of the programme, and the type of target group, minor adjustments in the above were permissible with the approval of the Statutory Bodies.

The learning package that a learner would eventually receive consisted of the following:

● Printed materials
● Programme Guide for navigating the Programme
● Student Handbook for the Practicum/Project Manual
● Synchronous and Asynchronous instructional resources
● Assignments

Instructional Design and Pedagogy

In designing instruction, IGNOU decided to follow the UKOU model of instructional design. According to Sir Walter Perry, this was the most advanced model, consisting of structured, high quality printed teaching units, supplemented by radio and TV programmes, and supported by a robust and comprehensive learner support system.

Course materials provided by IGNOU consist of specially developed printed self-learning materials which are at the core of the instructional package which is supported by radio and TV broadcasts, audio and video materials and interactive technologies like radio and teleconferencing. Face to face/online counselling is offered on weekends by part-time counsellors in Learner Support centres spread over the country. Besides counselling, workshops, field-based internships are also important features of some of the Programmes.

The pedagogy which gradually evolved at IGNOU is based on an understanding of the characteristics of a heterogeneous group of distant learners as adults. Effective strategies for assessment, feedback and contact with the teacher/counsellor, have been factored into for a two way communication.

Self- Learning Materials

Self-instructional materials used by learners in distance education are significant, because the SLMs, in the absence of a teacher, function as the only dependable source of information as well as a guide. For this reason, a lot of effort goes into their design. Designing a cover is an important activity involving the faculty, artists and the printers. Much time and effort goes into making a visually appealing cover as it is expected to affect learner's interest and motivation. Another purpose is that a well-designed cover conveys the theme or purpose in a distinctive manner. The typography and the font size are also chosen carefully.

A programme of study comprises courses, which may be compulsory and elective. An introduction gives the main ideas contained in the units. A Unit begins with an introduction to explain the purpose, rationale and learning outcomes. It reflects the concepts and principles which learners need to develop, learning activities and learning experiences that can help learners to achieve the desired learning outcomes. Content is presented systematically and sequentially in sections and subsections. To support learning and motivate the learner, Units are illustrated with concept maps, cartoons, pictures, charts, diagrams, maps, tables and figures. Features such as introduction, points to ponder, summary, glossary serve the purpose of helping the learners access, navigate and engage with the content. Self-check questions, exercises and activities are embedded in the text, giving adequate scope to the learners to check their progress and get feedback on their performance.

Print materials and assignments were dispatched to the learners from the Post Office. A post office, dedicated to sorting of materials, a gigantic task, and posting them different post offices, now operates from the Campus itself.

Practicum

The Schools of Social Sciences, Sciences, Education, Health Sciences, Computer and Information Sciences, Journalism, Engineering and Technology, etc. have practicum courses that are planned, supervised, and evaluated. The objective is to provide an opportunity to learners to apply the knowledge gained through theory and develop competencies, skills, and knowledge required for the professional experience.

The Practicum constitutes an integral part of many professional development programmes and is designed in different forms such as workshop, internship, field experience, clinical practicum, laboratory courses, school-based activities, extended contact programme, project reports, and so on. Depending on the programme, the structure and placement of the practicum differs within a programme and so does its duration and length.

In order to make the experience effective, a detailed plan of activities for learners to be done at different stages of the practicum is identified: pre, during and post practicum. Simultaneously detailed Manuals with learning outcomes, description of activities and assessment rubrics, explicit details about nature of learner engagement are prepared for the learners and the resource persons supervising/mentoring the practicum. The activities undertaken during the practicum are assessed as part of formative assessment.

Designing a Programme: Formal approvals

The process of instructional design is a systematic one and given the nature and scale of operations, starts much in advance. Although there are timelines associated with different phases. Commitment for funding and sustaining the programme is made once it is approved. All new academic programmes go through a standard process before they can be offered to potential learners. The School Board, the Planning Board and the Academic Council play a key role in ensuring that all new programmes meet the priorities and standards set by the University. Overall, the Academic Council is the principal statutory body responsible for approving academic programmes and maintaining standards.

Course Development Models

To ensure highest academic standards, there is specified process and principles for seeking approval for new courses. Through this rigorous process, the University seeks to ensure that its courses are academically sound, need-based and fit in within the overall purposes of the University. Over a period, different models of course development have been tried out.

Faculty-Led Course Team Model

Academic Programmes in the University are not designed or developed by an individual teacher, but it is the Course Team that is central to the

development of teaching-learning materials. Course Team is a group of people "*each with their own roles or responsibilities having the shared aim of producing a course on a given subject area*". Further, the significance of having a Course Team is reiterated in the Project Report itself which states, *'quite a few courses will be interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary in nature, therefore a coordinated effort by a well- knit course team is necessary'*.

The team comprises teachers from the School of Study/Studies offering the Programme and specialists from the University such as instructional designers, media experts, translators, graphic designers, editors. Each team member brings to the table her/his knowledge and ability for developing the Programme. This ensures an overall high quality of learning materials.

The process of course development involves the initiation of the concept note which is the beginning of process. A detailed Programme Structure is finalized in the Programme Expert Committee and is usually followed by course writers' meetings for each course. The audio-video programmes, assessment strategies and the process of organizing the practicum, if any are concretized. Apart from allocation of units to individual course-writers (including the in-house faculty), the timelines for completing the units are also drawn. Written units are received, and a round of formatting and editing is carried out by the course-coordinator herself. Subsequently the Units are followed by the content, language editors and instructional designers for content, format and its suitability for the distance learner. The final process is that of translation, printing and dispatch to the learner.

'Course Development from Below': A Participatory Approach

An alternative method, that of, adopting a participatory approach to the design and delivery of a capacity- building programme working in NGOs, can be described as a model of 'course development from below'. The project was the *Sahbhagi Vikas Niyojan*, (SAVINI) developed by the School of Social Sciences, with the help of NGOs, for development practitioners, working in rural and/or tribal areas in select states. Since most of them did not possess any formal qualifications, the eligibility criteria was a good command of Hindi or the local language; the ability to read and carry out simple arithmetical calculations. Six months of work experience in the sector was also included.

The method of an open, flexible and 'non-threatening' dialogue, perceiving the learners as 'active agents' working in the field, was adopted to construct the curriculum and subsequently to write the course materials and produce the videos. Reflective field diaries were used for recording observations. Video programmes made by the learners at different sites became a part of the instructional material. The role that the faculty assumed was that of an anthropologist 'listening, observing and reflecting.'

The programme managed to structure learning pathways, use innovative methods of assessment like public sessions, content generation, video production and programme revision. The programme was a success at a small scale, within that too there were problems of standardization of learning outcomes, content, etc. because of different contexts.

Workshop -Based Approach

Learning materials are also developed in a workshop setting especially for programmes that are of a collaborative nature or when considerations of time and costs are important. A team comprising instructional designers, course writers and editors, from within the collaborating institutes or outside, is mutually decided upon. Access to a library, internet, is assured and the course writers finalize the content and the format, after discussions and feedback from the editor and instructional designers.

At times, the only task taken up in a workshop is editing of materials as in the case of M.A. (Education) and M.Ed. programmes, whereas translations of the materials can take place in a subsequent workshop especially set up for the purpose.

For the Certificate in Guidance (CIG) offered by the School of Education, learning materials were developed in collaboration with the National Council of Educational Training and Research (NCERT), in several rounds of workshops organized in Delhi and Mysore, as many course writers came from these places. Similarly, B. Sc Physics Lab courses were developed in this mode.

Media Selection for Integration and Programme Delivery

Anticipating that technology was likely to play an intrinsic role in distance education, the University created a separate division for media production called the Communication Division, this was subsequently upgraded as

Electronic Media and Production Centre (EMPC). Its founding Director was Dr. A. W. Khan, a young and dynamic professional, who had worked with the national TV, Doordarshan and had a fairly good knowledge of media as a source and a tool for teaching. He later became the Vice-Chancellor of IGNOU for a brief period from 1998 to 2000.

As mentioned, media experts from the University are a part of the course team which develops an academic programme. Audio and Video programmes are developed jointly by the faculty and the producer together. Programmes are made in different formats: as a discussion, lecture, authentic locations, etc. These were meant to supplement the SLMs and enrich learning, motivate the learners and encourage active learning in peer groups. This was possible during the counselling sessions, with replay facilities. To ensure that learners have access to the Programmes, Study Centres were equipped with hardware like TV sets, VCR, Audio systems, dish antennas, by the University. For this purpose, Video and Audio Cassettes pertaining to different programmes were made available at the Study Centres. IGNOU was given a morning slot, convenient for office goers, to play the videos by *Doordarshan*, the national TV channel.

As has been the experience, designing a multi-media package and choosing the appropriate medium for teaching is not an easy task, the selection of the medium needs to be done judiciously in the learning process. To make things difficult, there were no readily available models to emulate either from the existing distance education institutes. Besides the costs, availability and access, characteristics of the medium, ease of use and maintenance played a role in the choice of the medium. With the passage of time, many factors became responsible for the low usage of the audio and video programmes at the study centres. Chief among them were the optional nature of counselling, preference for use of print materials, and the stand- alone nature of self-learning materials. Meanwhile, in May 1991 Government of India provided live telecast facility to IGNOU and gradually with the enhanced capacity of our satellites, IGNOU has been offered few channels to run the live as well as previously recorded programmes. More details on the technology enabled teaching-learning are presented in the subsequent chapter.

The University has digitized the Self Learning Materials (SLMs) of all the programmes and they are available to the learners through its *eGyankosh*

portal, and through IGNOU e-Content App in the Google Play store. COE has developed Mobile Application titled as "IGNOU E-Content" for viewing and downloading the digitized Self Learning Material (E-SLM) during 2021.

eGyanKosh is a National Digital Repository of IGNOU to store, index, preserve, distribute and share the digital learning resources developed by IGNOU faculty. Learning resources in *eGyanKosh* are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved by IGNOU, unless otherwise indicated. The contents on *eGyanKosh* are regularly updated with the new and revised course material. The *eGyanKosh* Portal is very popular among the learner community across the globe as is evident from the daily hits on the portal. The portal has a total user base of 14245301. Till date around 253,987,411 people have viewed the page.

Assessment

Assessment is an integral component of pedagogy and helps in teaching-learning process. Formative or continuous assessment is a compulsory part of all academic programmes offered by the University. Its purpose is to provide feedback to the distance learner who works in isolation and may not attend the optional counselling sessions. The communication helps the learners to progress towards realizing a learning goal by identifying their weaknesses and strengths. Formative assessment comprises self- check exercises embedded within the text; written assignments and experiential activities like workshop, project, thesis, internship, and other field-based activities, etc.

Assignments generally carry 25%-30% weightage towards the final grades. The Tutor Marked Assessments (TMAs) comprise a variety of questions such as essay type, short-answer type, objective, problem-solving exercises, etc. The in-house faculty coordinating the course prepares the assignments. These are hosted on the IGNOU website. There are schedules for submission of assignment for the learners and for evaluation of the same by the Counsellors. Students need to submit the assignments within the due date of submission and before the Term End Examination commences. There is however a low adherence to the deadlines by the learners and the counsellors.

Learner Support

Learner support is a three-tiered, decentralized system. The Regional Services Division (RSD), responsible for managing student support is located on the Campus in Delhi. RSD is connected with a network of Regional Centres (68), and Learner Support Centres (LSCs). Regional Centres coordinate, monitor and oversee provision of academic and administrative support to distance learners in LSCs within their respective jurisdiction. The next chapter deals in detail with IGNOU's Learner Support System.

Conclusion

IGNOU's journey from its inception to the present, is a that of fulfilment of promises, participation in national development projects, of forays into unconventional areas of knowledge dissemination, and creation of a body of knowledge which is referred to, not only by the students but also by teachers in the conventional system. The University has set standards in offering good learner-centric education which hitherto, was mired in society's perceptions shaped by Correspondence Education. This indeed is a matter of great satisfaction. The journey of delivering education at people's doorsteps has been rough and smooth, but it is important that we travelled!!

Experience of offering education for four decades in a challenging context, has some important learnings for future. There are issues for concern that need to be addressed so that The University can address concerns of the future by aligning itself to the roles and functions mandated by its Act.

Expectations from the Open Universities in the 21st Century are enormous. To deal with increasing complexities in a globalized world, Universities will have to foster 21st century competencies and skills- problem solving, critical thinking, ability to work together with diverse groups, effective communication and the ability to engage with ICTs. This is however not to suggest that these competencies have not been a part of the education process so far. IGNOU will have to brace for the challenge of developing pedagogies for the 21st century, while staying aligned to its commitment of providing inclusive and quality education for all.

IGNOU has to strive hard to establish its credentials due to the mindset

and perception of various stakeholders, students, parents, employees, educationists even policy makers.

IGNOU proved its credentials by ensuring its quality of education, primarily the print material. Experts from various fields of Academia are engaged for preparation of self-learning and self-instructional study material. This became a brand due to its quality and in-depth study and unique presentation with an inbuilt teacher. This was a new phenomenon in the history of Indian education system. Teachers, academics and all IGNOU fraternity took the responsibilities of preparing quality study material and Academics in Regional Centres took the responsibility to reach to the learners and in strengthening student support system through network of Regional Centres and Study Centres. The Regional Centres and Study Centres are the meeting points where learners interact with Academic Counsellors who come from the conventional system of education, thus creating a unique amalgamation of the distance learning system and the conventional one.

Appendix 1

IGNOU's Schools of Study:

1. **School of Humanities** was established in 1986 with the disciplines of Hindi, English and later added disciplines of Sanskrit and Urdu in 2018.

2. **School of Social Sciences** was established in 1986 with the disciplines of Economics, History, Library and Information Sciences, Sociology, Political Science and Public Administration. Anthropology and Psychology were added in 2010.

3. **School of Sciences** was established in 1986, with the disciplines of Chemistry, Life Sciences, Mathematics, Physics. Biochemistry, Geography, Geology and Statistics were added later.

4. **School of Management Studies** was established in 1986, to provide avenues for working personnel and professionals for acquiring management qualifications to upgrade their managerial skills, capabilities and orientation. The school was the first one to offer academic programme of the university. There are two disciplines in the school, Management and Commerce.

5. **School of Education** established in 1987, as mandated is to plan, develop and launch academic programmes in education as a field of knowledge and an area of professional practice. The School comprises four areas of studies: Education, Distance Education, Educational Technology and Adult Education.

6. **School of Continuing Education**, when conceptualized in 1986, started with programmes in two broad disciplinary areas: Rural Development and Women's Education. In the process of its growth, certain important areas of concern were identified and addressed through a number of programmes such as Rural Development, Child Development, Disability, Youth and Development Work, Nutrition, Food Safety and Dietetics.

7. **School of Engineering and Technology**, established in 1987, aims to provide quality education in different disciplines of engineering. The School has disciplines of Civil, Electrical, Mechanical and Architecture.

8. **School of Health Sciences** was established in 1991 with disciplines of "Nursing" & "Health Sciences" to materialize the mandates of IGNOU in Health sector. Since then SOHS has pioneered various programmes in the areas of Medicine, Surgery, Nursing, Dentistry, Allied Health Sciences, AYUSH etc. in collaboration with professional Councils, Ministries, governmental and non-governmental organisations of National & International repute.

9. **School of Computer and Information Sciences**, established on 18th February 1991 carved out from SOET, aims to provide high-quality education in computer and information science discipline.

10. **School of Agriculture** was established in January 2005, to address the need for education and knowledge management in agriculture for safe and sustainable resource utilization and nutritional food production. The School seeks to build the capacity of stakeholders in emerging issues in agriculture such as climate change and declining productivity through competency-based education and training. Academic and extension activities are undertaken with a mission to improve and sustain the productivity and quality of human life in rural areas.

11. **School of Law** was established in 2005. The School strives to ensure high-quality legal education and research through an innovative, multimedia learning package, with a focus on learning practical aspects of law, acquiring legal skills and scholarship.

12. **School of Journalism and New Media Studies**, established in 2007, undertakes wide-ranging multi-dimensional approach in the areas of journalism, media and communication related academic programmes, research and training.

13. **School of Gender and Development Studies**, established in 2007, aims at achieving gender justice and equity through developing and launching programmes in the areas of women's and gender studies as well as gender and development studies.

14. **School of Tourism and Hospitality Services Management**, established in 2007, has been offering programmes at various levels to meet the human resource requirements of tourism industry and also generate awareness on tourism.

15. **School of Interdisciplinary and Trans-disciplinary Studies** was established in 2007 with the aim of developing academic programmes and promoting research in areas of contemporary relevance which could not be captured within a single disciplinary framework and therefore merited an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary treatment.

16. **School of Social Work**, established in 2007, aims at providing quality education in the areas of social work, HIV/AIDS, counselling and family studies.

17. **School of Vocational Education and Training** was established in 2007. It aims at providing education and training for skill development to meet the vocational as well as technical requirements for economic development of the country. Research is another priority area for identifying societal and industrial needs.

18. **School of Extension and Development Studies**, established in 2007, aims at providing quality education and training in various aspects of extension and development, by offering programmes in the three thrust areas of the school viz.: Development Studies, Urban Studies and Extension Education.

19. **School of Foreign Languages**, established in 2007, was set up with the aim to promote communication across borders and countries. Presently, the School offers programmes in Arabic, French, Russian, German, Spanish, Japanese and Korean.

20. **School of Performing and Visual Arts, was** established in 2007, to create awareness about arts and aesthetic education and develop skills through research and academic programmes. The School strives to promote all forms of arts in higher education by providing knowledge and training in the potential areas of learning through Open and Distance Learning system with various activities-developments, training and research to unfold the aesthetic and creative potentialities of learners, enabling them to become professionals.

21. **School of Translation Studies and Training**, established in 2007 aims to offer academic and training programmes in the field of translation. The main academic thrust areas of school are Translation theory; Comparative Asian and Western traditions of translation; applied translation; translation and mass communication; translation and inter-cultural studies; and translation and linguistics. In addition, the School also organizes training programmes in different parts of India to train present and prospective translators.

CHAPTER 3:

REACHING THE UNREACHED

Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay and Neelam Chaudhary

In India, democratization of higher education is quite challenging due to a complex milieu characterized by multiple identities: social status (caste), gender (women), geographical location (rural, remote, slum), religion (minorities), region (North-East, tribal, economically and educationally backward) and disability. These groups have historically remained on the periphery of educational development even in free India. These comprise large numbers in absolute terms and there is a need now more than ever before to bring all marginalized groups, within the fold of higher education.

As such, 'inclusion' is not a new concept. Social inclusion has been deliberated in many debates around injustice and inequality prevalent in various societies. For integration of students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers, expressions such as special education, mainstreaming, integration and flexible education have evolved in a more value-oriented nomenclature of 'inclusive education' as it is 'responsive to diverse needs and circumstances of learners and gives appropriate weight to the abilities, skills and knowledge they bring to the teaching-learning process'. However, confining the domain of inclusiveness to the particular group of persons with disability is in our view not quite justified because disadvantage in any form limits the scope of growth and sustainable development of an individual. It is therefore important to create inclusive environment for all, irrespective of the nature of disadvantage.

Education is an important enabling factor for the people which facilitates economic development and human freedom. It is particularly significant for the economically and socially disadvantaged groups because it enables them to find jobs and resist injustice more effectively. According to Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, 'Literacy is an essential tool of self-defence in a society where social interactions include the written media. An illiterate person is significantly less equipped to defend herself in court, to obtain a bank

loan, to enforce her inheritance rights, to take advantage of new technology, to compete for secure employment, to get on the right bus, to take part in political activity – in short, to participate successfully in the modern economy and society' (Dreze & Sen, 2002, p. 143). Higher education further enhances confidence among the marginal groups. Education serves an important instrument of empowerment.

However, although higher education provides opportunities, it also creates areas of exclusion. At various stages of the development of higher education, different aspiring groups are left beyond its perimeters. The nature of the unreached varies at each stage and it is left to the policy-makers to devise new ways to include the hitherto unreached aspirants within the system of education. In India also, we witness that various governments in the independent period made strenuous efforts to extend the sphere of higher education to increasingly larger groups. The distance education system, for now at least, stands at the apex this endeavour. Its dire need was felt when it was realized that the conventional system of education, despite all its efforts to expand, could still not reach many sections of population with latent aspirations to get a chance to perform, to do well, or even to excel. Distance education was given the onerous task to provide opportunities in higher education to all those groups who, for various reasons, could not join the conventional formal system of education. It was a task which the distance education system, over the period, has been doing remarkably well. In India, distance education has been a cornerstone of educational strategy, and the IGNOU represents one of the highest achievements in this regard.

The project report of the Indira Gandhi National Open University prepared by the Educational Consultants of India Limited (EdCIL) in 1985 visualized that the University will witness a new experiment in the annals of higher education in the country. It is different from the conventional universities in several respects like objectives to be achieved, nature of tasks to be performed and spatial areas to be covered. Unlike the conventional universities, which have much narrow jurisdiction, often confined to a few districts in a State, the Open University's jurisdiction covers the entire Union of India. This apart, education has to be taken by the University to different parts of the country including remote rural areas and intractable hilly areas. All these need a new administrative organization which will

have to be different from the organization of the conventional universities. (IGNOU Project Report, p. 80)

Reaching the educationally marginalized stands at the core of distance education. Educationally marginalized can be defined as those groups who, for various reasons, currently remain outside the perimeters of formal education system. According to UNESCO, open and distance education democratizes the educational space by 'opening access to education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners' (Naidoo, Nhavoto, & Reddi, 2006, p. 7). The cost-effectiveness and shifting the focus from the teachers to the learners were additional important factors. By engendering the paradigm shift from teacher-centric to learner-centric education, the distance education system relies on the high level of motivation among the distance learners. Therefore, distance education has been more effectively used for tertiary education where the learners are relatively mature and can work on their own.

However, the motivations of learners enrolling for distance education may be different in advanced and developing countries. While in the former, generally employed and older persons enroll for distance education programmes, in the developing countries quite a large number of students may be those who just could not get enrolled in conventional system. Distance education occupied a larger space in the developing countries where the access to formal higher education is more limited for various reasons. It is no surprise that of the ten largest distance education universities in the world, nine are in the developing countries (Forest & Altbach, 2006, p. 2).

The university endeavours to reach out to a diverse range of learners from the urban, rural, and tribal areas. It has also made special efforts to cater to aspirants in backward regions. IGNOU has enrolled a fair number of students from socially backward categories. Besides, it has given opportunities for higher education to parents and homemakers, employers as well as employees from organized and unorganized sectors, personnel from Government and non-government sectors, jail inmates, the persons with disabilities, sex workers, and armed and paramilitary forces. For this purpose, the University has evolved an extensive nation-wide Student Support Network comprising of

Regional Centres and Learner Support Centres. It is through its deeply rooted Student Support Network that the IGNOU is able to reach out to aspirants of higher education in remote and backward regions of the country. This network makes available to the students a range of services, such as subject-specific academic counselling, listening/viewing of audio/video programmes, library facilities, teleconferencing, video conferencing, multimedia support, computer access, laboratory work and practical work. Special attention is given to women, socially and economically disadvantaged groups, jail inmates, minority communities, the North-East Region, tribal areas and low-literacy areas by establishing Special Study Centres in identified areas across the country**.**

Pan India Learning Support

The Student Support Services is one of the major sub systems that contribute towards the instructional system of the University. Emphasizing the importance of student support through study centres, the project report of the University outlined that one of the important features of the Open University system is making provision for contact programmes wherever necessary to enable the distant learners to meet the Faculty face-to-face to clarify their doubts. Such programmes are to organize in the Study Centres (EdCIL, 1985, p. 92). The Study Centres should compulsorily have a library and it should provide all the books which are recommended by the University for compulsory and optional reading. In the Study Centres, apart from regular and contact programmes to which attendance is optional, compulsory programmes should be organized, if the courses demand it (EdCIL, 1985, p. 93). Study Centres, as far as possible, should be located in the existing academic institutions like Colleges, Schools and Libraries. As the Study Centre would be open in the evenings and during holidays and vacations, it will not cause any inconvenience to the normal work of the institutions where they are located. Regional Centres may be established for a group of Study Centres. Initially, they may be organized, for a group of States and later, depending upon the demands of the work their number may be increased. These Regional Centres also, as far as possible, should be located within the existing institutions like universities and colleges (EdCIL, 1985, p. 94).

In the context of the student support through a network of Study Centres and Regional Centres as visualized in the project report of the University, the

Regional Services Division (RSD) was established in 1986 to operationalize the Regional Centres and Study Centres for providing Student Support Services to the learners of the University across the length and breadth of the country. The Regional Services Division at the headquarters oversees the administration of the student support system. This Division functions in close cooperation with the Schools of Studies, on the one hand, and the State Governments, Universities, other institutions of higher education etc. on the other, for organizing and strengthening the student support network. The Division also ensures the necessary infrastructural and manpower support to the Regional and Study Centres (IGNOU, Annual Report 1989-90, 1990, p. 48).

The responsibilities and functions assigned to the RSD are as follows:

- To negotiate with the Government Departments, educational institutions, other organizations including voluntary organizations for establishment of new Regional Centres and Study Centres, and strengthening the facilities at study centres;

- To assess the availability of physical facilities and academic expertise and arrange the delivery of all academic programmes launched by the University;

- To work out, in consultation with respective Schools, the required norms and procedures for appointment of counsellors and payment structure for conduct of counselling, etc.;

- To identify and appoint suitable resource persons for conduct of counselling and practical sessions, workshops, extended contact programmes, and evaluation of assignments;

- To organise orientation programmes for all counsellors as well as other part-time functionaries at the study centres;

- To organise induction and in-service training programmes for full-time staff of Regional Centres;

- To regulate funding and exercise expenditure control at Regional and Study Centres;

- To provide necessary furniture and equipment to Regional and Study Centres; and

- To coordinate various matters related to Student Support Services

between the Schools and Divisions at the Headquarters, in general; and Regional Centres and Study Centres, in particular. (IGNOU, Annual Report 2014-15, p. 40).

The Regional Access

The functioning of a group of study centres is coordinated and supervised by the Regional Centres. These Regional Centres are also entrusted with the responsibility of dissemination of information about programmes and courses of the University, organization of orientation and training programmes for coordinators of study centres and counsellors, monitoring the conduct of various academic programmes at the study centres, etc. (IGNOU, Annual Report 1989-90, p. 48). From 1990-91 in addition to the Regional Centres of the University were also assigned with the responsibility of new admissions to all the programmes offered by the University.

The network of Regional Centres was only two centres at the very start of functioning of the University in 1986. In the span of 35 years, the network evolved as a Pan India network with almost each State having at least one Regional Centre. In the year 1986, the University established two Regional Centres at Lucknow and Bhubaneswar. The year 1987 saw establishment of Regional Centres at Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Bangalore and Kota which was later shifted to Jaipur in 1990. The University established its first Regional Centres for the North East States in the year 1988 at Shillong and in the same year, new Regional Centres were established at Cochin, Kolkata and Chennai. The year 1989 witnessed two Regional Centres for northern India, the first being at Delhi which was later renamed as Delhi-1 and the second Regional Centre at Shimla. From 1990 to 1991, three more Regional Centres were added to the network of Regional Centres at Patna, Karnal and Pune. The second Regional Centre for the north east States was established at Guwahati in the year 1996. In 1997, second Regional Centre of the Delhi-NCR region was established at Ghaziabad which was later moved to Dehradun in the year 1999. In the year 1998, another Regional Centre was established in Delhi (Delhi-2) and the first Regional Centre of J&K was established at Jammu in the year 1998 and followed by at Srinagar in the year 1999.

The year 2000 witnessed another expansion in the network of the Regional Centres at Ranchi, Imphal, Itanagar, Aizawl, Gangtok and Kohima. Besides

establishing a new Regional Centre at Raipur in 2003, the University in the year 2004 developed another layer in support services network with the establishment of Sub Regional Centres (SRCs) under the respective Regional Centres. Accordingly, three Sub Regional Centres were established at Jabalpur, Madurai and Rajkot under the jurisdiction of the Regional Centres of Bhopal, Chennai and Ahmedabad. This was followed by establishment of new Sub Regional Centres at Darbhanga, Koraput and Siliguri. All these six Sub Regional Centres were to provide education to tribal and marginalized groups located in less developed areas. Later on, in the year 2005, the Sub Regional Centres at Koraput and Jabalpur were upgraded to the regular Regional Centres. In the year 2006, the University opened its Regional Centre at Port Blair in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (UT). Prior to establishment of this Regional Centre, the support services to the students at Andaman and Nicobar Islands (UT) was provided through Regional Centre Chennai. The year 2008 witnessed another expansion of the network of the Regional Centres with establishment of Regional Centres at Vijayawada, Jorhat (the 2nd Regional Centre in the State of Assam), Trivandrum, Noida, Mumbai and Chandigarh. Besides, many Sub-Regional Centres were also upgraded to Regional Centres in the year 2008 (Siliguri, Varanasi, Rajkot and Madurai). The year 2009 witnessed new Regional Centres at Nagpur and Raghunathganj and third Regional Centre for Delhi i.e. Delhi-3 in the year 2010. During the year 2010-11, new Regional Centres were further added to the network of the Regional Centre at Vatakara, Jodhpur, Bijapur, Bhagalpur, Saharsa, Deoghar. The Sub-Regional Centre at Darbhanga was upgraded to regular Regional Centre. In the year 2013, the University established four Sub-Regional Centres at Darjeeling (under RC Siliguri), Phoolbani (under RC Bhubaneswar), Tirupati (under RC Vijayawada), and Pithoragarh (under RC Dehradun) but later on all these Sub-Regional Centres were again merged back to their respective Regional Centres. Currently, no Sub-Regional Centre of the University is functional.

The network of Regional Centres which started in the year 1986 has now progressed towards a robust Pan India network of Regional Centres. In addition to the Regional Centres, the University through its IGNOU-ARMY Education Project (IAEP) and IGNOU-NAVY Education Project (INEP) and with ASSAM Rifles project operates additional eleven Recognised Regional Centres (RRCs). Out of twelve RRCs, seven RRCs

are under IAEP, four RRCs are under INEP and remaining one RRC is under ASSAM Rifles project. Presently, the University has network of 58 Regional Centres, 12 Recognised Regional Centres, over 2000 Learner Support Centres (LSCs) and 84 Recognised LSCs under IAEP, INEP and ASSAM Rifles.

Support Infrastructure

The structure of learner support devised in 1987, is decentralized in three tiers. The Division of Regional Services, (RSD) responsible for managing student support is located on the Maidan Garhi Campus in Delhi. Today, RSD is connected with a network of Regional Centres (67), and Learner Support Centres (LSCs), mostly set up in conventional institutions of higher learning and in other institutions/organizations, depending on the nature and requirement of the Programme. Regional Centres coordinate, monitor and oversee academic and administrative support to distance learners in LSCs in their respective jurisdiction. Presently there are more than 38,000 academic counsellors functioning in LSCs of IGNOU.

In 1995, Special Learner Support Centres (SLSCs) had been set up for the more vulnerable and disadvantaged groups SC, ST, women, the elderly, transgender, persons with disabilities, and persons living in rural and remote areas. Programmes for jail inmates are very popular since 2002 and are run in the jails (nearly 150, at present). The North East, a geographically remote and difficult area, is served by a network of nine Regional Centres and 205 LSCs.

Personalized institutional provisions such as counselling, two-way interaction by way of feedback to assignments, project work, workshops, lab work, video/audio conferencing, are implementable in Learner Support Centres. Learner support is also crucial for lowering attrition.

The special workshops, lab work, video/audio conferencing, are implementable in Learner Support Centres are geared to specifically address the problems of particular groups of the educationally underprivileged people. These centres are created as special resources which 'should possess the necessary infrastructure facilities and expertise to serve the given group and should be willing to collaborate with IGNOU for delivery of programmes to the disadvantaged by providing rent-free accommodation' (Toms & Reddy, 2018, p. 126).

Academic Counsellors are the main link between the learner and the University. Programmes are conceived and developed by the course team, but are transacted in face-to-face mode by Counsellors who are from conventional institutes of higher learning, industry, or specialized areas such as environment, law etc. Counsellor is the face of IGNOU, learners look up to her for their personal and academic problems. Academic Counsellors are appointed on the basis of their academic qualifications and teaching experience in the required area. Right from its inception, IGNOU has adopted the concept of Academic counselling which is a fusion of counselling (personal and individual needs) and tutoring (content related problems). Academic Counselling comprises of three components: Informing, Advising and Counselling.

Evaluating Tutor-marked assignment (TMAs) are important because they a part of formative assessment and carry 30 percent of total assessment weightage, the other 70 percent is assigned to the Term-End Examination. TMAs are an important tool to assess learners' progress and understanding and are based on the entire course material. TMA's can be in the form of essay type questions, short answer and multiple-choice questions. They are marked by Counsellors. Counsellors play a significant role in assessing the assignments. Their comments/feedback can motivate or demoralize the learner**.**

Technology Enabled Learner Support

A distance learner has unique set of attributes; despite being motivated s/he needs hand holding in the absence of teacher in conventional sense. Technology can play an important role in this endeavour. IGNOU has been sensitive towards providing academic and other support to its learners; some of these technology-based interventions are listed here:

● Launch of IGNOU App for the learners to access the course material on a smart phone.

● The website of the University has a 'Student Zone' where all the information pertaining to students such as admission, re-registration, result, status of Grade Card, new assignments, programme details, old question papers, etc. is available at one place.

● Students are updated on latest development through bulk SMS alter facility.

- An Information Brochure on IGNOU programmes has been developed in Sign Language for the benefit of students with hearing impairment.

- Every Regional Centre has its own website to cater regional needs of students and public.

- The contents of websites are frequently updated to provide updated information.

- 24x7 Educational Channel: *GyanDar*shan provides round the clock educational programmes on a variety of subjects.

- *e-GyanKosh* – a digital repository of the course materials (http:/egyankosh.ac.in).

- Dedicated portal for grievances redressal- *iGRAM*

- Facility to download identity card, hall tickets, grade cards, etc.

- Programme specific live interactive sessions are conducted via satellite through *GyanDarshan* Channel (GD-2) from the University studies at EMPC. These provide opportunity to interact with the subject experts through dedicated phone line and email. These are examined through DTH and are simultaneously available online.

- Interactive radio counselling through *GyanVani:* Live Interactive Counselling is provided on radio by invited experts. These are broadcasted through FM Channels across different cities and towns. The learners can interact live over phone.

- Digitization of its admission, re-registration and examination processes

- Internet audio counselling through *GyanDhara*: the learners can listen to the live discussions by the teachers and experts on the topic of the day and interact with them through telephone, e-mail and through chat mode.

Gender, poverty, social backwardness, region, and age may be said to be the main areas which impact the educational achievements. Besides these, distance education system can benefit those who are employed, or those who are forced to leave education under various circumstances, or those who simply cannot find a seat in conventional educational institutions for several reasons, or those who just want to continue their educational pursuit without the restrictions of a formal system. In the following sub-sections, we will

show how IGNOU's outreach to the educationally disadvantaged sections has widened over the years.

By opening its doors to all the aspirants in certain undergraduate courses, the IGNOU has truly created an opportunity for those without access to conventional higher education. The positive response by the students is reflected in the rapid increase in enrolment over the years. From an enrolment of 4,528 in 1987 the university has increased its enrolment to 838571 (fresh) in 2024-2025 This has been made possible through the offer of new programmes and courses as well as creating increasingly novel learning facilities for the students based on multi-media approach.

Adoption of 84 Villages for upliftment of rural communities as part of '*Unnat Bharat Abhiyan*'. Regional Centres have been entrusted the responsibility of creating awareness and skill enhancement through IGNOU programmes. Access to study materials and multi-media resources of the University in remote and tribal areas through its digital repository *e-Gyankosh*, IGNOU e-Content App, IGNOU YouTube videos, Audio/Video CD/DVD and other media like *GyanDarshan, GyanVani* and *GyanDarshan*.

Empowering Women

It is generally thought that women form one of the most important constituencies of distance education because attendance is not required and there is a lot of flexibility in the schedule of study. However, it has also been argued that it cannot be taken for granted that women would naturally register in distance education programmes. For example, Janet Jenkins argues that although distance education system is assumed to provide greater opportunities to female learners, 'there is no evidence that distance education is naturally attractive to women'. Thus, 'If distance education is intended as a means to improve opportunities for women, special measures may be necessary to encourage participation' (Jenkins, 2004, p. 49).

The IGNOU has given opportunities to all the aspiring women, in all ages and various situations ranging from housemaids to top management executives and from homemakers to social activists, to enhance their educational qualification in a flexible mode. Therefore, over a longer time-span, we see a higher rate of growth in women's enrolment than in total enrolment. Beginning with 30,512 in 1999, the enrolment of women in has reached

293,904 in 2019. The average growth rate has been quite impressive at 12.41 percent, and the women have increased their share in total enrolment from 25.26 percent in 1999 to 43.63 percent in 2019. Presently, 56.98% of the learners are women.

Catering to Urban/Rural/Tribal Population

If we divide the country into three sectors – urban, rural, and tribal – we find that IGNOU is making impressive progress in all the three. Such growth rates in rural and tribal areas are made possible by IGNOU's widespread learners' support network which ensures equal access of quality higher education. Remarkable strength of learners in rural and tribal areas expresses commitment of the University for Democratization of higher education. The University introduced mobile learning in remote rural/tribal areas having negligible density of higher education institutions. The university has been extensively utilizing the technology-based mobile learning in selected Regional Centres in rural, remote and hilly areas for i) digital Literacy Campaign ii) promotion and publicity of various academic programmes of IGNOU; iii) initiatives of the University for providing free education to SC/ST learners; and iv) other promotional schemes of the university, centre/state government for social welfare.

However, the growth rates in these sectors vary considerably. Thus, between 1999 and 2019, while the tribal India shows a remarkable growth rate of 28.24 percent (from 1,080 in 1999 to 16,325 in 2019), in rural India the growth rate is impressive at 14.36 percent (from 18,329 in 1999 to 2,53,856 in 2019 and 507144 in 2024-2025). The growth rate in urban India is comparatively much less at 6.47 percent, although the enrollment is the largest. Thus, in urban areas the number of students rose from 83,504 in 1999 to 331427 in 2024-2025. In 2024-2025 the percentage of SC, ST and OBC in the university accounts for 53.31%.

Reaching out to Learners from Socially Backward Categories

The University has taken several initiatives to improve participation of socially backward communities in higher education. Learners from SC/ST category are provided fee exemption/reimbursement in undergraduate and short-term (diploma and certificate) programmes. University introduced short-term vocational courses targeting academic/training needs of

marginalized segment of the society and established Special Learner Support Centres in areas highly populated with marginalized segments of population. Remarkable enrolment of learners from socially backward community reflects positive impacts of initiatives taken by the University for enhancing participation of socially backward categories in higher education. Thus, the enrolment of the Scheduled Caste students increased from 8,518 in 1999 to 96,835 which is an average growth rate of 13.77 percent. The average growth rate of Scheduled Tribes students has been even higher at 18.13 percent from 4,679 in 1999 to 62,129 in 2019. The students from the Other Backward Classes have also registered a high growth rate of 16.99 percent from 10,851 in 1999 to 117,584 in 2019; which has gone up to 284754 in 2024-2025.

Over the years, IGNOU has lived up to the country's expectations of providing education to the marginalised sections of society. The University has identified several educationally and economically backward areas and established Special Study Centres (SSCs). In order to enhance its reach, the University is reaching out to remote and rural areas. The University has contributed significantly to the higher education sector of the country by increasing equitable access to quality education through the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode. The Regional Centres in economically backward regions such as Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhatisgarh and the Andamans have been growing at a fast pace. In the IGNOU Regional Centre at Koraput (Odisha), the enrollment has increased from 7,363 in 2007-08 to 10,572 in 2017-18. In IGNOU Regional Centre at Raipur (Chhatisgarh), the enrolment has risen from 3,037 in 2003-04 to 5,673 in 2018-19. In IGNOU Regional Centre at Ranchi (Jharkhand), the number of students has shown a high increase from 12,770 in 2000-01 to 56,239 in 2018-19. In IGNOU Regional Centre at Patna (Bihar), the number of students rose from 5,117 in 1992-93 to 41,330 in 2018-19. In IGNOU Regional Centre at Port Blair (Andaman and Nicobar) also, there has been some increase in enrolment numbers from 1,768 in 2006-07 to 4,172 in 2018-19.

This shows that the IGNOU has been steadily increasing its presence in the backward regions of the country where the conventional system of education has relatively lesser presence. This will become even clearer by IGNOU's outreach to the Northeast as we will see in the following section.

Reaching North-East Region

IGNOU facilitates expansion of educational development in the North East Region (NER) of the country, which was relatively isolated from the main stream of development, by providing opportunities of higher education, training, skill development and other initiatives. MHRD granted Rs. 8.0 Crores, under the Prime Minister's non-lapsable funds to IGNOU for education at development of North-East in 2018. Special drive for NE Region was initiated in project mode named North East Project (NEP). This project was envisioned to enhance access and equalize educational opportunities in the NER. A unit named Educational Development of North East Region (EDNERU) was initially established under the North-East Project (NEP), later it became an integral component of Regional Service Division (RSD). IGNOU has made significant contribution for educational development of North-East Region through its network of 9 Regional Centres (RC) and 532 LSCs spread across 8 states in the NER, out of which 40 are special LSCs established for inclusiveness of marginalized segment of society.

The University constituted 'North-East Council for IGNOU Regional Centres' (NECIRC) to give focused attention to the development of the North-East Region, with mandated to evolve strategies for overall educational development of the north-eastern region. It comprises of nine Regional Centres situated in the North East Region of the country. A nodal office for NECIRC has been created at RC Shillong.

In North-East Region, the first Regional Centre by IGNOU was established in Shillong in 1988 with the responsibility for the entire Northeast region. After about a decade, the Guwahati Regional Centre was established in 1996-97. In 2001-02, the RCs at Itanagar, Imphal, Aizawl, Kohima, Gangtok and Agartala and in 2013-14 the RC at Jorhat was established. At present there are 205 LSCs functioning under 9 Regional centres in the North East.

Learning while Serving

Providing access to the employed is a universal characteristic of the distance education system the world over. In the developed countries, the share of the employed persons in total enrolment is significantly higher, but even in the developing countries they represent an important sector of distance education enrolment. IGNOU is also a significant destination for the employed persons

who cannot normally pursue their desire for upgrading their qualification and skills through the conventional system. The enrolment of the employed persons was 30,293 in 1999 and it has grown steadily over the years at the rate of 6.35 percent. In 2019, their enrolment stands at 106,070. In 2024-25 the number of employed persons is 150150.

It is calculated in the NSS 71ˢᵗ round sample [2014] that persons belonging to age group 18-22 represent 75.4 percent of attendees in higher education while those in 23-29-years bracket were 20.2 percent. It is clear that for the conventional higher education 18 to 22 years is the prime age, and beyond that the likelihood of admission in the system fell drastically. In IGNOU, the average age of the learners is about 25-26 years which shows that a significant portion of its students join their quest of higher qualification in a more mature age. However, for the undergraduate degree programme, it is just a little above 24 years which shows that the overcrowding in public universities and colleges and very high fees in private institutions are making it difficult for the eligible candidates to get admissions in conventional system. Moreover, the flexibility inherent in the open system is attractive to students wanting to pursue more than one course at a time. More mature persons are enrolling in programmes which can provide them higher qualifications than the basic degree. Many of IGNOU's students are senior citizens and some of them are quite advanced in age in their 70's and 80's.

In 2015, the average age of IGNOU's students was 26.59 years, in which the average age of the male students was 26.68 percent while that of female students was 26.50 years. In 2019, the average age of IGNOU's students has shown a slight decline to 25.43 years, 25.62 for male students and 25.24 for female students. The reason for this may be the pressure on conventional system resulting in the movement of students towards distance education system. The students find the openness of distance education system more conducive compared to the relatively restrictive nature of conventional education system.

Reaching Defence and Security Forces Personnel

IGNOU offer education opportunities for defence and para-military forces to improve chance of their employment after superannuation from defence. IGNOU runs special drive for offering admission opportunity for Defence

personnel for Army under Gyandeep, Navy under Sagardeep, Air Force under Akashdeep and Assam Riffles.

IGNOU's efforts for in-service education/training and civil degree are popular among defence personnel, resulting in significant enrollment under this initiative. The enrolment has shown an increase from 4,012 students in 2007-08 to 7,017 students in 2018-19.

Disabled Friendly Learning

The National Centre for Differently Abled (NCDA) was set up by the University under 10th plan and it started functioning from November 2006. The centre was mandated to provide educational, vocational and awareness programmes for differently abled and develop appropriate information and communication technology and software for education and training in the area of disability (IGNOU, Annual Report 2006-07, 2007, p. 45). The University institutionalised this centre as National Centre for Disability Studies (NCDS) in the year 2009-10. An MoU was signed between IGNOU and Rehabilitation Council of India, on 21st September, 2000 for making joint efforts in developing, implementing and promoting extension, training and education programmes for the empowerment of people with disabilities .and the centre in collaboration with Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) launched BED (Special Education), Foundation Course for In-Service Teachers and a Foundation Course on Education of Children with Disability for In-Service teachers in the same year itself. (IGNOU, Annual Report 2009-10, 2010, p. 30).

The NCDS is the nodal educational centre of IGNOU for persons with disabilities and has a bigger role to play for ensuring mainstreaming and equal participation of persons with disabilities in the society. The objectives of the NCDS are:

- To develop innovative approaches and policies for education, training and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities;

- To conduct research and development activities for educational and vocational development of persons with disabilities;

- To collaborate and co-ordinate with national as well as international agencies/organizations/institutions and concerned departments of

> Central and State Governments for support in implementation of their plans and schemes related to persons with disabilities;

- To identify and develop innovative academic activities as may be useful for implementing the provisions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016;

- To develop a network of academics and professionals to work in close agreement of cohesive environment of overall development of persons with disabilities. (Accessed from http://ignou.ac.in/ignou/aboutignou/icc/ncds/introduction)

Over the years, IGNOU has lived up to the country's expectations of providing education to marginalized sections of society. One of noticeable marginalized section is Persons with Disabilities (PWD). Conventional system completely ignored PWD and failed to adopt learning challenges of PWD in its teaching-learning processing. The university has brought appropriate changes in instruction resources and teaching-learning process to make the delivery disabled friendly education.

Prison Inmates

IGNOU plays an important role in the life of prison inmates in getting them rehabilitated after imprisonment and helping them become integral players in development of nation. IGNOU established special learner support centres (LSC) in premises of jails throughout the country. The university also offers fee exemptions to jail inmates to encourage their participation in higher education. There are about 146 jails with IGNOU's study centres offering various courses (Toms & Reddy, 2018, p. 128). Between 2007 and 2012, the total number of jail inmates admitted was only 7,772. Later, due to efforts made by the university the number rose. In 2013, there were 11,251 inmates admitted, in 2014, 11,224, and in 2015 10,822 (Chaudhury, Khare, Gupta, & Garg, 2015, p. 53). The university enrolled 15,742 jail inmates in 2019 through its special study centres within jail premises. As of 2024-25 IGNOU has established LSCs in 181 jails in the country.

Student Service Centre

The Student Service Centre (SSC), located at IGNOU headquarters, is an interface between the learner and University. SSC strives to provide the right information at right time, to facilitate and provide support services

for the divergent learner population, to redress grievances at every stage in coordination with various functions, units and Schools of Studies and thus tries to bridge the gap between the organization and the learner. Queries and grievances are received at SSC through various modes, namely, by fax and post, in person, e-mails/ SMS, WhatsApp, telephone calls, live on radio and television and on-line Portals. SSC handles the Public Grievance Portal, the UGC Online Student Grievance Portal, the RTI-MIS Portal, National Scholarship Portal, e-district Portal, INGRAM, IGRAM and Delhi Government Public Grievance Monitoring System. The University has been handling the students' grievances with utmost priority. The prime channels utilised by students are face-to-face, telephone, e-mail, RTI MIS Grievance Portal and iGRAM.

SSC regularly organizes trainings and workshops for capacity building of staff so that they are able to provide efficient and effective support services to learners. In-house workshop series is a regular feature for capacity building of SSC staff.

The University has put in place student enquiry and information systems at all levels to cater to the information needs of the prospective as well as enrolled students. At the Headquarters, there is a dedicated - Student Service Centre (SSC) which is equipped to handle student queries received through different modes – email, phone and letters as well as in person. In addition, the Operational Divisions - Student Registration Division(SRD), Student Evaluation Division (SED) and Material Production and Distribution Division (MPDD) have dedicated staff and telephone lines for handling student queries.

There is a Student Information Desk at each of the Regional Centres. The phone numbers and emails of Regional Centres are published on the website as well as in the Prospectus. The university regularly organizes staff development programmes so that students 'queries are responded efficiently. The university also ensure strict compliance of academic calendars and taken a number of initiatives for timely delivery of study materials and other supports to students.

Campus Placement Cell

The Campus Placement Cell (CPC) was established in the year 2005 as a nodal centre for all placement related activities so as to facilitate the

process of gainful employment for our learner population. One of the main objectives of the Cell is to provide meaningful employment opportunities for the learners matching with their personal and academic profiles. The CPC works on the premise the right candidate meets the right recruiter.

The Campus Placement Cell conducted four placement drives in collaboration with many employing organizations. It has conducted training programmes for enhancing employability of the students.

The Cell conducts on-campus and off-campus placement, and employability enhancement activities at the Headquarters, Regional Centres, and Study Centres**.**

Cross Border Reach

In the year 1995, the policymakers of the University visualized about the international operations to cater to the educational needs of Indian Diaspora who have migrated for employment or various reasons. Accordingly, the Board of Management (BoM) at its 43rd Meeting desired to constitute a committee to advise the Vice Chancellor on operationalizing the International Operations. An Advisory committee was constituted for operationalising the International role of the University and the report of the committee was placed in the BoM at its 50th Meeting held on 28.3.97. The BoM approved the proposal of delivery of IGNOU Programmes through Partner Institutions in foreign countries.

Further, to coordinate the delivery of IGNOU programmes to the international students, the University established an international cell in the year 1997 and it was upgraded to International Division in 2002. The International Division looks after international operations of the University. Its mandate is to promote bilateral and multilateral collaborations, network with international educational institutions, / inter-governmental agencies, to serve as a single window system for the University's overseas operation and to provide capacity-building through trainings for overseas institutions on demand. Identifying Overseas Study Centres (OSCs), extending learner support services for international learners through OSCs, providing capacity building training for academic counsellors in the OSCs and extending technical support etc. are also within the mandate of the International Division.

For the delivery of IGNOU programmes to international students, the MoUs with various Partner Institutions were signed for offering IGNOU's Programmes. The MoUs were signed as per the provisions of Sub Section (1) (vii) of Section 5 of IGNOU Act 1985 (No.50 of 1985) which states that University shall have the powers "to co-operate with, and seek the co-operation of other universities and institutions of higher learning, professional bodies and organisations for such purposes as the University considers necessary". At present, the University has a presence in 70 countries through academic engagements and in 57 countries through MoAs. IGNOU enrolled 2625 students during the July 2024 and January 2025 admission cycles through its 25 Overseas Study Centres in 15 countries across the globe.

Distance education in India, as elsewhere the world, arose as correspondence education within the conventional system. Soon, however, it was realized that the distance education system could be given an independent position in higher education. The huge success of the UK Open University (UKOU) clearly showed that distance and open education could form a parallel stream which could provide quality education with the flexibility and affordability associated with distance education. In India, the establishment of IGNOU quickly proved that an affordable and flexible education system can coexist with high quality. IGNOU's elaborate network of countrywide student support system made it possible to disseminate study materials of high quality in a multimedia mode. The enormous success of IGNOU established the prestige of distance education system in India as an alternative and viable mode of higher education. On its own, the IGNOU has done tremendously well as the largest university in the world with wide representation of all those sections in the population who remain outside the boundaries of conventional education either by choice or compulsion.

CHAPTER 4

MULTIMODAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Purnendu Tripathi

Higher education has witnessed a major paradigm shift, especially with the ODL system of delivery of academic programmes. The technology enabled learning is taking big leap over traditional modes in the environment of situated learning. There is a major shift in the learning behaviour and learning styles which forces the teaching communities to migrate to newer platforms of academic deliveries breaking the barriers of formal/traditional systems. Be it academic counselling or print-based content provisions or heterogeneity within homogenous environments, the digital learning effectively addresses more or less all components of pedagogy.

The decision to use media, other than print, was intended to enhance the effectiveness of teaching-learning and for reaching a wider group of learners in remote rural, tribal and isolated areas. Audio and video cassette-based programmes were produced since 1987, by the erstwhile Communications Division of IGNOU to supplement self-learning printed materials. The erstwhile Communications Division was upgraded to Electronic Media Production Centre (EMPC) in 1996 (established with grant/support received from JICA). The EMPC has state-of-the-art production and transmission facilities including two studios with multi-camera set-ups of 216 sq. meters and 196 sq. metres respectively (Gokhale, 2011).

The Electronic Media Production Centre (EMPC) at IGNOU emerged as a major hub in the region in the use of electronic media in distance education housed in the Sanchar Kendra Complex, Maidan Garhi, New Delhi. It serves as a nodal resources centre in production, dissemination and transmission of educational software in the country utilizing a wide range of communication media. The facilities were shared with various educational and training institutions, State Open Universities, Central and State Government Ministers/ Departments, NGOs, Corporate bodies and other sectors. The major activities undertaken by the centre are the production and dissemination of educational

audio video programmes. Curriculum- based audio-video programmes are developed to supplement the courseware of IGNOU by highly trained and skilled in- house staff. In addition, freelance filmmakers had been empanelled and suitable programmes are also sourced from agencies such as UKOU, BBC, Transtel DWTV, RCI etc. Both broadcast and non-broadcast modes of delivery are adopted by IGNOU. The Cassettes/CDs are sent to RCs/SCs and also sold at reasonable rates through the Marketing Unit of EMPC.

Educational Broadcasts

The project report of the University envisioned that in the years to come, the demand for radio and television time for educational purpose will increase. Not only the National Open University and the State Open Universities will use their media but also the formal institutions of higher learning as well as the schools would be asking for time. If education is to be strengthened at all levels and its quality to be improved, separate channels on television and radio will have to be provided. (EdCIL, 1985, p. 96).

The National Open University proposes to have its own studios and infrastructure for planning of programmes. The University studios will produce programmes for radio as well as television broadcasting. In other words, while the programmes will be planned, designed and produced by the Open University itself, the AIR and *Doordarshan* will take responsibility for their transmission on agreed timings throughout the day. (EdCIL, 1985, p. 97).

It is in the light of the vision of the University having its own state of the art educational media centre, the Communication Division was established by the University in the year 1986. By 20th May 1991, the National Network of *Doordarshan* started telecast of IGNOU's programme for 30 minutes and it was followed by the radio broadcasting when All India Radio started Broadcasting of IGNOU programme from Bombay and Hyderabad in January 1992. The post production centre of the Communication Division was inaugurated on 24th February 1992 by Shri Pranab Mukherji, the then Dy. Chairperson, Planning Commission. This development was followed setting up of Video Production of the Communication Division which was inaugurated by Shri K C Pant, the then Chairman of Finance Commission on 1st March 1993. Now it was time for Communication Building and Studio of the University for which foundation stone was laid by Dr Manmohan Singh, the he Finance Minister on 8th April 1994.

Besides radio and television broadcasting, another milestone achieved by the Communication Division in July 1994 when IGNOU-ISRO project for establishing a one-way video, two-way audio tele-conferencing network and the establishment of audio-tele-conferencing facility connecting all Regional Centres and three State Open Universities with IGNOU headquarters was operationalised.

Recognition of Communication Division for its critical role in the context of future of distance education in the country, and its potential for the region had resulted in the project "Improvement of Educational Media Facilities at IGNOU" (1994-95), which envisaged the establishment of "Sanchar Kendra" at Maidan Garhi campus. The project was entirely funded by the Government of Japan (JICA) under its Grants-in-Aid programme and the first phase cost of the project was Rs. 48 Crore (IGNOU, Annual Report 1994-95, 1995, p. 27).

The newly constructed Sanchar Kendra was completed and commissioned in 1995-96 at Maidan Garhi campus of the University with a Japanese grant of Rs. 68 Crores. The Sanchar Kendra had initially two video studios and two audio studios equipped with sophisticated modern facilities. The commissioning of Sanchar Kendra led to a comprehensive review of the role, responsibility and directions of development of electronic media in the growth of open learning system in the country in general, and IGNOU in particular. (IGNOU, Annual Report 1995-96, 1996, pp. 28-29).

By February 1995, one-way Video and two ways audio tele-conferencing commenced through Training and Development Channel. In March 1996, the Communication Division of the University was renamed as the Electronic Media Production Centre (EMPC). The newly constructed Sanchar Kendra of the University was inaugurated on 8th January 1997 by the Prime Minister of India, Shri H.D. Devegowda. By 1999, fifteen minutes educational news capsule entitled "Darpan" started transmission on daily basis on *Doordarshan* News Channel.

Another significant development under EMPC came in the year 2000, when Prof. Murli Manohar Joshi, Minister of Human Resources Development, Government of India, launched the national educational channel 'Gyan Darshan'. The test transmission of Gyan Darshan had already started from 10th January 2000.

During 2000-01, the EMPC was identified as nodal agency for implementation of Gyan Vani project which is an educational FM radio network operating through FM stations from different places in the country. Interactive Radio Counselling was initiated and broadcast was made for one hour from 184 radio stations every Sunday including two Sundays every month on the national hook-up. Toll-free telephone facility was made available from 38 cities from February 2001 enabling the learners to interact freely with experts and seek clarifications on the telephone. (IGNOU, Annual Report 2000-01, 2001, p. 11).

On 28th December 2010, the University signed an agreement with Mitsubishi Corporation of Japan for the project for strengthening EMPC in IGNOU and on 11thOctober 2012 amendment to the Grant Agreement with JICA Japan for third Japanese Grant for the project "Strengthening of Electronic Media Production Centre in Indira Gandhi National Open University" with an outlay of 787 million yen was operationalised. In 2016, EMPC introduced *GyanDhara* is an internet based interactive audio counselling/web radio service and by 2018 through a MoU with *Prasar Bharti*, Broadcasting Corporation of India, Gyan Vani was placed on DD free dish platform of the *Doordarshan*.

In its journey of over 30 years, the EMPC has produced a cumulative total of 5018 video programmes and 3180 audio programmes so far (AR 2018-19, pg 11). The GyanDarshan-1 (GD-1), India's first Educational TV channel which was launched 20 years back, now have programmes pooled from CIET-NCERT, NIOS, Rastriya Sanskrit Sansthan, CEC-UGC, DST, Directorate of Adult Education, National Literacy Mission (NLM), NITTTRs and Ministries of Government of India. Besides, another channel i.e. Gyan Darshan-2 (GD-2) is utilized for building interactivity in ODL through one way video and two way audio teleconferencing facilities (IGNOU, 2019, p. 11).

Radio and Television

Television broadcasting started in May 1991 through the national network of *Doordarshan* on every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 6.30 a.m. to 7.00 a.m.; this was subsequently increased to five days a week. The AIR (All India Radio) stations of Mumbai and Hyderabad started radio broadcasting in January 1992 (though AIR, Shillong which had started such a broadcast dropped out later). A television programme "open channel" was initiated

to answer queries of the student viewers, and bring Open University programmes closer to the public. The starting of the TDCC (training and development communication channel) for telecast on analogous transmission was a landmark in the history of distance educational media, and this initiative culminated in many subsequent developments described later in this section. The EMPC, housed in the *'Sanchar Kendra'* on the campus, has a wide range of media production facilities including two video studios (described above), two audio studios, five single-step editing suites, four A/B roll editing suites, three audio editing suites, three pre-view rooms, post production facilities, tele cine, duplication, tape library, graphic workstation, scene store and workshop. Betacam-SP format is used for both production and post-production of programmes. Digital facilities with digital audiotape (DAT) are available in the audio studios to produce sound qualities comparable to compact disc and conform to the latest trends in high-end audio production and broadcasting. The EMPC provides facilities to schools of studies and other divisions of IGNOU, other open universities and distance education institutions, other higher education institutions, NGOs, government departments and industry for production, post-production, teleconferencing (as also audio-conferencing, which is dormant now), training and consultancy, research and academic programmes delivery.

Interactive Radio Counselling

IGNOU got into Interactive Radio Counselling (IRC) in May 1998 as an experimental programme for one year conducted at the Bhopal AIR. IRC intended to bridge the gap between the institution and the learners through instant response to their queries, as also provide interactive academic counselling on subject areas. The lecture presentation is made at concerned radio station as well as the audio studio of IGNOU; the students at their home or workplace can listen to the presentation, ask questions through a toll-free number in their phone; and both the presenter and the students from all over the country can listen to each other. In March 1999, IRC was extended to 8 other AIRs (Lucknow, Patna, Jaipur, Shimla, Rohtak, Jalandhar, Delhi and Jammu). Today, 184 radio stations across the country broadcast programmes for one hour every Sunday (4.00 to 5.00 p.m. (Mishra & Khan, 2010); students from 80 cities can avail the toll-free telephone facility. The AIR slots time, the EMPC coordinates the

activities, and the Regional Services Division (RSD) of IGNOU handles the interactive counselling. During the first and third Sundays of the month, AIR stations of Delhi (in Hindi) and Kolkata (in English) broadcast IRC programmes from the national hook up, which 186 radio stations relay either of them. On the fourth Sunday, the programmes are slotted for the state open universities and are broadcast from the AIR stations of Ahmedabad, Bhopal, Bangalore, Patna, Jaipur, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Mumbai. IRC was designed to focus on interactive counselling on subject areas, though the highest number of questions received from learners were found to be more managerial and logistical. However, as was evident in the last few years, the (toll free) radio phone-in counselling had reduced student queries generally raised f2f at study centres and regional centres, and provided encouragement to students to progress on their courses.

IGNOU offers one hour of live phone – in counselling programme weekly through the National Network of AIR and GyanVani stations where studio invited experts clarify students' queries put across to them from their home via telephone. This value-added service is presently being offered through nearly 188 All India Radio stations every Sunday from 4-5 p.m. and toll free conferencing facility is available to the learners in 80 cities to interact freely with the experts. The interactive radio counselling (IRC) session on GyanVani Delhi are held from 5 to 6 p.m. on every Sunday (various topics) and Tuesday (topics related to IGNOU programmes). Other *GyanVani* Stations offers this facility at least one hour per week at the convenience of the students.

Teleconferencing

IGNOU conducted the first 10-day teleconferencing experiment for distance education in October 1993 through extended C-Band and satellite uplink support provided by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) with the help of a TRACT (transportable remote area communication terminal, a mobile uplink facility), in which the potentiality of non-print media components came to fore front of programme design and delivery, and the issue of interactivity came to sharp focus. The teleconferencing experiment was based on the preceding two-way audio-conferencing system established at IGNOU in 1993, and which was supported by the Commonwealth of Learning (this though has been dormant now). The audio-conferencing system was improvised with one-way video and two-way

audio teleconferencing system. The teleconferencing system connected the IGNOU headquarters, IGNOU regional centres and state open universities, and enabled all the participating nodes to communicate in a conferencing mode through the two-way audio links and communication through STD lines. The experiment involved 10sites, i.e. regional centres of IGNOU, and the respective regional directors, assistant regional directors and academic counsellors with the objective of gaining insights into the technical feasibility, organisation and managerial aspects, academic aspects and the cost of operationalising the system on a regular basis.

During the experiment, the system permitted interactivity, though the operation was not smooth. There were administrative and technical problems; STD was not always available and the students sometimes did not get change to avail of this opportunity; and the design of the teleconferencing was in question. All kinds of academic programmes were fed into it, the prominent were the undergraduate degree programmes for which there was not much response from the receiving ends. Perhaps, as was realized subsequently, teleconferencing with 'selective' programmes would have been more successful. The experiment of 1993 led to its regular use by IGNOU and other organizations for education, training and business meetings since 1995. For IGNOU, it is used for tele-teaching, tele-counselling, tele-training, tele-discussion and extended contact programmes. The studio at the headquarters contains three-camera set-up, scanner for graphics, facilities of special effects, video play back, computer interface, three dedicated phone lines in the control room, a fax machine for receiving participant's queries, and presentation facilities like white board and PC (with power point facility). The programmes (audio and video signals) passed through the TRACT which converted the signals to extended C-Band frequencies and uplinked to INSAT-2C, which in turn threw signals to the various receiving ends/nodes (substantially for IGNOU, and about 250 owned by other user organisations). Also, as a back-up, a second uplink facility was available at the Space Applications Centre of ISRO at Ahmedabad. The interactive system was functional for nearly 20 days in a month for about eight hours (with 60-90 minutes a session). While almost all the academic programmes of IGNOU found slots in teleconferencing, the highest number of tele-counselling- sessions was conducted by the School of Management Studies for the MBA programme. Though many non-IGNOU organisations and agencies used

the facility, IGNOU used it regularly for 246 hours in 1995, 483 hours in 1996 and 495 hours in 1997, the figures for non-IGNOU agencies during this period were 129 hours, 307 hours and 234 hours respectively. The figure in terms of hours of use has increased subsequently. While the teleconferencing was stabilizing, a local cable TV experiment was conducted at Modasa, Gujarat state which proved very useful in utilising local facilities for ensuring interactivity. Even today, the local cable operator in the city telecasts IGNOU programmes to the households. Due to the failure of extended C-Band of INSAT-2C, teleconferencing was suspended for some time. This was subsequently revived and made digital through INSAT-3B and later through INSAT-3C (Panda, 2006).

In order to infuse interactivity in distance learning, one-way video and two-way audio teleconferencing facility is being offered through GD2. Important nationwide programmes for IGNOU Learners, lecturers by eminent experts/dignitaries, discussion with RC staff, Induction for new students and convocations for graduating students are conducted live through live telecast every year. Besides tele-counselling session are conducted for select application-oriented programmes such as nursing, information technology, CEMPA/CEMBA/MBA etc. in which the students get ample opportunities to interact with the faculty. Besides, IGNOU, many other institutional also use this facility for reaching out cost-effectively to their learners scattered all over the country.

Gyan Darshan

GyanDarshan (literally meaning 'knowledge vision') represents the aspirations of the knowledge society to have a full dedicated educational channel in this country for educational and developmental programming. It was launched jointly by the Union Ministry of HRD, *Prasaar Bharati* and IGNOU (the latter being the nodal agency for up linking/transmission). Educational programmes for GD are contributed by IGNOU, UGC-CEC, NCERT-CIET, as also by National Open School, Department of Adult Education, and some governmental and non-educational organisations. The programmes are up-linked from the earth station at IGNOU and downlinked all over the country through INSAT-2B. Launched on January 26, 2000 as a 2-hour channel for daily transmission, the duration increased in 2000 to 9 hours in February, 18 hours in June, 19 hours in November, and 24 hours in January 2001. Though the trial transmission started with 3-8 metre

antenna, it increased to 7.3 metre when it was fully commissioned. Since the channel is not terrestrial, it is available through various cable operators all over the country; and attempt is being made to have nodal transmission from Mumbai, Ludhiana and Bangalore. Toll-free facility of 1-600-1-12345 has been extended to 40 cities. It is also available to class X and XII students. Coaching institutions are also invited to join GyanDarshan to receive television support in terms of telecast of produced programmes, telecast of live programmes, and their sponsorship of programmes. The signal for GD is available on INSAT-2B C-12 transponder, 4170 MHz downlink frequency, vertical polarisation 93.5 degrees east. Though an essential educational media, the decision on establishing GyanDarshan was handed down from the Ministry, rather than being born out of any academic need. IGNOU is at the mercy of the cable operators; though it is a satellite channel, cable operators have not been much favourable to it is not a viable business proposition for them. The operators are facilitated financially through ads, reimbursement and such other means so as to hold on to it for the larger benefit of the educational community. The cable transmission covers about 90% in Kerala, parts of Tamil Nadu, some pockets in the North East, Nashik, Ahmedabad, Delhi and Pune. The Asia net has been providing it free of cost in Kerala. It is claimed that the programmes go to 40 million cable homes in the country. The added benefit to cable operators is that other *Doordarshan* channels like DD-Marathi, DD-Gujarati, DD-Kanada and DD-Malayalam come free with Gyan Darshan. Efforts are being made to make GD available through terrestrial transmission; and the Government of India may make it compulsory for private DTH cable operators to provide GD. When *Doordarshan* shall have DTH operation, GD may form a part of that bouquet. While this may liberate the channel from the clutches of the cable operators, the unit cost for shifting to DTH receivers will still be high for many to afford. Now six channels are available on the GD: separate dedicated channels for higher education (Vyas Channel launched on January 24, 2004), technical education (Ekalavya Channel), agricultural education (*Kisan* Channel launched on January 21, 2004), distance education, and language education (*Bhasa Mandakini* launched on September 5, 2003, and telecast on DD1 from 6.30-7.00 a.m., 7.15-7.45 a.m. and repeated 12.00-1.00 p.m). Further, the upcoming EduSat (i.e. a dedicated satellite for education) shall boost educational broadcasting in the country. The downlink facility offered at IGNOU covers many parts

of the globe, and IGNOU's overseas partner institutions have been able to regularly view the GD programmes.

This 24- hour channel beams programmes produced by IGNOU and those from UGC, National Council for Educational Research & Training (NCERT), Central Institute for Educational Technology (CIET), NITTTRs, IITs and different Ministries of Govt. of India. The transmission of GD channels is almost completely automated through the installation f the video server.

'Gulistan-e-Urdu' a special Urdu Language Programme series as part of the '*Bhasha Mandakini*' was launched by Hon'ble Union Minister for Human Resource Development Sh. Arjun Singh in Oct. 2005.The programme is transmitted from 01.00 to 2.00 and repeated from 13.30 to 14.30 daily in GD1.This new programme consisting of informative culturally enriching and educational programmes reaches out to a large number of Urdu speaking people across the country. It aims to create awareness about the richness of the Urdu language besides promoting a composite culture.

Telecast on Gyan Darshan is also beneficial for learners of formal education system. Transmission of GyanDarshan is webcast also to extend reach of IGNOU programmes to audience world over. Viewers can access Gyan Darshan on IGNOU's website www.ignouonline.ac.in/gyandarshan. Major achievements of GD during the reporting period include live telecast of Prime Minister's address in the Conference of Academic Leadership on Education for Resurgence from *Vigyan Bhavan* on 29 September 2018. Gyan Darshan Channel must be carried by each DTH/cable operator functioning in India as per Gazette notification of the Government of India. The University has approached various Private DTH Operators for the carriage of Gyan Darshan in their bouquets. Due to the continuous follow up, the Gyan Darshan is today available in TATA SKY, AIRTEL, SUN DIRECT, DEN, In DIGITAL and HATHWAY networks. The University is also making efforts to get GD channel carried by the remaining private DTH/cable operators. Gyan Darshan is now part of SWAYAM PRABHA and can be watched on MHRD Channel no. 25.

India's first Educational TV Channel, GyanDarshan has completed 18 years of its operations. Programmes telecast on GD-I were pooled from various educational institutions and organizations, like Central Institute of Educational Technology of NCERT, NIOS, *Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan*,

CEC (UGC), DST, DAE (Directorate of Adult Education), NLM (National Literacy Mission), NITTTRs, BRAOU and Ministries of Government of India. In order to build interactivity in ODL, one-way video and two-way audio teleconferencing facilities are being offered through Gyan Darshan -2 (GD-2). Important nationwide programmes for IGNOU's learners, lectures by eminent experts/dignitaries, discussions with Regional Centre (RC) staff are also being frequently organized through this channel.

GyanVani

GyanVani (GV) FM Radio was conceived in 2001 as a network of educational FM Radio Channels operating from various cities in the country with an aim to enhance and supplement the teaching-learning process. Each GV Station has coverage range of about 60 Km and covers an entire city/town including the adjoining rural areas. The programs broadcast through each stations include both pre-recorded and live contents. The live programs are mainly interactive radio counselling session conducted by the IGNOU Schools/Regional Centres and at some places by partner institutions of GyanVani. The GyanVani serves as an ideal medium for a niche audience addressing local educational, developmental and socio-cultural requirements of the people. The flavour of the channel is by and large local and the medium is English, Hindi or regional language, but overall content pertains to Primary and Secondary Education, Adult Education, Technical and Vocational Education, Higher Education, Distance Education, Extension Education etc. Interactive Radio Counselling (IRC) facility is being provided by GV Stations to enable learners to interact with the faculty, academic counsellors and learner support staff. The live phone-in programmes are popular components of the network, where learners can participate in live programme over phone.

A shift form IRC is GyanVani, a Radio Cooperative devoted exclusively for education and development, which was created at the instance of aggressive initiative by the MHRD, Government of India. The Union I&B Ministry has now liberalised FM waves in the country, thereby private operators in 40 cities can operate the channel. One frequency for one educational radio channel in 40 cities shall be made available. The onus is on IGNOU to manage it. While GD is an educational television channel managed by IGNOU on behalf of *Doordarshan*, there is no interference by the All

India Radio in the management of the educational radio channel of GV. This is a decentralised operation, with all 37 stations to having their own programming in respective regional language of the state. The organisational components, content programming, and implementation strategy have been worked out by IGNOU; by 2006, IGNOU had 17 FM stations operating in cities including Allahabad, Bangalore, Bhopal, Chennai, Coimbatore, Delhi, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, and Vishakhapatnam.

This is a unique low cost interactive medium for enhancing and supplementing the teaching learning process by reaching out to widespread learners, GyanVani stations operate as media cooperative with the day-to-day programmes being contributed by various educational institutions, NGOs, Government and semi government organizations, UN agencies Ministries such as Agriculture, Environment, Health, Women and Child Welfare, Science & Technology, etc. besides national level institutions such as NCERT, NIOS and State Open Universities.

Each GyanVani Station has a range of about 60 Kms and covers an entire city/town and the adjoining rural area. *GyanVani* serves as an ideal medium for niche audiences to address the local educational, development and socio-cultural requirements. The flavour of the channels is by and large local, and the medium is English, Hindi or language of the region. The broadcast duration varies from station to station but the overall content pertains to the various aspects and level of education like *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, Primary and Secondary Education, Adult Education, Technical and Vocational Education, Higher Education, Distance Education and Extension Education.

GyanVani (GV), an educational Radio Channel, has been operating through FM radio stations in 37 cities of the country. The broadcasting on Gyan Vani FM radio was discontinued with effect from. October, 2014. The transmission of GV FM radio stations was stopped in October 2014 due to administrative reasons. It was re-activated in 2016-17 with transmission of GV radio station in Delhi city. Transmission of GV radio was reactivated in eight cities, thus, as of the GV radio stations broadcasts from 14 cities. The University made sincere efforts to reactivate GyanVani. Daily transmission of GyanVani Delhi from 8 am to 8 pm was resumed w.e.f. 11 January, 2017. Interactive Radio Counselling sessions have been scheduled every day since April, 2017. Transmission of GV radio was re-activated in eight cities i.e. Jaipur,

Pune, Madurai, Cochin, Chandigarh, Raipur, Jalandhar, and Bangalore in the period reported. The University already re-activated transmission in six cities in earlier years, thus, as of now GV radio stations broadcasts from 14 cities. Two live sessions are broadcast every day from 11am to 1 pm with repeats of this session from 5.30 pm to 7.30 pm through Interactive Radio Counselling (IRC). In addition, GV Radio Delhi station transmits IRC for one hour duration weekly on every Thursday from 4-5 pm.

Educational satellite (EduSat)

The initial satellite-based distance education, particularly teleconferencing, had been organized through a satellite transponder, and more particularly through extended C-Band. A revolutionary change and progress in the satellite-based educational communication in the country occurred in September 2004 when a satellite fully dedicated to education and training was deployed. The satellite has footprints and coverage all over India and parts of South Asia. One national and five regional beams in Ku-Band with digital transmission, along with the existing national beam through extended C-Band with analogous transmission are available. The communication channel provides for both two-way video and audio. There are provisions for both satellite interactive terminals (SITs) and receive only terminals (ROTs). There is also provision for digital resource repository, virtual classrooms, data transmission, and video-on-demand. While the technical support including the satellite itself has been provided by ISRO, each of the national educational networks like distance education (led by IGNOU), higher education (led by UGC), professional education (led by AICTE), school education (led by NCERT), education for all (led by SSA-MHRD) and many sub-networks is to be managed by the respective networks. Undoubtedly, distance learning (and IGNOU) is the largest user of this technology.

The teaching end at IGNOU has been operational since 2005 under the national beam with 131 SITs made operational for two-way video and audio multi-site interaction. By 2005, the other largest EduSat users have been APNET/Mana TV in Andhra Pradesh (with above 2000 terminals), the states of Madhya Pradesh (1350 terminals), Orissa (1434 terminals), Gujarat (550 terminals), Goa (20 terminals), Tamil Nadu (20 terminals), and KARNET in Karnataka (with over 200 terminals).

The launch of EDUSAT (a dedicated satellite for education) has ushered in an era where both internet and intranet can be used for transmission, interaction, dialogue, digital repositories, digital multimedia content, and for virtual education and research. EMPC- IGNOU has already established 134 interactive terminals across the country with the two-way interactive facility. The teleconferencing session on GD2 are simulcasted on the EDUSAT network. The facility is expected to enhance the capacity of the learners to access the resources as per the schedule. Networking of all *GyanVani* FM Radio Stations is also under consideration.

The Rajiv Gandhi Project

The Rajiv Gandhi Project for Edusat Supported Elementary Education was inaugurated by Hon'ble Minister Sh. Arjun Singh in December, 2005.This is a collaborative project of MHRD-ISRO-IGNOU and State Governments of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Chhatisgarh and Uttar Pradesh. The network has a provision of one teaching end with sub-hub at Jabalpur with connectivity to 850 schools in the Sidhi District and 50 schools each in Sonbhadra in U.P. Koria in Chhatisgarh and Vaishali in Bihar.

Education, Research & Training

The Education Research & Training (ERT) unit of the EMPC is engaged in developing academic programmes conducting research and training related to media and communication. Two academic programmes Post Graduate Diploma in Journalism and Mass Communication (PGJMC) and Post Graduate Diploma in Audio Programme Production (PGDAPP) developed by ERT Unit were on offer through School of Continuing Education, NOW THROUGH School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SOJNMS). Training workshops organized by the unit have become quite popular and requests are regularly received from various agencies including embassies. A training programme was organized for the diplomats of the Embassy of the State of Kuwait of "Media for Diplomacy." The media training and support component of the North East Project of IGNOU THE North East Media Focus (NEMFO) Project is being successfully executed since 1999.Research studies are also undertaken on the utilization patterns and effectiveness of audio-video materials.

GyanDhara

GyanDhara started as a pilot initiative, is an internet web radio service streaming contents of *GyanVani* for learners across the world. *GyanDhara* is very useful and cost-effective way of reaching learners across the globe thus it became a regular service functioning of the University. Recorded programmes of *GyanVani* uploaded on *GyanDhara* are very useful for learners living in different time-zones.

The *GyanDhara* IRC programmes were initiated in 2016 on pilot basis and later in full-fledged scale from 2017 onwards. It became low-cost solution for offering counselling and live lecture with eminent experts especially in academic programmes having low enrolment of difficult to get counsellors with desired academic and professional background particularly in rural and remote areas. *GyanDhara* IRC has been regularly used for delivery of counselling sessions and live lectures in PG Diploma in Urban Planning and Development offered by School of Extension and Development Studies (SOEDS). The School monitors participation of students in these sessions to immediately resolve issues of students.

GyanDhara, an internet based interactive audio counselling/web radio service for the students, was introduced in 2016. Students can listen to live discussions from teachers and experts on the topic of the day and interact with them through telephone or email and through chat mode.

New Initiatives

In alignment with the University's vision of providing accessible, flexible, and technology-enabled education, IGNOU has undertaken significant initiatives to strengthen the integration of ICT) across its academic and administrative systems. The following developments highlight the University's sustained progress in leveraging ICT for quality enhancement and learner support.

The University has adopted the SAMARTH e-governance platform for seamless management of student services, including admissions, registration, and learner data. This integration has enhanced transparency, efficiency, and accessibility across all learner-related operations.

IGNOU has migrated all its online programmes to a unified LMS—*IGNOU Online Platform (IOP LMS)*—which serves as a comprehensive space for course delivery, assignment submission, and learner–faculty interaction,

ensuring consistency and improved learner experience.

As one of the largest contributors to the national SWAYAM platform, IGNOU continues to offer Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in diverse disciplines, reinforcing its commitment to lifelong learning and the democratization of higher education.

The University's digital repository, *eGyanKosh*, remains a vital repository of self-learning materials, audio-visual lectures, and other Open Educational Resources (OER), accessible to learners and the public worldwide.

To strengthen outreach and inclusivity, IGNOU provides mobile-based access to digital content through the *IGNOU e-Content App*, enabling learners in remote areas to access course materials anytime, anywhere.

The University has implemented ICT-enabled systems for online submission of assignments and management of Term-End Examination (TEE) processes for online learners, ensuring efficiency and real-time monitoring.

These developments collectively represent IGNOU's transition towards an integrated digital ecosystem encompassing academic delivery, learner support, evaluation, and governance. The enhanced use of ICT not only strengthens the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) framework but also aligns with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, positioning IGNOU as a global institution in technology-enabled open education.

CHAPTER 5

TECHNOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS AND INNOVATION

Jyotsna Dikshit

The journey of four decades of technology and innovation in IGNOU has been nothing short of transformative, reshaping the way millions of learners' experience education. From print-based self-instructional material, to a dynamic, intelligent, flexible ecosystem of Open, Distance, Digital Learning (ODDL), IGNOU has redefined the meaning of access, equity, quality and inclusion in higher education, bringing the classroom to every corner of the country. This mirrors India's own pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities. The journey has been both challenging and exciting. Since its inception the university envisioned reaching the unreached through the various uses of technology. Initially self-instructional material was printed and sent by post to the students, subject-matter concepts were explained through face-to-face counselling sessions, audio and video programmes. Those early steps may seem modest now, but at the time they were pioneering. They showed that technology could transmit knowledge across social and geographical divides in a country as large and varied as India. Over the next forty years, the university kept innovating.

IGNOU's digital evolution has been driven by national policies like NMEICT, NEP-2020, Digital India etc. that emphasised high-quality digital content and infrastructure to be made available to all students. In fact, NEP-2020 focus on lifelong learning, open access, credit transfer and technology enabled learning which mirrors IGNOU's own vision and mission. NEP-2020 is a validation of IGNOU's decades-long philosophy. The university is one of the main coordinators to develop courses on SWAYAM, India's Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform, and SWAYAM Prabha, a 24×7 educational DTH channel bouquet. Throughout these years IGNOU digitized its self-learning materials, developed its own learning management systems, automated admissions and examination processes, and built the IGNOU Online Programme Portal. The programmes/

courses of the university now reach millions through mobile apps, online forums, and interactive content that blend technology with pedagogy. IGNOU developed prototypes of ODDL in its second decade of existence and during the third and fourth decade IGNOU became a living example of ODDL. These initiatives have positioned IGNOU at the core of India's ODDL revolution. Now IGNOU has a matured ODDL ecosystem which has been implemented at the national and international levels.

In this unfolding story of IGNOU's technology and innovation journey, the Communication Division (later renamed as Electronic Media Production Centre (EMPC)), Computer Division (CD), the Inter-University Consortium (IUC) (later renamed or reconfigured as Centre for Online Education), and the National Centre for Innovations in Distance Education (NCIDE) though different in origin and mandate, have functioned as structural catalysts helping IGNOU to deliver educational and innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives at the door steps of the learners. EMPC kept on innovating and strengthening its media infrastructure, and technology. It also launched various broadcast, telecast and digital initiatives, played a key role in developing multimedia-based learning packages and became one of the prominent components of implementing ODDL in the university. The Computer Division catered to the needs of learners, staff and faculty at the HQs, Regional Centres, Study Centres, across India and Overseas Study Centres abroad by providing digital infrastructure and technology enabled services. In the last two decades, the university ushered in the era of ODDL and ODDL enabled education in the country with the establishment of the Inter-University Consortium, now Centre for Online Education (COE). NCIDE evolved into a vibrant ecosystem for developing prototypes and products related to innovative learning and support solutions, innovation, and start-up culture among the faculty and students. This chapter will take you on a remarkable journey of 40 years of technology and innovation at IGNOU.

Building Media and Digital Foundation (1985-1995)

When IGNOU began its journey to impart education at the door-steps of the learners, the first programmes it offered were two postgraduate diplomas. Both the programmes were supported not just by printed self-instructional material but also by a handful of audio and video lessons, a new experiment, an innovation for Indian higher education at that time. These audio-visual resources were created to supplement the self-instructional print material that students received through post. Rather than depending

on outside agencies the university took a thoughtful decision to produce its own educational media. To achieve this, the university set up a special Communication Division, responsible for developing all media components in-house The Division started building technical and infrastructural capacity and acquiring essential production equipment. The production facilities for these programmes had been developed in temporary studios set up with equipment procured from indigenous sources. Till such time as the full-fledged production facilities were developed, video programmes are produced mainly through outdoor shooting. Some facilities are hired for post-production requirements like editing, computer animation, etc. In the beginning of 1988, the university built its own audio studio and video studio with funding from Overseas Development Administration (ODA), United Kingdom and in collaboration with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). The lectures were recorded in the studio, as well as the audio and video tapes were made available to the student community through Regional/ Study Centre.

In the early 1990's, *Doordarshan* began telecasting IGNOU's programmes. As part of these· telecasts, and student support an open channel programme was also started on television network to respond to the questions raised by the students and also to inform them about the systems and methods of distance education. By 1992 onwards, AIR stations in Mumbai and Hyderabad soon followed by Shillong broadcasted IGNOU's radio programmes. IGNOU collaborated with agencies like Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to expand its media facilities and experiment new ways of providing academic support to the learners. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) also funded the university as part of its efforts to strengthen interactive communication links among the various Regional Centres of the university spread across the country, IGNOU established an audio teleconferencing facility with interlinks at the headquarters at Maidan Garhi connecting all the 16 Regional Centres and 3 Open Universities in the States. The system had the facility for the exchange of two-way voice communication in real time among all the locations, which to a large extent, stimulated face to face interaction. At that time, this served as a vital communication tool for administrative as well as academic functions of the university. Another innovative initiative which the university conducted in collaboration with ISRO was satellite-based teleconferencing experiment. This experiment was conducted on a national scale connecting the Regional Centres of IGNOU with the headquarters by one way video and two-way audio for

ten days. The objectives of this experiment were fulfilled and its impact on the participants both at the teaching end and at the receiving ends had created the desirable impact. Encouraged by the success of this experiment, the Government of India was requested to provide a dedicated satellite transponder for time sharing by all educational agencies/institutions concerned like UGC, AIMA, IETE, IITs, IGNOU, etc.

Use of modern technology for dissemination of knowledge, management of student affairs and administration has been the basic approach of IGNOU right from the beginning. With this guiding principle in mind, electronic media and in particular computers were used to automate almost all possible operations at the Headquarters and the Regional Centres since the beginning of the university's functions. The Computer Division was established to play a major role in providing management information services and project control for the administration of the University, especially in the area of student services. Since inception the university had the provisions of maintaining comprehensive digital student records. It had digital systems to captures data and process information relating to activities specific to the Schools and Divisions such as Admissions, Evaluation/Examination, Material Distribution, Regional Services as well as Regional Centres and Study Centres. These included particulars of the students, the academic programmes and the courses for which they are registered, payment of fees, examinations, status of completion of academic programmes, medium of instruction etc. Through funding from ODA, UK which had provision of major infrastructural facilities main frame computer and software, printing and packaging equipment, etc. were provided to the university. In the early 90's the university had implemented the provisions of Computer Marked Assignments (CMA), and VAX/OMR system to evaluate entrance exam answer sheets. When the university decentralised the admissions software packages were developed for processing the applications at the Regional Centres and transfer of data to the headquarters. From the beginning, the central library of the university has been using technology for its various activities. Central Library was computerised and it had a collection of CD-ROM database on different fields of knowledge. It has a comprehensive reference source which gives bibliographic information.

Expanding Media Support and Experimenting with Open, Distance, Digital and e-Learning (ODDeL) (1995-2005)

As the University stepped in the second decade of its existence, in early 1996, the Communication Division was renamed as the Electronic Media

Production Centre (EMPC) to serve as a unique 'mega resource centre' both within India as well as in the entire South Asia region and to make a significant contribution in the use of modern state-of-the-art technologies in the critical areas of education and development in the country.

IGNOU's Virtual Campus Initiative (VCI), launched in 1999, was not simply a technological experiment; it was a reimagining of delivering education to the ODL learners themselves. Under the VCI, two pioneering programmes were introduced: the Bachelor of Information Technology (BIT) and the Advanced Diploma in Information Technology (ADIT). These were developed in collaboration with Edexcel (UK) and India's Ministry of Information Technology, respectively. The unique feature of this initiative was the delivery of programmes entirely through electronic means, including the Internet, CD-ROM, and satellite-based teleconferencing. This was the first time the University designed innovative teaching and learning methodologies, giving great impetus to the use of emerging technologies to empower the student of computer and information sciences. Through the education channel Gyan Darshan, teleconferencing-based lectures on various topics of the programmes were delivered by eminent experts, which reached directly to the homes of the students. Apart from this, the students were provided with recorded video lectures and courseware in the form of CDs, Computer-Based Tutors (CBTs), and Internet-based learning resources accessible through web browsers. Moreover, the printed materials of Certificate in Computing (CIC), Bachelor's in Computer Applications (BCA), and Master's in Computer Applications (MCA) were converted into HTML-based web modules. The faculty and experts used asynchronous methods to respond to the queries of the students.

The Virtual Campus Initiative (VCI) also had a 'Tele-Learning Centre (TLC)' component. Under this, TLCs were established to provide state-of-the-art hardware/software, computing, and communications facilities to the students of these programmes. PII/PIII multimedia systems, printers, colour televisions for watching Gyan Darshan, video cassette players to play the pre-recorded cassettes, library facilities, etc. were provided at the TLCs. The students could remain at these centres for 5–6 hours per week, to learn in a virtual campus environment. The TLCs also managed records of student attendance, particularly of the students participating in the counselling and practical sessions. They also managed the proper conduct of term-end examinations and practical for BIT and ADIT students. Initially, 12 TLCs started in collaboration with private parties, and 14 TLCs were established at various IGNOU Regional Centres.

In the year 2000, *GyanDarshan* a joint venture of the Ministry of Human Resource Development and Ministry of Information and Broadcasting with IGNOU serving as the nodal agency was launched which was a major milestone in the field of Educational Television in India. *Gyan Darshan* a 24-hour educational channel, offers the best of educational programmes covering a variety of subjects and catering to a wide range of viewers. These included pre-school, primary, secondary and higher secondary students, college/university students, youth seeking career opportunities, homemakers and working professionals. In order to build interactivity in ODL, one-way video and two-way audio teleconferencing facilities were being offered through Gyan Darshan-2 (GD-2). Important nationwide programmes for IGNOU's learners, lectures by eminent experts/ dignitaries, Tele-counselling discussions with Regional Centre (RC) staff were being organized through this channel. In addition to IGNOU, many other institutions like ICAI, NBE, DAVCMC and UNICEF also utilised this facility for reaching out cost effectively to their target audiences spread across the country. The University managed Gyan Darshan Channels (GD-I & -II) and *GyanVani* Stations. Organising and conducting Tele-teaching and teleconferencing were now regular activities of the University. In addition, the university also coordinated the functioning of GD-3, GD-4 and *Kisan* Channel. These services were also being shared with various educational and training institutions, such as State Open Universities, Central and State Govt. Ministries/ Departments, NGOs, corporate bodies and other sectors.

In the early 2000s, when the Internet was still a novelty for most people in India, the Indira Gandhi National Open University took a step forward and launched an online programme, Post-Graduate Certificate in Participatory Management of Displacement, Resettlement and Rehabilitation (PGCMRR) funded by the World Bank. The programme adopted innovative teaching and learning approach. The programme portal had the potential to provide an environment to the students which enabled them to explore ideas, share experiences, and build knowledge together. The instructors became facilitators, guiding and supporting students in their learning journey. In view of the accessibility challenges the course content was delivered online through a web portal and offline through CD-ROMs. Audio programmes were made available through *GyanVani* FM educational radio channel and the video programmes were provided through CD-ROMs and *GyanDarshan,* educational TV channel. The assignments and counselling were provided through the web portal and panel discussions were held through *GyanDarshan.* Learners attempted online quizzes (OCMAs) that

were instantly graded, joined discussion forums (PDFs) where they debated real-world issues, and maintained online diaries (ODs) to record field experiences. The PGCMRR programme was developed innovatively, with learner-centred design and it is a milestone in IGNOU's journey toward open distance and eLearning (ODEL).

A prototype for e-Learning using WINISIS was developed under the IGNOU-DSIR Project in collaboration with National Information System in Science and Technology (NISSAT). WINISIS—short for Windows Information System—was UNESCO's Windows-based version of the CDS/ISIS database software widely used for library automation across the developing world. IGNOU's Faculty of Library and Information Science had long trained its students to use CDS/ISIS, but hands-on practice was limited to occasional workshops. The new collaboration aimed to break that limitation, This innovative intervention provided an e-learning prototype that could teach students to manage library databases remotely, without the need for physical labs or face to face sessions. The delivery modes included CD-ROM edition for learners with limited connectivity, and a web-enabled interface that supported discussion forums, automated quizzes, and e-mail-based feedback. It also included student tracking and generation of progress report of individual student. In combining both forms, the project inadvertently produced one of the earliest examples of e-learning in India's public education system. The package was developed both with CD and Web interfaces. The objective of this project was to develop a methodology for e-Learning, which can be extended to other e-Learning courses of IGNOU in the future. The IGNOU–DSIR WINISIS project laid the foundation for IGNOU's later ventures into online learning, including its IGNOU-Online and digital repository initiatives.

Perhaps the most revolutionary technological development was the full-scale utilization of EduSat, India's first satellite dedicated exclusively to education. Launched by ISRO in 2004, EduSat was designed to support both one-way and two-way communication between teaching hubs and remote classrooms. IGNOU was selected as the national nodal agency for coordinating higher education content through EduSat. With EduSat, IGNOU could reach even the remotest corners of the country, offering interactive teleconferencing, live lectures, and virtual learning environments. Edusat was a collaborative project of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), Department of Space. The satellite had 6 Ku-Band transponders and 6 extended CB and transponders. One Ku-Band beam as well as

extended C-Band covered the entire country. Five beams of Ku-Band supported state level network regions in different regions. The IGNOU has a network of 134 Satellite Interactive Terminals (SITs)in the national beam on which regular two-way video-conference were being held. The university transmitted satellite-based counselling and student support via EduSat.

The ODDeL era and Institutional Innovation Mechanism (2005–2015)

When IGNOU entered its third decade of existence it had already established itself as the world's largest open university, catering to over two million students and a pioneer in open and distance learning (ODL). IGNOU had experimented and implemented innovative ways to deliver education to its students by using emerging ICTs. Yet, the next ten years would prove to be revolutionary. The challenge was not scale it was quality, accessibility, and interactivity. The university sought to bridge the digital divide by using technology. The technological strategy of the university was guided by four principles viz. access, equity, innovation and collaboration. This was not merely a period of digitization; it was the beginning of a technological renaissance in open learning. The era of creation of an ODDL ecosystem in the university. The journey spanned from the expansion of *GyanDarshan* and *GyanVan*i to the creation of *e-GyanKosh*, from EDUSAT-based classrooms to online programmes that foreshadowed the digital university and a matured ODDL ecosystem of the future and created an interactive digital learning and student support ecosystem. We witnessed scaled-up use of technologies like audio/video capacities, teleconferences, radio counselling, web-casting, online programmes on one hand and on the other, by introducing mobile SMS alerts, and online student support. IGNOU also became a key partner in several government initiatives, NMEICT being the prominent one aimed at enhancing technology-enabled education. The university's mandate as an open learning institution made it an ideal platform for testing and implementing schemes that required wide-scale outreach. The ODDeL ecosystem was created through *eGyanKosh*, IGNOU Online (www.ignouonline.acin), a one-stop window catering to the learning needs of the IGNOU students' community, upgradation of digital infrastructure etc.

The first step in IGNOU's ODDeL journey was the upgradation of digital infrastructure. Thus, IGNOU moved ahead to create a strong technological backbone to enable millions of students across the country and abroad take

advantage of the various open, distance and digital initiatives being taken by the university. By this time the EMPC was also equipped with advanced studios, servers, and satellite uplink facilities. As a nodal agency for Gyan Darshan television channels and Gyan Vani FM radio network it initiated several programmes for the student in every state, broadcasting thousands of hours of educational content each year. The Live "phone-in" programmes on Gyan Vani and Gyan Darshan became popular among the students. These programmes offered academic counselling, career guidance, and updates about new courses. Under the EDUSAT Project, through hundreds of Satellite Interactive Terminals (SITs), the university connected remote regional centres, enabling live tele-lectures and interactive sessions. To enable the ODDeL ecosystem IGNOU began executing campus networking, took several e-governance initiatives, and provided high-speed connectivity across the headquarter and Regional Centres.

The university also initiated the development of *eGyanKosh* a knowledge repository in October 2005 to store, index, preserve, distribute and share the digital learning resources developed by IGNOU. Launched in 2006, it became one of India's largest digital repositories of open learning materials. This digital repository aimed to house the entire course material of IGNOU in an open, searchable, and free-to-access platform. In the initial years, facilitation also extends to the use of IPTV for select programmes. By mid-2008, IGNOU opened *eGyanKosh* to the public, pioneering the concept of Open Educational Resources (OER) in India. *eGyanKosh* also integrated with YouTube, hosted video lectures. School-wise YouTube channels and embedded multimedia features transformed static learning into an engaging, visual experience. IGNOU also introduced blogs and collaborative wikis, allowing students and teachers to co-create and discuss course content.

By this time IGNOU created a digital learning platform where students could study at their own pace, interact anytime, anywhere, and get certified at their own pace. An in-house Virtual Classroom on the e-learning platform for delivery of online programmes was developed. Starting with the launch of two online programmes a total of 27 online programmes were launched from time to time by the University. This was not about moving courses to an online platform but it was about rethinking how learning happens. The online platform, which was designed completely from scratch, was a comprehensive virtual environment that would guide students from registration all the way to certification. Every aspect right from course design and mentoring to assignments and evaluation was designed to run seamlessly on the internet. Through this platform IGNOU introduced walk-

in admission system, which was shift from the conventional session-based model. The platform provided a complete Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) covering all the activities, from registration to certification. Every student was paired with a mentor or subject expert who guided them through the course, while chat tools, forums, and feedback systems made communication simple, even with limited internet access. IGNOU also introduced the Assignment Management System, for online programmes which created unique questions for each student from a large database. In practical oriented programmes, the university also added personal e-portfolios that tracked progress, e-tutors and virtual seminars so that practical work and discussions could happen online through live video, whiteboards, and file-sharing. Thus, IGNOU Online, a platform that embodied the convergence of technology and pedagogy flourished and catered to the learning needs of students of the online programmes.

Another innovative programme offered by IGNOU was the Post Graduate Diploma in E-Learning which introduced online, interactive, project-based learning. One of the major objectives of this programme was to use OER materials in the courses. The students were engaged in self-study using Open Educational Resources available on the web. For the teaching-learning process of the PGDEL Programme an open-source Learning Management System (LMS) was selected. Besides the self-study component the programme extensively used virtual class technology developed by the university for interaction between students and course teachers, asynchronous interactions were also facilitated through Discussion Forums. The students were expected to develop an e-Portfolio. In addition, a one-week compulsory fact-to-face workshop use to be organised at the IGNOU headquarters to provide hands-on experience and training. IGNOU's Academic Counsellors' Training (ACT Online) was also an impactful capacity development programme which included modular e-training, web-based assessments, and multimedia learning resources,

IGNOU also made major strides in building its student management architecture. The Student Registration and Evaluation Division (SRED) developed digital systems for admission, re-registration, examination, and result declaration. IGNOU was the first National level University which had implemented the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) for its back-office processes to improve effectiveness and management of the system in 2008. IGNOU also strengthened its Regional Services Division (RSD). Regional centres became digitally connected support hubs offering tele-counselling, online grievance redressal, etc. Later, these systems evolved

into a comprehensive Student Information Management System. The University also developed Online Convocation registration service apart from strengthening of student support services through ICT. Library and Documentation Division of the university implemented RATE service (Remote Access to e-resources) in 2011, through Ezproxy (a product of OCLC, USA) along with EcAccess (Informatics Indian Ltd) which connects Library users to web based subscribed e-contents/resources by allowing remote access using library issued credentials which benefited students, researchers and faculty.

Innovation at IGNOU

The University's innovation journey began since its inception, but to formalise innovation as part of its institutional framework the National Centre for Innovation in Distance Education (NCIDE) was established in 2005. The idea of establishing a National Centre for Innovation in Distance Education (NCIDE) took root when IGNOU recognized that to remain relevant in a rapidly evolving educational technology ecosystem, traditional delivery modes would need continuous re-engineering. NCIDE was proposed and approved in the 10th Five Year Plan. It was conceived as a resource centre, think tank, and creative lab; a place where ideas for new learning solutions could be nurtured, prototyped, tested, and disseminated across IGNOU and beyond through the Build Operate and Transfer (BOT) process. It is a facility for promoting, supporting, re-engineering and disseminating innovations in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system. The NCIDE is a ground for nurturing bright and inquisitive minds whose ideas and explorations are expected to develop the ODL system to suit the needs of 'Gen Next'. The Centre's goal is to develop a culture of continued search for new and innovative solutions to offer seamless education for all, achieve cost efficiency in its operations and provide borderless access to quality education and training. In the first decade of its existence NCIDE worked in seven thrust areas viz. incubation and nurturing innovations, development of innovative learning solutions, development of innovative support solutions, research and benchmarking for quality management, documentation and dissemination, capacity development and collaboration and networking. It provided intellectual, and technological support to stakeholders, encouraged experimentation in distance education, and acted as a resource-base for prototypes (emerging technologies, mobile learning, virtual labs), to conduct research on innovation in ODL, and to build a network of innovators and collaborating institutions.

One of the important thrust areas for innovation in ODL system is the identification, recognition and nurturing of innovations in Distance Education. In 2006, the university instituted "Gold Medal for Innovation in ODL" to recognise innovators and innovations in the ODL system which was only one of its kind in the country at that time. The main purpose of it was to nurture an environment of innovations in the ODL system by the way of acknowledging the innovators. It also enabled the university to identify innovations happening in programme design and delivery. For example, Instructional design to offer the Certificate in Craft and Design offered by the School of Engineering and Technology (SOET) was an innovative initiative of the university for transaction of technical, conceptual procedural and artistic content to address multilingual and highly diverse educational levels (functionally literate artisans and educated urban youth). Programme design for Certificate Programme in Motorcycle Service and Repair is another innovative initiative taken by SOET, IGNOU in collaboration with Honda Motors Ltd. (HHML), towards the competency-based skill development training for the motorcycle technicians of the country. The innovative programme design included firstly, the theoretical and demonstrative training of students at Programme Study Centres (PSCs) and then attaching them to actual work place to practice what is learnt. Another innovative intervention taken by the university was reaching children with disabilities through the Certificate Programme in Early Childhood Special Education Enabling Inclusion (Cerebral Palsy). This innovative programme in the sector of disability was developed by the Faculty of Child Development in the School of Continuing Education at IGNOU in collaboration with the Rehabilitation Council of India. The innovation in the Certificate Programme was in terms of programme concept, instructional design, programme content (curriculum and self-learning materials), eligibility requirements and the target group addressed. For example, the instructional design has laid equal stress on the theory and hands- on training. Various other innovative interventions/strategies in the self-learning material included transacting and explaining difficult academic concepts to the students with high school pass level, including real life situations in the text, extensive use of art work and pictures to indicate exact positioning needs and posture, and adaptations for a child with cerebral palsy. Project manuals were also created.

Another unique and innovative programme was planned and developed by SOET, IGNOU in collaboration with Ministry of Power. The programme aimed at addressing the grass root problem of proper training of technicians,

simultaneously it also helped in reducing huge transmission and distribution losses, minimizing casualties among technicians while working on power lines. Aligned to generate employment/entrepreneurship it was a new successful experiment done in ODL system through convergence and conversion of subsystem. Customized study material (for theory and practical manual/work book) with well designed structured, coloured simplified format with lots of illustrations. The programme also includes Tele-counselling, interactive radio counselling, pictures and multimedia enabled Computer Based Tutorials (CBT), etc. showing virtual working of machines, etc.

In another innovative effort an *Anganwari* Workers Training Programme was launched by IGNOU in preparing skilled personnel who would help the Government to lower its Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), in the State of Madhya Pradesh. Initially, the training modules for the *Anganwari* Workers of the State Women and Child Development Department were prepared and training of 1014 workers in Vidisha District was completed in collaboration with UNICEF. This programme known as "Vidisha Model" has been adopted by the Government of Madhya Pradesh for the training of *Anganwari* Workers in the entire state. The training module was also adopted for the Training of Trainers (ToT) by the Women & Child Development Department, Government of Chhatisgarh. IGNOU also experimented in providing 100% Job Placement for IGNOU Tribal Students of Gadchiroli. Gadchiroli Tribal District had very low (26%) literacy rate with naxal problem and severe backwardness. The high school pass candidates from the district studied a 6 months certificate course of IGNOU. Efforts were made in understanding their needs, providing them the job oriented vocational education, talking to employers for these students' employment, keeping students and Academic Counsellors sensitized towards quality studies (both theory and practical) and finally arranging campus placement interviews at Gadchiroli. Thus, the innovative strategy provided 100% Job Placement for IGNOU Tribal Students of Gadchiroli.

While university had already initiated the process of implementing ODDeL as discussed above, it also focused on development of innovative ICT enabled learning and support solutions for the students. For this purpose, NCIDE developed prototypes and products which gave glimpses of the future of open learning. The Virtual Lab Management System, tablet-enabled Arabic courses or mobile enabled chartbooks for health workers and prototype of Audio Books proved that even basic devices could support meaningful

learning experiences. Among these prototypes Science@Mobile transformed mobile phones into tools for science popularisation. Another experiment, Mobilets: Mobile Enabled Learnlets, further extended IGNOU's approach to micro-learning. The university also embarked on the journey of on-demand examinations, digital question banks and instant testing, digitizing administration and research, etc. Among the most innovative initiatives was the On-Demand Examination Scheme. Instead of students waiting months for exam date, IGNOU's system allowed them to appear for an exam whenever they were ready. Powered by software developed in-house, it generated individualized question papers on the spot each following precise blueprints set by faculty experts. Running successfully across 18 regional centres and 135 courses, the system represented IGNOU's belief in student autonomy. The model incorporated online registration, e-hall tickets, attendance tracking, and result processing well before online exams became mainstream in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the country. The university also recognized that importance of networks of expertise. Hence, a dynamic portal to collect, store and retrieve information about course writers, editors, translators, and evaluators across India was developed. IGNOU developed the Virtual Training Lounge (VTL) which was an online hub for both synchronous and asynchronous learning. Trainers used discussion boards, wikis, and blogs to connect with participants anytime, anywhere. In many ways, the VTL anticipated today's Learning Management Systems. Also, to support individual scholars, the Research Mate mobile app offered tools to manage research tasks, improve communication, and stay updated essentially a digital companion for researchers navigating academic life at IGNOU. Through *Navdharana*, the web-based Innovation Management System, the university designed and developed an online database on innovations in the Open and Distance Learning System (ODL) which contained more than a hundred innovations and ideas for the use of the stakeholders.

This decade witnessed the seeds of many national initiatives that followed, including SWAYAM, SWAYAM Prabha, and the Digital India Mission. It also witnessed the emergence of IGNOU's next transformation about innovation-driven, entrepreneurial ecosystem. IGNOU had again laid the foundation for ODDL, innovation and entrepreneurship movement.

IGNOU's Journey in Implementing ODDL and Innovation & Entrepreneurship Ecosystems (2015-2025)

When India's higher education sector began embracing digitalization in earnest, IGNOU was already walking that path. For nearly four decades,

IGNOU has been the torchbearer of open and distance learning in India. Yet, the fourth decade marks a particularly transformative chapter in its story. The phase when "open and distance" learning expanded into the realm of "digital," aligning seamlessly with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The emphasis was now being laid on developing interactive multimedia, expanding online student support, and adding value to the traditional distance education delivery mode with modern technology-enabled education within the framework of the ODDL system.

For implementing the ODDL in its true sense the Computer Division and COE IGNOU have robust digital infrastructure to support millions of students. The COE has state-of-the-art data centres and LMS platforms. The university's digital infrastructure ensures digital scalability, securing data while providing seamless access to study materials and records. Computer Division which is the core IT backbone of the University, provides various Computing & Network Services 24X7. The most significant change during this decade was IGNOU's commitment to re-centring the students within its ODDL ecosystem. Traditionally, open universities faced challenges of student isolation and administrative delays. IGNOU's solution was to facilitate student management through technology. The introduction of online admission and re-registration portals in 2016 marked the beginning of end-to-end digitization. The Student Evaluation Division (SED) launched systems for online grade cards, hall ticket downloads, making the student's experience smoother and more transparent. The University also developed an integrated system titled as 'IGNOU Students Management System' (ISMS) to support online delivery of information and services to students, RCs and others. Students were provided the following facilities through ISMS: Compilation of Admission and Re-Registration activities; Submission and Management of Assignment, Practical and Project; Transfer of registration data of students from RCs to Headquarters; Submission of Examination forms for Term-End Examination(TEE); Management and monitoring of pre and post examination activities; Extending other support to ensure declaration of results of TEE within one-and half months of conduct of the TEE; Dynamic dashboard facility and Student e-profile on demand.

Later, COE modernized operations through systems like *SAMARTH ERP* which is a Ministry of Education initiative to develop "An Open Source, Open Standard enabled Robust, Secure, Scalable and Evolutionary Process Automation Engine for Universities and Higher Education

Institutions" under NMEICT. The Student Life Cycle right from admission, examination, evaluation, to convocation and alumni engagement, etc. was implemented. Digital Locker system was also introduced. Moreover, the University initiated measures to enhance ICT use in academic and administrative transactions and introduced e-tendering for procurement through the Central Public Procurement Portal of India. As regional centres adopted digital workflows, IGNOU introduced the IGNOU Grievance Redressal and Feedback System, allowing students to file queries and receive responses within defined timelines. Additionally, the IGNOU online counselling Portal connected students with faculty and counsellors through chat and video interfaces. To further enhance interaction, the university integrated WhatsApp, Telegram, and Learning Management System (LMS) notifications for assignment updates, academic alerts, and examination schedules. During the pandemic, IGNOU launched web-based Induction Programmes, enabling new students to connect with mentors virtually.

In keeping with the University's vision to reach students through diverse and accessible media, and objective of implementing ODDL several innovative initiatives were undertaken to strengthen distance education and student support systems. In 2016, the university launched *GyanDhara* an internet web radio service streaming contents of *GyanVani* for students across the world as a pilot initiative and later expanded on a full-fledged scale from 2017 onwards. It turned out as a very useful and cost-effective way of reaching students globally with different time zones. Building upon the success of *GyanDhara*, the University further strengthened its audio-based student support system through Interactive Radio Counselling (IRC) sessions conducted daily for IGNOU students. In addition to this, the University adopted web-based technologies like Web Casting and Web-Conferencing to facilitate synchronous communication across widely spread functional units of the University apart from interaction of subject experts with students. In IGNOU, these tools are being effectively instrumented in extending interactivity between IGNOU's Head-Quarters, Regional Centres, students, Schools, academic counsellors and subject experts spread across India. Major events of the University are web cast for mass viewership. Taking the next step in digital accessibility, IGNOU launched its own mobile application 'IGNOU e-Content' to enable students to access IGNOU's learning materials. Through this app, IGNOU students can access their programme and course materials using their Smartphone. It is a digital initiative to take education to the doorstep of the students as

Smartphone are now common communication instrument in every home even in remote areas of the country.

The University continued to enhance its digital and ICT-enabled infrastructure by integrating multiple national and university-wide projects aimed at improving access and connectivity for students. The University's remarkable initiatives include designing, developing, and launching Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), accessing learning resources through *Shodhganga* (UGC-INFLIBNET project), and the National Digital Library (MHRD project). IGNOU also acts as the national coordinator for the SWAYAM Project, which designs and develops diploma and certificate-level courses. SWAYAM is an MHRD initiative offering MOOCs courses, hosted at the COE, facilitating development of SWAYAM MOOCs. Parallel to SWAYAM, the University's role as the national coordinator for SWAYAM PRABHA further expanded its reach through dedicated six DTH educational channels catering to diverse academic areas of ODL system. The content in these channels are delivered in 15 Regional Languages including English, Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Mizo, Manipuri & Urdu. The Live Chat facility for clearing doubts of the students is also available. The University is providing Channel-Based Counselling (CBC) in different regional languages for MBA Programme of IGNOU on SWAYAM PRABHA as per the mandate of NEP-2020. The channel-based counselling was initially operationalised at 20 RCs using four channels of SWAYAM PRABHA for the CBCS courses in 13 languages namely, Assamese, Bengali, English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. The COE coordinates with BISAG, INFLIBNET, and MHRD for production and broadcasting. During the initial days of these initiatives the EMPC was actively involved in producing tele-lectures and MOOCs courses for Swayam and Swayam Prabha projects. The University also undertook coordination of translation work of 16 SWAYAM Courses in eight languages namely Bengali, Guajarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil and Telugu. Videos belonging to 16 SWAYAM courses were transcribed and then translated into above languages. These translations are uploaded in the course pages on SWAYAM Portal.

To provide additional technology based academic support and implement ODDL for the students of distance mode programmes, in 2019 the university launched an innovative scheme of Web Enabled Academic Support (WEAS) is to provide an interactive one-stop programme portal that will help the students in getting academic support to the programme they are enrolled in through various innovative strategies. COE successfully

delivered IGNOU Online Programmes since Jan 2020. The WEAS scheme especially for large enrolment programmes like BSCG practices the ODDL methodology. Launched in 2020, IGNOU PODCAST aimed to keep the students and other interested parties up-to-date on a wide variety of themes. At this time IGNOU also launched MBA Audio Books as part of the study material are in line with the vision of IGNOU of providing accessibility, affordability, equity and inclusivity. In 2023, during the 36th Convocation of the University digital degrees, diplomas, and certificates were distributed through blockchain technology.

Since the past one decade, NCIDE's mandate aligns closely with the larger national agenda of self-reliance, digital empowerment, and sustainable development. The University has implemented several government schemes Innovation Club, National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), National Innovation & Start-up Policy, YUKTI– National Innovation Repository, Smart India Hackathon, Innovation Ambassador *Atmanirbhar Bharat*, *Viksit Bharat* @2047, KAPILA Scheme etc. Over the years, the university has tried to develop a culture of innovation by organizing a variety of innovation and entrepreneurial activities for the students as well as the faculty. The university created an Innovation and Entrepreneurship Ecosystem and is strengthening it in a big way through the Institution's Innovation Council, IGNOU's Innovation and Start-up Policy, Pre-Incubation Program, Incubation Centre, Patent Facilitation Unit, Mentoring for start-ups Scheme, etc. Recently, to further expand the I&E ecosystem the university has initiated an I&E outreach programme for the Regional Centres and Learner Support Centres.

The Innovation and Entrepreneurship ecosystem at IGNOU includes promoting the culture of innovation, identifying and recognizing innovators, incubating and nurturing innovations and entrepreneurship, process re-engineering, empowering faculty for innovation, documenting and disseminating innovations, and networking for collaboration. IGNOU has actively engaged in promoting a culture of innovation among students and faculty through NCIDE, which nurtures bright minds and provides support for ideas to become start-ups. Awareness programmes, webinars, and workshops on innovation and entrepreneurship are organized regularly for students and faculty. Topics include design thinking, creativity, communication skills, problem solving, prototyping, pitching, business plans, funding, and intellectual property rights, etc. These sessions are delivered through google meet, and social media platforms such as Facebook Live and *Udyamita ki ore*. through *GyanDarshan* and YouTube. Thousands of students and alumni

have attended these programmes, leading to the creation of start-ups. To identify and recognise the innovator and entrepreneur student the University launched IGNOU *Udyami* Scheme and organizes events like the Festival of Ideas, Smart IGNOU Hackathon, AppNnovate, Creativity Challenge, Best Idea Award Best Innovation Awards Best Business Plan Awards Best Start-up Awards. The awards are organised yearly for the students. For showcasing and promoting innovations and entrepreneurship initiatives by the IGNOU students the university organised IGNOU *Udyami Samagam*-2023, GNOU Innovators' Meet-2023, 2024 and 2025, IGNOU Start-up Fest-2023, Innovation and Start-up Fest-2024, IGNOU Udyamotsav-2025. etc. The university carries out the pre-incubation activities throughout the academic year engaging students in continuous training and hands-on activities. The major components of the pre-incubation scheme are empowering the students in generating ideas through training and mentoring sessions, followed by providing them knowledge sessions and handholding for developing proof of concept, prototypes, business model canvas and business plans. The students are also provided sessions on generating awareness about the start-up and related ecosystem and support services for start-up development. Selected students are further mentored to convert their ideas into start-ups through mentoring foe start-ups scheme of the university. To provide the incubation support in 2020 the university launched a Virtual Incubator named as NCIDE's Virtual Resource and Incubator for Entrepreneurship Training and Innovation (NVRIETI). It is a knowledge bank with learning resources. The university is also in the process of establishing a physical Incubation facility at the headquarters and innovation hubs at the Regional Centres. The scheme will work on the hub-and-spoke model. The University also launched various innovative schemes like Innovation Club@IGNOU, Innovation Club@RCs Idea Bank@IGNOU, IDEABANK for IGNOU Students etc. The NCIDE facilitates IGNOU faculty to innovate in areas of distance education and social relevance. NCIDE also provided capacity development programmes on innovative use of technology to the faculty of the university. Many faculty members have become Innovation Ambassadors certified by the Ministry of Education and mentor student innovators and entrepreneurs. The university has also implemented government schemes and programmes like Institutions Innovation Council, *Atmanirbhar Bharat* Scheme, Start-up India Scheme, ViksitBharat@2047, Mentor-Mentee Scheme, Smart India Hackathon, Toycathon, YUKTI Scheme, and KAPILA Scheme, etc. in a big way. Based on the National Innovation and Start-up Policy, IGNOU formulated the IGNOU Innovation and Start-up Policy (IISP) to promote, support and nurture innovation, entrepreneurship and start-ups. The

Policy aims to create awareness, develop a robust ecosystem, and identify, recognize and support innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives. It focuses on mentoring and handholding budding innovators through networking with alumni, academia and industry. The NCIDE facilitates IGNOU faculty to innovate in areas of distance education and social relevance. Many faculty members have become Innovation Ambassadors certified by the Ministry of Education and mentor student innovators. To facilitate easy reference for scholars, policymakers, and other stakeholders, the NCIDE documents and disseminates policies and practices related to innovations in distance education across the entire Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system in India and abroad. Reports of research studies, seminars, conferences, and other academic events are prepared and published periodically. Innovations, innovative practices, and startup initiatives by students and faculty are documented in the form of books and booklets, which are disseminated in both print and digital formats. To share and promote innovative ideas, innovations, and best practices, the Centre publishes a monthly e-Newsletter titled "Ennovate." This digital publication features articles and contributions from IGNOU faculty members and eminent experts.

As a result of the above-mentioned initiatives, the university has conducted more than 600 programmes and around 480 Live Sessions in the field of Innovation, Entrepreneurship and IPR, resulting in 350 + ideas generated by the students & faculty. The students & faculty developed more than 80 prototypes, more than 70 business plans, and more than 100 startup initiatives. More than 220 students have registered in the Yukti Portal. The IDEABANK@IGNOU has more than 400 ideas and many are focusing on re-engineering and upgrading the ODDL system. The Patent Facilitation Unit (PFU) organised 15 activities and recognised 28 Patents by IGNOU students and faculty. The Regional Centres of IGNOU through Innovation Club@RCs have conducted more than 100 activities on innovation and entrepreneurship. IGNOU has awarded more than 65 students for Best Ideas, Innovations, Startups and Business Plans.

Through NCIDE's sustained efforts, the university has earned national recognition for fostering innovation and entrepreneurship. 5-Star IIC rating was received by the university, the university was also ranked No. 1 in ARIIA-2021, maintained top ratings from 2020–2024, won the Best Centre Award 2022, and the Entrepreneurship Catalyst Award 2025 for its initiatives in innovation and start-ups. Since the past two decades the university has successfully cultivated a strong culture of innovation and entrepreneurship among its students, faculty, staff and other stakeholders.

IGNOU as the Apex ODL institution in the nation become leader in instrumenting innovative idea/consent to improve quality in design and delivery of academic programmes and improve satisfaction of learners. The University becomes guiding body and source of inspiration for other ODL institutions in adapting innovations.

IGNOU's International Outreach Initiatives in Technology and Innovation

In 2006, IGNOU signed an MoU with the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) under the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to provide online interactive training to Indian diplomats posted abroad. IGNOU developed a "Virtual Campus Web Site for mid-career training programme for FSI officers, who are posted in various countries" to address the challenge of "transferable jobs, making it difficult for them to have face-to-face, direct training." The University also collaborated with UNESCO to develop programmes for in-service teachers and impart training in ICT-enabled basic education and gender training. IGNOU also initiated the Pan Africa E-Network on Pilot basis in January 2007 with induction of 40 learners from Addis Ababa and Harmaya University of Ethiopia. The pilot project was successfully completed in 2009. Based on the experiences of pilot project, the main project of the Pan Africa E-Network was started on 11 February 2010 with Master's in Business Administration (MBA) and Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education (DECE) programmes being offered for the students of four African countries *viz*. Egypt, Rwanda, Botswana and Malawi. In July 2010, Ghana and Ethiopia joined the project for MBA programme. Students from Botswana, Malawi and Rwanda also joined Diploma in HIV and Family Education (DAFE) programme. From 2009 to 2013 IGNOU in collaboration with UNICEF developed a series of innovations like Interactive scenario-based interactive multimedia enabled IMNCI package for health professionals, mobile enabled interactive assessment and identification of treatment using chartbook for health workers, eLearning portal for integrated management of neonatal and childhood illness, bilingual, tablet-enabled, and IDVD-based packages for training health professionals and field workers which supported India's Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illness (IMNCI) initiative. IGNOU signed MoUs with 32 Institutes/ Universities in 31 countries of the African Students from African countries were enrolled

under the project in Diploma and Certificate programmes mentioned above. IGNOU offered its expertise in online learning, course design, learner support and assessment to Guyana through the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL). Under *the e-Vidya Bharati / e-Arogya Bharati* (e-VBAB) Network Project of the Ministry of External Affairs, IGNOU offers online programmes in multiple African countries. IGNOU signed MoU for offering 51 online programmes in 19 African countries. In view of implementing ODDL in PGDMCH programme, In 2021 IGNOU collaborated with WHO to develop e-learning package of the IMNCI component of the programme.

The university's story demonstrates that technology and innovation are the twin forces that guided it to meet its mandate which is based on commitment to serve all sections of society through sound pedagogy, This can make education not just accessible, but meaningful.

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EPILOGUE-IGNOU OVER THE YEARS

Year	No. of Programmes on offer	Number of Students Enrolled
1987-88	2	4,381
1988-89	5	16,811
1989-90	7	42,324
1990-91	8	48,281
1991-92	13	53,376
1992-93	26	62,375
1993-94	28	75,666
1994-95	28	84,175
1995-96	34	91,398
1996-97	36	1,30,354
1997-98	39	1,62,540
1998-99	39	1,63,394
1999-00	47	1,72,548
2000-01	50	1,96,650
2001-02	62	2,91,360
2002-03	72	2,98,987
2003-04	78	3,16,547
2004-05	88	3,34,315
2005-06	101	3,66,161
2006-07	125	4,29,542
2007-08	129	4,68,444
2008-09	138	5,60,600
2009-10	175	8,16,312
2010-11	338	8,52,740
2011-12	445	9,93,471
2012-13	511	6,96,753
2013-14	228	7,22,390
2014-15	228	7,42,426
2015-16	228	7,94,010
2016-17	232	8,21,658
2017-18	239	10,72,578
2018-19	249	11,48,956
2019-20	251	13,48,948
2020-21	271	12,88,416
2021-22	288	12,89,519
2022-23	331	13,05,196
2023-24	325	13,70,149
2024-25	331	14,90,971

**Number of Convocations Held and
Degrees/Diplomas/Certificates Awarded**

Years	Convocation	Degree/Diploma/Certificate awarded
1990	1st	1,171
1991	2nd	3,807
1992	3rd	4,907
1993	4th	4,444
1994	5th	7,580
1995	6th	9,246
1996	7th	12,301
1997	8th	16,150
1998	9th	25,196
1999	10th	33,119
2000	11th	53,298
2001	12th	62,369
2002	13th	78,074
2003	14th	81,931
2004	15th	74,603
2005	16th	71,298
2006	17th	75,174
2007	18th	1,11,699
2008	19th	1,01,346
2009	20th	1,37,169
2010	21st	1,33,628
2011	22nd	2,15,364
2011	23rd	1,10,792
2011	24th	1,11,898
2012	25th	3,02,873
2013	26th	1,58,387
2014	27th	2,38,276
2015	28th	1,91,803
2016	29th	1,93,662
2017	30th	2,10,811
2018	31st	2,11,129
2019	32nd	2,00,212
2020	33rd	2,31,622
2021	34th	2,37,839
2022	35th	2,91,588
2023	36th	2,94,609
2024	37th	3,08,584
2025	38th	3,17,080

Number of Online Programmes Offered and Student Enrollment

S. No	Admission Session	Total Programmes	Total Enrollment
1	Jan-20	3	481
2	Jul-20	15	2056
3	Jan-21	16	1404
4	Jul-21	18	2574
5	Jan-22	34	4586
6	Jul-22	41	8454
7	Jan-23	45	3544
8	Jul-23	47	9915
9	Jan-24	47	7454
10	Jul-24	51	9474
11	Jan-25	51	6397

Number of MOOCs Offered On Swayam and Student Enrollment

Cycle	RUN	Total Courses	Total Enrollment
Jul -2017	1st Run	11	15130
Jul -2018	2nd Run	13	21784
Jan-2019	3rd Run	10	9792
Jul -2019	4th Run	16	39550
Jan-2020	5th Run	21	56570
Jul -2020	6th Run	73	153094
Jan-2021	7 th Run	106	264854
Jul - 2021	8 th Run	129	201408
Jan-2022	9 th Run	151	217187
Jul - 2022	10th Run	185	250592
Jan-2023	11 th Run	190	189444
Jul- 2023	12th Run	214	174807
Jan-2024	13th Run	225	235686
Jul- 2024	14th Run	253	227541
Jan-2025	15th Run	291	324924
Jul- 2025	16th Run	314	311439
	Total	**2202**	**2693802**

List of Ph.D. Programmes Offered

1	Doctor of Philosophy (Anthropology)
2	Doctor of Philosophy (Biochemistry)
3	Doctor of Philosophy (Child Development)
4	Doctor of Philosophy (Chemistry)
5	Doctor of Philosophy (Commerce)
6	Doctor of Philosophy (Computer Science)
7	Doctor of Philosophy (Distance Education)
8	Doctor of Philosophy (Development Studies)
9	Doctor of Philosophy (Economics)
10	Doctor of Philosophy (English)
11	Doctor of Philosophy (Education)
12	Doctor of Philosophy (Environmental Science)
13	Doctor of Philosophy (French)
14	Doctor of Philosophy (Nutritional Sciences)
15	Doctor of Philosophy (Gender and Development Studies)
16	Doctor of Philosophy (Geography)
17	Doctor of Philosophy (Geology)
18	Doctor of Philosophy (Home Science)
19	Doctor of Philosophy (Hindi)
20	Doctor of Philosophy (History)
21	Doctor of Philosophy (Inter Disciplinary and Trans Disciplinary Studies)
22	Doctor of Philosophy (Journalism and Mass Communication)
23	Doctor of Philosophy (Library and Information Science)
24	Doctor of Philosophy (Life Sciences)
25	Doctor of Philosophy (Management)
26	Doctor of Philosophy (Mathematics)
27	Doctor of Philosophy (Public Administration)
28	Doctor of Philosophy (Psychology)
29	Doctor of Philosophy (Physics)
30	Doctor of Philosophy (Political Science)
31	Doctor of Philosophy (Theatre Arts)
32	Doctor of Philosophy (Fine Arts)
33	Doctor of Philosophy (Dance)
34	Doctor of Philosophy (Music)
35	Doctor of Philosophy (Rural Development)

36	Doctor of Philosophy (Sanskrit)
37	Doctor of Philosophy (Sociology)
38	Doctor of Philosophy (Statistics)
39	Doctor of Philosophy (Social Work)
40	Doctor of Philosophy (Tourism and Hospitality Services Management)
41	Doctor of Philosophy (Translation Studies)
42	Doctor of Philosophy (Urdu)
43	Doctor of Philosophy (Vocational Education)
44	Doctor of Philosophy (Women's Studies)

Network of Regional Centres and Learner Support Centres

Sl. No.	State	Name of Regional Centre	District (Where RC Located)	Total LSC
1	A & N U.T.	Port Blair	South Andaman	10
2	Andhra Pradesh	Vijayawada	NTR	24
3	Andhra Pradesh	Visakhapatnam	Visakhapatnam	25
4	Arunachal Pradesh	Itanagar	Papum Pare	11
5	Assam	Guwahati	Kamrup Metropolitan	31
6	Assam	Jorhat	Jorhat	32
7	Bihar	Bhagalpur	Bhagalpur	14
8	Bihar	Darbhanga	Darbhanga	30
9	Bihar	Patna	Patna	61
10	Bihar	Saharsa	Saharsa	25
11	Chandigarh U.T.	Chandigarh	Chandigarh	26
12	Chhattisgarh	Raipur	Raipur	51
13	Delhi U.T.	Delhi-1	South East Delhi	70
14	Delhi U.T.	Delhi-2	Central Delhi	41
15	Delhi U.T.	Delhi-3	New Delhi	26
16	Goa	Panaji	North Goa	13
17	Gujarat	Ahmedabad	Ahmedabad	32
18	Gujarat	Rajkot	Rajkot	26
19	Haryana	Karnal	Karnal	48
20	Himachal Pradesh	Shimla	Shimla	56
21	J&K U.T.	Jammu	Jammu	38
22	J&K U.T.	Srinagar	Srinagar	48
23	Jharkhand	Deoghar	Deoghar	22
24	Jharkhand	Ranchi	Ranchi	60
25	Karnataka	Bangalore	Bangalore Urban	73

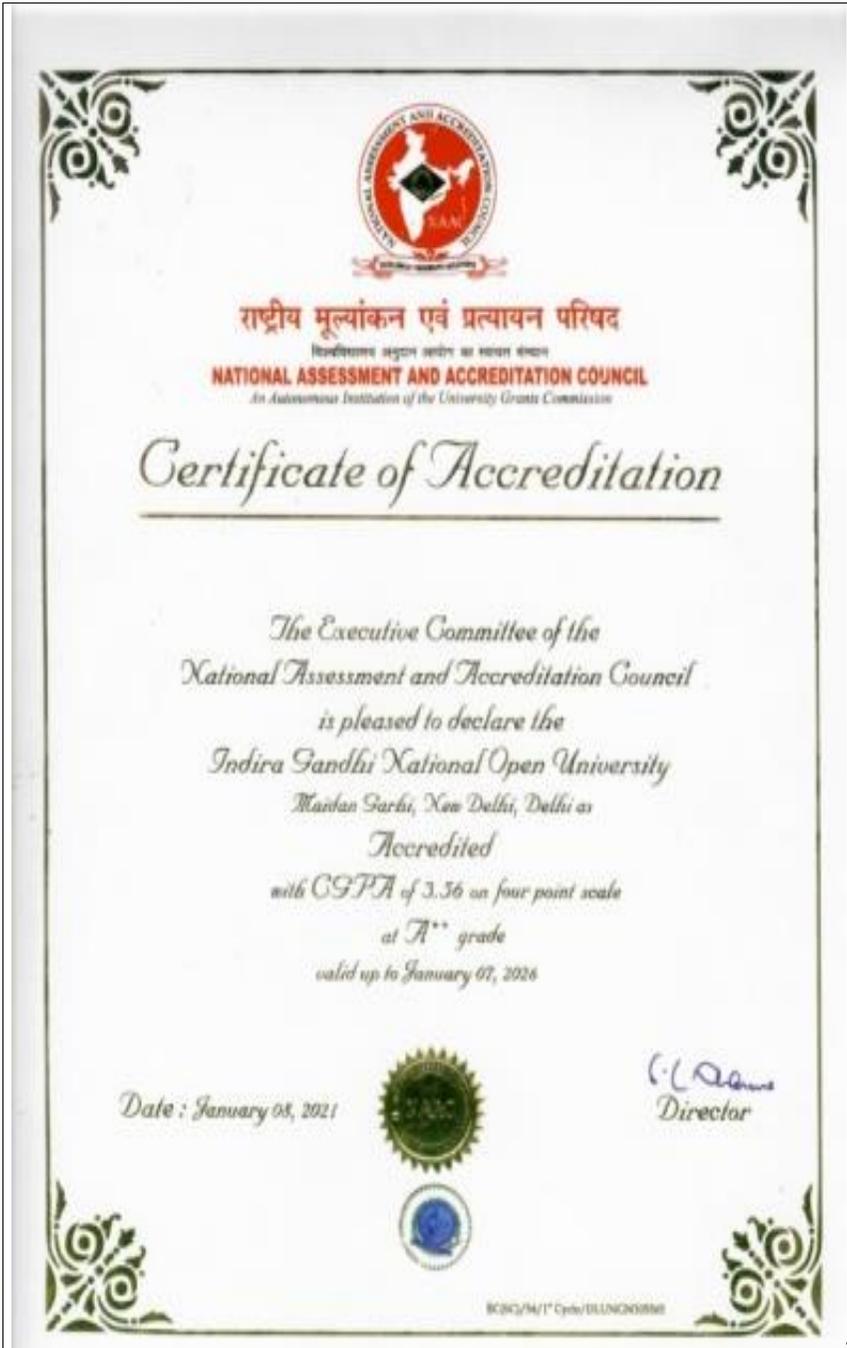| Sl. No.	State	Name of Regional Centre	District (Where RC Located)	Total LSC
26	Karnataka	Bijapur	Vijayapura	35
27	Kerala	Cochin	Ernakulam	43
28	Kerala	Trivandrum	Thiruvananthapuram	35
29	Kerala	Vatakara	Kozhikode	27
30	Madhya Pradesh	Bhopal	Bhopal	96
31	Madhya Pradesh	Jabalpur	Jabalpur	64
32	Maharashtra	Mumbai	Raigadh	30
33	Maharashtra	Nagpur	Raigad	38
34	Maharashtra	Pune	Pune	46
35	Manipur	Imphal	Imphal West	25
36	Meghalaya	Shillong	East Khasi Hills	23
37	Mizoram	Aizawl	Aizawl	30
38	Nagaland	Kohima	Kohima	23
39	Odisha	Angul	Angul	23
40	Odisha	Bhubaneswar	Khordha	57
41	Odisha	Koraput	Koraput	28
42	Odisha	Rairangpur	Mayurbhanj	01
43	Punjab	Khanna	Ludhiana	42
44	Rajasthan	Jaipur	Jaipur	89
45	Rajasthan	Jodhpur	Jodhpur	66
46	Sikkim	Gangtok	Gangtok	8
47	Tamil Nadu	Chennai	Chennai	58
48	Tamil Nadu	Madurai	Madurai	91
49	Telangana	Hyderabad	Hyderabad	25
50	Tripura	Agartala	West Tripura	22
51	Uttar Pradesh	Aligarh	Aligarh	24
52	Uttar Pradesh	Lucknow	Lucknow	75
53	Uttar Pradesh	Noida	Gautam Budh Nagar	69
54	Uttar Pradesh	Varanasi	Varanasi	64
55	Uttarakhand	Dehradun	Dehradun	28
56	West Bengal	Kolkata	Kolkata	49
57	West Bengal	Raghunathganj	Murshidabad	10
58	West Bengal	Siliguri	Darjeeling	28
		Total		**2265**

Number of Overseas Study Centres

Country	Name and Location of Overseas Study Centres (OSCs)
UAE	1) Wisdom Educational Consultant, Abu Dhabi, UAE (ID 5102)
	2) Al Hikma Education Institution, Sharjah (ID 5104)
	3) Emirates Professional Training Institute, Sharjah (ID 5509)
Kuwait	4) Gulf Centre for University Education, Kuwait (ID 5704)
	5) Kuwait Educational Centre, Kuwait (ID 5706)
Oman	6) Glory Institute, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman (ID 5905)
	7) Bridge Academy, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman (ID 5906)
	8) Polyglot Institute, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman (ID 5907)
Bahrain	9) Indian Academy W.L.L, Bahrain (ID 6001)
	10) UniGrad Education Centre W.L.L., Bahrain (ID 6002)
Saudi Arabia	11) Educational Consulting & Guidance Services, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (ID 6101)
	12) Educational Consulting & Guidance Services, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (ID 6102)
Ethiopia	13) St. Mary's University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (ID 8105)
Kyrgyzstan	1) Central Asian Indian Institute of Distance Education (CAIIDE), Kyrgyzstan (ID 9202)
Singapore	15) Open Minds International, Singapore (ID 9301)
	16) CLASCMA International Education & Research Centre of PMC Academy PTE Ltd. Singapore (ID 9308)
Kenya	17) Centre for Open and Distance Education, Kenya (ID 9401)
Nepal	18) International Centre for Academics, Kathmandu, Nepal (ID 9602)
	19) Nepal Information Technology Pvt. Ltd., Kathmandu Nepal (ID 9604)
Sri Lanka	20) Regent International Institute of Higher Education, Gampaha, Sri Lanka (ID 9702)
Afghanistan	21) Bakhtar University, Afghanistan (ID 9710)
Guyana	22) Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL), Guyana (ID 4001)
UAE	23) Emirates MCC University, Ras-Al-Khaimah (ID 5600)
Mauritius	24) Open University of Mauritius (ID 7202)
Ivory Coast	25) Hautes Etudes Commercials (HEC), Ivory Coast (ID 8203)

ACCOLADES

राष्ट्रीय मूल्यांकन एवं प्रत्यायन परिषद

विश्वविद्यालय अनुदान आयोग का स्वायत्त संस्थान

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION COUNCIL

An Autonomous Institution of the University Grants Commission

Certificate of Accreditation

The Executive Committee of the

National Assessment and Accreditation Council

is pleased to declare the

Indira Gandhi National Open University

Maidan Garhi, New Delhi, Delhi as

Accredited

with CGPA of 3.36 on four point scale

at A⁺⁺ grade

valid up to January 07, 2026

Date : January 08, 2021

Director

BC(6G)/94/1ˢᵗ Cycle/DLUNGN50860

INNOVATION CELL
(Government of India)

Ministry of Education
(Government of India)

AICTE

ATAL RANKING OF INSTITUTIONS
ON INNOVATION ACHIEVEMENTS

Certificate of Achievement

This is to certify that

INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY

is ranked "First" under the category

"CFIs (Non-Technical)"

in Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievement(ARIIA) 2021,

a flagship program of the Ministry of Education, Government of India.

29th December 2021.

Dr. Anil D Sahasrabudhe
Chairman, AICTE

Shri K Sanjay Murthy
Secretary (HE), MoE

Dr. Abhay Jere
Chief Innovation Officer
MoE's Innovation Cell

Ministry of Human Resource Development
Government of India

Swachh Campus Ranking 2019
of Higher Educational Institutions

The............Indira Gandhi National Open University, Delhi............has been ranked

............Second............amongst the cleanest Higher Educational Institutions in the

Country in the category............Non-Residential Universities - UGC............and was

awarded on 3rd December, 2019 at Prajnan (Auditorium), AICTE, New Delhi

R. Subrahmanyam
Secretary, Department of Higher Education,
Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India

Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank'
Minister of Human Resource Development,
Govt of India

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विश्वविद्यालय का कुलगीत

I
ये है जन जन का विश्वविद्यालय
ये है जन जन का विश्वविद्यालय
सरल सुगम शिक्षा का आलय
जन जन का विश्वविद्यालय
जन जन का विश्वविद्यालय

II
जोत जलाए ज्ञान की, स्वाध्याय की, अनुसंधान की
राह दिखाए वंचितों को शिक्षा के अधिकार की
ना उम्र का कोई बंधन, ना बंदिश परिधि की
घर घर है बना शिक्षा का देवालय
ये है जन जन का विश्वविद्यालय
जन जन का विश्वविद्यालय

III
जन जन का मान है, सम्मान है, पहचान है
जन जन का मान, सम्मान, पहचान है
राष्ट्र का आह्वान है, वरदान है, अभिमान है
राष्ट्र का आह्वान, वरदान, अभिमान है
सर्वसुलभ, सर्वोत्तम शिक्षा का है वादा
मुक्त और दूरस्थ शिक्षा का महालय
ये है जन जन का विश्वविद्यालय
जन जन का विश्वविद्यालय

IV
देश - विदेश पटल पर भूषित
नवाचार से सज्जित, गुणवत्ता से परिपूरित
ज्ञान वाणी, ज्ञान दर्शन, ज्ञान कोष से संचित
ज्ञान कोष से संचित
सर्वगुण सम्पन्न शिक्षा का हिमालय
शिक्षा का हिमालय
ये है जन जन का विश्वविद्यालय
जन जन का विश्वविद्यालय

Vishwavidyalay ka kulageet

I
Ye hai jan jan ka vishvavidyalay
Ye hai jan jan ka vishvavidyalay
Saral Sugam Shiksha Ka Aalay
Jan Jan Ka Vishvavidyaalay
Jan Jan Ka Vishvavidyaalay

II
Jot Jalaye Gyaan Kee, Svaadhyaay kee, Anusandhaan kee
Raah dikhaye Vanchiton ko Shiksha ke Adhikaar kee
naa umra ka koee bandhan, na bandish paridhi kee
ghar ghar hai bana shiksha ka devaalay
Ye hai jan jan ka vishvavidyalay
Jan Jan Ka vishwavidyaalay

IIII
Jan Jan Ka Maan Hai, Sammaan Hai, Pehachaan Hai
Jan Jan Ka Maan, Sammaan, Pahachaan Hai
Raashtra Ka Aahvaan Hai, Varadaan Hai, Abhimaan Hai
Raashtra Ka Aahvaan, Varadaan, Abhimaan Hai
Sarvasulabh, Sarvottam Shiksha Ka Hai Vaada
Mukt Aur Doorasth Shiksha Ka Mahaalay
Ye hai jan jan ka vishwavidyalay
Jan Jan Ka vishwavidyaalay

IV
Desh - Videsh Patal Par Bhooshit
Navaachaar Se Sajjit, Gunavatta Se Paripoorit
Gyaan Vani, Gyaan Darshan, Gyaan Kosh Se Sanchit
Gyaan Kosh Se Sanchit
Sarvagun Sampann Shiksha Ka Himaalay
Shiksha Ka Himaalay
Ye hai jan jan ka vishwavidyalay
Jan Jan Ka vishwavidyaalay

इग्नू
जन–जन का
विश्वविद्यालय

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UNIVERSITY

Indira Gandhi National Open University
Maidan Garhi, New Delhi - 110068, India