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Conceptualizing Critical Pedagogy and Andragogy Assessment for Scaling up Higher Education in Design in India

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Abstract: ***The study explores the challenges and gaps in design education in India, highlighting the lack of a specialized category for design subjects in the UGCNET examination list. It underscores the importance of granting an autonomous identity to design education, separate from visual arts, to better reflect the fields distinct nature. Drawing from personal experiences and academic interactions, the author identifies significant issues such as inadequate illustrative resources and the need for a comprehensive curriculum in design. The paper also addresses broader concerns in India's higher education system, including bias and corruption in PhD admissions, calling for reforms to ensure transparency and meritocracy. The aim is to enhance the stature and effectiveness of design education and integrate it more fully into India's academic framework. The article advocates for a paradigm shift in design education, characterized by a holistic and inclusive approach that transcends institutional boundaries and fosters a culture of innovation and excellence. By addressing the structural deficiencies and systemic biases, the paper endeavours to pave the way for a more equitable and reputable educational framework that resonates with India's global aspirations.***

Keywords: design education, UGCNET examination, curriculum reform, higher education bias, academic integrity

1. Introduction

Once said by the great theologian and Indian philosopher Adi Shankaracharya who changed the way of thinking and perceiving knowledge by expounding the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta (end of Vedas) and the introduction of Upanishads "Sickness is not cured by saying 'Medicine, ' but by drinking it. " Similarly, the basic purpose of the Degree of Doctor in Philosophy of Design is to bring the experiential philosophy to a practical use. After being adhered to the field of design since past ten years now, as a student, employee in the design industry, and design educationist (academician), I have come across a lot of loopholes in the field of design that I have been journaling down. After the post - graduation, I wished to proliferate the knowledge that I have gained to a practical platform. Being an Alumni after having pursued Bachelors in apparel/fashion Design from National Institute of Fashion Technology New Delhi, I feel privileged to have shared conferences with experienced academicians of the prerogative design institutes like NID, NIFT Delhi, Ambedkar University Delhi, IICD (Indian institute of craft and design, Jaipur, Rajasthan), etc. There are certain experiences, philosophies, and ideologies that I have developed after being a part of the intellectual debates with the qualified members of the conferences. Let us start with the smallest step or the loophole that I had listed in my journal. As a design student it is onerous to single out the elective for higher studies (Doctorate of Philosophy degree) in obedience to the UGC/ NET examination subject list. Design subject and its electives is not been provided by the UGC/NET, instead it is been categorised under visual arts as Graphic design elective without an appropriate module for design. This option of "Visual Arts" defalcates the students from their own skill, knowledge, and hard work they have put so far to set foot at this level of higher education (PhD.) in the field of design. The scope of this research is to provide an autonomous identity to the design subject under the UGC (University Grants Commission) /NET (National Eligibility test) examination list. Apart from having observed problems in design education, there are several other things like lack of illustrative books for students in India under the right budget. Illustrations play a major role in the development of student's interest in the subject according to the pedagogical analysis. There are several creative areas of research like Storytelling, folk - lores, visual language, system thinking and designs, etc. There is a lack of institutes that in our country that provides a particular curriculum of design to students who wish to pursue design and so to re - route the tree of design and art education in India. Every existing thing has merits and demerits of its own that affect the Dependent variables in a study (research methodology term). Otherwise, it is a matter of time when the tree shall no longer be seen as an individual, only its resources shall be absorbed by the other fields like Technology and artificial intelligence. We need to preserve and conserve the culture before it is all contemporised by the rapidly growing technological advancement.

2. Description

"When the Great Reality is not known the study of the scriptures is fruitless; when the Great Reality is known the study of the scriptures is also fruitless. " These golden words of wisdom by Adi Shankaracharya remind us of the reality check that needs to be brought back in the society. Big shots in the field of design are trying to set a trend of spreading design education and literacy amongst the youth. Do we have the exact analysis so far, of how many design institutions are contributing in the same? Well, it is hard to find the controversial aspect but here is a hypothesis that has been created by studying the data of past 10 years till present.



Image source[i]

There are several studies and thesis given by researchers in the field of design education and upscaling of the same. However, there are very few theories that have been applied in the field of design education. A few of them being Mr. MP. Ranjan (co - editor of the famous book Handmade in India), who conducted research and the author of the topics, "NID revised curriculum flow charts 1994", "IICD Jaipur curriculum document 1997", "NIFT Accessory design curriculum proposal 2002", "Advanced creative curriculum assignments LR Masters 2012", etc. We have design graduates in almost all the sectors of our society, but we still lack amongst one sector and that is education. Education sector is one of the largest economic sectors of India. A path of entering the field of design academics is still ambiguous. The design curriculum followed by various design institutes in India is area specific instead of being universal. Design is an open source of economy but it does hold an identity of its own. Different institutes use design according to their specific fields like engineering, Architecture, Art, for their economic growth and define design in their own perspectives. However, Design graduates still lack in identifying their own field as they do not understand the universal nature of design and somehow choose to be area specific. Although, designers are provided with identified Design degrees as per the education policies but it is not yet recognized by the University Grants Commission of India and National Eligibility Test list. Hence, it is Onerous for a design graduate to single out the elective for higher education in design in obedience to UGC NET examinations. There is an urgency to understand that not all design graduates aim to get into the industry but many wish to contribute in academics and research sector. NIFT (National Institute of Fashion Technology) has 17 centres across the country (now going to be 18 until 2024), and stands tall unshaken since 1986 holding an autonomous identity. However, the Overton window is seen changing rapidly. Not many students opt for NIFT for their reliable source of higher education as per the interview and survey conducted, 31% opted for IITs and UGC as an option for higher education. The number seems to be increasing at a higher pace than expected. And, why not? It is a much reliable source to opt for in terms of international repute and is being favoured by the Indian society since the time Macaulay hyped technology to be called it the only intellectual and international standard of measuring knowledge and intellect of a person as well as to boost one's economic growth.

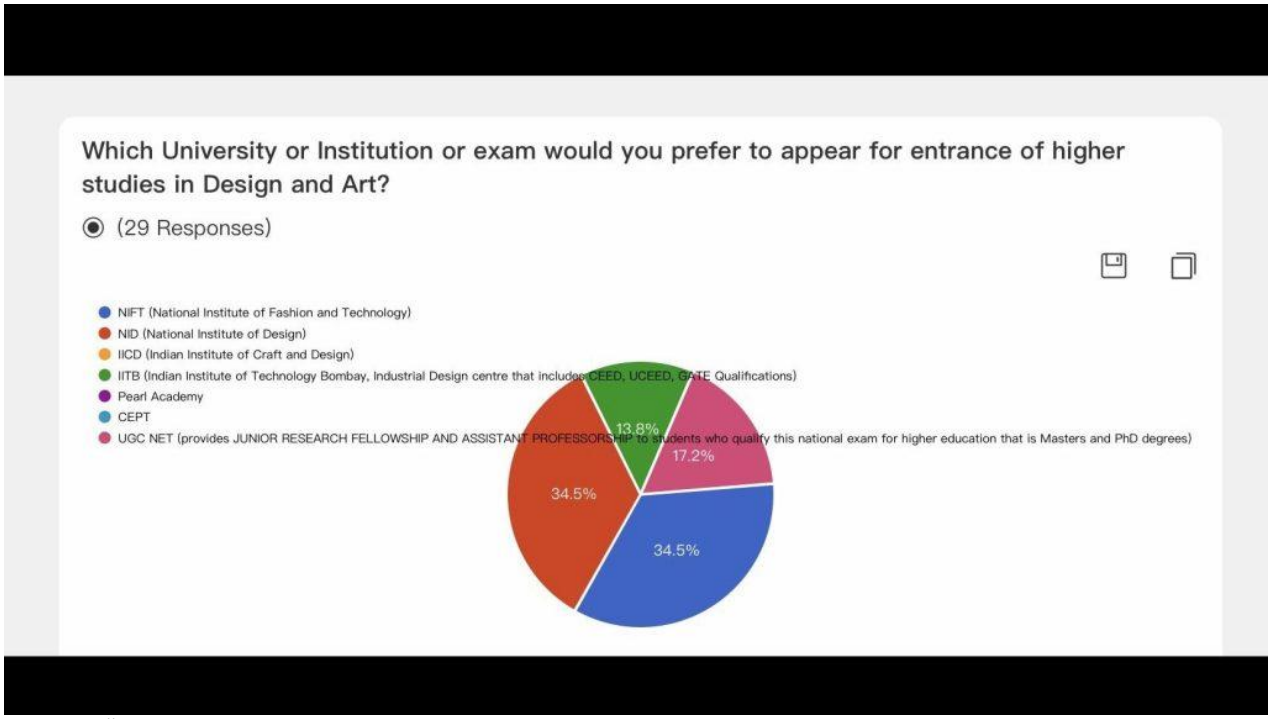


Image source[ii]

The Reality of Higher Education in India: Bias and Inequality in State Universities

India's higher education system, boasting a myriad of prestigious universities and colleges, plays a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual backbone of the nation. However, beneath the surface of academic achievements and accolades, there exist underlying biases and issues of corruption that mar the integrity of these institutions. Particularly evident is the preferential treatment meted out by some state universities in the selection process for PhD candidates, an issue that raises questions about equity and fairness in academic admissions as there is no merit system of selection amongst the students in state universities through PhD. Written test (UGC - NET).

Preferential Treatment in PhD Selections

A concerning trend has been observed in several renowned universities, including the likes of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and Delhi University (DU). There is a noticeable preference for selecting candidates who have completed their Master's degrees from the same university, often at the expense of potentially more qualified candidates from other states or institutions. This insular approach not only limits diversity within academic research but also undermines the merit - based system that higher education purports to uphold. Interviews and interactions with professors at these institutions often reveal a subtle, yet unmistakable bias towards their own graduates. This bias is not just a matter of personal preference but seems to be an entrenched part of the admission process, suggesting a systemic issue rather than isolated cases. The impact is twofold; it discourages talented students from other states or universities from applying, and it perpetuates a cycle where academic perspectives become echo chambers, lacking in the rich diversity that different backgrounds bring.

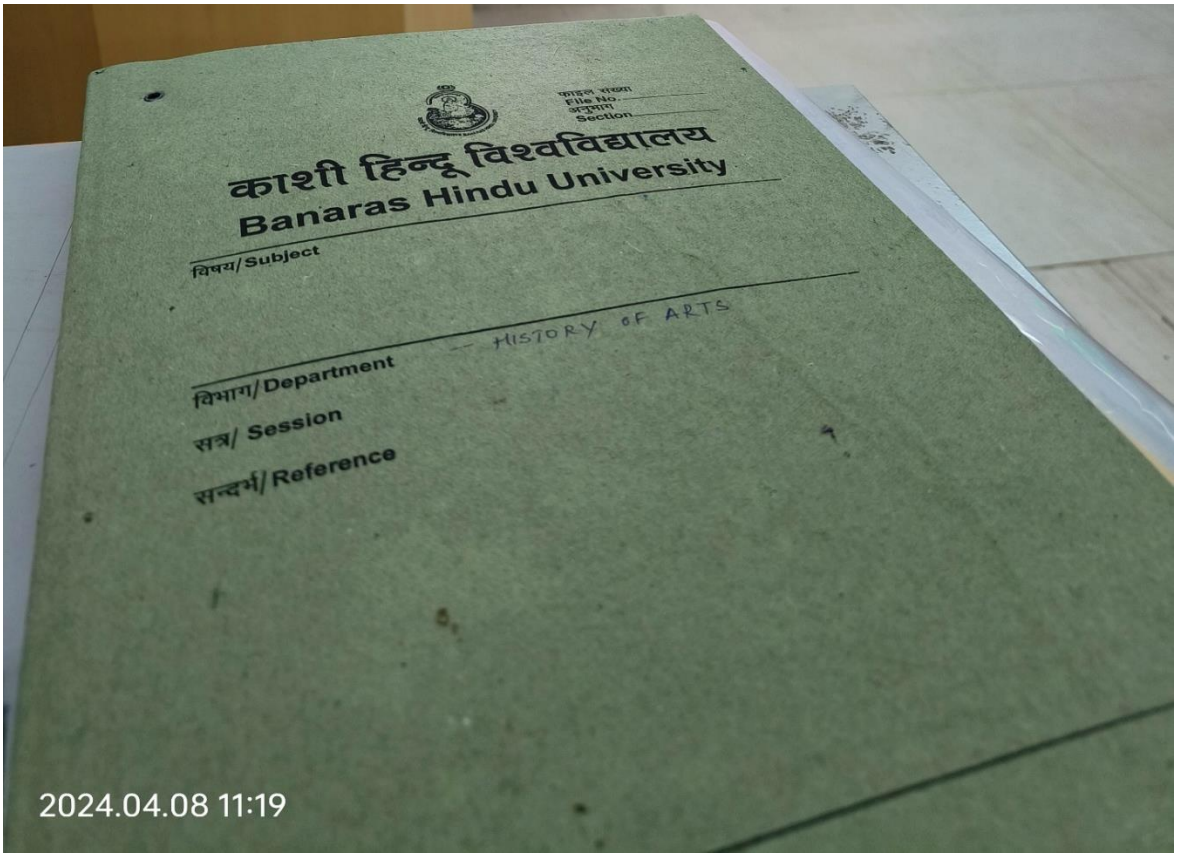


Image source[iii]

Empty Seats and Reserved Opportunities

Another disturbing aspect is the phenomenon of seats remaining vacant or being reserved under dubious circumstances. There are allegations that these seats are sometimes unofficially 'reserved' for students from the host university or for those who can afford to 'buy' their way in, despite official claims of meritocracy and equal opportunity. This not only questions the integrity of the admissions process but also hints at deeper, systemic corruption that can discourage deserving students and skew academic standards.

Corruption in Higher Education

Corruption in higher education, particularly in state universities, is a significant concern. The practice of buying seats or using influence to secure admissions is an open secret that undermines the credibility of educational qualifications obtained from these institutions. This culture of corruption can deter serious scholars from pursuing their education in these settings, leading to a brain drain where talented individuals either move to private institutions within the country or seek opportunities abroad.

3. Conclusion

NID still remains unshaken as it defines its curriculum of design conducted in different areas of design. The institute has also made its remarkable presence and importance in the society holding the field of design and maintaining its standards in the society by forming the India Design Council. The council talks about the ware bouts of the design fields and the success stories of how NID continues to maintain Design for public domain equal to the other departments. NIFT being from the same field has not yet made any contribution in the public domain but the members and students strive hard to maintain its repute and standards in the society. It is only a matter of hope that we can expect from NIFT, one of the most prestigious organizations across the country serving the society in the field of design academics, that it shall soon come up shoulder to shoulder with organizations like IITs and contribute on a tremendous platform to the public domain.

The need for reform in the higher education system in India is urgent. Ensuring transparency and fairness in admissions, particularly at the PhD level, is crucial. Policies should be implemented to ensure a diverse and inclusive selection process that truly reflects the merit and potential of all candidates, regardless of their educational or geographical background. Moreover, strengthening the regulatory mechanisms to curb corruption is essential for restoring faith in the system.

Universities like BHU and DU have a storied legacy and have contributed immensely to the intellectual capital of the country. However, preserving this legacy requires them to evolve and embrace practices that promote fairness and integrity. The Indian higher education system must commit to these values to remain relevant and respected on the global stage.

In conclusion, while India's higher education system has many strengths, it faces significant challenges that need to be addressed to ensure it serves the best interests of all students across the nation. Tackling the bias towards local students and curbing corruption are essential steps toward a more equitable and reputable educational framework.

[i] The picture is taken at **Indian Institute of Craft and Design, Jaipur, Rajasthan.** This highlights the working space of the design class in an Indian design institute (Here Fashion Design department).

[ii] Survey taken while conducting the research.

[iii] Picture taken at Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh during the interview for PhD. At the college.