

## Commercialisation in Higher Education in Tamil Nadu

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### Abstract:

Given the commercial attraction, permission to open an engineering or a medical college was more avidly sought than, say, a license for a liquor shop in mid-1980s in southern states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka much like Maharashtra. This article examines the factors responsible, first for patronage, and later, to keep the commercialization tendencies at bay in Tamil Nadu, against the backdrop of ideological commitment of Dravidian parties for expansion of HE by its de-elitisation and ruralisation, coupled with the social justice approach of 69% reservation in admissions, fee waiver and scholarships to the socio-economically disadvantaged children. What marks out Tamil Nadu is the competitive politics, between the DMK and AIADMK, initially over patronage to commercialization of HE, checking later their capitation fee menace without forsaking the social justice agenda, for the political-electoral edge these brought to them.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Privatisation of Higher Education (HE) could mean both transfer of public higher education institutions (HEIs) as well as provision of opportunities for HE to the private individuals and agencies, which were hitherto provided by the government. Commercialisation of HE is associated with the approach and practice of charging exorbitantly high fees and donations for admissions in clear violation of the rules and norms of the State and Central governments and their regulatory agencies like the UGC, AICTE, NCT, etc. (Gupta, 2015; Bhat, 2015). In majority of the other States, this has happened in the post-Reform (1991) phase. The southern states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu besides Maharashtra are seniors in both privatization and commercialization: these were about a decade ahead of other states in the wave of privatization and commercialization in general higher and technical and professional education, in particular. This article seeks to unravel the competitive commercialization tendencies in Tamil Nadu (TN) between the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), with the DMK being too ready to discard its initial ideological support for public sector approach and opposition to privatization and commercialization of HE, for fear of being outmaneuvered electorally, by its arch rival, the AIADMK, which could use this as a plank of meeting rising social aspirations, more than the DMK. It also marks another paradox peculiar to TN, viz., social justice, i.e., reservation of 69% of seats in technical and professional education colleges, while it was never above 50% in any other state, as by

Supreme Court orders (Viswanathan, 2003). This, state specific, social justice approach in HE along with de-elitisation, deconcentration of its urban centric nature, ruralisation and affordability, continued even in the all-pervasive milieu of privatization and commercialization of HE – this article's another focus.

### 2. BEGINNINGS OF PRIVATIZATION AND COMMERCIALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTHERN STATES

Andhra Pradesh started privatization, i.e., government sanctioning engineering colleges on self-financing basis as early as 1977 and the menace of commercialization became a major public outcry such that the Telugu Desam Party fought and swept the State Assembly elections in 1982 on the promise of banning capitation fee in the engineering colleges (Shatrujna, 1992). And, indeed the Andhra Pradesh Education Act, 1982 which was found inadequate to curb this practice was corrected by the Act of 1983 which laid down that the Government would prohibit collection of Capitation fee by an educational institution and make any such collection a cognizable offence, (GoAP, 1983). Shatrujna recalls the repeated attempts, from 1983 till 1992, by the caste-based educational empires dominated by the Reddys to dilute the ban on collection of capitation fees, until the Supreme Court struck down in 1993 the devious amendment sought to be brought to the Andhra Pradesh Education Act, 1983 (Shatrujna, 1992: 1119).

As early as 1980, the Karnataka University Review Commission (KURC) referred to the menace of “capitation fee in professional colleges” that have been “*sponsored in the State by unscrupulous persons interested only in making money by exploiting the system of 'capitation fees' and turning higher education into another arena for black marketing.*” It found that barring a few glorious exceptions, “a large number of the newer ones have shown little regard for academic considerations” (KURC, 1980: 10-11. emphasis added). Packing the university policy, executive and academic bodies to majority with their members of the politician-education overlords, from late 1980s and early 1990s, Maharashtra presented, a mirror of external pressure on the university governance that would not affect their institutions in any way in their pursuit of commercialization, and well up to the time of Supreme Court verdict in Inamdar Case in 2004 (Deshpande, 1993: 437; Chousalkar, 2000: 1348; Sahastrabudhe, 2000; Morkhandikar, 2000; Kumar, 2010: 20-21; Bhat, 2015).

### 3. COMMERCIALISATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN TAMIL NADU: THE BEGINNINGS

In higher education, the DMK government was wedded to the ideology of social justice, through deconcentration of its urban centric nature and promoting ruralisation and affordability, in fact, with a double incentive of fee waiver and scholarships to all the poor children from rural and remote areas and of BC, MBC, SC and ST communities (Thanappan, 2007). Thus, the DMK government increased the government colleges from 33 in 1969, to 51 and the aided colleges from 93 to 143 between 1967 and 1977 (Muniappan, 2012: 1-4; Thanappan, 2007: 133). Why and how did the need for unaided liberal art and science colleges arise in Tamil Nadu? Throughout the 1970s, the *Tamil Nadu Administration Reports* are full of references to the starting of: (i) new courses in the existing Under Graduate (UG) and Post Graduate (PG) levels; (ii) UG and PG degree courses in colleges where it did not exist earlier; and (iii) evening colleges/classes and increase in the number of colleges covered.

In a narrative of commercialization of HE, it is important to bear in mind a related dimension, i.e. social justice, with many attributes. Affordability is a related dimension to de-elitisation and expansion of opportunities for HE. Affordability was central to the political ideology of the Dravidian parties like the DMK and AIADMK. Thus, it started with freeing HE, beginning with the PUC from fee in 1972 and widened it to the degree courses within the next two-three years, and over time doubled it with scholarships to most of the children from poor, rural and remote areas and children of BC, MBC, SC and ST communities (Thanappan, 2007). This social justice and affordability dimensions were both part of the ideological baggage of the Dravidian parties (as can seen in the Budget Speeches during 1970s to 1990s (GoTN, 1971; '75; '89, '93; and Policy Note Demand No. 20, Higher Education from 2000 onwards), with great political-electoral appeal and clout that could not be forsaken in the all-pervasive commercialization milieu.

These attempts to increase the opportunities for HE mainly in the public sector – government and government-aided colleges -- fell short of the rising aspirations. In 1980-81 itself, the idea of providing HE where the cost will be borne by the students was first tried out by sanctioning a new

polytechnic college. In general higher education, the government tried out by starting self-financing evening colleges/courses along with regular courses in the existing government and aided arts and science colleges in the first half of the 1980s. However, it was during 1984-85 that 6 new unaided arts and science colleges were sanctioned by the AIADMK government. While sanctioning them to the private individuals, it was underlined that these institutions should be run with a social service motive and not with an intention to charge capitation fees that rocked the state in the area of medical colleges. However, by then, the practice of sanctioning unaided Engineering and Polytechnic colleges became a firm trend, with the sanctioning of un-aided Polytechnic in 1981 itself. 56 new polytechnic colleges, i.e. 56 out of total 115, were sanctioned in 1983-84, and 17 new unaided engineering colleges, i.e. 17 out of the total 30, were sanctioned in 1984-85 (GoTN, 1985: 51, 52).

Venkatramani reported the news of capitation fee in Medical Colleges in 1985, in the very first year of sanctioning of such un-aided colleges of medical education. He pointed out “how the controversy over capitation fees, having died down in other states, had resurfaced in Tamil Nadu which is now witnessing a stormy debate about the propriety of the AIADMK Government's action in permitting the opening of private medical colleges which charge hefty donations for admissions. The anger over the commercialisation of medical education is understandable. The three new private medical colleges that have been permitted to open will be admitting 100 students in the very first year”. He goes on to show that “Of these, 60 are private admissions made directly by the college and the remaining 40 are sanctioned by the state Government. Students admitted directly must pay Rs 2.5 lakh each as donation. The remaining 40 have to cough up Rs 5,000 in tuition fees every year” (Venkatramani, 2014).

A perceptive observer, Viswanathan, noted that “Tamil Nadu is perhaps one of the first few States that permitted the large-scale opening of unaided private engineering colleges, in the mid-1980s when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi launched the New Education Policy. Under the policy, entrepreneurs were invited to open professional colleges to meet the increasing need, since the government could not generate the funds required. Instant support came from the then Chief Minister, M.G. Ramachandran. For many it was an opportunity for money-laundering. Politicians, including Members of Parliament, also entered the field making use of some generous offers from the government in terms of land and infrastructure facilities. The highly polarised political situation in the State was also helpful in a large number of influential politicians getting permission to start colleges” (Viswanathan, 2003).

Profit as the purpose replaced social service motive, except that probably the incidence of capitation fee in arts and science colleges was not as oppressive as in medical and engineering colleges. But once profit motive invaded the educational scene, it hardly disappeared. Political patronage in sanctioning of unaided colleges had its returns, both electoral and monetary, although always known to the public and not accounted.

That the practice of capitation fees in engineering colleges was widespread, much to its opposition, as the champion of pro-public sector approach, became evident when the DMK

government came to power and knew of various “irregularities”, besides “inadequate facilities and poor quality of education”. The DMK government declared: “In this circumstances no new private self-financing colleges will be approved in future. The functioning of all such institutions which are in existence at present will be examined and necessary action taken” (GoTN, 1993:130). Despite its pro-public sector approach, the DMK government’s reaction to the private SF colleges was due to their irregularities and compromises on quality parameters rather than anti-private sector per se. This became evident when it returned to power in the second half of the 1990s.

Clear data regarding management type of Engineering and Polytechnic Colleges along government, aided and self-financing categories is not available for the period 1990-95 when the AIADMK was in power and its lenience on self-financing engineering and polytechnic colleges could not be tracked. As in Table-1, in liberal arts education, the SF colleges increased from 13% to 19% during 1990-92-93 (GoTN, 1992: 175; 1993: 173; 1994: 173; and 1997: 180). In the area of technical education, SF colleges were started by the AIADMK in 1984-85 on a big scale vis-à-vis the total, i.e., 17 out of 30, which represented 56.6% (GoTN, 1986:74). The next time the data is available is after 1997-98, which is under the DMK rule, and the share of SF engineering colleges was

76 out of 90, representing 84.4%. It had reached 143 out 157 in 2000-01, i.e., 91% (GoTN, 2008: 40, 43, 45). The position in Polytechnic colleges was very similar. Starting with just 5 in 1981, the AIADMK took it to 18 out of 147 in 1985-86, i.e., 12.2%. When the DMK returned to power in 1995-96, it took the drive to a new level, 112 out 173, 64.7% in 1997-98 and left it at 148 out of 210, i.e., 70.4% in 2000-01 (GoTN, 2008).

In the bi-polar political scenario of Tamil Nadu, there would always be a competitive politics on any issue, whether it be welfare, social service, education, etc. It would always be competition between the DMK and the AIADMK, one wanting to overtake and outsmart the other, on which their electoral fortunes and stints in the government depended. Especially after the onset of Reforms, the DMK was not prepared to forsake the socio-political and electoral edge that the self-financing college approach to promoting HE brought with it, because, if it was getting stuck with its opposition to the SF approach, its arch rival, the AIADMK, would outsmart it. That was the reason why, as seen in Table-1, even in its very first year in government in 1995-96, it approved 98 SF arts and science colleges and 76 SF Engineering Colleges in 1997-98 (GoTN, 2008: 43, 45).

**Table 1.** Initial Trends in Commercialisation of Higher

Year	Arts and Science Colleges			Engineering Colleges			Polytechnic Colleges					
	Gov.	Aided <sup>+</sup>	Unaided	Total <sup>#</sup>	Gov.	Aided	Unaided	Total	Gov.	Aided	Unaided	Total
<b>AIADMK</b>												
1979-80									29	16	Nil	45
1980-81									30	16	5	51
1981-82									30	16	5	51
1982-83									30	16	3	59
1983-84	61	168	Nil	216	7	5	Nil	12	31	16	56	115
1984-85	53	150	6	237	7	5	17	30	31	16	71	129
1985-86	54	148	8	238	7	5	6	36*	31	16	18	147
1986-87	54	133	11	229	7	5	3	39	31	16	7	154
1987-88	61	148	16	245	--	--	7	--	--	--	74	--
<b>DMK</b>												
1988-89	62	197	23	255	--	--	28	--				
1989-90	54	132	25	252	--	--	--	--				
<b>AIADMK</b>												
1990-91	54	132	29	215\$	--	--	--	--				
1991-92	54	132	38	224	--	--	--	--				
1992-93	55	132	46	233	--	--	--	--				
1993-94					--	--	--	--				
1994-95					--	--	--	--				
<b>DMK (1996 to 1997 data not available)</b>												
1995-96	65	160	98	323	--	--	--	--				
1996-97	65	160	122	347	--	--	--	--				
1997-98	65	160	158	383	7	3	76	90##	21	35	112	173
1998-99	67	161	175	403	7	3	106	120	21	35	143	204
1999-00	67	161	194	422	7	3	113	127	22	35	148	210
2000-01	67	161	235	463	7	3	143	157	22	35	148	210

Note: + also include Colleges of Teacher Education; # Include physical education, oriental colleges, school of social work, colleges of education, etc.; \*Include affiliated colleges, Deemed Universities, etc.; \$ only Arts and Science Colleges; ##Totals from 1997-98 to 2000-01 include affiliated and others under Anna University; -- implies, data not available

Source: A. Thanappan (2007), *Higher Education in Tamil Nadu during 1967-87*, University of Madras, Chennai, p. 133; Government of Tamil Nadu [GoTN], *Tamil Nadu Administration Report, 1985; 1988; 1991; 1992*; GoTN (1992), *Statistical Handbook of Tamil Nadu, 1992*, p. 175; and also for the years 1993, p.173; 1994, p. 173 and 1997, p. 180; GoTN (2008), *Policy Note Demand No.20 – Higher Education 2008-09*, p.40, 43 and 45.

**Table 2.** Entrenched Trends in Commercialisation of HE in Tamil Nadu

Year	Arts and Science Colleges				Engineering Colleges				Polytechnic Colleges				
	Gov.	Aided	Unaided	Tr.	Total	Gov.	Aided	Unaided	Total	Gov.	Aided	Unaided	Total
<b>Edn</b>													
						<b>AIADMK</b>							
2001-02	67	161	249		6	3	207	226#	22	41	147	208*	
2002-03	60	134	247	22	478	6	3	225	243	22	41	147	
2003-04	61	134	247	22(1)	478	6	3	222	249	22	40	145	
2004-05	67	162	249	22(1)	478	6	3	213	252	22	36	146	
2005-06	67	162	441	43(22)	503	6	3	224	239	--	--	--	
						<b>DMK</b>							
2006-07	74	162	567	277(256)	803	6	3	238	251	22	34	166	
2007-08	76	162	622	309(288)	860	6	3	263	276	22	34	205	
2008-09	77	162	906	--	1145	6	3	335	355	22	34	258	
2009-10	78	162	1014	645	1254	6	3	431	456	22	37	307	
2010-11	93	162	1063	--	1318	6	3	464	491	30	37	365	
						<b>AIADMK</b>							
2011-12	93	162	1068	660(639)	1323	6	3	498	525	30	37	380	
2012-13			--		7	3	525	553	30	34	395	479	
2013-14	69	162	1097	672(651)	--	10	3	541	572	41	34	414	
2014-15	120	168	1107	672(651)	1389	10	3	546	576	41	34	414	
2015-16	84	162	1126	724(703)	1409	10	3	553	583	41	34	406	
2016-17	128	162	1217	724(703)	1506	10	3	553	583	41	34	416	
2017-18	127	162	1217	734(713)	1506	10	3	554	584	46	34	418	
2018-19	139	162	1246	718	1547	10	3	503	1105	51	34	416	
2019-20	139	162	1246	718(697)	1547	--	--	--	585			520	
						<b>DMK</b>							
2021-22	900	--	--	649	1553	--	--	554	587	89	89	420	
2022-23	918	--	--	628	1553	--	--	539	573	34	89	420	
												509	

Note:-# Total include institutions like affiliated and others under Anna University;

\* Totals include HMCT/Film & TV/RLI.

Source: GoTN (2005), *Policy Note Demand No.20 – Higher Education, 2005-06*, p. 5; pp.19-20 for data on TE during 1997-98 to 2004-05; 2009, p. 91,93; 2010, p. 84,86; 2011, p.76,84,86; 2012, p. 136; 2013, p. 170,172; 2013, p. 23; 2015, p. 237, 239, 241; 2016, p.41, pp. 13-14; 2017, p. 11, 26; 2019, p. 12, and p. 52; 2022, p. 9, 36; 2023, p. 13, 22-23,99. (more than one set pps., in the same year refer arts and science streams and TE streams).

#### 4. SOCIAL JUSTICE EVEN WITH COMMERCIALISATION

TN's privatisation and commercialisation of HE, very strangely, went with social justice, as a matter of conscious and competitive policy approach both with AIADMK as well as with DMK, with an uncompromising zeal, as much for ideological fervor as for shrewd political-electoral realism. The system of admissions to professional colleges, as per the Unnikrishnan case verdict in 1993 enabled Tamil Nadu government, under the AIADMK, to ensure social justice in admissions by assuring 69% of reservation to the BC, MBCs, SCs and STs, through the "free seat" and "payment seat" on the basis of the ranks in state conducted admission test. This was struck down as "unconstitutional" by the Supreme Court in 2002. The unaided professional colleges' decision of both non-minority and minority colleges to adopt its own admission procedure and fee structure threatened to erode the social justice approach of the state government, and deprive the poor meritorious students of the opportunities for higher education. The government, this time again, the AIADMK, despite its traditional pro-privatisation disposition, was sensitive to the public apprehension, announced that 50% of the seats in unaided non-minority and 30% seats in un-aided minority SF professional colleges would be reserved for the government that it could use to

assure social justice and affordability in admissions. This was besides advising these colleges not to charge more than Rs, 30,000 annually for fees and give a concession of Rs. 5,000 to the students admitted under the Single Window System (Viswanathan, 2003).

#### 5. COMPETITIVE COMMERCIALISATION FROM 2000 DISREGARDING POLICY PROCLIVITIES

In the area of liberal arts education, as in Table-2, the AIADMK patronage to SF liberal arts colleges was 51.6%, i.e. 247 out of 478 colleges in 2002-03. This position reached 54.4% in 2005-06 before it demitted office (GoTN, 2008:40). The pro-public education sector DMK's patronage to self-financing private sector was evident when it sanctioned 567 SF arts and science colleges in 2006-07 in the very first year of its stint in power, i.e., 67%. It escalated this share to 80% in 2010-11 (GoTN, 2012:165). There was no change in the proportion SF colleges in the total in AIADMK regime from 2011-12 to 2019-20, viz., the same 81%. The competitive commercialization tendencies should be marked in the area of liberal arts and science education more than technical and professional education, given the DMK's traditional inclination in favour its public sector ideology, and when it

entered the SF fray in this sector, it wanted to overtake its political opponent AIADMK.

Competitive commercialization has greater political and electoral returns with monetary returns always not evident in the sanctioning of engineering and polytechnic colleges. Therefore, this trend is marker of who overtakes the other in the race of commercialisation in engineering and technical education in Tamil Nadu. As in Table-2, AIADMK began its stint in 2000-01 with 91.5% and 70.1% in engineering and polytechnic colleges, and took it to the same level in 2004-05. However, the DMK took the proportion of SF engineering and polytechnic colleges to 96.3 and 85% in 2006-07 and did not relent on the proportion till 2010-11, with 94.5 and 84.4% respectively. By the time AIADMK came to power, technical education was already in crisis, and in spite of its privatisation inclination, could not increase the share of SF in technical institutions besides maintaining at the same level of 94.8 in engineering colleges between 2011-12 and 2018-19 while the proportion actually fell from 85 to 80% in polytechnic colleges.

## 6. CRISIS IN TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN TAMIL NADU

Prior to say 2012, SF engineering colleges, much like management and other professional institutions, were owned in Tamil Nadu mainly by politicians and real estate barons, because it was hugely lucrative commercial ventures (Rani, 2010). But, the crisis in technical education, as a sequel to the severe economic and industrial slowdown, was manifest in the industries, including the IT and other software and engineering industries and that reduced absorbing engineering graduates. Except those from reputed institutions, graduates of sub-standard engineering institutions passed out unemployable. On the crisis in engineering education, R. Balaji and Swathimoorthy quote a study by Aspiring Minds Research Cell: "Tamil Nadu lags in average quality of talent". The study was based on an employability test, AMCAT (Aspiring Minds Computer Adaptive Test), taken by 1.2 lakh engineers across India for IT services and related jobs. It stated that though Tamil Nadu is considered an engineering hub, the State's engineering students' employability is only 8.33 per cent (Balaji and Swathimoorthy, 2017).

They go on to report the situation in 2016: "One good news is that the exorbitant capitation fees are no longer the norm. According to an engineering college faculty, around five years ago, the capitation fee for reserving seats in engineering colleges ran to lakhs of rupees — over Rs. 6 lakh for Mechanical and Civil Engineering and Rs. 1 lakh for Information Technology. Now colleges are struggling to fill their seats every year". The report further adds that "The starting salary for teachers too has come down in the past five years as admissions decreased. Initially, most colleges gave a salary of Rs. 19,000-33,000 for a fresher. But now that has come down to Rs. 12,000-14,000. In addition, professors are forced to bring 2-3 students each for admission or they face a pay cut of close to three months" (Balaji and Swathimoorthy, 2017).

In 49 out of 554 SF engineering colleges not even 10% seats filled in 2016-17. Colleges which filled 40% of seats accounted for 34.4%, i.e. 191 colleges. While the decline in

enrolment vis-à-vis sanctioned intake started even as early 2006-07, it became too severe in SF colleges. The SF colleges constituted nearly 95% in the total of engineering colleges. The proportion of sanctioned seats increased from 95099 in 2006-07 to 290761 in 2015-16, but the intake started declining from 95% to 55% between 2006-07 and 2015-16 (DoTE).

An account in respect of Education in Tamilnadu, perhaps around 2015-16 puts it: "Sample this: there are 550 engineering colleges in the state affiliated to Anna University producing over 2 lakh engineering graduates each year, most of them finding it tough to compete in the job market. What is more alarming is that despite nearly 80,000 seats going vacant in engineering colleges, the governing bodies like AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education) and Anna University give permission to start new colleges in the districts resulting in the boosting of supply side – more than double the current requirement of industry (DoTE).

## 7. WORST MARKERS OF COMMERCIALISATION IN TAMIL NADU HIGHER EDUCATION: COLLEGES OF TEACHER EDUCATION

SF Colleges of Teacher Education in Tamil Nadu is an eye opener in a discussion about the menace of commercialization in higher education. When SF Colleges of Teacher Education was sanctioned in a large number in one go in 1987 in Maharashtra to those agencies running engineering colleges, this was seen as a lucrative proposition: *Economic and Political Weekly* discerned the reasons: "*opening of colleges of education has proved even more lucrative than starting of polytechnics and engineering colleges. This is because hardly any inputs are needed (such as workshops and laboratories) to start such a college. The number of aspirants for admission is also much larger for such a college than other professional courses. It is no wonder that the permission for the opening of such a college is sought even more avidly than, say, a license for a liquor shop (EPW, 1990: 225-26. emphasis added).*

Unlike Maharashtra, in Tamil Nadu, it is not clear whether the same people running arts and science colleges and perhaps even engineering colleges, the real estate sharks, liquor barons, industrialists, religious trusts and politicians (Rani, Manual, Venkataramani, 1985), are those who opened a SF College of Teacher Education. The AIADMK government started with sanctioning one college of Teacher Education in 2003-04 (GoTN, 2003-04:13) but within another two years ended up with sanctioning of 22, i.e., 22 out of 43 colleges of education, i.e., more than 50% in 2005-06 (GoTN, 2005). The DMK which was traditionally a champion of public education, was only too ready in joining the race, and with a big bang, as seen in Table 2 above, by increasing the number of SF teacher education colleges to 256 out of 277, in 2007 (GoTN, 2007: 23), thereby increasing the share to 92% and 93% in 2007-08 (GoTN 2009). As in Table 2, AIADMK could take it to 97% during 2012-18 (GoTN, 2012: 165; 2019: 12, 52). This scene of 97% of colleges of Teacher Education being unaided private colleges in Tamil Nadu resembles the scene at the national level, as scripted by discerning observers like Amitabh Kant and Sarah Iype. Their observation that "about 90 per cent of these" 17,000 odd "institutes (i.e., Teacher Education Institutes [TEIs]) are privately owned", is more truer in Tamil Nadu, as it accounted for 92 to 97% between 2006 and 2018, as seen in Table 2 above. Kant and Iype go on to describe the nature

of these TEIs “a mind-boggling majority of them [the 90% being privately owned] are standalone institutes, running single programmes with as few as 50 students. In fact, while most of these TEIs are financially unviable, some function out of tiny rooms with duplicate addresses, and a few could even be selling degrees at a fixed price. These institutes function in isolation from the rest of the higher education system, and there is no system to assess and accredit them. Consequently, there is no systemic sieve to ensure the entry of only motivated and meritorious individuals into the teacher education space” (Kant and Iype, 2020). There is no guarantee that this is not true of the TEIs scene in Tamil Nadu also. Kant and Iype make bold to contend: “Till date, there is no accurate real-time database of the number and details of teacher education institutes, students enrolled and programmes offered”.

This is perfectly true in respect of TN. A look at the Website of Tamil Nadu Teachers Education University (TNTEU) indicates that the number of Colleges of Teachers Education, including government, aided and unaided, as 753, and the number of teacher training institutes under SCERT is 424. The Policy Note Demand No. 20 – Higher Education 2019-20 indicates the number of Colleges of Teachers Educations in TN as 718. However, the NCTE Website cites the number as 2136 with clear addresses and contact details; it is not clear which data source is true – Policy Note Demand No. 20 – Higher Education 2019-20, TNTEU, SCERT or NCTE, as regards the number of Colleges of Teacher Education and Teacher Training Colleges/Institutes.

## 8. CONCLUSION

In the area of technical education, there is a crisis of oversupply and more than 50% of remaining unfilled and engineering colleges applying and waiting for closure. The burden of survival in many cases has been transferred on to the shoulders of the faculty with the threat of salary cut if they fail to bring in students for admission. Commercialisation in terms of capitation fee has gone long before and there is a crisis for engineering colleges waiting for approval for closure or permission to switch over to liberal arts and science colleges (Balaji and Swathimoorthy. 2018; NT Bureau, 2019). In the area of teacher training, there is a glut with much larger number of sub-standard and sub-optimal size of TEIs, as Amitabh Kant and Sarah Iype portray. Engineering colleges which were once sought more avidly than a license for a liquor shop, no longer appears to be a commercially lucrative venture in TN, as elsewhere. TN seems to at peace with itself with the level of commercialisation in liberal arts and science education with its usual package of the social justice baggage.

Among India’s large states, Tamil Nadu consistently maintains the highest GER in higher education for five academic years between 2017-18 and 2021-22. In 2024, Tamil Nadu leads in higher education enrolment with a GER of 47%, surpassing the national average of 28.4% (*The Hindu businessline*, January 30, 2024; Rangarajan and Shanmugam, 2024: 2). Inclusion and affordability have been an undeniable feature in the HE policy milieu even in a predominantly privatisation and commercialization paradigm in Tamil Nadu, with more than 75% of HEIs in general education and more than 80% in technical education in the un-aided sector.

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