Autonomy to Private Universities

What is the issue?

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- Recently, government has proposed to grant autonomy to 8 more private universities, which inherently runs the risk of precipitating a fee hike.
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- This could exacerbate the financial exclusion that is defining the education landscape for long and lead to further marginalisation.
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How did the proposal come up?

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- The current events have been created through a simulated politics of urgency that followed a report that ranked no Indian university in the global top 200.
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- All of a sudden, the government jumped into action and “speed seems to have become a substitute for efficiency and progress, a substitute for social justice”.
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- While the hollowness and superficiality of reform is startling, it is being projected as decisive action deserving applause.
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- **Problems -** The organic evaluation for creativity and technological prudence seems lacking and institutions are being ranked based on facilities.
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- The current ranking framework merely involves a number game that attempts to coat the desire for profits (autonomy in fees) with a social justification.
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- Hence, in the name of autonomy, the public good called education is being privatised and being made traded free market commodity.
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- The government is merely divesting itself of its responsibility and this is being disguised in creating a few narrow entitlements for a few institutions.
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What are the shortfalls in the deal?

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- **Autonomy -** This is being celebrated as some new invention while it was always a part of the public university tradition to a considerable extent.
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- In fact, even in state run universities, the rules of the craft were always largely at the hands of the practitioners.
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- **Quantifying Knowledge -** Bureaucracy is defining the university setup, which puts the entire education system and culture of innovation at risk.
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- Hence, quality is getting reduced to quantifiable output, while seeing research as a learning craft through experimentation is being sidelined.
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- **Costs –** Government is clearly withdrawing from education.
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- Institutions can now change admission rules, or charge more fees on their own.
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- India is a split-level world where the majority of institutions suffer from lack of funds, while a few parade their affluence (richness) as superior quality.
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- Hence, the rich can now create captive institutions while the middle class watches helplessly as quality education in democratic spaces empties out.
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- The idea of university as a public space, where subsidies are provided to allow the marginalised to participate with dignity, is being lost.
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Source: The Hindu

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