

CHAPTER V

THE CONTOURS OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION IN KARNATAKA

Karnataka is in the foremost among many states in the subcontinent as a destination for professional education. Institutions offering medical, engineering and dental education in Karnataka have proliferated during the past two decades. As a matter of fact, the state has been a host to thousands of students each year from all over the country who are aspiring to get enrolled in different professional colleges, preferably in the field of medicine and engineering. While in the foregoing chapters concepts and theoretical concerns over social mobility were examined, in this chapter I focus on the status of professional education in Karnataka with special emphasis on Bangalore city, in which the study was carried out.

By the very design, as was pointed out in the methodology section in the introductory chapter, Bangalore was chosen as the locale of this study. Much has been said of the city's claim to fame both as an educational and IT hub of the country. In the more recent years, Bangalore is emerging as the most favoured destination for health care as well. Since this study aims specifically at examining the formation of aspiration among young boys and girls to get educationally qualified to enter into one of the most coveted professions to accomplish social mobility, Bangalore city presents itself as an ideal locale of the study. Given the growing number of medical, engineering and law colleges in the city, it is recognised as producing the largest numbers of doctors, lawyers and engineers in the country.

The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I give an account of the institutional infrastructure to support pursuit of Professions and professional education in Bangalore. In the second section, I present a brief outline of the successive steps that the state has attempted to govern the process of administration of professional education and discuss one chief institutional arrangement that has been evolved to facilitate the aspirants to get admitted to colleges to pursue professional education. The final section deals at length concerning implications of all the administrative measures upon the pursuit of

engineering education. The chapter, at its conclusion would demonstrate how the elaborate institutional arrangement for governance of professional education in Karnataka is itself a response from the state machinery to the mounting aspirations among students and their families to obtain educational qualifications in the fields of medical, engineering professions. Stated differently, the issues discussed in this chapter is an indication, in anticipation, of the compulsions on the part of the state to be responsive to the needs of the community that aspires for professional education.

5.1. Professions and Professional Education in Bangalore City

The growing demand for professional courses in education reveals a shift in the interests among people, for young students and for their behalf by the parents. In the early 1940s and 50s, there was an increasing demand for lawyers, and the profession of Law was valued high. After independence, there was a greater rush among the younger generation towards civil service, coinciding with the expanding and growing importance of the Government. Gradually, there was a growing demand for chartered accountants as market and commerce were expanding. For some time there, was a growing demand for agricultural scientists too coinciding with the emphasis on overcoming food shortage in the country. Followed by it was a demand for degrees in commerce coinciding with reforms in Banking and Finance sectors during the early seventies.

In the early eighties, there was sudden renewed demand for medical professionals due to which the number of medical colleges got multiplied, facilitating the menace of 'capitation' fees in a welfare economy. But, towards the late 1980s, a course in medicine was often the first option among young students. Parents struggled hard to ensure that their children got into the medical course somehow either through some quota (Reservation for backward castes and tribes, sports quota, N.C C and N.S.S quota etc) or by paying heavy capitation fees. Caste and Religious associations too started to demand a professional educational institution to be "sanctioned" to them such that members of their caste/religion could equip themselves with such professional degrees. Often the key concern was not whether permission to start a college in one or the other professions was accorded, but the number of students they could admit which became a bone of contention.

The mid- and late nineties witnessed a change with a growth in preference from Medicine to Engineering. Earlier the students accorded first preference to medical courses and the engineering course as their second or third option. Now engineering has become their only career choice for majority of the students. In the early nineties the perceived prospects of growth in medicine started slowly diminishing. The Engineering field was, in fact, giving wider scope for career growth. In the engineering field, computer engineering gained immense importance. As already mentioned, it was due to the growing demand for computer professionals in the computer industry. The students, who could not get into computer engineering, had a tendency to equip themselves with the computer knowledge from any leading private computer training educational institute along with their formal engineering course. This ensured them to get into some companies related to computer industry.

But since three years, the interest in pursuing IT career is waning. Following the recent news reports about retrenchment and growing unemployment among the IT engineering graduates there seems to be a drastic shift in the preference by the public from Computer Science to Electronics and to some extent to Telecommunications. Apart, from engineering and medicine, demand for Management Schools, which was passive in the early eighties has now intensified itself. Educationalists and Sociologists predict that courses in Biotechnology and Bio-Medical Engineering will be in great demand in the coming decades.

5.2. Common Entrance Test (CET): A Testimony of Merit

The CET in Karnataka was started in the mid eighties. Since then this has been an active platform for evaluating the merit of students seeking entry into professional colleges. The Karnataka Common entrance Test is conducted every academic year during the month of May. The tests determine the eligibility/merit of students for admissions to the first semester of full time courses in Medical, Dental, Engineering disciplines etc in professional colleges within the state of Karnataka. The seats available in the professional colleges have been classified into free and payment seats and then shared between the state government and managements. The payment seats are further sub-divided into Karnataka and Non-Karnataka quota. The test facilitates the filling up of the vacant seats in professional colleges falling within the share of the Karnataka state government.

Though the examinations are scheduled in the month of May every year, lasting for two days, the 'CET fever' persists throughout the year. Generally, the PUC students start preparing for their CET exams right from the first year of PUC, if not earlier. Coaching Centers, especially for CET, new "guides" with latest updates, reading materials, interactive CD ROMs etc., are products that are advertised and marketed throughout the year. There are many web-sites providing the complete CET syllabus with several online tests on specific areas of study, besides hosting solved-old question papers. During those crucial months leading newspapers regularly provide information about CET by dedicating special columns such as 'CET Bulletin', 'CET News', 'CET Watch' etc.

Prior to giving an account of the complicated, often legally challenged process of seat selection facilitated by the CET, it is necessary to answer a few questions at the outset. First, why did CET become necessary? How did students get enrolled prior to the institutional arrangement of entrance to professional education was evolved? In the process of answering this question, not only an attempt would be made to substantiate some of the issues pertaining to social reproduction, but also demonstrate how there was a growing aspiration for professional education among different sections of society, especially the backward classes and the other vulnerable sections of society. An analysis of these aspects in Karnataka, indeed sets the stage for a political economy approach to the issue of professional education and the desire for social mobility.

Prior to 1975-76, professional educational institutions, especially in the field of medicine and engineering, were confined to some of the major cities such as Bangalore, Mysore, Dharwad, Mangalore and Belgaum. These institutions too were, by and large, run by the state government, and were usually called the 'Government College of Engineering' or 'Medicine' as the case may be. Perhaps the scanty number of institutions were until the late 1970s were sufficient to cater to the needs and demand for professional education in Karnataka. Admissions into these colleges were, by and large, 'first come – first serve' principle, although it was expected that the meritorious students had the first option to decline a seat offered to them for a less merited student to secure admission. Looking back at the at the time when they secured admissions in prestigious medical or engineering colleges, several of the 'older' engineers or doctors (professionals in the sample of this study) recalled the ease with which they could 'walk into the college, apply and get

admitted.' However, over the years, there began to emerge a feeling, not without empirical evidence, that procuring of admission to professional educational institutions had become another means of social reproduction of a social order in which the 'higher' castes had a better advantage, while those from the backward sections of society were denied such exalted education. In keeping with the growing demand for professional education, especially in the fields of engineering and medicine, the government then began permitting new colleges to started. The 1970s also witnessed the appointment of a Second Backward Classes Commission, with Justice L G Havanur as its Chairman to recommend the policy for the state to govern 'reservations' for Backward Castes and Classes in education and employment. The landmark recommendations of the Havanur Commission were accepted opening up opportunities for the hitherto socially excluded sections a right to education, especially in the professional colleges. The several private colleges that had been permitted to function, initially, had been admitting students on the strength of what they could pay as 'capitation' fees in addition to regular tuition and other fees. Paradoxically several of such private colleges had been permitted to be established by caste associations, or persons belonging to such castes that had claimed 'social and economic backwardness' although in their practice of admitting students they had not been necessarily favouring students of their castes. Instead, whoever had the money to pay the demanded as capitation fee.

When the students and parents, especially of those belonging to the backward classes, began to agitate and press for social justice in admissions to professional and higher education, the state government began to pressurise the private colleges to follow the principle of merit and reservation. The college managements, on their part, began to insist that they should have a freedom to admit students willing to pay higher fees; for it was only through such admissions that the managements could recover the costs involved in building up the educational institutions. Eventually the state, after experimenting several formulae, decided that the colleges could have a proportion of admissions based on their own criteria, while a mutually agreed proportion of admissions have to be in keeping with the recommendations of the Backward Classes Commission as well as economic justice of affordable fees. In order to determine who should be admitted through what became known as the State's or Government's quota, (as opposed to Management Quota), the

Common Entrance Test was evolved. At the completion of the tests, each student is given a rank based on the marks obtained by the person in the entrance test (separately for medicine and engineering). The student is free to choose the college of his or her choice for admissions to the preferred course (engineering, medicine, dental, and of late, Ayurveda, Indian Medicine, etc.) Each college has a certain number of students that it can accommodate every year. These seats are, bifurcated, first into two: management and through the CET. With respect to the management quota, the college was for all these year free to determine the fee to be paid, but the admissions made could not exceed the limit agreed upon based on the sharing principle between the state and the management. Until recently, this used to be 75:25 per cent respectively. As regards the state's quota of 75 per cent, it had to be distributed in turn to the different social sections as recommended by the Backward Classes Commission from time to time. There are quota for rural students, rural Kannada medium students, students who are physically challenged, or those belonging to economically backward families, and so on. A certain percentage of the available seats was also meant to be for such students who do not come under any of the 'reserved categories' under the label of General Merit.

A special cell of the Directorate of Collegiate Education was created to monitor the admissions process following the CET norms. This cell is popularly known as the CET cell, and all allotment of seats is transparent, for every one to see. When the process of admissions begin, usually a few weeks after the announcement of the results of the CET examinations, the CET cell conducts an open session of seat allotment based on merit within each category for which seats are reserved in each of the colleges.

A very complex matrix is followed during the allotment of seats in CET. In spite of the instructions provided in the CET Bulletin it is not an easy task to comprehend the entire process of seat allotment. Most of the students along with their parents make dry-run visits to the cell to become familiar with the pattern followed and to understand the language of the CET and thus avoid mistakes which would cost them heavily. The CET cell only initiates the allotment of seats. Its information brochure clearly mentions that it is not involved in any kind of counselling and they only manage a seat selection process. Initially, the concept of counselling was widely misused and misunderstood by the public. The Cell is unable to understand as to how and why the whole process is referred to as

Counselling. Officials of the CET Cell maintain that they are not a counselling body. Instead, it is strictly an administrative body, which monitors the admission procedures of the students to various professional courses in different colleges in an objective, efficient and transparent manner. According to them, the CET Cell cannot take up the responsibility of counselling since it is a subjective function and it involves a series of procedures. It needs experienced professionals, namely, psychologists, educationists, sociologists, social workers etc., and the task cannot be carried out by administrators alone. CET might also lose its objectivity in functioning if it shoulders the responsibility of counselling. However, CET Officials indeed strongly feel a need for counselling bodies and centres to help the students so that they are well-informed before they attend the selection procedure.

For nearly a decade the process of admissions of students into medical and in engineering was seemingly smooth on several accounts. First, it had the claims to be most transparent process, and those who did not succeed had only to blame his or competitive performance either or both in the qualifying examinations and CET tests. Second, it nearly put an end to the earlier practice of 'admission' or 'seats' to be sold by the private educational institutions. There was a clear understanding of the share of the colleges *vis-a-vis* the state administered seat sharing. With respect to former, the college could collect fees as the market determined, while the latter was determined by the state.

However, the private colleges found this arrangement not acceptable for long, as they found the cost of infrastructure high, and the CET administered seat sharing impinged on their rights. The Supreme Court eventually upheld the rights for the private minority educational institutions that were not in receipt of state aids (i.e., unaided) to administer the admissions independently. In the judgment delivered on 31st October 2002, the Supreme Court provided autonomy in the management of private institutions, including admissions and in fixing the fee structure. An important change brought out in the light of the Supreme Court judgment was that the unaided minority institutions ceased to recognise the passing of the common entrance test held by the state agency. On the other hand, the institutions had the freedom to conduct a separate entrance exams for admissions.

The Supreme Court had declared the Unnikrishnan Scheme of 1993 which was in practice in all private colleges as unconstitutional. According to the impinged scheme, the

unaided colleges had only 15 per cent of the seats at their discretion which could be filled up as the 'management quota' while the rest were filled through the CET cell, as payment or free seat. Fifty per cent of the seats were filled as free seats and the fee was fixed by the state government and the rest were filled as payment seats, the amount of the fee for which was also decided by the government itself. However those students who secured the seats through management quota with exorbitant fee were exempted from the CET process. But now, following the Supreme Court's judgment there exists no free seat or payment seat and the quota system have been completely abolished. Instead, the unaided private colleges can independently enroll the students on the basis of merit by fixing certain amount of fee themselves although profiteering is in principle prohibited. These colleges can also conduct their own entrance examinations. But the government can impose certain regulations to ensure that merit is given importance and the standards of education are maintained.

The Government has been demanding that private colleges should reserve certain percentage of seats for admissions of the students by the management who has passed the common entrance exam conducted by the college and the rest of the seats should be reserved for students who seek admissions through common entrance test conducted by the state agency. While the state is demanding a 75:25 share, the private colleges have been demanding 50:50 share of seats between CET and private managements. Additionally, a rational fee structure needs to be evolved by the management which does not encourage any kind of capitation fee. The government should also come out with a proper proposition to administer admissions based on merit in case of aided colleges. Earlier, in case of the aided minority institutions, 50 per cent of the seats went to the government and the 50 per cent of the seats were managed by the management. But now, the government should fix a quota for admissions based on the local population, student's needs and the type of institution in order to accommodate a certain percentage of non-minority students.

The 2002 ruling by the Supreme Court led to much confusion than was expected. It resulted in the unstructured admission policy, unclear fee structure, conflict among the government and the management over the share of the seats which ultimately affected the students. The Supreme Court ruling excluded the minority and unaided institutions from the government's purview and they were allowed to adopt their own admission procedures.

From the academic year 2003-04, the Cell would be entitled for making admissions to only 16 engineering, 4 medical and one dental colleges which include both government and aided colleges. There were totally 109 engineering colleges¹, 28 medical colleges and 35 dental colleges in the state in 2002. Of the 109 engineering colleges and 28 medical colleges in the state, 15 and 10 colleges belong to religious/linguistic minorities respectively. Of the 35 dental colleges, 5 belong to religious minorities while 4 belong to linguistic minorities. Thus, as per the changes, the government can allocate only a small number of seats in different professional courses as compared to the previous years. It is believed that the government now has control approximately over 8,000 of the 57,000 engineering seats, 400 out of the 2,400 medical seats and only 60 of the 3,000 dental seats from the academic year 2003-04. These can be allocated to the students in different colleges based on merit through the Common Entrance Exam. Earlier the state government would allocate 85 per cent of the total seats in all the courses.

Karnataka model of CET was considered the best in the whole of India and served as model for other states. There were instances where some of the states had replicated the Karnataka CET model for establishing one in their state. But the recent changes have posed a threat to the continuance of CET in Karnataka because the number of seats has been drastically reduced. Now there is a relaxation and the students need not take CET exams to secure a merit based seat in professional colleges. They can directly write an entrance exam conducted by the concerned private institution (if the management conducts) and secure a seat if their name occurs in the 'merit' list. The Supreme Court has made it clear that CET is compulsory for an aided institution while the unaided has the right to conduct its own exams and at the same time respects the CET by accommodating certain percentage of students through CET procedure.

The CET was like a single window clearance for the students to get admissions to various professional colleges. This was very useful and helped all the students to choose the subjects and the college easily. But now the cell is likely to be limited only to the government and government aided colleges. But the private management institutions have come together and established their own association to facilitate admission procedures to

¹ The number of engineering colleges has been increasing every year. By 2004, there were totally 123 engineering colleges in Karnataka.

the students in a organised way. COMED K (Consortium of Medical, Engineering and Dental colleges of Karnataka²) was a result of such collective effort put forth by the private educational institutions. They have a separate entrance test and hence, have their own ranking list of merit students. In 2004, most students took up both CET and COMED exams to be on safer side. But, mere conducting of the exams under a common head did not solve all the problems of the private managements. Fixation of the fee and the actual seat sharing formula continued to plague all the institutions offering medial, engineering and dental courses as there was no consensus between the state and the private management institutions until very recently as late as September 2004.

This had serious repercussions on the students and the parents as many of them were on the verge of losing one of their academic years at a crucial time. While some could not join the respective courses in which they had secured the seats due to hike in the tuition fee, others did not have the patience to wait for such a long duration for the court to decide upon the conflict. They had admitted themselves to different courses like BSE, Law, Fashion Designing etc. There were also a few unfortunate cases where the students ended their lives as a result of their frustration over the indecisive situation of the admission status in the academic year 2004-5.

5.3. A brief account of the CET imbroglio in the academic year 2004-5

The tussle between government and private management over the seat sharing ratio in professional colleges took several ugly turns in the year 2004. The worst affected were the students and parents who were caught between the cross-fires of the government and the private managements. The private managements (COMED K) were firm with the stand of 50:50 seat sharing ratio and ruled out the possibilities of negotiating with the state government. Adding to their advantage was the Supreme Court ruling which categorically stated that sharing of seats should be on the basis of 50:50 between the government and the private management. They were agitated when the state government went ahead with the seat selection process for the academic year 2004-5 on the basis of 75:25 seat sharing

² Henceforth, the Consortium of Medical, Engineering and Dental Colleges of Karnataka shall be referred to as COMED K.

arrangement. The immediate reactions of the COMED K threatening to deny admissions for students sent to their institutions through CET cell created tension and turmoil among the concerned students and parents.

As the confusion over the seat sharing and fee structure continued, a new tussle unfolded. Who will conduct the counselling (seat selection) for management quota seats? How will the actual admission take place? Private managements affiliated to COMED K had already begun issuing application forms to students. That is, all students must apply separately to every medical or dental college or engineering college they want a seat in before they become eligible for counselling in that college. Thus, lack of centralised system of admission among the private initiatives as it was in CET (a state initiative) turned out to be a financially expensive and mentally tiring for parents and students. However, in an attempt to fulfill one's educational aspirations, both parent and the student community seemed to have been extremely patient. In order to be on the safer side, students took up both CET and COMED K entrance tests. Followed by it was the attempt to fetch seats through both sources. As they began to face CET counseling based on the ranks possessed, they had also alternatively applied to the selected private colleges separately so that they could be called for counseling in those respective colleges.

As students and parents were busy with counselling or seeking admission for professional course in one or the other college, a Supreme Court ruling on 15th Feb 2004 further intensified the chaotic situation. It rejected the state government's decision to maintain a 72:25 ratio of seat sharing arrangement and upheld that the admission be carried on the basis of 50:50 ratio during the current academic year of 2004-5. As a result of this the seat selection process at the CET cell for admission to professional colleges came to a halt with immediate effect and got indefinitely postponed. In the meanwhile, the CET Cell had commenced the seat selection process from July 8 2004 and the cell had allotted 1,253 medical seats and 163 dental seats in government aided and private unaided colleges. These seats were deemed cancelled followed by the Supreme Court order. An immediate impact of the Supreme Court order was that more number of seats would fall into the managements (COMED K). But the representatives of COMED K had ruled out the possibilities of conducting a centralised counselling on the lines of CET Cell thus leading to uncertainty and confusion. Besides, the government and the managements failed to

arrive at a common consensus to further the seat selection process. The saga continued as the government was unable to free itself from the grip of private college management. Added to this, the MCI (Medical Council of India) declared July 31st as deadline for medical admission thus ruling out further extension. Students, unfortunately, found themselves caught in the power game between the government and the private college managements. While the chief minister of Karnataka state openly claimed in the media that the private college managements had agreed to the 75:25 seat sharing arrangement, the representatives of COMED K showed reluctance, over it and this conveyed confused picture to the public. The status quo continued for a long time with the state government sticking to the 75:25 formula while the COMED K being firm with the 50:50 formula of seat sharing in the professional courses.

Gradually, there appeared to be some consensus between the two parties as 65 out of the 123 engineering colleges agreed to abide by the formula proposed by the government of 75:25 seat sharing arrangement. The forum of Unaided Private engineering Colleges, which has 54 colleges seemed to offer complete support to the government. These colleges that had agreed to the formula were the new ones, which were unsure about filling their seats. But the COMED K which has 26 engineering, 26 dental and 16 medical colleges refused to extend their support initially. Besides, the government was also unable to convince the management of medical and dental colleges on seat sharing and fee issues. As a result, no clear picture emerged even after a month after the declaration of CET and PUC results in the academic year of 2004-5. Amidst the confusion, the seat selection process got restarted from July 8 even as the CET imbroglio remained unresolved. The confusion and scene at the CET cell during the selection of medical seats was heart-boggling.

Hundreds of students who attended the medical and dental seat selection process were completely dejected as they learnt that they could not afford to join the medical course despite being in the merit list due to exorbitant tuition fee. Every parent had to shell out nearly 2 lakhs per year as tuition fees. Thus, many bright careers came to an end and dreams got shattered. The brilliant but financially weaker section slowly realised that money mattered more than merit and that CET was not meant for them. For instance, Parijatha who had secured 610th rank in the medical rank list opted out of the seat selection

process although there were nearly 1,000 medical seats available while she appeared for counselling. She opted out because each seat came with a price tag of Rs 1.57 lakhs to Rs 2.62 lakhs. Her father said:

"How can I arrange Rs 2 lakhs every year? I have other responsibilities in the family. Even if I pool my entire savings of 23 years of my service, I would not be able to mobilise such a huge amount to provide medical education to my daughter. I know it is very difficult to get such a good rank in the CET. But I am helpless. I cannot give false assurance to my daughter that I shall somehow manage the educational costs because I know very well that I cannot manage and it might lead to other uneven domestic consequences. I am feeling extremely sorry for my daughter, who had worked so hard for her examinations and dreamt of being a doctor. Unfortunately, she could not fulfill her aspirations due to heavy fee structure".

The increase in the fee for medical and dental courses in the academic year 2004-5 and the absence of 'free seats' in private professional colleges has been a great loss to the middle and lower middle class students. Of the 1,400 medical seats in the state, only a fraction are government seats for which the fee is Rs 16,200. The remaining seats in private colleges come at a price range that is beyond the reach of the common man. But many parents and students were not aware of these developments. Hence, it was a shock to many who had come without adequate financial preparations. For example, Rohit from Hubli had managed to get a ranking of 717 in the CET and was very confident on securing a medical seat. He and his family were unaware that the cutoff rank for a medical seat in the government college was 174 for general merit category. Had he appeared for the CET last year, when 25 percent in private colleges were allotted as free seats, he would have certainly secured a merit seat. Luck was not on Rohit's side and he had to sacrifice his childhood ambition of becoming a doctor. His agitated mind spoke:

"Merit has no value these days. I worked so hard for the entire two year and as a result of it I also go a ranking within 600 in the medical list. But so what! It is not in anyway helping me as I am not in the position to pay for

the medical seat which is easily available for me. The paradox is that my friend who did not make such a serious attempt to these exams and just got a ranking of 8,000 and odd is in a better position as he is able to buy the medical seat through money power. He is a winner in the end as he is able to achieve his goals by fetching a medical seat by some means. Indeed money triumphs merit"

Thus, there were many students who had to go empty handed disappointed and agitated due to the changes made in the admission procedures at CET in the academic year 2004-5. On the other hand, there were several colleges of COMED K family which began admitting students based on 50: 50 formula of seat sharing. They were unconcerned about the state government's move to bring legislation to enforce 75:25 seat sharing ratio in professional colleges and they went ahead to complete the admissions of 50 per cent in all its member colleges by July 31st as it was in accordance with the Supreme Court's verdict. Besides, they threatened of canceling the seats of the government sponsored students from CET if they did not report to their colleges by July 31st.

But the Karnataka government, in its pursuit to meet the dead line set by the Medical Council of India (MCI) to complete the admissions by 5 pm on July 31, made thousands of students go through the hell. There was complete chaos at the CET Cell on 31st July as parents and students landed from different parts of Karnataka to complete the admission formalities. While the public was already under tension due to hurried CET counselling and the last date notified for admissions, the government sources declared that the fresh selection process for admission to medical courses was likely to be held soon and it would be based on the 75:25 seat sharing arrangement. It was further substantiated with the argument that the seat selection process held so far by the CET and the race against time to report to medical colleges was just an exercise to meet the directions of the Supreme Court and the deadline set by the MCI. The modified list issued by the CET Cell slashing its quota in unaided private medical colleges by 25 per cent to peg it at 50 per cent only added to the confusion and anxiety. As suggested by the CET Cell the students made their best efforts to report to the colleges in which they received the admission orders, but it turned out to be a night-mare to them as it was in a chaotic situation everywhere. Some succeeded in meeting the ultimatum but many did not.

Many students were shocked as they found that they were allotted a different college than the one which they had opted during the seat selection process which was largely the consequence of the re-allocation by the CET Cell. Parents and the students were agitated and frustrated as they were made to run from pillar to post by the college authorities and they finally landed up at the CET Cell to address their grievances. As one of the parent puts it:

“Why are the government and the college authorities harassing the students and the parents? Not even a day's notice was given to us. How should anyone expect us to travel overnight and report to the colleges? Even after reporting, what is the use? Everything is disorganised and admissions are not happening. The government and the college authorities are playing the blame game and we are caught in between”.

He was angry as his son had to rush from his home town Tumkur to Mysore to report in one of the medical colleges. But he had to return back as his name did not figure in the list as he had been allotted a seat in a medical college located at Belgaum. Confused, he did not know whether to go towards Belgaum or get back to Bangalore and report the happenings at the CET Cell. There were many cases of students whose names were not found in the list displayed by the colleges although they were in the merit list. They were told that they figured in the 25% per cent seats which had to be left out from the main list to comply with the directions of the Supreme Court. There was also a section of students who were denied admissions in some colleges. They were not even allowed inside the college gates by the security guards and hence, they could not meet any one representing college authority. The worst was when CET authority was indifferent to these incidents and washed its hands off saying nothing could be done when it was reported by the parents at the Cell. Anxious students and parents had several doubts and queries but no answers. CET officials were equally hassled and were of no great help to the public. After a point of time, they refused answering phone calls as it started pouring grievances and complaints from troubled parents.

The situation was peculiar and it was for the first time in the history of CET admission that such uncertainty and disarray prevailed. It seemed that either way about 25

per cent of the students, who took the CET 2004 and COMED K entrance tests would have to sacrifice their dreams. If the Supreme Court upholds the state government's legislation and 75:25 ratio, private college managements, which have admitted students on a 50:50 ratio, will have to send back the additional 25 per cent students they admitted. Similarly, if the apex court retained its July 15 order and directed the state government to stick to 50:50 seat matrix, then the 25 per cent extra admitted by the CET Cell would have to forgo their seats. This was because; the CET went by the 75: 25 formula. With this confusion, there were 125 per cent students in each college of which 75 per cent were sent from CET Cell because (the government believed in that ratio) and 50 per cent admitted by the private college managements.

In the process hundreds of students were left in the lurch and were facing dilemma as they were uncertain about their future educational career due to government apathy in finalising a policy for admission to professional colleges. But, yet there seemed to be a ray of hope for the excess students since government sources declared that there was a possibility to accommodate all the 125 per cent students if the intake in the government colleges got increased. With such news spreading, there was little and partial relief among the public, but the anxious and tense atmosphere continued. Besides these, almost 30,000 students from outside Karnataka were also left in the lurch as no seats were allotted to them and hence, the anguish and agony of the parents from different states were more severe as many had flocked to Bangalore after travelling a long distance from their homes with a view to securing admission to a desired professional course. Thus, admissions to professional colleges in the academic year 2004-5 became messier with every passing day.

The first week of August once again brought fresh hopes to the students as government sources revealed that a fresh seat selection process would commence from August 7 and it would also include additional number of seats. This round also promised reallocation of seats to all candidates including those whose medical seat selection had already been over. But yet the CET Cell was to face a dicey situation with regard to seat sharing ratio and everything depended upon the verdict of the Supreme Court. At the outset it was decided that the CET Cell would be equipped with both the matrices i.e., one with 75:25 ratio and another with 50:50 ratio and operate whichever the court ordered.

However, if the Supreme Court failed to deliver its verdict by a week's time, the Cell would go ahead with the 75:25 matrix.

Meanwhile the apex court maintained the status quo of its order of 50:50 ratio as seat sharing arrangement between the government and private managements. It was mainly because private colleges claimed that they had already filled 50 per cent share of seats. The Court also asked both the state government and the unaided private colleges to file affidavits detailing actual percentage for admissions made by them. The court fixed 27 August as the next date of hearing although the state had asked for an early hearing. These developments forced the government to direct the CET Cell to suspend the on-going engineering seat selection process for the time being. Thus, there was hold on the seat selection process again and sources indicated that it might not be resumed till August 27, the date of next hearing fixed by the court.

Again, the already grieved parents and students put forth several questions although there were no immediate answers? Would the status quo be maintained on the admissions made by the managements or the admissions made by the CET Cell? In all, 125 per cent admissions had been made in most of the private medical and dental colleges. But which 25 per cent would be struck down? Or would the entire seat selection process be held again? Similarly, would the admission made by the CET Cell until recently i.e. 19th August for BE seats based on 75:25 ratio would remain valid? In fact the Cell had already allotted 15,500 engineering seats up to the rank 20, 300 since it commenced the fresh rounds of counselling based on 75:25 seat sharing arrangement. These questions intensified the tension among the public while the government had no answers to the questions and queries raised by them. Uncertainty continued to grip both students and parents since the management and the government failed to arrive at a consensus over the fee structure and seat sharing issues for more than a week after the government suspended the seat selection process for the second time.

By 28th August, the situation seemed to have relatively improved since there was some kind of understanding between the management and the government over seat sharing and fee structure issues in what appears to be an 'out of court' settlement. But this was only with regard to the engineering courses while the settlement for medical and

dental courses continued to hang in the air. They arrived at a decision that the seat sharing for the engineering courses would be based on the 75:25 ratio between the government and the management. Of the 75 per cent seats, 65 per cent would be reserved for Karnataka students and 10 per cent for non-Karnataka candidates. The remaining 25 percent seats would be allotted by the college managements. But this agreement was to be subject to the approval of the Supreme Court, which was expected to hear the case on September 3. Following, it however the, Supreme Court agreed to such a joint memorandum between Karnataka government and private professional college managements envisaging a comprise seat-sharing formula of 75:25 in engineering courses and 60:40 in medical and dental courses.

These developments led the government to announce fresh counselling at CET Cell from September 10th. The seat selection process for medical and dental seats were scheduled first followed with that of engineering courses. The fresh counselling was inevitable and the seat selection made up to August 19th might not be valid any more because in some engineering streams, more than 65 per cent students had been admitted. With quota for state students under the new agreement being restricted to 65 per cent the additional students could be accommodated. Thus, fresh counselling became imminent due to substantial variation in fee structure and deviation in seat sharing formula. The counselling was likely to last till November 17th of 2004. This was the third time that CET schedule got revised in the academic year 2004.

Karnataka had been a favourite destination for non-Karnataka students for taking up professional courses. This year, as many as 32,000 non Karnataka students appeared for the CET. But the developments with regard to the professional education in the state was a major set back to the non-Karnataka candidates because the government had decided to do away with the counselling process for medical and dental seats for them. The government and the college management had agreed on a four slab fee structure for engineering and three slab fee structure for medical and dental courses. Following (See table 5.1) indicates the detailed fee structure for the academic year 2004. (Source, Deccan Herald, dated 8th September 2004)

Table 5.1: Fee Structure (in Rupees) for the Academic Year 2004-05

(In Rs.)

Discipline	In Govt. Colleges	In Aided Colleges	In Private Un-Aided Colleges				
			Minority		Non- Minority		
			For 30% of Intake	For the Next 20% of Intake	For 30% of Intake	For the Next 30% of Intake	
Medical	9,200 +7,000*	-	35,000 + 7,000*	1,65,000 + 7,000*	35,000 + 7,000*	1,65,000 + 7,000*	
Dental	6,900 + 7,000*	-	25,000 +7,000*	1,00,000+ 7,000*	25,000 +7,000*	1,00,000 +7,000*	
Engineering	7,500 +2,590*	7,500 +2,590*	15,000 +2,590*	50,000 +2,590	For 30% of Intake	For Next 35% of Intake	For 10% of intake for non-Karnataka
					15,000 + 2,590*	50,000 + 2,590*	1,00,000+ 2,590*

* Indicates OTHER FEES including University Registration fees for the respective disciplines.

The government quota of seats for non-Karnataka candidates was restricted only to engineering courses. Besides, non-Karnataka students would have to pay huge amount as fee to the colleges. Each seat would cost them Rs one lakh per year the highest in the three-slab differential fee structure struck between the government and private managements. For medical, a four slab differential fee structure was decided and the non-Karnataka students had to pay the highest slab which would cost them more than 1.5 lakhs every year. These figures were indeed quite moderate when compared to the cost of a management seat in medical and engineering colleges. In the academic year 2004-5, a single medical seat in a management quota in Bangalore ranged between 30 to 40 lakhs and an engineering seat was about 8 to 10 lakhs.

But the mere verbal consensus over the fee structure between the management and the state government did not end student's plight. Even as seat selection for professional courses was set to begin from September 10th through the CET Cell, private minority colleges announced yet another entrance test on September 13. The Karnataka Religious and Linguistic Minority Professional Colleges' Association (KRLM-PCA), had already held a common admission test on August 17, but that was a test for admissions to medical and

dental courses. The entrance test for engineering courses under the management quota in these minority institutions was scheduled to be held on September 13, 2004. Seat-sharing in minority institutions was based on 50:50 ratio, between government and management quotas. There were ten engineering colleges which were the members of KRLMPCA. Hence, those students, who had limited chances in CET but still aimed to join an medical college had to write another entrance exam in order to keep their options open.

Adding to these problems were the private professional colleges also stating that they might refuse to accept students sent by the CET Cell till the government agrees to pay the differential amount in the fees of CET quota students. It meant that the government would have to pay up Rs 1.65 lakhs for every student admitted at a subsidised fee of Rs 35,000 per year, if all the management quota students filed a case in the court in future. The deadline for all medical admissions was extended to September 30, but admission process to medical and dental process was troubled due to the indifference shown by the some private management institutions. This indicated that the outcome of the long awaited meeting between the management and the government had not necessarily come out with a clear policy at least in the issues of fee structure.

As a result, there were a number of harassed medical and engineering students who came back to the CET Cell after the colleges they had chosen earlier refused to admit them. It was indeed again a night-mare to the parents of those students who felt completely dejected with the entire issue. In addition to this was the fresh controversy over the fee structure for the professional courses which was taking new turns with the private management stating that they would be forced to slap an uniform fee structure on all students if the government failed to resolve the issue.

After months of impasse, private colleges and the government had finalised a comprise on medical and dental admission on a 60:40 basis with a three-tier fee structure. Of the 60 per cent medical seats in the government quota, half had to pay a subsidised fee of 35,000, while the remaining had to pay Rs 1.65 lakh per year. For the 40 per cent in management quota, Rs 3.75 lakh was the fee fixed. This fee structure was challenged by a section of students. Hence, COMED K representatives expressed that the managements had no option but to collect a uniform fee of Rs 2,08 lakh for every medical seat and 1.47

lakh for every dental seat if the government failed to defend the comprise formula.. They argued that they needed funds to run their colleges and they could not provide subsidies and run the colleges efficiently at the same time. This was a terrible blow to hundreds of already hassled meritorious students who had opted for the subsidised fee in medical and dental seats through the CET Cell. Accordingly, a student who was to pay Rs 35,000 per annum under this category would have to now shell out Rs 1.73 lakhs more to retain his or her medical seat. However, the COMED K's new decision on fee structure policy did not have much impact on engineering colleges as only 12 of the 112 engineering colleges were affiliated to the consortium. As a result there were instances of several merit students who opted out from joining medical course in private colleges as the fee structure for medical education in this academic year was exorbitantly high.

It was the end of September as the last round of CET counselling process in the academic year 2004-5 came to an end and the admissions to different engineering and medical colleges were taking place. By the first week of October 2004, students gradually settled in one or the other professional courses either with reluctance or by choice. But only time should tell as to how feasible and conducive was this arrangement made between the government and management. The most important question is how long would it survive. As per the Supreme Court's order, on September 3, the arrangement made by the Karnataka government and the private management over the issues of seat sharing formula and fee structure arrived at the so called 'out of court settlement' among them was valid only for the academic year 2004. With just a few more months ahead, the next academic year is likely to begin. The fate of students aspiring to join professional courses next academic year once again is likely to hang in balance as the arrangement seems to be partial and incomplete. Keeping in mind the students and their families and the unending grievances caused to them as a result of the unstructured admission process in the past two years, there is an urgent and immediate need for the Karnataka government to evolve a substantially approved policy jointly by the educationalists, management and policy makers which should make the admission process to professional courses in Karnataka more systemic and organised.

5.3. Engineering Education: A Special Reference

A special emphasis upon the engineering education is required, since there has been substantial changes occurring in this field of education since last one decade in Karnataka. This has considerable impact upon students and their families as well as the entire professional education system in Karnataka. The general apprehension is over the quality of engineering education owing to the increasing number of colleges in the state. Such signs are gradually reflected even in the dental and medical education, but it has not been as rampant as it is in the scenario of engineering education. Thus, an attempt is being made here to situate the current state of engineering education in the state.

With every passing year, there has been an addition to the large pool of engineering colleges in one or the other part of Karnataka. Table 5.2 shows the growth of engineering colleges (Source: Deccan Herald, 6th November 2001). Along with the increasing number of engineering colleges there has also been an increase in the number of vacant seats in several engineering colleges as every academic year passes.

Table 5.2: Growth of Engineering Colleges in Karnataka state

Year	No. of Colleges
1993-94	51
1997-98	70
1999-2000	77
2000-01	82
2001-02	109
2003-04	123

5.3.1 Vacant seats and growth of Engineering Colleges

In the year 2001, the number of vacancies was 4,022 in different engineering colleges. During that year, 27 new colleges were sanctioned in the state. There were none to question as to why the sanction was given when there were 4,000 odd seats already vacant. For the past few years there has been increase in the vacant engineering seats as

well as the institutions which impart engineering education. Following table highlight the details.

Table 5.3: Vacancies in Engineering Colleges

Year	Intake Fixed	Admissions	Seats Vacant
1997-98	23,802	20,408	3,394
1998-99	24,384	22,462	1,922
1999-00	26,292	22,968	3,324
2001-02	---	---	4,022

There is no need for so many engineering colleges given the account of the vacant seats lying unclaimed every year. Yet, there have not been any serious questions raised either by the educationalists or the state government. During 2001, what was prominent was the fact that vacancies were found in Information Technology related courses and during that year all the newly sanctioned engineering colleges offered only IT and related courses. For instance, it was found that in the academic year 2001-02, approximately around 300 seats were found unfilled in computer science, 650 in Information Science, 400 in Electronics, and 300 in Mechanical engineering in different colleges. This was generally found in the case of the new colleges. In the established colleges it was found that while the IT related courses got quickly filled up, the seats in traditional courses like civil, mechanical, electrical etc., remained vacant.

What also needs to be taken note is the fact that vacancies were mostly vacant in the payment category which reveals that students did not want to pay and join engineering courses and at the same time they did not mind pursuing an engineering course if merit seat was available. (Thus, engineering is no more worth to be pursued by paying huge donation and possess the qualification or the degree. Or, it also reflects that there are a number of students who cannot pay but who may be willing to pursue the course.) During that year (2001), the number of payment category vacancies was 2,300. Taking all this into account there seems to be no proper justification by the state government over its approval of increasing number of engineering colleges every year especially 27 colleges in one year itself.

Vacancies indicate that there have been excess of colleges than what is in demand. With so many colleges, there are already large numbers of engineering graduates coming out every year. For instance, most of the civil, mechanical and electrical engineering graduates just finish their course for procuring the degree, but are not particular to continue in the same line. There is a tendency to possess some knowledge of IT (Information Technology) through diplomas so as to get into any of the IT firms. Considering the growing tendency among engineering graduates in Non-IT fields to gain additional qualification and formal or informal training in IT or IT related fields, one gets the impression that these degrees are becoming more like other 'general' bachelor's degrees (e.g., B.A, B.Com or BSc). Non-IT engineering degrees are thus becoming less attractive.

There has been surplus output of engineering graduates who are not much in demand in specialised sectors. As a result, there are increasing numbers of engineers doing the odd job, totally not suited for their qualification. (Interestingly, some of them are quite successful and have made huge amounts of money.) They are found selling household appliances on the road side, serving as servers in hotels, working as drivers and bus conductors, security guards, running taxis etc. Invariably, large numbers of engineer graduates are found as sales or travelling service personnel, though with glamorous titles. It is not easy for them to survive even in that field because of competition as every individual after his/her graduation can seek an entry in sales profession if interested. The more recent trend has been for many engineers to work in 'call centres'. The growth of call centres in Bangalore has been enormous in the past five years and the entry of engineers in these sectors is not taken by surprise as the status, perks and compensations there is now equal to what was received by engineers a couple of years ago.

Despite the changes the demand for permission to start new engineering colleges has been constant. It is quite evident that political linkages and factors have a greater role to play in the sanctioning of new colleges. There is pressure on the government to start new colleges since there is huge money involved in the process. The professional education lobby is as strong as any other. Even if a brief survey is made, it is quite well known that most of the heads of the professional educational institutes are either the politicians or the businessmen. These individuals are well aware that one of the best ways of investing one's money is by starting a professional college. Hence, the permission to

start engineering colleges is largely based on political drama and not so much to do with neither the demands of the educational sector, nor with the need of technical manpower in the society.

The eligibility norm to have an entry to an engineering college which was 50 per cent has now been lowered by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). The cut off marks for the entry into engineering course has been 45 per cent for general merit and 35 per cent for SC/ST/Category students. This should only result in lowering the standard of education with the delivery of increased number of engineering graduates every year. Getting engineering seat is not difficult any more. One has to no longer get 50 per cent marks to qualify for competing for an engineering seat. A mere pass mark is enough to take up the entrance exams for engineering and join one if they are through with the entrance exam. There is also no need to compete very hard in the entrance exam as in the earlier years because there are lots of engineering colleges offering the seats and each may have separate entrance exams.

Managements have criticised the move made by the AICTE of relaxing the entry norms of engineering courses. It is against the spirit of the improvement in the quality of education. It will not only lower the standards of and quality of the products but also leads to unwanted proliferation of engineering graduates. More focus should have been given to the quality and relevance of higher education and efforts should be done to upgrade the content so that the graduates will be able to compete with the best in the world market. The move made by the AICTE by lowering the eligibility norm to engineering colleges will only lead to the production of the third and fourth grade engineers who only add up to the existing 'unemployed pool of engineers' or constitute a new generation of unemployed graduates in the country. The move also is made at a very unstable and indecisive situation and in the middle of existing inconsistencies in the professional education. It is made when the Supreme Court issues an order giving a free hand to private institutions in admissions and fee structure in a situation where normally every year there are a large number of seats lying vacant unclaimed. This will only lead to private colleges to collect money and sell the vacant seats at whatever price available in order to run the colleges. As a result there is a total collapse of merit as anybody with little money even without merit can get an

engineering seat in the present context. It only reflects elitism in its crudest form where the meritorious and the poor are not benefited.

But, the AICTE has felt the need for questioning the 50 per cent as the minimum eligibility standard since separate entrance examination is conducted for admissions for engineering and also taking into account the large number of engineering seats lying vacant every year. It would be a myth if one feels that private institution should not indulge in capitation fee and strictly follow the court's order and help merit students. These private institutions are already permitted to collect funds for maintaining certain standards which is an opportunity for them to accumulate as much wealth as possible through different kinds of fees from the students who join their colleges irrespective of whether they are merit students, lower income groups or underprivileged. This should further deteriorate the standard of professional education in the country.

At the same time, one should not ignore the possible positive changes anticipated. It is not far away that differential fees for the same education would be the norm of the day. An engineering seat should be available for rupees 10,000, 25,000, 50,000 and 75,000 also based on the quality of education it imparts. Depending upon the financial capacity, the consumer is free to choose the one he wants.