

BLENDING HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The Youth of India belong to a generation that admires and chases after 'tech-ism', 'consumer-ism', 'mall-ism', 'nuclear-ism' etc, often ignoring ideals. Everyone seeks degree certificates from world class Universities, whatever the cost. Universities and Colleges that hand out these degrees are increasing in number. The gross student enrolment ratio is also increasing along with the number of graduates and post graduates. All these are positive signs. But caution is needed. Progress towards 'Modernization' is good and is indeed the natural order of things. But we must also take care to retain what is of value in 'Tradition and traditional systems'. There needs to be a suitable blending of modern concepts with traditional values for the wholesome development of any nation. We present a descriptive study of the present higher education scenario, highlighting some well-known but neglected facts and offer some suggestions towards future developments. We emphasize the importance of inculcating an open mind in our society towards our traditions even as we harness the powers and potentialities of modernization to achieve long term sustainable and equitable growth.

I. INTRODUCTION

Studies by Historians have revealed that there existed a high quality higher education system in India from ancient times. Takshashila /Taxila and Nalanda were our eminent Universities, imparting education in areas such as spirituality, mathematics and logic. Blessed by the presence of outstanding teachers, our institutions would attract brilliant students from far and wide. Even a walk through the ruins of these universities gives enough indications of their eminence and scale, and brings to mind an era when India led the world in creating and imparting knowledge – and was a hub for quality higher education.

In those times, Knowledge was considered too sacred to be exchanged for money, and hence no fees were charged from students. Financial support came from the society at large, especially from rich merchants and wealthy parents. Though the number of students studying under a single Guru (teacher) sometimes numbered in the hundreds, none would be turned back, even if he/she were poor. Free boarding and lodging were provided and the students would do manual work in the household. Wealthy students like princess were taught during the day, non-paying ones, at night. Examinations were considered inessential and not considered part of the requirements to complete one's studies. The process of instruction was critical and thorough - unless a topic was assimilated thoroughly, the student was not allowed to proceed to the next. No convocations were held upon

completion, and no written "degrees" were awarded, since it was believed that knowledge was its own reward. Using knowledge for earning a living or for any selfish end was considered sacrilegious. Centuries have passed and Money has become all-important. Even higher education has become big business, dominated by tycoons. The higher educational Institutions are increasing in number; but what quality? Education has become only a means to find employment - attaining knowledge is the aim for but very few. The study here aims to reveal the nature of education that was provided in Ancient India, with special reference to Taxila and Nalanda Universities, and to find out the vital elements of that ancient education system that our present Universities are deficient in, with a view to offering suggestions for future improvements to our education system.

II. METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive study compiling necessary secondary data collected from various literatures supplied by experts and with some new thoughts added.

III. RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

This study assumes importance in the current context when a strategic environment is prevalent in all sectors – the education sector is also not an exception. The number of educational institutions offering higher education has increased rapidly. India is proud of its higher education system that ranks third in the world after United States and China. Despite rapid growth in the higher education sector, India lacks internationally prestigious Universities [1]. The literature further reveals that there were famous centers of learning in ancient India which were not huge in number but were the best in providing quality education. [2] There is no Indian University ranking among the first 100 Universities in the world. It is this transition – booming quantity and degrading quality - that aroused the researcher's attention to choose this topic.

IV. LITERATURE SURVEY RESULTS

Universities coming in the World's top 100 are excellent centers of higher learning. One can see that there is no Indian University in the top 100 world's best Universities as per the ratings given by various agencies. Assuming that these ratings are 100% bias free, this shows an alarming situation that the nation must be very careful about. Increasing the number of centers of higher learning as per the increase in seekers of degree certificates is not a certificate of accreditation for the quality higher education provided by the nation. [3] When earlier, ancient India was able to attract even foreign scholars to its centers of higher learning now Indian students have to go abroad to master in higher learning from world class Universities, a situation which needs drastic measures to bring back the old glory to this nation. Even when there are contradictions in considering Universities like Taxila and Nalanda as Universities in modern sense, they are really worthy to be compared with any world class University. [4] It is remarked that Taxila University was considered as center of 'intellectual suzerainty' over other centers of learning in India and it offered mainly higher education. Though the basic courses that were offered in this University covered basically the Hindu scriptures and Sanskrit, what one has to observe and analyze is about the way the knowledge was imparted there. Almost all the teachers and students of this University are noted personalities world-wide. Buddhist tradition was mainly followed in this

University. [4] Nalanda University was also a Buddhist centre of learning. This center also based its academics around the Indian Vedas like Taxila and other centers of excellence of that time. This University also attracted many scholars from native place as well as from foreign countries. A common feature of these Universities is that they taught practical subjects like Logic (Hetuvidya), (Shabdavidya) Grammar and [5] Philology (the branch of knowledge that deals with structure, historical development, and relationship of language or languages), (Chikitsavidya) Medicine, (Atharvaveda) the works on Magic, Archery, Hunting, elephant lore etc along with imparting the Hindu culture, Vedas and Sanskrit . In Taxila, any person who was a scholar in a particular field of knowledge could start his Institution and impart knowledge. Many eminent teachers were there in the teaching community (which can be compared to today's Board of Studies). Chanakya (who composed Arthashastra- Sanskrit for the knowledge of Economics), Charaka (the Ayurvedic healer), Panini (ancient grammarian) were some of them.

The system of education that these Universities designed, was based mainly on the [6] 'Ashram system' that existed in India in ancient and medieval period. An Ashram in Hinduism comprised of 4 stages: Brahmacharya (student life), Grihasthashram (Householder life), Vaanaprastha (Retirement life), and Sanyasa (spiritual life- life of renunciation). Every person in ancient India had to pass through these 4 periods in his lifetime. In this it was the first stage (Brahmacharya- upto 25 years of life) that is concerned with one's education where one had no tie ups with his/ her home and had to spend time with the Guru (the teacher) and procure maximum knowledge in almost all areas of wisdom needed for one's practical existence. In this stage a student must lead a very simple and modest life and dedicate oneself fully to acquire maximum knowledge as possible. At that stage, the student had to observe cleanliness, simple living, ahimsa (not hurting or causing wound to something or someone), meditation, voluntary restraints on certain diets, intoxicants and behaviors (including sexual behavior), the complete attention must be devoted to knowledge gaining itself. Through observing all the above said traits, one can advance really well in the pursuit of gaining knowledge and spiritual liberation.

The aim of this ashram system was to help oneself to develop into a perfect individual. It is this system that was kept in mind by the designers of ancient centers of learning. But still they never kept age as a barrier for entry into their centers of higher learning. There the disciple must show complete dedication to his/ her studies and unless the teacher was satisfied with the performance of his/ her disciple regarding a subject, that disciple will not be promoted to the next stage of knowledge gathering. For that there was no curriculum, nor any written syllabus, no proper examination, no time tables, but all things went scheduled and the one who cleared his/ her graduation/ post graduation under those streams could really be called as Masters of those subjects, though it was not evidenced by a Degree Certificate. In the absence of a formal degree certificate, or convocation also they developed as experts. Fees that this form of studies demanded was in the form of whole hearted co-operation, complete attention, dedication, commitment and truthfulness. A small token of love and gratitude was submitted by the disciple called "Guru-Dhakshina". Guru never demanded that it should be in the form of money itself. Whatever the student and his parents could afford, they submitted. After completion of studies from such Universities, that individual learned how to lead the rest of his life, they were never to be torn up or broken down by worldly issues.

V. REALITY OF PRESENT ERA

In the present era, in India there are many Universities offering various courses of specialization. There are no barriers for students from going abroad in search of knowledge. The number of colleges have increased manifold. The number of teachers has increased and so is the number of students. But whether all these Universities and colleges provide quality education is a matter of debate. Whether all these teachers who have Master's degree in their subjects can be valued as real masters of that subject is also a matter that catches attention. The purpose for which one joins a center of higher education has also changed. Majority of these Institutions are also working like a business concern where things go around their customers (the students). When earlier, a scholar went in search of a tutor, now the Institutions are competing among themselves to grab the student folk. These Institutions produce individuals with high academic scores but majority fail to equip these graduates with the knowledge needed for existence in the world. These students find it difficult to lead their life in the midst of worldly issues. This crisis is clearly depicted in literatures.

[7] The suicide rates in India are the highest in 15-29 age- groups. 80% of the suicide victims were literate, the literature reveals. [8] Another survey reveals that young Indians are more prone to committing suicides, irrespective of the fact that majority of them are highly educated and belong to wealthier families. Despite of the various reasons that were found for this increasing tendency among youth in committing suicides, a common factor that lay was that majority of today's youth do not have proper mental health to withstand problems, even if they had a very good IQ. [9] Another literature discloses that in India the unemployment rates are still higher. The unemployment rate was high among highly qualified individuals especially females. The educated unemployed youth rate has been increasing, alarms this survey report. [10] Another point requiring specific attention is that among Indian youth divorce rates are also increasing at a fast pace, reports Hindustan Times. One among the reason for this is the increasing independency gained by women due to their increase in educational status and job status. This report reveals a situation which is an emergency issue to be tackled in a country like India where marriage and married life is respected with all dignity and divine sanctity. [11] Another notable condition is the increase in crime rate among Indian youth as revealed by a report. "Youth are there to shape the future of the country and statistics of crime amongst youth portrays a dark-clouded picture for the nation", comments the reporter. The major crimes done by youth today include crime against women and cyber crimes, says in the report. The astonishing factor is that majority of the youth involved in these crimes are highly educated ones and the reasons they do these are found to be: lust for easy money and luxuries, frustration due to unemployment, etc. The upbringing in families, lack of time spent by parents with their kids, lack of better job opportunities, inhibition to take up less paid jobs, undue influence of movies, social networking sites, poor learning quality etc are the other main reasons for this increasing crime rate among youth. "We are in dire need for a better education system, huge modifications are called for in terms of upbringing and social awareness. Youngsters are a sensitive and tender group and need to be dealt with better care and protection. They need time and need to be talked out with the help of love and care. It does not guarantee that no offending by youth will be considered or committed but reduces the risk to a minimal level", the reporter adds.

All these and many more, points out the major base issue behind all these: the lack of proper, timely, valuable, education system. This clearly justifies the saying by [12] Martin Luther King, "The function of education is to

teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character- that is the goal of true education” Now it is the time to think broad and wide, removing the clutches built by so called political, economic barriers. At least in the education sector- whether elementary or higher level, novel ideas must emerge where there is a respect for traditional values and a wise usage of modernized techniques.

VI. SUGGESTIONS FOR AN INNOVATIVE MODEL BASED ON THIS TRADITIONAL SYSTEM THAT INDIAN UNIVERSITIES CAN FOLLOW

The suggestions that are going to be mentioned here are researcher’s vague intuitive ideas of an idealistic situation which exists in different parts of the world, which existed in India centuries before, which, if can be brought forth, will help our nation to curtail such alarming situations that we saw among our youth.

Today’s youth decide the future of their nation. [13] As Swami Vivekananda, the youth icon of India has rightly quoted: “Youth is the future of India- My hopes for the future lies in the youths of character, intelligence, renouncing all for the service of others, and obedient, good to themselves and the country at large”.

How much so ever be the money spent on rising up the youth education, if that does not guarantee their character strengthening, then that entire amount spent is wastage. The designers of higher education scenario have, in front of them, various teachings and quotes of Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and other eminent personalities of the nation. Also they have the ruins of various eminent Universities like Taxila and Nalanda, through which a proper excavation can be made to dig out the path that was followed for rendering knowledge at that time. Through all these, our Universities can also get back the glory that their ancestors set for them, gain a remarkably better position among world class Universities, and develop youngsters who will surely architect and engineer their nation’s machinery to success.

There can be a change from the grass root level, but for which the political missionaries need to take the grip and kick start the move.

A common syllabus rooted on the Indian culture, tradition and values with a mixture of modern up-dates in various subject areas, culminating world- wide trends, incorporating positives of the nations world-wide must be initiated as this is an era where the entire globe is a village. We need to uphold our traditional values and incorporate others’ values too.

A pattern of study must be developed where the first Ashram (Brahmacharya) can be followed- the simple, modest, way of grabbing knowledge. It must be inculcated among the students that in that age of elementary and high level learning, there needs to be much commitment and dedication, modest dressing, balanced diet, upholding ethical values and a sacrifice of worldly pleasures at least during the course of education. The traditional ashram system can be put to practice to render a valuable learning pattern.

The tutors must be encouraged to continue learning subjects of their interest to the maximum extent possible. Blend today’s technological advancements and expertise with the traditional “Guru” concept. A “Guru” “enlightens his/ her disciple from darkness. The term darkness includes darkness due to ignorance and also all form of evils. In today’s world, knowledge gathering is not at all a problem, but the urge must be there and the teacher (Guru) must be driven by that inner urge. That motivation must be inculcated by the higher authorities. Those who have knowledge in a subject area but who do not possess any degree certificates must be identified

and they must be made a part in designing the curriculum and even they must be encouraged to interact with the student folk.

IQ (Intelligent Quotient) tests must be mixed with EQ (Emotional Quotient) tests. Students must be helped to develop a broad mind where they will consider and respect other's viewpoints also. Tests must not be mere memory tests. There need to be various opportunities given for them to prove their knowledge like asking them to hold discussions, helping them participate in world- wide conferences, making them spend time with financially down trodden, design curriculum to include chapters/ modules where practical approaches are there where they get a chance to excavate on their own, what our traditional educational system was all about, etc.

As far as possible, residential pattern of education must be encouraged. If not, venues must be created where parents can be met at intervals to discuss about family atmosphere and incase needed counseling must be given to parents when essential. The students must be discouraged on the overuse of mobile phones and social networking sites. Even if they are doing it, it must be under the supervision of parents or teachers.

Indian Vedas, Culture and tradition must be compulsorily taught in all classes on a progressive basis irrespective of the caste, creed, and religion or gender disparity among students. They must be encouraged to respect each other's values their culture etc. This practice must be developed in all classes whether at the primary level or at the tertiary level. Strict actions must be taken against those who do not follow these principles.

A common pattern must be followed by Universities, after holding discussions, in setting curriculum, syllabus, pattern of teaching etc giving importance to national integrity and at the same time upholding regional/ state-wise values and cultural discretions and the unnecessary competition among the centers of learning must be avoided. Healthy competitions can be encouraged and the accreditation must be designed by the central system and it must be set applicable to all Universities and colleges.

Proper analysis committees must be set to understand the correct reason for this value deterioration among youth and this committee must include experts from Universities also so that whatever corrective measures possible at the higher educational level can be entertained through proper channel.

All these exist in our nation in a partial way. That must be changed. Educational matters must be dealt with by center itself that too upholding the rich heritage and values of our nation.

VII. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

A point to be noted is that these suggestions are put in practice by many, world- wide and even in our nation. But the thing is that it is narrowed down to that group alone. This situation needs drastic change. Elementary and High level learning must be made on the basis of a unanimous curriculum and syllabus. The tutors/ facilitators/ teachers must be chosen to these Centers of learning on a common basis. No bias must be there in selection of the tutors, only knowledge must be the criterion. The distorted form of knowledge rendering that takes place now must give way to a centralized path of learning. The situation is not easy to initialize and establish. It will take a long time span to give a structure to this idealistic world. Here lies the scope for further research as to:

- Identify methods for systematically planning and executing such ideas
- Analytically assessing the need for bringing up a change in the knowledge delivery pattern adopted in our nation.

- Critically assessing the requirements of today's youth to play their role effectively in nation building
- Bringing up consensus in minds of providers of higher learning regarding the urgency for a total grass root level revolution
- Inculcate the feeling in the youth of today that they are the architects and engineers who can build modern India without sacrificing it's values ; etc

VIII. CONCLUSION

There is nothing worst in any traditional system and nothing that can be seen as the best in modern systems. Both the systems have their own positives and negatives. Too much dependence on one ignoring the other will never give desired results. There has to be an innovative model that promises a blend of both systems for the overall sustainable growth. This principle is applicable in almost all fields and education sector is no exception. In this busy world education is also an item of sale, which is available in different standards. Quality education can be afforded only by big pockets. Earlier when knowledge was available for all those who were seekers of the same, now the situation has changed. All are running to grab degree certificates of Institutions coming in 'Top- ranks'. How many bother to seek knowledge is a matter of doubt. The result is increase in suicides, depression rates, divorce rates etc among the educated youth. When the earlier system was a cheap one, it could develop the individual for all facets of life, but what the costlier present systems are doing is developing broiler chicks which have a good demand in the market but they don't know that ultimately they are going to be eaten up by the rest fellows of the world. This is not a practice done unanimously but by the majority. Therefore a blend is what is needed in the present hour to develop the scholars of today into worthy individuals of tomorrow. Traditional values blended with modern advancements make the sustainable growth possible, of a nation thereby a whole world. One has to always remember that a mere degree certificate procured spending lots of money, putting zero effort might prove to be a certificate that marks one's stupidity for having spend so much on something which does not have an intrinsic value. Traditional educators educated the brain and the mind together, but most of the modern educators feed the brains alone ignoring the equilibrium. Therefore a blend must come to ensure sustainable growth of an individual, a generation, a society, a nation and the world at large and once this is set to momentum, we can see the repercussions over the future too.

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