



Remodeling the Universities – Meeting Challenges of the 21st Century. Srinivas K. Saidapur. Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd, New Delhi 110 002. 2022. 206 pages. Price: Rs 795.

Education is necessary to free our minds and enable them to think for themselves. Education has two components. One, it enables us to earn our living; two, it liberates our minds and raises individual consciousness to its highest level. The aim of higher education has been changing in the last five thousand years. Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Islamic systems of education operated in India till the advent of British rule. Through British rule, we got a western system of education, including experimental science. India had only theoretical science and Mathematics till then. In ancient India, *paraa vidya* (higher education) was distinguished from *aparaa vidya* not by the number of years spent by the student but by the nature of problems addressed and the purpose and outcome of education. Research was always part and parcel of higher education. In the last 150 years, more than twenty-seven education commissions appointed by colonial and independent Indian governments have influenced our higher education institutes (HEIs). We are still evolving, clueless about what is best for our young people. Although STEM education has attracted the most attention from both public and private sectors, NEP-2020 has ushered in a new era of integration between Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities on the one hand and between Fundamental and Applied (read Vocational) streams on the other hand. A redesigning of the University structure and repurposing of higher education towards social transformation is necessary.

The author of this book rightly says in the Preface that ‘the wellbeing of a Nation

rests largely on the performance of the Universities’. But what is good performance of a University? It is producing quality human resources—educated, independently thinking, technically skilled and socially responsible manpower which can catalyse sustainable national development. Constitutional goals like democracy, individual liberty with social responsibility, social equality, universal literacy, empowerment of all citizens through technical skill, equity with excellence etc., have to be attained through such enlightened, educated products of HEIs. Strangely, the National Institute Ranking Framework (NIRF) or Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) or even the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) assessment and ranking of HEIs evaluates the performance by some other criteria!

Chapter 1 attempts to give a historical perspective to the Indian higher education system, especially the Hindu system of *Gurukulas*, including the subjects taught and the scarcity of source books. I wish the author also touched upon the Buddhist, Jain and Islamic systems of education. A characteristic feature of all these systems was that even secular subjects were taught in the garb of religion. The author then jumps to the colonial system of education. The true intentions behind starting the colonial system of Schools, Colleges and Universities were not commented upon while referring to Lord Macaulay. Moreover, the fact that native zamindars ran more English-medium schools than colonial powers is not pointed out. It is a pertinent point in the present-day discussion on the medium of instruction, three-language formula, etc. There is no doubt that colonial rulers ‘rediscovered’ ancient India. While the native system preserved this vast knowledge in secrecy and provided limited accessibility, the colonial system made it accessible to the wider public. Standard textbooks on History, Philosophy, Natural Sciences, Mathematics etc., were written and made available to anybody who wished to learn. The concept of inclusive education started with the colonial system. A fascinating discussion on the role of higher education in Nation building is given as also the reasons for the partial success of many education commissions. Preparing students for succeeding in examinations appeared to be the only goal of our HEIs. Even the quality of scientific research was limited to assessing how good HEI are in replicating western science. The social context and purpose of HEIs have not been discussed in depth.

In Chapter 2, the inadequacies in ‘leadership’ and prevalence of ‘governance deficit’ in HEIs have been discussed. Accountability is missing in HEIs. A remark that private sector performs better than public sector may not be accurate, especially in the field of education. No private University or professional college in the private sector comes anywhere near some IITs, AIIMS or even the University of Delhi/BHU. It may, however, be true at school level. The current Delhi government is belying even that. Motivation and accountability are equally important. The current procedures for the appointment of Vice-Chancellors, etc. have been discussed. Valuable suggestions have been made to ensure that expectations are met. The Board of Studies (BoS) in the current system does not inspire. A similar discussion has been presented on hostels, libraries etc., in the current system. The major reason for their unsatisfactory functioning is a lack of conviction apart from a lack of sufficient funds. The author has given many practical suggestions to bring healthy, upright, visionary leadership to state universities. These suggestions, if taken seriously by the state governments, will go a long way in bringing back the lost glory of state universities as they existed in the old Madras, Calcutta, Karnataka or Osmania universities not long ago.

Chapter 3 is an excellent write-up with many insights on the proper management of financial resources in state universities. Novel ideas like using empty campus spaces for income generation activities have been given. The role of RUSA, a newly established organization or even Alumni, in funding the development of infrastructure and ‘best practices’ in the management of ‘receipts’ and ‘expenditure’ has been discussed. It is true that the total income earned by alumni would be hundreds and thousands of times the paltry tuition fees that they would have paid.

Chapter 4 discusses the most important activity of academic institutions – curriculum designing and implementation. The path-breaking recommendations of the NEP-2020 have been reiterated. More importantly, allotting adequate funds to run new, novel, and interdisciplinary courses have been rightly emphasized. As a natural corollary, restructuring the departments, schools and centers is a must. The advertisements for filling vacant faculty positions also have to be carefully worded. The essential qualification for every new position has to match the essence of that domain

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knowledge and not always the name of the department. The old system did not permit the appointment of interdisciplinary faculty into conventionally named departments. Another anomaly in state universities should also be mentioned in this connection. This is about one person holding more than 3 or 4 administrative positions, including HoD, which is an academic crime and has resulted in irreparable damage to the quality of higher education.

Chapter 5 is an excellent contribution to conducting quality research including ethical aspects. The three stakeholders in research, namely, the research student, guide/mentor and institution, have to cooperate and work towards a common goal of achieving excellent research output. Faculty Selection procedures, adequate funds, maintenance of 'creative atmosphere' including a supportive library, recreational facilities and compassionate administrative support are all equally important in producing quality research. The author has made a novel but realistic suggestion that the Ph.D. output should be called 'dissertation' and not 'thesis'. Pure research-based degrees do not exist anymore. Further, most Ph.D. work is technical without a proper conceptual research question. For example, Ph.D. without any investigative component or a testable hypothesis is the norm in reductionist biology.

Chapter 6 discusses issues of managing constituent and affiliated colleges. The quality of a University is limited by the quality of its colleges. Ask any educated person to name a few great colleges in the country, and he/she will name ten or twenty with great difficulty. There are more than forty thousand colleges. The author suggests that the constituent colleges should slowly transform into Model colleges/mini universities by becoming autonomous colleges. Adequate motivation and support should be provided to realize their potential. They must plan and implement novel and innovative courses, as well as develop and maintain high-quality infrastructure. The problem of managing affiliated colleges to assure quality educa-

tion through them has been adequately discussed with many novel suggestions. However, this will remain wishful thinking unless the implementing authority is empowered. The state governments should take these suggestions seriously and take appropriate administrative action which is legal and humane.

Chapter 7 discusses the role of Human Resource Development Centers (HRDCs), also called Academic Staff Colleges or Centre for Professional Development. Their main activity is conducting Refresher and Orientation courses for the in-service and newly appointed faculty. Teachers participate in these courses purely as a requirement for a promotion. Barring few exceptions, these courses are run routinely without inspiring content or resource persons. No serious thought is given to the course content. They are not used to test newly designed innovative and interdisciplinary courses. The whole activity is intellectually non-challenging, even in the central universities. It should be mentioned here that the refresher courses and Lecture Workshops supported by the National Science Academies are far superior to the refresher courses conducted by the universities.

Chapter 8 discusses the role of State Higher Education Councils (SHECs) in managing the colleges in framing the rules and regulations, in giving direction for curriculum development, etc. What surprises me is that the SHECs presuppose a lack of any trace of leadership, initiative, motivation, and sincerity among the college faculty, including the Principals. Quality cannot come through a top-down approach to reform. If the faculty in the college are similar to those recruited in University PG departments, SHECs will become redundant. BoS should be able to do the job. Good, competent and inspired faculty should ensure HEI are run properly and delivered. They owe it to the society that trusts them to take care of their personal and professional career to satisfaction. The key is to select faculty for academic considerations without political interference.

In Chapter 9, the author has given suggestions for new roles for NAAC. In his previous book, the author had given a better account of NAAC and host institute preparedness for NAAC visits. Accreditation by NAAC or NBA has of late become a manageable activity. Some consultants will advise the college/university and manage. It is also true that many institutions have managed to get a high NAAC score in one cycle but were unable to maintain or exceed that score in the subsequent cycles. Academic institutional activity is supposed to be an inspired activity. When inspiration does not come from inside, external auditing will do the trick to correct it to some extent. Ultimately, colleges and universities must be inspired by themselves, so that quality is assured. That is why the average life of a good college or university in India is not more than 20–25 years. One or two exceptions do exist. We have to seriously analyse this and seek reasons for the decline in quality. Is it that Indian society, in general, does not support scholarship or is it that HEIs have failed to respond to the social demands as well as have failed to influence society? HEIs should never become ivory towers. This is truer for scientific institutions. It is also true that great societies produce and sustain great HEIs.

This book by Srinivas Saidapur is an excellent and comprehensive analysis of what is wrong with our higher education system. New insights have been provided on every dimension of higher education. I think this book has to be read along with the NEP-2020 document to understand the significance of the reforms suggested. This book calls for a new classification of human knowledge, demanding parallel action in designing new courses, departments and centres. It is a must read for all faculty members, both current and prospective.

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