



## Emerging trends and challenges in higher education: A perspective

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### Abstract

A well developed and equitable system of higher education that promotes quality learning as a consequence of both teaching and research is central for success in emerging knowledge economy. It is widely acknowledged that education contributes significantly to economic development. The developed world understood much earlier the fact that individuals with higher education have an edge over their counterparts. They are the ones who always believed that any amount of investment in higher education was justifiable. It is, therefore, imperative for developing countries too, to give due importance to both the quantitative and qualitative expansion of higher education. The role of higher education is not limited to fostering the economic development of nations and providing opportunities for individuals, it extends also to promotion of cultural diversity, political democracy and trade. Emphasis is highly placed on how higher education can better serve society and promote international cooperation.

**Keywords:** Trends, challenges, higher education

### 1. Introduction

The development of an individual in every conceivable dimension is the aim of education. As per traditional Indian thought the aims of life are: Dharma (Duties), Artha (Riches), Kama (Pleasure) and Moksha (Liberation), Here the first three are related to the existing life, whereas the fourth one is related to that which is beyond life. Hence we can re-categorize them as: liberation and other than liberation. Liberation is pertaining to beyond life which means renounce and what is other than liberation is pertaining to the life and it may be told as indulgence. As per an ancient Indian scripture "knowledge leads to liberation" (Sā Vidyā yā Vimuktaye). But today's education does not seek anything beyond life. In other words, today's education is sophistic in character. Hence, today's knowledge is other than liberation; which is: (i) Indulgence in performing duties (Dharm); (ii) Indulgence in acquiring wealth (Artha) and (iii) Indulgence in experiencing pleasure (Kāma). This is the fast emerging trend in higher education in India and elsewhere Harmony among the three worldly aims of life i.e. among Dharma, (Performance of duties), Artha (acquiring riches) and Kāma (experiencing pleasure) is very essential for success in life, from today's standards. Today's higher education is pandering to materialism and materialistic success in life here and now and there is less and less emphasis on such knowledge which leads to 'liberation' (Moksha), the fourth essential aim of life. To my mind knowledge or higher education ought not to be divorced from this fourth objective of life – Liberation or Moksha. Perhaps this is a big challenge before the contemporary higher education in India. In other words, to keep the Indian higher education wedded to the liberation (Moksha) aspect of knowledge is the fast emerging challenge. It is not that since ancient times in India materialism was altogether neglected and acquiring wealth (Artha) was a taboo. Instead, acquiring wealth or riches was very important but it was not all important and it was not summum bonum of life. Among Dharma, Artha and Kama,

Artha was most important and remains most important because the other two (Dharma & Kama) depended on it. This, among the three (Dharma, Artha, Kama), acquiring wealth is the most important as other two are depending on it (Dhanat dharamam tato sukham) exclusively not only in the present scenario but also in years of yore. The first written document of Indian civilization – The Rig Veda signifies the importance of riches in its commencing hymn itself: "Agnimile Purohitam Yanjasya Devam Rt vijam. Hotaram Ratnadharamam."<sup>1</sup> It means, I enlogize that Agni, who is: (a) leading personality of performace; (b) benefiting instantly; (c) the communication and (d), The Provider of Riches. Mahabharata, the great Indian epic proclaims a hundred times: Arthe Sarvam Pratistham (everything exists in wealth). Kautilya says: Arthamulau Dharma Kamau. (Performance of duties and pleasure depend on riches). In other words it can be interpreted as – "education enables one to be capable of acquiring riches." All this said, the greater truth still stands out-Sa vidya ya vimuktaye. Only that is knowledge which liberates. Every other kind of vidya is 'Avidya', which may be interpreted as Karma (action) or Skill (Dakshatā). As Ishayasyopanishat beautifully puts if: "Vidyām cha Avidyām cha yast dvedobhayam Sah. Avidyayā Mrityum tērtva Vidyayā amritam ashutē."<sup>2</sup> It means: One who knows that Vidya and Avidya are to be combined or to go together, overcomes death (or goes across the life) by avidya and attains immortality by vidya. Thus the clear injunction of Ishopanishat is that of pursuing vidya (Pure knowledge) and Avidya (Action as per one's skills). One's skillful actions throughout the life are generally concerned with performing duties (Dharma), acquiring riches (Artha) and pursuing pleasures (Kama). But together with all this, pursuing pure knowledge (Vidya) must not be neglected during the action packed and eventful life in order to attain immortality (Moksha). Keeping the higher education constantly abreast with this paramount truth is an emerging challenge especially in India; Western civilization has always been mostly materialistic in

approach and essence. Apart from the above fundamental challenge before higher education in India there are other emerging trends - positive as well as negative. To fight the negative trends that are fast emerging in Indian higher education is a tough challenge. To begin with, there is a negative trend emerging in research. Almost all the Indian Universities are producing bogus research, which is quite sub-standard and not upto the mark. In fact Research and Development has become Repeat and Deliver. There are two major causes for this negative trend: firstly there is no proper training of researchers in researching Methodology and in adopting a proper research Approach; Secondly, there is a fall in value of degree and rise in value of certificate. Method is mediocrity but Approach is merit. Now-a-days there is a lot of hype about Research Methodology and there is utter neglect of Research Approach. "In fact Approach is primary and Method is secondary. Method is a more general term which denotes a particular way of doing something. In a systematic study method may be defined as the procedure of inquiry by which reliable knowledge may be obtained and reliable conclusions could be drawn. Examples of method are: Scientific method, inductive method, deductive method, comparative method etc. On the other hand, approach is a wider term which comprehends not only the method (i.e. how to inquire) but also the focus of our study, (i.e. what to inquire) in order to understand the given phenomenon."<sup>3</sup> As Vernon Von Dyke has stated: "An approach consists of criteria of selection – criteria employed in selecting the problem or questions to consider and in selecting the data to bring to bear, it consists of standards governing the inclusion and exclusion of questions and data."<sup>4</sup> Commending on the distinction between approach and method. Dyke has further pointed out: "In brief, approaches consist of criteria for selecting problems and relevant data, whereas methods are procedures for getting and utilizing data."<sup>5</sup> It may, however, be observed that an approach is usually wedded to a particular method while a method is not always wedded to a particular approach. That is why an approach suggests the relevant method also. Thus behavioural approach is wedded to scientific method as behaviour of several actors in a political situation is capable of scientific study. The normative approach is wedded to philosophical method because norms and values can only be determined philosophically<sup>6</sup>. Thus Approach is primary and method is secondary. For a good research the adoption of a proper approach is no less important than the selection of a research methodology, which is usually according to research approach adopted because the approach suggests a suitable method. Great works produced by scholars in the West and East reveal a proper approach not method. Plato adopted philosophical approach and deductive method. Aristotle and Machiavelli adopted historical approach and inductive method. Brighaspati and Kautilya adopted political economy approach. Later Marx adopted political economy approach while working on his Das Capital. In ancient India Dharmshastra, Arthshastra and Neetishastra produced respectively by Manu, Brihaspati and Shukra suggested particular approach followed by each of them. The point that I want to make is that without finding and adopting a suitable approach of research, the quality research is very unlikely to be produced. Method is not as important as approach, it is always auxiliary. The major cause of bogus researches produced by Indian universities is utter neglect of approach and emphasis only on

methodology. At the same time, there is no proper training of researchers in research approach and method before they undertake a research work. One big reason is absence of faculty positions of Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and professors of Research Methodology in Indian Universities. At the policy level government must go forward to create such faculties in the universities and degree colleges in order to improve research work and to give boost to quality research in India. Under the present API (Academic Performance Indicator) system of UGC value of degree is falling and value of certificate is rising. The API system puts premium on participation (in seminars, symposia and workshops) and not on value and level of participation. All this has given boost to a seminar business wherein you can acquire a certificate by paying the registration money and you can get your article published because the API system values the paper presentation not the value of paper presented or published. This is a very negative trend fast emerging in Indian higher education which must be checked forthwith and nipped in bud. For this UGC's API system is largely responsible which can be changed only by policy makes and government. Herein I am forwarding the REST model of higher education. The acronym has two descriptions and both of these are suitable for quality higher education in India and elsewhere. One description of REST is: Rational, Emotional, Spiritual and Technological. Higher Education means giving REST to the student. It means giving a student Rational, Emotional and Spiritual treatment while teaching using suitable contemporary Technological probs Education is definitely a rational exercise on the part of the teacher as well as learner. In higher education we have maximum number of students of the age group of 15 to 25 years. This is a very volatile age wherein students are a very emotional, sensitive and sentimental lot who must be taught very caringly. Teacher must care for students' emotions, sensitivities and sentiments and he/she must furnish himself/herself as an emotional anchor to the student. Teacher must serve as a reliable, trustworthy and friendly confidante of the adolescent student so that student shares his/her most private problems with the teacher and could feel totally free to seek teacher's advice on almost all matters, educational and otherwise. There is a lot of wisdom in the old saying that. "parents are first teachers and teachers are second parents." Higher education strengthen the spirits of the student and enriches his/her soul. Higher education must cultivate humility and strengthen the belief in the value system of society. The higher education must cultivate in the student the liberal values of tolerance, humility, service, altruisms so that in life he/she could balance between 'Shreya' (Credit, which comes from altruism and social service) and 'Priya' or self-interest). Last but not least, the current technological probs must be used to a required and suitable degree to help the teaching- learning process. For example, at present information, Communication technology (ICT) must be used by teachers to an optimum level to facilitate the efficacy as well as clarity of their teaching. The other meaning of REST is 'Research plus Teaching', which is very important in imparting higher education. Teaching without research has no roots and research without teaching has no fruit. 'Research plus Teaching' is summum bonum of higher education. Here research does not mean that a teacher first envol himself/herself under a guide after selecting a research

problem and a proper approach as well as method of research and work for. D.Phil degree and after obtaining the same he should proceed to class room to undertake the teaching work. Here, 'Research' simply means 'Innovation'. Every teacher engaged in higher education must strive for innovation in his/her teaching. He/she must strive for introducing and explaining his/her each lesson to the students in his/her very individual, innovative and creative way. That of course requires some research before undertaking any lesson for teaching. Innovation and creativity on the part of the teacher is life-breath of teaching at higher education level otherwise the higher education will be prosaic and mawkish. 'Research plus Teaching' (REST) will go a long way in ensuring the internal quality in the institutions of higher education. If both the aspects of above described REST model of teaching are applied and used by teachers then higher education may become Sa Vidyā Yā Vimuktayā and, at the same time, it can meet most of the emerging challenges to it. After the above suggestions let us now concentrate on some fundamental and contemporary challenges before higher education. One very fundamental challenge is – How to make the teachers of higher education grasp the curriculum as they generally cannot rise above the syllabus and their approach to teaching is quite superficial. Curriculum is strategy, whereas syllabus is tactics. Curriculum is superset, syllabus is subset. Curriculum refers to 'what', whereas syllabus refers to 'How'. Curriculum is roadmap for reaching through syllabus. If teaching of a syllabus is anchored in the spirit of curriculum only then the real objective of higher education in any country will be realized and it will help make the higher education a real tool of nation building. Another fundamental challenge is assuring internal quality in the institutions of higher education. Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQACs) have been established and are functioning in various universities but they are there only in name. They are not functioning well and their membership is bankrupt of any ideas for assuring and maintaining internal quality in the institution. Often they do not know what does internal quality of an institution of higher education connote. If IQACs are manned with men of ideas and with those who know what is internal quality of an institution of higher education and evince a commitment and dedication for the same, then it will go a long way to meet this challenge as the real reform comes from within. One big challenge before higher education in India is that of populist policies. Policy making in India suffers from populism as education policy is often based on public pressure rather than pragmatism. It is populism, ideology and vested interest that drive policy in India. It seeks to achieve arbitrarily set goals that are often elusive and more than that, pursued half-heartedly Policy can be made to meet or cope with the emerging trends and challenges from across the globe. Though the policy-making is not our job, but being citizens of a democratic nation moulding the policy by advancing the critique of the policy is definitely our job. Here, the real challenge is implementation, execution and realization of the ends and goals of policy. Globalization is the current trend and adjusting the higher education in India to globalization is quite a challenge. Adjusting to globalization means pragmatism rather than ideology is guiding the countries which are reshaping their higher education systems to make it globally competitive. Three other big challenges to higher education are <sup>[7]</sup>.

Ensuring education for employability;

- A. To break the link between cost and quality;
- B. The entire learning eco-system needs to change to accommodate alternative providers and the future of work. And the six major trends fast emerging in higher education throughout the world are as under: <sup>[8]</sup>
  1. The global economy is changing - the combination of globalization and technology is transforming the way the global economy works.
  2. The global economy is suffering – the global economy is dealing with a trauma of worst crisis in modern times, as the consequences of two decades of irrational exuberance slowly unwind.
  3. The cost of higher education is increasing faster than inflation.
  4. Meanwhile, the value of a degree is falling.
  5. Content is ubiquitous – We are living in the age of MOOC or Massive Open Online Course. The courses are free of charge and open to a global audience.
  6. The competition is heating up – there are numerous institutions and universities throughout the world including the developing world which are luring the students and their parents with world class infrastructure and very competitive fee structure.

My belief is that deep, radical and urgent transformation is required in higher education in India as much as it is in school systems. My fear is that, perhaps as a result of complacency, caution or anxiety, or a combination of all three, the pace of change is too slow and the nature of change too incremental. Also think over the suggestion of the following urdu couplet:

Oefj Ûee ceW leueelegce nes lees yeÛe mekeâleer nw keâMleer keâ Mleer ceW leueelegce nes lees meefnue ve efceuesiee Here Dariya refers to the whole world of higher education. Talaatum indicates the deluge of trends and challenges emerging from throughout the globe, and Kashtii refers to governmental universities and colleges or India. Inc.

## References

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2. Ishavasyopanishat. Hymn, 11.
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4. Sec Dyke, Vernon Von, Political Science A Philosophical Analysis, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1960.
5. Ibid.
6. Gauba OP, Op Cit. 79.
7. See Barber, Michael Donnelly, Katelyn, Rizvi Saad. Avalanche is Coming-The Higher Education and the Revolution Ahead, Pearson, 2013.
8. Barber Michael, opcit.