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REDISCOVERING QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION ROLE OF NAAC

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ABSTRACT

India is home to the second largest higher education system in the world. Quantitatively the system is highly impressive, but lot of questions are to be answered with regard to quality. Development of the wholesome personality of the individual is as important as the accessibility to the educational services. Educational institutions have become factories producing relentless job seekers. The training of soul and mind of the individual is totally neglected. It is high time we rediscover the glorious educational system of our past that had attracted the attention of the students worldwide. Let our educational system produce minds not simply graduates. The establishment and functioning of National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is a major step forward to bring back quality in our higher education institutions.

KEYWORDS: personality, relentless, glorious, accessibility.

INTRODUCTION

"Education is not a product, marks, diploma, job, money – in that order, it is a process, a never ending one. And the process begins right in the mother's womb and goes on till the last breath. There are many who assume that education is over once you leave the university or the college.

But the fact is that every moment of our life is a learning process. Education is not a mere investment in employment possibilities, though it is very important. Real education must create conditions for the development of a wholesome personality of an individual so that he can contribute his best to the family, society and country. Otherwise the adage, 'I was born intelligent but education ruined me' will turn into reality.

India has second largest higher education system in the world. Due to the impact of globalization there is an increasing demand for quality assurance in higher education institutions. The NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation

Council) is established as an independent body to assess the quality and accredit the higher education institutions. The different criteria adopted by NAAC in accrediting colleges and universities should make them function in such a way so as to reinvent the educational methods and aims of our ancient past.

EDUCATION IN THE PAST :

History records that India had its own universities, long before Bologna, the first university made its appearance in the West-Takshasila, Nalanda, Oddantapuri, Vikramasita, Ujjain, Amaravathi etc., Takshasila (1000 BC – 500 AD) was the first university in the world. It was the intellectual capital, sort of central university. Among other things, its job oriented, employment based courses



included 18 shilpas, indicating crafts – secular law, vairashika (atomic theory of creation), music, medicine, logic, history, conveyancing, accountancy, poetry, military art, Agriculture, cattle breeding, Magic, snake-charming etc. It is important to note here that modern educationists have to introduce many job oriented courses in view of the demands of global competitive society.

The first convocation address in the world was delivered thousands of years ago in 'Taittiriya upanishad'. The teacher's parting advice to the students was "Matru devo bhava, pitru devo bhava, Acharya devobhava, Atidhi devo bhava.... Practice dharma and work for loksangraha . It is surprising to note that some of the aspects of education in ancient India are still valid and relevant to modern times. The main purpose of education was total and integrated development of the human personality. According to Sankhya Yoga, the human soul is surrounded by five sheaths 'Pancha kosa'. They are (a) Annamaya (b) Pranamaaya (c) Manomaya (d) Vijnanamaya (e) Anandanaya. According to the Upanishads, the principal object of education is to provide balanced development of these five 'Kosas' of human personality. In other words, the flowering of personality towards excellence depends upon the development of body, mind, intellect, heart and the soul. This is in perfect accord with the modern philosophy of education. The only thing missing in the present day education is attention to the heart and the soul. That is why there is so much violence and corruption today. Modern educationists have to seriously think of and act accordingly.

Albert Einstein, the great Mathematician and scientist wrote about India, "We are indebted to India for all scientific progress because it is they, who taught us how to calculate without which no progress could have been achieved". India invented the number system. It was Arya Bhatta who invented the zero. Bhaskara and Varaha Mihira were great astronomers. Ayurveda is the earliest system of medicine, which produced pioneers like jeevaka, Charaka and susruta.

The important thing in the educational process is "Don't stop questioning", said Einstein. Unfortunately in our educational system, today "Thinking is neglected". The student is taught what to think, but not how to think. During the days of Nalanda University a student was made to study a portion of the book. Questions were put on the content. Only when the student gives satisfactory answers the teacher went to the next lesson. Fahiyen, the historian, wrote in his diary that questioning was used as an educational technique in Nalanda University and teachers who did not prepare their lessons used to hide themselves in bushes because they could not face the questions of their students. It is surprising that Nalanda University even attracted the students world wide. It has got such a significance due to quality education. It is important to note that the students from India are now being attracted by the universities abroad, particularly from U.S.A., U.K. and Australia etc. Hence there is an urgent need to rediscover quality in our higher education.

According to Eric Ashby, former Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University, one of the objectives of higher education is "promotion of capacity for critical dissent". But today we have only yes men and rubber stamps. Most of the educationists are providing the students with lot of information. But information alone will not do. Swami Vivekananda said, "if information alone is education the encyclopedias are our gurus and our libraries are our rishis. As Jiddu Krishnamurthy said intelligence is greater because it gives direction to information and knowledge. Information must be controlled by character and directed by wisdom. What have our universities done during the last 50 years? Have they produced a single man who could think independently? Asked Swami Vivekananda. He expressed his scorn for the modern intellectuals who were lavish in words but laggards in action.

EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES :

Many opine that India has survived with an increasingly mediocre higher education system for decades. We still follow the educational system which was started by Britishers. The present model of education still heavily relies on the model adopted by Lord Macaulay which fulfills his aim of producing only clerks. It is a well recognized fact that education has to be in accordance with the national priorities. Education is a means to achieve the goals enshrined in the constitution. Our late Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi said, "Education is a liberating force and in our age it is also democratizing force, cutting across barriers of caste and class and smoothing out inequalities imposed on by birth and other circumstances."

History will record that the greatest mistake of the Indian Republic in first forty years of its existence was to make far less investment in human resources – investment in education - than in brick and mortar, plants and factories. Now India strives to compete in a globalised economy in areas that require highly trained professionals, the quality of higher education becomes increasingly important. Philip Altbach writes, "India's colleges and

universities with just a few exceptions have become largely underfunded, ungovernable institutions. At many of them politics has intruded into campus life, influencing academic appointments and decisions across levels. Under investment in libraries, information technology, laboratories and class rooms makes it very difficult to provide top quality instruction or engage in cutting edge research.”

At present there is a high degree of asymmetry in the education system. While there are many who aspire to higher education, quality institutions to impart this are few. This creates a mismatch of demand and supply in quality manpower. Few in India are thinking creatively about higher education. There is no field of higher education research. As things stand there are short falls in investments for research purposes and for getting new faculty members. Those in government, as well as academic leaders seem content to do the same old thing. Academic institutions need good data, careful analysis and creative ideas. In China, more than two dozen higher education research centres and several government agencies are involved in higher education policy. In India, at present there are nearly 300 Universities and 18000 colleges. There are nearly 10 million students in the field of Higher Education. It is ironical that quantitatively our educational scene is impressive.

GENESIS OF NAAC :

Taking the cue from the international system, the University Grants Commission in India established an autonomous institution, National Assessment and Accreditation Council in 1994. Since then NAAC is functioning to assess and accredit institutions of liberal arts, Sciences and other disciplines with the objective of helping them to work continuously to improve the quality of education. It is playing a catalyst role in providing quality assurance in their agenda by the higher education institutions and thus functioning as a motivating force for quality higher education in India.

NAAC CRITERIA AND QUALITY EDUCATION :

The issue of quality has become critical in the face of globalization of higher education and liberalization of trade in higher education services which hold opportunities as well as risks. Globalization resulted in quantitative growth of educational institutions without qualitative development. The Kothari commission report of 1966 on education has commented that a preponderant number of students who leave the portals of our colleges and universities are lacking in communication skills. They cannot speak. They cannot write. They cannot even think independently. Some of the finest educational institutions in our country are producing graduates, not minds. Even in U.K. today they are making reforms in education to teach the student how to think and come to independent conclusions. In this context, the NAAC assessment seven point criteria is relevant as it contributes for quality higher education.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT :

NAAC gives importance to the curriculum development and the faculty and institutions are to involve to improve it in a continuous process. A balanced approach to academics, sports and cultural activities is the need of the hour. Curriculum has to be restructured to underline the importance of skill based programmes. We must put in efforts constantly to try and reorient our focus to meet the demands of our time and impart quality education. Ever evolving unique curriculum is to be framed. If a teacher does not like what he is teaching, he should be allowed to change it altogether, provided he can convince his peers about it.

TEACHING - LEARNING AND EVALUATION :

One of the most important criteria adopted by NAAC in its assessment is the teaching learning evaluation. It appears that teaching is a dying art throughout the world. The teaching method adopted by most of the teachers is to give lecture for the whole period without leaving anytime for the students to respond. There is a need to reverse the traditional lecture-centric style of instruction. Passive listening still persists in many academic places of our country. Participative style of instruction wherein the students will benefit from an interactive mode with the faculty is to be encouraged. The conventional talk and chalk method which hinders the interaction between the students and the teacher is to be eliminated. The reality is that most of the teachers are not exposed to the latest trends in education. Even though they attend orientation and refresher courses, no practical application of training and skills are imparted in such courses.

Besides regular courses, students should be allowed to study applied components such as population studies, investment analysis, mass communication market research techniques and law. We must enable the students to get dual specialization in any field of their choice, a feature that can work wonders in the age of multi specialization and multi tasking. Freedom and flexibility are to be ensured in the learning programmes.

Good teaching is not effective communication of knowledge but an intimate transmission of knowledge. Education and the teacher student relationship have to be seen not in the business terms but with nation's growth in mind. A nation's wealth is the young generation of the country. A proper education would nurture a sense of dignity and self respect among our youth. The teaching community has to make the students to believe that they are worthy of being citizens of a developed India. Focus should be on the development of critical and creative thinking of students. Unique and meaningful blend of theory and application is essential. 24x7 system which emphasises the importance of learning round the clock and even outside the class room is to be adopted by the faculty. IQAC must help the students and the faculty to maintain high standards in the teaching learning process.

NAAC gives importance to the student-centred teaching-learning process and the higher education institutions should provide all necessary support services to the students in acquiring quality education.

INFRASTRUCTURE :

One fears a bulk of the conventional colleges mostly in rural and semi urban areas will not get qualified for assessment as they will be found below the academic poverty line. As to infrastructure these colleges have little to boast about. Possessing no buildings of their own they fall back on the shared buildings where the basic requirements like office, library, reading room, girls room etc. are not fully met.

BEST PRACTICES :

Education is a blessing and blessed are those who have received this blessing. Power lies in knowledge and the poor has no knowledge. The colleges must show commitment to the poorer sections of the society. Poor students must be allowed to be financially self sufficient by taking part in the earn while you learn process.

Education is certainly the most important instrument of beneficent social change and elevation of special ideals. Innovative programmes are to be introduced every now and then. Colleges must also concentrate on social work. Students must get tuned to social reality at an early stage. The colleges must adopt slums in nearby locality where students are made to teach and conduct health camps.

CONCLUSION :

Thus if the assessment of NAAC can drive the institutions to tap and channelise the power and potential of youth in a right way then we can have young bubbling with creativity, tremendous energy and great responsibility, thereby leading our nation to the top of the world. In the words of Swami Vivekananda the main objective of Education, "Man making, Nation building and service mindedness," will be fulfilled.

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