

## 7. CUBICALIZATION OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

*M. Anandakrishnan\**

### Cubicalization

During the discussions in the Committee on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education Prof. Yashpal who headed the Committee coined the term 'cubicalization' to describe the state of fragmentation and isolation of professional disciplines from one another. This phenomenon got further reinforced with the trend towards formation of university level institutions for each professional discipline starting with the technical education. The Andhra Pradesh Technological University was first established in early seventies followed by the Anna University in Tamil Nadu in the late seventies. Since then a large number of technical universities have been founded in several other states in India and more are being contemplated. Initially these were formed as unitary universities. With the exponential growth of engineering colleges in the country many new technological universities are coming into existence as affiliating universities. The apparent rationale for the unitary type was for the States to emulate the Indian Institutes of Technology. Unfortunately, they ended up no different from plain old engineering colleges ignoring the special academic and curricular features of the IITs, such as strong basic sciences and humanities content, grading system, internal evaluation and so on.

The tendency to isolate engineering education from general universities was justified by the complaint that the academic councils of general universities mostly ignored the issues connected with technical education

and most of the Vice-Chancellors of such universities lacked technical background. Another justification was the success of the agricultural universities forgetting the fact that the curriculum of the agricultural universities was more holistic than the technical universities.

Following the technical education, university level institutions are springing up in other professional disciplines such as medicine, dental science, sports, teacher education, fashion technology, Hotel Management, veterinary science etc. These are either state level institutions or deemed universities. Degree and Post-Graduate Colleges of a particular discipline are simply transformed into universities either by legislations of the States or by the University Grants Commission under Section 3 of its Act as deemed to be universities. The state governments exercise enormous control on the State professional universities. The private deemed universities are mostly family controlled with enormous scope for malpractices. The fragmentation of the professional education was further reinforced by the multitude of statutory regulatory bodies like AICTE, Council of Architecture, BCI, NCTE, MCI, Dental Council, Nursing Council etc., many of which were initially meant to establish norms for registering professional practices; but, in due course took over the curricular aspects including approval for starting new institutions and prescribing intake capacities. This was also the beginning of corrupt practices in professional education

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*\*Chairman, Board of Governors, IIT-Kanpur*

system. In effect, these developments abandoned the idea of a university.

### The Idea of a University

The Report of Yash Pal Committee deals with the idea of a university, comprehensively. To quote from this Report *"A university is a place where new ideas germinate, strike roots and grow tall and sturdy. It is a unique space, which covers the entire universe of knowledge. It is a place where creative minds converge, interact with each other and construct visions of new realities. Established notions of truth are challenged in the pursuit of knowledge. To be able to do all this, universities have to be autonomous spaces. They are diverse in their design and organization, reflecting the unique historical and socio-cultural settings in which they have grown. This diversity reflects the organic links that they have with their surroundings, which are not only physical but cultural as well. Through research and teaching, they create, evaluate and bring about advances in knowledge and culture. The principle of moral and intellectual autonomy from political authority and economic power is ingrained in the very idea of the university. This autonomy ensures freedom in research and training and it is expected that the governments and the society would respect this fundamental principle. Teaching and research have to be inseparable, because the task of the university is not only to impart knowledge to young people but also to give them opportunities to create their own knowledge."*

*".... University education is no longer viewed as a good in itself, but also as the stepping-stone into a higher orbit of the job market, where the student expects a concrete monetary return, and consequently in this perception, the university of today is expected to be in tune with the emerging needs of the society. Even so, graduates should be sufficiently exposed to interdisciplinary experiences, which can sustain them when the demands of a particular job market changes."*

*" .....All this requires us to go beyond*

*specialized knowledge and competence. This universal approach to knowledge demands that boundaries of disciplines be porous and scholars be constantly on guard against the tendency towards 'cubicalization' of knowledge. Apart from resisting fragmentation of knowledge, the idea of a university should at the same time aspire to encompass the world of work in all its forms. Work constitutes the human sphere where knowledge and skills are born, and where new knowledge takes shape in response to social and personal needs....."*

### Role of Universities

In general the programmes of universities may be seen under two broad categories: one for scholarly pursuits and achievements and the other for work-force requirements. It is now increasingly recognized that this dichotomy should be erased and shift away from undue emphasis on "manpower-oriented" planning. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, in his convocation address to the University of Allahabad in 1947, summed up the basic objectives of the university and its role in national life: *"A university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for the adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for the onward march of the human race towards even higher objectives. If the universities discharge their duties adequately, then it is well with the nation and the people."*

In the rapidly changing contemporary world, modern university system is undergoing profound changes in their scope, functions and organization and is in a process of rapid evolution. Their tasks are no longer confined to the two traditional functions of teaching and advancement of knowledge. They are assuming new functions with increasing range, depth and complexity. In broad terms, the functions of the universities may be said to be: to seek and cultivate new knowledge; to interpret old knowledge and beliefs in the light of new needs and discoveries; to provide the right kind of leadership in all walks of life; to include the youth

from all sections of the society to develop their full potential; to help to cultivate right interests, attitudes and moral and intellectual values; and to strive to promote equality and social justice and to reduce social and cultural differences through diffusion of education.

Universities are essentially a community of teachers and students where, in some way, all learn from one another or, at any rate, strive to do so. Their principal objective is to deepen our understanding of their role in the society and to disseminate this understanding throughout society and to apply it in the service of mankind. Yet another responsibility of the Indian universities in the present context is to strive to assist the schools in their attempts at qualitative self-improvement. For this purpose, universities should conduct experimental schools, run advanced courses for teachers in various school subjects, assume greater responsibility for the training of teachers at all levels, organize summer institutes for their in-service education, assist in the search for and development of talent, and develop new curricula, textbooks and teaching materials.

## Recommendations

The Committee has recommended in its final report to the Government of India, the following agenda for action:

- Creation of an all-encompassing National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER), a Constitutional body to replace the existing regulatory bodies including the UGC, AICTE, NCTE and DEC (See Appendix A) and to follow up the Constitutional amendment with an appropriate law for the Commission's functioning;
- Universities to be made responsible regarding the academic content of all courses and programmes of study including professional courses. Professional bodies like the AICTE, NCTE, MCI, BCI, COA, INC, PCI etc. to be divested of their academic functions, which

would be restored to the universities;

- Curricular reform to be the topmost priority of the newly created NCHER which would create a curricular framework based on the principles of mobility within a full range of curricular areas and integration of skills with academic depth;
- It should be mandatory for all universities to have a rich undergraduate programme and undergraduate students must get opportunities to interact with the best faculty. While appointing teachers to the universities, their affiliation to a particular college should also be specified to emphasize the need for their exposure to undergraduate students;
- Undergraduate programs to be restructured to enable students to have opportunities to access all curricular areas with fair degree of mobility. It is highly recommended that normally, no single discipline or specialized university should be created;
- The vocational education sector is at present outside the purview of universities and colleges. Alienation of this sector can be overcome by bringing it under the purview of universities and by providing necessary accreditation to the courses available in polytechnics, industrial training institutions, and so on. Additionally the barriers to entry into universities for students going through vocational training should be lowered to enable them to upgrade their knowledge base at any stage of their careers;
- The NCHER should also galvanize research in the university system through the creation of a National Research Foundation;
- New governing structures to be evolved to enable the universities to preserve their autonomy in a transparent and accountable manner;
- Practice of according status of deemed university be stopped forthwith till the NCHER takes a considered view on it. It would be mandatory for all existing deemed universities

to submit to the new accreditation norms to be framed on the lines proposed in this report within a period of three years failing which the status of university should be withdrawn. However, unique educational initiatives which have over a period of time enriched higher education by their innovations to be given recognition and supported appropriately;

- Modern higher education system requires extension facilities, sophisticated equipment and highly specialized knowledge and competent teachers. It would not be possible for every university to possess the best of these infrastructures. Hence, one of the primary tasks of the NCHER to create several inter-university centres (IUCs) in diverse fields to create the best of these possibilities and attract the participation of several institutions of higher learning to avail them. The model already successfully demonstrated by the IUCs of the UGC like the Inter University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, Inter University Accelerator Centre and others, would be a valuable guidance in their structures, governance, operation and support.
- Institutions of excellence like the IITs and IIMs to be encouraged to diversify and expand their scope to work as full-fledged universities, while keeping intact their unique features, which shall act as pace-setting and model governance systems for all universities;
- One of the first tasks of the NCHER should be to identify the best 1,500 colleges across India to upgrade them as universities, and create clusters of other potentially good colleges to evolve as universities.
- Universities to establish live relationship with the real world outside and develop capacities to respond to the challenges faced by rural and urban economies and culture;
- All levels of teacher education to be brought under the purview of higher education;

- A national testing scheme for admission to the universities on the pattern of the GRE to be evolved which would be open to all the aspirants of University education, to be held more than once a year. Students would be permitted to send their best test score to the University of their choice.
- Quantum of central financial support to state-funded universities be enhanced substantially on an incentive pattern, keeping in view the needs for their growth;
- Expansion of the higher education system to be evaluated and assessed continuously to excel and to respond to the needs of different regions in India in order to ensure not only equity and access but also quality and opportunity of growth along the academic vertical. The NCHER too should be subject to external review once in five years.
- Establish a National Education Tribunal with powers to adjudicate on disputes among stake-holders within institutions and between institutions so as to reduce litigation in courts involving universities and higher education institutions; and
- Set up a Task Force to follow up on the implementation of this Agenda for Action within a definite time-frame.

Some of these recommendations may be implemented immediately while others may take some evolutionary steps and procedures. Even so, it is hoped that the ideas behind them would be kept alive by keeping them under active and wide-ranging discussions. In fact, there should be an educational movement to continuously articulate and debate these issues so that changes are made in keeping with the emerging trends nationally and globally on the most effective forms of higher education. These recommendations are not for all times to come. There should be sufficient social and political awareness to continuously monitor and adopt new innovations based on the ever evolving

demands of the society and economy.

## Conclusion

The proliferation of fragmented professional universities in India, is a matter for serious concern. In an age, when most discoveries and innovations are taking place at the interface between many diverse disciplines, the professional universities for narrow specializations will be a waste of human and financial resources, besides loosing the

competitive potential in the global economy. Not one of the existing professional universities, whether State, Private or deemed, can even remotely measure up to the idea of a university. Hopefully, the NCHER, if comes into existence, will reflect on the possible corrective measure to rescue and restore the value of the university education from the existing cubicles.

