

HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: COLONIAL LEGACY AND PRESENT STATUS

Dr. Madhu Sultania*

ABSTRACT

The present day educational system in India has been modeled on the western institutional base as well as content. The colonial rule introduced western legal, administrative, medicinal and educational system. These institutions not only replaced the indigenous institutions but in certain ways were in dissonance with the social structure and cultural ethos of the country. The new institutions have helped in the creation of a hiatus between the vast populace and a select elite minority. The foundation of the new educational system in India was laid by the Britishers. The motive to introduce British system of education was to recruit local people at the lower level of administrative hierarchy. It also led to pursuits of the west and a taste for alien styles of life. There have been several unintended consequences of the Western education, chiefly exposing sensitive young people to the ideas of liberty, freedom and equality and denial of dogmatic faith. Thus a system which was intended for perpetuation of colonial hegemony itself was responsible for creating a band of people determined to fight for the freedom of the country. Macaulay's system of education did more than mere meet the needs of an imperial administration.

Keywords: Educational System, Social Structure, Cultural Ethos, Western Education.

Introduction

Historically, the process of intellectual creativity in India has been characterized by profound diversities in terms of areas, dimensions and depth of knowledge sought and explicated. This cognitive plurality is the source of cultural and structural diversities of the Indian society. The realm of knowledge in its historicity encompasses not merely metaphysical, philosophical and spiritual but also literary, linguistic, political, social, scientific, aesthetic and even sensual areas. The classical texts give profound evidence of the intellectual contribution and sustained seeking and achievements in spirit, art and cognitive enterprise.

The knowledge was logically categorised into different disciplines and the process of its creation and communication had an institutionalized basis. The diversity of knowledge was possible due to freedom of intellectual pursuits and openness of society to tolerate and absorb. It ought to be emphasised that a great deal of literature exists in the form of handwritten manuscripts, which has not been translated, studied and even properly preserved. This literature has been written in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali and different regional dialects. The neglect of study of the indigenous literature -both classical, semi-classical and folk has been further buttressed by the adoption of western academic structure at all levels of institutionalized acquisition of knowledge.

In essence, India presents a microcosm of various schools of thought and streams of knowledge as acquired historically in different epochs as well as contemporary trends of cognitive forms. It is true that the endogenously created forms have been marginalised and the contemporary forms of thought have gained primacy, including the western institutions for creation and communication of knowledge. There is a rich tradition of 'pundits' who acquire and transmit knowledge in traditional ways. The milieu, the attire, the language and the ethos of the pundit tradition are entirely different from the modern educational institutions. There is no dialogue between the intellectuals in the universities and 'pundits' and quite often the pundits are ignored, and even considered backward by the contemporary men of knowledge. The despise and low respect is the result of ignorance of intellectual tradition of

* Joint Director, College Education Rajasthan, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.

Indian cultural heritage and absence of contents of classical tradition in curriculum of the modern universities. In the recent past certain efforts have been made to start dialogue between the pundits and the intellectuals in the universities. This exercise has proved to be very useful in terms of mutuality of learning. The resistance to ignore contents of classical cognitive tradition in the university curriculum is largely due to the ignorance of these aspects by the university faculty, although arguments used to exclude them are different and so intended as not to reveal the fact of their ignorance and difficulty to understand it due to inability to comprehend the Sanskrit language. On the other hand, the western academic structure has been so powerfully institutionalised that all other cognitive models are considered unimportant and theologically or metaphysically oriented lacking the scientific rigour; hence unacceptable even to be taken note of. The contemporary contribution of science has been so much emphasised that the contribution in the realm of sciences and social sciences in ancient India has gone unrecognised.

The higher education as introduced by Colonial powers was totally based on British pattern of education. Many of the professors were British. It is important to understand the social and cultural consequences of higher education as introduced by the Britishers in India which had a different cultural heritage, variant social institutions and social structures, and a population and size of high magnitude as compared to U.K. The first three universities were opened in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras in 1857, the year of first organised struggle for freedom which ironically has been termed as mutiny by the British historians. The dimensions of higher education as initiated by the Britishers could be identified and categorised as under for explication:

- Locale - orientation : Specific
- Content - orientation : Western ideas and ideologies
- Goal - orientation : Servicing.
- Cultural - orientation : Western style of life
- Clientele - orientation : Elite minority
- Social - orientation : Stratificational

Locale - Orientation: Specific

The higher education was confined to three big cities of India - Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. This consequently led to the process of 'enclavisation' of higher education. For more than half a century no new university was opened except at Allahabad. Such an enclavisation resulted into regional imbalances. Even today, almost all the universities are located in urban centres and major cities. Towns and villages do not have universities excepting a few Agricultural Universities which are not located in big towns: Obviously the ecological, social and cultural aspects of the social reality of Indian Society got neglected due to sheer spatial separation. There were hardly any attempts to understand the indigenous systems of medicine, engineering, technology and other systems of social life. Urbanity reflects a way of life and higher education was to become a part of urban way of life. It got distracted and disconnected with the tradition and traditional knowledge. In post-independence era locational differentiation and imbalances in the institutions of higher learning led to politicization for the demand for opening of the universities on the basis of region.

It also had consequences in terms of access to education. The Presidency College of Calcutta accounted for 41% of the total enrolment of Eastern India in 1874-75 and for 32% of the same in 1899-1900. The opportunity for higher education was thus open to urban based upper class and castes in the Indian Society. This legacy has continued despite efforts for opening colleges and universities in all the regions. The damage was already done as the most prestigious universities continue to exist in major cities of India, The best of scholars have gone to big cities and shun to go to smaller cities.

Content - Orientation: Western Ideas and Ideals

The emphasis of Britishers, was to provide general and liberal education and not scientific and technological. The purpose was to create a cultural imperialism at the abstract level of values and attitudes and at the concrete level of styles of western life. This was intended to make the people realize the superiority of western thoughts as well as material style of life.

Obviously, the idea was to deny the Indians an identity of their own and to insulate the common man. Many were impressed by the superficial gloss of western culture and converted themselves into willing tools for propagating and fostering 'westernization'. For them modernism was the same as westernism. The values of democracy, liberty, freedom, rationality appeared attractive but it was not difficult to see that those who practice democracy and liberalism at home resort to inhuman, barbaric and repressive methods in the colonies.

Education brought with it a whole system of governance, regulation, examination and degrees. Being in college also meant adoption of a style of life and also abhorrence for illiterates and the less educated. The western model and method negated an enquiry and study of rich intellectual heritage of India. It was sweepingly considered mythological and meaningless in the contemporary context. Even those who adhered to traditional way of life in parts, didn't understand the meaning of rituals, rites, Sanskrit verses, which they adhered to in puja and in marriage, death and other ceremonial occasions, obviously it was difficult to defend it, unless one knew the meaning of it.

The course contents didn't reveal the social reality of India. Even the nursery rhyme didn't make any sense as it was far away from the imagery of child's psyche, shaped through real life experiences. The problematic dimensions of Indian Society were never part of the curriculum nor researches were undertaken in those areas. If British scholars studied caste and village, so did the Indian scholars - with the same conceptual and theoretical framework. The '**peculiar**' was emphasised and not the '**problematic**'. Studies on poverty didn't exist. Exploitation and deprivation were never part of study of research till recently. The academic colonialism continued even after political freedom. History was taught from the perspective of rulers. It was written in a manner that it could divide the population on religious, regional and linguistic basis.

Education was imparted in English language. This was not the language which was spoken at home. Education through Mother tongue was never part of educational policy of Britishers. This further created a wide gap between the educated minority and uneducated majority. Understanding of English itself was enough as a substitute for knowledge. There was neglect of education in the areas of science, medicine, engineering and related areas.

Goal Orientation Servicing

The Goal orientation of higher education as enunciated by the Britishers was to create a class of clerks who could read and write English and thus facilitate the administration. It was not possible to bring people from the U.K to work at lower level of administration as the sheer size of the country needed a vast number of people for its governance. Britishers needed to govern the country with primary focus on the maintenance of law and order. Developmental tasks were not part of the administrative strategy of the Britishers. The bureaucratic system which was developed in India was highly impersonal, rigidly formal, significantly hierarchical and based on codified rules and regulations.

Its central ethos was governance, maintenance of law and order and suppression of any move for freedom through political tactics and state terrorism. Education helped the British goal as bureaucratic system attracted educated people as this made them feel as being part of power and gain self-esteem in the eyes of others. People at lower hierarchy used authority to make their presence felt socially.

This bureaucratic authoritarianism continues even today at all levels of public bureaucracy in India. Higher civil service continues to attract bright young students. It must be mentioned that higher education also created a sense of self-awareness and exposure to values of freedom, equality and liberty. Most of the important leaders in India in the pre-independence era were exposed to higher education. The very system which was designed to perpetuate colonialism, also became a source for ideas for the struggle for freedom.

Cultural Orientation: Western Style of Life

The higher education in India encouraged western style of life. There was emergence of a westernized sub-cultural pattern through a minority section of Indians who first came into contact with western culture. The sub-culture was developed by the Indian scholars who adopted both the cognitive pattern and styles of life of the west. They also supported its rapid expansion. The dress, food, new technology was first adopted by the people who were exposed to higher education. This was related to the external forms of culture. The press, the media was handled and manipulated by the educated elite in the Indian Society. The Community of scholars, writers, commercial, middlemen, entrepreneurs and administrator-politicians limited the western style of life. The new generation of middle class professional groups and groups of social reformers were imitators of western style of life.

The result of educational changes were two-fold; first, the interjection of the western values and ideologies among the members of the new educated class, and secondly, the size of social and cultural reformation movements. The styles of life, although limited were not accepted in totality. There was synthesis of traditional and western style of life. This explains the resilience and adaptability of the Indian Society. The food habits continued to be indigeneous basically, although western dishes were fitted into the traditional framework. The dresses of ladies continued to be traditional.

Clientele Orientation: Elite Minority

The British pattern of higher education was designed to cater to the elite minority who were urban upper and middle class people. There were no efforts to take into account the deprived categories of Indian Society namely women and members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The creation of an elite class through education was furtherance of inequality in the already stratified Indian Society.

The creation of elitean class led to furtherance of western model of cognitive structures, instructions and styles of life. The idiom of criticism was also western. This led to alienation of masses and policy formulations on the basis of imported models of change and development. The felt needs of people, the ecological and environmental aspects and the strength of indigeneous institutions and cultural forms were not taken into account fully. The cognitive conditioning was too strong to permit this.

Social Orientation: Stratificational

Higher education has created roots of inequality. The educational facilities have not resulted in equalization of opportunities for all. Apart from the generality of inequality created by education, the problem of imbalance is more acute :

- Between scheduled tribes and others
- Between scheduled castes and others
- Between males and females
- Between developed and less developed regions.

The scheduled tribes have been deprived of life chances including educational opportunities due to their geographical isolation. They have their own sub-culture which is distinct and distinguishable from the culture of the mainstream of life. The scheduled castes have been historically deprived d opportunities due to structural constraints. There were no efforts during the period of British rule to provide for special facilities for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students. After independence, special provisions fo reservation of jobs, admissions and political participation have been made in the constitution and several schemes to facilitate and encourage students belonging to these categories have been initiated.

The generality of social status of women in Indian society has been low, despite the fact that in ancient India, they enjoyed equal status with men. Practices like female infanticide, satihood, restrictions on widow marriage and purdah were largely consequences of influences of alien conquest and cultural contact through political hegemony. Comparatively, the status of women, specially in the urban areas has changed significantly. Education has been one of the important instruments for such a change. Although many women have gone in for higher education, the share of women in higher education has increased marginally from 21.5% in 1966-67 to 27.1% in 1981-82. The ratio of male, female students in universities is 3:1. Most of the women have opted for Arts subjects. Nearly two-thirds of their enrolments is in Arts and Commerce faculties. Their share in the professional courses is low. During the seventies, there has been a gradual shift from Arts faculty to Commerce faculty. The share of Commmerce faculty has increased from 2% in 1971-72 to 13% in 1981-82.

Consistent efforts have been made for higher enrolment of women in education. Higher education in India is very inexpensive. Many States provide free education at all levels to girls. Separate schools and colleges exist in different parts of the country so that social barriers do not come in the way of educational attainment. In Indian society the traditional expectation and modern expectations have been best imbibed by women. This certainly has added burden and strain to her multiple role performances. Women have been able to synthesise the traditional value-system with the modern expectations and value-system. The resolution of contradictions has not been easy for them. They have been put to added burden and strains and yet have to compete with men in education and jobs. It can be safely asserted that women do not experience either favour or prejudice in jobs and education in their competition with men. Thus there are neither additional facilities nor institutional biases against women in any of the competitive streams. More often than not, women have to perform the domestic roles also alongwith studies and jobs.

There are significant regional disparities in terms of several dimensions related to the indicators of educational development. The socially and economically backward regions are also backward educationally in terms of enrolment of students, availability of facilities for higher education and direct expenditure per student. Regional imbalances led to politicization of issues, which in turn has negative consequences on the quality of education.

Some of the issues which confront the realm of higher education can be identified as under:

- Quantity Vs Quality: The question of emphasis.
- Information Vs Values: The need for integration
- Indigeneous Vs Western: The problem of synthesis.

The desire to preserve the best in tradition and to adopt the appropriate modes of modernity, the utilitarian need for career and the desirability of inculcation of moral, human and spiritual values tends to be contradictory at the operational level and the desire to reconcile the polar contradictions is one of the most difficult task in the educational policy.

Obviously, the reports of different education commissions have cluded all suggestions and possibilities which intelligent diverse opinions can express. In a democratic country of the vastness and size of India, there is strong political pressure to accommodate contradictory, diverse and conflicting viewpoints. India has done its best to synthesize without creating major upheavals. Resilience has been one of the important features of Indian society and this feature itself has helped in the reconciliation and accommodation of contradictory perspectives and plans. Both the populist as well as elitist preferences and prejudices need to be rationally judged so that policy formulation reflects a direction and a futuristic vision.

The need for synthesis of classical knowledge with the western knowledge is an important one. The richness of classical knowledge has been recognised but not grasped. The dynamism of universities, its freedom, the leisure, ought to make it possible to take up the challenge. The cultural content of higher education was liberal in nature. The literary content of the courses in the humanities and social sciences were drawn from the literature of the European Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment. Its sociological result was disenchantment from traditional education." Disciplines like. History, Geography, Political Science and Economics focussed on contemporary realities. The empirical was emphasised and not the normative, the presnet became important and not the heritage.

Higher Education in India has come of age both institutionally and intellectually. Despite limitations of varied nature, it has strong potential for creativity. The phase of stabilization is leading to positive and serious task of . formulation of creative knowledge.

References

- ✖ Y. Singh, Modernization of Indian Tradition, Thomson, Faridabad, 1977, P.102.
- ✖ Moonis Raza, Y.P. Aggarawal and Mahud Hasan, "Higher Education in India," in Higher Education in the Eighties, (Ed.), S. Veera Raghavan, Lancer International, New Delhi, 1985.
- ✖ Moonis Raza, Op cit., p. 104
- ✖ Ibid, p. 110
- ✖ Ibid, p. 103
- ✖ Y. Singh, op.cit., p.87.
- ✖ Singhi, N.K. Education and Social Change. Rawat Publications 1979, Jaipur, p. 80.
- ✖ Ibid. p. 80.
- ✖ India 1985, Publications Division, Government of India, New Delhi, 1986, pp.70-71.
- ✖ Singh, op.cit. p. 103.

