

Positioning Higher Education in Viksit Bharat

Satyameva Jayate: Mundaka Upanishad

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Part I

1.1 Early Glimpses:

The Government of India has envisioned that by 2047 CE, India will be a developed country - a Viksit Bharat. The vision is based on the seven objectives - zero poverty, 100% good quality school education, access to high quality, affordable and comprehensive health-care, 100% skilled labour, 70% of women in economic activity and farmers making our country the food basket of the world [1,2]. Related to this vision is the Atmanirbhar Bharat campaign, that is, an independent and self-reliant India, that is determined by the five key aspects: Economy, Infrastructure, System, Vibrant Demography and Demand. Higher Education as an implicit constituent should form an integral component in Atmanirbhar Bharat and therefore, positioning it in the vision is no less important and must get its due weightage. It may be of interest to know how Higher Education, which is imparted to pupils after the 12th standard, began to be provided for the young Indians during the British Rule. Throughout the ancient centuries and up to the reign of Moghul empires, there were traditional learning centers, Agraharas, under the patronage of the respective kingdoms [3]. Given the longevity of the ancient Indian civilization composed of the diverse cultures, education of its people has always constituted an integral component in learning. There used to be centers (one may say Gurukuls) or parishads where young people were lodged and boarded for studies which lasted for a number of years. They were



taught Vedas, Upanishads and other disciplines - medicine, law, grammar, literature, art, accountancy, astronomy (including mathematics), astrology, agriculture, archery, theology, philosophy, logic, state-craft and so on. Around circa 6th century BCE, Takshashila as a university was established near Indus River (in today's Pakistan) that attracted students from the Indian sub-continent and remote places. It is said that rigorous training was part of its curriculum which also included Bodhisattva, a philosophy of Buddhism. Following its destruction after nearly 900 years, a similar university called Nalanda (in today's Bihar) was established circa 5th CE which survived up to the 12th century until it also perished. This university turned out to be a Buddhist center of learning and attracted a large number of young people from as far as China and perhaps beyond. The students received instructions in Mahayana Buddhism along with Jainism and other subjects as cited above. The university is believed to have been constructed with specious infrastructure like class rooms, library, meditation halls, boarding and lodgings for thousands of students. While a strong intellectual but friendly bond between the teacher and the pupil was forged, at the same time, the pupil's participation in public discussion was encouraged. History says Vallabhi in Kathiawad and Kanchi in the southern India and Nadia in Bengal were other contemporary institutes but not much is known about them. The Moghul Rulers in the mediaeval periods established madrasahs (the equivalent of colleges) with the medium of instruction being Arabic and they were dedicated to higher learning, functioning alongside the traditional Hindu institutions. However, most of them have not survived over a period of time. When British Rulers replaced Moghuls, they realized and desired that English education would be more useful than native education in running civil administration across the Indian sub-continent. One of the social reformists Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1722-1833) of Bengal, who despised Hindu traditional practices, helped the East India Company to achieve this goal. Colleges were created one after another; the Hindu college, for example, was founded in 1817. While English, European literature and science were taught to the native youths, the white men of European descent were educated to become missionaries. The B.A. and M.A. degrees were awarded to the successful candidates by the colleges; however, for a Ph.D. degree, the youths had to go to Europe. The rich parents sent their sons to



study at British universities; the scholarship scheme and royal patronage supported talented but poor ones who also pursued studies in the U.K and elsewhere in Europe. It must be noted that initially Christian missionaries too established schools followed by a number of colleges at different places. They had dual objectives: firstly, to impart teachings of Christian religion; secondly, to teach European science and literature. Those native Indians educated in Western science and proficient in English were employed in government jobs. All these initiatives were taken in the first half of the 19th century and it was also desired that college education must also be imparted in medical science, engineering and law which were indispensable for consolidating British administration. As the education enterprise progressed, it was realized that the colleges had to be brought under a university system as in England, and therefore, three universities were established, namely, the University of Calcutta, University of Bombay and University of Madras, all around 1857-58. Based on the model of London University, these universities were administratively structured comprising a Chancellor, a Vice-Chancellor and a Senate. However, the universities simply became affiliating bodies for colleges under their jurisdiction and were regulated with regard to admissions and conduct of exams. There was no plan to transitioning to ‘a constituent system’ from ‘an affiliation system’. As a result, the affiliation system restricted freedom to teachers and administrators in running the colleges. The first Education Commission of 1882 recommended, among others, to expand the scope of Higher Education by creating more colleges and allowing private societies to establish schools and colleges as a measure of reducing financial burden on the British Government. By 1901-02, the number of colleges swelled to 179 of which 126 were founded in British India and the remaining in Burma and Ceylon (which were under the British Rule). Finally, the Universities Act of 1904 came into effect which laid down elaborate regulations, lending tighter bureaucratic control to the British Government. During these years, a wave of protest against British Rule had been brewing mainly led by the Indian National Congress founded in 1885. Interestingly, the European education in Indian colleges stirred up the political consciousness of the people to support freedom movements against the British Rule itself!! After a long gap, some more universities were established towards the end of the 19th century and in the

beginning of the 20th century: Punjab, Allahabad, Dacca, Patna, Banaras, Aligarh, Nagpur and Rangoon Universities were established. It was Pt Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861-1946) who founded Banaras Hindu University in 1917 and served it as its third Vice-Chancellor. The establishment of universities in the southern India began in earnest. Thanks to the vision and initiation of His Highness Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV (1884-1940), the ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore and its Dewan Sir M.Vishwesharaia, the University of Mysore was founded in 1916. His Highness Krishnaraja Wadiyar was its first Chancellor. It became the first university in the Madras Presidency and subsequently also the first university in Karnataka State, the second being Karnatak University (1949). Other universities established include Andhra University (1926), Annamalai University (1929) and University of Travancore (1937, later called University of Kerala). It is of interest to note that the first College of Civil Engineering in 1847 was founded in Roorkee, Uttarakhand, by Lieutenant-Governor James Thomason, with the sole purpose of training people for survey work and building canals across the Ganges river. After his death, the college was renamed Thomason College of Civil Engineering in 1854 and later in 1949, it was renamed University of Roorkee, and in 2001, it was renamed again Indian Institute of Technology-Roorkee (IIT-R). It is one of the highly rated institutions for engineering education and research.

1.2 Higher Education Goals:

After India earned freedom from the British Rule on the 15th of August, 1947, it became necessary, among other challenges and tasks, to organize Higher Education in the colleges and universities for building strong and modern India. The country had inherited all the colleges and universities that were founded and administered under different British Presidencies employing a plethora of diverse regulations. There were, however, exceptional institutions outside the ambit of the Presidencies' regulations. The Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, was founded in 1911 following steel tycoon Jamsetji Tata's vision, initiation and munificence. It functioned purely as a research institute by its own governing council to which representatives were

nominated by the British Government including the selection of Director [4]. Sir C.V.Raman was made first Indian Director of IISc in 1933. Similarly, Dr. Homi Bhabha founded the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) in 1945 at IISc with full funding from Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and subsequently it was relocated to Mumbai. It functioned like IISc with Dr. Bhabha himself being its founder-Director. However, after 1947, a tripartite agreement was signed between Tata Trust, Government of Bombay and Government of India for sustaining TIFR from government grants and autonomous governance with representatives from the tripartite partners. The first Report of The University Education Commission 1948-09 headed by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan says ‘Great as were the changes that had taken place in the political and economic conditions of Indian society in the years that preceded the transfer of power on August 15, 1947, considerable as was the progress in education during that period, they are less great than the changes that have been crowded into these few months of freedom. The academic problem has assumed new shapes. We have now a wider conception of the duties and responsibilities of universities. They have to provide leadership in politics and administration, the professions, industry and commerce. They have to meet the increasing demand for every type of higher education, literary and scientific, technical and professional’. Further, the Report sets clear goals for universities: ‘If India is to confront the confusion of our time, she must turn for guidance, not to those who are lost in the mere exigencies of the passing hour, but to her men of letters, and men of science, to her poets and artists, to her discoverers and inventors. These intellectual pioneers of civilization are to be found and trained in the universities, which are the sanctuaries of the inner life of the nation’. In his eloquent speech delivered on the occasion of Convocation at Allahabad University, December 13, 1947, Pt Jawaharlal Nehru, then the Prime Minister of free India, succinctly described what the University stands for: ‘A University stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for progress, for the adventure of ideas and for the search for truth. It stands for the onward march of the human race towards even higher objectives. If the Universities discharge their duty adequately, then it is well with the nation and the people’ [5]. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji has this to say: ‘Education should become a force for the nation’s character building’ [6]. All these

constitute the ingredients as values and the goals of Higher Education. If colleges and universities train young minds, equally important is their enrichment of the spirit of enterprise.

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