

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ANCIENT INDIAN UNIVERSITY AND THAT OF MODERN STATE FUNDED UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Universities play a very important role in shaping a nation. Comparing ancient India with current India we see a substantial change. But have the universities changed too? India, has been the hub of advanced learning with universities attracting attention of scholars worldwide. Today however, the situation has deteriorated a lot, and the Indian Universities seem to be going through a tough phase, crippled with serious questions about their autonomy and education culture. This becomes all the more visible through a comparison with the ancient Indian universities. The ancient period saw the growth of some great universities like Nalanda, Takshashila and others. The inscriptions found suggest considerable operational/administrative/educational autonomy in the functioning. The universities were granted villages for their upkeep and the brahmins were exempted from taxes. The law officers of the kind did not enter the premises. While mainly focusing on religious studies, there are evidences to the effect that the education culture was open. Science was interpreted in religious terms, but wasn't beholden to will of ruler. Discussions, debates were common and attested to by Fa Hein and Huan Tsang.

Keywords: Autonomous body, Politisation, Patronage

INTRODUCTION

During second half of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, Swami Vivekanand, Rama Krishna Mission and Theosophical Society of India tried to familiarize the Western World, too, to the charm and graciousness of the ancient gold mine of knowledge, which had inspired not only Indians, but foreigners as well. Intellectuals from various countries have translated it in their own languages and reinterpreted it for a rational mind. As India progressed from ancient to medieval, its education system deteriorated. Various factors were responsible for the degradation of such an efficient and most ancient education system of the world. With the decay in the medieval ages and the constant churning due to invasions, the idea of university as a space for development of knowledge was forgotten. The British could therefore easily set new norms, to make their intermediaries, clerks and law abiding citizens. The Rayleigh report was made when the Viceroy Curzon felt that the Indian universities were becoming centers of propaganda and radical thinking. This report was therefore meant to put down the "intellectual expressions" of emerging India. Consequently, the universities were shackled by bureaucrats, ministry oversight, regulated finances and ideas. Post independence, the structure has failed to change. Government with its UGC arm controls the universities and the emerging political debates. Politicians want poor quality students, to fill their political rosters and the level of politicisation of campus politics is an evidence of the same.

COMMENCEMENT OF EDUCATION

In the Vedic system, education of a child commenced at the age of five with the ceremony called Vidyarambha. It was marked by learning the alphabets for the first time and offering worship to Goddess Saraswathi. But it was only after the ceremony called Upanayana that a child used to leave his parent's home and go to stay in the house of his teacher to commence his study. He was now called Brahmacharin. Upanayana ceremony was held to Brahmin boys at the age of eight, for the Kshatriya boys at the age of ten and for the Vaishya boys at the age of twelve. In the Buddhist system of education, a child commenced his education at the age of eight after an initiation ceremony called Prabrajya or Pabbajja. This ceremony was open to person of all castes

unlike the Upanayana ceremony where only the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya caste were eligible. After the initiation ceremony the child left his home to live in a monastery under the guidance and supervision of his preceptor (monk). He was now called Sramana and used to wear a yellow robe. In the Vedic system of education a Bramachari after finishing his education was eligible to become a Grihastha or householder, in the Buddhist system of education after finishing his education, a Sramana was given a full status of monkhood or Bhikshu.

OBJECTIVE OF EDUCATION

Gaining mere knowledge is not the purpose of learning. As Khalil Gibran has said, a little knowledge that acts is worth more than much knowledge that is inactive. Also, one whose knowledge is confined to books cannot use his knowledge wealth when the need for them arises. Knowledge, the object of knowledge and application of the knowledge – all the three are equally important for motivating to take a wise action. Pursuit of material success is super-most objective in the minds of young students. It is making them more and more selfish and intolerant to others. They are drifting almost rudderless without sense of direction. Academic background, career and good earning is important in life for happiness and satisfaction, but more important is living a quality of life, humanity, compassion and self discipline for enjoying life fully. Once more, India has to be made a hub of knowledge creation. It will be a big blunder, if it fails to do it now. India's massive human resource needs to be cultivated through sound system of education and training to get out of the rut of mediocrity. The system of education and learning should be such that it could the faculties of human beings 'in proper manner towards proper objectives, channelize the desires and energies of Indian people towards proper objectives and right activities. Discipline and productivity are necessary for education The aims of education were to provide good training to young men and women in the performance of their social, economic and religious duties. Also preservation and enrichment of culture, character and personality development and cultivation of noble ideals were the other aims of education in ancient India..

FEATURES OF ANCIENT INDIAN UNIVERSITY VS MODERN INDIAN UNIVERSITY

1. FUNDING AND CONSEQUENT AUTONOMY :

Ancient universities like Nalanda, Taxila and Vikramshila were mostly sustained by grants and donations of kings and merchants and were located in remote forested areas which ensured their autonomy of thoughts and deeds. Their autonomy was sanctity where learners were allowed to debate and discuss with gurus without any outside interference of kings or merchants. But modern universities are mostly state funded and located in central cities which curbs their freedom of thinking and actions. For example, DU had to roll out FYUP on the instructions of HRD and in JNU freedom of debate and protests were challenged by govt. National political interference in student elections inspite of Lyngdoh committee recommendations cannot be denied. The ancient universities received grants from kings, and merchants, who mostly practiced non interference as there was firstly no "modern version of politics" and secondly due to the religious and customary importance and respect given to the institution of guru and his domain. On a contrary, the universities today are mostly state funded and the sanctity of the teachers has more or less vanished, thus leading into encroachments over the universities by the political entities for political gains and abidance by the university as it needs funds from the state.

Opposite to it if we see autonomy of students in relation to their residing will Apart from thinking, ancient universities expected students to spend their lives in their premises till they are students, but modern universities provide autonomy in this respect.

2) EDUCATION CULTURE :

a) Inclusiveness : This is where there is a division between the ancient universities. While some universities used to be more accommodative, as students from Java, China and Tibet also used to study in these institutions, others suffered from brahminical dominance and exclusivity. In this

regard the universities today are definitely more inclusive and accommodative.

b) Subjects taught : the ancient universities, having limited advances in disciplines, were confined to philosophical and logical learning, while today, universities offer a plethora of advance learning course. In ancient universities only law, philosophy, logic and religion were taught mostly which limited their widely. This can be seen from the debate between Anglicists and Orientalists in Imperial college where teaching of English language had to undergo tough times. Modern Universities are more accommodative as students are allowed to choose form diverse disciplines and make their career in them. Even fashion designing and hotel management is a course in modern institutions.

c) development of critical reasoning : This is where we still need to learn from our ancestors, as today, our education system, instead of teaching "how to think", is more concerned with telling "what to think", which might not be a good direction to move in.

3. UNIVERSAL EDUCATION

Formal education restricted to only a section of the society (Brahmanas, Kshatriyas), rest learn their family professions like Pottery, Basket making, Goldsmithery, Black smitery. But in contrast modern university provide Universal access to formal education infact the State promotes this through incentives and scholarships etc .Modern university provide secular education as Majority of the curriculum is on secular aspects like Science, History, Geography, Linguistics. And no ashrama style facilitate no restriction in pursuing other aspects of life.

4. POLITICAL INTERFERENCE

Ancient universities were mostly based on guru-shishya tradition where pupil had to oblige the teacher within the premises. Today's universities while preserving this tradition allow the students right to dissent. The tradition has moved forward can be seen in the recent JNU row where teachers also stood behind the release of a student.

Thus, features of universities are determined by the time and need so is the case with ancient and modern universities. In this respect today's universities are expected to be more democratic and pupil friendly. Ancient Universities Located in remote, forested areas – ensured autonomy in functioning and independence in thinking and work. In modern universities political interference is at most. Obligation of the state as are State funded, location amidst power centers (state capitals, district head quarters) .Political interference, activism of political parties to extend the sphere of influence on youth .It is Huge through student unions in university politics, propaganda through textbook curriculum (trying to push leftist, rightist ideologies)

5. INDEPENDENCE OF IDEAS AND FREEDOM TO DEBATE

Ancient education were independent in their thought process, and had freedom to choose, think, discuss, debate and speak their mind out.Though financed by the merchants and was given funding from the govt side, but they never tried to impose their state and cultural ideology. Education was imparted to all irrespective of their caste, creed and culture. It was based only on interest, related to contemporary times. It was give and take process rather than monologue..Education was considered to be a "Noble profession" The quest for Money was not involved. On the Contrary in present times the State funded universities are imposing their own ideology and their own version of education(i.e. saffronisation).Expensive higher education only (18% has access), reservations was given to end social discrimination. The freedom to protest, debate and discuss is subdued in the name of anti-nationalism. Funding is crunched to subdue the voices. Populist ideas are only discussed sensitive and controversial ideas are talked about (eg :- Capital punishment).The political outfit attached to particular ideology tries to impose their views without taking into consideration the views of others.

6. COSMOPOLITAN CENTERS

Ancient Universities attracted students from across the world. As the quality of education was Best at that time. Attracted students from all parts of the world like, Indonesia, China, Malaysia,

Srilanka, Japan etc. But modern university are not comparable to global standards except few. Therefore it needs improvement as no longer attracts foreign students.

UNIQUENESS OF ANCIENT INDIAN EDUCATION:

From time immemorial, India has explicitly recognized that the supreme goal of life is self-realization and hence the aim of education has always been the attainment of such a fullness of being. But at the same time it was also recognized that different individuals have naturally different inclinations and capacities. Hence not only the highest philosophy but also ordinary subjects like literature and science as also vocational training find a place in ancient education system. The education system of ancient India may claim to be unique in the world in many respects like-

- The State and the society did not in any way interfered with the curriculum of studies or regulating the payment of fees or hours of instructions.
- Another special characteristic of ancient Indian educational system was it was fully and compulsorily residential. The student had to live in the house of his teacher for the whole duration of his studies and learn from him not only what was taught but also observe how his teacher responded to different situation arising in daily life and learn from it.
- Stress was laid on having a personal relation between the teacher and the taught. Each student used to meet the teacher separately and learn from him through separate instruction and guidance.
- Education was absolute free and the teacher looked after the primary needs of the students including food and clothing.
- The Indian system of education upheld the dignity of labour. Hence even a student aiming at the highest philosophical knowledge was duty bound to do some manual labour daily such as collecting fuel, tending cattle, etc.
- Education in ancient India was more of seminar type where students used to learn through discussions and debates.

Ancient Indian universities have been centre of excellence since time immemorial .Those universities were marked by their distinctive characteristics and "real swaraj of mind".University gives the platform for pluralism, inculcates the idea of tolerance, liberty, freedom of speech. It should not be converted into political battlefields rather allowed to discuss the revolutionary ideas. From the Later Vedic time women took a backseat which was also reflected in imparting education. However, modern Institutes have fared well here. Caste distinctions prevented the outcastes from attaining education. Ex- Eklavya was denied admission by Dronacharya. However, secular religions like Buddhism did away with this. This shows religious beliefs had an impact in decision making. Modern universities are said to be secular but after admission the discrimination done is unbearable in few campuses. Ex- Rohit vemula case. When we observe the existing state of university education in the country, it does paint a sorry picture. It would be good to highlight the differences in the working of current universities vis-a-vis the ancient seats of learning in India. Features of the 'Modern' University. State funded universities are totally dependent financially on the Govt. They have no substantial sources to sustain themselves of their own. The govt wields substantial influence over the administration of the universities The universities are often administered by generalist administrators who are ex-functionaries in the govt or people who have specialized in a particular academic discipline The pedagogy in the country at present is dogmatic. There are very few places wherein debate and discussion are encouraged. The purpose of teaching and learning is solely employability which hampers the process of learning itselfSocio-Economic differences have crept into university life as well courtesy India's skewed development story. This has played a role in hardening social differences which has taken myriad forms, the most dangerous being the caste divide

CONCLUSION

In India, illiteracy of a large number of people has turned the visions of 'Education for All' into empty dreams. Especially, population explosion has put a heavy pressure on its available infrastructure. India has the world's largest population of illiterates. According to 2011 census,

literacy-rate has gone only up to 74% from 65%. For males it has risen to 82% from 75%, for females to 65% from 54%. In absolute number, the figure of illiterates is alarming. No nation can afford to have a large number of its population to remain illiterate, ignorant and unskilled. Overall, it can be seen there are many aspects where we have denigrated our own education system which leads to students pursuing education abroad. The need of the hour is to depoliticize universities and welcome dissent since this triggers the thinking ability which is really essential. There are many universities in India where foreign students can be found. There is a dedicated "SAARC university" in Delhi. We can tone down our language by comparing Indian universities with likes of Harvard, Oxford and Stanford, saying contemporary Indian universities lack in extensive research and originality which made ancient universities like Nalanda and Valabhi an international center. It is prudent that our administrators and planners of higher education in the country take a leaf out of the pages of history and seek solutions which may help to put things back in shape for the universities of our country. All in all, on one hand we need to keep improving on the advancements but should also, on the other hand, learn from our past experiences, the traditions of autonomy, critical reasoning and broad development of the mind

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