

IMPACT OF UNIVERSITIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONS : AN ANALYSIS FROM SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

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The Context :

Education has always worked as a major instrument to achieve the objectives of social, economic and political development of a nation. While the school education equips the society with enlightened workforce, university education provides competent leadership for the all round development of a nation by supplying top level manpower such as scientists, engineers, doctors, teachers, managers, bureaucrats, technocrats and so on. It is this manpower which finally takes the responsibility of operating the development system of a nation.

In the past, there has been lot of developments in our country in various fields – agriculture, industry, science & technology and so on. But, in spite of such development, can we say that an average man is living a satisfying life. As per National Sample Survey (2004-05) nearly 28% of country's population is still living below poverty line in a miserable condition. There is a lot of corruption and exploitation in public life. Honesty and integrity, in general, is lost. Social & cultural values are disappearing. Though, universities are supplying the requisite manpower, wisdom is in short supply. Even highly educated people are not behaving in terms of their education. In such a situation, questions are being raised as to what is development after all? Is it limited to scientific & technological advancement and economic growth only or Does it have some social concern also? What is the purpose of a university and are they serving the purpose for which they were set up? In what way does a university contribute to development? What are the social returns of a university? What role our universities can play in re-knitting the social fabric of our nation? What should be the vision of such a university? In this context of the questions raised, it was thought appropriate to review the role of a university in the development of a nation from its social perspective. The present paper is a modest attempt in this direction.

Development : The Basic Urge of the Nations :

The basic urge of most nations today is development. This is particularly true of developing nations who got independence after Second World War and were eager to

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develop and build their nation on the lines of developed countries. All the poor nations of the world today are development minded as they believe that the development of their nation only can solve the problems of human misery, degradation and discontent.

Initially, the term development was equated with economic growth measured in terms of GNP/per capita-income. The assumption was that once the economy becomes strong enough, its benefits will automatically 'trickle down' to the low-income groups. But, in actual practice, this did not come true for all the developing countries. Not only that the 'trickle' never reached to the bottom, too much emphasis on economic growth resulted in mass scale poverty and economic disparity. A country may become rich in terms of GNP but it still remains under developed if the standard of living of its people is not improved. It implies that, in spite of increase in GNP, social infrastructure of the nation may remain undeveloped and thus may not be capable of making any contribution in raising the people's quality of life.

This thinking resulted in a search for a new meaning of development. It is now argued that development is not purely an economic phenomenon. While economic growth is an essential component of development, it is not the only one. Ultimately, it must result in an upward movement of the entire social system with the main objective of enhancing the quality of life of the masses. Thus economic growth is not by itself an objective of development but rather a means to an end, the end being the all-round development of a nation with main emphasis on the betterment of human social conditions which, in turn, may lead to human social development. To achieve this end, the emphasis on development is now shifted from economic development to social development which includes the elements of former also and thus making the concept of development more broad and comprehensive. Therefore, the focus of social development is not only the economic growth but the development of total social support system also.

Keeping this view in mind, it is now believed that the aim of development should be to achieve amore equitable distribution of the benefits of growth in the whole economy so that there is reduction in poverty and inequality, which, in turn, may help in improving the quality of life of the masses. According to the World Development Report (1991) : "The Challenge of development in the broadest sense is to improve the quality of life specially in the world's poor countries. A better quality of life generally calls for higher income, but it involves much more. It encompasses, as ends in themselves, better education, high standards of health and nutrition, more equality of opportunity, greater individual freedom and a rich cultural life. Seeing from this perspective, development of a nation can be defined as to include not only the growth of GNP but also an increase in the facilities for

the satisfaction of basic needs like food, cloth and shelter, an equitable distribution of goods and services, reduction in the level of poverty, unemployment, economic inequality and injustice, provision of minimum social services like education, health care, security, recreation, means of transportation and communication, opportunity for participation in decision making, greater freedom to express and choose, improved conditions for workers and a change in the status of women.

The development of this breadth and depth demands sharp break from traditional form of human interaction to modern ones. A Society can be regarded modern when its people become rational in their thinking and as a result they become more open to new experiences, leading to the acquisition of modern attitudes, values and beliefs. To bring about development of this nature, a nation needs leadership of its citizens who are highly educated in various fields. University is a place where the human resources are developed to take such leadership for the development of a nation.

Concept of a University in a Changing Perspective :

The concept of university has been changing from time to time with the change in the concept of development and societal needs. In ancient times, the needs of men were limited and he only viewed development as the development of mind and character. Education, therefore, was considered as a mean to satisfy man's intellectual thirst in the process of exploring the working of world in which he lives. At this stage, university was considered as a community of people having superior intellect in pursuit of scholarship. It was thought as an institution constantly engaged in search of truth, adventure of ideas and quest for knowledge. Its primary goal was to preserve, renew and transmit the cultural heritage of a society; to generate new knowledge and to build a store of collective human wisdom. Thus, a university was considered a home of intellectual adventure, the shrine of wisdom and the abode of cultural guardianship. In India, we had such university level institutions in the past at Taxila in the North, Nalanda and Vikramshila in the East, Vallabhi on the West and Kanchipuram in the south which flourished between first and eight century AD (Jha, 1991). During that period of history, the heritage of knowledge, culture and wisdom was constantly preserved and transmitted in these centres of higher learning.

With the advent of modern civilization universities became more formal in nature with the introduction of formal teaching and evaluation and compartmentalization of knowledge in the form of specialized discipline. Such a system of higher education came into existence in India during British period when three major universities (Calcutta, Bombay & Madras) were set up in 1857. During this period, primary purpose of a University was

to produce the people who can run the day to day administration for the British Government. But after independence, higher education has been perceived as an important tool to produce the manpower required to meet the demands of national development in different fields. Thus, the main purpose of the university became to develop the human resources for running the various sectors of economy.

At this point of time, science and technology became important in university, and they were considered as an important instrument of socio-economic transformation. As a result, higher education grew at a very rapid rate and many new universities came into existence. Expansion of university system certainly helped in accelerating the pace of economic growth but at the same time, it was also noticed that fruits of economic growth were not reaching the grass root level. Thus emerged the function of extension services for the universities. As a result, adult and continuing education non-formal education and extension education departments were opened in the universities. Today, a traditional university is changed with the responsibility of undertaking teaching, research and extension.

The impact of economic reform of nineties and the emergence of latest information and communication technology finally led the universities to enlarge its objective further by making it available for all through its distance learning mode. To achieve this objective, Institute of Distance Education were opened in many universities to provide open access to a large section of population. As a result, universities discarded their elitist character and became egalitarian.

Thus, there is a need to refix the goals of a university in the light of prevailing confusion and bring the university back in touch of social dimensions of human behavior.

Contribution of Universities to National Development :

It is now well established fact that for any kind of development, the development of human resources is of utmost importance because it is ultimately the human potential which will finally play the key role in bringing social and economic development of nations. A university takes this responsibility of developing human resources and thus provides the required manpower for various sectors like industry, business, agriculture, transport & communication and so on.

Not only this, it prepares its own manpower – the teacher. Here it would not be an exaggeration to say that if university system fails to generate the requisite manpower, the whole process of development will come to halt. It is, in fact, human resources that has contributed to the faster development of countries like Japan & Korea and

also sustained the development process in developed countries like USA, France & Germany.

For the development of human resources, a university not only imparts the knowledge and skills that enable individuals to raise their productivity but also develop positive attitudes, values and ideas conducive to the process of development. Research evidences suggests that education may operate through a transformation of values and attitudes that have direct implications for development (Mc Clelland and Inkeles, 1974). It is to be further noted here that universities provide strong leadership in building-up an appropriate value system that can help development and equitable distribution of goods and services among the masses.

It is thus true that universities contribute to the society in the form of highly developed human resources. But, in recent years, the contribution of university education in the process of development has been a matter of debate among development planners. On the basis of research evidences, it is now argued that higher education provided in universities does not bring as high economic returns as primary and secondary education and that private returns of higher education exceeds social return. Therefore, it is pleaded that more resources be given to primary and secondary education and that the resources to higher education be reduced from plan to plan. No doubt higher education promises a higher life time return to an individual but its contribution to society is much more. In this connection the view of Alfred Marshall (1890) are apt here : "The wisdom of expanding public and private funds on education is not to be measured by its direct fruits alone... The economic value of one great industrial genius is sufficient to cover the expenses of the education of whole town... All that is spent during many years in opening the means of higher education to the masses will be paid for if it called out one more Newton or Darwin, Shakespeare or Bethhoven". Marshall, therefore, regarded higher education as national investment.

Marshall's view point out to the fact that besides private returns, higher education also yields a set of social returns that are difficult to measure and whole contribution is far reaching on economic and social development of a nation. Some of these social returns known as external benefits are as follows :

- (i) Besides teaching, a university is also engaged in research work and thus it generates new knowledge in various fields like science, engineering, agriculture, medicine information and communication technology and so on. Application of this new knowledge helps in accelerating the pace of economic growth.

- (ii) University education helps in widening the mental horizon of the people and creating better mutual understanding and tolerance among different communities which is very much necessary for the nation to develop socially.
- (iii) Universities have helped in transmitting the common cultural heritage from one generation to another and thus provide a certain measure of social control.
- (iv) University education has contributed to considerable upward mobility of socially backward communities in different regions by making reservations in admissions.
- (v) Universities are also helping the society by providing population awareness through its extension services which may go a long way in bringing population control in the future and thus will have direct impact on economic growth.
- (vi) Recently, all the Indian Universities have introduced a compulsory paper on Environmental Education in all the P.G. courses which will certainly have its impact in improving the quality of the environment in the long run.
- (vii) The spill over effect of higher education are also quite high as educated person spill over its effects of education to other members of community. For example – parents transmits some of the benefits to their children. It is to be further noted here that spill over benefits to higher education are much higher in developing countries like India that in developed countries like UK and USA (Muzammil, 1984).
- (viii) Universities alter consumption preferences, saving propensities, economic rationality, adaptability, innovativeness, flexibility and attitude towards various social phenomena.
- (ix) Universities ensure not only economic growth by increasing productivity but it also create a cohesive and vibrant nation out of people belonging to different culture, religion and languages (Muzammil, 1998).
- (x) Universities, through the National Service Schemes (NSS), have also contributed to the works related to adult literacy, village uplift, prohibition, environmental awareness and population control (Powar, 1998).
- (xi) Universities contribute their thoughts by discussing various social, economic and political issues and problems of the society in seminars, conferences and symposiums.

Thus, returns on investment in university education must not be seen strictly in economic terms because social impact of higher education is much more contributive in the long run.

Present Status of Universities in the Process of National Development :

Universities have long been recognized as one of the vital force in the process of national development. It is because of this realization that higher education grew at a very rapid rate after independence. In 1947, there were only 20 Universities and 500 colleges enrolling about 1 million students. As of now, there are 350 Universities (including Deemed Universities and Institutes of National importance) and 17,500 colleges enrolling about 10 million students (Gnanam, 2006). In absolute terms this number appears to be very high. However, this represent only 11.7% Indian Youths in the relevant age group of 13-23 years (Thakur, 2006). This percentage is extremely low as compared to 98.8% for Canada, 76.2% for USA, 45.6% for France, 37% for Germany (FR), 31% for Japan and 46% for South Korea (UNESCO, 1994). As Tilak (1997) points out: A minimum level of 20% enrollment ratio can be viewed as a threshold level for developing country like India to reach a higher level of economic development. In India, enrollment of 11.7% is likely to reduce further if the resources to higher education are also curtailed. India can hardly expect to meet the requirements of a growing economy if efforts are not made to raise the enrollment in universities.

To increase enrollment in higher education, more funds need to be devoted to higher education but it is unfortunate to note that planners have been reducing the resources to higher education from plan to plan on the plea that higher education provides more returns to the recipients than to the society as compared to primary and secondary education. Plan expenditure to higher education which had increased from 9% to 25% of the total educational budget from 1st Plan (1951-56) to Vth (1969-74) has now decreased to 8.5% in Xth Plan (2002-2007). It is not appropriate to view different stages of education (viz. Primary, secondary, tertiary) in isolation because they are interdependent on each other. Primary education lays the foundation for secondary education which, in turn, lays the foundation for higher education. Looking from other way, higher education provides the teachers and other manpower for school education. Thus, all the stages of education are related with each other. Dilution at any stage will affect the other stage of education. So, how is it justifiable to say that one stage is more important than the other. As such, all the stages of education are equally important and therefore need appropriate treatment.

Seeing in this perspective, the status of universities need to be restored by providing access to university education to all and making the enough resources available as the implications of social returns from higher education are certainly much more than the private returns as discussed earlier.

Vision of a University :

After having thorough discussion on the university and development linkage we are in a position to have a clear vision of a university from its social perspective. We reflect that vision in the following formulations.

- (i) **Wisdom and character** : The objectives of a university are not only the acquisition, preservation and dissemination of knowledge but also the development of wisdom, not only the sharpening of intellect but also the formation of character. These are the foundations for any kind of development to occur. Knowledge without wisdom and intellect without character is meaning less because it leads to destruction. Thus, wisdom and character are as important as knowledge and intellect. A nation can not develop socially if its people lack wisdom and character. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of a university to see that its scholars acquire wisdom and character also besides knowledge and intellectual power. This is essential for the social development of a nation.
- (ii) **Value System** : A university is not only expected to preserve and renew the cultural heritage and transmit the same to the next generation but it is also expected to provide a strong leadership in building up an appropriate value system among its youths that can help to achieve the purpose of development. Today, our universities are so dominated by the economical goals that social value are overshadowed. It becomes the duty of a university to develop in students (of course in teachers too) the universal values of truthfulness and honesty, social values of responsibility and integrity, personal values of hard work and intellectual objectivity and national values of socialism, secularism and democracy. If the university system is unable to foster a basic set of values, the process of development will certainly become more difficult. There is little to be gained if there is no connection between brilliance of mind and a sense of values. The possession of a value system is a pre-condition for any kind of development.
- (ii) **University Community Interaction** : The duty of a university is not to teach only in classrooms but it should also interact with the community within which it functions. Academic community is generally not aware about the needs and expectations, the issues and problems of the society. There is a need for the university teachers, students and supporting staff to interact with the rest of the community so as to get a social perspective of their role and a sense of responsibility. Academic community should have frequent exposure to the various issues and problems facing the society through seminar and conferences. They should be given opportunity to participate in

the social activities of the community so as to take stock of their needs. If our universities perform this role, they are likely to come closer to the community. This will not only help in understanding each other, but will also help in reducing the gap between the university and the community. Universities, in returns, may regain their lost respect and status in the eyes of the community.

- (iv) **Extension Service** : A university is not only supposed to engage itself in research work for the extension of knowledge but it should also engage in extension service to the society. Universities should broaden their outlook and must come out from their cubicals and work in the field by disseminating their knowledge and information to the masses. Let their knowledge and research evidences, discoveries and innovations, experiences and expertise be known to the common people so that the same is utilized in a practical way for the benefit of the society. Adult and Continuing education, life-long education and recurrent education should become national goals. University teachers, students supporting staff and other resources be used for mass literacy mission, population control movement and environmental awareness campaign. Variety of extension services, if provided by the universities to the society in a planned manner may go in a long way to bring improvement in the quality of life of the masses.

To sum up, a true university is that which performs both intellectual as well as social roles and thus works for both academic excellence and social excellence. This must be the vision of a university.

Conclusion :

Our universities have made significant contribution in the past and are still making their effort to do the best. But, universities alone probably can not lead to development. It can make significant contribution to the process of development if properly supported by those social, economic and political forces by which it is determined and to which it contributes. In order for the universities to be able to realize their role, impediments that are encountered by our universities need to be overcome. Universities must be made clear about their developmental priorities. There has to be objectivity and merit in recruiting the human resources (for both teaching and non-teaching) in order to produce qualitative human resources further. The existing infrastructure of the present universities need to be strengthened before taking any decision with regards to its further expansion. Government will have to rethink about its decision to cut the educational expenditure on universities. And finally universities will have to become more socially responsive by coming more closer to the society. In time to come, the contribution of our universities is not going to be judged by our research work or excellent teaching performed but by how

such achievements are being used to create a better society for the masses. In future, we will not have to prove our accountability to university system alone but to the society at large. We should be ready for that.

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