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National Education Policy- 2016 for Higher Education: Some Suggestions

Hema V Raghavan*

It seems impertinent to send a few suggestions for quality improvement in Higher Education in view of the fact that it has become the whipping boy in both academic and non-academic discussions. I have this defence for doing so simply because I have no vested interest. I superannuated ten years back after serving the University of Delhi in various capacities as a teacher, Principal and Dean during a span of forty years. I have thus the experience of an insider of four decades of academic and administrative experience and the wisdom in hindsight garnered during the decade after retirement.

It is a truism that the quality of higher education needs to be bolstered. There is a perceptible decline in the quality of all sections of academic stakeholders that include students, teachers, academic administrators like the Principals, Directors and Vice Chancellors – not to leave out the administrative staff managing the affairs of higher educational institutions. The irony is everyone laments this quality decline, but no one offers a solution. The government in its wisdom periodically appoints a committee to make recommendations and the committee – normally headed by a retired bureaucrat and a few members unconnected with academics makes a recommendatory report that has its use only for the Teachers' Associations to go on strike. After the NEP of 1986, there has been no effective policy, only sporadic cosmetic changes made to address the problem of quality decline in higher education. I have a few suggestions to offer, though with all modesty, I do not claim to have spoken the last hundred words on this issue.

The decline that we attribute to Indian higher education is not a unique phenomenon; it is global except for a few pockets of excellence – in particular in some of the renowned universities in US, UK and Europe. This is because of modern interpretation of higher education that equates post-school learning of every kind, with college/university education. College education is for the acquisition of knowledge and offers degree certificate on completion of graduate and postgraduate courses in disciplines studied by the student. Today, industry sets the curriculum and higher education is increasingly subjected to industry's demands and has deflected from its objective to generate new thoughts, ideas and values.

There are institutions offering certificates and diplomas in vocational and skill training courses. The Hon'ble Prime Minister had launched Skill India last year, to provide skills and competencies in areas that require trained personnel. The problem before us is the confusion between knowledge and skills. One cannot acquire knowledge through skills just as knowledge does not provide adequate competency for jobs that demand special skills.

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