

# Appropriate Knowledge and Curriculum in Higher Education Institutions in India: Need for Reform



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## **ABSTRACT**

*A paradigm shift towards a culturally appropriate knowledge base will help to reestablish the lost link between curriculum and the learner's identity. The change in the curriculum for language teaching being introduced in the HEI help only to meet the demands from the market forces in the globalized context. But 'saleability' of the content should not be the sole criterion upon which the significance of the curriculum relies on. Through language studies, the learner must be able to gain clarity regarding the ideas which shape his/her behavior in society. Therefore the term appropriate knowledge refers to knowledge that generates the culture of the individual and the community. Language education whether it be English or an Indian language should guide the learner to ask questions about the meaning of one's own institutions, rituals of behavior and patterns of values.*

Schumacher in his world famous book **Small is Beautiful** declares categorically that "All history as well as all current experience – points to the fact that it is man, not nature, who provides the primary resource: that the key factor of all economic development comes out of the mind of man....In a very real sense, therefore, we can say that education is the most vital of all resources" (64). So a proper and efficient management of resources in Higher Educational Institutions could very well start with the fundamental principles governing the creation and transmission of knowledge through educational institutions. Two kinds of innovations are possible for a qualitative change – One is the innovations within the existing structure in colleges/ Universities and the other is innovations in

the very re-definition of knowledge that could be formed appropriate. I am here trying to question the validity of the existing knowledge systems dominating the higher education sector and an alternative structure is being presented for a more efficient total quality management in colleges/Universities.

Higher Education institutions in India have been under the influence of two epistemologies – 'a colonial epistemology and an anti – colonial epistemology partially anchored in the indigenous sense of collective identity. One is a dominating framework and the other is based on the integration of knowledge with culture. One is neo-colonial, carrying with it imperialist paradigms rather than Indian Paradigms.

The curriculum is generally influenced by approaches which are insensitive to the cultural contexts. Any kind of knowledge is conditioned by a process of interpretation that occurs in a context.

The colonial policy denied indigenous knowledge and skills a place in the curriculum in higher education institutions and the same policy continued in HEI due to the resistance to change and inertia displayed by the policy makers. Macaulay and Traveilyn introduced English literary education on the principles of moral ideas and religious basis represented in it. The missionaries had taken a major part in the text book writing and production through bodies like the Calcutta School Book Society. A textbook centered curriculum in colleges denied opportunities to access the true worth of the Indian learner, his values or skills. The external evaluation system was introduced which indicated a lack of trust in the system. Krishnakumar in Political Agenda of Education comments, "The hiatus between the curriculum and the milieu is part of the colonial and pre-colonial legacies of our education system (50)

The conservation and transmission of knowledge in to a formal system emerged in India a thousand years before Christ followed by the colonial educational system. The ancient system of educational arrived at liberation through adherence to Dharma. Buddhist Viharas prospered later and the Muslim system of modern higher education started with the Calcutta, Bombay and Madras University which neglected the Indian intellectual tradition resulting in the following:

1. Indian intellectuals distanced

themselves from Indian knowledge system

2. Neglect of the vernaculars
3. The link between the requirements of the masses and the educational system got severed.
4. Cultural amnesia
5. Indian paradigms in education got subjugated in the learning process.

The British model in HEI distanced the educated elite from the masses, from the skills in arts, crafts and in health management practices. In 1948, the University Education Commission under the Chairmanship of Dr.S.Radhakrishnan struck the right note when he stated - "Our ancient teachers tried to teach subjects and impart wisdom. Their ideal was wisdom along with knowledge. No amount of factual information would make ordinary men into educated or virtuous men unless something is awakened in them, an innate ability to live the life of the soul". The latest attempt for change is the Knowledge Commission Report after the New Policy of Education documents.

The National Knowledge Commission seeks to develop a framework that provides access to knowledge, knowledge concepts, knowledge creation, Knowledge application and development of better knowledge services. One common feature of all the reports on reform is the elitist, undemocratic functioning of the commissions, without defining knowledge against an anticolonial discursive framework. Knowledge that has to be imparted in HEI must be validated in familiar situations and contexts." Knowledge is contextual as what is right in one context

need not be so in another cultural context. Raymond.A.Horn in “Knowledge in a Reconceptualized Educational Environment” argues that a reconceptualised view of knowledge which is diverse, egalitarian and critical is the need of the age as against an empirically generated knowledge which supports the dominant culture. Teachers have to use a Pedagogy that imparts critical thinking and creativity by incorporating Indigenous Knowledge in the curriculum... includes beliefs, perceptions, concepts, and experiences of local environments both natural and social.”(505 George J Etal). The myths, legends, cultural practices all have a profound instructional effect in a learning environment. The spiritual knowledge systems help the learner to understand his own self, for developing his emotional/ spiritual intelligence.

Spiritual insight is also a valid body of indigenous knowledge, establishing the connections of the self to others in the community. A counter hegemonic paradigm shift in curriculum is possible by drawing on the multiple knowledge forms available in the community in which the learner lives. It is not a static system, It is fluid and collaborative .In the Indian context, Spiritual traditions can help men to resist inappropriate education. When Spirituality is occluded in classrooms ... the result could be destructive for the development of self and identity (66,George J)

The hegemonic knowledge structure in Indian Universities started with the idea that knowledge was natural and political .The Standardised tests for identifying merit was based on this ideology of meritocracy.

The standard of test used all over India measures only fixed notions of intelligence and ways of knowing. Intelligent candidates fail to gain the power of psychological validation just because they are outside the space of set neutral norms .Tests by recruitment agencies define what is excellence and what is knowledge in a limited rigid and neo-colonial space.

The standardized valid knowledge tested by agencies reflects the practices and ambitions of the new elite, inadvertently taking the position of the colonies. The common man’s children are forced into forgetting their provincial and national history as well as his spontaneous skills and knowledge .For building up a democratic curriculum frame work a new definition of excellence in education has to be evolved taking into account the significance of inherited knowledge or cultural intelligence within each learner. Excellence should never be defined in terms of the unquestioned acceptance of elitist conceptualization of knowledge.

#### **Innovative Practices Based on the four Pillars of Education**

UNESCO in an exhaustive report on the status of education all over the world refers to the four pillars of education – Learning to know (acquiring the instruments of understanding), Learning to do (developing competency to act creatively in society), Learning to live together (competence to deal effectively with human beings) and Learning to be (Developing a human being to act with autonomy, to understand himself properly). Let us have a brief analysis of the possibilities of innovation and resource management in the background of these

four seminal goals in relation to Higher Education Institutions.

### **Learning to Know**

Acquisition of knowledge is possible through instruments of knowledge, like the language, the methodology, the standards of evaluation and so on. The models available in the Madras University did not encourage exchange between traditional Indian Knowledge and modern European knowledge. All Indian sources of knowledge were scaled off in a separate label called Indology so that a comparative study was rendered irrelevant. Thus a one sided dependence on colonial academia imparted a negative impact on the quality of academic transactions. As G.N. Devy in **After Amnesia** comments – “The continued acceptance of ideas from the West cannot be fully attributed to the intrinsic worth of those ideas Indians ... they started studying western ideas because they had already accepted the opportunity of the British culture. (21)

The coloniser’s language, accepted all over India as a convenient instrument of knowing, according to the African writer Ngugi “is the most powerful vehicle through which ... European power fascinated and held the soul prisoners: - English language served as the means of spiritual subjugation”

The English language should be adapted to absorb the Indian ethos and the characteristic Indian rhythm of life. The English Language, as Raja Rao says, should be the Indian variety reflecting the meaning of Indian life as powerfully as possible.

### **Learning to Do**

Undergraduate education is supposed to

fulfill both the functions of general education and training for indepth enquiry into an academic discipline/professional career. Developing a competency to act creatively has to be developed in every student who comes out of a college. But the system of evaluation gives no scope for divergent thinking as the ‘right’ answer converging into a uniform pattern. An original creative response or in other words an impulse for creation of knowledge is not sufficiently rewarded in the evaluation system. There is a failure of imagination in the organization and structure of the curriculum. The curriculum fails to provide impetus to students to play a proactive role in fulfilling civic duties like maintenance of public health and hygiene, conflict resolution, internal security and so on. Academic achievement of students from the marginalised sections of society should be considered as an indicator of the principle of equity and justice being practiced in the curriculum.

Excellence or achievement should no longer be determined in terms of text centered, memory based learning. The self esteem and self image of the student in a college classroom determines the quality of service that could emanate from him. The ethnic identity, family history, economic class all have to be included in his personal database kept in the college for developing an individualized assessment scale. Such an inclusive curriculum can motivate the learner to do it for society. For example, the resources available in language education courses can be utilized with optimum benefit to the society at large. The learning of history, civics, culture, critical reasoning, and general awareness all can be addressed through a language education course or

courses. Even a grammar book can be made interesting by introducing culture specific examples and humorous situations. The prescribed texts should be rich in cultural details and should present cultural issues in depth so that the learners can critically analyze them. The best option for language teaching may be to include significant content from translated texts in Indian languages. The purpose of cultural understanding, learning historical consciousness, cultural assertions leading to improved self concept etc. will be fulfilled through appropriate selection of content in language education, both in English and in Indian languages. But while selecting content for text books, care must be taken to see that there is no perpetuation of a single, narrow notion regarding that particular culture.

The conflict between the linguistic identities of the Indian student with the English language used in classrooms must be carefully resolved by a sensitive teacher who could provide culture specific concepts to ease the tension. Translated knowledge from different states in India can be an appropriate knowledge base, for fostering cultural identity and appreciation. Gail. E. Tompkins in **Language Arts: Content Teaching Strategies** argues that culturally conscious literature affirms the cultural identity of students of diverse places.

### **Learning to live Together**

The class room culture can be made enriching with group activities, peer teaching to allow a chance for the student to learn to live in a society. Extension programmes and action research are to be made a compulsory component of undergraduate curriculum for language

teaching. For instance, the documentation of the traditional social-religious practices of a locality, uploading it in the internet, collection of rare out of print books in an Indian languages, arranging a digitalized library or establishing a museum of Indian knowledge systems and numerous other programmes can be arranged by students and credits given to them appropriately. Development of interpersonal intelligence and life skills like courage, honesty, patriotism, and respect for the environment will all help a learner to learn to live together.

### **Learning to Be**

Learning is essentially an experience that enriches one's sense of values. Learning ultimately develops a person who understands himself. Learning to be is a summation of all the above three concepts. The classroom can rise up to this noble end when there is (1) relationship building (2) fostering critical thinking (3) fostering creative thinking. The learner must be able to select what he wants to learn, and he must be given freedom so that he could be the center of the educational activity.

Unless and until we adopt appropriate knowledge which could be of use to the learners overall development of the curriculum will remain rigid and inappropriate to the social context. Emotional ethical integration of the individual into a complete man is a broad definition of the fundamental aim of education. The cultural values available through the curriculum are significant as all learning is mediated through culture and its products.

The hegemony and ideological control of the Euro-American academic establishment

with the help of a western publishing industry can no longer be validated. Innovation in educational practices can be fruitfully initiated by strengthening and including the contents of indigenous knowledge systems in the curriculum. To understand the cultural and civilizational specificities of knowledge, a new epistemology which is a force against the 'epistemic fascism' prevailing in HEI, must be accepted for the future of the Eastern nations. All kinds of knowledge can directly function in the non-urban locale, including Indian Knowledge Systems which can be utilized to construct a new challenging curriculum in HEI.

### **Conclusion**

A paradigm shift towards a culturally appropriate knowledge base will help to reestablish the lost link between curriculum and the learner's identity. The change in the curriculum for language teaching being introduced in the HEI help only to meet the demands from the market forces in the globalized context. But 'saleability' of the content should not be the sole criterion upon which the significance of the curriculum relies on. Through language studies, the learner must be able to gain clarity regarding the ideas which shape his/her behavior in society. Therefore the term appropriate knowledge refers to knowledge that generates the culture of the individual and the community. Language education whether it be English or an Indian language should guide the learner to ask questions about the meaning of one's own institutions, rituals of behavior and patterns of values. Education in HEI, if it has to fulfill the goal of development, must critique India's own culture and ideas about development,

the people's preferences, capabilities, values and assumptions. The self-reflexivity can be achieved through the framing of language content for both English and regional languages. The District Primary Education Program at the school level which commenced in the early 90's addressed these issues in a very effective manner and the same kind of change in context and methodology will help HEI to go a long way in the direction of an appropriate advancement of learning with a minimum of rote learning. The quality of education in colleges must be judged in terms of its relevance to the context of the learner and also to his needs and the needs of humanity. The recent initiatives of the Government of India for a total revamping of education, it is hoped, will address critically the appropriateness of knowledge created and imparted for the Nation.

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