

## 41<sup>st</sup> INDIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE CONGRESS

### THIRD DRAFT OF THE NOTE ON

#### FOCAL THEME

#### INDIAN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION SYSTEM: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

#### 0100 PREAMBLE

Indian Social Science Academy (formerly Indian Academy of Social Sciences, ISSA) in *association* with Periyar University proposes to focus the deliberations of the 41<sup>st</sup> session of the Indian Social Science Congress (ISSC) on '**Indian University Education System: A Critical Appraisal**' with a view to comprehending its necessity, relevance and validity in advancing newer science of Nature-Humans-Society capable of liberating the peoples of India from perennial poverty, hunger, disease, unemployment, ignorance, etc. and enabling them to live well in peace and harmony with Nature.

#### 0200 CONTEXT

Present-day events such as the privatisation of universities, or the commercialisation of education, cannot be correctly and critically understood without a deeper understanding of the history and philosophy of the Indian University Education System.

The fact is that the existing university education system was established in India in 1857 during the colonial times. There was no critical appraisal then. The privileged may have benefited more.] Higher education by its very nature is elitist or meritocratic. Now the access to higher education has improved with reservations and affirmative policies but the ongoing privatisation has led to an accentuation of inequalities in access.

Prior to 1871, there was no secular education in Britain. Rather this education system was designed and maintained as a monopoly of a religious organisation—the church—to suit the political agenda of the British rulers. The fact is that our present system still mimics and holds in high regard the Western University Education System (and universities such as Oxford and Cambridge) which were set up by the church during a religious war—the Crusades.

The various education commissions instituted after political independence in India, totally failed to correct (or even notice) this critical design flaw in the education system. As products of that education system, the members just assumed that a system of education designed and perfected by the church, to create missionary minds, was most suitable to a free and democratic India, and what was required was only some minor tinkering with it.

Accordingly, a critical appraisal of the university education system is long overdue.

Some of these issues surfaced during the 38<sup>th</sup> session of the Indian Social Science Congress which deliberated on '**Knowledge System, Scientific Temper and The Indian People**'. For example, Macaulay, in his Minute of 1835, advocated Western education for the sake of science. However, he used false history of science which was gullibly accepted for 150 years, by a mass of educated Indians without once attempting to cross-check it. A scientific temper demands that we cross-check everything, especially the premises on which we rejected the traditional education system and initiated the current university system. But despite much talk of scientific temper, this scientific temper was not exhibited in action.

Likewise, some of these issues also surfaced during the deliberations of the 39<sup>th</sup> session of Indian Social Science Congress, which had the focal theme '**Emerging Interfaces of Social Science and Public Policy in India**'. In particular, the issue of colonialism in the social sciences was addressed in the presidential speech. The 40<sup>th</sup> session of Indian Social Science Congress was centred on '**Peoples' Health and Quality of Life in India**', and gave rise to the question of values inculcated by the education system, given the total commercialisation of the medicine and health system.

What we need today is a fundamental reconceptualization of the aims and curriculum of university education. We need education which aims to free the mind instead of enslaving it, an education system which suits a free India, not a colonial India. We realize the large dimensions of the problem: that the colonialism

globalised its university system, and that a university does not exist in isolation. However, we also realize that Indians are not the only ones seeking a solution to the lingering problems of colonialism and its education system. Africa, for example, is witnessing huge student agitations to decolonise education. Global norms and standards cannot be accepted as a given and need to be rethought. For example, we need to rethink the current ways of ranking of universities, and current ways of ranking the academics employed in the universities, keeping in mind the revised overall objectives of university education.

Accordingly, the Indian Social Science Academy and Periyar University, have resolved to deliberate upon '**Indian University Education System: A Critical Appraisal**' during 41<sup>st</sup> Indian Social Sciences Congress.

### **0300 MEANING OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION SYSTEM**

A question may arise here: What does University Education System mean? In order to define it one needs to understand meaning of the word 'System'. 'System' means 'an assemblage or combination of things or persons forming a complex or unitary whole or any assemblage or set of connected members'. What it means is that system comprises interconnected objects/things/persons having some kind of common attributes/functions/motions/actions. There may be natural system (e.g. mountain system, earth system, universe, etc), biological system (e.g. nervous system, digestive system, etc) and social system (e.g. political system, Economic system, education system, agrarian system, industrial system, etc). Each system has a process, a structure and a function. All its constituents form a single unitary whole appearing as a unit. Unity of collectivity is the founding block of a system. The system is dynamic and not static as it is in constant motion. Each system can have sub-systems. Viewed this way the University Education System, therefore, has several interrelated components having interconnected common functions, motions/ actions, all forming a single unitary whole. Motion/action/function of all the components shall refer to 'process' or 'processes', whereas the interconnections between and among various components shall refer to structure. Organization of the University Education System, therefore, shall mean both, structure and process. For examples, students, teachers, Vice-Chancellor, registrar, clerical staff, etc comprise the components of the University Education System, and the manner in which they are put together will refer to organizational structure. Subject departments, faculties, library, curricula, syllabi, pedagogy, medium, etc form another set of components of University Education System. Source and nature of funding too form its components. Philosophy and objectives put all the components together in a dynamic unitary whole. The manner in which they act together refers to social process, (In biology, 'Anatomy refers to structure and physiology' refers to process). It may be noted here that University Education System is a sub-system of a larger system called social system. The social system can be primitive, tribal, feudal, colonial, neocolonial, democratic, socialist etc. It will have political, economic, education and culture its main constituents. Objectives and functions of the University Education System, therefore, shall be determined by a larger social system's objectives and functions. In other words, there will be and ought to be high order of correlation between the objective and function of the larger social system and the University Education System. Prior to August 15, 1947, India was a colony of Britain because of which it had colonial social system and colonial university and school education system. Since the colonial social system was rooted in the philosophy of exploitation, plunder, loot of India's Wealth, it has exploitative social system having all kinds of commands and controls, all organized in a hierarchy. Indian University Education System had to serve this larger goal of the colonial system.

India became free on August 15, 1947 and a Democratic Republic on January 26, 1950. New democratic social system rooted in the principles of freedom, equality and fraternity is said to have come into existence. Peoples of India became sovereign of Democratic Republic. This called for corresponding change in colonial School and university Education system. Question to ponder is: Did Democratic Republic of India create a new democratic and scientific Education system in consonance with its Democratic social system and democratic needs and aspirations of its sovereigns, i.e. peoples of India?

### **0400 OBJECTIVES**

The deliberations on '**Indian University Education System: A Critical Appraisal**' seeks to focus on following objectives:

#### **HISTORY/ COLONIZATION**

- (i) To examine the historical and philosophical genesis and growth of university education in India, both the traditional universities such as Nalanda and Takshshila, and the colonial university education system.

- (ii) To critically examine whether the colonial university education system rooted in the philosophy of social alienation and slavery suits the needs and aspirations of the people of present-day Democratic People of India.
- (iii) To reassess Macaulay's argument that university teaching must be done in English for the sake of science.
- (iv) To examine how the existing curriculum may be decolonised and democratised in all the branches of sciences, including in mathematics, science, and technology, commonly regarded as universal.
- (v) To assess the interconnections between present democratic Political-Economic System and University Education System
- (vi) To assess the relevance and validity of present hierarchical organization of universities (e.g. Central, State, Advanced Study Centre, Autonomous colleges, Deemed to be University, Private Universities, etc.) to University Education System.
- (vii) To assess the relevance and appropriateness of differential/preferential financing of Indian universities

#### AUTONOMY

- (viii) To examine the status of autonomy of Indian Universities
- (ix) To determine the nature and relevance of political interference in Indian Universities
- (x) To ascertain the ethical and moral standards of Indian Universities
- (xi) To assess the process of selection, placement and promotion in Indian Universities
- (xii) To assess whether university education is primarily meant to train people for jobs or whether university education must be separated from job-oriented training, with which it might coexist
- (xiii) To determine the connections between congeniality of academic environment and creative/innovative research in Indian Universities

#### PRE-ADMISSION

- (xiv) To assess the curricular pressure exerted by admission tests and how to offset it.
- (xv) To assess the interconnection between School and Collegiate education system and University Education System.
- (xvi) To explore the impact of mushrooming of coaching institutes on University Education

#### NECESSITY AND RELEVANCE

- (xvii) To evaluate the necessity, relevance and validity of private universities and their impact on Indian University Education System
- (xviii) To determine to what extent university education must be regulated by the government and how. To assess the roles of government regulatory bodies such as UGC and NAAC
- (xix) To devise alternative ways of ranking universities, other than publication, citation, impact parameter etc. For example, if local social objectives are or ought to be a key concern of the university, the system of ranking universities and academics must be changed accordingly?
- (xx) To assess the necessity, relevance and validity of open universities and teacher education in the Indian University system
- (xxi) To assess the possible role of traditional knowledge in the curriculum.

#### FLAWS

- (xxii) To examine what ails the University Education system(Curriculum, teaching and examination) Why it is trapped in an unproductive spiral of poor teaching, flawed examination, poor learning and ineffective output, why does it produce graduates who may not have skills, or if they do, prefer to leave the country for better prospects
- (xxiii) To suggest alternatives to the aims and curricula of university education.

#### STUDENTS PROTESTS

- (xxiv) To assess the dynamics of rising students' protests and suicides in Indian Universities
- (xxv) To examine the obvious and hidden processes by which students come in through reservations are discriminated against, resulting in students' suicides in Indian Universities
- (xxvi) To examine the congeniality of faculty, students and administration

## 0500 ACTUAL UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN INDIA

Historically, a system of school and college education was set up by the Christian missionaries at the time of setting up of the first missionary school in 1508, and Jesuit college in Cochin has been since 1550. These mission schools kept proliferating for centuries, and captured various sections of the elite to exert pressure through the students they taught. For example, Ram Mohun Roy, who helped set up the Presidency College, Kolkata in 1818, converted to Christianity, and wrote to the Viceroy asking that the British government should re-prioritise spending on introduction of Western education in India rather than on the Indian education with focus on Sanskrit. Macaulay, who is usually blamed for bringing in the Western education built on this political support from the indigenous elite, who remained blissfully unaware of his real motives that Western education was the cheapest means of preventing revolt. They did not notice the connection even though Western university education started in India in 1857, the year in which colonial power was overthrown, even if temporarily.

The Sapru Committee Report of 1934 already opined that this system of education prepared students only for passing examinations, and not for any vocation in life. But it failed to notice what that system was designed to prepare students for. A few years later, the Zakir Husain committee, under the Congress administration tried to put into practice some of the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi, by advocating the teaching of some form of manual labour or productive work, or handicraft, and advocating the use of the mother tongue for education.

Post independence, the University Education Commission of 1948, under the chairmanship of S. Radhakrishnan, made some cursory remarks about the need to introduce critical thinking, without themselves putting in any critical thinking into the design and origin of the prevalent university education system. The students and teachers saw through this hypocrisy??, and continued to focus on examinations to the point that, today, coaching classes have not only become more respectable than schools, but they openly declare that their objective is to pass examinations, and not to acquire knowledge.

The Kothari Commission of 1964-66 suggested a drastic reconstruction of the education system, “almost a revolution”, and laid out lofty principles of democratic values and scientific thinking, but did not make even the slightest dent in the prevailing system. Several other committees were set up for improving University Education after Kothari Commission.

It is true that university and higher education institutions have proliferated over the last 70 years. But this has not been enough to meet the growing demands. The major change has been in terms of privatisation following the Ambani Birla committee report of 2000 suggesting the setting up of a credit line to finance job-oriented education.

While doing so, it needs to be kept in view that our University Education System has undergone series of changes since our independence. Now we have over 600 universities, 5000 degree and post-graduate colleges, dozens of IITs, NITS, hundreds of Regional Engineering Colleges, over 200 Medical Colleges, dozens of Medical and Health Science Universities, and hundreds of national and regional institutes under the auspices of CSIR, ICAR, ICMR, DST, DRDO, ICSSR, etc. We have Central universities, State universities and private universities. The Indian State of Democratic Republic of India started withdrawing from education and health in 1990 in order to facilitate rise of private universities on the philosophy of ‘**Commodification of education and health**’ which is tantamount to ‘**Commercialization of education and health**’. Also, phenomenal growth of private coaching institutes as big business in education coupled with growth of corporate world led to the emergence of the online examination system. Extension of duration of degree courses from two years to three years, postgraduate courses from two years to three years along with introduction of admission tests and all levels too need to be rocked with??.

Also, a ‘**policy of contract teaching**’ as integral to the changed national labour policy called ‘**Policy of contractual labour**’ introduced by the then Prime Minister late Sri P.V. Narasimha Rao and then Finance Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in 1990s ought to be studied for its impact on our University Education System. All subsequent Governments led by Sri Atal Behari Vajpai, Dr. Manmohan Singh and Sri Narendra Modi have continued to faithfully reinforce this policy without bothering much for its adverse impact on the society. The philosophy of New Education Policy of Education ‘**emphasising skill development**’ being put forward by the present Government too need to be studied objectively and seriously.

There is also a parallel education system called ‘**Open Education/Distance Education**’.

While doing so, one must reckon with the following:

- (i) Several crores of educated young Indians holding Ph.D/MA/MSc/M.Tech./B.Tech/B.E./M.Ed/B.Ed/MBA, etc. are without any job. The Ph.D holders are even seeking job which are meant for unskilled. This is so while lakhs of teaching jobs in universities/colleges/schools/research institutes are lying vacant since 1990s despite achieving the so-called high rate of economic growth.
- (ii) Students passing UGC Junior Fellowship Tests and National Eligibility Test find hard to get Ph.D Admission and teaching jobs.
- (iii) Universities awarding BA/BSc/MA/MSc degrees do not value the degrees awarded by them. Instead they ask their students to appear in the new admission tests.
- (iv) Conduct of examination is now a big business
- (v) Though till date science has not discovered and developed such valid scientific test by which one's potential can be correctly measured, yet all universities, colleges, institutes and examining centres are holding admission tests in the name of science freely without there being any challenges from the university professors and eminent or not-so-eminent scientists. Now Olympiads are held for selection of science students without any justification.
- (vi) Certificates of participation in departmental seminars/regional/national conferences are being used for getting UGC sponsored API scores for promotion and for being declared eligible for applying for the teaching posts.

### 0600 ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTS OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Today's world is called a democratic world. Being a Democratic Republic, India too is part of this democratic world. Democracy means sovereignty of people rooted in principles of equality, freedom and fraternity. Sovereignty of people ends all forms of preceding notions of sovereignty (tribal, feudal, imperial, colonial, capitalists, etc.) and all forms of slavery and all forms of politics. Its notion of equality is rooted in recognition of the natural truth that all humans, irrespective of their birth, gender, class, caste, creed etc, are Homo-sapiens and Homo-erectus and that no single individual or group of individuals have right of sovereignty over land, forest, mountains, rivers, mines, air, fire, etc. and that there are reciprocal relations between and among all living species including humans and between non-living and living. Sovereignty of the people also recognises the vital role of collectivity as against individuality and cooperation as against competition in survival, growth and well being of humans vis-à-vis other living beings. In democracy, therefore, bureaucracy, state, competition, market have no place. This is what M.K. Gandhi wrote in his seminal book '**Hind Swaraj**' and opposed British type Parliamentary system.

The concept of University Education System has to be rooted in principles of democracy and peoples' sovereignty. University Education System has to be fully democratic, autonomous, free from politics and collectively managed. Its bond with the people and their needs for scientific knowledge of Nature-Humans-Society has to be very strong. There is no place for bureaucracy and hierarchy in the University Education System. University Education System has to be accessible and open for all those who wish to discover new knowledge. To be precise, doors of universities have to be open for all without any discrimination.

Question to ponder is:

Is the Indian University Education system capable of upholding democracy and promotion of science?

This being so, parameters for appraisal of our education system have to be democratic and scientific. Some of these can be as follows:

- (i) Democratic vs. authoritarian/colonial
- (ii) Autonomy
- (iii) Freedom
- (iv) Equality-Fraternity
- (v) Non-hierarchical
- (vi) Public
- (vii) Congeniality
- (viii) Absence of bureaucracy
- (ix) Absence of Political Intervention
- (x) Cooperative and Collective Management

- (xi) Openness and free admission
- (xii) Peoples' language
- (xiii) Connectivity/bond between the people and the university
- (xiv) Innovations/Creativity
- (xv) Quality of Education and research
- (xvi) Connection between University Education System and Public policies
- (xvii) Competence and devotion of faculty
- (xviii) Teacher-Student Relations
- (xix) Non-discrimination
- (xx) Utility of knowledge being produced and utilization of the same for public wellbeing
- (xxi) Secular
- (xxii) Ethical/Moral Standard
- (xxiii) Non-alienating or absence of social alienation
- (xxiv) Any other

A study of history of freedom struggles shows that several Indians tried to create an alternate concept of education and university education. Mahatma Gandhi in his **Hind Swaraj** (1909), Nanabhai Bhatt's Lok Shiksha in Amla and Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore's Visva Bharti were major contributions to alternate school education and university education. Mahamana Madan Mohan Malviya and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan established Banaras Hindu University and Aligarh Muslim University respectively. Question arises: What happened to these initiatives? Did these result in creating a new democratic and scientific school education system and university education system? Answer may be very frustrating. Visva-Bharati, BHU, AMU and Gujarat Vidyapith are now integral part of the same old university education system. Nana Bhai had established Lok Bharati Gram Vidyapith as an alternate Peoples' university after India attaining freedom from the British. His Lok Shiksha experiment spread in a few districts of Gujarat and over 100 Lok Shalas (Peoples School) were established. But neither the Government of India nor the State Government of Gujarat promoted these in order to replace the British-born School Education System and University Education System. Of late the Gujarat Government has stopped Grants to Lok Shalas and Lok Bharati Gram Vidyapith. Their extinction is imminent.

### **0700 THEMATIC ISSUES AND PROBLEMS**

In accordance with the focal theme, all aspects of current university education should be subjected to critical inquiry. The ISSA categorizes topics into (a) major themes for the plenaries and (b) sub-themes for Research Committees and Thematic Panels. Since all the 28 Research Committees are structured around a subject/discipline, each one of them should examine concerns specially relevant to their special fields of enquiry, with regard to university education. Appropriate suggestions in this regard are invited from members, scholars and all those concerned with university education.

### **0701 MAJOR THEMES**

Following may be considered as the major themes of Indian University Education System:

- (I) Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Indian University Education System
- (II) Connections between Democratic Political Economic System after August 15, 1947 and Indian University Education System
- (III) Autonomy and Democratic character of Indian University Education System
- (IV) Impact of privatisation and commercialisation on Indian University Education System
- (V) Structures and processes of Indian University Education System
- (VI) Necessity, Relevance and Scientific validity of all forms of admission tests and devaluation of degrees and diplomas awarded by Indian universities.
- (VII) Connections between School and Collegiate Education and Indian University Education
- (VIII) Connections between University Education and Research and Research by Government Research Institutes (CSIR, ICAR, ICMR, DST, ICSSR, ICPR, IC&R) etc.
- (IX) Financing of Universities
- (X) Hierarchy in Indian Universities (Central, State, Deemed, Private).
- (XI) Impact of continuation of English in Indian Universities on the quality of Education and Research
- (XII) Social alienation and University Education System
- (XIII) Impact of in-roads of Foreign Universities and FDI on Indian University Education System
- (XIV) Assessment of curriculum of Indian University Education System

- (XV) Equality, Freedom and Fraternal relations in Indian University Education System
- (XVI) Rising conflict And corruption in Indian Universities
- (XVII) Rising students' protests ad suicides in Indian universities
- (XVIII) Rising unemployment of Ph. D holders and University/IIT/NITs educated students.

## **0702 SUB-THEMES**

### **INTERNATIONAL/NATIONAL/SEMINARS/SYMPOSIA/WORKSHOPS/COLLOQUIA**

Following are the themes suggested for organisation of international/national seminars/ symposia /colloquia/workshops:

#### **(I) INTERNATIONAL**

- (i) European University Education System
- (ii) American University Education System
- (iii) African University Education System
- (iv) Chinese and Japanese University Education System
- (v) Asian University Education System
- (vi) Internationalization of Higher Education

#### **(II) NATIONAL**

- (i) Connection between Indian School Education System and Indian University Education System
- (ii) Impact of Privatization/commercialization on Indian University Education System
- (iii) Linkages between Higher Education and Community

#### **(III) SPECIAL**

- (i) Tamil And Culture
- (ii) Freedom, Equality and Fraternity
- (iii) Science, Religion And Politics
- (iv) Indian Economy And The People of India Today
- (v) Deepening Agrarian Crisis
- (vi) Unemployment And Jobless Growth

There are 28 Research Committees representing almost all subject of science. Each one of these can deliberate upon status of Education and research vis-a-vis Indian University Education System. For example, Agricultural Science Research can deliberate upon Agricultural Science University Education System, Medical and Health Science Research Committee on Medical and Health University System. Similarly the 21 Thematic Panels can examine the status of interdisciplinary research and theory.

## **0800 APPROACH**

In order to arrive at an appropriate understanding of the Indian University Education System and the problems confronting it, it is necessary to adopt multipronged, multidisciplinary scientific approach. All teachers, students, vice-chancellors, policy planners and administrators have to be involved in the process. The whole deliberations have to be free from politics. Indian Social Science Congress is an ideal national forum for it. An attempt will be made to involve all the universities, IITs, IIMs, IISCIERS, NISERs, IISC, TIFRIR through pre-post and during XLI ISSC deliberations. All the Vice-Chancellors/Directors have been involved to the National Academic Advisory Committee of 41<sup>st</sup> Indian Social Science Congress. Having deliberations with every degree and Post Graduate College is quite difficult. Nevertheless efforts should be made in this direction. Since political parties and their leaders have been playing the major role in shaping the whole Education System in Democratic Republic of India, it would be ideal to invite all political parties to present their views.