



CULTURAL MISFIT OF INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: A REVIEW

Rakesh Pathak¹, Smita²

¹PhD Research Scholar, Amity Business School, Amity University, Mumbai, India

² HR Executive, Sudarshan Foundation, Greater Noida, India

ABSTRACT

India is one of the emerging economies. The young demographic profile is an opportunity for India to accelerate the economic growth. Higher education has a crucial role to play in the development of economy by developing human capital. The Indian higher education sector has not utilised its full potential except few islands of excellence. Culture influences higher education. India inherited higher education system established before independence by a culturally different ruler. Despite several decades of independence India is still following the same pre-independence higher education system. The paper explores the cultural misfit of Indian higher education with Indian values and culture. Exploratory research design is used for the paper. It is found that cultural integration is needed to make Indian higher education inclusive and relevant for the society.

KEYWORDS: India, Higher Education, Culture, Values, Misfit, Inclusive

1. INTRODUCTION

India has the third largest higher education system in the world. But it is not reflected in innovation and entrepreneurship index. The higher education is expected to enhance critical thinking skills and promote a culture of innovation. The poor employability of graduates in India, indicate the failure of Indian higher education to fulfil basic expectation of student to get job after completing graduation. The quality of higher education has been low as compared to other countries in global rankings (Tilak, 2016). The limitation of public sector enterprises in providing jobs to a large number of aspiring youth is understood. This should have created a culture of entrepreneurship to fulfil the aspirations of youth. But the culture of exam oriented higher education has not been able to develop the ability of running an independent enterprise among the graduates. The ancient teacher based education system of *Gurukuls* was replaced by British to damage the self esteem of the society. The English speaking higher education was focussed on passing exams to become clerk, but did not provide critical thinking and life skills. Gradually the society has lost the confidence to start business ventures. Status of doing a job in a large organisation is higher than those who manage their own start ups. The poor employment and disguised unemployment has made

people slaves of government help to survive. People are just surviving biologically devoid of any enthusiasm and ambitions. Government initiatives like Make in India will be fruitful if skilled human capital is available in the country (Tiwari & Anjum, 2015). Culture not only influences education sector but also influences industry (Tiwari & Anjum, 2014a). Poor quality of higher education is reflected in large number of students going abroad for higher studies. Indian students spend US \$ 7 billion for foreign higher education (Kumar, 2015). Former Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh had commented that “We must recognise that too many of our higher educational institutions are simply not up to the mark” (India Today, 2013). New national education policy provides a vibrant framework for technology driven student centric learning (National Education Policy, 2020).

2. OBJECTIVE

Explore the cultural fit of Indian higher education with Indian culture

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on exploratory research design. The paper published on influence of culture on higher education has been reviewed. Articles



available on SSRN, Research Gate, Google Scholar, and Scopus have been reviewed in addition to newspaper and other articles available on online sources.

4. LANGUAGE

The language of instruction in higher education in India is English. This has made higher education elitist and restricted to a chosen few who can understand English. A large segment of population is not able to understand English and is hence excluded from the higher education. The modern higher education system was introduced by British administration to prepare English speaking clerks. Unfortunately decades after independence the same system is being allowed to exist by narrow minded shrewd politicians, who want to keep people psychological slaves by creating divide on the basis of caste in the form of reservation policy, religion by spreading hatred, regional clashes by creating hatred for Indians from other regions and operating on the wishes of wealthy and powerful foreign agencies. Indian higher education is a misfit with Indian culture. Indian culture has various regional languages as first language, whereas higher education is for those who understand English. Sustainability requires inclusion of various sections of society (Tiwari & Choudhuri, 2015).

5. NEGLECTED TEACHERS

Adhoc teachers are working without any benefits of regular employment for a large part of their life. Teachers should be allowed to have alternate source of income. The eight hours office timing should be relaxed and teacher should be required to be in the institution physically present only during the class timing and for any library and research work. Development of human capital for different professions (Saravanakumar and Devi, 2020) need dedicated faculties. A holistic performance appraisal of teachers is needed (Tiwari, Anjum 2014b). The surplus time of a teacher can be invested in some other productive activities and will result in value creation for society and wealth creation for the teacher and economy. The basic needs of teachers should be taken care of by higher education system (Nigam, 2017). Indian higher education has ignored motivation of teachers (Tiwari & Anjum, 2014c). Faculties of twelve colleges have not been paid salaries for many months in Covid-19 pandemic (New Indian Express, 2020). Indian higher education is a misfit with Indian culture. Indian culture gives highest regard to a teacher (*Guru*) equivalent to God (*Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh*). Higher education cannot be transformed if teacher issues are not resolved (Tiwari & Anjum 2014d). Ghost faculties are appointed to clear the hurdles of

regulatory inspections (Nagarajan, 2019). Unless teachers are given their due respect and dignified salary, no talented individual would be ready to accept teaching as a first choice of career. Experienced teachers are not given due recognition. Experienced teachers should be given autonomy and due recognition (Tiwari & Anjum, 2014e). Work life balance is needed to enhance satisfaction of teachers (Punia & Kamboj, 2013). Teachers should be provided growth opportunities (Bakker & Bal, 2010). Motivations needs of teachers with different skill and hierarchy are different (Tiwari & Anjum 2018). Downfall in respect for teachers is linked to dominance of western values in Lord Macaulay's education system (SatyaKumar, 2018). Teachers are not given incentives to collaborate with industry and other stakeholders (Tiwari & Anjum, 2014f). Blended learning can enhance work life balance and satisfaction of teachers (Mishra & Smita, 2021).

6. CAPACITY EXPANSION

Capacity expansion has been done by privatisation of higher education. Privatisation of higher education has made it a for profit activity. Private institutions pay royalty or ransom to political bosses and ignore the needs of students and teacher. There is no significant difference in teaching effectiveness of private and public sector institutions (Tiwari & Anjum 2014g). Though private institutions are established as a trust, but it is known to all concerned that these are money minting machines not charitable institutions. The entry of private players did increase the number of seats available (Tiwari et al. 2013), but without any accountability towards students. Except a few elite private institutions, majority of them are running like extortion businesses, extorting money from students in the name of tuition fees. Private sector institutions have adopted technology. Online teaching has immense possibilities (Tiwari & Anjum, 2013b). Indian higher education sector has the potential to develop as a centre of excellence globally (Reinda et al. 2011). Technology not only enhances efficiency but also enhances transparency (Tiwari et al. 2020). Large numbers of seats are lying vacant in private institutions. It indicates failure of the inorganic growth (Tiwari et al. 2019). Just privatising higher education will not make it relevant for the society.

7. DISCONNECT WITH CORPORATE

The elite institutions have become source of human capital for the developed economies, as most of the talented students leave India after passing from the elite institutions. The culture of Indian corporate does not allow people to grow and innovate. Skill enhancement is better with industry academia collaboration. Balanced score card needs to be used



just like corporate to enhance utility of education system (Umashankar & Dutta, 2007). A yes sir culture is prevalent in Indian corporate world. Submissive slaves are stable employees but energetic, critical thinking and innovative people are not given a fair treatment, so they decide to leave the country for better career opportunities. Private institutions have developed better industry academia collaborations (Tiwari & Anjum, 2014h).

8. GOVERNANCE

Indian higher education is based on affiliation model which focuses on uniformity. In contrast Indian culture is based on diversity and autonomy. Demographic factors play a crucial role in higher education (Tiwari & Anjum, 2014i). Culture has to be an important part of Indian higher education system in addition to curriculum, customer, creativity and collaboration (Tiwari & Anjum 2014j). Holistic approach is needed for enhancing relevance of higher education (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003).

Affiliation model restricts autonomy of institutions (Sharma et al. 2013a). Governance of Indian higher education institutions has become complex. Indian culture is focussed on simplicity. Simplicity is important for achieving the desired outcomes (Tiwari et al. 2018). Large institutions and affiliating universities should be replaced by small autonomous institutions. Small and medium size organisations make a significant contribution in Indian economy (Rana & Tiwari, 2014). Dedication is more important than size of organisation (Choudhuri et al. 2015). Better governance and autonomy will enable Indian higher education institutions to develop as a centre of excellence with global rankings. Students from across the world can come to such centres of excellence and develop foreign exchange reserves and contribute in the development of economy (Tiwari & Anjum 2016). Financing options have made higher education accessible for middle class (Tiwari & Anjum, 2013a). Demotivated teachers cannot deliver quality service (Pop et al., 2008). Transformational leaders are required in Indian higher education (Sharma et al. 2013b).

9. POLITICAL INTERRUPTIONS

The institutions of higher education have gradually transformed into nurseries of political ideology. Instead of investing energy in innovation and wealth creation, students are busy in fighting election in campuses of higher education institutions. Hatred against own country, violence and antisocial activities have become the identity of Indian higher education institutions. Research, innovation skill development has taken back seat and such things have become redundant in Indian higher education,

except few elite institutions. Politicians have won their personal battle by corrupting the students for their spreading political ideology, but the country has lost its precious human capital.

The appointments in higher positions are made by politicians. Every big appointment has a price tag. Vice Chancellor appointment becomes easy for candidates who are able to pay the ransom to the political bosses. In one such appointment, candidate paid INR 50 crore for the post of vice chancellor (Raghu Raman, 2020). Such paid appointments create a culture of recovery of the ransom, by asking for ransom from affiliated colleges and granting affiliation and other facilities for a price. The appointment of teachers should be made by experts who do not have any political influence (Nayyar, 2017).

Teachers and students are at the receiving end of this ransom game. They get a paper degree which can do no harm but also does not do any good to them. Dreams are shattered and they are left to live a marginalised life of somehow surviving biologically by doing some odd jobs. Skilled human capital is needed to face global competition (Tiwari et al. 2017).

Culture of a higher education system cannot be isolated from the culture of the country. Any attempt to change the culture will meet intense opposition because of malafide motives of the political class. The political class has made people submissive slaves and people have accepted the silent slavery. Every five years in elections something is offered free and people are happy with it. They do not have high aspirations. Indian higher education is a misfit with Indian culture. In Indian culture, Kings used to give highest regard to teacher (Guru) and used to consult them in important decisions. On the contrary the current Indian higher education, as political establishment treats teacher as unwanted part of society, worthy enough to be neglected.

10. ASSESSMENTS

The assessments are based on previous years question papers which are prepared by student just a week before exam and they pass the exams with little effort for a week. Internal assessments in most of private sector educational institutions are like a free lunch coupon. Every student gets distinction marks or even more as it does not cost much for an institution to give free marks. It lures students to take admission in such institutions. Practical assessments are an event where it is impossible to fail. A celebration for students as everybody gets at least ninety percent. A false sense of comfortable life is acceptable to student and parent but nobody asks any questions regarding quality of assessments. A strong political will is required to reform the Indian higher education



by evolving a culture of innovation and wealth creation instead of degree creation. Indian higher education is a misfit with Indian culture. In Indian culture evaluation was based on outcomes, whereas current higher education system in India considers evaluation as a means to check memory for three hours.

11. SPIRITUALITY

Indian culture is driven by spirituality. Spirituality enables to reach true potential (Narayanswamy, 2008). Indian higher education ignores spirituality. Spiritual well being and material well being can co-exist (Balasubramanyam, 2011). Spirituality in ancient education system in India brought students close to the teachers. But current Indian higher education system has created large power distance between students and teachers and this restricts development of critical thinking (Tiwari & Anjum 2014k). People laughed at him when Professor Narayanaswamy of IIM Bangalore started an elective course in spirituality (Prayag, 2003). Spirituality has been found to positively influence research outcomes (Upadhyay, 2017). Spirituality needs to be integrated into Indian higher education (Sengupta, 2016). Spirituality makes learning a multidimensional activity (Ricciardelli, 2016). Saudi Arabia is exploring adding Indian spiritual texts as a part of education system to enhance ability of students for peaceful co-existence (Sharma, 2021). Spirituality can add value in the learning ecosystem (Anand, 2017). Spirituality enables multidimensional transformation of a learner (Charaniya, 2012). Indian higher education system is a misfit with Indian culture as it ignores spirituality.

CONCLUSION

Culture influences higher education. The aspirations of youth can be fulfilled by a culturally aligned higher education system. The language of instruction should change from English to mother tongue. Traditional knowledge base should be developed to convert it into patents as per modern science practices and can become a source of wealth creation. Instead of political bosses, the appointments in higher education institutions should be done by a separate panel which should have representation from academia, industry, psychology experts. It is high time for policy makers to reform higher education to integrate Indian culture and values. Assessments should be outcome based rather than a three hour exam. The synergy of cultural values and class room values will build a mentally strong, emotionally stable, innovative and happy human capital willing to take risk and develop their own ventures. The purpose of higher education should change from degree providing institution to a place to rejuvenate

self, generate new ideas, networking for building up business, developing values for peaceful coexistence in harmony with nature, relationships and materialistic achievements.

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