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HIGHER EDUCATION IN RURAL AREA IN MAHARASHTRA



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I am the Principal of a college situated in a 'rural area', which means not an 'urban area'. These two terms 'rural area' and 'urban area' differ substantially in letter and spirit. The big cities and towns where education is a vital part of social and cultural part of life, where employment is the mind-set, come under this nomenclature 'urban area'. The 'rural area' is one where prevails the opposite state of mind to this. It is a fact that the Indian rural scenario, even now, presents a different picture regarding the concept of education and its connection to employment. Very few in these rural areas consider that education is an essential activity of life, and that education can really lead to employment and least to enlightenment. The majority of rural people still require a lot of goading to be convinced about the need of college education for their wards. Of course, there are a very insignificant number of people, who really think that education is the real need for their children, but this number is very meagre. These factors are more manifested in relation to higher education. Hence higher education in rural area requires special attention, special study and analysis and special measures.

It need not be repeated here that the concept of education itself is undergoing various changes. The ancient Indian conception of education laid more emphasis on the intellectual and spiritual development of an individual at the cost of material effluence. At present education is understood by millions as a means of employment and resultantly material comforts and worldly pleasures and happiness. And this idea is also substantiated by the fact that the government has linked degrees to the jobs. As a result of this, education is understood as obtaining only a degree to get a job. Actually these two ancient and present concepts go against each other. Under this cloud of confusion, the rural population doubts if education leads to enlightenment or employment. These observations are derived by experience, because for admissions at the beginning of each session, I meet the parents and guardians who express such views. What I want to emphasize here is that the mind-set of the rural

population is more or less apathetic towards higher/college education.

But a question may arise: why such a spurt of colleges in the rural areas? This phenomenon of mushroom-like growth of colleges in the rural areas may not be due to the educational demands of the local population. It can be due to the indiscriminate policy of state governments and commercial desires of politicians. Of course this need not be discussed in detail. Fifty years back it was completely a different picture. In 1956 Dr. C.D. Deshmukh warned against such unplanned growth of colleges. "However, such has been the revolution of rising expectations about higher education in the country that the phenomenon of opening of new colleges has gone on inexorably and not yet lost its momentum". (Dr.P.R.Dubhashi) Since then there have been several complaints regarding this unplanned and indiscriminate growth of colleges in general. Under such conditions the situation in the rural areas is not only deplorable but also miserable.

"The quantitative expansion has inevitably resulted in qualitative deterioration". According to the various studies made in this direction, the reasons and results seem to be same. Especially in the faculties of Arts and Commerce, graduates and post-graduates are churned out sans knowledge or skill and these pupils have become neither enlightened citizens nor employed persons. In urban area this condition may not have been received as sensitively and seriously as in rural areas. Such a phenomenon disturbs the compact society in rural areas and forces it to think twice before sending the boys and girls to higher education in arts and commerce faculties. The tragic irony is that almost all the colleges in rural areas invariably start only Arts and Commerce faculties, because starting these faculties do not require any expenditure or infrastructure.

The rural psychology always demands quick results because of poverty and backwardness. In most of these families boys and girls are daily-wage earners irrespective of age. They utilize the available opportunities to become farm-labourers or anything to

earn something by the evening. Under such conditions sending these boys and girls to colleges, with a hope that they would become officers in indefinite and unpredictable future, is seen as a futile venture. Their practical sense says that "one in the bush is equal to two in the sky". The reasons are not difficult to understand. Neither the centre nor state nor the Universities consider this hiatus between the urban and rural ethos and the need to frame different syllabus for these two areas. Any study of the syllabi framed for the under graduate and post-graduate courses proves that they are made for the urban areas only. A syllabus for the rural areas must have the maximum practical-content, that enables a student to become an earner as soon as he leaves the college.

The subjects in that syllabus must be relevant to the local and regional needs. Of course this deficiency was already detected by the University Grants Commission and come out with the introduction of vocational courses. We all know that these vocational courses evolved by the U.G.C. are inadequate to answer to the needs of the variety and diversity in the country. Besides in many colleges these vocational courses now are either closed or being continued with the fee collected from the students. Because the state government is not ready to stand by its commitment to finance these courses after the plan period. These courses have not been evolved and framed by the Boards of Studies in the universities. If it were so they would have been an organic part of normal pattern. At present the academic and managerial structure of a university is semi-academic and semi democratic, responsibility and answerability cannot be located and identifies. Actually the Boards of studies being the principal authority to frame the syllabi, it must study these different conditions and needs between the urban and rural areas and frame the syllabi also differently. This vital step is an immediate need to solve the present crises of higher education in the rural colleges. Another important and serious malady of higher education in rural areas is the financial dimension. In rural area, the starting of colleges and the availability of funds to run these colleges are inversely proportional. In the past generous donors and magnanimous philanthropists used to come forward for the cause of education. Later on the state government helped these colleges with grant-in-aid formula. At present the policy is to sanction colleges on permanent no-grant basis. It is a clear proof for the government's indifference towards higher education. In spite of this the colleges are started without infrastructure and basic requirements. Casualness glorious in every aspect of higher education specially in the rural areas. Officiating principals function for

years, unqualified teachers carry the teaching show on C.H.B. and colleges wear a deserted look. All this is only due to lack of funds. It is difficult to comprehend as to why the government sanctions new colleges at all and if they sanction why without grant? Even the old established colleges are deprived of the non-salary grant. All such conditions do not affect the colleges in the urban area as fatally as they do not face problems as the colleges in the metropolitan and big cities do not face problems as the colleges in rural places do.

For example sufficient student-strength, optimum utilization of the building and the infrastructure for commercial purposes, availability of qualified teachers, scope for starting short time professional courses to attract students and the mind set for full time studies are some issues where the urban colleges and rural colleges differ drastically. The colleges in the rural areas are groaning under these disadvantages.

On the contrary, the institutions and colleges run by the central and state governments are put on a very affluent level. The IITs, the Central Universities, the Open Universities or the state-run colleges present a picture of models. Is it not because of the free flow of funds? Even some of the metropolitan and city colleges wear the same and academic and aesthetic image. Ultimately this out-ward glamour is identified with quality, and there is a new divide of common and quality education. Such a comparison is again another disadvantage for the colleges in the rural areas. So on the background presented above, it is clear that imparting higher education in the rural areas in Maharashtra is passing through innumerable hurdles and obstacles. It is acknowledged that India is a country of villages, and it is also stressed that the country progresses only when the villages progress. If that is so, it is urgent and important to see that the rural areas must be assisted more sincerely substantially in the aspect of higher education. What are the suggestions for remedying this situation? First of all the financial assistance for these rural colleges must be changed. The government may define the term 'rural' on the basis of social and economical backwardness, lack of employment avenues, absence of natural resources and industrial potential. Then identify such rural areas. The colleges sanctioned in these rural areas, must be considered for grants right from the starting. As an illustration, the government declared some areas as 'tribal areas', and the colleges sanctioned in those areas get grants right from the first year. Similarly the colleges sanctioned in 'rural areas' also must be extended this facility of grants from the first year. Secondly, these rural colleges must be considered with retrospective effect. Thirdly the fee-structure for the students of

these rural colleges must be different considering and suiting the local conditions.

The government should stand by its promise to finance the vocational courses even after the plan period, in the colleges in the rural areas. Actually these courses have been evolved by the U.G.C. to enable the pupils towards immediate livelihood. While sanctioning these vocational courses the government gives an undertaking that these courses shall be financed after the plan period. So this measure shall help the rural college immensely. These are only some of the measures to strengthen the financial conditions of the rural colleges, which must be taken immediately.

In the improvement of the higher education in rural area, the University has a very important role. It must be realized that the needs and objectives of the rural students are different from those of the urban students. Hence the Boards of Studies must study these aspects, and while framing the syllabi they must distinguish between these different needs. The carpet syllabi making is not desirable. They study-content meant for the rural student must be relevant to local conditions and must be practice-oriented. Such a study must enable a student in becoming a daily-earner as soon as he leaves the college. At present syllabi are not framed taking these aspects into consideration. So the

University must pay more attention to this problem. Similarly in many of its decisions the University ignores the hiatus between the urban and rural students. For example the students from the remote and rural areas are forced to visit the University for different things. This can be avoided by establishing sub-centres, and it would save the poor rural students from time and expenditure. Some times these rural students feel alienated in the University, and they must be protected from this complex by some liberal measures to be taken by the University. Only such an attitude and action of

the University can assist the rural colleges and students in their pursuit of higher education. To provide a strong voice in the policy taking authorities of the University, reservation must be provided for the rural colleges and teachers on the various authorities and bodies. An amendment must be made in the Universities Act to this effect. Lastly, the population and the students of the rural areas be exposed to the knowledge regarding the need and utility of higher education. This must be done as a mission by the ministry of rural development. All types of attempts must be made to change the rural ethos in favour of higher education. It also requires that the rural population must be shown the benefits and profits of higher education quickly and surely. Hence one important point must be mentioned. The government proposes to punish the erring and non-performing educational institutions. For example grants are cut if the result is not satisfactory. In the same way awards must be proposed for the performing colleges and teachers.

More increments must be given to the very effective and hardworking teachers and employees. Such incentives and encouraging measures shall definitely help the progress in the rural area. Only these measures and others can salvage the glory and quality of higher education in the rural areas. If we want a prosperous and progressive Maharashtra, it is essential that the rural areas must become self-sufficient and educated and enlightened. Through this paper I strongly appeal to all the concerned to extend a helping hand to the stability, continuity and quality of higher education in the rural areas of Maharashtra. Before I conclude this paper, I wish to make my position clear, lest there be any misunderstanding in the hearts of the readers. When I defend the cause of higher education in the rural areas, I do not hint at any partial or prejudicial view about the higher education in other areas.

RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

REFERENCE

Professional Competency in Higher Education Edited by N.K.Uberoi.