4.1 69th AIU Annual Meeting Presidential Address
-1994-

(Source: ……..)

Abstract

In his presidential address the author sets forth some requirements for rethinking the system of higher education and harnessing new educational technology for meeting the demands of the globalization process. One of the basic changes of our time is that knowledge is not only a source of authority but constitutes the capital for development and upward economic and social mobility. 'Education For All' should not only concern itself with the removal of illiteracy, but with all forms of knowledge; technology based educational network should make it possible to achieve this. A redefinition of the concept of higher education and the need for strengthening non-formal education are addressed subsequently. An outmoded system of affiliated colleges is one of the causes, among others, of the failure of tertiary education in India. The role distance and open education can play effectively is emphasized and the concept of open education network is elaborated. The adoption of an open education system with formal and non-formal educational components will generate wide ranging educational resources for the benefit of students and teachers. Such changes are within our reach.(By: LA)

4.1 69th AIU Annual Meeting Presidential Address (1994)

The Honourable Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Shri Arjun Singhji, Honourable Chief Minister, Shri Sharadrao Pawar, Chairman, University Grants Commission, Prof.G. Ram Reddy; the Maharashtra Minister for Education, Dr.Patangrao Kadam, Prof.Shridhar Gupte, Prof.K.B. Powar, Dr.M.G. Hapse, esteemed colleagues, invitees, ladies and gentlemen.

Let me join hands with Professor Shridhar Gupte, Vice-Chancellor of the Poona University, in extending a warm welcome to you all.

It is a great pleasure to deliver the presidential address to such an august gathering. I feel honoured because of the presence of the Hon'ble Minister for Human Resource Development, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra and the Education Minister of Maharashtra. Their presence at today's function is an indication of the importance the central and state governments attach to higher education and the affairs of the University system.

The Association of Indian Universities is thankful to the University of Poona, and particularly to its Vice-Chancellor, Prof.Shridhar Gupte, for kindly agreeing to host this year's annual meeting. The Association of Indian Universities is visiting Pune after a long gap of 30 years and I am sure that this meeting will be memorable, not only for the excellent hospitality extended by the University but also for providing excellent conference facilities in the main building of the University, which was earlier, the residence of Govemers of Bombay Presidency and has just been renovated, for the first time since independence, to mark the occasion; and for the keen interest evinced by the citizens of Pune, a city which has long been known as a seat of learning and scholarship.

My pleasure at being present here today is heightened by the fact that I was the Vice-Chancellor of this University for six years and had as my close colleagues both Prof.Gupte, the present Vice-Chancellor and Prof.Powar, the Secretary General of the Association.

The higher education system in India has for long been under considerable strain and reccnt changes in national policies related to the liberalisation of the economy and globalisation of our activities have necessitated a considerable amount of rethinking in the system. The emphasis must now be on the 'quality' of education, and those in authority must accept the responsibility for the performance of institutions of higher learning. It is for this reason that we have chosen " Accountably in Higher Education" as the subject of this year's seminar.

In my presidential address, I would like to place before you some thoughts on the prospective and prospects of higher and open education systems, as I visualise these on the basis of my association of over 35 years with university education.

As we stand on the threshold of the 3rd millennium, we must reorient our thinking and our activities to the requirements of the 21st century with an emphasis on innovations and harnessing new educational technology for meeting the demands of changing Situations. With the process of

globalisation being accelerated, the information communication networks, both national and international, are set to bring about a communication revolution. Satellite communication, broadcasting by national and international agencies, cable TV with multiple channels, are bringing down regional and cultural, barriers. India too is responding to the changes in an effort to keep pace with developments in different parts of the world. The changes cannot be confined to the economic and industrial realms only. Education also must change, become international in character and at the same time meet the requirements of the Indian socio-economic milieu. Education all over the world is still looked upon as a harbinger of all other changes : social, cultural, economic, scientific and technical.

One of the basic changes that are envisaged is that knowledge will not only be a source of authority, but also the capital for further development. Efforts must, therefore, be directed to developing human resources in a manner that they become sources of strength and wealth to the country. It would be a challenge to harness modem technologies for an all-round development and simultaneously retain the socio-cultural identity of our nation; an identity which has survived for centuries and which has influenced countries of both nothern and southern hemispheres in their thoughts and actions.

Our National Policy on Education emphasises the fact that education should lead not only to empowerment in terms of professional competence but must also serve as a vehicle for upward economic and social mobility. It is seen as a means of reducing inequalities and giving opportunities to the less privileged. We have been spending approximately 3.7% of our GNP on education and it is heartening to note that our Prime Minister has unequivocally stated that this would be raised to 6% *by* the end of the 8th Plan. This statement is most welcome and augurs well for the country.

One of our major concerns is "Education for All". India has taken literacy and post-literacy programmes as its national missions and one can hope for a total eradication of illiteracy within the next few years. Eradication of illiteracy alone, however, will not suffice. We have to provide for much more. The Committee on Open Education in U.K. stated, as far back as 1969, that 'It is... unjust to the individual and unwise for the society to deny the greatest educational opportunity to the greatest number of its citizens. For long regarded as the privilege of the few, the opportunity to engage in higher education is at last becoming widely accepted as a basic individual right. Moreover, education in general, and higher education in particular, is at one and the same time, a necessary condition of a modem technological society and a defence against its abuse'. 'Education for All' cannot be a slogan for the removal of illiteracy alone. It has to be made applicable to all forms of knowledge which an individual of any age may aspire for.

It is expected that widespread application of modem communication technologies may enable us to leap-frog into the 21st century by-passing stages of development that have since become obsolete. In the field of education, educational and communication technologies appropriately developed and deployed, should enable us to educate millions of persons who would otherwise find it difficult to have the benefits of education. The approach obviously should be to develop an educational network that would reach well into the country-side including villages or groups of villages. Modern communication technology should facilitate the delivery of education to these village centres, however distant they might be.

We are proud of the fact that we have perhaps the largest educational system in the world with about 106 million students at the primary stage, 39 million students at the middle stage, 23 million students at the secondary stage and 4.6 million students at the tertiary stage of education. At the tertiary level about 7500 colleges, 215 universities and university- level institutions are trying to meet the ever-growing demand of further education among our youth. It is estimated that by the end of the century the number of students entering into the tertiary stage of education will reach about 55 million.

It has been observed that nearly 74.45% of students drop out of education before they reach the 10th Std., leaving only 25% to avail of higher secondary education. The figure further drops to about 6% at the tertiary level within the 17-23 years age- group. With the emphasis on universalisation of education at every stage, the current enrollment at the tertiary level will have to be, it appears, fourfold The developed countries with their present coverage of 20-30% of potential learners at the tertiary level, are already attempting to raise this figure to 50% by expanding their educational systems. In fact, the United States of America has alread reached this level. Trying to reach a comparable target in our country will mean a manifold multiplication of the existing facilities, perhaps even a hundred times.

While considering the need for higher education, we should not forget the adults working in the fast changing world of work. The development of a modern technological society, which demands fast changing skills in working, needs educational and training facilities for all.

In passing, I would like to make a plea for redefining our concept of higher education. As of today, if refers to the education after 10t-2 or 13 years of learning. To my mind, higher education should refer to the education, covering knowledge, skills and attitudes, that empowers a mature adult to meet and improve upon his or her requirements - individual, economic and socio-cultural. All programmes of education, therefore, offered to a mature adult to help in successfully tackling the problems of living and working belong to the realm of 'higher' education.

It is evident that all the demands for education from youth and adults of such a magnitude cannot be met by the formal stream alone. There is a need to strengthen non-formal programmes for school dropouts in the age group of 9-14 years, establish open schools at the secondary level, and more open universities and correspondence course institutions at the tertiary level. These can constitute an alternative channel for providing education for all at different levels. There is also a need to harmonise the interaction between the formal and non-formal systems, and promote migration from one to the other. With a little innovation and implementation of ideas that are well known, this can surely be achieved.

The system of higher education is under constant attack from all sides for its failure to play the 'centre stage' role in shaping the younger generation, the society and the nation. The perceived failures in the system are not due to lack of ideas and plans but due to tardy implementation. All our efforts have failed to make the system of higher education flexible, relevant and socially responsive. Thus, our much touted plans for examination reforms, autonomy for colleges, vocationalization of courses, industry-university linkages etc., are either not picking up or have not borne fruits commensurate with our expectations. However, there are some isolated examples

of success stories and these show that given the perseverance and dedication, a change in the social and cultural ethos can certainly be brought about.

The main causes of the failure of tertiary education in India arc an outmoded system of affiliated colleges, leaving little room for imagination and creativity, an undue emphasis on centralised annual examinations, neglecting other vital aspects in the teaching-learning process, an over-dependence on centralisation of activities and administrative controls and a crippling reliance on state funding, often breeding inactivity and non-accountability.

Many promising programmes, developed and geared towards quality assurance eg. National Eligibility Testing, accreditation of educational institutions etc. require drastic structural changes for successful implementation.

Autonomy to all colleges, deemphasising university end examinations, introducing eligibility tests for admission and employment and offering developmental grants purely on the basis of institutional performance are some of the structural changes awaiting urgent implementation. Such changes must, however, be introduced in a phased manner, taking care that the disadvantaged sections of society are not adversely affected as is feared by some. For the weaker sections of society, the state should provide financial support by offering loans repayable in easy instalments.

I would like to stress the role presently being played by the distance and open education system and that which it may have to play in the near future. With one national open university, 6 state open universities (only 3 of these being functional), and 46 correspondence course institutions, the non-formal system of education is already taking care of 11% of the students enrolled in higher education.

There is a feeling amongst a section of educationists that the formal system of education should restrict itself to specialised education that needs face-to-face interaction, and allow the general purpose degrees such as B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. to be catered mostly through distance education. The spare capacity which would consequently be available in the formal system can then be used for the propagation of special disciplines. It is also necessary to add a non-formal component of education to every formal institution and this component should supplement and not duplicate, the efforts of the open university system. Thus, courses for which excellent learning material has been developed by the national and state open universities, could be adopted or adapted by the colleges and university departments. Students in the formal stream should be allowed to take up courses available in the non- formal stream and be given due credit for it. This will enable students to choose from a wider range of courses. It will also liberate the students from the limitations of a local educational institution. With close collaboration of formal and non-formal systems in the country, a system of credit transfer could be developed that will give every student an autonomy to study what he wants, whenever he wants and from wherever he wants. It will mean universalisation of education in the true sense of the term.

Distance and open education, developed so far in India, has successfully demonstrated that the system can effectively offer educational courses in faculties of humanities, social sciences, science, commerce, management, education, engineering, computer science, etc. In fact, it is the

contention of the academics working in the system that Open University education can be offered in all faculties of knowledge. The distance education system has the advantage that the number of students enrolled for each programme can be very large and widely spread-out in the country. Recently the YCMOU has undertaken, in collaboration with the Dept. of Education of Maharashtra State, a task of offering in-service training to 90,000 high school teachers - a task to be completed in 2/3 years. Nearly 40 thousand teachers have already been trained and the remaining will be covered in this and the next year. Technical and vocational education can also be effectively given through the open university system. It is worth mentioning here that in computer skill education programmes, the Maharashtra Open University has enrolled more than 3000 students in 30 districts of Maharashtra served by 30 study centres and 200 work centres without investing much in the infrastructure. With appropriate system development, the Open University should be able to offer every year computer education to 50- 100 thousand learners. The open university approach can also be employed in offering extension education in the field of agriculture, technology, etc. to achieve socio-economic development of the people.

OPEN EDUCATION NETWORK

With the advent of the open universities a model of open learning is getting evolved in the country. It essentially consists of the following:

1. **Learning Resources :** These consist of self-study, multi-media instructional materials that suit diverse requirements of heterogeneous target groups of learners.

2. **Delivery Net-work :** This refers to the mechanism of offering educational programmes to the learners by organising delivery of educational services such as counselling, training in skills and practicals at places called study centres, work centres, work places etc.

3. Linkages with Society : Education has ultimately to link itself with the developmental processes in the society. Open universities, therefore, establish linkages with various institutions, organizations, groups and individuals to ensure their participation in all stages of educational activities of the University.

The open university system still in a formative stage, needs to be expanded and strengthened for offering life-long learning to all mature adults. The key element in the system is the study centre which is a resource and service centre for educating people in the region surrounding it. The centre can be enriched in educational resources by offering a wide variety of instructional packages suited to the needs of every learner. The disadvantaged people in the region can also be offered all the multi-media learning facilities at such a centre. With these resources and facilities the centre can become a 'Mass Education Centre' (Lok Shikshan Kendra - LSK) for all. The LSK can simultaneously be net-worked regionally and nationally through broadcasting, and non-broadcasting media and computer linkages with various resource centres such as universities and colleges. Such an educational net-work, the Open Education Net-work (OENET), would, I believe, be the ultimate solution to our ideal 'education for all'. It would not be out of place to mention here that a small pilot project of developing ten LSKs in a group of 60-70 earthquake-affected villages from Latur and Osmanabad districts has been undertaken by the Maharashtra

Open University in collaboration with local non-government organizations, to find a way of catalyzing the development process in the region.

The study centres or LSKs forming service terminals in the open education network should receive, at least during the initial phase, all the facility support from a district or block centre which is linked with major educational resource centres in the region or the country. The net-work should connect all Open Universities, regional centres of the Open Universities, colleges, general universities 'and other educational institutions and organizations. A well-spread out Open Education Nct-woric, rich in educational programmes and services would thus be able to offer educational opportunities to millions.

The effectiveness of the Open Education System will depend on the successful development and application of educational technology which can synthesise the best of subject experts, practitioners and experienced teachers into educational packages and offer them on an extensive scale through multi-media and self-instructional packages. This in fact is a gigantic task providing both a challenge as well as an opportunity to every teacher. The Indian educational system, often dictated by the end examination also needs the development of an evaluation technology that will free the teachers and students from the troublesome tasks and worries of university end examinations. Modern educational science and computer technology could be used to develop a system of 'on-demand examinations'. Such a system can then be useful for offering formative feedback and guidance to learners on a large scale.

The transformation from the existing stage to the open education system through OENET, which may take a decade or two, could be effectively started if the following measures are taken :

1. All the Open Universities and Correspondence Course Institutes contribute their well accreditated courses into a common pool of educational programmes to be made available to all students.

2. Every college and university initially introduces and afterwards integrates a non-formal open education component and links itself with the Open Education Network for offering educational resources and services to non-formal students.

3. Students are allowed to take courses from other universities and the credit of the courses successfully completed is counted towards their degree require- ments.

4. The structure of the degree/diploma programmes is made modular, based on credit points, and flexible enough to allow students to take courses of their choice from other universities.

5. The existing facilities of the NICNET are allowed to be used extensively by all the colleges and universities for free communication of their educational and administrative information.

6. Separate channels are allocated on television and radio for broadcasting educational programmes in all national and regional languages.

7. The University Grants Commission and the Distance Education Council undertake the programme of accreditation of courses and the establishment of Open Education Network (OENET) on a priority basis at the national and/or State Level

8. Resources are given liberally for developing need-based self-instructional courses for various target groups and the materials so developed are deposited in the common pool.

9. Funds are provided for the development of facilities of multi-media learning centres to those institutions which will encourage their students to use outside university materials in their studies.

With a proper promotional policy and adequate developmental resources, these steps will help in achieving the desired transformation.

The development of the Open Education System by ensuring cooperation of the formal and non-formal educational institutions will soon gather rich and wide ranging educational resources and the OENET will then offer access to millions. Besides using all the features of modem communication technologies, the Open Education Network will slowly deinstitutionalise the present rigid institutional frame and change slowly the role of students and teachers. The students will have autonomy in choosing their educational programme and teachers will be facilitators or counsellors in helping the students in achieving their objectives of learning. The colleges and universities, in most cases, may become resource and facility centres where educational services would be made available to all. When such a sphere of knowledge and learning facilities envelops the nation, we will be entering into the information society of the twenty-first century.

All the changes proposed are not beyond our reach- educationally, financially and technologically. What is needed is a clear vision and a commitment to change. If we do not change early, the developed countries which are using communication technologies extensively may sweep into the country offering their educational programmes. Further, there is no other alternative to open education for educating millions of learners simultaneously.

We are, in a sense, poised for the Copernican revolution in the field of education. This is going to be a very exciting as well as trying period for us. The challenge to work for developing an Open Education Network that will encompass all - formal and non-formal systems, is very real and very close to us. Friends, let us accept this, 'centre stage' role for taking our people and the nation into the twenty-first century.