5.3 The Idea Conference, Madras (13th Oct. 1995) – valedictory address

Abstract

The article discusses the history of non formal eduction in India which includes

"PARTICIPATING IN THE EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION"

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 I am grateful to the President of the Indian Distance Education Association (IDEA) Conference, Prof. Bakhshish Singh, the host university, in **particular** Prof. P.K. Ponnuswamy, Vice-Chancellor, University of Madras, and Dr. **M.** Shanmugam, Director, Correspondence Courses Institutes, University of **Madras** and the organisers of the conference for inviting me and giving the honour **of** delivering the Valedictory Address at the IDEA Conference. In fact the **General** Secretary of IDEA, Prof. Murali Manohar, has been inviting me to the IDEA Conferences, for the last three-four years. However, due to my intense **pre**occupation with the Maharashtra Open University, I could not avail **of** the opportunity given. Now in a different role, I could not resist the temptation of having this opportunity of talking to the select and very distinguished gathering of distance educators in the country. I am, therefore, grateful to the **organisers** for giving me this opportunity.

1.2 I would like to compliment the organisers for selecting persistently **the** themes of **IDEA** Conferences that are the major concerns of distance **educators** and policy makers in the country. The themes of earlier conferences, **i.e.** widening access to and quality in distance education, and the current **theme** related to **'Sharing Resources and** Experiences **Towards a more Academic System in India'** are vitally important to the development of the **distance** education system in India. In my valedictory address, I will, therefore, **he** touching upon these issues, which in fact, have become our main concerns **in** IGNOU. **As** we are developing our ideas and programmes and in turn our **vision** of IGNOU-2001, we are realising that we will be soon going through **a great** transformation process; the process I am tempted to call **'an educational revolution'.** I have therefore entitled my talk as 'Participating in the Educational Revolution', which at first sight might appear to be either populist or **pompous.**

2. THREE PHASES OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

2.1 We are all aware of the development of non-formal education in the university system since Independence. It all started with extra-mural education, continuing education, adult education etc, with an objective of taking the knowledge confined within the four walls of the educational institutions to the common people through various programmes. All these activities of non-formal nature, were later on consolidated into **'Extension Education',** which was given

place of pride by the University Grants Commission in the University functions by according it equal status with teaching and research; the three often are called the three dimensions of university education. The development and **use** of communication media in various walks of life is having its impact on the patterns and channels of education. **We** may broadly categorise the transformation of the non-formal education through three phases depending on the use of communication technologies.

2.2   The facility of postal communication gave rise to the correspondence course institutions which is the first major addition of non-formal education to the university education system. The **correspondence education** heralding the first phase of non-formal education relied exclusively on print medium, **used** mainly postal communication, and offered the class-room or face-to-face courses to off-campus or distant learning students. The expectation of the Education Commission that the correspondence courses should succeed in enrolling about l/3rd of total students after two decades did not materialise for various reasons, and could reach only upto about 5% by 1984-85.

2.3   The large scale use of radio and television brought in the second phase m non-formal educational system leading to **distance education.** The **Distance** Education system started using multi-media, i.e. audio, video and print **media as** distinct and separate components, with print dominating the instructional **materials** and the learning process. The domination of print materials is obvious for its portability and personalised use. The other media are yet to achieve, **that** personalised use in our country; and the only media that can come closer to such an application in our socio-economic situation, is the audio cassette, which, unfortunately, is not properly exploited by the distance educators. **At** present, **the** concern is how fast can we use audio-visual media and raise their role and importance in the instructional materials, and make them appropriate and **effective** in the process of self-learning, which is the dominant skill expected to be mastered by the learners in open and distance education. In fact UGC and IGNOU are jointly organizing a one-day seminar on 15th October, 1995 to consider **the** issues in transforming Correspondence Courses Institutes into Distance Education Institutes by identifying strategies and plan of action for such a transformation.

2.4   We are, however, facing currently a new change brought about by the communication technologies through the use of communication satellites and versatile new-generation computers. I am referring to the information communication networks that can transmit data, voice and images, and the development of multi-media, rather digital multi-media to distinguish the term from its conventional use in Distance Education. The modern computers and technologies are enabling us to develop digital multimedia in which text, voice, pictures, simulations etc. can be integrated and learning materials can be offered through computers as an interactive learning package. The new communication technologies and networking are slowly enabling us to develop what is often called, virtual class-rooms, virtual conferencing, virtual laboratories, virtual field-work etc. Though these ideas are at present at the initial stage and appear vague, they reflect the applications of artificial intelligence and may soon become a virtual reality in the field of education. Though not an expert in computers, but as a student of science, I can visualize a great change and transformation that is coming up in the field of education within the next few years. We are certainly marching towards the next change i.e. the third phase of non-formal education, i.e., **networked educational** system.

3. GLOBALISATION - CHALLENGE TO INDIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

3.1   Look at this little ad. in a newspaper. "I welcome all the Indian youngsters who will soon be apart of our family of the Open University of British Columbia". This is an invitation by the Director of the Columbia University published recently as an advertisement in partnership with APTECH, a private computer education company. The university is offering B.Tech. degree in information technology and assures of high quality education and bright future. Internationally renowned London School of Economics is offering its Programme in partnership with an institution in Bombay. Many universities in developed countries are trying to find partners for offering their programmes in many Asian and African universities. The National Technological University of USA is offering engineering and technology courses at master's level on their electronic information system through International Network (INTERNET). Students of this University are spread all over the world. This is just a beginning.

3.2   Broadcast is also being used for offering educational courses. **ZEE TV** has started an educational channel called **'ZED'** (Zee Educational) offering a computer education programme. There are plans by Doordarshan and Ministry of Human Resource Development to use TV channel for education through satellite. It should be noted that satellite is being used both for open transmission on TV as well as for network communication.

3.3   India has a legacy of and great fascination for an education from the great universities of the west, such as Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, etc. Many aspirants for higher and quality education went to and are still going to western universities for their higher studies. Now many universities from the developed countries are offering in India their degree programmes through satellite and internet. The attraction of foreign degrees which may be preferred by multinationals and also by our institutions in India, is posing a challenge to the Indian education system.

3.4   In general, the current transformation that is sweeping all walks of life, is described variously as transformation to post industrial society, information society, third wave society, twenty-first century society, scientific & technological society, etc. So far the societies were separated by national boundaries. Now globalisation has become the major direction of change. Automation and artificial intelligence will be used in all walks of life. According to Daniel Bell **"Knowledge and information are becoming the strategic resource and the transforming agents of the post-industrial society".** We are and will be experiencing explosive changes in our personal working and social life during this period.

3.5   We are all passing through epoch making changes. Education System will obviously be experiencing the impact of the technologies that is changing the total nature of society. It is, therefore, a golden opportunity to all of us. to participate in the **educational revolution** and constribute to developing that system of education which will help in shaping universal man and appropriate society in the third millenniam.

4. DIRECTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA

4.1 India is having at present one national and seven State Open Universities, out of which two are non-functional. Govt. of India has adopted a policy of establishing one state open university in each major state. With the enrollment of two lakh students in open universities and nearly 5 lakh in 46 Correspondence Course Institutions forming nearly 13-14% of the total enrolment, the Open and Distance Education system has already acquired a major size and role in the university education.

4.2 IGNOU was established to perform two *roles,* the first as an open university for the whole country and the second as an apex body to coordinate, promote and monitor standards in distance education. During the last *few* years IGNOU is changing its roles. Besides being an open university, it is acquiring a role of Resource Centre through its activities and facilities such as STRIDE (Staff Training and Research Institute in Distance Education) for training functionaries in D.E., Electronic Media Production Centre with its broadcasting facility on extended C-band, Computer Networking and by contributing all its programmes in the common pool for their use by other open universities.

4.3 **Consortium of Open Universities**

Distance education in lndia is getting organised under the Distance Education Council (DEC) of IGNOU. DEC is currently developing a consortium of all the open universities in India for:

(a) developing common pool of programmes well assessed for their quality.

(b) establishing norms for sharing common pool programmes by the members of the consortium and maintaining their quality in delivery to students.

(c) developing common credit system, so that students' mobility is easier and they may take programmes of their choice simultaneously from more than one university.

(d) maintenance of standards and quality assurance in open and distance education in India.

The consortium of open universities will be expanded to include 46 correspondence course institutions in its fold from the 9th plan period.

5. OPEN EDUCATION NETWORK (OPENET)

5.1 One of the ambitious programmes envisaged is the development of a network for open and distance education institutions.

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has established for IGNOU and other distance education institutions, a tele-conferencing system with one-way video andtwo-way audio, whose teaching-end conference room is located at IGNOU Campus in Delhi and the receiver-ends are located at nearly 100 places in India out of which 23 belong to IGNOU and its sister universities. At the receiver end students can see and listen to the experts and teachers on TV Screen and ask questions simultaneously through telephone or fax. This is a **virtual class room** now getting established in India. Common pool courses as in management, education etc., would be learnt by hundreds and thousands of students through virtual class-room spread all over the country. The present facility is a broadcast network and can be extensively used for training and developmental activities.

5.2   Physical network is also getting established by sharing the facilities and educational services of the open universities through their regional and study centres which number around 1,000. Computer network is also proposed to be established by linking all the open universities and their regional and study centres in a phased manner, so that students can be served academically and administratively with efficiency and promptness.

5.3 There are, however, many deficiencies in the present set-up of the Network, which we are trying to establish with our limited resources:

(a)   The network has to use existing telephone lines. By considering their present reliability and cost, a common student will not be able to pay the cost of the network use.

(b)   Talk back at the user ends will be located only at the district places or in big cities where our Regional and Study Centres are located. The geographically disadvantaged students living in rural or hilly areas will not be able to use this knowledge or education network.

(c)   We are using the extended C-band transponder which needs special dish antenna. At present they are installed at 100 places. Even if they are multiplied 10 times, the whole country will never be covered. **What is therefore needed is a dedicated educational channel available 24-hours and accessible on general TV channel to every viewer.**

(d)   Teaching-end facility is now located only at one place and needs uplink facility which costs around Rs.3.00 crore. If education is to be made accessible on mass scale, such uplinks and teaching-ends have to be established in every state in every major Indian language.

(e)   The total cost of establishing the network is quite high and cannot be borne by the educational institutions. Initial investment by the Government to create infrastructure is therefore necessary. Later on, commercial use of the network can be generated in such a way that it can be made operationally self- supporting.

5.4 By considering the global competition in which outside universities are likely to swarm the Indian educational scene, particularly for higher end courses in the areas of management, technology and communications, it is very essential, for the survival and development of the Indian educational system, to have national educational network that will allow flow of data, voice and images. Over the years, the Indian educational system has proved its quality and standards, easily seen from the contributions our graduates are making in developed countries. Now it is a competition of quality education on our soil. Every university has now to come up with high quality assurance in all its educational programmes. The modem communication technologies are enabling us to transmit a wide range of courses of high quality to reach students separated from the university campuses. The communication technology edge for better competitiveness and quality, therefore, needs to be acquired by the Indian education system. Open and distance education institutions are struggling to get it.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS:

I have broadly indicated the direction of development planned by IGNOU for developing OPENET in partnership with open and distance education institutions in India. Successful development and implementation of OPENET will require participation and contribution from all and may lead to a network of rich and wide-ranging educational resources, capable of fulfilling educational needs of millions. Let us all participate in this great transformation process by contributing our best for developing the open and distance education system for all.

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