

## In This Issue

ITEMS	PAGE
<b>Articles</b>	
Making Universities World Class: Why and How?	3
Influence of Academic Performance Indicators on the Quality of Education and Research	7
Challenges in Professional Development of Teachers	11
In Search of a Pedagogy for Ethnic People: A Case Study	15
<b>Convocation</b>	
Al-Falah University, Faridabad	19
<b>Campus News</b>	22
<b>Theses of the Month</b> (Humanities)	29
<b>Advertisements</b>	31

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# Making Universities World Class: Why and How?

B M Naik\*

## Why India Needs World Class Universities?

Universities in knowledge economy, world over, are achieving high significance. Nations are strong where universities are world class, not otherwise even if the nations are endowed with abundant natural resources. The strength of a nation is measured now not in terms of the size of army or arsenals but the number of world class universities. They are mandated to produce new knowledge, new technology, and new theories besides graduates. Vector direction of universities is turned to industrial development, and human well being.

World experience tells us that it is world class universities which propel the industrial development. India today is technology follower and not leader. India aspires to be a technology power in near future. India has started schemes like Make in India, Start ups in New Technology Based Companies, Research Parks, skill India, etc. It wants to give boost to hi tech, high income employment for young generation. Industrial development of India previously was propelled by foreign countries. Now it desires to have import substitution driven nationally. The schemes can be implemented more meaningfully only when India has world class universities.

Indian universities do not yet make a mark in world list. Government of India is quite serious to boost education to world standard, and has started also National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) from 2015. Small countries like Singapore, Canada, and Australia in spite of smaller population have world class universities where brilliant students from a big country like India every year go for higher education, by paying huge sums of money, by one estimate Indian students going abroad in sum total pay money enough to build 20 IITs. Many Indian universities have good infrastructure but they lack world class professors and academic culture which is necessary for a university to be world class. In the absence of world class universities in India, thousands of students are going abroad. And foreign universities are coming in. Brain drain is taking place on big scale. World class universities are needed to arrest brain drain.

India urgently needs to have world class universities, so as to achieve its dream to become a developed nation by the year 2020. Presence of world class universities in a nation now is considered to be a distinguishing feature, and differentiating factor between a developed and developing country. World class universities produce professional leaders, globally competent, for various professions, like engineering, industry, commerce and trade besides politics and administration to ably run country's affairs

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at local, national and international levels. It is believed that seeds of leadership are sown within the four walls of class rooms. Leader's matters most to speed up the process of development of a nation. Leaders produced by world class universities are found to be competent to make best possible use of physical and financial resources of the country and bring about meaningful and purposeful development for human welfare.

Mediocre universities produce mediocre leaders and world class universities produce globally competent leaders. World experience tells us that nations and regions are prosperous where universities are world class. Others even if they are endowed with ample natural resources like minerals, land, water etc are less prosperous. This is because; with the presence of good universities people do get latest knowledge, latest technology which is born from the womb of world class universities. It is the world class universities, who produce competent human capital, who intern produce financial capital and other resources. This is essential to remove poverty and increase the standard of living of vast masses. It is on account of this that world ranking of universities, world over, has assumed great significance.

India so far remained a low income economy, in spite good amount of natural resources. It is mainly because India is a lowly educated country, having low standard universities. India is economically far too behind the world, because its universities are behind. Now so as to build India a developed country, India with priority will have to build universities offering education of world class standard, good quality comparable to their counterparts in developed countries. Government should do the following to make universities world class.

### **Professors Matter Most**

There are many universities in India who have ample land, five star buildings, brilliant students, brilliant faculty, and good amount of money yet the universities do not stand high in the world list. These universities have all the resources at hand but not world ranking professors. The professors have necessary intellectual potential. But due to poor service conditions and world class growth opportunities they indulge in politics instead of academics. For example, professors do not have facility of sabbatical leave which is essential for a professor to excel. They do not have adequate research budget. Professors are provided far too less opportunity to go abroad, and work with

industry nationally and internationally. The universities lack scientific approach in their planning and governance, comparable to world best. How do you create good academic culture? India government ought to reengineer policies and practices, systems and procedures, visions and missions, and adopt new strategies for governing the universities. India ought to learn from the experience elsewhere in the world. Indian universities ought to harness the global winds of change. Our universities need to be research based, and not teaching oriented. Professor is a kingpin in making a university world class. His service conditions need to be redesigned in the light of what prevails in world best institutions. How do you enable a university to be world class? The enterprising culture, autonomy, and growth and innovation opportunities necessary for a professor to be world class need to be urgently provided. Research should be their main job; teaching has to be incidental, supporting like in world best universities elsewhere. Present day universities unfortunately are bureaucratic, working like a government office riddled with red tape. The Apex bodies like UGC and AICTE are unfortunately managed and maintained by babus, clerks instead of creative and innovative personnel.

### **Build University - Industry Synergy Urgently, Starting from Top at Ministry Levels**

University Industry Interaction in India is conspicuously absent. Ministry of Industry and Ministry of HRD do not have much interaction. They are supposed to be interdependent and not independent. There ought to be lot of interface between the two. But this interface is neglected by both. There is no synergy between the two. There is no shared vision and collective ambition for growth and prosperity at national and state levels. Industrial estates are planned and implemented by industry department with huge sums of money without any financial inputs in universities and colleges for research and innovation. As a result industries do not get solutions to their problems and have to be importing technology from abroad, at heavy cost. As a result they remain technology followers and do not become leaders, remain less competitive and in the course of time even become sick. For example, Delhi- Mumbai Industrial project is spending millions of Rupees on land, buildings, roads, water supply, and electricity but not spending a single Rupee on strengthening research and innovation in university and colleges in Aurangabad, Nasik, etc. Skill set demanded by industry is not



provided by university. What is provided is not useful to industry. There is a huge mismatch, which by interaction can be avoided. It is believed that even if the industry and universities have all the resources at hand but not the synergy between the two, India will lag behind the world. There is no feedback obtained from industries as to how the education and research conducted by university are received by industries. Consequently, mismatch results. On one hand there are many educated people with degree in hand but they are unemployable. On the other hand industries are not getting the type of people they are looking for. Their growth prospects are hindered. Universities earlier were reflection centres, taught knowledge coming from abroad. Now they are expected to give birth to new knowledge, new technology, and spin off hi-tech start ups in new technology based firms. They have to be idea generators. University and industry both without synergy will remain behind the world. Government should start Adjunct Professors scheme from industry to teach in university. Twenty per cent of the professors should be from this category. This is the world trend to give professional and practical inputs to students. Only class room teaching by full time professors is not enough. Adjunct Professors are badly needed. Can a university without adjunct professors ever become world class? If we want a change these things must be done. They do not cost money; on the other hand they save. Universities can become world class only in partnership with industry and not without.

### **Install Innovation Centre, Incubation Centre, Research Park in each University**

You do not see a university abroad without these centres on campus but in India you hardly see a university with such centres. As a result our brilliant students lack in creativity and imagination. They become servants, and termed in USA as technology coolies to low end jobs in multinationals and not drivers, architects or creators. Innovative centres are the only way to educate students in an innovative manner. Unless we have a swimming pool we cannot learn swimming. The students are learning known knowledge and known technology but innovation skills and research skills without these centres cannot be learned. This makes our brilliant students technology followers and not leaders. Indian universities need to produce professional leaders and not followers. India is not short of resources but is short of synergy between the industry and institutes. Developing a world class university is therefore not a business of only university

or government alone but essentially joint effort in partnership with industry. India needs these centres to make education and research compatible to employment and growth opportunities.

### **Create Innovation Forum in each University, Consisting of Innovators from Industry, University and Civil Society**

In knowledge economy of today the strength of a nation is measured not in terms of the size of army and arsenals. It is measured in terms of people's scientific and technological capability for which world class universities are necessary. Universities now are expected to produce not only graduates but give birth to new scientific inventions and new technologies. World class universities by virtue of knowledge organization have come to be known as providers of the economic security to a nation, and creating bright future for young generation. Without world class universities India cannot get globally competent professional leaders. Nothing is more important for Indian economy at this juncture of time than building synergy between university and industry for faster development. Interaction between the two is now not optional but compulsory. Universities have come to be known, world over, as the drivers of development.

Recognising the need and importance of world class universities in nation building our Prime Minister has announced government's determination to make a beginning with ten universities world class in public sector and ten in private sector. Also he declared they will be granted extra funds and granted full autonomy and that they would be unique, falling outside the purview of UGC and MHRD. India is aspiring to be a developed nation as early as possible. It has the necessary potential. So as to unfold the potential it requires giving higher priority in national and state budget to education. Some time back Noble Laureate, Dr Amartya Sen, was asked a question by the then Finance Minister, Dr Yeshwant Sinha what priority India should give in national budget to education. The noble laureate replied First priority. Then he asked what should be second priority in national budget, he again replied education. Third priority should be given again to education. India today is grossly a less educated country. Unless the education level goes up it is difficult for India to climb the ladder and become a developed country. University education today in India by world comparison is far too weak. This does not mean that by just providing more budgets to universities they will shine in world list. They need money and many other

important things. Government should do them at earliest.

### **Abandon Bureaucracy and Red Tape**

Government should make a difference between government working and university working. It ought to abandon bureaucratic working and red tape culture in university working. Intellectual component in university working is much higher than in government. A committee may be appointed to make comparative study of service conditions and growth opportunities being provided in world best universities, and redesign new service conditions to be provided to Indian academics. Professors ought to be extrovert and not remain introvert. They must remain in touch with their fraternity elsewhere in the world. Indian government has launched many schemes to modernise the universities by upgrading infrastructure. But it has not taken up any scheme to upgrade professors to world level. In fact professors matter more than infrastructure. Any deficiency in infrastructure can be made up by able professors, but deficiency in professors' costs heavily to quality of education.

### **Streamline the University Management**

Organization and management of universities should be innovative and creative. Time has changed, but Indian universities have not. They do not have capacity and ability to change with respect to time. They work in a routine old manner and not in innovative manner. Indian universities by and large open at 10 am and close at 5.30 pm like a government office. The systems of working are designed based on government systems. Whereas world class universities open at 8 am and work up to 11 pm late in the evening. Libraries remain opening 24/7, so also the laboratories. Professors work with trust and confidence. Professors in India are too dependent on head of the institution and his office clerks. They do not have financial power needed to buy necessary things. More importance is given to registrar and his administrative machinery in university act than to professors. Government should have to change these things forthwith.

Universities should have to dream big think great and show commitment to implement. They should have high ambition. Indian universities do not have high ambition to be world class, although they have capability. They are almost insulated from their counterparts elsewhere in the world. They have huge assets like land, buildings faculty and staff. The students

are brilliant. But these physical and intellectual assets are lying idle, not utilised fully. Full economic returns from these assets are not attempted. Because the universities lack enterprising culture. UGC and AICTE are run by bureaucrat and not by professors, or thinkers or reformers. This is a major weakness, which needs to be corrected urgently. National Knowledge Commission 2006-7 gave recommendations in this regard. But those recommendations are yet to see the light of the day.

Autonomy like in foreign universities should be given to Indian universities and colleges. Autonomy comparable to world best universities should be accorded forthwith. Autonomy does not require additional money, instead it saves. Government has granted autonomy to universities and many colleges on paper. But government has kept the strings in its own hands. The boards of governors are formulated, but they do not enjoy the necessary powers. Intervention by government in the governance is too much. The type of autonomy enjoyed by world class universities elsewhere in the world should be granted to Indian universities and colleges. Then only they will come up to expectations. Our institutions are too much oriented to memorization for examination and not creativity or learning. The students have no autonomy to choose the subjects of their liking for study. Cafeteria approach is absent. Professors have no autonomy to conduct the research, and teaching. They are too much controlled by authorities. If India gives autonomy to universities and colleges, then they will take care of all other things. On the other hand if we do not give autonomy then nothing will work, situation will perpetuate.

### **Conclusion**

- (i) Service conditions of professors should be reengineered and made comparable to world best universities.
- (ii) Innovation centres, Incubation centres, Research Parks should be installed forthwith in each university.
- (iii) Industry- Institute synergy should be built starting from top ministry level. Mismatch in education is a result of lack of synergy. Education is not matching with growth opportunities, in globalization.
- (iv) Unless we have world class universities India will continue to get mediocre graduates and mediocre leaders. India will remain behind the world, brain drain will continue.

*(contd. on pg. 14)*

- (vi) Apex bodies like UGC and AICTE need revamping.
- (vii) India government must harness the global winds of change.
- (viii) University education and research is of paramount importance for well being of people.
- (ix) Mediocre universities are far more costly than the cost involved in making universities world class.

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