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**TEACHING-LEARNING IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF  
INDIA IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AND  
BEYOND : SOME THOUGHTS**

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# **TEACHING-LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF INDIA IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AND BEYOND : SOME THOUGHTS**

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*It is the quality of higher education and ability to use technology which transforms a society into a knowledge economy. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is gaining recognition across the world as the century for Asia. India shall therefore have to be one of the leading knowledge economies of the world to truly become a country that our ancestors have dreamt of. For that, education would be the single largest driver. The need of the hour for our educational institutions therefore is to develop a sizable portion of our youth into productive human resource and global leaders. The universities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century India need to play a very creative and inspiring role in tapping the intellect of students and scholars and to guide them to actualise their potential towards making India a global knowledge leader.*

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is gaining recognition across the world as the century for Asia. It is a matter of only a few years that out of the four countries in the world having the largest economies, three shall be from Asia. India shall therefore have to be one of the leading knowledge economies of the world to truly be a country that our ancestors have dreamt of. For that, education would be the single largest driver. Education is essential for the development of our country. However, for the production of goods and services which are essential for increasing our national economy our youth would require to undergo higher education. At present, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of higher education of India stands at around 25 percent, whereas China's is close to 40 percent and Japan's around 64 percent. It is clear that India would require an upsurge in the entry of our youth in the temples of our higher education at a very rapid rate. At the same time, the quality of education and learning in these institutions have to be such that the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be squarely met by our youth and they should be able to find ways to overcome those. This requires an extremely involved education in which no area should be left untouched and where the light of learning can reach. This includes covering both the spatial or regional dimensions along with all the traditional and modern subjects and disciplines. For the teacher and pupil ratio to be optimal, we require a large number of good teachers that are capable of engaging the youth right from the time of their entry to the portals of higher education and lead them into arenas of new knowledge and experiences. The time spent in the colleges by the youth should be such that it would enable them to take our country to the desired level of well-being and development.

National prosperity is basically dependent on three crucial factors: higher education and technology, raw materials, and capital. Of all these factors, higher education and technology gain advantage over the other two in order of importance because it can help to negotiate deficiencies in natural resources and shortage of capital. It is the quality of higher education and ability to use technology which transforms a society into a knowledge economy.

The explosion in population, particularly in countries like India, has created a situation wherein there are a large number of human beings but only a small percentage of human resource. This can be corrected only through the process of higher education. All efforts for improving the educational standard and quality of higher education therefore should be given the highest priority. In these days of emerging knowledge society everyone should be not only concerned but also committed to provide high quality and relevant higher education to its younger generation on whose shoulder will rest the future of the country. Quality depends upon stakeholders like teachers, administrators, policy makers and students. All the stakeholders need to complement each other so that the country is in a position to instil good quality higher education in its universities.

We live in a time of accelerated globalisation, mounting information, growing hegemony of Science and Technology, and a clash of civilisations. Our times call for new ways of learning and thinking in educational institutions, business and professions. In this connection, Howard Gardener's seminal book on education, *Five Minds for the Future*<sup>1</sup> gives us a good direction. The word 'Minds' in this book is used to represent the instruments of human thought, logic and thus attitudes. Describing the cognitive abilities of the mind, the author noted 'five minds' that will command a premium in future. One needs to work hard to acquire these cognitive abilities in order to derive maximum benefits from the valuable knowledge that is being imparted in the educational institutions. The five minds described and discussed in the book are:

***The Disciplinary Mind:*** This covers competence with regards to major schools of thought and approaches which can develop through the disciplines of science, mathematics, history or religion.

Our world is at present going through the most severe environmental challenge. It is absolutely necessary therefore that the citizen must be extremely disciplined and be responsible towards preventing any further degradation of the nature.

***The Synthesising Mind:*** This implies the ability to assimilate ideas from different disciplines or spheres into an integrated system and put forth these synthesised thoughts with a new meaning.

With the increasing volume of information today, the capacity to synthesise assumes greater significance. This is clearly seen at the highest levels of scientific development where different disciplines of basic sciences converge in a manner that it no longer remains in any single domain.

***The Creative Mind:*** This calls for building capacities to uncover and create solutions to new problems, questions and phenomena.

The importance of both linear as well as lateral thinking is understood well through the creative mind. For finding correct and sustainable solutions, the leaders of tomorrow in any field will have to continuously foresee the effect of any action and plan the correct measures accordingly.

***The Respectful Mind:*** This segment demands a unique capability. It seeks a mature mind that has awareness and appreciation for differences in point of view among human beings.

A respectful mind is needed in all spheres of activities where management of large organisations or resources are undertaken. Maintaining harmony inside or outside the organisation will be essential to ensure sustainable benefits out of the venture.

***The Ethical Mind:*** It is indeed a built-in capacity for fulfilling one's responsibility as a worker and citizen simultaneously. This will essentially lead to working and succeeding with integrity.

This is absolutely essential for ensuring the long term success of any organisation which has substantial deployment of human power.

These five types of 'cerebral instrumentalities' are very important in a person's life because with these 'minds' a person is equipped not only to deal with what is expected, but also what cannot be anticipated. Further, a person will not be at the mercy of forces that they cannot understand.

In the light of the aforesaid, it appears necessary that the scholars as well as their guides and teachers need to nurture all the above mentioned minds. Honing these will be possible only if the youth are helped to build amongst themselves the following five essential capacities: enquiry, creativity, appreciation of technology and new thoughts, will to take up challenges, and assume leadership roles. If we develop and encourage these five capacities we will produce autonomous learners – self-directed, self-controlled, lifelong learners who will have the capacity to respect authority and at the same time be able to question the authority in a manner that is appropriate.

The teacher in this new role requires to nurture in the student the desire to discover their abilities. The corner stone in this process is to instil in them 'the power of enquiry' and the 'will and capacity to seek'. The teacher of today needs to be a friend and guide to the student; be able to communicate with them in a manner which enthuses the student to learn more and learn constantly. The teacher or *Guru* of Ancient India had been equated with God by the society of that time and *Gurukulas* were meant to be the institutions where the youth sought knowledge, skills and abilities. Today, more than ever, the teacher requires to be given that kind of position and respect in the society and be responsible for shaping the future of the Country. Therefore, it will be imperative to give the teacher much more respect and dignity than is presently given.

The universities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century India need to play a very creative and inspiring role in tapping the intellect and generating awareness among its students and scholars to help translate the potential for growth and development in the region and therefore the country. Education is an endless journey which has to be experienced through knowledge and enlightenment. The aim of education is not only to enhance students' knowledge but also to equip them for open-minded enquiries and reflections in many contexts. We have to enable our students to become proficient in the skills and acquire knowledge of their chosen fields so that they can develop their own creative imagination and abilities.

Young people have a keen mind, which is always looking for answers of myriad questions on nature and life. They are energetic, idealistic, and adventurous, which makes them open to positive influences. It should be the endeavour of our education system to develop and actualise this natural potential of the youth. The teachers therefore must be able to motivate and create enthusiasm in young minds for acquiring knowledge. Once these students are motivated, they will be able to acquire and use the knowledge that they have gained from experience, no matter where they live in the world. The need of the hour for our educational institutions therefore is to initiate significant efforts to motivate young minds to be curious, inquisitive, and search for new solutions.

India has the capacity to become the skill capital of the world. It will be necessary to develop a sizable portion of our youth into that kind of human resource. This is the era of globalisation and of rapid changes wherein new challenges are being posed and new opportunities are being discovered at great speed. The digital revolution has brought the whole world at our door steps. Whether to search for answers or to provide solutions, the digital world has connected us all with the click of a mouse. Reference libraries from all over the world are now within the reach of the research students and scholars. Teachers and guides therefore need to lead their students to find a wide range of reading material. Our educational institutions must take the benefit of this global connectivity.

In the light of above mentioned points, pedagogy in the sector of higher education, seems to place the teacher in dual role of information provider and also a guide, leading the scholars and students to find alternative thoughts and ideas. There should also be a greater opportunity for the students to express their thoughts on what they have learnt by writing papers; teachers need to encourage their students in this regard. In fact, some part of the assessment of the student should be done by the quality of the papers they have written.

Needless to say, through this method of teaching and learning the interaction between the teacher and the students would need to be comprehensive, objective and supportive, without being judgemental. In order to enable this, universities should provide a congenial environment for the teachers to carry out research in their domains of interest that is relevant for the overall benefit of our society. Teachers

are the managers of knowledge, which comes from further research. In this process, students can also learn immensely.

The number of educated unemployed continues to be sizeable and traditional employment avenues like the Government, Public Sector Undertakings and the organised sector are also not expanding and keeping pace with the increase in the population. The situation cannot correct itself on its own. Sincere, genuine and visionary efforts therefore have to be made in order to make the higher education relevant to the needs of the society of tomorrow. With the decline in the proportion of 'white collar jobs', it is required that the attitude for 'entrepreneurship' should be cultivated right from the first year of higher education. Universities and colleges have to evolve and develop methodology wherein the students are taught to take calculated risks for the sake of larger gains and for attaining the set goals. They must be helped in cultivating a disposition to do things in the correct way and not fall prey to corrupt practices or take short cuts in order to gain seemingly immediate advantage. The desired disposition and capacity building amongst students should be based on fundamental qualities like the spirit of enquiry, creativity, technology, commitment and moral character. This will ensure that students passing out of such universities and colleges can confidently meet the challenges that await them and also be able to carve out the correct path for themselves.

Students studying in Indian universities should not feel that they are there only to obtain degrees; rather, they must gain confidence in the fact that they can use their knowledge and abilities which they have obtained for meeting new challenges. This way, they shall be prepared for any eventuality to complete the tasks that they have undertaken. It is imperative to understand that learning is a continual process and at every stage of one's life and career, it is necessary to update oneself with the current scenarios in terms of processes or technology. Similarly, the experiences that students have gained in the colleges and universities with respect of sports and cultural activities shall enable them to take on leadership and team building roles that are necessary for the success as entrepreneurs.

Hence, it also becomes necessary for our higher education system to have enough encouragement for the students to take up sports, cultural and co-curricular activities which will also build team spirit and leadership qualities amongst them. Further, these days, excellence in the sports and cultural fields has huge income generating possibilities. In this regard, adequate sports infrastructure, scientific coaching and sports science backup is necessary to be provided in the universities and colleges. Indeed, there are many sports and the Performing Arts' sectors which have significant income generating possibilities for the youth. In fact, there are many such talented sports persons and artists who have made a good career out of their abilities in respective fields and are amongst the role models of the current youth.

India in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is poised to take up the leadership role of the world and it is necessary that our higher education system should prepare our youth to be the future global leaders.

## Reference

<sup>1</sup>Gardner, Howard (2007). *Five Minds for the Future*. Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA.

# The Biography of the Author

## Shekhar Dutt

Shri Shekhar Dutt is an Indian Administrative Officer (IAS) of 1969 batch. He served as Governor of Chhattisgarh State from January 2010 to July 2014. As an IAS officer, he served in a variety of ministries at prestigious positions including Health Secretary, Defense Secretary, Deputy National Security Advisor, Director General Sports Authority of India etc. He served in the Indian Army and received the Sena Medal (SM) for gallantry in the 1971 Indo-Pak war. He served as the Principal Secretary, School Education, Sports and Youth Affairs and Principal Secretary Tribal and Scheduled Caste Development and Welfare. As Governor, he was the Chancellor of State Universities of Chhattisgarh and Visitor of some Private Universities. He served on the Board of Governors of DeSales University, USA from 2008 to 2010 and is presently Member of the Governing Board of the University of Engineering and Management (UEM), Kolkata. He played the key role in organizing the training and coaching of the Indian Contingent for the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games as Director General of Sports Authority of India (SAI) 2001-2003 which enabled the Indian Contingent to win the highest ever medal tally of 69 medals in the Manchester Commonwealth Games 2002. He successfully organized the first Afro-Asian Games in Hyderabad in 2003.

He is a recipient of several honours and awards including the Paul Appleby Award for rendering outstanding services in the field of Public Administration; Life Time Achievement Award by the International Society of Ethnopharmacology; Honorary Fellowship of the Institution of Engineers (India) etc. He was conferred with Honoris Causa by Swansea University of the United Kingdom and Degree of Doctor of Science (D.Sc) Honoris Causa by the University of Engineering and Management, Kolkata. He has several Books to his credit including 'Reflections on Contemporary India' which has gathered immense popularity.

Presently, he is involved in the sectors of Education and Training, National Security and Defense, Renewable Energy as well as Sports and Culture.