

## Constitutional Goal of National Reconstruction and Development of Educational Objectives

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**N R Madhava Menon, Chancellor, National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), New Delhi delivered the Convocation Address at ICFAI University, Tripura on September 14, 2017. He said, "Higher education is about development of higher levels of character and higher levels of intellectual abilities. When the Constitution conceives it as part of citizenship and Universities take it as part of its mission, you get higher education serving the goal of national reconstruction through responsible citizenry, informed with character and involved in intellectual activities assimilating the values of civilization. That is why we say Universities should be open to all without discriminating on the basis of religion, race, caste or gender. The idea is to bring in diversity in the student body which reflects India's national character and promote the unity underlying it through the educational processes." Excerpts**

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Tripura is a relatively peaceful State in North-East India full of scenic beauty and rich in natural resources. The state has to catch up with the developmental aspirations of the people along with the rest of India. In this process, education generally and higher education in particular occupy a crucial role in the context of a knowledge society fast emerging in a global scale. The pace of development will be proportional to the quality of higher education made available to the large number of youthful population in the state.

The purpose of higher education in a large, liberal democracy like India is not only to enable the youth to find gainful employment but to make them responsible citizens capable of leading this country in the path of development. It is a task envisaged in the Constitution of India to be undertaken by every citizen and more particularly by those fortunate enough to get access to higher education. Let us remember in this context that in India even after 70 years of Independence, access to higher education is available only to 25 per cent of eligible youth, despite having nearly 800 Universities and 40,000 Colleges in the country. We are lucky that since 2010 every child is now able to receive free, compulsory elementary education upto the age of 14 years because of it having become a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution. But higher education is not a fundamental right and the market forces of demand and supply govern this sector, though Governments at the Centre and in the States are subsidizing higher education through opening Colleges and Universities in the Public Sector. Yet, only a fourth of the eligible population could get access to it. I, therefore, would like to record my appreciation to the management of ICFAI University for having set up its

campus in this remote part of the country and set an example for other public-spirited entrepreneurs to follow. This is truly a private initiative in public service.

Let me congratulate the students who are receiving their degrees and diplomas in this convocation and extend special congratulations to those who have won medals and distinctions for their outstanding academic performances.

Convocations are occasions to celebrate for teachers and students. At the same time it is an occasion to look to the future and plan how the performance could be improved on the pursuit of academic excellence and fulfilment of social responsibilities. It is in this context, I want to focus on how colleges and Universities can plan to perform their nation-building role on the basis of the Constitutional Dream where we, the People of India have set for ourselves when we began the journey as a Sovereign, Democratic, Socialist, Secular Republic seventy years ago. It is regrettable that higher education institutions and even the regulators of higher education have not cared to look at the Constitutional Goals with the attention they deserve in setting their academic agendas. An average teacher today is blissfully unaware of the fact that he or she is involved in nation-building activities of a fundamental character and, as such, the syllabus and pedagogy he or she employ have to be tailored to larger goals of nation-building than just facilitating students to pass examinations! It is a tragedy the consequence of which we are experiencing today where educational campuses are becoming battle fields among students, students unions are indulging in seditious activities undermining the unity and integrity of the nation, and the teacher politicians are abandoning their primary

responsibility to the students in order to pursue their own self-interest to the detriment of teaching and scholarship. Of course, I am not generalizing to paint a cynical scenario in higher education. Because of the honourable exceptions only, India's higher education system is still receiving public support and India continues to be a leader in certain areas of higher education. My regret is, it is nothing compared to the huge potential we have in terms of human resources to make the country an educational hub for the world.

### **Constitutional Goal and Higher Education Institutions**

Let me come to my topic of Constitutional Goals of Nation-building and Educational Objectives and illustrate my propositions in terms of curriculum planning, pedagogy and learning outcomes.

What have universities to do with Nation Building? What does the Constitution of India say in this regard apart from the National Policies on Education which the Government of India announces from time to time?

I would set out the function of universities in nation building inter alia, under the following five propositions. They are illustrative and not exhaustive.

- i. First and foremost, higher education is intended to shape good human beings who are role models to others. In Constitutional terms, higher education should help to prepare responsible citizens for a liberal, secular democracy where unity in diversity in the national character.
- ii. Secondly, higher education should inculcate the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform on all associated with it.
- iii. Thirdly, higher education should strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement. This is the quality dimension of University education intended to be world class in standards of instruction and research.
- iv. Fourthly, higher education should impart on every individual a culture to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life, and to have compassion for living creatures.
- v. Finally, higher education should enable its recipients to find useful employment to earn a

decent living and be of service to the community to which he or she belongs.

I assume these are nation building activities which are reflected in the Preamble and the Fundamental Duties Chapter of the Indian Constitution.

The task of the educator, the educational administrator and the education regulator is to treat them as part of educational objectives and convert them into courses of study at the Graduate and Post Graduate levels. It is then the function of teachers to structure the syllabus accordingly, assemble the study materials suitably and deliver the modules by appropriate teaching/learning activities. It is indeed a challenge in a vast and diverse country like ours steeped in poverty and inequality institutionalized after long periods of foreign domination and exploitation.

The vision statement of every higher education institution invariably reflects in various degrees the cultivation of humanism, character and scholarship on its pupil as part of its organization and intellectual activities. And higher education is about development of higher levels of character and higher levels of intellectual abilities. When the Constitution conceives it as part of citizenship and Universities take it as part of its mission, you get higher education serving the goal of national reconstruction through responsible citizenry, informed with character and involved in intellectual activities assimilating the values of civilization. That is why we say Universities should be open to all without discriminating on the basis of religion, race, caste or gender. The idea is to bring in diversity in the student body which reflects India's national character and promote the unity underlying it through the educational processes. This is again nation building based on unity and common brotherhood transcending religious, linguistic and regional diversities. This is a task universities are equipped to do better than any other public institution in society. It is thus a function of the admission policy, the curriculum content, the pedagogy and the mission of the institution itself. It is for the university or college to determine how far it should emphasize 'responsible citizenship' as part of its educational objectives irrespective of the subjects taught or the courses of study offered.

Secondly, as I pointed out, the Constitution expects the higher education institutions to inculcate on the learners scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform. For centuries together, feudal practices and foreign rule have kept this country

under-developed letting the people live in poverty, superstition and in a state of despair. When the rest of the world prospered through scientific, technological and industrial developments, higher education in India was directed just to produce the civil servants to protect the interests of the ruling power. India lost the spirit of inquiry and reform which, once upon a time during the days of Taxasila and Nalanda, the hallmark of Indian Education. When the country got its freedom, one of the priorities before the nation was to speedily make up lost time and catch up with developed countries on science and technology for improving the quality of life of the people. Education was the tool to make the whole generation renounce practices derogatory to development and assimilate the method of science for reform and progress.

Naturally, the challenge before the Universities was great and the resources limited. The political leadership had to seek foreign assistance to set up world class institutes like IITs to act as pace-setters for reform in the University system. The transition was slow and private investment became a necessity to support the national endeavour of reaching modern education to larger sections of people. While access increased and equity advanced, quality suffered with uncontrolled expansion. Higher education is wastage of resources without assurance of quality, as innovation and creativity which are drivers of development happen mainly through quality education. Each institution of higher learning is therefore expected to chart out its plan towards excellence and endeavour to do everything to achieve it, if it has to serve the constitutional goal of all round development.

The world is realizing slowly but steadily the importance of managing natural resources in a sustainable manner if life on earth is to be sustained for long. India inherited a culture of divinity being ascribed to rivers, forests, and wildlife with compassion for all living creatures which the Constitution ordained as a fundamental duty of all persons. The changes in life style and unlimited consumption of those in the so-called developed world have brought about a situation in which climate change and related events are putting the whole world in jeopardy. Educating people of the dangers involved and sensitizing them to live in harmony with nature is the function particularly of educational institutions. That is why few years ago, the Supreme Court asked the NCERT and the UGC to

compulsorily include the subject of environmental studies in their curricula at all levels of education. It is sad that we are still to imbibe environmental consciousness to the degree required for which the responsibility rests with educational institutions as much as Government.

The Universities and Colleges in the country have done precious little in this regard. A whole new generation is growing up on the shadow of western civilization of unlimited consumption and personal aggrandisement. The Constitution has certain Directive Principles which propounds a philosophy of compassion for all living creatures and safeguarding of environment. The duty is not only on the states and its institutions but also of the citizens and education providers. How much of these constitutional goals have got into curriculum development and system of instructions in our schools, colleges and universities will determine the extent to which they contribute to national reconstruction and sustainable development.

Finally, I must say that education generally and higher education in particular should enable its recipients to find useful employment for a decent living for themselves. We often hear reports of unemployable engineers being produced in large numbers by our sub-standard colleges. Many of them are now closed down. A similar fate awaits other professional colleges giving sub-standard education while collecting heavy fees from gullible students. Instead of nation building, these institutions are doing just the opposite and bringing bad name to higher education itself.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, nation-building is a work in progress at different levels of governance. In this what matters is leadership, competence and commitment. I hope ICFAI is a university with a difference which has a mission of public service and human development in tune with the Constitutional Dream. I assume that vision is shared by the graduates passing out today. I wish them well whatever career they take up in a world full of opportunities for enterprising and talented persons.

I thank the Vice Chancellor and the University bodies for having associated me with your Convocation Ceremony. Let ICFAI establish its campuses in every state in the north east and make this region a hub for quality education and research. □