

IIT Delhi : Education Conference

Indian Institutes of Technology have come to be acknowledged as educational institutions of excellence, even though they may not be on every list of world-class institutions of learning. The Delhi IIT has a special place in the pantheon of the great educational institutions. It is, therefore, an honor to be invited to the Delhi IIT for an educational seminar. The honor is even more, considering that I have only recently strayed into education, having spent the last forty years in the Indian Foreign Service.

The debate today is not on the merits and demerits of globalization or on whether the onset of globalization can be halted or delayed. Frenetic crowds going on the rampage at venues of global conferences are things of the past. Globalization has come to stay and the need of the hour is to maximize its opportunities and minimize its challenges. I believe, like the legendary Prof of Columbia University, Jagdish Bhagwati, that globalization is not only inevitable but also desirable for human development. To those who say globalization must have a human face, his reply is that globalization already has a human face.

No human activity has remained unaffected by globalization and education is no exception. Internationalization of education is considered a consequence of globalization. But we must remember that internationalization of education took place before globalization and that education has contributed to the advent of globalization. Education has not shown great respect for juridical boundaries and higher education has always been more internationally open than most sectors because of its immersion in knowledge.

Globalization has been defined in many ways, but it is essentially “the widening, deepening and speeding up of interconnectedness”. Fast communication is an essential feature of globalization, but internationalization of education took place when travel was still by sailboats and horses. Movement of people at that time depended on the wind in their sails and the strength of the hooves of the animals they used for transportation. The quest for knowledge brought scholars from across the Himalayas and across the seas to India and hordes of Indians travelled around the globe to assimilate western thoughts and ideas. Knowledge could never be confined to geographical boundaries.

If globalization has merely accentuated a process that was already in place, it cannot have too many adverse consequences for education. But challenges there will be and education has to adapt itself to the new situation as it unfolds. Globalization has underlined the need for reform like wider utilization of Information Technology, giving productivity dimension to education and emphasis on its research and development activities.

Since education is one commodity, which gets enriched by every transaction, the more the interactions and the broader the reach, the better it is for education. The blessing of internationalization of education is that the wheel does not have to be invented again and again. The Internet has torn down boundaries and self-taught Ekalavyas will not be required to give the ultimate gurudakshina. Campuses have become irrelevant to a great extent except as meeting places of intellectuals and thinkers.

The challenge of higher education, then, is to make full use of the opportunities that globalization has provided. First and foremost, the marvels of technology must be fully and profitably deployed. In India, Internet connectivity for university students is still inadequate. But the massive increase in cell phones, which are becoming more and more versatile, may be the answer to India's connectivity crisis. Once full

connectivity is accomplished, the students can be liberated from the classrooms and allowed to find and create knowledge. The Universities will simply have to devise a means by which it can be established that the knowledge attained is genuine and accurate and that it is relevant to the needs of the countries concerned. Different students in the same class may diversify themselves and enrich different branches of knowledge.

One impact of globalization on education is the urgency to develop a skilled work force at all levels to meet the demands of increasing business environment. Instead of its traditional role of providing education as a welfare measure, the state is required to facilitate privatization and deregulation in education, particularly as the quality of education provided by the state institutions has been rather poor. This is by no means undesirable, as privatization of education has helped to increase quantity as well as quality. Profiteering is a negative factor, but its evil is often offset by the timely and efficient utilization of human talent to develop competitiveness worldwide. Indians seeking employment and competing successfully is no recent phenomenon. Globalization has merely hastened the pace of migration and created better placements worldwide.

The likelihood of entry of foreign universities into India is an inevitable consequence of globalization. Top class foreign universities are anticipated to add prestige to India's higher education. The expectation is that foreign universities will bring much needed capacity and new ideas on higher education management, curriculum, teaching methods and research, together with investment. Though fear has been expressed that only commercial institutions will come to India and that Oxford and Cambridge will shy away, my guess is that top class universities will come to India, not to make profit, but to profit from the vast intellectual resources of the country. The foreign universities bill has adequate safeguards against throwing open our higher education to fortune seekers and unscrupulous business interests.

The advent of Public Private Partnership in education is also an offshoot of globalization. It is an innovative idea that can tap private resources for expanding the education sector. The Narayana Murthy Committee set up by the Planning Commission envisaged as much as 50 % of the outlay for education to come from the private sector. Of course, the fear is that PPP will be used to compromise access, equity and quality. But a carefully controlled and coordinated infusion of private resources will benefit higher education. To try and keep private resources out of the campuses is to deny ourselves an opportunity to expand and strengthen higher education. The national commitment to provide good quality education will not be compromised if there is adequate legislation and just devolution of powers between the centre and the states.

The anxiety about the impact of globalization on education arises out of its association with increasing social inequality within and between countries as well as instability and conflict. The dwindling importance of the state has also been a matter of concern. Commoditizing of education and undue influence of private individuals and business houses are opposed by leftist ideologues. One of them argues that the entire education system must be informed by a certain perspective aimed at the creation of “organic intellectuals “of the people who defend their freedom and their interest against the globalized order headed by imperialism.

The need of the hour is not to fight the onset of globalization, but to turn the challenges into opportunities. The best revenge against the forces that cannot be stopped is turning them to our advantage. Education is one area where it can be done effectively. Some of the measures suggested by experts to accomplish this are:

- ⇒ Liberalize and deregulate the education system,
- ⇒ De-license higher education, confer institutional autonomy and decentralize syllabus design

- ⇒ Change the role of Governments into facilitation and supervision through adequate regulatory measures
- ⇒ Upgrade teacher training, infrastructure and syllabus

These are by no means exhaustive. Many more suggestions must emanate from conclaves like this so that we do not curse globalization, but turn it into our advantage. We must have the courage and confidence that a nation of India's stature, strength and size cannot be swept away by the forces of globalization. Like Mahatma Gandhi said, "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."

Thank you



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