

The Rural Universities of West Bengal: Prospects and Problems

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Abstract

The concept of 'Rural University' was mainly recommended in University Education Commission(1947-48) with special emphasis on Rural Indian tradition maintaining Rural profession and business. In course of time the concept has been moderated and implemented in slow progress. In West Bengal a few Rural Universities were established containing many rural colleges though not followed the recommendations thoroughly. After many decades of Independence, West Bengal government started feeling the necessity of setting up new rural Universities due to increasing pressure of enrollment and other issues. In the advent of globalized system of education new University systems like open universities, distance education spreading their influences and throwing challenges in front of those traditional universities.

This paper not only tries to show those new challenges in front of the Rural Universities to maintain the traditional rural cultural values but also add some points of possibilities to enhance their excellence.

KEYWORDS: Rural Universities, globalized system of education, traditional values.

INTRODUCTION:

“THE FUTURE OF INDIA LIES IN ITS VILLAGES”—M.K.GANDHI

Universities are considered to be the highest institution of a country for education and obviously the backbone of the nation. If elementary education helps to create the foundation of development of a nation then universities provide intelligence, efficiency, planning and management capacity and creative imagination to generate and maintain development. So university education is very important to a developing country like India. Hence it was given prime importance in the very first education commission after independence (1947-48). But strangely enough recommendations like 'rural universities' has been much neglected and even after seventy years of independence university education is not available to all over the country, especially in rural areas of India. It is not that there is no scope of higher education in rural India but the education is not up to the mark both in quality and quantity. The concept of rural university was raised to develop rural economy, to nurture the simplicity of rural culture and values, to develop the standard of living and obviously to have a universal access of knowledge.

In the age of global village the concept of “Rural University” may raise various debates but we should not forget the history and present status of the higher education in rural Bengal. We must have to take in our account that the compulsory elementary education has been started in recent past and its impact is started falling in higher education. Universities no longer restrict their arena in storing and disseminating mere knowledge. The issues like skill development, employability, regeneration of traditional values and universal access of higher education are the recent challenges in front of the Universities.

It is the high time to reconsider the matter of rural universities which was initiated in the first university education commission.

As West Bengal has a strong higher education network whose date back to the beginning of education system of India and played a significant role to promote a national life of earlier history and in Indian National Movement, the gradual development and present situation of rural universities of West Bengal would be an interesting study.

The present paper attempts to find out the present situation and problems of those universities situated and based on rural background of West Bengal and on the basis of findings tries to add some points of possibilities to enhance their excellence.

OBJECTIVES:

- i. To find out the background of rural universities.
- ii. To determine the status of University Education in rural areas.
- iii. To show the problems of University Education of rural areas.
- iv. To find out best possible remedies to cope out those problems.

METHODOLOGY:

In this paper the research is based on descriptive method using secondary data. The data is taken from different research reports, journals, websites, research papers, E-journals, and Report of the higher education department of West Bengal.

HISTORY OF RURAL UNIVERSITY:

In India the concept of rural university was recommended in University Education Commission (1947-48) taking the fragrance of Gandhi ji's Basic Education and following the model of Denmark's people's college. The concept was not given much importance in later few years. But in 1956 National Council of Rural Higher Education was established to look the matter of rural education. The council had marked 15 important institutions all over India working for this purpose and in west Bengal it was Rabindranath's Sriniketan. This prestigious institution had already been working in many fields like removing illiteracy, developing village agriculture and rural industries, professional development of the villagers and so on. In addition the council recommends those 15 institutions to open new rural development courses for regular diploma and degrees. In 1961 a new post-graduate diploma course had been started for the development of rural economy and co-operative system. Meanwhile three important institutions had also been started in semi rural locality taking few rural colleges. They are Burdwan University (1960), Kalyani University (1960) and North Bengal University (1962). Much later in 1981, Vidyasagar University was established for the rural people of southern part of West Bengal who were mostly depended on Calcutta Based Universities. The only prestigious technical university (IIT) was established in khargapur in 1951.

In 1986 The National Policy of Education once again raised the issue of establishing Rural Universities and gave emphasis to extend them in large scale. And in West Bengal a number of rural based universities have been established from 2008 onwards.

STATUS OF RURAL UNIVERSITY EDUCATION:

Organization like NAAC accepts that 'the state of West Bengal, have played a leading role in the country in spreading education at all levels, beginning with mass education and culminating in higher, professional and specialized education.'

They particularly categorize the Universities by their main thrust. For example the five affiliating universities, namely, University of Calcutta, University of Burdwan, University of Kalyani, University of North Bengal and the Vidya Sagar University is teaching and research in humanities, arts, sciences and commerce streams.

Though provision for affiliation is provided in the act, the Jadavpur University and the Rabindra Bharati University, due to their limited territorial and academic jurisdictions have remained more or less unitary in character. While the Jadavpur University concentrated more on science and technology, the Rabindra Bharati University remained dedicated to the teaching of dance, drama, music and visual arts. The state also has one Central University, the Visva Bharati University, and a National University of Juridical Sciences. The other universities in the state, namely, Bidhan Chandra Krishi Vishwavidyalaya, University of Animal and Fishery Sciences and the Uttar Banga Krishi Vishwavidyalaya have taken up the task of teaching and research in the field of agricultural sciences, fisheries and animal husbandry.

There are 32 Universities in West Bengal listed under UGC among them 18 universities are in Kolkata and mainly city based and eight(8) Universities are newly built. Private Universities are also new addition in the arena higher education of West Bengal. From 2011 onwards 8 Private Universities have been affiliated of which 5 are again kolkata based.

It is not that these Kolkata based Universities are solely for the City dwellers but they are mainly centered round Kolkata. As the prime purpose of the part is to show the status of Rural based Universities and it is clear from the above information that number of universities in rural West Bengal was very poor but gradually started increasing. Now entering into the structure of those rural based Universities it is seen that there are number colleges under these Universities.

UNIVERSITY	GEN. D CLG	EDU. CLG	LAW	ART	MANG MENT	HOTL MNG	MUSIC	ENG TECH	OTHE	
BURDWAN	93	31	06	01	-	-	01	-	13	145
VIDYASAGAR	44	21	02	01	-	-	-	-	06	74
KALYANI	43	21	03	-	-	-	-	-	03	70
NORTH BENGAL	50	10	01	-	-	-	-	-	-	61
WEST BENG. STATE	50	11	01	-	-	-	-	-	01	63
GOUR BANGA	24	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	37
SIDHO KANHO BIRSHA	19	4	4	-	-	-	-	-	01	28
WEST BENGAL UNI. OF TECHNO					40	04	-	84	59	187
8	323	151	17	02	40	04	01	84	83	565

Source: Annual report of Higher Education department of West Bengal (2012-13).

It is also clear from the above data that most of the rural colleges are general degree colleges and education colleges. From another source of West Bengal Higher education it comes out that in general degree more than 48 percent students studied arts. Most of the universities do not have management colleges whereas the number commerce students are decreasing day by day.

According to UGC, there are 899 affiliated colleges in West Bengal and only 565 of them are in rural areas. It is also interesting that total college per lakh population is 8 whereas it is only 3 in rural areas. But average enrolment per college in West Bengal is 1439 and in rural areas it is 1531. Many colleges in rural setting have not yet got NAAC accreditation. Those colleges who have got accreditation are to some extent satisfactory. Recently UGC declared that "...as many as 250 colleges in West Bengal are yet to get the NAAC accreditation. If the NAAC deadline was not extended, these colleges might not receive financial assistance from the UGC."

PROBLEMS OF RURAL UNIVERSITIES:

CURRICULUM PROBLEM:

It is a matter of great regret that the recommendations of Radhakrishnan commission regarding curriculum of Rural Universities had not been given much importance. In West Bengal only a few Universities have been giving their utmost effort to retain the cultural values as well as the development of rural Bengal. Unfortunately Visva-Bharati has no scope to spread it through other colleges.

The commission clearly stated that 'as advanced and specialized subjects no field of human concern should be foreign to the Rural Universities.' In reality traditional subjects have been taught year after another.

They also proposed to have combine courses from several fields or disciplines to meet the individual needs of rural people. A fine example might be an inspiration. A subject like Public water control project may combine law, engineering, and public administration. There is no shame to say that this types of innovative curriculum in higher education is still farfetched.

The subject like agriculture which is the prime base of rural economy and life had got much focus in the commission as subject of Rural University. If we look into the history of development of agricultural institution in West Bengal, it would be clear to us how a subject like agriculture has been neglected and education of rural Bengal become a mere imitation of western project to prepare clerk.

Only two Universities had started long after the recommendation of the commission. In 1974 Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya was started and in 2001 Uttar Banga Krishi Vishwavidyalaya at Coach Behar. Once again Rabindranath thought of agriculture much before and sent his son foreign to learn it. In Viswa-Bharati Agriculture has been a prime subject. Ramkrishna mission Vivekananda University has also started agriculture recently. Only in 4 other colleges' agriculture has been started.

LANGUAGE PROBLEM:

One of the major problems of the students of rural areas is the medium in which they study. Of late in most of colleges under the rural Universities, teaching and learning is taking place mostly in regional languages. At primary level most of students in rural areas study in regional languages. They find it very difficult to study in English. It is

often found that many talented students could not attend success due to their language problem.

There is much evidence where most the rural students were failed to impress the interviewers at the time of selection for a job. Unless we equip the rural students in English, We are certainly killing the future of rural boys and girls.

As the world is moving fast and therefore, communication skills have become most important these days, whether we like it or not English has become the decider of fate of future generations in job market.

PRIVATIZATION AND OPEN UNIVERSITIES:

Rural Universities mainly affiliate colleges and take their exams. It is found that students got poor marks in this system. Whereas in private universities or in open education system or in distance mode the scope of getting marks is higher. In future there will be a tendency in getting admission these systems. It is obviously a big challenge to the universities. A recent study showed that number students are being cheated by few universities. They fell into trap due to get good percentage of marks, less expanse to complete the courses and some time to avoid pressure of studies. Attempts have been taken by UGC by black-listing those dishonest universities.

In case of private medical and engineering colleges huge amount have been taken in many ways. In rural Universities medical education is still not available and a few government medical colleges in rural Bengal is like due drops in desert.

CULTURAL VALUES:

In the age of globalization rapid erosion of values and degradation of culture is a common phenomenon. Student unrest, violence, excessive emphasis on politics are no separate incidents but a result of this. At the bottom of the proposal of Rural University one of the most important mottos was to nurture rural cultural values and a proper dissemination in future. The University education is now posing this potential threat to retain their cultural values and maintain globalized standard equally. Students mostly depend on private tuition and marks oriented and self-centered.

QUALITY:

The most important problem of Universities having rural setting in West Bengal is in maintaining quality of education. Quantitative expansion is not adequate either. There is a significant difference between rural and urban quality of education. "The Indian higher education is characterized by a large rural-urban and gender divide." The gross enrolment ratio in rural area is estimated 7% while urban area has a GER about 23%.

NASSCOM Report has said that not more than 15% graduates of general education and 25-30% of technical education are fit for employment.

The quality and methodology of teaching is not up to date in rural setting. There are very limited research facility and poor infrastructure in rural universities. There are different causes behind it most common causes are socio-economic condition of the students of rural areas, further political interference and corruption dilute the role and impact of these intuitions in ensuring the desired quality standards. Specially after RTE 2009 huge number of first generation learners come in contact with universities. To maintain increasing pressure of enrolment these universities are giving responsibility to different colleges for post graduation without having proper infrastructure. There is also high dropout rate in rural areas.

FEW SUGGESTIONS:

- a) First of all rural universities must give emphasis on curriculums. Curriculum will be interesting, innovative, and up to date and obviously much more practical based and job oriented. Bengal can no longer continue the model of general education as it has been persisting in for the large bulk of the student. Rather, it requires a major investment to make human resource productive by coupling the older general disciplines of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and commerce to their applications in the new economy and having adequate field based experience to enhance knowledge with skills and develop appropriate attitudes.

Responding to these emerging needs, the UGC stated: "The University has a crucial role to play in promoting social change. It must make an impact on the community if it is to retain its legitimacy and gain public support".

- b) The emphasis on English language and communication skills should be doubled. English must be taught from pre-primary and primary levels. In rural areas teaching English language in secondary level should also be instructional and communicational.
- c) Rural universities must accept the challenge of privatization by introducing innovative and interesting ways of teaching learning process using ICT. They must accept the change but also keep their existence and relevance.
- d) Rural universities are the only hope to keep the rural cultural values alive and popular. Universities like Visva-Bharati might be a good example and inspiration of keeping Bengal's rural cultural values alive. Thanks to UGC for taking initiative to detect fake universities and preventing malpractices of few universities.
- e) To maintain quality of the rural universities Government must have to improve educational infrastructure, especially access to computer and internet and scientific laboratories and also traditional infrastructure such as libraries, class rooms from primary and highest level of education.

The recruitment, retention, motivation and long term development of well trained faculty are also important. All plans for expansion must have a major thrust on enhancing quality of education.

- f) Finally to achieve these efforts, a transparent and informal dialogue needs to take place, bringing together educators, industry, government, prospective students and other Stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it may be said, the dream of rural university is still far away from reality.

It is a long way from a transformational change which is envisaged by various committees. However, recommendations if implemented can pave a way towards at least a beginning of new dawn. Education is the key which alone can prove a solution to multiple issues. It should be available in all corners of the country if we really want a self dependent society able to solve unforeseen troubles. It is a need of hour to expand and update university education for the rural people to turn the dreams in to reality.

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