

A Constructive Role of Teacher Association in the Implementation of New Academic and Administrative Reforms in Higher Education in Western Himalayan Hill State Himachal Pradesh of India

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Abstract

Experimentation in higher education has been ever going process. A new initiative in 11th five year plan under speedy and substantive academic and administrative reforms in higher education were suggested by the UGC. These suggestion have been slowly and steadily been implemented in the 12th five year plan throughout the country. Himachal Pradesh a hill state in the western Himalayan part of India is a leading state to implement these reforms. How for these academic and administrative reforms have been improving the quality and quantity of higher education in the present scenario, is a million dollar question? The ground reality in Himachal Pradesh seems to be far from a dreamy situation. The author has tried to make a critical review of these reforms i.e., admission process, semester system, choice based credit system, curriculum development, and examination in the present paper along with the constructive role played by Himachal Govt. College Teachers' Association in the betterment of these reforms is a welcome step as teacher organization has often been criticized for their myopic view concentric around financial benefits alone.

KEYWORDS: Academic, administrative reforms, UGC, CBCS, Teacher Associations etc.

Tertiary level of education in our country is one of the largest in the world. It has grown bound and leaps rapidly since independence and has produced enormous versatile trained man power in almost all the disciplines and level of excellence in all corners of the world. It may be attributed to highest intellectual level of our people in general. The genesis of higher education of our country has a long history in the pre-independence. However the major flaw of our higher education is that it was designed to suit foreign interests. in pre-independence India. After 1947 in a free democratic society the higher educational goals in terms of objectives, approach and value systems has undergone drastic changes to suit our requirements. There has been series of committees and commissions set up by different Govt. of the time after independence but the '*Achilles heel*' of Indian higher education is the implementation of these reforms. The national policy on higher education way back in 1986 stressed on the need of having a coordinating agency for the national bodies like UGC, AICTE, ICAR, MCI, NCTE etc. Higher education in India is still in a state of flux (Swamy, 2003). In fact we have moved into 21st century caring a heavy burden of pending reforms and obsolete practices on our shoulders.

Since the last few years there has been lot of talks about new academic and

administrative reforms such as semester system, choice based credit system (CBCS), Curriculum development, admission process and examination at tertiary level. In fact it all started with the University Grants Commission (UGC) new initiative under 11th five year plan for speedy and substantive academic and administrative reforms in higher education for promoting and bringing quality and excellence. The process of broadening access, making higher education inclusive and promoting excellence initiated during the 11th plan must be consolidated and expanded further during 12th plan (Kaur, 2014).

With regard to semester system in higher education the very opening line of the document on these reforms says that the format of academic session spread over 10 or 12 month suffers from several limitations that is, why most of the institute of higher learning in '*Western Europe and North America*' follows semester based education. It's very strange that even after 68 years of independence we still have been continuing with the cut, copy and paste of western ideas. Knowing well that whatever suits to them may not necessarily suit us as physiographic and geographical conditions are different here. Moreover, each culture is characterized by a particular set of shared beliefs, style of leadership, set of shared values that act as a bond or glue for members and strategic emphasis in pursuit of effectiveness (Gupta, 2014).

Using very high sounding word in praise of semester system the document further goes on saying that semester system goes far beyond being a time-format, enlarges curricular space, encourages and support accelerated learning opportunity for everyone along with accommodating diverse choices. In fact the ground reality is just the opposite of this, as every one of us is feeling suffocated as learning time and space has further been squeezed. In fact everything is happening so quickly that there is hardly any space for accelerated learning not to talk about our colleagues teaching in hard area such as *Pangi, Lahul-spiti* and *Kinnaur* where for sizably good number of days are non-working due to inhospitable conditions.

The other point which has been quoted in support of semester system is that most of the professional institutes in our country are already following semester system. Oh! For God shake do not compare professional institutes with our general institutes of higher learning as professional institute has limited number of students to teach, more over there is proper teacher taught ratio, students by and large academic wise superior to these general degree course students a hard fact to digest for everyone of us. See the ground situation in colleges of our state, caring less about the teacher taught ratio in almost every college is a routine affair. The Govt. has hardly any will and determination to rationalize the post according to the need and requirements of country side colleges. The manipulators are enjoying the creams and others just cursing the system without being heard and of any result. In fact it seems that introduction of semester system at this point of time at under graduate level for general degree courses in Himachal Pradesh is case of premature birth.

Similarly '*Choice Bases Credit System*' (CBCS) have also several features like enhanced learning opportunities as per students scholastic need and aspiration, inter institutional transfer of students, flexibility of completing a program in different institution, improvement in terms of quality and excellence, advantages for working

students, standardization and comparability of program across the country are some of the key features listed in support of new western system. Aided by modern communication and informational technology the CBCS is expected to have the high probability to be operationalized effectively and efficiently along with elevating the higher education institutions and students of our country to new heights. In Choice Based Credit System a student has the choice of choosing a major subject, two minor subjects, a few compulsory subjects along with some hobby subjects. Thanks to the intervention of Himachal Pradesh Govt. College Teachers' Association that certain useful amendments have been made in the 'Choice Based Credit System' (CBCS) in Himachal Pradesh for the benefits of students community such as for graduate degree eligibility the credits have been reduced from 120 to 106 for pass course, participation in NSS, NCC, sports and cultural activities has also been allowed to be considered as hobby subject, in the audit pass environmental study paper continuous comprehensive evaluation has been deleted and the percentage of continuous comprehensive assessment and end semester examination has been reduced to 30:70 instead of 50:50.

There has been no provision for teachers for hobby courses in our colleges. Moreover, there is circular that debar Principal of concerned colleges from making appointments of any sort against non sanctioned posts. The hard reality is that there has not been a proper homework for sanctioning posts to different colleges across the state on logical basis. For same number of students in same colleges for sister subjects you have different yardsticks e.g. In the subject of, Botany we have two sanctioned posts and in Zoology only one post for almost same number of students at Govt. Degree College Nagrota Bagwan and worst part is that in some colleges there is not even single teacher in some subjects. The will and determination on the part of everyone concerned with the well being of higher education in very important and political interference and manipulation should be done away with immediately.

The hall mark of a vibrant educational institution and discipline is their curricular content which should evolve continuously. Curricular development should be an ongoing academic activity which must involve every faculty members. Not only it endow academic program with quality but also adds to their contemporariness and relevance. The institutions of higher learning in our state do undertake revision of syllabi of a program offered by them but priority and periodicity remains somewhat uncertain. Nonetheless substantive thought and attention has to be given to curriculum development in all disciplines and academic programs. Up gradation and revisions for post graduates to limited extent should be done every year whereas substantially every three years for all other courses, we are not seeing that happening. Up gradation and revision of curriculum is to be done keeping in mind the current knowledge state, national and international development and relevance of new ideas, concepts and knowledge to concerned discipline. This important academic function requires curriculum transaction and synergy of all faculty members in the departments and should be based on the principles of 'Teach and Update curriculum' in letter and spirit.

In fact it has been more than three years since this new system has been working now in Himachal Pradesh but hardly there has been talk about the curriculum revision. Also, it seems that in the beginning that syllabus has been framed in so hurry that simply

fission of earlier old annual papers into two for semester system has been done. Now the time has come to give a fresh look to this very important issue if we want to grow as an education hub internationally. Also, in the present setup there is dire need to re-orient and re-design value education and help the young generation to overcome the malady of value crisis (Thakur et al., 2014).

Student's admission to educational institutions is the first and foremost step of educational process that should ensure access, inclusion, equity and quality. The process of admission has to be objective based and transparent. The admission process in our colleges and universities of the state is 100% fare and transparent following proper roster as per our state and national policy of reservation for vulnerable section of society. But the extension of admission dates time and again, has been playing havoc with the whole academic calendar and a serious note should be taken off immediately.

The other point which has been listed in favor of this new system is that higher education has been mostly examinations oriented and examination at the end of academic year insulates students from quest for knowledge, excitement of discovery and joy for learning often leading to insensitive cramming of superficial information. In countries like Europe and North America rely mostly of internal evaluation by their teachers. Significantly, a lot of demerits have surfaced in the concept of continuous internal evaluation in our state than simply being a blessing. The students are seen continuously under stress as they are throughout the academic year busy with different kinds of tests, moreover this experiment of continuous and comprehensive evaluation at the school level seems to have failed and authorities are seriously thinking of reviewing it. Also, now due to the intervention of Himachal Pradesh Govt. College Teachers' Association instead of earlier two mid-term tests of 15 marks each now one test of 15 marks will be conducted when two-third of the syllabus will be completed. Considering an humanitarian angle another suggestion by the association have been accepted by the authorities for such student who fulfills all the requirements for appearing in a semester examination are somehow unable to appear in the final examination or complete it on account of his/her own serious illness, accident or on account of death of his/her near relative or dates of state or national level examination falls on the semester exam may be allowed to appear in the next semester exam with due permission of Principal/Director on production of valid documents.

Thus, under the circumstances it is necessary that we need to implement the reforms in higher education system and also bring forth new factors of production, namely knowledge, skill and technology which has the ability to unleash the productive frontiers of economy in the most efficient and dynamic way (Modi, 2014). In the nutshell we can say to improve the quality of higher education in our state, it is imperative on the part of every player concerned with it to contribute positively. For this undertaking, promoting and coordinating research in all branches of education is must. Both pre-service and in-service training program at advance level must be organized on regular basis along with extension program. It is should also be mediatory to undertake and organize studies, investigations and surveys relating to educational matters or appraisements of educational program (Bhatia et al., 1992). Also dissemination of the best practices along with welcoming good ideas from all corners of the world is very

important. The teacher organization has been often criticized for not showing their seriousness beyond their financial benefits has also to rethink and remold themselves for playing their greater new constructive role in national building.

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