

Research Papers

An Interview

With Prof. V. Shivkumar



Pro. V.Shivkumar

Industry varsity linkage will help

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- Interviewed by Shubashree Desikan, The Hindu News Paper

What are the job prospects for a student enrolling in the university system?

Job prospects are [a matter of] great concern as is value-based education. The latter is important because our students have to know how to weed out corruption and make India safe from violence and terrorism.

As for the former, I don't believe in knowledge for the sake of knowledge and that job prospects are different. You need to make your knowledge available to benefit society in some form.

Unfortunately, many universities in India do not bother about higher education relating to job opportunities. [They see] some of the courses such as history or philosophy as non-profitable courses. They say that with this course one cannot get a job. Now if that is the case, **why don't you change the syllabus and make it interdisciplinary, so that students get jobs?**

For M.A. History students, introduce a course on tourism, or a course on culture, and see whether these students get jobs in cultural groups or tourist industry. An M.A. History student can even study agricultural development and branch off to something else. Why not? **We need an interdisciplinary, holistic approach.**

Certainly, universities must tie up with the industry. When I was Vice-Chancellor, I asked companies from the IT sector to frame a course so that they could absorb our students. So, I think industry-university linkage is a must.

Can you talk about the area studies program and other trends we should establish?

Not many colleges and universities seem to be aware of the area studies program, which is of great relevance now, except for UGC. If you have a good centre for Sri Lankan studies, people will be informed about what is really happening, what is the history of this whole episode and what is the policy formulation they want. Also, in other areas such as Pakistan, Latin America, Africa, and the United States — you must have area studies programs on these in Indian universities... The UGC also gives a 100 per cent grant for area studies...

Area studies are potentially job-oriented. There is only one Centre for Latin American studies tucked away in Goa. Why can't there be more? They can have one in Pondicherry which has a Latin and French connection... and other places.

In fact, Latin America is looking towards India. They think China is dumping their goods on them. China has one thousand million dollar investment in Latin America, compared to India which has not crossed even an investment of two hundred million dollars. TCS has gone to Latin America and so has Infosys, and the Ambanis and Dr. Reddy's have gone to Latin America. So, why haven't other industries, and even the media, gone there? The reason is a lack of knowledge about the region and the language.

Every student should learn foreign languages in this era of globalization. They should be sent abroad for higher education particularly to learn about other countries.

In this, the government sponsors them in China, and as far as South Korea is concerned, the business houses such as automobiles, sponsor the students. They can go abroad, study, find the market and when they come back they are absorbed by the company. Later they are posted in places overseas, where they know the language and have made friends and the business goes fine! Universities in India lack the initiative to relate their courses to job opportunities. They must see what the market demands. The university must be open to new ideas, flexible syllabus and curricula.

You have said that promoters of higher education must realize that it is not a lucrative business to save tax. Is this a reasonable demand?

I am an exponent of *Vidhya Daan*. Both during the colonial and post-colonial periods, there were private initiatives in higher education in India. These were all also motivated by philanthropy. The investors earned a profit in the business and invested it in education for the poor, the needy, in free India. Today, the government of India provides tax concessions. **Why can't big business houses start educational institutions on a philanthropic mode?**

Is there any process by which the quality of universities and colleges may be brought up to the level of the best institutions? For example, the upcoming IITs are being mentored by the existing ones. **Will such a system work for colleges and universities?**

It's a very interesting and complex question. There are very good universities in India – that comes with a rider because no university that we know of in India comes within the best 200 universities in the world. There are some departments in some universities that come within the top 200. The international Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is anywhere between 22 to 24 per cent. Whereas, the GER of China has touched 20 per cent compared to India having 12.5 per cent when both the countries started on the trajectory of development at the same time and at the same level in the 1960s.

In quantity we may be rich, but in terms of GER in higher education we are not rich.

(Regarding your question) ...When and if a central university wants to mentor a State university, the state university being autonomous, does not want to accept this. On the other hand, if a central university wants to mentor a neighboring college or university which is within its jurisdiction, it is possible. There can be absolutely no objection to that. Perhaps the central universities had not thought about it.

Another important thing is uniform syllabus.

I have been propagating both officially and in private that there must be uniform syllabus. You can have any number of electives which is relevant to the region. The interdisciplinary approach is crucial. When I was Vice-Chancellor, I brought in an interdisciplinary approach. In fact, the Yashpal Committee report stresses interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary pursuits. These are all equally important and need to be focused upon.

References:

[1]. Industry varsity linkage will help by Prof. V. Shivkumar published in "The Hindu" newspaper published on published on February 18, 2013 retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/features/education/careers/industry-varsity-linkage-will-help/article4427963.ece>

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