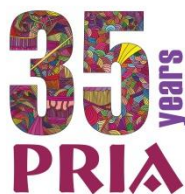




# Education for Public Good

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## **Participatory Research in Asia**

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## Education for Pubic Good

I am honoured to join you all on this auspicious occasion.

Convocation is a day of recognition, transition and hope. On this day, graduating students are recognised for their scholarship and learning. They are certified now as 'knowledgeable'. You all are now certified professionals.

Convocation also marks an important transition to real world, from the somewhat 'sheltered' life of a student in a first class university campus like this one. This university is a unique post-secondary educational institution, distinctive in its mission and design. It values talent in the rural hinterland of this country; it recognises that such talented youth need an educational opportunity to excel in life. This campus has world class educational infrastructure, and learning environment to become better than the best.

The life in the real world outside this campus brings hope and challenges. Hope is essential for each one of us, more so for the young. You enter this real world hoping to have a good life. In so doing, you will face challenges that are inherent in our times.

### Challenges Ahead

We live in a world of great progress and advancement; per capita incomes have risen sharply, and educational and health indicators for people around the world have improved substantially over the past fifty years. Yet, we live in a world where one fifth of its people live in poverty, and a third of world's girls and women remain illiterate. *It is an unequal world<sup>i</sup>.*

Inequality has been increasing along with wealth. Eight richest individuals in the world own wealth more than bottom 50% of the world's population. This inequality has also been a big challenge for India. Recent Human Development Report (2017) places India at 131 rank, which has remained somewhat stagnant over the past fifteen years. In an era of rapid economic growth and enhanced investment in social development, this is indeed surprising. The underlying reason for this is skewed and unequal access for tribal and dalit communities; ST, SC and minority households (which constitute nearly 40% of society) continue to remain excluded. Eastern & northern regions of India remain backward and poor while southern and western regions have moved forward. *Inequality is not only undesirable, it is unsustainable.*

We are also witnessing a *disruptive era of social and technological changes*. Globalisation of economies and technologies has brought significant changes in life, work and play. Internet and mobile technologies have significantly 'disrupted' our daily life. Now, artificial intelligence and robotics is about to 'invade' our homes and lives.

Several social changes have become equally disruptive:

- Rapid migration from rural to urban areas
- Disruption in joint family system, individual ahead
- New social norms of communication
- Consumption for now, not for tomorrow

In the process, social tolerance of diversity and plurality is rapidly decreasing. We are becoming distrustful of 'different others'. We are returning to our narrow parochial identities of caste, religion, language, region, ethnicity, etc. Despite access to higher education and excelling in scholarship, societal attitudes towards girls and women have not changed significantly. Gender division of labour continues to make a working woman professional still take full responsibility for home-maker functions. Safety and security of girls and women at home, in neighbourhoods and institutions continues to be a matter of great concern.

We also live in *youthful times* today. Median age of Indian population is less than 25 years; 650 million Indians were born after 1991. In several northern states (like UP & Bihar), median age is nearly 21 years. It implies that India is enjoying demographic dividend over the next twenty years. Youth in India are its growing constituency. Yet, youthful India poses some challenges for us all. If not adequately educated and skilled, this youth bulge may in fact turn into a demographic nightmare. Large numbers of poorly skilled, recently migrated youth face uncertain and poorly paid livelihood; and live in scantily furnished dwellings with inadequate water, toilet and security provisions.

New graduates and professionals like you all are entering this new real world, full of hope and opportunities, fears and challenges.

In addition to degrees and certificates, and knowledge of your disciplines and professions, you will need some additional capacities to navigate this real world.

### **University as Public Institution**

In this land of Nalanda & Takshila, universities have a long tradition and history. In recent years, discourse on higher education and universities has got mired into semantics of private vs public good, largely driven by economist theorisation. Funding of higher education and roles of universities in ensuring faster enrolment rates have occupied the discourse of higher education in India. In the process, the mission of higher education, and higher education institutions (HEIs), has been somewhat lost sight of<sup>ii</sup>.

One of the three main missions of a HEI is *teaching*. Teaching of undergraduate and graduate students is a core task of all colleges and universities. Teaching requires students, teachers, curriculum and pedagogy. *The purpose of teaching is to enable learning of students*. A focus on learning in today's context may necessitate that teacher does more than deliver contents. In the age of smart phones (and smarter students), real teacher for reading content is 'Guru Google'. Download & enjoy! So, what does teacher do now? The *pedagogy of learning* has to be different from pedagogy of teaching. Teacher as facilitator of learning may suggest that contents have to be somewhat related to real world outside. *Engaged teaching* may entail interactions of students with the curriculum and the world around the university. Engaged teaching may necessitate learning of new competencies by teachers.

*Research* is the second mission of higher education and HEIs. Producing new knowledge has been an important historical contribution of universities. Of late, new knowledge is being produced by a whole new set of institutions and actors, in addition to universities---research agencies, think tanks, private business, civil society, media, etc. Questions about quality and *relevance of research to societies* are now being asked around the world. European Union has a new emphasis on 'Responsible Research & Innovations' (RRI); its programme on 'science and

society' is now being focused on 'science with & for society'<sup>iii</sup>. Social relevance of research is being enquired by policy makers and funding agencies world-wide. Indian government's recent emphasis on social responsibility of research demands clarity of choice of research topics and methodologies. Framing and conducting research in partnership with local societal actors—business, local government, civil society—requires a new set of competencies in community-based participatory research<sup>iv</sup>. Undertaking research in partnership with societal actors necessitates new ways of organising pursuit of new knowledge, along with recognition of indigenous and practitioner knowledge. *Engaged scholarship* demands ethical and normative stances of researchers and universities in a complex local and global context.

The third mission of HEIs is *service*. Service has historically implied outreach and extension. Universities 'adopt' villages and slums, to 'bestow' their superior knowledge and expertise on them such that those villages and slums develop. This is a myth. Without mutually respectful and beneficial relationships between university and community, no engagement is meaningful and sustainable. Service has to generate '*service learning*' for students and professors of the university. Service has to support empowerment of communities and its excluded sections. Service impacts universities as much as it impacts communities.

Taken together, HEIs can approach their three missions in an *engaged* stance—engaged with society, locally and globally<sup>v</sup>. Engaged stance makes university as a public institution, beyond its boundary walls. Such a stance requires that universities become a space for dialogue, debates and conversations—beyond walls. These walls are not merely of stones, but disciplinary, epistemological and pedagogical. Societal challenges demand solutions which can only be 'discovered' in a trans-disciplinary approach. Pedagogy as science of teaching and learning has to move outside the classroom and the lab. Epistemology as the science of knowing has to contend with feelings and actions as legitimate, as cognition, modes of enquiry.

Overcoming such inwardly imposed boundaries may support HEIs as publicly respected and sought after institutions for promoting public good.

### **Preparation as Global Citizen**

Professionally certified students enter the real world with abundance of disciplinary knowledge. Are they prepared to become active global citizens?

In addition to acquiring expertise from the domain of knowledge of one's profession, it is important that students *are prepared to listen* to other forms and domains of knowledge. Learning to respect knowledge diversity enables young graduates to be humble and open to learning. Language diversity, though being drowned by internet these days, contains theories and concepts that can enrich the perspectives of youth.

*Ethics and values* are socially learnt; young people learn them in everyday life. Moral lectures do not make people ethical. Personal actions and choices demonstrate ethics in everyday life. Have young students examined their ethical choices? Has the university enabled them to reflect on their attitudes and orientations towards different others? Has higher education contributed to learning to be an ethical person, not just learning to do some job?

As citizens of an increasing globalised world, have these students learnt to practice their citizenship? *Active citizenship* is learnt in everyday life, not through a classroom course. Active citizens seek solutions to challenges of our times. Citizenship entails asking questions, to pose puzzles to phenomena around us. Have students learnt to question themselves, their teachers, parents, colleagues? Questioning reflects curiosity, without fear.

As certified professionals, each of our graduating students will enter their professions with competence to succeed. Yet, professionalism is more than your domain of knowledge to be practiced at work place. Are we acting as professionals in everyday life? *Professionalism in everyday life* implies timeliness, punctuality, respect for systems, rules and norms, support to others and joy in making a contribution—at work, at home, at play.

In addition to learning to do and learning to be, I do hope all of us are *learning to learn*. As social and technological changes disrupt our lives, capacity to learn will help in navigation with hope.

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<sup>i</sup> OXFAM (2017). An Economy for the 99% (OXFAM Briefing paper). Retrieved on March 26, 2017 from: [https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file\\_attachments/bp-economy-for-99-percent-160117-en.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp-economy-for-99-percent-160117-en.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> GUNi (Ed.). (2014). *Knowledge, Engagement and Higher Education: Contributing to Social Change* (Higher Education in the World 5). Hampshire (UK)/New York (USA): Palgrave Macmillan

<sup>iii</sup> Sutcliffe, H. (2011). A report on Responsible Research and Innovation. Retrieved on March 26, 2017 from: [https://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document\\_library/pdf\\_06/rri-report-hilary-sutcliffe\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/rri-report-hilary-sutcliffe_en.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Tandon, R., Hall, B., Lepore, W. & Singh, W. (2016) *Knowledge And Engagement: Building Capacity for the Next Generation of Community Based Researchers*

<sup>v</sup> GUNi (Ed.). (2017) *Towards a Socially Responsible University: Balancing the Global with the Local* (Higher Education World Report 6).Girona