

**The Diamond Jubilee 18<sup>th</sup> Mary Clubwala Jadhav Endowment  
Lecture:**

**The Role of Higher Education in Youth Development**

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**Introduction**

The world today comprises over 3.5 billion people under 30 years of age, of which 89.7% live in developing economies. India and China alone claim the largest share of the youth population at 704 million and 497 million respectively. This proportion of Youth in the world's population is often referred to as “the youth bulge”. I wish to quote the statement of the Secretary General of United Nations Organisation, Mr. Ban Ki Moon, in the 2011 report of United Nations Organisation – “Young people (including young women) are more than our future. They are also our present both in numbers and how they drive political and social change” This statement acknowledges that young people are considered as valuable resources, essential human resources for nation building.

The huge youth population is as much a boon as it could be a bane. It is a boon if we could harness their strength, but it would be a bane if the present state of unemployment and unemployability persists in the society. Therefore investing in the youth of the developing countries assumes tremendous significance. From being necessary, it has now become inevitable. Empowering the youth, who will be the future citizens of this world, is an issue that demands immediate attention. The context thus deems it most appropriate to address the issue of Youth Development and the role of higher Education to fulfill the same.

**Opportunities Galore: Roses and thorns**

Demographic patterns reveal the power of youth who far easily outnumber adult population. Opportunities, hitherto unknown to the

developing nations are now accessible to tap their potential. It is therefore necessary to enlighten them on these opportunities. Decision of the policy makers, highlighting the accessibility of higher education, skill development, work etc., will determine the level of attraction the youth show towards embracing them. A rise in the demand for post-basis education and therefore the skill for employability is a clear indicator and reflects the influential power of these decisions.

The road to success is however not as rosy as one would wish. The thorns in these roses are indeed sharp. That the youngsters in the age group of 18 to 24 struggles immensely for a smooth transition from graduation to work is a testimony to this. Consequently the unemployment rates soar to nearly 2 to 3 times greater than those of adults in the age group of 25 and above. Thus revisiting the measure adopted so far seems indispensable. The need to examine the role played by developing skills in higher education and the workplace and their impact on the transition from college to work must be taken up on a war footing.

### **Currents of Change: Skill Development**

Prior to the industrial revolutions, skill development happened predominantly in the workplace - earned as they learned. However, such training, now part of the secondary and tertiary education, through technical and vocational education programmes have redefined skill development. In this scenario, we have churned our graduates who are theoretically sound but cannot translate theory to practice. This in a nutshell is the core of the issue.

A cell for systemic change is indispensable if we are to transform these knowledgeable but practically deficient graduates into efficient performers. Policy makers of the Higher Education must work towards refurbishing the system to include practical application even as they learn. To quote Confucius, "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." This perhaps is more relevant now than ever before.

**Knowledge development: From the known to the unknown**

It is not wrong to construe that the times spent in schools and colleges do include memorable and pleasurable moments. Any quantum of knowledge that is thrust from outside, evaporate in double quick time. In fact it is the joy of learning that makes one recall and reuse learning. This joyous learning to KNOW, i.e., knowledge and learning to DO, i.e., skill is a necessary in every field of education. Therefore Higher Education must aim at providing both aspects of learning – theory and practice, stimulating the learners to re-search knowledge and skill to improvise upon them.

**From a society of learners to a learned society**

Redefining teaching and learning has now become the watchwords of education. The percentile ratio of knowledge to be provided by the teacher as against those to be imbibed by the learner through self study and practice becomes crucial. Such an approach would create a society of learners who would make peer learning a habit rather than an exception. To achieve this, it is necessary to make the learning content learner-centered; learners can find it easier to learn from each other. Another crucial aspect is to make learning affordable. This alone ensures that knowledge and skill penetrate into interior regions, particularly the villages. Further, the approach should inculcate in the learner, an urge for lifelong learning through the concept of learning to learn. The approach ought to initiate collaboration, interaction, discussion, healthy debates among the learners. As needs of the learners vary with each other, the learning content must cater to a diverse population of students. In return, learners learn to adjust and adopt. Subsequently a society of the learned emerges producing intelligent and adoptive people capable of DOING what they KNOW. This change will help to produce and disseminate knowledge, promote strategic partnerships, facilitating communication among them and help in the emergence of a learned society.

However, a change in the systemic approach should ideally address certain specific issues that arise from various areas concerned. The role of Higher Education in the long-term contribution to knowledge

systems, to the academic professions in general and to creating a highly-skilled workforce merits serious analysis. Some of the pointers towards developing knowledge skills include addressing needs of the industry and economy which fundamentally aim at developing social, academic and professional skills.

### **Tripartite Skill Development**

Higher Education must emphasize on three types of skills among the learners-social skills, Academic skills and Professional Skills. It is a combination of all the three that enables smooth transit from the campus to corporate.

**Social Skills** are necessary to interact effectively with all stake-holders and enhance inter personal relationship. Polite and courteous manners can be more rewarding and effective than mere knowledge skills, a quality sadly lacking these days. Interpersonal skills also demand rational analysis of problems. Problem solving skills refer to the ability to identify multiple solutions for a problem and choose the most appropriate to suit the people and context concerned. Developing this skill can be exacting as most soft skill classes end up as language learning contexts.

**Academic Skills** aim at relating knowledge to real life situations. This can be accomplished by applying learning to real time contexts through activities. This can be best implemented by establishing a strong Industry- business partnership, encouraging research that have immediate applications, emphasize training / teaching by experts in the field. Collaborative methods of teaching / learning where industrialists and other business sectors teach and students do projects for them can go a long way in developing academic and applications skill among the learners.

**Professional skills** are vital to enable the learners to identify their strength and weaknesses. Communications skills, supervision & management skills, planning and execution skills, innovation / creative skills, organizing and delegating skills form the crux of Professional skills. Opportunities for developing these are available within the

existing curriculum through Extension services like the NSS, NCC, Rotaract Club. Therefore much rests with the authorities to implement them rigorously. Recognizing the purpose of their learning is indispensable to set their goals. An ability to visualize them in future paves the way to reach 'there'.

Professional skills bridge personal ambitions and societal needs. Higher Education, this way, can transform a simple learner into a socially aware and conscious learner who will reciprocate to society what they received from it. It could be in terms of money, time, knowledge, social service, skills or any other form of service.

Such service mindedness moulds healthy attitude among the learners. Developing the right attitude towards self and environment is crucial for any real time success. Higher Education can emphasize the need to resolve behavioral problems and issue between self and society.

### **Conclusion**

Identifying one's interests and passions by following one's heart needs nurturing. A liking, a desire to do will give them the fillip and a finer edge to excel in whatever they do. Fostering the skills for which one has an aptitude aids them to outshine in their subject of study and the job/work/profession they take up. Higher Education must promote the option to pursue their passion or interest.

It is therefore a matter of utmost importance that Higher Education focuses not just on providing higher knowledge to the learners, but enough opportunities to apply them in real life situations, which alone is the real test of their learning. Such an education would certainly provide a unique window of opportunity to “the youth bulge” to globally engage themselves as positive resources in creating a more sustainable just and equitable world.