

New Task for the New Vice Chancellors

G Palanithurai*

Once in India and particularly in Tamil Nadu Vice Chancellors were visionaries, and academic giants. Leaders of higher learning institutions were men of upright character, honest, dedicated, committed and builders of modern India. They were above politics, and they belonged to a cadre of men and women known for sacrifice and dedication. Governments conducted search for such persons and persuaded them to take up such assignments. When eminent persons were appointed as Vice Chancellors, the above positions have been made as respectable positions. They never preferred to meet governance leaders and in fact governance leaders used to meet them. In such a way Vice Chancellor positions had been kept in high esteem and honour. They were looked at with respect and they were free from political interference. They were above the state bureaucracy. They also conducted themselves in a highly dignified way. But now these positions have been transformed as office of profit and as a result, higher learning institutions are in bad shape. Anti corruption wing of the government conducted raids in many of the universities and located needed evidence to file cases the Vice Chancellors as they involved in corrupt practices. This kind of news items in the news papers have given an image to the public that higher learning institutions are deeply afflicted with mal and corrupt administration. To change the existing condition and image we need a different set of academic leaders. We need a cadre of honest, committed, scholarly and visionary leaders to our higher learning institutions to transform the existing institutions as Institutions of Excellence to compete with National and International institutions. Higher Education System in India is undergoing a change in terms of its output in quantity and quality due to globalization. Its implications have to be seen in perspective. It has got both positive and negative aspects.

Background

Higher Education System in India has two faces. One is excellence and the other one is poor. One set of public premier institutions are maintaining their standards and the other set of public institutions like

universities barring a few have reached the lowest ebb in terms of their standards. In the same way private institutions also have two sets. One is excellent group of institutions operating in a business mode with quality. The other set of institutions have poor infrastructure and poor quality of teachers and as a result they exploit the students. The public premier institutions and some of the private institutions have produced talented manpower needed to the market. Hope raising was done only by these institutions. But in practice, the aspiring individuals who are being drawn towards higher education portal are exploited by the poor quality institutions both private and public. The premier institutions contributing to knowledge economy have made the people to develop aspiration to make quick and instant money. There has been heavy rush for medical and technical education. Students have been made crazy after medicine and engineering as they found money spinning opportunities in those courses. As a result mushroom growth of engineering and medical colleges. Most of the Engineering and Medical colleges are owned by the politicians. It is a new business venture found out by our politicians. A few of them are with neo merchant class. Ultimately the objective of the creation of new institutions is to make profit. Many of them have been created by flouting the established norms, rules and regulations. It is a pity that a student who has secured a just pass with a minimum of passing is admitted in Medical Colleges and Engineering Colleges. Students who are not eligible to get admission in some of the courses in arts and science departments in highly rated Arts and Science colleges are eligible to get admission in Medical and Engineering Colleges managed by the private trusts. In such a way basic minimum qualification for admission to medical and technical education has been lowered. Despite the lowering of basic minimum qualification, seats are available and unfilled in thousands. But in reality the produced man power from the poorly maintained public and private institutions could not be absorbed in the market as the quality of the manpower produced from the institutions is poor.

While looking at the scenario, one will find sudden expansion of the higher learning institutions and on the other sudden increase of unemployment. But the government has fixed the target for enrolment increase.

*Dean, Students Welfare, Gandhigram Rural Institute – Deemed University, Gandhigram - 624 302, Tamil Nadu

As a result higher learning institutions have increased more social problems. This is the general trend all over the country. To participate in knowledge economy and to maintain economic growth skilled manpower is needed to the tune of 500 million in 2020. But the existing institutions are producing graduates, certificate holders, diploma holders but not individuals with quality skill required to the market. There is yet another issue namely the students coming to basic science and social science disciplines are the rejected lot from the premier institutions and those who are unable to pay the fees in technical institutions. Absolutely for social science, students who have secured lowest marks are coming and joining. It is almost a scholarship academic programmes. Here also, only the premier academic institutions get students of high quality. As a result in the process of sudden expansion of higher education with an objective of exploiting the opportunity of entering into knowledge economy and to increase the enrolment rate have caused great damage to the whole system. In the process of expansion of higher education, exploitation has been increased alarmingly. Private players have been allowed discretely without proper screening to enter in to higher education as service providers. The service provided by them is substandard and in turn they instead of helping the society, they create problems to the society by producing unemployable graduates. In the given context, making the institutions to deliver the quality goods as per the expectations of the market and society is really a difficult job. Yet it has to be performed.

Leadership Crisis

Many factors responsible for the poor performance of the higher learning institutions and of which one is obviously the leadership. Leadership plays a critical and crucial role in shaping institutions and their delivery of services. In Tamilnadu it was obvious from the observation and statements made by some of the key intellectuals who involved themselves in cleansing the higher education system that Vice Chancellors had been appointed on political, caste and of late monetary considerations. Once a leading educationist made an observation that highest bidder can get Vice Chancellor position in the universities of TamilNadu. The Vice Chancellors are also involved in all kinds of corrupt practices which are even not known to the politicians. Because of the corrupt practices the position of the Vice Chancellors has been made very weak. Dignity of the post has been lowered. Academics who assumed leadership in the recent past have turned the higher

learning institutions as business centres. At present every stakeholder made prosperity by degrading the higher learning institutions. The above statements have been observed by several educationalists and academic administrators. All the above observations have been captured in the newspapers also. Teachers with high integrity and probity in the higher learning institutions could not do anything on this issue as they are individuals and not organized and moreover they did not want to get trouble from the power centre. Other teachers started discussing the issues in public places and end it there itself. Beyond that no one wanted to take up the issue as they are not affected and instead they are also free without having any accountability. Vice Chancellors in recent times never ensure accountability in the higher learning institutions as they are weak in morality and honesty. As a result the higher learning institutions are in lower order interms of production of quality man power. Pay and Perks of the teacher are very high in the university system. Teachers have never imagined that they would get such huge sum as salary. Yet the Vice Chancellors could not get best out of them for the benefit of the students as they do not know the way how to extract work from them. The universities are in the lowest ebb in terms of their functioning and delivery of services. But the context requires high capability on the part of the teachers and the efficiency on the part of the functionaries of the higher learning institutions to compete with the global players in terms of man power production.

Searching for New Leadership

The XII Plan approach paper unequivocally argues for quality, inclusion, expansion and competitiveness on the part of higher learning institutions. For sudden expansion the government of Indian opens the system for private players to participate and reduce the burden of the government. While allowing the private players every one kept the American experience. The models evolved by the central government opens the door for private players. All higher learning institutions are put in a competitive mode. The available staff and more particularly the quality staff are inadequate for the expected expansion. So, the continuous upgradation of the quality of the teachers is the need of the hour. The existing higher learning institutions are not in good shape and functioning mode. Against this background one has to look at the process of recruitment of the Vice Chancellor. So the universities need visionary leaders with commitment and zeal to transform the universities from deep slumber and inefficiency to

dynamic and efficient in their functioning. To perform the above task a highly reputed scholars with integrity and a sense of commitment have to be appointed as Vice Chancellors. The new Vice Chancellors should have vision, commitment, honesty sense of dedication and courage with a new management perspective and strategy. Tenure given to Vice Chancellors is only three years. It is a very short period to bring drastic transformation in the university set up.

New Roles

Absolutely the new incumbents in the universities have to put the higher learning institutions in a mission and campaign mode to perform the difficult job of making the teachers to work and to enhance their capability to the expected standard. The newly appointed Vice Chancellors have to give a clear cut message to the teaching and non teaching community that the administration and governance under his / her leadership should be open, transparent and work towards efficiency. Quickly road map has to be drawn for contextualizing the academic programmes, research activities and outreach or extension programmes. With the active participation of the faculty members an action plan has to be prepared. It should be contextual. Equally an administrative reform document has to be prepared with the active participation of the non teaching staff of the university. Immediately the teacher's capacity development to the context has to be done with the involvement of the teachers of the premier institutions. For quality research and outreach programmes, systems and mechanisms have to be created and if available they are to be fine tuned. Enormous resources are available in higher learning institutions and they can be extended to the community directly by the institutions themselves. Suitable mechanism has to be evolved and by which outreach programmes and activities can be carried out. In the same way social relevant issues can be taken up for research. Ultimately, well researched issues and the conclusions drawn from the research can be used more effectively for policy advocacy and contributing to Industry. In such a way research has to be promoted.

While the whole functioning of the institution is transformed to work towards outcome and not output the teachers should not be in panicky. So far the academic system's evaluation is based on the output and now it has to move towards outcome. When the system is moving towards outcome evaluation, teachers have to transform themselves attitudinally, behaviorally and performance wise. This transformative process

should be made easy and for which the leadership has to adopt consciousness management approach. Teachers should feel that they gain advantage in every action in the transformative process. In such a way message and perception has to be given to the faculty members. Otherwise the non – performers in the university system are always in group with political lenience and they will make the administration in a crisis mode. If the university goes in a crisis mode creative development works will suffer. In the process of transformation, the performers have to be facilitated continuously and they are to be protected from the disturbances of the non performers and the performers will be put in group work for the efficient delivery. Public opinion has to be created to the effect that the higher learning institutions are marching towards the new heights in a new direction. Quickly university has to be taken from the bureaucratic web and for which reform initiatives have to be taken to reform governance and administration of universities. The governance and administrative system with higher learning institutions have to be simplified and made transparent. By doing so, message has to be given to the stake holders that the new Vice Chancellors should have open agenda for total transformation. The available faculty and the facilities have to be used very effectively in all the three dimensions namely teaching, research and extension or outreach.

New Linkages

Our universities which intended to achieve higher goals and outcomes have to be linked with other national and international premier institutions. There are enormous resources both material and human resources available in many premier institutions which are underutilized at present. They are to be used profitably for the advantage of the many stake holders. In our university system grouping the scholars for a common research task is very difficult for the academic leaders and there is no such vibrant culture developed in our university system even though we had stipulation from the University Grants Commission. Likewise, we do not have a healthy culture in the university system to collaborate with other institutions either on project or activity basis. Because the question of who is working under whom prevents the academics to have institutional collaboration. This kind of culture has to be changed by introducing a healthy relationship between and among institutions with a norm of 'working with' and not 'working under'. Functional relationship has to be developed with developed

institutions in the west and the north through signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Signing of MoU should not be done in a ritualistic way. Western universities sign MoU with Indian Universities with a clear cut focus of mutual co – operation. Every university should have an office for international co – operation headed by a senior professor. The main duty of the centre is to facilitate the faculty member to have international collaboration with the faculty members of other foreign universities. The office has to work for helping the students to avail the foreign fellowship. In the university system it is one of the most important activities of the centre for international co – operation.

Contextual Programmes

Next to internationalization, appropriate academic programmes contextually designed have to be introduced and existing programmes have to be contextualized and fine tuned. While conducting the programmes extreme professionalism has to be followed. Higher learning institutions have to be made more rigorous and outcome oriented. For this purpose professionalization of academic programmes is an imperative need. In our country we have professional and non professional programmes and courses. But to make the students employable the programmes whether the students are in professional or non professional programmes, they should be offered in a professional way. Even a non professional programme could be made a professional one by doing it in a professional way. Sometimes even the professional courses are done in a non professional way and as a result the students from the professional programmes could not get employment opportunity even though vacancies are abundant in the same specialisation. That is why we face high rates of unemployment. As long as the higher learning institutions are producing unemployable graduates, the institutions are doing a havoc to the society. It is almost a disservice to the society done by the higher learning institutions. Higher learning institutions should not fix only the target, gross enrolment rate but they should concentrate on high quality production of man power from the institutions. All public funded institutions are conducting conventional academic programmes whereas the private and self financing institutions are conducting academic programmes based on the requirements of the market. The new Vice Chancellors have to face volley of problems to change the mindset of the academics to reorient the academic programmes to the requirement of the market and the society.

There is yet another challenge in the higher learning institutions in the present context. Academic programmes have to be fine tuned by incorporating skill oriented courses at least one fourth of the entire programme. Even to offer this skill effective linkages have to be established with industrial houses and other stake holders who provide job opportunities to the students. The Vice Chancellors work goes beyond the boundary of the university campuses. The board of management has to change the style of functioning. So far the board of management substantially involved in resolving the problem of the staff and internal politics. Now it has to move away from the mundane works to development and transformative works. Further, the existing teaching mode has to be changed to learning mode and class rooms should be the space to be created by both teacher and the taught. Newer teaching and learning methods have to evolve and used in the higher learning institutions and for which university and college teachers have to be prepared.

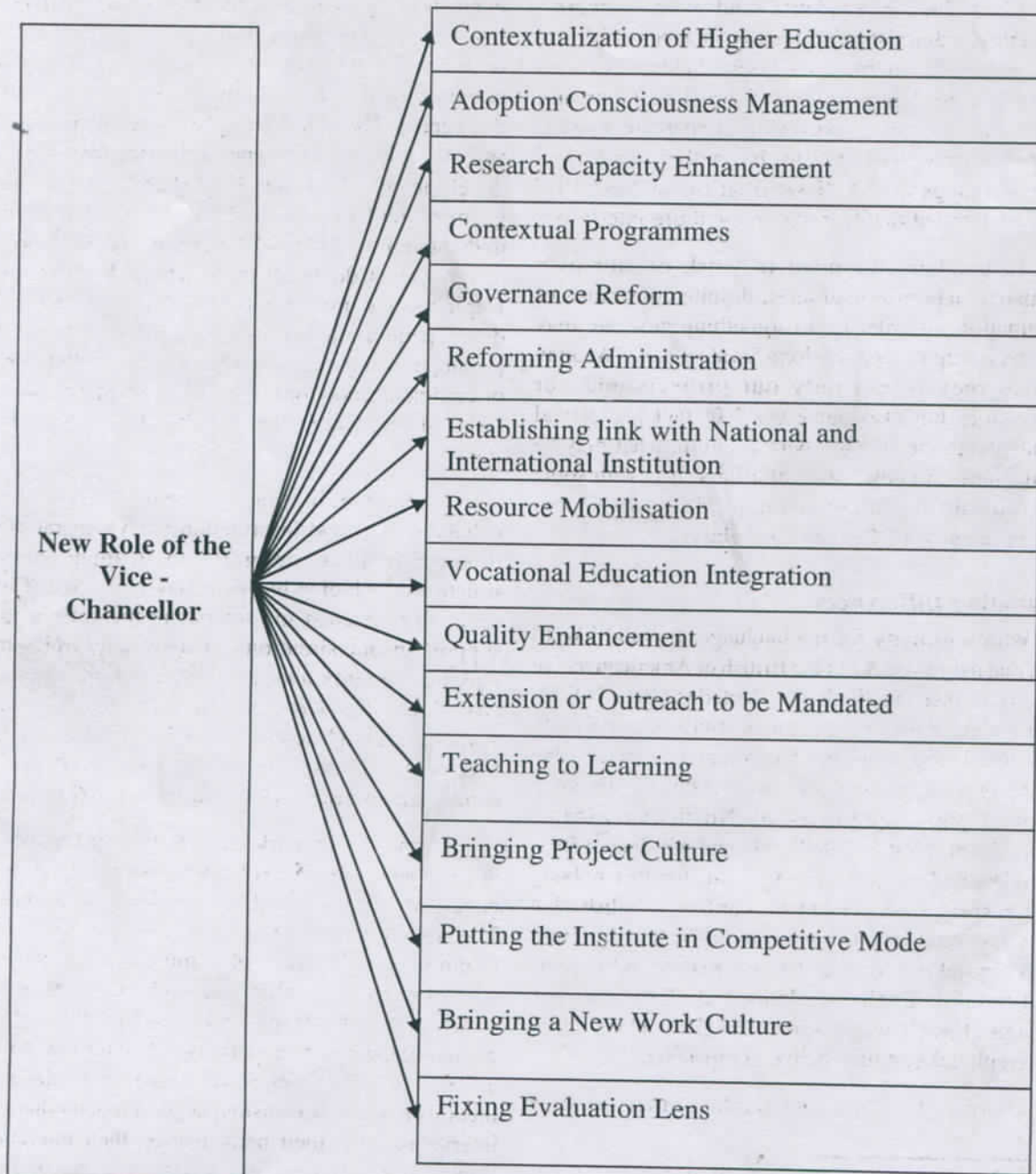
All the departments should have high standard academic programmes, research both foundational and action oriented programmes and outreach programmes and for which new research and project culture have to be developed. Teachers have to be sensitized and oriented to take up projects and for which facilitative mechanism has to be developed. Unless the higher learning institutions move away from bureaucratic web, it is very difficult to make the teachers to take up projects. Now, the entire university system is under the control of the clerks and section officers. A new outreach unit has to be developed with the available faculty members to carry out outreach programmes. The whole administrative mechanism has to be geared up to support the academic, research and outreach programmes. In this process transparency and accountability in administration has to be maintained.

Reforming Governance

Contextualizing the University Administration is a stupendous task before the university leadership. The bureaucratic system which we have at present in the universities is more obstructionist rather than facilitative. Despite all technological development, the non teaching staff of the university system has not come up to the level of expectation. Unless the university non – teaching staff is reoriented and fine tuned to the expected role in the context it is very difficult to transform the teaching staff to work for new contextual roles and objectives. It is the responsibility of the leadership to enable the faculty members and the non

teaching staff to move faster and work harder to put up the face of the university so strong and vibrant. To perform the above task a new leader is needed. He or She should be transformative, scholarly, known for administrative ability, open to learn, and eager to advice. S/he should be transparent, responsive, responsible, accountable, and administrative and governance leader. S/he should have needed capacity

to exhibit quick change in the style of functioning of the university system. His or her sincerity, honesty, skill and dynamism will be the core for the transformative process of higher learning institutions. To take the university in a new direction, cleaning operation has to be undertaken. Equally teachers and non-teaching staff have to be prepared to perform the task professionally in a changing mindset.



(contd.on pg.19)