



An intriguing interview for curious minds

Prof. Unadkat has worked in the field of education for almost three decades. She has been part of various state and central government committees instrumental in supporting and developing Higher Education (HE) with special emphasis on teachers, teaching, and training. She herself has conducted many faculty development programmes, seminars, webinars to help instructors in staying current with the latest trends in education.

She was recently interviewed by a local radio station about the present state of HE in India. She shared her thoughts, ideas, and worries related to HE in India during this programme. The following are some of the highlights of her interview.

Q: According to you, what is the role of Higher Education (HE)?

A: The idea that HE is essential for long-term human growth is unarguable in the modern world. Learning analytical and problem-solving abilities through HE, eventually aids in the development of intellectual curiosity and character in people. It encourages students to define and create career objectives that will prepare them for working environments. A learner can achieve economic, physical, and social well-being with a quality HE.

Q.: Does today's Higher Education serve these purposes? What is the current status of Indian HE?

A.: Sadly, the answer is no. India has been independent for more than 70 years, but HE system has yet to reach its full potential. It is demonstrated by its poor performance in university rankings (there is no Indian University among the top 100 universities in the world), the low employment rate of its students, the bad record of earning national honours and recognition, the low percentage of research funding, and other factors.

Q.: So, what do you believe to be the main reasons for this?

A: Oh, there are so many reasons for this, including an inadequate importance given to equity and quality in education, a lack of necessary infrastructure, obstructions in hiring or promoting staff in institutions, autonomy, a low accreditation rate, faculty members who lack enthusiasm for research and innovation, etc.

Q.: I must mention that this list is pretty extensive and quite insightful. Could you please elaborate for our listeners?



A: Sure. When it comes to enrolment, according to the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) report 2020–21 India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in HE is just 27.3%, which is relatively low when compared to developed and other developing nations. As school enrolments rise, there are not enough HE institutions available to accommodate the nation's expanding needs.

If we talk about quality in education, the government is consistently emphasising quality education. However, many colleges and universities in India are unable to achieve the basic standards set by the UGC, and as a result, they are

unable to claim a spot among the best higher education institutions in the world. Learners are gaining theoretical information, yet there is a skills deficit in several areas. Recruiters see a lack of marketable skills among Indian grads.

Another difficulty for India's HE system is a lack of physical facilities and infrastructure. For many years, faculty shortages and the state educational system's incapacity to attract and retain skilled instructors have posed hurdles to excellent education. Even though there are many opportunities in HE, a large proportion of NET/ PhD candidates remain unemployed. The University Grant Commission (UGC), has declared through statistics that several teaching posts are lying vacant, affecting the teacher-student ratio and occasionally restricting institutions' capacity to attract more students.

Another aspect is academic leadership. Academic leadership requires the capacity to cross departmental boundaries, connect divergent disciplines, and manage a large number of stakeholders. Academic success demands the integration of skills in teaching, research, and academic administration. However, leadership sometimes lacks these abilities...

Besides these concerns, a major issue is indifference towards research. We must acknowledge that, research and innovation are the keys to a better, more sustainable future. However, there is an inadequate emphasis on research in HE institutions.



There are not enough resources and facilities, there is a shortage of skilled academician/ researchers to guide students. Furthermore, very few Higher

Education institutions are effectively linked to national level research institutes and industries.

Q.: Do you think we have a chance to redeem our HE System?

A.: In the seven decades since independence, HE in India has increased substantially, yet accessibility and quality remain challenges. If India wants to reap economic benefits and growth, to reach the grassroots, investment in Education Sector should be prioritised. That, I suppose, will be our way to redemption.

Q.: That has surely given our listeners some perspective. I'm curious what your closing remarks might be.

A.: I feel, Education must empower the future generation to become enterprising and creative innovators. It must provide students with broad based multidisciplinary education and 21st century skills, while developing specialised knowledge with true disciplinary rigour. HE is a critical contributor to sustainable livelihoods and economic development of the nation. It should be emphasised that HE must build expertise that society will need over the next 25 years and beyond. Thus, the HE system in India must, at the earliest, be readjusted, revamped, and re-energised to fulfil these important and noble aspirations of the people.

In view of the requirements of the 21st century, the aim of a quality HE must be to develop good, well rounded, and creative individuals. The structure, curriculum, and processes of HE must all work together coherently towards developing a global individual.

