

The idea of a University by Newman in the Present Scenario

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Abstract

At the top of the educational ladder, there is a university, that provides guidance to the whole society. A country is as strong as its universities. Various intellectuals provide the idea of a university in their own view. Among these ideas, Newman's idea is considered very prominent. Although he provided a quintessential idea about a university but outcome has changed when it tested on real ground. Some of his ideas are still valid while some are not relevant in the current scenario.

Keywords: Habit of Mind, Clear Conscious View, Universal Knowledge, Ivory Tower.

Introduction

Various intellectuals and philosophers have given the meaning and idea of a university in their own perspective. The most prominent name that appears in the field of the idea of a university is John Henry Newman. From Newman's era to till now structure of a university, nature of disciplines, the expectation of society from a university and system of education has changed a lot. Along with this lots of new disciplines have come into existence and some become obsolete. So, it becomes inevitable to test Newman's idea of a university on the criteria of the present scenario and on the behavioural ground. To test Newman's idea, first, it is necessary to throw light on major themes of his idea about a university.

Aim of the study

The aim of the paper is to critically examine the relevance of Newman's idea of a university on the present ground reality, especially in the Indian context.

Idea of Newman

The founder of the Catholic University of Dublin and a great philosopher Cardinal John Henry Newman, had given the idea of a university in 1852, in a series of discourse on "Scope and Nature of a University Education". Later these discourses had published with the title "The Idea of a university", (Soni,2014). Major themes of Newman's idea about a university in these discourses are-

Universal Knowledge

Newman believed that a university should be a place where all branches of knowledge should profess to teach and no subject can be excluded from it. That means a university is meant to teach universal knowledge. The door of a university is open for every kind of subjects, if a university excludes certain subject to teach, those students would also be excluded from university who wants to pursue those study subjects. He argued that the term 'university' is incongruous with the term 'restriction'. So, we cannot restrict any subject to teach in university but it should profess universal knowledge. To advocate his opinion, he took the reference of Johnson where term University is defined as – 'a school where all arts and science faculties are taught'. There are various dimensions of knowledge and university should furl all dimensions in their own line (Newman, 1917).

Habit of Mind

A university has two aspects to deal with, one is its branches of knowledge and another is students. As for concern branches of knowledge, Newman believed that they all are connected and affect each other because knowledge is a unit. A University should profess all branches of knowledge but the student cannot pursue every subject. So, a University should be a place where intellectuals gather together, who are zealous for their own branch of knowledge, and create an atmosphere of thoughts by

which students also get benefit irrespective of their stream. Through this atmosphere student enable to understand outlines and principles of that knowledge otherwise, he remains deprived of those pieces of knowledge. Consequently, a habit of mind is developed in students which last through their life. The habit of mind attributed to a sense of emancipation, calmness and wisdom. These qualities in students inculcated by the faculties and supported by the administration (Newman, 1917).

Clear Conscious View

Newman opined that philosophers and man of the world are formed in the same manner. As the philosophers have the command over the matter of thoughts the man of the world has command over their business and conduct. University is neither meant for some particular kind of persons who master over some specific arts or develop some skill like leadership and authorship, nor it is meant to develop persons for some specific professions like engineers, experimentalists and economists etc. although it pertains under the scope of university. But the aim of a University is to develop the intellectual tone of society, improve the public mind and make a better member of society. University gives a man a clear conscious view of his own thoughts, enables him to develop a sense of judgment. Through the university, man learns how to accommodate himself to others, how to influence them, how to understand them, the university also enables him to learn when to speak and when to remain silent, when to be serious and when to be a trifle, enables him to ask questions, learn the skill of conversation and become a good listener also. University develops the art of social life and makes man accommodate himself in the world (Newman, 1917).

The Ivory Tower of Society

Newman argued that university is such a precious place that should remain far separated from the influence of society where scholars indulge in search of knowledge in their own area of interest without being accountable to anyone. University should work for the betterment of society rather than provide benefits to individuals. More it is a place meant for spiritual well-being, calm and emancipation (Newman, 1917).

Discussion

After analysis of these ideas in behavioural form, especially in the Indian context, it is found that the teaching of all subjects in a university is neither necessary nor possible. Some disciplines are of no use or little use in the present. In a developing country like India where there is a scarcity of fund for higher education, these disciplines create an extra burden and share financial resources. This sharing of funds sacrifices the interest of other disciplines that are more important in the Indian context.

Purpose of a university vested in specialization, not in generalization. Different subjects have different requirements to profess, need different kinds of resources and different environment to conduct research in that field. It is not feasible for a university to meet the requirements of all branches of

knowledge and create an environment that will be suitable to profess all subjects. It is true that knowledge is a unit and for the sake of feasibility to study it is divided into different branches. This knowledge can be compared as a Banyan tree and branches of a tree with its different subjects. Likewise, the Banyan tree grows up the aerial roots, the Banyan tree grows up the aerial roots arises from its branches and penetrates to the soil to support the tree and function as a stem. In the case of knowledge, the same thing happens so. Day by day new knowledge is added through researches in different branches of knowledge. Consequently, the scope of knowledge in some of these branches expands too vast so that it needed a completely different and specialized university to profess. Nowadays there are several examples of such specialized universities like a university for medical sciences, technical education, management education, teacher education. Tamil Nadu Teachers Education University specialized only for teachers' education. These universities serving better as per their specialized nature which may not be possible when they were generalized to profess all subjects. The present scenario demands that there should be an increase in number and nurtures such specialized universities to meet the requirement of modern society.

The concept of 'atmosphere of thoughts' of Newman is now appearing in an interdisciplinary approach of universities where scholars and teachers of different disciplines interact and share their knowledge on a theme. Moreover, to promote this interdisciplinary approach, universities construct their programmes, especially undergraduate and postgraduate, as such that force students to select one or more papers from subjects other than their own discipline in limited options, regardless students have an interest in them or not. This approach adversely affects the very main purpose of a university to generate new knowledge. There is more possibility to generate new knowledge when a student focuses on one topic or a point, remain with that point for a longer time and go deep and deep in rather spread his energy to gain more superficial knowledge from many disciplines. Although, it seems quite beneficial that scholars and teachers of different disciplines exchange their views and knowledge on a common theme and reach a fruitful conclusion. But in that interaction, they put their views on the basis of their specialized area. Based on superficial knowledge, scholars cannot explicate the matter in a real sense as expected from a university student. Because such explication will also be shallow and this will ruin the purpose of a university. The soul of a university education lies in specialization rather than generalization. This inter-disciplinary approach of university force students towards generalization that may not fulfil the real purpose of a university.

Society is composed of individuals, without betterment of individuals; development of society cannot be imagined. On the one hand, Newman advocated that the aim of a university is to make a better member of society, and improve the public

mind while on the other he denied the individual development of a person as an aim of a university which seems contradictory. Every individual has their unique talent, a university should create an environment through which such talent could be identified, facilitate the growth of such talents and provide a way through which he reaches his highest capability in that area.

As a concern of profession, indeed, the university is not meant to produce professionals of different fields, but at the same time university should keep an eye on the demand and needs of professionals to the society. Society needs a different kind of professionals for its proper functioning. It is the duty of a university to provide proper guidance to the production of such skilled professionals not only for the individual but to meet the demand of society. Now in India various universities are establishing which are not only specialized for various technical and professional courses but also for nurturing fields like music and dance, sports etc. and regarded as technical university, music and dance university, sports university. These universities are running and achieving their aim successfully by producing skilled professionals of different walks of life, providing an environment to nurture different skills and talents that lie in students in dormant form. If a university successfully attains the aim of exploring such talents and provide an environment to flourish them it automatically indulges a habit of mind in them. When one explores his innate talent, he consequently develops a sense of judgement, clear conscious view about his own thoughts. When a person attains his highest capacity, he will certainly learn to accommodate himself in society, can serve society better and learn how to speak, when to remain silent and develop a sense of social life that enables him to successfully accommodate in the world. Because the development of the habit of mind is the by-product of the realization of one's own nature and talent.

Newman emphasized that the university should be the Ivory tower of society and should remain far separated from the influence of society and do its work without being accountable to anyone.

The above view of Newman about a university may not be completely acceptable in today's scenario, especially in the Indian context. In a country like India, a university should not be a precious place but it should be open for all deserving candidates who are willing to explore the field they are interested in. The door of a university should be open for all even for the marginalized section of the society. As being a socialist country, in India, such ideas and activities are accepted that provide equal opportunity for all and discourage the concept of privilege on any basis.

University should work for the betterment of society, but how it can be succeeded in this purpose if it works by remaining far separated from the influence of the society. For the proper functioning of a university, it should aware of needs, situations, activities, culture, system and factors that influence the society. If a university remains far separated from

the influence of society how it can get aware of or feel the needs and problems of society. A university can work for the betterment of society when it allows society to interact with them. The role of a university is to provide guidance and lead society. University should produce the man of eminence in their good times as they can provide guidance to the society in its hard times (Muthukumaran, 1994.) and this can be done when university and society closely and continually interact with each other. Through that university let society to aware of its needs and problems.

Of course, a university deserves autonomy for its functioning and should not get interference from outside, but meanwhile, it should be made accountable. As the government universities are funded by the state that fetch money from the public through various taxes. So, the university should be accountable to the government as well as a society for its functioning. Although this accountability should not attract interference in its day-to-day functioning either by the state or any other mean. University should have the freedom to build its curriculum, make rules for its administration and has the right to allocate its resources according to its set priorities, but it should make responsible for its decisions and performance.

Conclusion

John Henry Newman provided a very vast, comprehensive, quintessential and deep idea about a university which covers its all functional and philosophical aspects. But his idea provides an extreme view about a university that is far away from the real ground. In today's scenario especially in the Indian context, these ideas do not fit completely like his concept of universal knowledge, university as an Ivory tower etc. Although some of his idea sare still valuable like developing a habit of mind that is followed by universities in the form of the interdisciplinary approach. Despite this extreme view, his idea is still providing a guideline for the vision and mission of universities to successfully meet their role.

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