

Role of Universities in Today's Society



PROFESSOR M. M. SHAHIDUL HASSAN

and guiding for knowledge production and for pushing innovation and societal self-reflection than in any other time in their history. In past the concept of the university flourished when education was the preserve of social elite. German founded the University of Berlin in 1810 under the influence of Humboldtian model of higher education, and renamed the Humboldt University of Berlin after World War II. Humboldt University is traditionally seen as the model institution of the 19th century. The central Humboldtian principle was the 'union of teaching and research' in the work of the individual scholar or scientist. Humboldtian model opted for independent research and graduate studies, in which academic research would, in turn, inform and shape teaching and build a stronger academic community. The union of teaching and research practically reflected the restricted social mission of the elite university. It was only in the twentieth century that research came to be seen as a vital activity in itself, contributing to utilitarian fields like industrial progress, military strength, and social welfare, and requiring collaborative rather than individual effort.

There is an increased awareness of vital importance of higher education for socio cultural and economic development, and for building the future, for



which the younger generations will need to be equipped with new skills, knowledge and ideals. A vision of higher education in this century is set to include acceptance of the university's role as an agent of social and economic mobility for students. The modern evolution (Martin Trow 2000) has been marked by the movement from elite to mass higher education, from institutions primarily concerned with teaching to increased focus on creating knowledge, educating highly qualified graduates and responsible citizens able

to meet the needs of all sectors of human activity, provide opportunities for learning throughout life, and disseminate knowledge through research and provide, as part of its service to the community. In this quest, international standards of excellence focused largely on research productivity are not ignored, but are framed as only one goal towards supporting a university's productivity and larger social purpose—not as an end unto itself.

The innovation of the "market university" (Elizabeth Popp Bermanas

2012) as an economic engine, diverges from Humboldt's principles. Universities have more and more become market-driven. However, no such "market university" has been established in Bangladesh. Universities in Bangladesh have not changed in nature. Once in a life time education is not desired rather lifelong learning and mass higher education is most desirable. Every year a high percentage of HSC passed students is going to universities to pursue higher studies. Government's open door academic policy has enabled a good number of students to enter universities to get higher education each year. Starting with 6 public universities in 1971 today there are a total of 38 public universities and 93 private universities in the country. A question from different corners has been raised what our universities can uniquely provide to our society. Universities in this country have not yet focused much on utilitarian fields. Many academic leaders and education scholars in our country are beginning to understand that the bell-curve approach of rankings and the research-dominant notion of World-Class Universities are no longer adequate to produce employable graduates. It implies rethinking the role and the education forms of universities in Bangladesh without losing its quality, paying attention to new challenges, like preparing

students for a job and carrying out research for both scientific and economic development. Universities should offer not only elite programmes but also programmes in utilitarian fields. Few decades back, universities have started few programs in utilitarian fields like business, pharmacy, textile, IT, fisheries and law. But universities do not yet focus on delivery methods, thinking about innovative forms of teaching, learning and evaluating. High education should promote rational and critical thinking, and social competences together with research. Active teaching/learning methods, international exchange and formative/ participative mid-semester evaluation encourage students to work better. Articulating explicitly how students are expected to perform in their learning process facilitates their success, and develops a basis for continuous improvement lasting after the university time. Government particularly UGC should come forward to reform our higher education systems in reaction to societal needs. Establishing Market University does not deny the need of existence of research universities in Bangladesh based on Humboldtian model of higher education.

The writer is the Vice Chancellor, East West University, Dhaka. He can be reached at: vc@ewubd.edu

We live in a time where education is increasingly acknowledged as the basic for individual prosperity and country's economic development. Knowledge is gradually replacing other resources as the main driver of economic growth. A debate centres on whether university engagement with society requires new forms of knowledge that differ from traditional academic modes. Being social partners, universities cannot avoid discharging a responsibility to support citizens and country's economy. Universities in North America and Europe have drastically changed in nature. They have now more and more become market-driven. New flagship universities (John Aubrey Douglass 2016) in USA have sought utilitarian relevance and more engaged in economic development and social inclusion. These universities are now more important for socioeconomic mobility, for nurturing