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THE HINDU

EDUCATION

Disseminating policy initiatives

ACCORDING to a report, the annual sum total of tuition fees alone from foreign students to their universities fundings stands to the tune of \$6b in America. The government of the United States recognises it as a part of its export sector to be billed against the incoming receipts. Since a modern foreign policy has become integral to international commerce, perspectives of universities and diplomacy have started converging, not to speak of the cultural and communication consequences of such an evolution. The Indian situation can be no different.

A university is the base of any professional education, diplomacy included. The efficacy of learning on job training stays weak in the absence of the perceptual and conceptual ability born out of an advanced academic environment. The origin of the nuance, which is the essence of diplomacy, or an intangible which is another important adjunct to the diplomacy, are fundamentally founded in a higher academy. So is the case of suppleness and finesse that diplomacy relishes for fine finishing.

American administration has a strong tradition of using its universities as platforms for the express purpose of disseminating their policy initiatives. Here they find readymade zestful audiences. Commencement Address is the one of the most prestigious event.

Using a university as a springboard is a great challenge as well as a supreme opportunity. A hard task because the political VIPs face sharp questions which could tear apart their fragile veneer of their political double standards. For, once they make a point it is splashed across the entire country.

The Indian experience in this context is not very encouraging. The Sixties were days when

in order to serve such causes modern universities were *created* in India. Galbraith personally came to PAU Ludhiana to participate in its foundation laying ceremony in 1962. Former Hungarian ambassador to India Mr. Bolag and Prof. Cohen taught at JNU in the Seventies. In the former every second teacher was trained in the U.S. under exchange programme. In the latter the left wing bias could not whittle down out/world interest in terms of history and the political practices of the nations. Basic tendency being towards regression overtime both went in decline. The former could no more contribute to the contemporary issues like GATT, patents or intellectual property rights in an effective manner; and the latter could rarely cull out a single hard concept from the soft discipline of the social sciences.

Back overseas, foreign universities proved themselves as seminal entities occasionally, in turning the tide of major foreign policy disputes. It were the American university campuses who were first to tell the American Administration to get out of the Vietnam quagmire; when four students were killed at the Kent State university the entire American nation was galvanised to back that judgment.

Indian leaders too fell in line when they made their diplomatic jaunts. Rajiv Gandhi spoke at one of Ivy League university during his visit to the U.S. And when Mr. Narasimha Rao recently visited Germany as Indian Prime Minister, his address at the Humbolt University in Germany included serious foreign policy issues. That way China has more credibility than us.

In England invitees to the Speaker's Union at Oxford carry out their speaking assignments with verve and glee. Harvard groomed Henry Kissinger as a Frank Sinatra of modern diplomacy with his regular conduct of the national security

seminars. This is because university is a place where the genuine contest of the ideas takes place with the revolutionary fervour as an appropriate requirement for synthesis. Foreign policy overtures are highly contingent upon new ideas, more out of foresight rather than the experience of a well laid political or economic system. Indian diplomacy is at the verge of major transformation, therefore, the start can be safely designed from a university, if available, having a fair degree of intensity and inspiration.

Critics might interpret such an approach as too academic. Any path breaking proposal could be construed as an Oversized idea whose experience is missing. But creativity comes from looking for the unexpected and stepping outside one's own experience. So far conventional thinking in the Indian foreign policy could not spark a breakthrough that could be sustained over the long term for the policy makers were fed with the concepts and information of an accountant, totally authentic but fundamentally useless. Few professors were appointed as envoys but the idea was to oblige/save the person rather than to strengthen the foreign policy system; others were asked to prepare reports against payments but nothing to be heard there after, informal seminars or dinners defined convenience for preventing embarrassment. The need is to substitute informality with institution and to preserve the intellectual stock whatever garnered rather than repeating the collapse history of the National Security Council. This would be the breeding ground for ideas. Some of such ideas might not take off for the moment against the weight of inertia but their spirit would live on to the stage of accomplishment.

Students will have to be groomed to teach that diplomacy like life is a fragile bargain but the upcoming of the new breed of academic life in Delhi could rectify or remove a strange lopsidedness in our political debates. It would improve culture that at present cuts us off from many things happening in the world.

Appropriate balance in between the personal political calculations of leaders and a well debated national interest needs to be fine tuned. In the existing academic and intellectual set up the hunker down mentality has pervaded all the way. What is needed is a new kind of platform in the academy for the generation and diffusion of new foreign policy recommendations aimed at arresting the current declines in the international political public discourses within the country.