Editorial

The history of 'modern' universities in India could be traced back to 1857 wherein the University of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay began their humble journeys. 156 years later, India now has 659 public and private universities. Universities of Nalanda and Takshashila in India initiated their journeys before 1857. However, as Gundemeda (2015) indicates, the two visions and articulations of the university, the pre-modern and the modern differed significantly in their sociological and epistemological functioning and ideology. In the last few years, the trajectories of public or private universities, the state and liberal universities, and universities, more generally and research centres, the latter reminiscent of Napolean's academic circles, have followed quite divergent tracks. While the state policies have had significant impacts on framing the higher education policies in these institutions, the implications and interventions have been implemented differentially. Furthermore, we have witnessed a distinct change in the university structures, their approaches, and their purpose and nature of existence. In the context of a globalised world, given that India is the third largest education system in the world after China and the United States, it becomes imperative for us to understand the impact of the transitions and the epistemological and sociological underpinnings of a university in these times.

In the contemporary discourses on the current and future trajectories of higher education in India, a pertinent question has been raised - whether universities should prioritise equity or excellence. This is especially so because, in many contexts, we have realised that there is a significant lack of acquiescence between the two. While a prominent strand of discourse has argued for excellence and merit, others have argued for the need to understand accessibility and social inclusivity as a core idea underlying a university. Gundemuda following Beteille asserts that "…a critical reading of the history of the idea of a university reveals the clash of epistemological traditions on the lines of universal

versus specialized learning, excellence versus equity, university for knowledge versus the market and social versus personal good (Beteille, 2005)." (Gundemeda, 2015) Within such a context, when there are recommendations for a national university, do we consider whether the national university can ensure excellence and/or inclusiveness?

From Newman (1908) and Humboldt's idea of universities as teaching-research centres to more recent articulations of university systems (Beteille, 2010; Guha, 2007; Sen, 2011), universities indeed have undergone several attempts of idealisations. Ideological differences aside, one essential attribute that has remained is the prioritisation of diversity and learning. Incidentally, the economic and political conditions have created fractures in the holistic understanding of universities as a space that creates intellectual communities, shares knowledge and wisdom, and helps individual transform and leads ethical social lives (see Beteille, 2005). The socio-political realities of India, as evidenced in the last few years, have been quite chequered. A university is a space embedded in the society, not beyond or without it. While at one level, we argue for social commitment and relevance of the university graduates, yet at another level, we insist on creating walled boundaries, creating imagined, yet a strong boundary between education, and a social or political commitment. We should, as educators and researchers, reflect on the walled cities.

I understand that the university and the society are connected in their ideological imagination. A centre for learning is essential for public and the academic work has to bear reference to the everyday realities of the societies. The violence and intolerance outside the walled cities should ideally not be a consequence of our indifference within or due to us facilitating the pedagogy of the non-oppressed. In current times, therefore, the urgency and necessity of developing a progressive intellectual, who acknowledges plurality in the current existential ethos of the modern nation-states, require us to probe deeper into the philosophy of education that is embedded in the sociality of education spaces, in the analysis of the discourses on national education or university.

Tattva, Journal of Philosophy seeks to facilitate critical study and in-depth reflection and analysis of issues, problems, and concerns of human life, in order to further the directions and transformations human society needs to evolve into. This issue of Tattva brings together research articles that seek to address questions specifically pertaining to education and national universities.

Probal Dasgupta, in his article on *Bongitude and the specification of freedom* discusses the contestations, ideological underpinnings, and counter-narratives in the formulations of essential conditions of freedom and autonomy for "the little nationalisms within the Indian trans-nation" in diverse spheres, including popular culture, literary ideations, and in our higher education pedagogies, specifically for region-displaced students.

Rajan Gurukkal, in his article on *What is Interdisciplinary? How is it Different from Multidisciplinary?*, argues that interdisciplinary research and pedagogy facilitates our extension of knowledge and due to its predominantly non-linear trajectory, produce knowledge that is epistemologically and pragmatically, converging, critical, subversive, and empowering.

The article by L N Mittal on the *Character of National University – A Conceptual Framework* is primarily a conceptual endeavour to conceive the National University as a space that facilitates an all-round development of individuals by "promoting creativity, innovations, development, and entrepreneurship". Providing analyses of the current higher education contexts, he argues for an urgent revision of the pedagogy, curricula, industry-academic collaboration, and research orientation of the students and faculty members.

G N Madhuranatha Dixit argues in his paper, *National University as a Developer of Social Capital for Nation* argues that an introspective, reflexive approach could guide us in our conceptualisations of a national university. Emphasising on a sincere commitment towards acknowledging and providing service to the needs of the local communities, he proposes the model of a national university be based on a strong, social, cohesive bond between everyone involved in the process. He argues further that the social capital so

developed could be compared to a "transformation engine that contributes in creating a first-class cultural foundation and a robust narrative for the nation" which incidentally could guide the formation of a national narrative pertaining to higher education.

Satarupa Chakraborty's article, *Nation-state-university: Which flag must a university unfurl?*, provides a historical and conceptual analysis of the debate of nationalism in India. Evaluating its relevance in within the purview of a university, she additionally proposes that a nonsectarian vision for a university instead of an enforced conformance to archaic rules and regulations and restricted ideologies could be detrimental for the future of an understanding of a national university.

We invite our readers to read, examine, and deliberate!

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