PUNE has always been in the limelight for its rich and varied approach towards civilization and also has been extremely forward with its approach towards a rich and varied culture. This city is also synonymous with its educational heritage in the past and in recent years. Chronicling the educational heritage of the city has been a very interesting and eye-opening experience. In spite of the influx of students from all parts of India and abroad, seeking admission in various institutions in the city, the developmental graph of the education system existing here has raised a few important questions. Is the education system holistically developed? Is the education imparted in the city a qualitative process or is it restricted to being nothing more than quantitative machinery?

The functioning of the education system has been reasonably stereotypical, but with non-traditional techniques being introduced there has been a very significant change. Dr. Narendra Jadhav, the vice-chancellor of Pune University, has been quite instrumental in bringing about a lot of qualitative changes and is working on the restructuring of the University and its functioning towards holistic education. "The curriculum that we were following for ages was hopelessly out of pattern and association for many subjects. We are following the same prototype for ages together without accepting anything new or fundamental," Dr. Jadhav states.

His views on education and its importance in the holistic growth of an individual have been a comparative analysis of the chronology of the changing attitudes of students of the generation then and now. The meaning of education has
always been restricted to personal growth and development. It's a process which over the years has repeatedly been used and abused and needs a radical change because the times when these methods were devised have changed and the world demands highly competent products. “Education spells the liberation of the mind. I see a distinct change of progress. My father's generation represented the oppressed lot and the persecution against whom my father revolted to fight was for dignity and determination. My generation is the one with a split personality - hounded by the past and basking in the comforts of the present and looking forward for a better future. But the next generation is truly liberated from the yoke of the past and unapologetic of what they are. They are the true global citizens,” elaborates Dr. Jadhav on being quizzed about the current academic scenario.

The Pune University, which has been one of the most prestigious universities and is recognised globally, is working towards bringing about a huge change in the way things have functioned till date. When Dr. Narendra Jadhav took over the mantle of this premier institution, he had his share of disabilities to tackle. It's not been an overnight change but strict measures are being taken to unlearn the traditionally stereotypical methods and introduce newer, much more industry-oriented syllabus, thereby making the process more holistic.

“I came to the University of Pune with a mission. I am literally looking at rebuilding the University which happens
to be one of the largest in the world with a student population of 533,000 at 433 colleges and 223 research institutions. The most important priority is to update the curriculum. Also, the teaching staff needs training and a large dose of morale boost to charge them up. So, we shall be inviting five intellectuals of national repute to teach the University faculty for a week every year. An outdated curriculum and staff can be a disastrous combination. Apart from this, we have a large Maharashtra population as a part of our NRI program. As a part of the curriculum these students will spend one semester in the University of Pune and they will be taught subjects like Indian history, languages, culture and philosophy,” Dr. Jadhav informs.

The educational heritage is ever-growing with a lot of deemed universities achieving global standards by having international collaborations with universities abroad, which in turn would help them to make the necessary changes and keep the education system upgraded. The city is introducing a lot of new measures towards the betterment of students and is also bringing about changes in the way things function currently. These educational institutions are gearing up with state-of-the-art infrastructure, qualified faculty and stringent guidelines for students. “Education today is about ‘actionable knowledge’. The key words are ‘knowledge – application’. Hence the pattern of education has shifted from theory-based to hands-on. And this change is coming in from the school level. Graduate studies today are focused on implementation of knowledge. The reason for this change is the pace of growth of the industry. Today, companies don’t have time as well as resources to invest in training, unlearning classroom studies and re-learning the industry standards. Hence this bounty of creating industry-ready has been taken up by graduate schools around the world. For instance, all our IT and Biotechnology programs ensure that our students are productive from the first day. Besides, another component that is taking priority is Life Skills Development. This has become an integral part of every curriculum,” believes Anuna Kataru, executive chair, IIIT.

In this whole process of high quality education, being holistic, extra-curricular activities and hands-on experience plays a very important role. One of the evident things in today’s world is exposure to the industry. Extra-curricular activities, industry placements, training periods, work study options are being introduced to produce quality professionals for various industries and fields. These reasonably new techniques have seen a positive change in the quality of work produced on completion of the respective courses. Manish Chadha of Wigan and Leigh College says, “The distinction of the WLC programs is in the traineeship programs offered by us which is a ‘learn while you earn’ set-up, a unique concept wherein the students are given training on the job through internships with the best of the multinationals in the country. This guarantees the creation of an awareness of the corporate world in the students right from the time the students join in with us. The students are exposed to a variety of additional activities like soft skills development and industry visits to the most reputed industries in their region. This is done so that they get a day’s outing and interaction with the head honchos of the corporate world and can interact with them.”

Continuing in this vein, Chadha adds:
"Guest lectures too have become a very important part of our curricula and the creme de la creme of the corporate world and top executives from different fields like finance, banking, human resources, marketing, fashion, media etc are invited to the college so that students interact with these guests and learn more out of their experiences." The holistic development of the system demands a lot of revision in the syllabus and also demands a lot of work outside the syllabus. Producing academically strong products is as important as creating completely developed human beings. There is more to education than the literal boundaries of being restricted to a certain syllabus or a set typecast. With developmental processes being constantly at work, this education system is certainly showing promise and a wind of change.

Pang Shah of Flame Institute sums up holistic education as being able to question, think critically and be capable of articulating thoughts. "At Flame we put our undergraduates through a core course in 'rhetoric and critical writing', a course in 'logic' and a course in 'Visual Communication'. This enables the development of practical skills," he adds.

The demand for quality is eternal and needs a regular supply of qualitative output. Will the city continue to carry the baton forward? Will it retain its status as the Oxford of the East? It will all show in the years to come and with a dire need for a change in the functioning let's hope for a true 'holistic' growth of the education system, and not commercial factories producing bulk. The city certainly is gearing up for a major change and the future seems to bode well in the years to come. ♠