Academic Actualities

PROF INDRA J PARIKH dwells upon the present status of education in Pune and about whether an increasing number of institutes will really add to the qualitative aspect of academics.

PUNE has evolved as a city. It has also created spaces and opportunities to create educational institutions for undergraduates, post graduates and beyond. Pune's earlier educational institutions have acquired significant reputation in terms of graduating fine scholars and researchers who have made their mark in the country as well as internationally. Such institutions are recognised as having academic excellence and maintaining standards of excellence in both students and faculty.

Recently, in the last two decades Pune has been growing steadily to be recognised as an educational hub where students from across the country and outside come to Pune in search of higher education which reflects quality. With the passing of years the number of institutions and students have increased substantially.

Recently, there has been also a lot of discussion and dialogue about Pune evolving as the Oxford of the East. What does this mean? There are also concerns reflected around too many institutions coming up and questions are raised about the quality and standards of education, teaching faculty and the material of teaching as well the physical and other infrastructure of learning.
Let us explore the issue of too many educational institutions in Pune and especially the proliferation of management education in Pune.

In the context of transformations occurring in the larger perspective of globalisation, this is a healthy trend. It is only when many institutions are created that over a period of time some institutions will emerge as providing quality education and institutions of excellence.

Differentiations will begin to emerge with respect to faculty, students, curriculum, content, pedagogy, creation of learning environment, emphasis on students’ involvement, assessment, absenteeism, teaching material and overall preparation of students to occupation and life.

Differentiations will also occur in the infrastructure of learning and the learning environment. Similarly, time will tell whether the institutions have contributed to the well adjusted healthy and wholesome individuals who take responsibility and contribute as leaders and citizens of the nation or education has been provided for a degree, diploma or a certificate with limited job skills and no broader learning perspective. It is a waste of time if the spirit of learning is missing.

In order that this differentiation begins to occur over time it is necessary for many institutions to be started. Over time, many will fall by the wayside or be known to bring out students whose learning, knowledge, attitudes and skills do not stand up to the tests of life and or at work.

At the moment all kinds of diverse institutions are being set up every day adding to the woes and confusion of students. The students and parents never had so many choices, so many educational institutions and so many possible potential career opportunities.

The second issue is of Pune being the Oxford of the East. The sheer quantum of institutions and number of students do not create excellence. If we have many, many institutions which are providing excellent education, wherein high number of intelligent and brilliant students are being pursed and wooed by several institutions, then Pune truly becomes a centre of higher education.

At the moment there are still few institutions and the population of students seeking admissions is very large. And all of a sudden with the IT boom and other new fields of education proliferating – the whole educational scenario is in a state of flux and transition, however, growing at a fast pace.

So what are the benefits?
- Availability of many institutions to choose from.
- Institutions providing diversity of emerging educational areas.
- In the emerging educational scenario, many new occupational opportunities, alternatives and choices.
- An increasing competition amongst institutions to add creative and innovative approaches to education.
- Institutions attempting to design their curriculum as relevant and connected to environment and the larger social issues.

What are the lacunae?
- Education becoming more and more commercialised as different from spending more on creating a world class learning environment.
- Education becoming more and more occupation, job and skill-focused as different from focusing on diversity and holistic education contributing to healthy, reflective leadership development.
- So many similar educational institutions creating a pool of nomad faculty who go from one institution to another opening their shops for few hours to teach and then moving on.
- Students and parents getting highly confused and as such go shopping for a career and occupation in an educational institution rather than making a choice based on the interest, liking or passion regarding what the student would want to do in life.
- Either there is an excellent infrastructure or very shabby physical environment which creates either lack of respect for what is available or indifference to the setting as well as the learning process.

Essentially in times to come, there will be immense sifting taking place where institutions providing and creating a learning environment will be differentiated from the institutions providing average learning environment. That Pune would continue to grow into a hub and a centre for learning is a reality. This process would push the institutions to focus, to create, to innovate and be counted as leading institutions in the city where young, bright, intelligent and aspiring students will grow into mature young adults.

(The writer is the founder president of FLAME)