

UNIVERSITIES
ARE DEDICATED INSTITUTIONS
FOR SOCIAL UPLIFTMENT
R.Dwarakinath

Universities, among the many social organizations, are the most unique and precious institutions. They are devoted to strive ceaselessly for the betterment of human society. In this regard, they seek to perpetuate ***the best there is***, and seek to attain ***the best that is possible***.

From the colonial days, up to Independence, the country has benefitted from a range of outstanding universities. They have made invaluable contribution in building the national character, developing outstanding leadership and finding a place in the world. It is, in fact, difficult to imagine the situation that would have prevailed without these institutions in position.

After attaining the Freedom, the country was rearing to go forward, with a sense of urgency, to catch up with ***the progress of centuries in decades***. But, then, there emerged some serious problems that threatened the very existence of the new nation. A huge food scarcity became the critical one. The Partition had separated the granaries of rice and wheat of Colonial India. The after-effects of the Second World War were quite aggravating. The nation was still an agricultural country, with a vast population stuck in farming for a living. The Grow More Food (GMF) campaign, hurriedly put in position, did not serve the purpose fully. As such, the task of a rapid agricultural development assumed the highest priority. It is in this context, that the Universities of Agricultural Sciences came into being around 1960s, along with the Green Revolution that entered the farm sector, changing the scene.

Compared to the conventional universities of the past, termed here as General Universities, the agricultural universities are Specialized Universities with a more specific focus, but with an urgent goal to pursue. For a while, in the beginning, there was some confusion about their mutual roles. But, that did not last long. The General Universities are much larger entities, serving a far wider purpose of the society, and continue to be the repositories of basic sciences. On the other hand, the Specialized Universities, now with Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Sciences and Fisheries, have a more defined objective to serve, and with a greater sense of urgency. Thus, today, both the General Universities and the Specialized Universities have got well defined spheres of operation, and have quite specific contributions to make.

A close look at these two kinds of institutions provides some significant insights regarding the kind of social purpose they serve. The General Universities are essentially educational institutions. They have rendered historic service over the years, particularly in preparing the younger generations in a manner appropriate at different times. They have contributed to the enrichment of thought, processes and achievements of the society in different generations. Some rare and valuable research also goes to their credit. They continue this contribution even today. The Specialized Universities, on the other hand, have come into existence in a problem solving mode. They have the important role of enhancing the productivity of the farm sector, uplifting the quality of farm life, and helping in conservation and development of the environmental resources. With this end in view, these second generation institutions pursue research vigorously to generate practical, new knowledge, prepare professional manpower for different roles, and conduct non-formal, out-of school education for serving the farm families. The most noteworthy feature of the new universities is, in fact, their third function as ***social service*** to the farm population.

What is the nature of this rural social service they seek to render? There has always been a marked difference between the rural and urban life. While the urban life was more material, rural life was isolated, simple and self-satisfying for those who preferred. But, today, things have changed. The communication systems and rural literacy have reduced the distance between rural and urban life. The aspirations of rural youth have changed, with urban life styles becoming their model. Meanwhile, the barter economy in rural life has yielded to monetization. With liberalization, privatization and globalization, farming has become just another **economic activity**, a cog in the larger economy, and **no more a way of life**. At the same time, the population growth, even with rapid urbanization, has materially altered the land-man ratio. Most farm holdings are uneconomical, with about 35% small and 45% marginal holdings. Also, nearly 50% farm population shares just 15% of GDP, while the rest enjoys 85%. Thus, there is a vast, visible gulf between the urban and rural situations. Rural poverty continues to persist.

Of course, a structural modification in this situation can happen only gradually, led by the national economy. Agricultural universities, concerned with a fairly large farm population, can only strive to promote **acceptable changes in farming and ways of living**. The assured farming areas, which is less than 30%, have benefitted from the Green Revolution already. But, then, even after three decades beyond this revolution, and even being the **second largest dry farming State in the country**, Karnataka does not have an appropriate public programme for development of dry farming. As a result, rural life continues to suffer.

Agricultural universities have a critical role, here. They have a mandate to find and educate the farmers about the new ways of betterment of farming and farm life. A couple of illustrations will be in order here. **One: Dry farming can be the second front of agricultural development**. A few States in India started dry farming research as early as 1930s. CRIDA made a review: **Fifty Years of Dry land Agricultural Research in India** in 1990, highlighting that a combination of the research technologies can double the yields over a few years. UASB also conducted dry farming research for more than three decades, and organized Operational Research Projects (ORPs) on farmers' fields, with very good results. But, this knowledge is not going to the farmers. **Two: Karnataka can avail water saving techniques in farming**. As an upland State on the Deccan plateau, it has a deficient rainfall on the eastern plains; but, even then, it has to share half this rainfall with the lower States. The new **System of Rice Intensification (SRI)** saves nearly 50% of water, without reducing the yields. But, this is not yet a State programme, even though the neighbouring States have adopted it already. **Third: There is no agricultural extension system on the field**. The simple extension system that made the Green Revolution a success, with trained rural boys and girls, is dead and gone, particularly when the farmers to be reached now are not the creamy layer but the resource-poor, middle order farmers. There is no attempt to shape an alternative system to reach and work them. Building upon people's own interests and initiatives is possible. Some other States have done this. Having a Home Science Wing, farm women, also as home makers, can be reached. We note that USA with only 2% farm population, a full-scale extension system continues to work, in its second century.

A KVK could really be the spring board in forging new ways to progress in farming and farm life, and enabling interested farmers. The country is about to face again problems in food and nutritional security. Hence, there is an urgent need for the new universities to re-visit their vision and mission. For, **Generating new knowledge is not an end in itself, but putting it into action for human benefit is**. The General Universities with their vast experience can join hands in this all-important task.

**Only those are alive
Who live for others**

Swami Vivekananda