

# A VISION AND A MISSION



**BANASTHALI VIDYAPITH**

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The origin of Banasthali is unique in more ways than one. To realise a dream, which he had cherished since his boyhood, Pandit Hiralal Shastri resigned his prestigious post of Secretary in the Home and Foreign Department in the erstwhile Jaipur State in 1927, and selected the remote village of *Bansthali* (as was Banasthali originally called) as the centre of his life's work. His plan was to organise a programme of rural reconstruction on the lines laid down by Gandhiji and also to train public workers through constructive service of the people.

While so engaged in his work Shastriji also wanted to train his promising daughter Shantabai as a social worker dedicated to the cause of women's upliftment. But destiny ordained otherwise. All of a sudden, after a brief illness of a day, Shantabai bade farewell to Banasthali on 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1935 at the tender age of only 12 years. The loss seemed irreparable at the moment, but soon the mood of despondency gave way to a new hope. If one Shantabai had departed there were others who could be trained likewise. This idea gave solace and opened the path of action.

Thus the Vidyapith owes its existence neither to the zeal of an educationist, nor to that of a social reformer, it is also not a creation of a Philanthropist's purse. It has arisen like the fabled phoenix from the ashes of a blossoming flower, which had withered before its hour. It is a spontaneous filling up of the vacuum caused by Shantabai's death. Here love, eternal love, has been the fountain head of all the thinking and the motivating force of all the actions.

The concept of Banasthali took form in an ethos of dedication to the nation. It also had before it a vision of Indian Culture. Therefore Banasthali's whole architecture stands upon the twin foundation pillars of Nationalism and Indian Culture.

While the Vidyapith was very clear about the perspective in which its educational efforts were to be made, it did not have a clear picture of the form and pattern of educational programme which was to be adopted, except that it should be able to promote development of a balanced and harmonious personality of the students and so should be different from the form of education prevalent at that time which emphasised book learning to utter neglect of all other aspects of education.

The Vidyapith's aim of a full and balanced development of students' personality got concrete expression in the form of 'Panchmukhi Shiksha' which evolved out of initial experimentation. 'Panchmukhi Shiksha' attempts a balance of the five aspects of education, namely Physical, Practical, Aesthetic, Moral and Intellectual.

The compromise of following the form and pattern of education prevalent in the country and enriching it with other elements of education worked satisfactorily for sometime. But later the Vidyapith felt greatly hampered in its educational endeavour and its integrated programme of education started falling apart. Aspects of Panchmukhi Shiksha other than book education tended to be relegated to secondary position. The ethos of education in India presently is such that unless a part of educational programme is evaluated, and such evaluation affects the overall assessment of a student's achievement, it suffers neglect both by students and teachers.

It was this gradual undermining of the Vidyapith's mission that led it to strive for securing autonomy.

Only three types of institutions can award degrees in India under the University grants commission Act 1956. The most common types of institutions authorised to grant degrees are universities established by an act of Parliament or State Legislative namely, Central Universities and State Universities. Such institutions are fully controlled by the Government and their objects, structure, organization etc. can be changed by the Legislature at its pleasure. The second type of institutions enjoying the privilege of awarding degrees have been those which have been declared institutions of national importance. The third type of institutions are those which are notified as institutions deemed to be universities under Section-3 of the University Grants Commission Act. The institutions which have a special mission and which due to this reason and also because of their history wish to have a distinctive organization and desire to be free from the danger of being sucked into stereotype milieu at the pleasure of the Legislature cannot accept being put into the first two categories of university institutions.

Obviously the Vidyapith too could not have opted for becoming a statutory University and therefore moved the Government of India in 1964 to notify it as an institution deemed to be University. The then Education Minister, Shri M. C. Chagla stated in the Lok Sabha in April, 1965, "A reference was made to Banasthali in Rajasthan," I have visited the Institution. I think it is one of the finest Women's institutions that I have seen anywhere and we are seriously considering giving it the status of University" (emphasis added).

However, the UGC thought otherwise, It wanted the Vidyapith to wait for a while because of the reason that it had "small number of students at the college level". It forgot that Gurukul Kangri and Jamia Millia had earlier been notified as Institutions deemed to be University with rather smaller number of students.

Thus the Vidyapith's effort to get autonomy at the University level was frustrated for time-being.

Ultimately the Vidyapith's effort to get notified as an institution deemed to be University succeeded in 1983 and the Notification to that effect was issued on October 25, 1983.

The UGC Committee which recommended conferment of the University Status on the Vidyapith noted many special features of the institution, most important of which were (i) it had a definite and viable programme for restructuring its courses at undergraduate level and was eager to carry out various measures to make education more meaningful and practical; (ii) it was providing opportunities to its students to develop their personality and (iii) was inculcating in the students spiritual and moral values through various activities and emphasizing character building and simple living.

One reason for Banasthali seeking autonomous status, apart from the general principle that education flourishes only when institutions have freedom to experiment and innovate, was that it had a special mission as a women's Institution.

The idea that the question of women's education is not different from the question of education in general and that the women's education, at least at the tertiary level, cannot be and should not be different from men's education is widely held. According to this view the only problem that relates to women in the field of education is ensuring equality of opportunity and better access to education for women. This view has been very forcefully presented and argued by some Commissions and Committees on education in India also. If it be so, women's educational institutions will largely lose the *raison d'etre* for their separate existence.

But it is not so. Men and women are equal yet they are different. As Partha N. Mukerjee has argued there are two basic ireradlicable differences - one, physiologically it is only women who can procreate and suckle the child and two, physically man is more powerful in "brute" strength. The physiological and physical differences do not mean the two are "unequal". If a difference does not mean "inequality" then equality too need not necessarily mean "identity" or sameness.

The above differences are very important because due to these differences women face contradictions and dilemmas which men do not have to face.

The foremost dilemma in a woman's case arises from the physiological difference. If it is only the woman who can procreate and suckle the child, to that extent nature itself has ordained sexual division of labour. If to this difference we add the institution of family, differentiation of role is further accentuated.

It is for the society to decide for itself what it intends to do with the family. One may also raise the question whether home, where many of the emotions that make man human are fostered, can or need survive. Changes will have to come in family structure but whether family itself should stay or go is a moot question.

With home comes home making. But with women's emancipation and education homemaking as sole vocation of women has, however, become an anachronistic idea.

Accepting career as an alternative to marriage has also not proved very satisfactory either. During the sexual and feminist revolutions of the 1960's and 1970's many women chose to

postpone marriage and family for pleasure and career in the United States. But now, in 1980's says Susan Bakos they have learned that those revolutions have not delivered all that they promised. Casual sex has disappointed. Job and pay equality are still out of reach for far too many. In replacing the Feminine Mystique with the Feminist Mystique, they have discovered that the new mythical woman - "The Happy Have-It-All Working Woman" - is no more real than was "The Happy Housewife" of the past.

Combining homemaking with a "second career" too has not resolved the contradictions. Instead, with the rise of the second career woman the educated homemaker's "problem without a name" has been transformed into another, this time a concrete and real one, a conflict between the career life and homemaking.

This dilemma is a serious one. If the women's universities go on replicating the work being done by general universities and do not address the themselves to the task of helping young women find answer to the above dilemma they certainly will have no *raison d'être* for their existence.

The other important task that the women's universities have to fulfil is to make coverage of higher education for women more wide. They have to make conscious efforts to attract women from those classes and areas which are not yet touched by the liberating influence of education. As the commonwealth of Learning has emphasised there are three main responsibilities of women's education:

1. To equip them to occupy the positions of powers that will in theory become available to them,

2. To prepare them for meeting the increasingly more demanding needs of homemaking, and
3. To provide appropriate training to enable them to assume leadership roles in their communities.

There is one more angle to the problem. The debates about what milieu is best suited to develop women's talents and to enable them to act affectively in a highly competitive society revolve around the fact whether proponents of change choose to stress women's sameness or difference in relation to men. Proponents of sameness have stressed the importance of the same residential environment, classroom and curriculum, seeing education in all female groups as being "sheltered" in some undefined way. In this view, the developmental process of moving from adolescence to young adulthood is identical for women and men, and is best experienced together.

Proponents of institutions for women emphasize the importance of internalizing strong female identity in the process of becoming adult, seeing that experience as a key to becoming successful. Because they acknowledge difference, women's institutions and their faculties and students have been prominent in arguing for curricular reform so that both liberal arts and professional training take account of women's experience.

Theoretically, there is no reason why life transitions could not be easily managed in a coeducational setting, but if the academic environment is one that assumes the male experience as normative, and provides few examples of successful and competent women receiving respect and recognition from their male peers, such transitions can not be easily managed.

Indeed, the challenge for women's education is much bigger than the challenge before the education system as such.

The Vidyapith is conscious of its role as an educational institution for women and it has moved towards evolving a programme specifically addressed to the needs of women.

The first step in this direction at Banasthali has been to restructure the first degree course.

The University Grants Commission in its "Development of Higher Education in India - a policy frame" declared restructuring of courses at the undergraduate stage to be an important part of the reform of higher education. It said that it was absolutely essential that every undergraduate should be given a grounding in four important areas :

(1) A set of foundation courses which are designed to create an awareness of areas such as Indian History and Culture; history of the freedom struggle in India and other parts of the world; Social and Economic life in India including concepts and process of development; the scientific method including the role of science and technology in development, alternative value systems and societies based on them, Cultures of Asia and Africa and Gandhian thought (2) a set of core courses which will give the student an opportunity to acquire a broad familiarity with some chosen disciplines, including a study of one or more of them in depth (3) some applied studies/projects/ field work which will form an integral activity of the course and will be carried out in the Final year and (4) involvement in a programme of national or social service for the first two years. This will provide a rounded and richer education.

When Banasthali took up the work of restructuring of courses, immediately upon attaining the university status, it thus spelt out the problem :

"Under-graduate education is at present perhaps the weakest link in the education system: this is largely due to multiplicity of objectives which are sought to be achieved through it. These objectives are sometimes contradictory and therefore efforts at achieving them if not made with caution, may lead to failure in achieving any one of them.

The inability of the School education to perform adequately the task expected of it, i.e., to provide a broad based general education, has resulted in making undergraduate education to a great extent an extension of school years. Thus one objective which is sought to be advanced through undergraduate education is to provide a broad based liberal education.

The undergraduate education is also the foundation for higher academic work at a Master's level and further for advanced research. As such it is expected to give adequate academic grounding to the students.

Introduction of 10+2+3 should mean terminal stage of education at +2 for many. If this can be done +3 stage need not aim at providing general education but prepare base for higher academic work. However the social reality is different. The Challenge of Education - A Policy Perspective had stated that effective steps should be taken to see that only those with scholastic interest or aptitude enter higher education but it also realised that this was possible only if degrees are delinked from jobs. However the problem is not merely that of degree-job link. The degrees have a high social value also.

So long as these constraints are there the First Degree Course will have to provide for both general education and advanced academic work. This can be done in two ways, providing two different courses at the undergraduate level

catering for the two different types of students or make provision for a different subject mix and introduce flexibility within one common structure.

10+2+3 structure has also failed on the vocationalization front. Vocationalization has not made much headway mainly because of the cultural prejudices towards skill oriented education. Insistence on some children going to vocational stream may create resentment among the parents even if children are to enter that stream on the basis of their aptitude. The need to seek a way out of the difficulty posed by the lure of degree on one hand and need to increase the horizon of the employ-ability of science and art graduates remains.

The foundation courses component will continue to be of great significance in providing a general education. The nature and scope of these courses should be decided in the light of the University Education Commission's view cited above. One has to be very clear about this and resist the temptation to include all such courses which might be considered significant today. Also some thought should be given to the possibility of what can be done at the school level in regard to this component. In particular, while the importance of language as a means of communication in higher academic work cannot be overstated one will have to think whether enough in this area is being done in the school.

The Vidyapith has adopted structure of the first degree course taking all the above considerations in account.

At the Post-graduate level, though the Vidyapith is continuing with master's courses in traditional areas which were being offered prior to the Vidyapith being notified as an institution deemed to be university, its thrust at this level now is to offer

Master's courses in new and emerging areas of study which will provide women better chances of a fruitful career. During last seven years the Vidyapith has introduced M.Sc. Home Science (Foods and Nutrition), M.Sc. Home Science (Clothing and Textile), Master of Computer Application, M.Sc. Computer Science, M.Sc. Mathematical Science (with specialization in pure and Applied Mathematics/Operation Research and Statistics/Theoretical Computer Science), M.Sc. Bio-Science (with specialization in Applied Botany and Applied Zoology) and M.Sc. Biotechnology, M.Sc. Electronics, M. Tech. (Computer Science) and M.B.A.

Vidyapith's M. Phil. Social Science (History, Economics, Political Science and Sociology) is also of an innovative kind. It has an element of multidisciplinary studies and it includes introduction of Pedagogy in addition to Research Methodology.

The Vidyapith has also initiated changes in examination system to make it more meaningful. Continuous assessment is being given increasingly more and more weightage and forms of evaluation other than written tests (assignments and seminars etc.) are also being introduced in the system. Hopefully, this will lead in due course to changes in teaching methodology also.