

## **The University's Role in Development**

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**Abstract:** *Universities are always a powerful and creative hub of ideas, innovations and inventions. As factories of knowledge, universities disseminate knowledge, values and culture.*

*The economy centered capitalist ideology considers University's major role in terms of development of technology, talent and tolerance. To achieve these three objectives, the capitalist order invests in higher education to improve quality of life, economic productivity and maximization of profit margin.*

*Globalization of economy, in the final analysis appears to stand for control and monopoly multinational's network in economy, media, education and culture.*

*While fully aware of its role in economic development, university as a seat of learning and producer of knowledge has to take first things first without minimizing the importance of technology it should address the primary issue of purpose of knowledge or purpose of life. Higher education should, first and foremost serve the purpose and objective of life. Economic development, technology, enhancement of talent and building of tolerance, are directly linked with the purpose of life. This paper argues that a holistic education paradigm can achieve this objective better than the existing utilitarian educational paradigm, exported, in the name of globalization, to the so-called developing world.*

*This paper makes an effort to highlight basic features of a holistic education paradigm based on the global ethical values of Islam.*

**Keywords:** Development, Technology, Talent, Tolerance, holistic development, values

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Human capital development remains the key to a meaningful global development strategy whether in the east or the west. The western Capitalist economy could grow and reach its height thanks to a proportionate development of skills, techniques and human resource needed to meet challenges of technology. The correlation between fast technological development and human talent development is the key to the capitalist development strategy.

Influenced by the technological revolution in the western capitalist model of development, the so-called developing world believes the key to improvement of quality of life lies in technological progress alone. In the western model three T's are believed to play key role. First and foremost is technology.

The contemporary technological revolution, with its unprecedented speed in IT revolution and consequent globalization of media and economy not only have transferred the size of economy and nature of society but also have changed our concept of time, space and world view. Technology has assumed so-central a place in human life that not only those who live in cosmopolitan cities and posh suburbs but even those who live in rural areas cannot survive without technology. Man's dependence on technology has reached a point where human behavior is to be adjusted and modified in view of the demands of latest technology. Man's food habits, reading culture, interpersonal communication, global connectivity, ways of socialization, travel, security, personal time, in brief total human behavior in society has because subservient to technology, man's own invention and creation.

Technology remains a key factor in economic development, knowledge transfer, man's security and future of humanity, poverty alleviation, literacy level, health care, housing, in brief man's basic needs depend directly on the level of technological development.

Universities are hotbeds of inventions, innovations and the cutting edge of technological advancements. The secret of high technological performance of the west lies in its interface of University education with the industry. A recent study of over three hundred metropolitan regions done by Richard Florida et al, tries to establish a logical correlation between universities and creative economy.<sup>1</sup>

Development of metropolitan regions has been directly related with the role of universities in conducting research and offering technological

solutions. The role of Stanford University and MIT in development of Silican Valley and greater Boston area is a ground reality. The point we would like to emphasize is while regional economic development in the US or elsewhere appears have correlation with the leadership role played by participating seats of higher learning, does economic and technological development and excellence in technology transfer also results in a holistic development of man with internalization of basic human values?

The second pillar of economic development, in the utilization paradigm, is said to be talent i.e. enhancement of human capacities needed to run technology, and at the same time attracting available top class talent, researchers, inventors, mentors, as faculty members in the universities. A proper combination of the two gives a university an edge over other institutions. It is innovative faculty which attracts industry to invest in research and benefits from the fruit of research in its industrial build up at national and global level. Market need leads to discovery of innovative solutions and their application in industry brings success to entrepreneurialism.

This industrial link with the academia results in ranking of universities, in the west and the east, for achieving higher number of patents and research publication in high impact factor journals. Faculty who succeeds in getting larger number of patents is considered more talented and resourceful and qualifies for fast track academic promotions and financial rewards.

Third place of economic progress and scientific and technological development is said to be creation of tolerance which means acceptance of diversity in ideas, identities, ethnic, religious and cultural realism as well as acceptance of life styles which have been earlier considered unethical, immoral and unlawful. This departure from the established universal norms has become an obsession with the post-modern morality. Leaving it aside for a while, the concept of tolerance itself is a welcome idea and helpful in social interaction in our age of globalization. To sum up, universities as engine of innovation and hub of technological development its transfer lead a society to better economic progress and play a crucial role in regional development. The question we raised earlier that 'what do we mean by development' still needs an answer. Is development confined to creative economic index? Is it enough to have a vibrant relationship between universities and industry, in order to create a tolerant human

society? Can excellence in scientific and technological innovation also make a society socially sustainable? This and other related questions, we raised earlier call for further deliberations.

The key to the role of universities, in our view, as engine of development lies in our vision and purpose of life. If the purpose of life is to have material satisfaction of the individual in measurable economic terms, the role of universities as engines of innovation and hub of technological solutions is understandable. However, if the objective and purpose of life is to realize certain higher global ethical values in human conduct and behavior, technological development and innovation should also lead to realization of a value based ethical and moral society.

A value based society does not mean a rural or pre-industrial and pre-techno culture environment and habitation. It simply means technology should be subservient to ideology and not ultimacy of technology and economic progress. Technological development and innovation is necessary to cope with the growing needs of human society. However, it is totally different thing to use technology for higher objectives of life than to make universities simply engine of innovation, mainly in technology. If technology is taken as the benchmark of quality of life and success of academic program of a university, in the final analysis we may have technocrats and work force with expertise in technological know-how but with no concept of purpose of life.

This aspect has become glaringly visible in highly technological societies in the west as well as in the east. An obvious example of take-over by techno-culture and consequently decline of family values, for example is in the case of U.S. and Japan.

A holistic development of human personality can take place when universities give equal importance to the human, intellectual, spiritual, psychical as well as technological needs of society. Islamic paradigm of knowledge and higher education represents a holistic model in which the Divine guidance, the Qur'an and the prophetic *sunnah* enjoin ethical and moral conduct as well as call for exploration in the universe, to discover what the Creator has provided for the benefits of mankind. This is done with a deep sense of ethical and moral responsibility toward the Creator (*huquq Allah*) and toward His Creations (*huquqal 'ibad*). The faith of a Muslim persuades him to

conduct scientific enquiry to understand Allah's blessings and favors on man.

University education, therefore, has to have primary objective of developing critical thinking, search for meaning in life and the purpose of human existence on earth. It is not for the theologian or philosopher to address those questions. It is for each and every researcher to think and try to find out what should be the objective of scientific research and innovative technology, is it simply a matter of using technical know-how for economic prosperity or to achieve certain higher goals of life. Is there a desire in the university education to inculcate values such as unity in life (*tawhid*), equity and just and fair attitude (*'adl*) contributing to the welfare of society (*infaq*), realization of good and virtue (*ma'ruf*) and elimination of wrong, evil and unethical practices (*munkar*), achieving excellence in doing good (*taqwa*), standing for truth (*haqq*), facing crisis situation with boldness (*shuja'ah*), facing difficulties and frustrations with strong resolution, confidence, optimism and persistence (*sabr*) considering human kind a single community (*ummah*) and brotherhood (*al-ikhah*), doing best to make human society peaceful and secure (*Dar-as-Salam*). Those are as a few out of a number of global ethical values whose inculcation in the personality of a researcher, a student as well as a teacher can transform the world view and way of life of a person. Consequently, such a person cannot become ego-centred, individualistic, concerned with his or her personal gain and benefits. These values inculcate a sense of belonging to society and consequently contributing to the welfare of humanity.

University's engagement with industry, through technology and scientific research is a phenomenon which has made Stanford University and MIT success models. But engagement with society, understanding human problems and man's encounter with the ultimate is equally a workable model which helps in holistic development of the human talent. A holistic model of development, in our view, alone can reduce extremism, violence and use of force in human society. It can produce a new generation of young scholars with their commitment to moral and ethical behavior and total involvement in innovative technologies.

An integration of global Islamic values in the teaching material as well as teaching methodology is the key to a moderate, balanced, fair and just or (*'adil*) society, state and humanity. This can be done only when

academicians liberate themselves from the intellectual colonialism of the west. There is nothing wrong in learning from the western models, success, stories and failures. It is totally different thing to adopt their world view, philosophy of education and solution to their typical problems.

It is not necessary that solutions developed in the west also work in a totally different geo-political and cultural context. Muslim world particularly has to liberate itself from the cultural, educational, economic, political and social imperialism of the west over the rest.

To conclude our higher education and concept of development should be based on our own purpose and objective of life. An imported education system based on individualism, utilitarianism, materialism and ethical relativism can never satisfy our needs and aspirations. An ethics centered system inspired and guided by the two non-variable sources of guidance (*hidayah*) alone can lead us to development of a society where fairness, justice, moderation, critical thinking and serving Allah and His creature's prevails.