

Friends.

Education has not only decided the course of our civilization but has also been very crucial for human survival. However, over the years --pre modern to modern times --while the essence and the role of education has remained the same there has been massive transformation in terms of Institutions and formalized delivery. It has not only evolved in terms of its subject content, but the delivery has also transformed with the developments in the field of information technology and the digital revolution. The delivery of education through formal institutions has remarkably changed and the knowledge contours available to the humanity today is a reflection of that.

However, today, the humanity and its institutions stand face to face with an extraordinary situation of COVID-19 pandemic. As the world has locked itself down to fight the pandemic in an unprecedented manner, the consequences are already visible and being felt in almost all spheres of human life and activities. May they be financial, economic, educational, interpersonal, social or cultural. This change, as I see, could be more than temporary if not permanent.

In response to the pandemic, the humanity is trying to come up with various responses which seek fundamental changes in our institutions. Educational institutions are trying to formulate new response mechanisms and paradigms to learning and teaching. Virtual or Online education seems to be the most acknowledged answer to the 'new normal' in educational campuses across the world. The pandemic has rendered traditional educational delivery functionless and paralyzed. Hence, digital education designing, content development, delivery and of course its adoption by the relevant stakeholders are real time challenges

today. The adoption gets more complicated in the absence of real time teacher and learners.

With the emergence of futuristic technology applications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine learning (ML) in education, the revolutionary changes shall be visible in the educational content and its delivery modus operandi. This entails familiarity, proficiency and completely different set of pedagogical training, on the part of trainers and learners. Also the reach and access of the technology has to be ensured to the learners in a soup of digital divide, especially in developing countries. Hence, a comprehensive ecosystem of various technology and its stakeholders needs to be developed. No wonder, the government today, is promoting development of indigenous virtual meeting solutions, learning applications and platforms which are easy to use. It is also promoting integration of virtual and traditional learning. Some of the initiatives in this direction could be seen in Flipped classrooms and MOOCs which have been pioneered by CEC.

It would not be out of place -- if I draw your attention towards CEC as pioneer organization which has long been contributing towards digitalization of higher education in the country. CEC has not only developed and disseminated digital educational content to its learners but has also been promoting and working towards adoption of digital education through various outreach and awareness programs across the country. I would also like to apprise the august audience that CEC is the National Coordinator of SWAYAM MOOCs, for both UG and PG level credit based courses. CEC has the honor of hosting largest no of credit based courses free of cost for its learners on SWAYAM platform. CEC also conducts

online country-wide proctored examinations for MOOCs at a nominal fee which is refundable to the students on clearing the exam.

In the face of Pandemic, education in the country and beyond has already taken a digital turn. With educational campuses being off limits, for learners and teachers alike, digitalization of education seems to be the best bet for providing – learning remotely through virtual campus and e-learning platforms like SWAYAM. Viewing this as an opportunity and given the vast landscape of higher education in India --- with approx. 300 million student population in over 950 universities and more than 45000 colleges, digitalization of the education seems to be the only answer. It shall, not only help us achieve massification of higher education but shall also seek to address the issues of quality education delivery in the country. Though it offers numerous merits, achieving it may not be as simple as it may sound.

For it to be a reality, it requires a drastic change in the mind-set of policy makers, authorities, students and specially educationists. Faculty training, accreditation parameters, criteria also need revisiting. As society evolves post-pandemic, new norms of behavior, working, and communication will evolve and universities will have to change their programs, delivery modes, assessment, working models and governance.

Friends, since the COVID-19 situation has knocked the conventional education delivery off ----- into a totally different trajectory, we need to bring about fundamental changes in education system and processes. The digitalization of higher education which has already been taken up by the Consortium for Educational Communication shall gain further momentum. We at CEC are all geared to tackle the problem and provide a workable solution to our teacher-

learner ecosystem. Current situation has definitely accelerated our use of digital technology and can transform our education system for the better. Face-to-face interaction in classroom teaching, will take time to return. And even when it does, it will surely return with new norms such as a blended mode, or with changes in student-teacher ratio so as to maintain proper social distancing. It is now time for us to respond to the extraordinary challenge. The opportunity, therefore, in higher education is one of transformational change and not just incremental. This requires brave adoption of extraordinary solutions.

Friends, to conclude the fate of humanity and its institutions depend upon our resilience. On the face of Pandemic, it is time that we “gird up our loins” and be prepared with dynamic responses, their adoptions and integration in the new self of society.

It would not be out of place if I quote Alvin Toffler a great author and futurist who once said “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn”.

So Let’s get going and be a literate.

Best Wishes and Thank you.