

## **Thinking *Bharatiya*, Acting *Vaishwik* in Internationalization of Higher Education**

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### **Abstract**

*Internationalization of Higher Education (IoHE) is a rapidly emerging zone of transition for visualizing new forms of intercultural communication, collaboration, knowledge creation and dissemination in the present. As a responsible, knowledge-centric society, it is imperative for us to create pathways for not just building Destination Bharat but also to stay connected to our commitment towards realizing our role as a Vishwaguru (a teaching light to the world). This requires that we leverage and shape our pedagogical approaches towards understanding and mainstreaming the inherent Bhartiya Anubhav (Indian experience) in the Vaishwik (global) context. This article throws light on these multiple approaches and explains certain related issues to the Indian context.*

**Keywords:** Internationalization, *Bharatiya Anubhav*, Decolonization, Higher Education

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## **1. Introduction**

Internationalization of Higher Education (IoHE, henceforth) is often confused with globalization and, to some extent; the overlap between the two is justified (Altbach & Knight, 2007). One may ask how else to envision the international creation and communication of knowledge and ideas, if not in a global paradigm of affairs, whether scientific, socio-political, cultural, or educational. However, scholars vary on this as internationalization may be seen as operational with core national aspects and features that are now, through IoHE, being sought to be spread strategically, foregrounding the national advantage (Buckner, 2019). To some extent, thus, IoHE may seem to be emerging as a counter to those aspects of globalization that also culminated in a backlash, often consisting of an assertion of cultural identities against the processes of a cultural leveling of sorts, unevenly mainstreamed through the globalization thesis. A similar critique is available (Altbach, 2004) for the uneven flow and framing of the agenda as well as the knowledge exchange procedures being given effect through the IoHE dominated by the global north in the present. For a hugely diverse country like India, which has now majorly arrived on the global scene of IoHE, possibilities are boundless. This article delves into certain aspects contrasting the economic with the socio-cultural in IoHE, specifically with regard to the advocacy for India's unique role and position on IoHE.

## **2. The Economic and the Cultural in Internationalization of Higher Education**

There can be little doubt that higher education has increasingly been drawn into the game of trade and economic advantage being aggressively played by the major players of the global north (Tokas, 2017). The other half of the world is dealing with the socio-economic and cultural implications of the same, seeing this negotiation of theirs often as a concomitant to the aspirational journey of people as well as the policy agendas drawn at the global scale that meet their expectations. As the ideal of social justice is intertwined with the concept of higher education, and especially so for the developing world, internationalization is also

often seen through this prism. Thus, concerns about equity play a major role in the drafting of policies, e.g. the National Education Policy 2020, in these contexts (UGC, 2021).

Decolonization is another aspect which gains primacy for these countries in the wake of the motto of internationalization being somewhere seen as aligned with new forms of academic imperialism (Bamberger & Morris, 2023). It is imperative for India to consider its options for balancing the economic with the cultural while negotiating its interaction with different models of IoHE. These two sides are also present in the assessment of student choices of institutions, courses, and the preferred components of the curriculum. The motivations vary in accordance with situational factors and related issues, which play a definitive role. Research shows that non-economic factors play an important role in the selection of Destination India by foreign students (Tokas et al., 2022).

### **3. Intersectionality within Internationalization of Higher Education**

Often, it is said that IoHE has a bent towards approaches flowing from the West. This, however, is argued in conjunction with ideas like internationalization at home, which foregrounds the need to align the curriculum, processes, and policies in IoHE towards capacity building in the state-steered institutional framework of higher education (Guri-Rosenblit, 2015). The Indian scenario of higher education is deeply rooted in the statist paradigm and has ideas of valuing inclusion and diversity at its core (Kumar, 2016). The goal becomes to work with intersectional and inclusive approaches that give due weight to race, caste, gender, and ethnicity on various fronts. The built-in capacity to be intersectional is almost synonymous with *Bhartiya Dristhti* (Indian ways of seeing). Thus, internationalization at home must reconcile with intersectionality at home to bring IoHE home. As the optics of IoHE in the West appear to have a homogenized hue (Tight, 2022), this uniquely Indian approach can project Destination *Bharat* in the true light of a *Vishwaguru*. It also has a close connection with promotion of a language-centric model of IoHE.

#### 4. The Language Question in Internationalization of Higher Education

Language is an important ally in visualizing decolonization in a new light. For long, debates in higher education have been around the question of an epistemological departure towards the post-colonial. The idea of a language-centric model is not new in this light. However, to imagine something like IoHE in these terms is indeed worthwhile for overcoming some of the limitations inherent in the confrontationist, post-colonial imagination (Spivak, 2010). This approach is also relatively different when it comes to operationalizing in terms of carving out new modalities of intercultural communication, rooted in IoHE. Thus, promoting the appeal of Indian languages and their expressive depth must be our emphasis. An important dimension in this is the student's voice and identity. Pedagogically speaking, the navigation of an educational sphere is impossible without resolving the language question. If we emphasize the learning of one Indian language alongside the main curriculum design, students will not only develop cross-cultural competence but also be able to build empathy and connection in a much deeper way. Therefore, it can be argued that the *Bhartiyakaran* (Indianization) of higher education's internationalization needs to be conceptualized with the unique linguistic and civilizational appeal which can transform one's *anubhav* (experiential realization).

#### 5. Foregrounding Learn with India: *Bhartiya Anubhav* in Internationalization of Higher Education

India has emerged as a significant player on the international scene of learning, especially in the post-globalization era. Examples of this can be seen in the celebration of Yoga, Ayurveda (especially in the post-Covid days), the rising appeal of Sanskrit and Indian music (The Hindu, 2009), as well as the unique spiritual appeal that the Indian worldview inspires for the inculcation of peace-loving ways of learning and knowledge dissemination. This is a highly sought after quality when it comes to intercultural communication. A lot of celebrated achievers and even common people in the West have looked towards Indian spiritual messages for purposes of finding meaning in their otherwise successful lives. This includes

the likes of Steve Jobs (Economic Times, 2021), Julia Roberts, Richard Gere (My Nation, 2018), and others (Gilbert, 2006). However, it is to be noted that this *anubhav* (realization through experience) needs to be mainstreamed in our IoHE approaches at various levels through conducting detailed research and even short-term studies of student experiences (Tokas and Kumar, 2023). Going further, a new pedagogy of *Bhartiya Anubhav* needs to be evolved to meet this goal. We need more ethnographies and studies rooted in social psychology to understand this advocated path better. However, these studies also need to be seen together with evidence that gives a statistical picture of broad trends and preferences with regard to IoHE.

In conclusion, one can say that the constructive task of building the Indian response to IoHE firstly needs to foreground the deep civilizational learning, and the *Bhartiya* worldview, through a transformative imagination of understanding the *arth* (meaning) of an experiential journey alongside it. Secondly, and more importantly, the idea of Thinking *Bhartiya*, Acting *Vaishwik*, as conceptualized here, speaks of the shift in approach from emulating the West towards imagining a self-reliant, self-aware and a much more rooted approach to IoHE. However, for making strides in this direction the point of departure from the presently dominating modes of doing IoHE has to be seen in theorization of a new cultural semantics of imagining the *Vaishwik* within the *Bhartiya*.

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