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Preface...

Research, the systematic and critical investigation of information, serves as a cornerstone of modern education. Over the past two to three decades, courses on social research methodologies have become an essential component of humanities programs. This trend reflects a growing recognition that understanding the methods and tools of social inquiry empowers students to become critical consumers of information. Today, it's increasingly likely that most universities offer courses in social research methods. These courses equip students with the skills to analyze social phenomena, evaluate evidence, and formulate their own research questions. By fostering critical thinking and research literacy, social research courses empower students to engage with the world around them in a more informed and meaningful way.

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally altered the educational landscape, forcing universities to adapt and innovate. As we move into a post-pandemic era, the conversation around universities' social responsibility takes on renewed significance. This responsibility extends far beyond academics, encompassing a commitment to social good, environmental sustainability, and equitable access to knowledge. Universities have a unique capacity to shape a better future. They are hubs of research, generating solutions to pressing issues like climate change and public health. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) in India, for instance, emphasizes the importance of integrating sustainability practices into the curriculum. This aligns perfectly with the growing "Blue Economy" concept, which promotes economic development that protects our oceans. Integrating such themes into education empowers students to become responsible citizens and future leaders.

Social responsibility also involves ensuring inclusivity and access. Universities must address gender disparities by initiatives like Gender Labs within Women's Studies departments. Furthermore, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision for education, which advocated for equal opportunities for all, provides a guiding light. Universities should strive to make quality education affordable and accessible, transcending social and economic barriers. The post-pandemic world demands agile and adaptable institutions. Decentralized governance models can empower departments and faculty to be more responsive to community needs. Additionally, digital transformation presents immense opportunities. Online learning platforms can democratize access to education, while also fostering sustainable practices by reducing the environmental impact of physical campuses.

The path forward requires a commitment to integral education, as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo. This approach promotes the holistic development of students, nurturing intellectual, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Universities that embrace this philosophy will be better equipped to cultivate responsible citizens who can solve complex problems and contribute positively to society. Universities have a pivotal role to play in shaping a just, sustainable, and equitable future. By embracing social responsibility in its various facets, from curriculum development to governance structures, they can become true catalysts for positive change in the post-COVID era.

Dr. Asha Shukla
(Editor-in-Chief)
