STANDARD OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ASIA: PANEL PRESENTATION
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1. Preamble

There are many associations/organizations/institutions/universities/deemed universities in Asia that are also involved in theological education, we can only note of their presence, and their part of contribution can only be noted here, and a discussion can be suspended over them.   Theological Education in World Christianity, a joint report of ETE-WCC and WOCATI-2009 noted that there are 50 affiliated institution of SSC (Senate of Serampore College), 100 to ATA (Asian Theological Association), 105 to Association of Theological Schools in south East Asia (ATESIA) and 70 to Indian Institute of Missiology (IIM).   I am told that there are more than 2000 theological seminaries/colleges/bible schools/missionary training institutes in India alone.   It may be helpful if we take a note that this presentation is centered on Serampore experience, and it does not cover other regions in Asia.

Serampore is an university which is established under a Danish Charter (1827), and an Act of the State Assembly (1918), with power to award degree in any branch/branches of knowledge. It now offers degrees only in Christian Theology, thus it is only university in India which offers degree in theology. Serampore College as University has to follow, as a general policy, the norms and rules applied in sister universities in India. Serampore is an affiliating university system under a body, termed as Senate. Senate is responsible to frame courses of studies, rules for the conduct of examination and determine the qualifications, and eligibility of candidates for different degrees and diplomas conferred by the Council.

2. Introductory remarks

a. Theological education in Serampore System is open, all-embracing and ecumenical.

Serampore has been ecumenical in word and action throughout its history. First Council, the Supreme Governing Body of the College, mandated that one of the members of Council (one out of there, i.e. 33% at that time in 1833) shall be other than the Baptist. Senate which conducts the academic administration of the University is also legally bound to be an ecumenical body, comprised of members resenting all the major denominations in India.

Colleges are also affiliated without any denominational prejudice and discrimination. One should note that theological education, in India, is becoming more and more inclusive in nature and there is a tendency towards dilution of Exclusivism in our system. Some may complain that there is a strong prejudice against certain segments and strands of Christianity (Conservatives, Fundamentalists, and Evangelicals, Charismatic, Pentecostal etc.) within our family. As staff and students from other traditions, regions and language groups, are now joining our systems, we are called upon to be inclusive and ecumenical enough within us.

Serampore, therefore, emphasizes the importance of cultivating an ecumenical perspective, which it believes must be informed by one's own inherited ecclesiastical tradition as well as by other traditions in the Indian religious context, and developing an open-minded and respectful attitude towards others, without giving up one's own beliefs and traditions and at the same time be constructively critical to both one's beliefs and traditions and those of others.

b. The Perspective of Senate of Serampore College (University) on theological education takes the context of plurality in all seriousness. It is aptly stated in the Constitution of One National Structure for Theological Education In India: Set in the midst of people of other faiths and ideologies, as well as situations of life–negating forces, we are called to equip the whole people of God to respond to the contextual challenges, critically and creatively, by being faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the

light of this faith and self-understanding, we seek to equip ministers, leaders, scholars and the whole people of God, to be committed to creative discernment of and active participation in God's liberative mission in the world at large, and in south Asia in particular, by providing programmes of theological study and ministerial formation at various levels through affiliated colleges.

c. Aims and objectives of Theological education

Along with the above mentioned paradigm, the Senate tries to involve itself in helping affiliated institutions to provide relevant curriculum for training ministers, leaders, scholars and the whole people of God engaged in the salvic and liberative mission in the world.

It strives towards the broad goal of equipping the people of God and the congregations, in their respective contexts, to live out the doxological-liturgical, *koinonial*, reflective, *diakonal* and missional dimensions of their existence, with a strong commitment to the liberation of the down-trodden (dalits, adivasis, tribals, women, the disabled, persons infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, etc.). Reconciliation among all human beings (particularly in the multi-religious and pluralistic contexts), and integration and renewal of God's wider creation (particularly in the context of ecological crises) are also a part of it.

The aim of theological education, therefore, is to cultivate an integral and holistic spirituality that would enable the students to be sustained in their commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and be committed to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their living out the truth and values of the Gospel, thereby helping them become faithful and effective ministers/ teachers/ servant leaders in and through the Church and society.

Thus, the academic, professional and personal/ communitarian and vocational formation of candidates are taken seriously under the Serampore theological education system.

d. Standard of Qualify assurance in Serampore System has following set ups:

   i. Evaluation of Colleges through Evaluation Commission

   As Serampore became an affiliating university in 1918, it had to set some conditions for the colleges to comply with. They were to submit a clear statement of qualifications of its staff, general character and equipment of its institution, and give an undertaking to report to the Senate any changes that may take place in the staff situation of the institution. Now institutions have to apply and fill an elaborate self-evaluation Performa. An Evaluation Commission is appointed to visit applicant colleges and give an elaborate report on the staff position, general character of the college, buildings and equipments, finances, library, etc to the senate with recommendation. It is the Senate which takes final decision.

   ii. Senate through its Academic Council work out Degree programme, curriculum and syllabuses, involving affiliated colleges, churches and secular educators. Council of Serampore College has the final say on these matters.

   iii. Board of Moderators deals with cases of maintaining quality and purity in examination and evaluation systems.   grading, class; Internal assessment; External assessment, Mode of Examinations- Assignments- reading, project, term papers, verbatim, participatory; Written; Viva-voce- interactive; examination for practical courses

   iv. Evaluation: Serampore has a Centralized evaluation system though affiliated colleges have freedom to examine and evaluate answer-scripts of their students. Their grades are accepted by the Senate and students are given credit for that. The final grading is the alphabetic (Qualitative) numerical (Quantitative)

3. **Theological Education in Asian Context**

a. **Context**

   i. Asian context-no uniformity, Plural, multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-political system; sectarian, secular; democratic/ideological/authoritarian/religious, multi city (Kung)

   ii. Dominant religion- Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, indigenous

   iii. Christianity is a minority religion in most of the Asian countries.

   iv. Economically, most of the nations in the region can be classified as undeveloped/developing/developed

    v. Social structures- are diverse (tribal/class/caste, agriculture-industrial, rural-urban, rich-poor divide, deprivation/exploitation of large masses; human right issues, gender justice)

Theological education in Asian context has to be for the entire people of God. There is no doubt that in the early days of evangelization, theological colleges, as missionary centres, built up structures that were to support the missionary concerns. For long, theological colleges were considered as centres where pastors, evangelists, missionaries and church professionals were educated in order that they may preserve and propagate certain Christian truths and ethical norms. Now there is general agreement that theological colleges are meant to educate entire people of God so that authentic Christ-centered communities are formed. This dimension of theological education needs to be recognized and strengthened.

Mission and missionary motifs are still primary concern of the Christian communities in this continent. It is praxis oriented and contextual, demanding total commitment with changed life-style of whole people of God. It has to involve the whole church and has to become an instrument of the church in equipping the believer to be an active agent of the liberative mission of God through witness, service and teaching. Theological education, in Asian context, ought to have missiological dimension and there should be addition of relevant courses from time to time. The whole program should be under a rationalized nomenclature, which would enable the students to make choices in accordance with their interest in ministry. Included in this, there should be a dynamic process of incorporating regional and contextual issues either within the existing syllabi of a course, or by developing new courses.

Gradual shift from the understanding of theological education for pastoral ministry to education for the diversified ministry of whole people of God provided a opportunity to Serampore to introduce a few courses for the informed laity of the church and the society. Courses meant for the laity are consciously devoid of pastoral component, which we often find in the ministerial programmes and are external in nature; they are also less in numbers of courses required. Furthermore, many issues/areas that have impinged on theological education in recent times, since the advent of liberation theology, and which have exerted sufficient pressure to ensure that they cannot be ignored in the process of ministerial formation, has forced the theological curriculum to move far beyond the limits of traditional accepted courses of study.

b. Instruments for Theological education
    i. Theological university system (only for Christians), such as Serampore is unique example in Asian contest.
    ii. Secular university system- through Christian Study Departments- is also an example which is now followed in many countries. Theological studies are available to all, irrespective of religious affiliation of the students. Some of the department of Christian studies are established by the churches and are staffed by the churches; some departments are inclusive as they offer studies in all religious traditions.
    iii. Deemed university system is being introduced in some countries like India where centres of specialized fields are recognized and conferred university status. Some of them are offering theological courses and degrees. This field is yet untested as some of them are receiving government funds which is supposed to be secular.
    iv. Accredited institutions- ATESEA, IIM, ATA, are purely private in nature, though following discipline of the accrediting body.
    v. Independent school system have their own diploma/degree system and authority to grant such diploma/degrees.
    vi External based institutional system-distance/electronic

c. Standard of quality assurance under different systems
    This is measured/assessed through different apparatus
    i. Evaluation of Institution- some criteria is set to take an objective view.
    ii. Centralized examination system for grant of degrees/diplomas

    iii. Self-evaluation system, providing opportunity to colleges to assess themselves.

4. Towards standard of quality assurance in Asia

A. Preliminaries-

    i. Theological education is the backbone of the Church and Christian community everywhere without exception, more so in our context in Asia.   In our context, churches depend upon us to provide theological education to their candidates for pastoral as well diversified ministries. The task, consequently, upon those who provide theological education though is noble, involves greater responsibility and accountability. Some mechanism for quality assurance in theological institutions and education is not only necessary, but desirable.

    ii. Quality can be defined differently in different contexts; it can be looked at-from zero defects to 'fitness for purpose'. In reference to theological education, quality means that education process is such that it ensures students achieve their goals and thereby satisfies the need of the church and society.

    iii. Quality sometimes defined as 'fitness by purpose at minimum cost to the society'. As quality in theological education is priority for us, we need to achieve it keeping in mind the issues of relevance, cost, equity and international standards. We should also be concerned with the promotion of a culture of quality within our institutions and have to spell out the elements of this culture.

    iv. There is constant need to assess quality in our system, and seek ways to improve upon:

        a. How we have handled such challenges: It may be that we require different sets of leadership in our institutions to bring out changes, or need more decentralization, dialogic and democratic style of functioning and management to maintain quality in theological education.

        b. We are discussing the question of 'control' and ownership' within our system. How do we generate a sense of ownership among the staff so that they are motivated to align themselves to institutional goals and give their best? How do we convince the management (Churches in most cases, Governing Boards, in others) to own the institutions, and not to control?

        c. Planning and resources are needed to watch constantly any pitfall in quality in our systems; monitoring and evaluation is to become part of all processes, systems and sub-systems; and a continuous quest for excellence is required.

        d. With the increasing convergence of face-to-face, open and distance learning and e-Learning systems, we need to evolve separate quality assurance mechanism instead of applying the same criteria we apply to other systems.

        e. There is a criticism, perhaps valid, that the Quality Assurance Agencies (like Serampore) are becoming exclusive clubs, and questions are being asked about our credibility; who is to accredit the accreditors?

B. Instruments of maintaining Quality

I have no doubt that every one involved in theological education is conscious of the quality that it propose to provide; so also the credibility and acceptance of its programmes by the church and society. Therefore, quality assurance is the responsibility of everyone in an educational institution, though the top management sets the policies and priorities. As a consequence, assuring quality should be a continuous and ongoing process. It should not be considered as a one time activity for accreditation/affiliation alone.

Serampore, since 2006, is using criteria which are developed by National assessment and Accreditation council (NAAC) for assessing universities and colleges; it has been quite helpful and useful. I will take some more time now to analyze and prepare a report on the basis of form I have received.

Quality assurance is assessed in the following way:

a   self-evaluation as per the guidelines provided: Real quality that is sustainable is one that is assessed by self; gives strength and limitation of an institution to itself and to others; this helps for improvement;

       leads to completion-good or bad (manipulation of marks/results, extra teaching, personal attention; more equipments etc.)

b   identifying pre-determined criteria for assessment

c   peer review by a panel of expert; evaluation team: meeting with Principal, staff, students, visiting class rooms, hostel, staff residences, library.

       External quality monitoring- mandatory/voluntary; checks reports, record and policies, interviews;

       Internal quality monitoring by Academic Council, Planning Boards, Executive Committee, Boards of Studies etc;

       Problem with autonomous body (invasion on autonomy, academic freedom,

d   analysis of impression/information, report and recommendation

e   final decision by the committee

Summary: self evaluation, bench marking and external quality monitoring.

Evaluation is a continued process, is supposed to be repeated every five years/at the time of new affiliations at MTh/DTh levels.

There has to be different criteria for distance education/research, though they are substantially the same in all cases.

C. Comments and suggestions

i. Assessing the assessors

One may note that we have not been able to assess ourselves as a university/accrediting body, which can be an extension of the assessment of colleges affiliated to the Senate. We need an outside body to asses us under following: curricula; teaching-learning and evaluation; research, consultancy and evaluation; infra-structure and learning resources; student support and progression; governance and leadership; innovative practices.

This may amount to suggesting formation of an external body in each of the accrediting/affiliating systems in theological education that are functioning in the region/sub-region. Common/combined evaluation team for affiliation/accreditation can also be helpful. Some thought can be given to this.

ii. Association of accrediting/affiliating institutions

Multiplicity of accrediting bodies has to be taken serious note of, and some where its implication to theological education should have to be discussed. In this context, we should think of a National/International association of accrediting/affiliating institutions engaged in Theological education, as suggestion is worthy for consideration.

iii. Exchange forum

There has been a long-standing need for national and international exchange forum where different theological accrediting bodies/systems can have a time for interaction and exchange of concerns and ideas, such an association will be most helpful in Asian context. It may meet once a while for sharing, common understanding, and planning for joint programme. The difficulties associated with division along doctrinal/theological perspectives can be set aside with mutual trust and commitment.

iv. Network for quality assurance agencies

We are living in an age of global village, but terribly lack in our contact with each other. There is a need for a notional/international network for quality assurance agencies in theological education to collect and disseminate information on current and developing theory and practice on the assessment, improvement and maintenance of quality in theological education. It can provide advice and expertise to assist, facilitate link between accrediting bodies, assist credit transfer schemes for migrating students and provide information about dubious accrediting practices and organizations.

vi. Closer Cooperation

We need to have some kind of active cooperation, and participation in, the process of working our academic programmes irrespective of our affiliations /accreditations in order to be more relevant in our vocation in training misters for Christian. This may be in some of the areas, such as these:

a. Preparation of Common Syllabus, incorporating minimum/maximum contents with emphasis on Contextual syllabuses/courses. We should be sensitive enough, and nothing should prevent us not to be helpful, and flexible enough, in incorporating courses dealing with the concerns of present day in our curriculum, such as issues of Dalits, Minjung, women, indigenous groups; socio-cultural, political and religious movements; rise of communalism, fundamentalism, terrorism and globalization; threat to environment, eco-system, global warming, denuclearization etc. Our task is to equip the students with enough critical tools to be able to relate and integrate class-room theory, practical pastoral situations, and present day socio-religio-economic-political context including sensitivity to the needs and feelings of other people, gender, groups etc.

b. **Cross-over mechanism**- for mutual/conditional recognition-
   Principles of mutual recognition need to be worked out and their and some efforts towards their recognition and acceptance have to be made. This can be worked out through
   i.   Agreed Equivalence System
   ii. Qualifying, or comprehensive Examination; short/tailor made course system, external system;
   iii. Agreed structure for admission process

c. **New ways of providing theological education**: Common minimalism in theological education
   E-Theological Education to counter isolationism
   Distance theological education
   Theological education in multi-religious setting

d. **Resource deficit**: Many theological institutions are facing scarcity of resources; this is leading to related problem- effecting library resources, brain drain, weak infra-structure, poor quality in management etc. Others have inefficiency in managing human resources, budgets and infra-structure assets. Sharing and closer cooperation will help

e. **Pedagogy**: Quality in teaching (pedagogy) and lack of research opportunity
   Theological education has never taken this task seriously. Teaching element, pedagogical aspect, was never included in our structure of curriculum. Courses in Christian Education do have a few segments on it but it is not sufficient to help our graduate to be skillful as a teacher. Whether we have a course in pedagogy in curriculum or not, the college should evolve its own way in preparing its students to be an efficient teacher wherever they are. Time has come that we take some steps to train our teachers in theological seminaries and colleges. Specialized institutes, offering degree/diploma courses, can be established; regular training programmes for teachers can be offered through regular fresher' courses, seminars and consultations.
   *Context oriented teaching methodology has to be preferred than the content based. It means that the ministerial needs of the church and society should be given freedom to determine the nature of theological education. It calls upon the seminaries to participate in the ministry of liberation of the oppressed and marginalized, exploited and the weaker section of the society and working towards its transformation into the reign of God.
   *There should have to be a paradigm shift from disciplines to issue-oriented learning. Such a structure would address the contemporary issues, problems and concerns of the church and society from biblical, theological, ethical, sociological and other perspectives would facilitate dynamic relevance. The introduction of inter-disciplinary and integrated courses, in the past, was a conscious effort on the part of Senate towards that shift, but it failed to encourage group and team teaching within our system and could not deliver desired result.
   *This also involves another shift, from class–room to out-of-class learning, from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning. The courses and teaching method applied needs to be radically changed in order to establish new form of understanding and relationship between the teacher and pupil.
   *Another shift that is required concerns with reducing the load of the students: from unwieldy to the manageable curriculum. Most of the desired aspects and effects from the study of variety of subjects that are now included in our curricula can be tapped by means of offering a few courses. Course that

are inter-disciplinary in nature may be more helpful; so also preparing more integrated courses that can be taught by a few teachers from different branches.

*Theological education and ministerial formation is a life-long process, and it does not end at the conclusion of first-degree programme. We need to work out a programme that supports the process even after student leaves the seminary.

f. Curricula Revision-Parameters

Much of our curriculum and syllabuses are the one which were given to us by the earlier generation; and we have mostly followed them faithfully. Our resources hardly allowed us to review them and come out with new innovative ideas and programmes.

*The issue has often been raised that context concerns should be included in the theological curriculum. Context of economic poverty, social injustice, religious and cultural plurality, political oppression etc. should be addressed in theological education and ministerial formation. *Relevant theological education should have to take the contextual concern seriously and should have to include them in its curricula. Certainly each region, perhaps even each country, would have issues peculiar to their contexts which should find space in a theological curriculum offered by institutions in that area. However, it should not be necessary for issues that are clearly confined to a region/country to be a part of continental curriculum. *The curriculum should strive for cultivating academic excellence, practical skills and personal formation. Theological colleges should not be mere degree-oriented institutions but disciple training centres. *Personal formation should be extended beyond individual formation to community formation.*It is often pointed out the theological education is primarily urban-oriented where the needs of the rural churches are side lined. The same is true of the ministry of churches. Pastors and ministers needs to be prepared for the rural churches and courses with specialization in rural ministry should be introduced in our theological curricula.

Contextual/regional concerns:

The institutions in our continent may have to deal with the following issues in their curriculum, and perhaps develop specific courses for understanding and interpreting the mission of the church, and for the proclamation of the Gospel:

a. the rise of religious fundamentalism that has pervaded the ideologies of political parties,

b. The rise of violence against Christians by groups claiming to have the backing of political parties or religious groups, the indifference of law and order and other authorities to these incidents unless pressure is brought to bear on them   from higher authorities, and the helplessness of the courts in curbing these incidents and bringing culprits to book.

c. The socio-economic condition of the majority of Christians in the continent,

d. The shortage of qualified theological teachers in the region,

e. The plight of regional language institutions as qualified teachers are rare;

f. freedom to colleges to add regional concerns to present courses   and develop new courses, which would introduce contextual concerns and keep theological education relevant to the issues faced by the people;

g. Mission concern is an area, which is highlighted by many churches. One way of doing this to penetrate and spread the subjects dealing with mission over all branches of study in the basic and essential study of ministerial formation at graduate level so that it may reach the congregation through the minister. Of course, the course should be introduced at Master's level too.

h. Concern for lack of personal and public morality among those who are entrusted with responsibilities. Personal and spiritual formation needs special attention.

i. With the introduction of multiple of degree programmes and courses, we often miss our priorities. A trained Christian theologian is expected to be professionally competent person in his/her respective field of training. We seem to produce ministers and theologians not competent enough in Christian discourses and spirituality. This may be contributing towards alienation of major segment of our community.

j. Theological courses for all: Laity oriented theological education; Theological regulation for informed People of other faiths (Inter-faith oriented courses)

5. Recommendations
  i. We may think of an international support-group for quality assurance in Asia.
 ii. We should try to work out evaluation criteria, such as we have in India under NACC as applicable to theological education in our context.
iii. Composition, terms of reference, methodology and other administrative aspects can be discussed in details.

Helpful References:
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