

**Executive Summary of Kerala State Higher Education Council Sponsored Research Project,  
'Expanding the social reachabilty of higher education through effective interventions in  
academic practices: Reflections on Best Practices for social transformation' by  
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Academic departments in our higher educational institutions exhibit a tendency to remain aloof from other disciplines and work in cubicles of their respective knowledge domains. Our colleges have immense potentialities in creating new knowledge systems through simulating the imagination and creativity of the faculty members and the students, but we often follow the conventional path ways of knowledge. Following interdisciplinary methodologies these institutions could reach out to the academic world and the society at large in a more fruitful manner. For achieving this we need to break academic isolationism that exist in the centres. The academic culture of an institution needs to be revamped through certain approaches and systemic departures, where certain practices aiming at creation of interdisciplinary knowledge is to be mooted. When this process is internalized and succeeds in creating a new knowledge system it becomes truly interdisciplinary. Best academic practices are to emerge from this context, where social sciences and sciences associate fruitfully for the academic community and the society. The project seeks to explore possibilities in identifying, implementing, institutionalizing and internalizing certain practices which in the long run attain the status of best practices.

Much hue and cries are made about the deterioration of teaching and learning standards in the arts and science colleges which are affiliated to various universities in Kerala. Instead of seriously trying to find out the root causes of the problem, discussions and deliberations are made within the context of fixing global standards in education and converting these colleges in to some other entities as envisaged by specialists belonging to the new culture industry. In a similar plane, the output of these institutions is judged by the same parameters which are fixed for industries and factories. This is a mistaken notion which can do only harm to the future of these higher education centres, which through years have contributed much to the society in terms of knowledge production, social transformation and the larger

process of nation making. Though the material concerns about these institutions are indeed significant agendas for discussion, the side that is neglected is the academic restructuring which warrants timely and logically suitable interventions from policy formulators, curriculum planners and the faculty members of the home institution themselves. One possible remedy which is suggested for the rejuvenation of these centres of learning is formulation of curriculum and course design from the home institutions fully realizing its potentialities and the demands from the need based society. A possible way out is the integration of academic programmes between different departments in the colleges. If implemented well, these programmes are bound to produce better results for the academic world and the society at large. The departments which so far colonized the disciplines need depart from the cubicalised way of treating it and reach out to other areas for more critical and productive engagements. Courses and programmes conceived for generating inter disciplinary knowledge are to take place of the ones which repeat the age old academic methods of tying down the system to the so called autonomous realms of unitary disciplines.

The report is spread in four chapters and appendices which are given to compliment the arguments made in the study. In the introductory chapter the problem is defined, questions and methodologies are stated. In the second chapter entitled *Need for new partnerships in Knowledge making*, the idea of interdisciplinary studies are elaborated as seen from the writings of the major scholars of the field. In this chapter some light is thrown on the open course programme successfully implemented in some of the colleges affiliated to the Mahatma Gandhi University, where students were given an option to take a foreign subject of their choice, as offered by other departments in the colleges. Crossing to other disciplines within the structural formalities of the institution has provided fillips to the knowledge drive of aspirant students and promoted inter disciplinary learning practices among them. This forms an essential pre requisite for placing the projects visualized in the succeeding chapter. In this chapter, some projects which are workable within the limits of arts and science colleges are pin pointed. The whole narrative is linked through certain observational

comments which the present researcher has tried to grasp through association with the system on which the study is made.