

Corruption undermining higher education in India^[1]



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People of India are deeply concerned about the form and extent of corruption in almost all walks of life. What is particularly alarming is the conspicuous corruption in higher education undermining the foundations of society. It has become so pervasive, making it difficult to assess the root causes.

The general perception, however, is that the increasing degree of political interference in higher education is a dominant factor. It occurs in many insidious forms, making it appear almost legitimate.

For instance, the state legislations on appointment of Vice-chancellors (V-C). In a few states, the chancellor, who is generally the governor, is required to consult the state government in selecting the name of a person from the panel submitted by the search committee. It is an open secret in some states that the ministers demand from the persons in the panel to shell out a few crores to be appointed as V-C. Currently, in one state the amount ranges

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Areas of Professional Interest

Civil Engineering, Environmental Engineering, Remote Sensing, Information Technologies. Science and Technology Policy Analysis; Development Indicators; International Transfer of Technologies; Small and Medium Industries; Management of Academic Institutions; Children's Science Education

Positions Held

Vice-Chairman, Tamil Nadu State Council for Higher Education, (Rank of Vice-Chancellor), Chennai, India Concurrently was Advisor to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu on Information Technology and e-Governance. (July 1996 - Oct. 2001)

Vice-Chancellor of Anna University, Chennai, (May 1990 - May 1996)

United Nations Centre for Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD) Served in different positions as Deputy Director, Senior Officer, Chief of New Technologies Section, Secretary of the Advisory Committee on Science and Technology for Development. (May 1978 - October 1989)

Science Counsellor, Embassy of India, Washington D.C., USA (June 1974 - April 1978)

Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, India Served as Asst. Professor, Professor and Senior Professor and Head of Dept. of Civil Engineering and Acting Director of IIT/Kanpur. (March 1963 - May 1974)

Senior Scientific Officer, Grade 1, Central Road Research Institute, (CRRI/CSIR), New Delhi. January 1961- February 1963

Materials Engineer, Twin City Testing and Engineering Labs St. Paul, Minnesota. USA. (June 1958 - October 1960)

from Rs 5 crore for smaller universities to Rs 50 crore for large universities with hundreds of affiliated colleges.

V-C aspirants accept the bait as the amount could later be collected from the affiliated colleges and from the various appointments and promotions in the university. It is sad that in several instances the chancellor/governor is also known to indulge in such collections through intermediaries. It is not difficult to see the spiralling effect of such a practice deeply penetrating every level of the academia.

For aided colleges, the state education ministers delay the sanction of faculty positions against existing vacancies till the college managements pay up the amount on the basis of number of vacancies. The logic is the managements should collect the amount from the selected teachers. The teacher in turn would engage in all forms of illicit practices to recoup the sum from the students and others. This is one reason for many competent persons not choosing to apply to some of the aided colleges.

Likewise, stories about demands made on PhD scholars by research guides sound like fiction but, unfortunately, are too widespread to be ignored. Besides demanding sexual favours, thesis supervisors and examiners extract sizeable sums from the helpless students before final approval.

Another cause for concern is the corruption in granting approval for new institutions. Many worthless institutions had obtained the status of deemed universities through bribing. So is the case with technical institutions.

Of late, the establishment of private universities under state legislatures has become a lucrative venue for huge illicit collections in some states. Many such universities tend to resist any form of regulation to maintain quality and standards of academic programmes. Hopefully, the proposed mandatory accreditation process will help raise the credibility of academic programmes of such institutions.

These are matters that need urgent attention at a time when the higher education system is poised for a steep growth. Fortunately, such undesirable practices are confined only to a few states in the country, though the number of institutions and persons affected are significantly large. In general, the institutions under the purview of the Central government are largely, though not entirely, free from such atrocious practices. Examples of several Central, state and private institutions which have demonstrated their ability to function unaffected in such a vicious environment can be emulated by others.

Fortunately, the regulatory authorities concerned with higher education at the Central level and in some of the progressive states are conscious of the prevailing malady and hopefully some of their initiatives will bear fruit.

References: [1] Dr. M Anandkrishnan, Chairman, Board of Governors of IIT Kanpur (Sep 2013), "Corruption undermining higher education in India" retrieved from <http://www.newindianexpress.com>- Republished by taking the permission.