

University autonomy

By M. J. Audi

During the noon session of the Legislative Assembly of Goa, the Chief Minister pleaded inability of his Government to discuss the management of Goa University on the grounds that the university enjoys autonomy. This article is an attempt to acquaint the representatives of people and society with true meaning of university autonomy.

University autonomy means university's freedom to manage its affairs without interference. Why should university enjoy autonomy? To lead us from darkness to light; to free us from the shackles of ignorance and prejudice. Refined intellect, delicate taste and candid mind are the attributes of culture. University is the nursery of culture. Hence, the destiny of nation is folded within its universities as is the flower within the close embrace of petals.

Evidence

Empirical evidence indicates that persons in power, persons with affluence and influence and university administrators are the real enemies of university autonomy in India. Because of them, university autonomy is only a name and not a thing. In the name of autonomy, autocrats rule our universities in arbitrary manner. No wonder, our universities, new and old, prestigious and without prestige, are rocked by corruption. Corruption in universities relates to: appointment and promotion of teachers; construction and maintenance of buildings; purchases of furniture, library, laboratory and stationery and examinations.

The teachers are backbone of every university. When the posts are advertised, the candidates are instructed to apply only if they fulfil necessary conditions. Sincere candidates who do not meet the requirements do not apply. The candidates who meet them are not selected. The favourites who do not meet the requirements are instructed to apply, called for interview and selected by abusing discretionary powers enjoyed by the university administrators.

A large number of academic appointments are finalised on the dining tables and formalised through selection committees. The directives of the University Grants Commission and the special conditions laid down by the universities

themselves which candidates must meet to be eligible for interviews and appointment are systematically violated by the university administrators. Four and five increments are given to the favourites at the time of appointment whereas not even one increment is given to the deserving candidates.

Professors

Candidates without prescribed qualifications and experience are appointed as Professors which is the highest position in hierarchy because they are the blue-eyed babies of persons in high places. Teachers with proper qualifications and experience stagnate for decades in the lower posts. The University Grants Commission is eager to sanction higher posts to the universities to eliminate stagnation. It urges the universities to submit their proposals. But the university administrators take sadistic pleasure in the continued stagnation of teachers who refuse to be their sycophants and who do no cultivate godfathers.

Like a bolt from the blue, one of the disciplines in the university suddenly becomes a "thrust area". The moment the favourites are appointed and confirmed in their posts, the "thrust area" becomes "dust area". The discretionary powers are exercised by the university administrators in a ridiculous manner. What is roundly condemned as an act of mediocrity in one teacher is warmly praised as a feat of brilliance in the other. His and her doodles are orchestrated as sparks of excellence. Thus in our universities, teachers without academic achievements make rapid advancement in their career because of their right contacts and connections. How can such teachers and the university administrators that appoint them command respect or inspire excellence? These manipulations of university administrators do not come to the public notice because they invoke university autonomy.

Opportunities

Between the lines of written agreements with architects, builders and suppliers lie unwritten understandings between them and the university administrators. The opportunities for making money at the expense of universities are infinite. So are the pretexts for frequent air-travels and cosy stays in expen-

sive hotels and pleasure trips within the country and out of it. The Executive Council is the key organ that approves the decisions of university administrators. The Executive Councils do not insist upon knowing all aspects of given case which alone enables one to know the fairness of a decision. They approve on the basis of short summaries prepared by university administrators. Every summary ends with the ominous sentence which is as follows. "The Executive Council may kindly approve". Thus the Executive Councils are merely the rubber stamps of the university administrators.

Non-interference by outside forces is not at all true meaning of university autonomy. University autonomy definitely does not mean rule by a Vice-Chancellor, a Registrar and a handful of nominated and elected members. University autonomy in true sense of term means active involvement of all teachers in the decision-making processes on all matters pertaining to the university. When autonomy from without is not accompanied by autonomy from within, the university jumps from the frying pan into the fire.

What, then, is necessary to guarantee university autonomy? Like liberty of citizens, autonomy of university is not and cannot be absolute. The universities are totally financed by the Governments. The universities' budgets run into crores of rupees every year. It is the sacred duty of public-spirited persons to see that public funds are properly utilised, that merit is recognised and rewarded and excellence is encouraged. Hence, the functioning of the universities must be openly debated and the university affairs must be closely scrutinized by the public. Like government, people get the university they deserve.

Accounts

The Chief Minister advised the MLAs to amend the Goa University Act if they desire the Government to move. With due respect to his opinion, it must be asserted that such an attitude reflects formal legalism. According to the Goa University Act, the annual accounts of the University along with audit report must be submitted by the University to the Government of

(Contd. in Col. 8)

University autonomy

(Contd. from Col. 5)

Goa which should place it before the Legislative Assembly of Goa. Interestingly, The Goa Public men's Corruption Bill, 1988, in its definition of "public men" includes a member of "The Syndicate or Executive Committee of a University established by the Goa University Act, 1984". Clearly, Goa Government and Legislative Assembly of Goa are dutybound to scrutinise each and every aspect of the university administration.

Doubtless, the Goa University Act needs modifications. Its glaring defects are: composition of various organs of university, manners of selection of their members and distribution of powers amongst them. The statutes and Ordinances framed by Goa University are no better. The Act, the Statutes, and the Ordinances fail to take into account the teachers who constitute the most vital component of university. Strangely the drafters do not appear to have grasped that in all universities, a Registrar is just an incharge of administration and record keeper. Under the existing Act, Statutes and Ordinances, Goa University is not likely to acquire name or fame for academic excellence. Hence, the representatives of people and society must insist upon the introduction of true autonomy in Goa University.